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Title of paper: From grieving to career change: How personal grief-inducing events affect work identity

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The impact of a personal grief-inducing event on professional life, and work identity in particular, appears to be both implied and underexplored by scholarship. On one hand, the literature on the work-life interface suggests that events entailing profound losses and powerful emotions, like grief, can have a spillover effect to the work domain (Crouter, 1984; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). For example, negative emotions received in the life domain, including grief, spill over into the work domain and make a person experience grief-related emotions at their desk (Hendricks, Hinz, Pletneva, & Yoon, 2021). However, this literature does not go beyond exploring the immediate effect such events and emotions can cause on one's work life. On the other hand, identity scholars using the lens of post-traumatic growth at work (Maitlis, 2020) and positive identity work (Maitlis, 2009) showed that traumatic events can have long-term effects on professional identity. However, this literature has been generally focused on exploring the impact of *work*-related traumatic events, i.e., traumatic events which directly affect work, for instance, an injury that prevents continuing career of a musician (Maitlis, 2009) and dancers (Maitlis, 2022). As the result, recent scholarship has called for a deeper investigation of the impact *personal* events can have on professional life and the mechanisms such an impact involves (George Wittman, & Rockmann, 2022). I answer this call by drawing on grief literature and the rare studies which suggest that pivotal events can be triggers for career path change (Ibarra, 2004) and the decision to get retired (Vough, Bataille, Noh, & Lee, 2015); and argue that personal grief-inducing events can affect work identity. As such, this study asks: How and with what consequences does a personal grief-inducing event affect work identity? Without this knowledge, we miss understanding the interconnections between personal events and work identity as well as the consequences such an impact can lead to.

To pursue the question above, I undertook a qualitative study conducting 51 in-depth interviews among employees who had experienced grief-inducing events, in particular, the termination of significant relationships as the result of bereavement or separation of a strong committed partnership.

As a result of data analysis, I developed a model of the impact of personal grief-inducing events on work identity and the consequences of such a process. I found that these events prompt a new emphasis on work identity meaningfulness as well as humanizing of work identity that can take three paths: rebalancing work and non-work identity, work identity humanizing as a coworker or a manager, and work identity humanizing as an employee. Such processes were induced by affective, cognitive, and relational triggers generated by grief-inducing events. In turn, humanizing of work identity and the new emphasis on work identity meaningfulness led to work-life balance's resources reallocation, career path change, or job crafting.

This study makes several contributions. The study contributes to the identity literature by uncovering the impact personal grief-inducing events can have on an individual's work identity. Additionally, it reveals the mechanisms of this process and, thus, answers the identical call (George et al., 2022). Moreover, the study contributes to the literature on the work-life interface by enriching our understanding of the interconnection between personal events and professional life in the long-term. If the previous literature demonstrated an immediate and short-term effect of the impact personal events may have on the work domain – the spillover effect (Crouter, 1984; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000) – my study shows that such impact can occur on a long term and have a lasting effect. Finally, the study contributes to the literature on the meaning of work by uncovering the dynamic of work orientations and, thus, challenges the predominant assumption that work orientations are relatively stable.