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Transcript for “Work AND Life AND Balance” series, Episode 07: Balance – Hobbies, Fun, and Mental Health

Released March 11, 2019

Unknown 0:00

[Intro Music]

All 0:17

Welcome, to STEMculture/podcast.

Dani 0:18

Oh, I fucked up! [laughter]

Zach 0:24

Alright, we have an intro.

Dani 0:25

You guys, it's really warm in here

Keighley 0:26

Welcome to STEMculture podcast. Today we're talking about balance: of time of your mental capacity and of your health. We will acknowledge that time is a valuable currency, and some of our suggestions for why spending it diversity is important. Today, you get all five of us. This is Keighley;

Will 0:43

this is Will;

Dani 0:45

this is Dani;

Zach 0:45

this is Zach;

Brooke 0:46

this is Brooke.

Keighley 0:47

And we each have found a unique way to strike balance in our own lives. And we each have ways to get it back on track when it falls out of balance.

Will 0:56

This episode goes out to all the people who were able to say no to drugs, but still go to weddings and baby showers.

Zach 1:05

So, what is balance? By definition, balance is a condition which different elements are equal or in the correct proportions. Work-life balance is a term used to describe the balance that an individual needs between time allotted for work and other aspects of life.

Dani 1:19

The outline for today: First, we're going to discuss balance as it relates to balancing work and life. Then we'll talk about how balance helps with mental health. And end by talking about the role of hobbies and balance.

Brooke 1:32

As I had mentioned in our life episode, I believe that work and life are kind of impossible to separate from each other. For example, if you receive a raise or lose your job, that directly affects your life.

Dani 1:45

And as I was talking about last episode, the loss of a family member or someone close to you can really affect your work.

Zach 1:53

So we want to know for those at the table here, how have you taken or a portion of your work or life and use it to shirk other responsibilities?

Will 2:01

And I'll go ahead and throw my hat in the ring. So, for me lately, one thing I've been doing is I'll get really into some part of my dissertation project. And when I'm into it, that's all I want to do, thinking about it all the time. And that sort of sounds like good thing because I'm trying to finish the dissertation. And that will potentially help. But, the problem is that then the other areas of my life suffer. So I don't spend as much time really being present with my significant other and I stop taking care of myself. So that actually can have a negative effect of my overall well being. So that's how work can take away from the rest of my life. But then, you know, historically, for me, personally,

I've spent a lot of time and wasted a lot of time probably playing video games. And that hasn't been such an issue for me anymore,

except occasionally like when Red Dead Redemption 2 came out. And I spent an unspecified number of days and hours just completely obsessed with that game. So I've definitely taken that both ways.

Dani 3:22

Yeah, and I'll say too in response to the video game, I'm honestly the same way when new Pokemon games come out for my Nintendo DS. So I really have to wait until there's maybe spring break or winter break or summer so that I can let myself get that level of obsessed with it. So it doesn't affect my work. But I do find on the other end of things that when I'm really stressed out, or I'm depressed, that I will absolutely throw myself into my work and really try and ignore the things that might be causing those feelings.

Keighley 3:56

So kind of what Will had mentioned going off of that, and I didn't realize that I did this until Will just have this now. But instead of going into my work for a long period of time, I'll do this kind of on a micro scale, where I'll be at work for a very long time into the morning hours, and I'll instead of just blow off whoever I had plans with, or another time I'd set aside to be social and make those social connections that are really important for my personal well being. Instead, if I feel like I'm being really productive at work, I'll choose that consistently over sometimes hanging out with people and that sometimes also at the detriment of something like sleep or eating. When I first heard this question, I thought more of how I avoid work, because that's kind of a bigger thing for me. And a big one that I'll use life in place of work is cleaning my house.

Brooke 4:45

Yeah, that's, that's really something that I do. So if I have a big project coming up, that I know I need to tackle or start on, I will avoid by cleaning house or organizing a drawer or doing something that's absolutely in avoidance of whatever, just that starting process is really difficult for me. And so that's what I hate the most. And that's what I will avoid.

Keighley 5:12

Swallow the frog!

Brooke 5:13

Yeah, swallow the frog.

Dani 5:15

Still, no one has really responded to me, though, about ever having heard about what--

Keighley 5:20

[Interrupting] We're going to just keep saying it

Dani 5:21

-- about what swallow the frogs means. No one else has heard of it.

Brooke 5:24

Mark Twain said it.

Dani 5:27

Show me the receipts.

Will 5:28

Tell us more. Tell us what you mean, when you say that.

Brooke 5:30

Yeah, so swallow the frog is something that like, you know, you have something looming in your life, like a project that you want to do. And instead, you avoid it by doing other things. And so swallow the frog is this concept of do what you dislike the most, or you know that you're avoiding the most do that as your first thing of the day. So you get it off your plate. And so that everything else that comes behind it, it's easy to do, because you've already done the largest, most daunting thing on your task list.

Dani 6:05

Yeah, and that'll, that harkens back to our work episode, Episode Five.

Zach 6:11

So for me, I often use work to get out of my other responsibilities. For example, I would rather be in the lab, I don't particularly enjoy writing, but I'm using it as an excuse every now and then to not teach and I have an obligation by my department to teach. And I know that I sometimes shirk responsibility to not do that, mainly because I'm, I guess you can call it senioritis even though we don't have four years or something like that's a fifth yearitis, which sounds like a horrible disease

that I really just I would avoid teaching at this point. But at the same time, I've used my other-- I want to call it a side hustle-- but my other responsibilities outside of my research and writing and even teaching to avoid doing research and writing. So there's always an infinite circle or a never ending loop of, I don't want to do this, I'm going to do something else, I should really concentrate on how much time I've spent on this. But I don't know I just watch TV.

Keighley 7:03

Yeah, that exact same thing written down is I use work to avoid other work. So I'll use the orgs that I'm involved in in place of doing the benchwork. And that's how I usually end up at lab really late because I'm not doing my benchwork. And then if I kind of put off as much as I can doing the other things. Then I'll finally go to my benchwork. And like, oh, but if I could start these other experiments that I don't have to read or write or do other parts of research that I dislike more... so yeah, work for work is a big one.

Dani 7:36

So you can probably hear how we're all really valuing our time. And we know that when we're also trying to avoid certain things. So it's good to remember that time is really the most valuable currency we have as graduate students, perhaps other than grant money. And it is important to check your time-balance when considering a new draw on your time. So let's talk about saying no, in the least asshole-ish of ways. But first, a warning before we get into this next section. I, Dani, currently hold the record for most curse words said to date in our podcast. One of the many benefits of transcribing our episodes, we can go back and by we I mean me, I can go back and see how many times I've said fuck. It's a lot.

Zach 8:22

It's now 14

Dani 8:24

That is an accurate number. So I currently hold that record. And today we're going to blow that out of the water and other people are going to start cursing besides me by talking about fuck budgets. Now, this concept comes from the "Life Changing Magic of Not Giving a Fuck" by Sarah Knight. She wrote a book and she also has a YouTube video. Is that a TED talk?

Zach 8:46

Yeah, it's a TED talk.

Dani 8:47

So, it's a TED talk. So I'm going to let others take that away.

Will 8:52

Yeah. So in this technique, the first step is to acknowledge that giving a fuck takes time, energy, and money. These are limited resources. So make calculated decisions on where you want to spend these resources. This is described by Sarah Knight as making a fuck budget. So first, let's all talk about the things we do not give a fuck about. And how we avoid spending fucks on those activities.

Zach 9:24

I'll go first. I don't give a fuck about sports. I have the shortest attention span when it comes to sports. I cannot sit and listen to a basketball game where squeaky shoes echo through the entire arena for at least two hours. I know there's about an average of like 20 to 30 minutes of actual football time play. The rest of it is commercials. And if I am asked one more time, what's in my wallet by Samuel L. Jackson, I'm going to lose my mind. So with that, I just don't pay attention to sports.

Brooke 9:53

So one of the things I don't give a fuck about is Friday seminar session. 4:30 in the afternoon! Geez, Louise. Like, I get it though. You know, we need to think about science and science that's other than our own and appreciate others coming and talking about science with us.

But Friday

night or Friday afternoons are really [groans]

We want to be off campus, we want to be done. We're not fresh in our week. And that's a really tough area for me to give a fuck about.

Dani 10:30

Something that used to be on my list that I enjoyed doing was partying every single weekend night, Friday night, Saturday night, and then feeling very tired and hung over for that whole weekend. But that's not on my give a fuck budget list anymore. So I don't really enjoy going out with a bunch of people and getting trashed. That's just not on my list anymore.

Brooke 11:00

My party is at home in my pajamas on my couch watching Netflix.

Will 11:06

It's a good party.

But I have no space in my budget for people who are not genuine.

Dani 11:16

Oh, yeah.

Brooke 11:17

I like that

Will 11:19

In my life, I found that because I actually have an inclination to give lots of fucks about people that those are the places where I lose most of my fucks. And so I have to be really careful about my people fuck budget, specifically. And,

you know, if somebody is not being real with me, if they're not, you know, not on day one, but if they're, if they're never getting to a place where they're sort of like, you know, showing me who they really are... or they do, show me who they really are, and like, it's not something that I like, like, like, you know, dishonesty, and I don't know, stuff like that...

I don't have time for people like that in my life.

Keighley 12:09

I'm glad you kind of bridge that because the thing I wrote down... because I actually do give a lot of fucks about everything. That's kind of who I am as a person. It's just always caring. But the one thing that is currently working on, but I'm definitely trying to push to stop giving a fuck about other people's unfounded anger and angst towards me or about me, or about the decisions that I make in my life. That's something that I faced more regularly than I like and I am deciding I'm not going to give a fuck about it. Because I've decided who is important to me just like Will was saying, and those are the people who I'm going to care about and if you want to have unfounded anger towards me, that's on you.

Brooke 12:50

Alright, so now that we're aware of what our limited fuck budget is, we need to consider all of the things that bring you joy as well as the things that annoy you. So change only happens when you actually can clear out your mind. So we're just going to start de-cluttering. First, I think really, you need to make a list of everything that's on your plate and apply the Not-Sorry method. And so that consists of deciding what you don't give a fuck about and what brings you more joy.

So I like to think of it as making a pro and con list called "give a fuck" and then "fuck this". So really, you just need to stop giving a fuck about those things by allocating your fuck budget accordingly and remove yourself from that-- whatever that activity is, or responsibility-- in a timely fashion. But really you can do this by being polite and honest. And you don't have to do it in a rude way. You can politely decline to do things you-- you know. But I think the one thing that

she says in her... that Sarah Knight says in her video is that, you know, reply very soon, with a polite and honest "No, thank you, thank you for thinking of me, but I don't have time", you know, whatever it is that you feel like, you don't want to give a fuck about. You can say it in very nice, kind way.

Dani 14:31

And think of this too. When you can mentally de-clutter, you can make room for more joy or less sorrow as some people like to think of it. So I recently binge watched "Tidying Up" with Marie Kondo in a single day. And I was very sad, they're only like, eight episodes,

But, we can really think about this is using that method for our minds. So think of it this way: there's only so much you can give a fuck about because we have a certain mental capacity for only so many feelings, and, and so much mental energy.

So what activities that you're doing, give you joy, or will lead to joy for you? And if joy is not your thing again, think of it more as like contentment, or what activities will help you towards your goals or what is worth your time.

Keighley 15:25

And so when I kind of heard this, the original Not-Sorry, method, and kind of like the KonMari method, you know, what does bring you joy, what doesn't it, it reminded me back to the work episode where we talked about Pick Three, where we want you to have a list of so many things, ie what are the fuck lists, one of the things you want to give a fuck about. And then, you know, potentially one mechanism of doing that is pick some things for the day that you would actually give a fuck about. So these are all becoming really interconnected ideas. And if you want to find another resource, one of the podcasts, I also listen to talked about the, the "Subtle Art of Not Giving a Fuck" by Mark Manson. And he has very similar ideas to what we've been discussing so far. And so it's the idea that, you know, a lot of people say that the key to success and confidence is, you know, just by saying, I don't give a fuck about this, you know, like, we say that those really great people, like, they just don't give a fuck, like, Oh, so and so was super rude to their boss, and they still got a raise. So like, they don't give a fuck, but like, that's not really the point. The point is not that we don't give a fuck it's that we're actually giving too many fucks. And the book really does go quite into depth about this. And if you go to the website, which we'll link in the show notes, it's super funny in the way that mark Manson has written kind of his own short blog post about this is really great, because he not only writes it in the third person, which is pretty good. But he counts the number of times he says, fuck the in the blog post, which is well over 150 times

Zach 16:53

Ooh, we gotta catch up.

Dani 16:56

Maybe as a whole we'll get there today.

Will 16:59

[background] fuckfuckfuckfuckfuck

Keighley 17:01

And so he says, the ability to reserve our fuck for only the most fuckworthy situations would surely make life a hell of a lot easier. And I think three things that are subtle-- subtleties to this whole "not giving a fuck" that I think are worth mentioning. So it's not being indifferent. It's not that we don't care about this, it's not by choosing to have a budget that we don't care about anything, it's that we've choose the things that we do care about, right? If you give a fuck, it's things you do care about. And even if it doesn't necessarily line up with the things you've chosen. One of the examples, he gives is his mom gotten a really tight spot. And obviously, that wasn't something that was like immediately on his fuck budget, because he didn't anticipate his mom being in that position. But that trumped, you know, something he had already written down as like something he cared about. So he's not being indifferent. It's just comfortable with being different from other people. Another one was to say, you have to, in order to not give a fuck about adversity, you must give a fuck about something more important than

adversity. And this was really interesting. And I this is a thing we haven't really talked about a lot. It's that if you're getting bent out of shape, about the little things, which I am definitely

respon-- that happens to me a lot. It's either A) you need to realize that you aren't caring enough about the big things. And you should be allocating more of your attention to that so that you can let the little things go. Or you might not even have enough big things in your life to begin with. And so it could be a sign that you need to maybe refocus and push yourself towards a purpose that you feel more strongly about that maybe something you're currently doing, which I thought was really interesting. Does anybody have any thoughts on that?

Brooke 18:33

I've never really thought about it like that but I think that makes a lot of sense. You know, like, I guess it kind of goes along with the saying "get a life" you know, when somebody like, makes a big deal out of a little thing. And you're like, "gosh, just go get a life".

But it sounds terrible. But like, really, maybe their focus is just off and they don't have like a view of a bigger picture.

Dani 19:02

Well, there's another book called -- gosh, I'm gonna have to look this up-- but I think it's called "Don't Sweat the Small Stuff".

Brooke 19:08

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Dani 19:09

And it's the same idea. Like, I mean, basically make a priority list of the things that matter the most to you. And, if there's something that happens, or something that somebody tries to get you to put on your list, and there's no room for it, then there's no room for it.

Brooke 19:23

Right? Yeah, kind of gaining perspective.

Dani 19:26

Yeah

Will 19:27

So one last thought on this, if y'all don't mind

When we talk about "bringing joy" or "getting a life" or getting a purpose, I think that maybe one way to bring all that together is to, to, I think, realize that purpose and satisfaction are linked. So I don't think you get satisfaction from doing things that aren't a part of a meaningful purpose to you. So if you know, getting a PhD is a meaningful purpose to you, then that is going to bring you more satisfaction perhaps, than doing a job that isn't meaningful to you at all.

Zach 20:16

So the important part about this, though, is that you really don't want to be an asshole when you back out of something. So as Brooke mentioned, be polite about it. Be honest. So here are a few canned



responses you can use when you're backing out of a situation. So first, you can say, "Sorry, I can't make it. I'm busy. No, thank you. I don't have time and I can't afford it". Or if you're honest, "I don't want to". And that's something that I rarely say when I come up to a situation where I don't want to get involved is "I really don't want to" and I know it's difficult for me, is it difficult for any of you?

Keighley 20:47

It is...

I definitely-- my dad is a strong person who likes to say no, very strongly. And he likes to think that that's how I can operate through the world. And I've kind of taken that and not that I don't want to, but it's you know, "I really appreciate you for thinking of me, this isn't something I would like to do right now. But thank you for reaching out". And that helps me feel like I'm not burning a bridge. Or I'm not potentially just shutting something down. But yeah, it's been really, I don't know, lightning? Not like enlightening. Just like it, it takes a lot of burden off of me just to be very straight with people because it helps them just know where I'm at. Like I love spending time with you. But this is not an activity, I wish to partake in. And that helps everybody navigate each other a lot better.

Zach 21:30

The important thing is that you don't feel obligated or guilty and that flaking out at the last minute should really be a crime punished by law. My opinion. But that's just because if you drop out of the last minute, I hate you

Keighley 21:42

and ghosting let's add to that

Zach 21:43

Ghosting, flaking, ditching. You're the worst. So remember that also spending your fuck-bucks on something, implies that you generally have to spend your actual bucks on something. And that's sometimes a struggle with graduate students who are operating on a budget or get paid once a month.

Will 22:00

Yeah, maybe. I mean, I think I probably haven't done super well with all these things for my whole life. But I think I'm better at it now than I was 10 years ago. So you know, if you're, if you're not good at it now. And you're currently ghosting people--

Zach 22:14

STOP

Will 22:15

--maybe so you could do on the front end to not do that and also be happier.

Keighley 22:23

So I think talking about ghosting really does bring up the point that there's a reason sometimes people do and it's not always just because they're terrible people who aren't respectful of people's time. Sometimes it's because there's an actual mental health problem. And I've done some reading about this. That's kind of why I think about this. But I think Brooke has maybe a little bit more clout and has a little bit more experience in this field.

Brooke 22:48

Yeah, so you know, I've read a lot about this, and I've experienced it. And I have a lot of friends who've experienced this as well, I don't think that I've said this on, you know, in public, but I am an introvert in many ways, where too much people-ing can really tire me out and it can stress my body, you know, so that I just have to have time where I have to recharge my batteries. And sometimes it's not because I have ill intentions. You know, when I make the plans initially, it's like, okay, I have every intention of doing it. But when the time comes, I have to listen to my body and say, no, this is not the time. I did that this morning. You know, with the activity that we had planned, where I woke up, my body was just hating me. And so I said, Nope, can't do it. I want to save my time, or my energy for, you know, coming together with you guys this afternoon. And so sometimes it's really important to maybe not get mad and understand the real reasons behind it. A lot of that is I was really upfront with you guys and said, I can't do it. And this is why. But if somebody is continually ghosting, maybe that's a good opportunity to check in with them and say, how are you doing? Is there something more going on, can I be a shoulder for you, can I be an ear for you to talk to? Because it could be a sign that there's something more going on. And it's better to be supportive friends than just get angry about ghosting. So, you know, just another side. Another thing to look at.

Dani 24:30

Thank you.

Keighley 24:32

So kind of taking that idea and thinking about combining taxing on your time in this like fuck budget we've been talking about and how it's, it's this thing you're spending. And so when we think about how you spend your money, we can kind of think about it like an overdraft. And this can sometimes cause, be cause for some of these mental health problems that Brooke was bringing up in, you know, if you overspend on your fuck budget, you're now in this deficit that is very stressful. If you actually think about your own personal bank account, if it starts running low, or you realize, Oh, crap, I have a bill coming up, like you have a big event coming up that you're going to have to put more energy into, oh, gosh, like, and you're overspending on things that don't matter to you as much, it puts you in this really stressful situation. And you end up living your life with a lot of anxiety. And as somebody who personally has gotten dinged for over-drafting, it sucks, like it just-- but it's a check in, right, it's a reminder that I need to reset, I need to reevaluate how I'm spending my own actual dollars. And also, you know, when you have that stressful mountain, if you will, that kind of comes up, it's a reminder that you need to maybe seek some help or reevaluate how you're spending your fuck-bucks.

Dani 25:54

So in speaking about mental health, let's talk a little bit about the services your university should and hopefully does offer. So hopefully, your university does offer some kind of mental health services. And they may provide these may, they may provide counseling for graduate students on a sliding scale, or maybe even for free. There also may be support groups at the Counseling Center, or perhaps through the graduate school. So like our university just started a dissertation support group. There also may be a graduate student association at your university, or even a departmental grad student society, that could be an unofficial peer support group for you. Now, there's many hurdles we as grad students need to overcome to get to a balance or integration of work life balance that works for you. And you might feel feelings of imposter syndrome and guilt and maybe have tough interactions that you need to talk about. So really taking advantage of what your university has to offer for mental health services. It's, it's really helpful. And I've made use of mine, sometimes I'll see somebody several times. And other times, it's just a one time to talk something through. And it can be, I mean, it's really, really helped me

Keighley 27:01

When you say a sliding scale, can you talk about that a little bit? I was little not sure what that means.

Dani 27:06

Sliding scale means based on what your income is, they may give you breaks on how much counseling services cost.

Keighley 27:15

Don't all grad students typically make like, in a department the same amount?

Dani 27:19

No.

Keighley 27:19

Okay.

Dani 27:21

It depends. I mean, because sometimes you're a research assistant or you're a graduate assistant or you're a teacher, you're maybe TA-ing, maybe you got a fellowship, maybe you're on a grant. So

Will 27:33

They also may pay you different amounts based on what stage of the program you're in. So

after we become candidates in our program, we get paid more.

Keighley 27:38

Okay. So that would be really, you know, it's helpful to know for people who might be feeling like, oh, gosh, like, I can't afford it, I'm just a first year and you know, especially those first years, gosh, that transition's tough

Dani 27:54

Well and, plus some, you know, the sciences, STEM graduate students usually get paid more, much more, than humanities is for stipend. So knowing about that sliding scale, or hopefully, your university's providing these mental health services or counseling for free,

Hopefully, hopefully.

Keighley 28:13

Sometimes it's really helpful, you know, Dani is talking about the services that should be there, and the hurdles that we need to have overcome. And there's a reason why it's important to not only give yourself good mental health, but to practice this balance, and to practice these hobbies. And there's some really interesting science out there that was published kind of throughout the years, there's one by Connor, de Young and Silva and we'll, we'll link out all of these. And they published an article on everyday creative activity as a path to flourishing. And it was really interesting that talked about how getting involved in a creative activity or creative hobby can make you feel better the next day. So they're out of New Zealand. And they found that engaging in creative behavior like a hobby, and as I'm pretty creative person, so I thought this was really resonated with me, it actually increases your well being that

lasts until the next day. So they measured that across a couple of different parameters. But they were looking specifically at activities like songwriting, creative writing, knitting, crocheting, visual art, and musical performance. And, you know, even though we're STEM folk, and typically, people like to stereotype us as very, you know, data minded and not creative, you know, there's a lot of different ways in which we can express our creativity. And it can even just be like building a really beautiful figure. And taking time to do that, and really putting your effort into that can actually make you feel a lot better the next day. Another one has been done by Fenton et al. And this was an article about the benefits of recreation for the recovery and social inclusion of individuals with mental illness. And this is a really big review. And it talked about how, if you're having a really hard time, you know, if you're going to mental-mental support systems, like support groups, or you're getting counseling, or maybe those aren't readily available, one way to maybe start that process is by being creative, and having a hobby that you really can feel good about, because it can help support recovery, or it can be something that you integrate into that, that support and they were able to demonstrate that there was a correlation there. And the last article that I think is really demonstrative of the importance of having these hobbies. And this, like other fun-ness is about sports. And so I know some people really don't enjoy just being creative. Maybe that's a stressful thing. And they don't feel like they're, quote/unquote, good at it. But sport can be the other kind of side of that. And so this group looked at 1.35 million Australian adults. Clearly, more studies need to be done, not in New Zealand and Australia, we need to get them here. But they're doing it. There's research out of those areas that are really good. And they were looking at those who looked at, or who's participating in team sports were less likely than average, to experience depression, anxiety, or stress. And, you know, there's a whole bunch to be said about reasons why, you know, team sport is so important, but just three good resources if somebody wants to look into a little bit more about the science and how that's being supported through the literature.

Zach 31:11

Awesome. So for what we're interested in here is one: What are our hobbies? And how do we bring joy to ourselves? So first, we're going to define what a hobby is: a hobby is defined by Merriam Webster as a pursuit outside one's regular occupation engaged in, especially, for relaxation. It's also the short term for a small horse, but that's unimportant

Dani 31:31

Like a hobby horse.

Zach 31:36

So what do you guys in particular do to reach balance? What is your hobby? What do you find joy in?

Will 31:43

So, Dani has mentioned before that she and I share a hobby, which is a strength sports in some form.

So we go and we throw heavy weights around in very particular ways. Dani does power lifting, and

Dani 32:04

--which is squat bench and deadlift--

Will 32:06

Yeah, and I do those movements too and I do some other stuff. But the

cool part about those, which I'm going to again refer back to this later, is

that there's a real structure there. Squat, bench, and deadlift, if you don't already know are very actually complicated movements to do right. And not just do safely, but to really optimize your power. And so there's some real stuff to sink your teeth into there. But, you know, if you go to the gym, and you're safe, but you don't quite, you know, hit your numbers, the consequences of that are not life altering.

So for me,

you know, it's almost like meditation. And I'm not the only one that feels like that. There's actually a Washington Post article that I found that makes the same argument that I'll link in the show notes.

Dani 33:10

Yeah, and power lifting. For me, it's, it's really, it's really empowering for me, there's also not a lot of women who power lift. So when I go to the gym, and I see other women lifting there, it makes me so happy. And I'm friends with many of the women that go to my gym, and I really love it. And it is a kind of meditation as well. So it's something that I can really engage with, with my brain and really think about the science and everything behind what I'm doing. But it's also this quiet moment, right before you lift something really heavy, where you just get set, and you go, and there's just something really magical about that, for me,

Keighley 33:48

Especially the repetition, you know, I gotta imagine that's extra....

Dani 33:52

I hate repetition.

Keighley 33:55

Okay....

Dani 33:55

[laughter]

Will 33:55

I don't think Keighley means lots of reps, I think. Correct me if I'm wrong.

Dani 34:02

Sorry!

Will 34:02

I think what Keighley means is that it's a very familiar activity. So you're going in, and you should develop a very strong routine or, well, they also call it ritual for setting up for and doing your deadlift. And you see people do all kinds of interesting stuff. Like they have a real particular way of getting into their stance and way of putting their hands on the bar. And people take it really far. But I think that's-- Is that what you were talking about, Keighley?

Keighley 34:34

Yep, yep, yep, that's where I was going with that.

Will 34:36

So you go there. And it's a familiar place that that you associate with lots of positive stuff, hopefully.

Keighley 34:45

For me. So I've already kind of mentioned that I really like doing creative things. And sometimes they're helpful for my work, you know, it is building really beautiful figures, or taking stats and turning them into like, infographics. Or designing things on PowerPoint, because that's the only product I know how to use,

but also doing things like this and doing things in science communication, and that's taking pictures of my science and sharing them online and talking about them, and fostering those communication outlets, or going out into my community. And those are, for me, those are hobbies that I really enjoy spending my time on away from my work and away from my life, if I can't make it to a presentation, and it's not going to alter my PhD success. And it's not going to just, you know, take away from my house getting clean, necessarily, it all will happen. But it's something that makes me feel a lot more fulfilled. And then, kind of on the more typical scale of hobbies, I dance, that's always been my thing. And I'll dance in the lab space, if you paying close enough attention, I'm usually tap dancing. As long as I'm not holding anything too breakable or anything really important. Like my cell lines, definitely no tap dancing then. But if I'm like, waiting for, you know, my gel to finish up, I'll be be-bopping around. Otherwise I'll, I'll find other outlets like a dance hall. And it's just a way for me to be really free and move my body in a way that I don't typically get to. And that really helps me reset and refocus and feel like I've done something good for myself.

Brooke 36:18

Very cool. I have a-- I guess that maybe I have a weird hobby. So one of the things that I like to do is look at houses and for houses. I really, really,

really want to have my own Airbnb, like, empire.

And so I love looking for homes in different areas that I like. It's something that also my husband and I do together, along with planning the next remodel that we're going to do for our own house. So that's kind of like an obsession that we both share. And it's very relaxing. And I love the creative process. I love searching for weird, random strange things that will go in the remodel

Junk stores, antique stores, people's backyards,

Zach 37:26

I'm always lookin'

Brooke 37:27

Don't judge me

All 37:28

[laughter]

Brooke 37:30

Yeah, so I think it's just my creative outlet. And, and something I get to share with my partner because we don't see each other very often. And so it's, it's definitely something that helps to bond us together.

Zach 37:46

So I'm the odd one of this bunch, because I don't like going outside as much as these guys do. So most of my hobbies are indoors. So for that I am a big-- if it wasn't noted on our website-- I like D&D or dungeons and dragons. I've always been a nerd regarding that, I've been playing since high school. So I've gone through multiple editions, if that means anything to you. My goal is to get this table here to play another game with this. So I'm just going to slowly wear them down to where they accept it. Keighley says, No, with just her face. She doesn't have a choice. I've already convinced them to go to escape rooms. And so I'm already winning on that one. So I also do enjoy escape rooms. But you do have to leave your apartment for that

Keighley 38:28

But you go into a new, whole new little space,

Zach 38:31

Yeah, tiny space, maybe there's additional rooms attached to that. But I do enjoy video games. And one thing that I like about it is there's another additional social aspect of it. So I don't necessarily talk to everybody from work when I come home. My own social network is online. And so I have like this game that I've been playing for years now. And I can log in and see my old-- it's called a clan in this case, it's it could be a guild, whatever you want to refer to it. And it's a bunch of people that I've known for years that I've just known on the internet, which is chat and hang out..

shoot stuff.

Keighley 39:02

So, uh, also, one thing that I think we mostly all do except for is Zach, and two of us happen to be partaking in this particular hobby, concurrently. There is [can taps on table] Yep. That sound.

Dani 39:16

Alcohol?

Keighley 39:17

Drinks! Yeah!

Will 39:18

Is... is that a hobby?

Keighley 39:20

I think it can be a hobby, because I was listening to again, another podcast. And I learned about Pantsdrunk, which is an actual thing by Miska Rantanen and it's this self care practice that involves alcohol.

Zach 39:38

Yeah, I know about this one

Keighley 39:40

It's so interesting because it takes something a lot of grad students enjoy doing and really does make it about rejuvenation, and bringing yourself back to a peaceful place, you're not allowed to do work. It's

like this ritual similar to the ritual maybe that you have when you go into lifting or you know, I go before I go dance, you we all have these little rituals, and this one just happens to incorporate drinks or fancy things that you know, you can get juice that you really like, or maybe like Topo Chico seem really fancy to me. So maybe you get yourself one of those. But it's this idea that you like, come home and you put on your comfy pants and you get Pantsdrunk. And I'm saying like the Finnish people might because I don't have the quite the right accent.

But Pantsdrunk is this practice where you don't do work. There's like a list of five things that you like, should or should not do while doing Pantsdrunk. And obviously, like, if you start feeling sad or lonely or have negative feelings, you should immediately stop doing Pantsdrunk. This is meant to be this really healing time where you don't have to feel guilty about just taking some time to yourself and imbibing in whatever makes you happy.

Zach 40:49  
That's spelled "pants drunk"

Keighley 40:51  
There's a little thingy

Dani 40:54  
An umlaut?

Keighley 40:55  
Yeah, over the "a" of pants drunk.

Zach 40:58  
This-- the guide is you generally wear just your underwear and sit around your house in sweatpants. And drink

Homer Simpson.

Keighley 41:06  
But classy and with meditative implication

Zach 41:10  
And you're supposed to eat random stuff, whatever, you can find that looks delicious,

Keighley 41:14  
Oh yeah, there's a lot of-- there's a snacking component.

Will 41:16  
So one of the, one of the things that sort of is coming out of this conversation is that people have different hobbies. And that's cool.

But also maybe that all hobbies are not equally good for everyone. They're not all created equal for you, and some bring more joy, satisfaction, etc, to you than others. So like, how do you know the difference between those things? And I'm going to make a couple of suggestions about ways you can think about



your hobbies. And I want you guys to tell me what you think about them. So some hobbies that can be really good for people are structured play. And what I mean by that is activities where there are rules and stakes of some kind. That's the structure. But the stakes are not like real life stakes. So like I mentioned earlier, if you go in the gym, and you don't hit your numbers, like that matters to you, but you're not going to lose your job.

And it won't be devastating.

So the upside of the structure part of the play is that it gives you the opportunity to get satisfaction out of these things that are lower stakes, and also maybe develop skills like concentration and stuff, all with your free time and without the stress of those consequences. So one thing that's important is that, if it stresses you out, maybe it's not really a hobby, and you should consider how it fits into your fuck budget.

Dani 42:49

Brooke is pointing very aggressively at Zach right now.

All 42:53

[laughter]

Will 42:53

Why is that? What...?

Zach 42:55

So the relationship I had of this was the discussion we had prior to recording was that sometimes I find that D&D can be stressful, particularly for those who if you've ever played, there's a person who runs the game. And then they're all of the players. And the person who runs the game has to prepare: I have to put a story together, I have to know the rules of what you're going to do today. If you do something weird. I have to break out improv skills that no one's used in 20 years-- I'm not that old-- five years. So with that, it can be a stressful thing. And I've actually had to pull away from that recently, I was running four games, two of them were the exact same story. So I could be like, it's the same thing and not worry about it. But it put a lot of mental stress on me that I couldn't, couldn't manage it anymore. And so I just backed away saying, you know what? I can manage being a player. That is the fun I get from the end is I get to sit at a table and be a douche bag, or play a bard who just sings constantly, which really annoys everyone else.

Will 43:47

I really want to hear that.

Zach 43:49

Well, if you play D&D you can [laughter]

With that, there are some parts of your hobbies that can be stressful. And if that's the case, pull back, find something else if you can, maybe it's not something you've invested a lot of money and books for. But...

Will 44:07

Well, I mean, the other side of that is that it was clearly a creative practice.

Zach 44:11

Yes.

Will 44:13

And so like Keighley was saying earlier, that creativity that really does have benefits, I think, for your well being. So I'm not saying that you should drop the hobby, necessarily, you, Zach, or anybody out there in TV land, but reevaluate, think about what are you getting from it, and how much you get into it.

Dani 44:33

So because I like the, I like talking about some hobbies that cause stress. And because we don't talk about that a lot. And one of the things that I was realizing, actually, with the conversation with Will earlier today is that I have a lot fewer hobbies now than I do-- than I did when I was younger. When I was young, especially like, when I was 12, I was swimming and dancing, and baseball, and soccer, and probably piano, tons of other activities, right? And then as you grow older, you really learn which hobbies you really like, and want to stick with,

Zach 45:08

Or your parents stopped paying for you to go.

Dani 45:10

Mm hmm.

That can definitely be part of it.

Or like, I remember when I was a teenager, kind of 15/16, I actually went through a million scuba certifications to the point now where I'm technically an instructor scuba certified person. But I don't scuba dive anymore, because I did all of that, because I thought I should or I had to, or because I'm a marine biologist, that it would be useful in some way. And even though I really enjoyed it, once I was in the water, everything around it just caused a lot of stress for me, and I don't do it anymore. And sometimes I feel kind of guilty about that, 'cause I did spend so much time focused on learning that skill set. And also my parents spent a ton of money on it as well. Sorry. But, it's just not something that really brings me that much joy anymore. So I do these other things instead.

Keighley 46:05

But, one thing when you were saying that I immediately thought about was, you know, this goes back to our Life episode too, it's not even just like, we have to reevaluate what hobbies are important, we just do not have as much time because we've added other responsibilities in. Right? Like, we become more and more responsible for that, like Hierarchy of Needs on our own, you know, we start moving down, we have to now find our own shelter, we have to feed ourselves, we have to, like, get money to do these things. And that just takes out time and energy to do our hobbies. So it really does make the hobbies we have way more cherishable and so much more valuable. Because we have decided that they are worth our time.

Will 46:41

Yeah,

Brooke 46:41

Good point

Will 46:42

It's a process that you can refine your hobbies so you really get the most out of 'em

Zach 46:47

More joy.

It's more concentrated.

Will 46:49

Yeah

Dani & Zach 46:50

Concentrated joy [laughter]

Will 46:52

So, one thing about, one thing about lifting, one thing about doing strength sports as a hobby is that you're getting sort of like double value--

Zach 47:01

gains [laughter]

Will 47:06

Yeah, gains are life.

But it's also good for you.

And probably a lot of people are like "Ah, is lifting weights good for you? I heard it was dangerous." Well, only if you're ego lifting, so don't do that.

Maybe we'll talk about that another time. But

it's, it is good for your health. And, and so it's a hobby, but it's also a physical activity that you know, so you're getting sort of like twice, twice the amount for your fuck bucks. So I have one more thing I wanted to bring up about group play in particular. For me, another one of my hobbies that I hadn't mentioned before, is I picked up playing basketball after my whole 10 years like a organized sports kids player/ player as a kid,

I didn't really start-- it was like the first time that I played a sport ever because I really wanted to play it. Like when I was a kid, I played sports because my parents were like, you should play sports.

But then when I was in college, I started playing pickup basketball at, like, the gym with whoever showed up. And I found that it was really satisfying. And I thought about it for a long time. And I think I sort of understand why. Okay, so what I'm saying is, because it's structured play,

and there are rules and stakes, but you have to navigate that with other people as a hobby. It gives you the opportunity to see what people are really like. And this also goes that goes back to what I was saying

about not giving a fuck about people who are not real with me. I find that playing pickup basketball with a bunch of people gives me the opportunity, because, to see who they are as a person. Because if you value your team winning over sportsmanship in a situation where the outcome literally does not matter at all for your life, that says something about who you are to me.

And so it gives you an opportunity to really learn about people in a deep way. And therefore build a sense of community, which we also discussed in previous episode has positive health benefits.

Zach 49:24

So as graduate students were often faced with pretty busy schedules, if you haven't picked that up in or if you haven't realized quite yet yourself. So what has barred you from balancing your work and life in graduate school?

Dani 49:37

So, for me stress has really barred my ability to balance work and life, or really integrate them well.

And it's really it seems to primarily like the last six months be from mismanaged interactions and bureaucracy, sometimes because of my mismanagement, and sometimes not.

And then I really have to retreat into myself and take care of myself, and try and get myself back on track. And I usually will do that either by throwing myself into work, or maybe taking an extra day off so that I can just focus on me for a little bit.

Will 50:13

So I had a semester early on in my graduate career. So it's probably

two and a half years ago now. And as Zach mentioned, sometimes "grad school get real crazy". So I have--

Zach 50:27

An exact phrase, said just that way--

Will 50:30

So I had a pretty busy research schedule. And I also had a full class schedule. And in particular, I had one class

and I really invested a huge amount of time into the project for the class. It was a team project. And it was something where we just signed up for something that was way more complicated, we realized, and I ended up putting, like, 40 hours a week into the project-- alone, for a month, probably. And so during that time, I was working literally, from when I woke up to, when I went to sleep

every day, seven days a week for like, maybe five weeks, or something like that. And at the end of that time, so all of the self care, all of the balance just was completely out the window. And for me, I was able to maintain that despite raised constantly raising levels of stress over the time. So it didn't hit me right away. I was able to sort of be okay for a little while.

But it got it got really bad. And there was a night towards the end of that time when I was coming down to the wire on that deadline for that project. And also, you know, I was supposed to be making progress

on my research, and I worked a whole day and then I went lay down and try to go to sleep, and I couldn't sleep. And this, I'm lucky, this doesn't often happen to me. But I literally, lay in my bed and wept with like, my whole body for-- I don't know how long-- until I was physically exhausted. And then I finally fell asleep. And then the next day, I was like, "Nope, I gotta stop this, I'm going to literally lose my shit". And so yeah, that's what happens; is, I like, you have a, you have a-a-a mental breakdown. And, and like, I didn't have serious consequences from that. And I'm really lucky. But it definitely changed the way that I do things.

Brooke 52:29

Yeah, I mean, my first entire year of graduate school was very stressful with stuff that I was kind of working out with bureaucracy, is probably the nicest way I can put it. And it caused tremendous stress. And my body really hated me for a long time. And so, but there's really nothing that I could do about it. And now that I've made it through that year, all I'm doing is focusing on self care, like really making that my priority. And it just makes what I'm doing in science that much better. Because now it's like, okay, I can think about things. Whereas I think in that first year, it was truly like, survival mode, you know, my Hierarchy of Needs was very much on the basics. So sometimes we just can't avoid that, you know, it's out of our hands out of our power. And,

you know, I think that we're all kind of really lucky, the people who are sitting around this table right now are really lucky that we have the ability to kind of make our own schedules. But that's not always,

you know, people, not everybody can do that.

Not everybody has that opportunity, depending on the relationship that they have with their or what they are expected to do from their programs. So, you know, I think we really need to think about how can we make a change in culture to be more, you know, have self care be more prevalent and, and prioritized so that we can be better scientists, eventually.

Keighley 54:22

Um, I don't think I have a big challenge with it, I will very readily push off work if I feel like I need it. Or if I feel like my life needs it. I mean, I do say like, my, my life is probably the thing that I will push more often, like, getting a car registered is weirdly not happened yet, which is weird for me. But like, things like that, that actually require time and planning because I if it's not in like, my convenient schedule then I just kind of won't do it. So it's really the only thing that's barring me, for my balance is me,. I have an incredible boss, I have amazing friends. I do not really, I'm very, very fortunate, right? Like, I'm sitting here over here, like "ah, I'm amazing", so it's just, it's me, right? That's the thing that's causing me to have issues with my balance. And that's why I do things like time track, which we talked about in time-- in Episode Five. And that's why I need those external reminders of "okay, it's you now.;you're the one causing issues." Because if I spend a couple of days prioritizing life or the fun things, then I can kind of feel like, alright, go back into work. It's never long enough or disastrous enough, or it hasn't been yet, that I feel like I'm, like, spiraling or things are so out of whack that I'm really concerned.

Will 55:39

But I mean, you mentioned earlier that, that your upbringing, you had at least one role model who was very good at saying no to stuff that that he didn't want to do. Your dad I think. And so maybe that implies that you sort of come from a personal culture that has healthy mechanisms for this sort of built into it. But everybody doesn't, right? I mean, there are a whole countries where the accepted culture is

that your whole life is your work. So the example that I think I'm thinking of is in South Korea, they just reduced the official work week from like, 72 down to 65 hours as compared to our 40-hour work week.

And so I think a real strong part of their culture is that the expectation is that you're going to spend most, if not all of your time working. So if that's the culture that you come from, and it's not healthy for you, it's not good for you. How do you push back on that?

Keighley 56:44

If you're in that culture still? That's tough.

Will 56:46

Yeah. Well,

Zach 56:51

[laughter] At what point does self care become procrastination? Because that's something I've always worried about is, oh, I've worked really hard for two straight weeks to get this paper done. And I need to take a break or any other projects that I've been working on. At one point, I might take a half-day just to sleep and catch up on what I've missed. And then I start diving back in again, at what point is me delaying the inevitable of actually doing my job, procrastination versus self care?

Keighley 57:19

Probably when it stops feeling good; if you still--

Zach 57:22

Procrastination feels so good. [laughter]

Keighley 57:27

So lately I've been I've been having some oversleep situations going on. And I think it's probably for a plethora of reasons. But at some point, it doesn't feel good anymore. Like, my body doesn't need this, it's actually causing me to-- like, more stress than it's helping, it's not rejuvenating. It's not like me, spending more time in bed is actually what my body needs. And so that's like, no longer self care. That's not me listening to my body, that's something else. So it's like, you're just taking time. And I think if you really pay attention, you'll notice that, you know, even if I'm like, sitting in a bubble bath, or like doing something that's like, very traditional self care, there's a point where I'm like "eh, this isn't like doing it for me anymore". If I've, like, pushed so far past the limit--

Zach 58:08

Not bubbly! [laughter]

Keighley 58:10

Bubbles are gone. Yes. But like, that's, I mean, I think that's a really easy sign, in that when it just it stops feeling like it's fulfilling you and it's not serving its purpose.

Dani 58:21

Well, I think another thing to get back to Episode Five on Work is if you're tracking your time, and you can actually look back and see how many hours you've been putting into this thing. If you've been working 80 hour weeks, or even 60 hour weeks, I think it's far too much,

then that can be a sign as well.

Will 58:42

So I definitely have tended to be a procrastinator in my life, also, and I totally get what you're saying with procrastinating feels good. I also feel like procrastination stresses me out a little bit. So I think maybe one thing that I do now is I recognize when it's starting to stress me and I just, you know, I don't know if that's just an unconscious trigger when that procrastination is stressing me out and I listen to it. But then I think another thing that I do is I try to work a little bit and if it feels good, I keep doing it.

Dani 59:16

I think it's a lot of trial and error too, and you'll find the right balance for yourself.

Brooke 59:23

[singing] To sum the fuck up

We talked about the balance of work and life, mental health and the role of hobbies in balance.

Dani 59:37

Thank you so much for listening. Next time we'll be hosting Dr. Chad Starks for our second inSTEM episode titled "Diversity in STEM with Dr. Brian Chad Starks".

Will 59:47

He describes his journey to a PhD in criminology and how his experiences with STEM led him to what he's doing today: working to address under representation of certain groups in STEM.

Keighley 59:59

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Zach 1:00:16

Until next time, don't forget to consensually have a grad student or at least buy them a coffee or a double sweet Thai Tea.

Unknown 1:00:21

[outro music]

All 1:00:21

[inaudible, outro music] fuckfuckfuckfuck.....

Keighley 1:00:21

Frick on a stick!

Will 1:00:21

Fruitcake!

Transcribed by Keighely & <https://otter.ai>