

Up in the Air: Using Blogs to Study the Identity and Emotion Transitions of the Unemployed

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The 2008 recession caused unemployment, motivating individuals to evaluate their work-related identity. We qualitatively study such identity transitions and emotions during: (1) involuntary job loss, (2) subsequent unemployment, (3) job search, (4) underemployment, and (5) reemployment. We analyzed fifteen blogs of individuals laid off from October 2008 to April 2011. Blogs provide a rich medium to study of thoughts and feelings due to non-researcher-influenced discourse. Using grounded theory, we construct a model of the various transitions work-related identity undergoes. We also note how opposing sets of emotions interact with cognitive ideological techniques during identity transitions to produce varying outcomes.

Keywords: emotions, unemployment, identity, reemployment

INTRODUCTION

The credit crunch of 2008 forced companies to undertake massive employee layoffs leading to an exponential rise in the unemployment rates (Coy, 2008). Such massive job losses led many to evaluate their work-related identity. For instance, individuals may question their career path and evaluate whether their jobs enable or enrich their lives. Past economic crises have led to scholarly attention devoted to examining how individuals deal with job loss and unemployment psychologically (e.g., Gabriel, Gray, & Goregaokar, 2010; Patton & Donohue, 1998; Wanberg, Zhu, & Van Hoof, 2010). However, little scholarly attention has been given to what emotions are generated during the work-related identity transitions that occur for individuals who are laid off and subsequently find employment. While a few studies have examined the role of identity at particular points in the career transitions process that is precipitated by job loss (Ashforth, 2001), to our best knowledge, no study has tracked changes in an individual's identity from job loss to unemployment and then possible underemployment, to reemployment. Consequently, the role of affect/emotion on identity has remained largely ambiguous (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008).

To fill this gap, we utilize a qualitative, grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to analyze individuals who experienced either (part or all of) the identity transitions from a job loss event to the period of unemployment, to job search, to possible underemployment, and to being reemployed as well as the related emotions at each phase. Specifically, this study has the following research questions:

1. What are the key components to the work-related identity transition process as individuals experience (1) job loss, (2) unemployment, (3) job search, (4) possible underemployment, and (5) eventual reemployment?
2. What are the emotions most often expressed by individuals undergoing job loss and subsequent phases? How are those emotions related to the work-related identity transitions of the unemployed?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Individual Identity

In this study, identity refers to the various meanings attached to a person by self (Gecas, 1982). Identity is a complex and changing representation of self-knowledge (Kihlstrom & Klein, 1994) that is associated with a broad range of self-relevant feelings and attitudes (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). Identities are multiple, mutable, and socially constructed (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934) but coexist within a self that integrates diverse experiences into a unity (Gecas, 1982; Markus & Wurf, 1987).

Professional and Work-Related Identity

According to Schein (1978), professional identity refers to a relatively stable and enduring collection of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences that individuals use to define themselves in a professional role. Professional identity changes during periods of career transition (Ibarra, 1999; Nicholson, 1984) and is influenced by relevant experiences and meaningful feedback (Schein, 1978). Professional identity is often strictly defined from the perspective of professionals (e.g., doctors and lawyers). Dutton, Roberts, and Bednar (2010) introduced the concept of work-related identity which reflect how individuals construe themselves in their work domain with the conception being intentionally broad to encompass the variety of activities, tasks, roles, groups, and memberships that can compose a work-related self.

Role Transitions and Identity Negotiations

While identity changes often accompany work-role changes or transitions (Ibarra, 1999), it is important to understand what exactly entails a work role transition. According to Van Gennep (1960), a transition is a movement from one status to another. Such transitions can be as “micro” and every day as a transition from home roles to work roles (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000), to something as “macro” and unusual as a promotion from middle to senior management (Ashforth, 2001). Role transitions occur in three distinct phases: separation from the old status, initiation into new status and incorporation of the new status into one’s self-identity. Transitions involve taking on new roles, which demand new skills and behaviors and thus produce fundamental changes in an individual’s self-definition (Hall, 1976; Schein, 1978; Hill, 1992). Role transitions are, therefore, the sequential (and often permanent), psychological (and sometimes physical) departing from one role (role exit) and entering into another (role entry) (Burr, 1972; Richter, 1984).

Unemployment and Emotions

Unemployment can be considered an instance of a particularly severe work or role transition, one where most individuals struggle to maintain a strong sense of identity, even in situations in which there is a strong record of accomplishment (Amundson, 1994). Social support, self-talk, marketing strategies, and focused and persistent effort are proposed as the mechanisms via which individuals negotiate stronger identity post unemployment (Amundson, 1994). For those actively seeking reemployment, eventually finding (part-time or full-time employment) would conceivably involve further identity transitions due to changes in the external situation (Nicholson, 1987; Ashford & Taylor, 1990).

Studies on job loss show that job loss and unemployment are consistently associated with negative emotional outcomes such as stress and lowered self-esteem (Kessler, Turner, & House, 1987; Winefield & Tiggemann, 1990). The ways in which individuals cognitively interpret the job loss event and are

emotionally aroused by it are proposed to influence the ways they cope with unemployment and establish new routines (Leana & Feldman, 1988).

Two hypotheses about the impact of job loss on emotions have been frequently posited. On the one hand, job loss is associated with increased feelings of apathy, passivity, and depression among terminated employees (Cohn, 1978; Warr, 1978). However, job loss is also associated with increased feelings of anxiety, challenge, and aggression among terminated employees, with anger causing the individual to intensify job search activities (Bennett et al., 1995) and some individuals even experiencing feelings of excitement and challenge (Feldman & Brett, 1983). Thus, the negative emotion of anxiety that may accompany job loss may also be more facilitative than debilitating.

METHODS

Description of Research Setting – Blogs

Blogs are an ideal setting to address the research questions for the following reasons. First, blogs enable unobtrusive data gathering; unlike surveys or interviews, no extra step or time is required on the part of the respondent, and the data are not generated for researcher-influenced purposes. Secondly, in terms of emotion, blogs make for a good data source because it allows individuals to maintain anonymity and express their true feelings without fear of social stigma. As such, blogs might provide an unobtrusive way to detect the expression of true feelings. In terms of identity formation, blogs make for a good data source because language and discourse are important tools for identity construction and maintenance (Li & Seale, 2008). Thus, an ideal way of examining changing identity is to study identity narratives provided by individuals undergoing identity transitions. The time-stamped and diary-like nature of blogs makes it possible to track emotions and identity transitions of the blogger longitudinally.

Data Description and Collection Procedures

We identified blogs to study by using search strings that combine the words “unemployed,” “fired,” “laid off,” “sacked” with the word “blog.” Thereafter, we used a snowball sampling method to find other relevant blogs that were linked to the blog sites we visited. To be included in the sample, the blog had to be written by a person who experienced involuntary job loss either during or post 2008. Data were collected from 15 blogs that housed stories of various people’s employment. However, the dataset is not limited to only 15 individuals since we included blog posts from guest bloggers and commenters in the data and analysis. Each of these blogs was about unemployment written from November 2008 to April 2011, which was the period beginning after the most recent major economic downturn in the U.S. We used the following criteria to qualify data to be included for this study: (1) blogs must be written in English, (2) blog posts or comments selected should be specifically about the writer’s personal experience of job loss/unemployment/underemployment/ subsequent reemployment, (3) writer should have had such experiences in the U.S. job market context and should not be a recent graduate with no prior job experience in the field which they consider themselves a professional. Since identity is formed via social interaction (Amundson, 1994), our data included blog posts as well as related comments to those blog posts. We analyzed a total of 253 blog posts within the 15 blogs studied. We read through thousands of pages of blog posts and comments and at the end included about 500 pages of relevant data that were analyzed in depth.

Building Grounded Theory

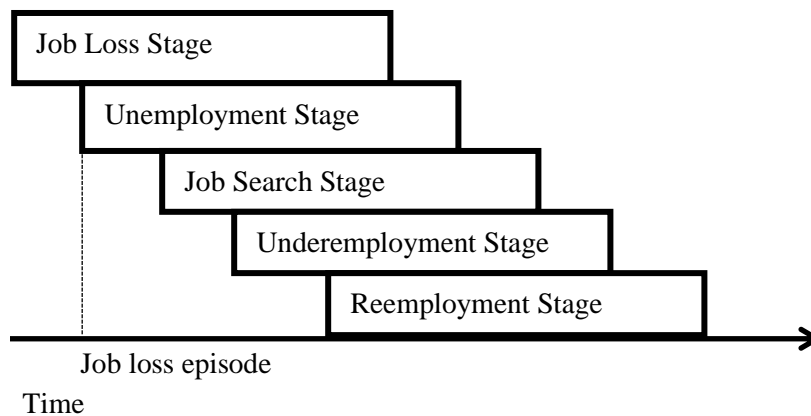
We followed Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) grounded theory methodology and identified some salient concepts by engaging in open coding, in which we assigned broad open codes to sections of the blog text. We then used a constant comparative process to analyze the data line-by-line and compare new data with old (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Corbin and Strauss, 2008). We followed Corbin and Strauss (2008) who acknowledge and encourage the use of researcher’s theoretical lenses during coding, while also allowing for the possibility for other codes to emerge. Since the same blog text could possess elements of more than one open code, we coded for multiple open codes where the case may be. Codes resulting from such an open coding exercise represent a first-order analysis that reflects the informants’ view of their experience

(Van Maanen, 1979). We also performed axial coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), which grouped the open concepts codes into more abstract categories to eventually help identify relationships between and among these general categories. All codes became a part of our coding dictionary, which we updated as and when we assigned, changed, or deleted a code. While open coding breaks the data up, axial coding attempts to bring it together and helps relate subcategories to categories (Charmaz, 2006). Axial coding represents a second-order level of analysis (Van Maanen, 1979).

FINDINGS

Longitudinal tracking of blogs resulted in observing repeated patterns of connections between (1) stages (job loss, unemployment, job search, underemployment and reemployment), (2) identity issues, (3) outcomes, and (4) opposing sets of emotions that affected the outcomes. Figure 1 depicts the model derived from the longitudinal qualitative data.

**FIGURE 1
OVERLAP BETWEEN THE FIVE STAGES**



Job Loss Stage

The job loss stage is the time period surrounding the actual firing episode. The primary identity issue during this stage was a sudden work-related identity hit. As a result, an individual often expressed emotions of either shock or relief and narrated an immediate mental withdrawal from the job leading to a sense of calm. The shock of job loss often led a questioning of what happened and why it happened which in turn resulted in blame assignment.

We found cogitation regarding the termination episode to be especially strong during the initial few hours post the job loss. The next morning, when an individual began his or her day with no workplace to go to, a temporary mental paralysis of sorts occurred. Dealing with the work-related identity hit due to job loss often led individuals to question why they were being terminated. For example, blogger 12x writes: "...human resources calls me and asks me if I can come in...and the news is delivered. I melted down ...cried I was shocked.... (they) tried to reassure me it had nothing to do with my performance. But ...if I am such a good worker why are you letting me go?" In this quote, the individual expresses sadness and shock and suggests that these reactions were regarding the hit her work-related identity had taken. Such a work-related identity hit, while uncomfortable for most, can also sometimes be an exciting time for others as it provides a space for pursuing dreams. For example, blogger 13x states: "I got a call from the general manager... And that's when it started. "Hardest part of my job (is having to fire you) ..." What was I going to tell my wife? How would we pay our bills? Would I ever realize my dreams of film school and filmmaking? ...This story might have a happy ending, though. I'm in film school now, making my thesis feature, and it was inspired by my layoff and nine months of unemployment." In this quote, we see how

this individual's unexpected job loss causes him to question the achievability of his goals, however, ultimately the layoff motivated him to pursue his dreams.

A coping mechanism during this stage was blame assignment, which involved individuals' questioning of whether their termination was fair. For example, blogger 3x states: "I was also totally humiliated when I was let go ... I remember feeling hot and my stomach churning...I know that the right thing will come, but until then, I am fine admitting that I am still mad, I'm a little scared, and I'm just plain tired of corporate America." In this quote, we can see how this individual is placing blame outside of herself, indicating that her work identity rested on the belief that she was worthy of that job.

Unemployed Stage

The unemployed stage follows the job loss stage. The prominent identity issues during this stage revolved around different types of work-related identity discrepancies. Further, ideological techniques such as reframing were observed in this stage. This helped individuals transition from the shock experienced in the job loss stage to an acceptance of unemployment, which was coded as normalization of identity as an unemployed individual. Individuals grappled with identity discrepancies between current vs. ideal work-related identity and also between past vs. present work-related identity. The former is a mismatch between the individual's challenges due to current work-related identity reality vs. what would have been ideal. For example, blogger 4x writes: "A very difficult decision (was) the decision to sell my house and downsize...Several people (asked) if I'd consider taking in a renter or tenant. I never entertained the notion. It didn't fit my previous perception of middle-class comfort and attainment." This individual describes the identity discrepancy between their current unemployed self (who cannot afford their home) and their ideal self (independence and middle-class lifestyle). Further, this discrepancy is triggering sadness and anxiety, demonstrating how identity discrepancy can lead to negative emotions.

Another work-related identity discrepancy was between an individual's former (past) work-related identity vs. what his/her present (post unemployment) identity. For example, unemployed individuals lamented the sense of routine a job provided, which unemployment took away. Such loss of routine sometimes initially provided a sense of freedom and relaxation but eventually became a source of discomfort, translating into a perceived loss of control. To regain this sense of control, many of the unemployed individuals devised a routine that they would force upon themselves. Blogger 6x, for example, states: "There is still a hint of surreal in the air as I start my third week of unemployment...(It) has something to do with breaking the cycle of having to be somewhere every day...(but) I'm doing what I should be doing — picking up a little freelance work here and there, talking to people about potential employment, surfing the job boards — and between that, personal projects and this blog, I feel busier than I was when I had a full-time job." In this quote the individual expresses how the loss of structure is discomfiting but a self-imposed structure allows for a reduction in anxiety/negative emotions. Further, it also demonstrates how moving from past to present identity, enables normalizing unemployment which in turn helped individuals transition to the next stage of job search. Another example at regaining control was the accomplishment of "small victories." For example, blogger 7x states: "I'll admit, that each day I have a momentary freak out and wonder how we're going to get by, but by the end of the day I feel good about what I accomplished. Even if it meant putting on pants." While here it might be stated more humorously, there are several similar examples where small accomplishments made an unemployed individual experience a sense of accomplishment and productivity to his/her day.

Job Search Stage

The job search stage begins when the individual undertakes activities related to seeking a new job, such as updating one's resume, conducting online job searches, and contacting individuals in one's network to let them know he/she is on the market. The major identity issue in this stage was navigating the exploring of possible selves: which refers to ideas about whom one might become, would like to become, or fears becoming (Yosh, Strube, & Bailey, 1992). Possible selves serve as cognitive and emotional filters by which people enact their environments and provide incentives for future behavior (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Evaluation of potential jobs led individuals to be more or less open to the various possible identities those

jobs bring with them. Being open to new possibilities was labelled as ‘prospective work-related identity success’ while rejection of potential jobs was labelled as ‘prospective work-related identity failure.’ The former led to increased job opportunities, while the latter led to a reduction of job opportunities.

Prospective work-related identity success or failure depended on whether the individual was able to push themselves out of their comfort zone (as related to the process of the job search or the nature of the job itself). Reframing could also occur when an erstwhile negative situation or task was characterized as a more positive one making it easier for individuals to push out of their comfort zones and explore new possible selves. As an example of prospective work-related identity success, blogger 8x writes, “I have made a firm commitment to focus on pursuing a career in a field that I had considered long ago but, for various reasons, did not ultimately pursue after college.” This identity success led this individual to discovering a passion for the job search process. For example, blogger 8x further writes: “What I have found is that the decision has made my search much more fun. It has opened my eyes to just how limited my network was...”

One of the ways individuals pushed themselves out of their comfort zone was networking which was seen as a key tool to exploring jobs but was often uncomfortable for individuals. For example, blogger 4x says: “...I went to a seminar entitled “Networking for the Slightly Shy, the Reserved and the Downright Introverted.” I’m not shy, but I can be a little reserved and introverted...I’m just comfortable by myself and don’t much like networking events. (But) it was very helpful, and I’m glad I went...”, making this a successful case of when an individual pushes themselves out of their comfort zone. As mentioned earlier, the ideological technique of reframing was found to play a central role in the job search process. In the quote below, blogger 10x reframes the concept of networking to make it more approachable: “I have found it most helpful to stop thinking around the term “networking” and to think more around the idea of relationship building... As I began to think more in terms of how the potential relationship could be mutually beneficial, however, the process got much easier.” In this quote, the blogger attempts to infuse the idea of networking with positive value by viewing it as mutually beneficial relationship building. Sometimes pushing of comfort zones failed, for example, when individuals longed for their comfort zone, they experienced adverse emotional reactions to the new prospective work-related identity. This led to a desire to revert back to their old self, in turn decreasing the number of potential job opportunities. Individuals blamed their age or the salary they made as roadblocks to breaking out of their comfort zones and exploring new identities. For example, blogger 9x states: “I took a job that made me feel like I was back in high school. I hated it and quit three days into it. I found some people were meant for fast food jobs, some for sales, and others are not. I am not one of those people. I couldn’t do it. I know I have bills, and such but I am woman enough to admit that I can’t work where I felt uncomfortable, unfamiliar, and unhappy in...”. In this quote, this individual narrates the failure to explore an unfamiliar identity and blames it on her life stage/age. We found that various emotions affected the willingness of a person to undertake the job search process.

Further, the pattern of positive and negative emotions and its relation to job search was not always consistent in terms of the fact that not all positive emotions were either good or bad for the job search. This warranted further examination of discrete emotions and also the context in which these discrete emotions played out. For example, blogger 6x writes: “If you truly believe you have something to offer, you will end up somewhere—it is just when- not if- but when. It took me 2 1/2 years.” This individual indicates that she held on to her self-belief that enabled her to have hope for a positive outcome in the job market even after many rejections. Hope, on the other hand, can also hinder an individual’s efforts on the job market if it leads to complacency. Many individuals expressed that a job interview going well led them to complacency in their search. For example, blogger 12x writes: “Several weeks ago, I interviewed for a position with a large public company ...Happily, I was one of two candidates for the position—I felt I was well-qualified and that I was a good fit culturally. While waiting for the verdict, I attempted to continue my job search, which was very difficult to do when you’ve interviewed well for a position that you would really like!” In this quote, this person hoping that things would work out, found that their motivation to keep looking dwindled. Thus, the same emotion—hope—can inspire both continued job search efforts as well as dampen them.

Another code of interest in the job search stage is how individuals deal with rejection. Rejection was more often than not found to be a source of negative affect and demoralization, which was coded as despair. For example, blogger 11x stated: “Company Q finally got around to rejecting me by e-mail...Four days later, human resources at Company Q e-mailed me again to tell me I had been rejected. It was more salt in the wound.” Here, blogger 11x notes that when he received news that Company Q had rejected him, he felt hurt. However, rejection could also act as motivation towards further job search. For example, blogger 10x states: “The hardest part of all of this is the emotional roller coaster that the process has put me through. Being strongly optimistic only to find out that I am not a fit or, worse, that I came in second place at the end of an extended process, could be devastating if I let it.rejection has to be used as a motivator. If you are getting rejected, at least you are in the game.” This individual reframes rejection into something positive suggesting it acts motivation to enable one to keep making progress towards employment.

Underemployed Stage

The next stage was the underemployed stage, which is a discrepancy between satisfactory employment and current employment (Kaufman, 1982). It can also be thought of as reemployment that is either part-time or outside of the individual’s field of interest and/or expertise (Kaufman, 1982). Thus, we categorized findings as concerning underemployment only if the individual communicated that he or she was doing a temporary job or in a full-time job that he or she was over-qualified for or did not feel sufficiently remunerated for. As depicted in Figure 1, there is overlap between the stages of job search and underemployment, such that when an individual is underemployed, they are typically still undertaking job search activities. Interestingly, during underemployment, the individual has two active identities- that of having a job and that of still looking for a job. We observed a hierarchy of desirability of the kind of underemployment an individual undertook. In most cases underemployed individuals were still looking for full-time work and remained unsatisfied with underemployment as a permanent solution to unemployment. However, occasionally, individuals began to view voluntary permanent underemployment as desirable, which in turn halted any further job search for full-time work. Permanent underemployment becoming attractive was motivated by a mental shift in perception regarding full-time work.

We found that often individuals accepted underemployment in order to keep their heads above water by earning an income. On the other hand, sometimes orientation toward underemployment went beyond a survival mentality and became a positive, desirable opportunity that enabled one to thrive. The temporary identities during this stage were those makeshift work-related identities that were adopted by individuals when transitioning from a work identity of a full-time employee in a field they were familiar with to either (1) a part-time employee in a field they knew or (2) a part-time employee in a field that was entirely new to them or even (3) a full-time employee in a job they disliked/did not feel was worthy of them.

When undertaking underemployment, individuals often conceptualized themselves as being in survival mode. An underemployment for survival type identity was adopted when individuals perceived that their circumstances left them with no choice but to have to do an underemployed job that was undesirable and often repulsive. While underemployed jobs provided an opportunity to make some income and thus survive unemployment, it also translated to time away from investing effort towards finding the right jobs. Underemployment solely to survive often led to individuals experiencing negative emotions and had negative effects on their well-being. However, sometimes individuals could also experience positive emotions for surviving due to the job they had. For example, blogger 4x writes: “I totally understand applying for ‘survival’ jobs as I did just that ...The job paid \$30K less than my previous position. But I accepted the offer because a) I had to pay the mortgage, and b) the financial crisis meltdown was front and center in everyone’s mind. I decided it was better to have a job that paid ‘anything’ rather than to continue collecting unemployment ...Three months into the job, I realized that not only was I underpaid but I was overqualified for the position. However, I fought not to slide into discontentment and focused on being grateful to be able to keep the roof over my head and to stay ahead of all my bills.” This is a case of someone viewing underemployment as a means to survive and thus avoiding experiencing negative effects on their well-being by focusing on the gratitude they feel that they are able to pay their bills.

On the other hand, individuals who viewed underemployment as a way to both survive and thrive worked in jobs they desired and viewed those jobs as enabling survival but also building new skills/stay active by utilizing their existing skills. For example, blogger 8x states: “I have started consulting on two projects. I’m using many of my existing skills while adding some new ones. I’m particularly excited about applying my skills to a new field and earning an income again.”

Sometimes underemployment is also seen as an opportunity to thrive via transitioning into a permanent full-time position with the company. For example, blogger 12x states: “I was offered, and accepted, a full-time position at the company where I have been working as an external consultant this past year. I was indeed expecting that this full-time opportunity might arise. I will now have the opportunity to see the team’s efforts to fruition as a consultant for this services company.” The person indicates that he viewed underemployment as a way to survive and thrive. The fact that an individual stays in an underemployed job indicates at least an attempt to adopt a temporary work-related identity. On the other hand, sometimes individuals were found to experience either prospective work-related identity failure or experimented temporary work-related identity failure.

Experimented work-related identity failure occurs when individuals try adopting a work identity for a temporary job, but then find themselves miserable and unable to continue working and thus quit the underemployed job. We saw an example of this earlier in the job search section where a woman decides that she is unable to work a fast-food job even as a temporary way to tide herself over. On the other hand, prospective temporary work-related identity failure occurs when an individual decides he or she is not even able to entertain the possibility of a work-related identity required by a certain work opportunity. They thus reject outright even the idea of adopting any work identity but the ones they are comfortable with. For example, blogger 15x shares: “I’ve been seeking my next CFO opportunity for quite some time now... Since I’m targeting specific senior management positions, which are limited by definition, it’s even more challenging. I don’t believe that there is any point in just sending out my resume to a number of companies...Because there is only one CFO position in any company.” This example shows that this person has experienced prospective work-related identity failure since he is not willing to try and find any other jobs apart from CFO positions.

An interesting finding related to this stage was around the idea of whether or not a person is seen as more desirable by a future employer if he/she already has a job. Since identity is socially constructed and socially influenced, these findings speak to how work-related image might influence work-related identity decisions. Some individuals felt that, from the perspective of a future employer, spending the time of unemployment to further one’s education or even solely dedicating oneself to finding full-time employment was a better investment of an unemployed individual’s time. For example, blogger 6x’s site states: “I understand lowering your salary expectations but not the actual job quality. If you were a production manager, why would you apply for a position at 7-11 and say to them “sure I can see this as a long-term career” when you know that’s BS ...Employers need to watch out for people ...who are desperate and take any job offered.” Here the person is arguing against underemployment in terms of qualifications needed for a job and suggests that he or she thinks that future employers should be wary of people who undertake such types of underemployment. More often, though, individuals were of the opinion that having a job made you more attractive on the job market and showed you to be enterprising and a survivor. For example, blogger 6x’s blog says: “It’s easier to find a job when you have a job right? That’s what everyone says, and I think it’s true that employers are more likely to look upon you favorably if you are currently employed versus unemployed.”

Individuals shared that, when job hunting, their underemployment was seen as attractive since it allowed them to stay active and polish their skills while also being flexible enough to leave the work whenever they liked. For example, blogger 8x notes: “During my recent interviews, I believe my consulting has been viewed positively. A common question that I get is how long is my commitment and when I would be available to start work. My response is that my current engagement is flexible, as the company is aware of my continued job search, so my availability is not an issue.” In this quote, we see how this individual is thus using the fact that his current job is temporary as a selling point, indicating that he is active in his field,

but flexible enough to suit the joining date needs of a future employer. Thus, how employers viewed underemployment could be reframed as either a positive or a negative issue.

A final finding in this stage is the idea that any job and a steady stream of income from a series of temporary jobs is preferable to being unemployed and searching for a full-time job. Here an individual no longer views an underemployed job as temporary. Hence, their job search now becomes looking for their next temporary assignment and occurred when individuals experienced a mental shift in thinking about full-time employment. They began to look at jobs as temporary “gigs.” For example, blogger 11x states: “I have been a consultant for a long time & I prefer to remain one. There is no such thing as a “permanent job” these days. If I am out of work again in a few months, I will at least have money in my pocket & additional experience/contacts to move forward into future roles.” We can see how this person’s mental shift in thinking about full-time employment enables them to view underemployment as an attractive option. Another commenter on the same site had the following to say about the nature of work and consulting: “...work activities – often the most interesting ones – do not match-up well with the (“get a job, keep it forever”) philosophy ...A lot of real-world jobs have a beginning, middle, and end that are not so far apart. Consulting-as-occupation addresses these as middle of-the-market revenue opportunities, rather than as “jobs with no future”. There’s real satisfaction in being able to leap into someone’s sea of problems, work your tail off for weeks or months or even occasionally years, and then say “Goodbye” with a smile and a handshake. Consulting – as a career – is both more and less secure than holding down a job. In this quote, we see that this individual views a career in consulting as an attractive option to full-time work, arguing that it can be more secure than full-time work.

Reemployment Stage

The last stage in this study was the reemployment stage. In this stage, individuals had found full-time, “permanent” employment they considered to be worthy of their educational and work qualifications at satisfactory salary levels. There was some overlap between the reemployed and underemployed stage in two ways: (1) underemployed jobs that began as temporary/part-time sometimes became full-time permanent positions, and (2) the individual’s identity was so scarred by the experience of unemployment that they began to view every job as temporary. The latter often was associated with a loss of trust in organizations as a whole. As an example of such a scarred identity, blogger 5x states: “I am confident that I will find another job; I am equally sure that my next position will not be my last. In today’s world, there is no such thing as a permanent job. People that are employed today are really just between job searches...when I was gainfully employed, I never wanted to think about the possibility of a job loss. But nowadays...hindsight tells me that this kind of preparation is important and there are lessons that I hopefully will heed next time.” In this quote, the blogger was still in the job search mode when writing this post. However, she was forecasting the stage of reemployment she vows to view all jobs as temporary to mentally prepare herself for the next job loss, indicating scarred work identity.

Most reemployment did trigger positive emotions and a reinforced work identity. This is true even when reemployment was not an easy transition to make. For example, blogger 2x states: “Having a full-time job is a lot harder than I remember it. The work is often taxing, particularly as I dust off the little-used parts of my brain. But I enjoy being engaged.” This individual seemed to experience positive emotions and a re-established sense of work-identity due to reemployment. Another blogger 14 x states: “I’m happy to announce that I was just offered a job with a great company, in an interesting position with a good salary. I couldn’t be more excited to start this next chapter in my career! ... In not having a job...I realized how much I missed working. I realized not only how much I have to contribute to a company, but also how much that company can contribute to me.” In this quote, this individual is expressing their positive emotions of joy and excitement and is experiencing a reinforcement of his work-related sense of self.

After a while, the scarred or reinforced work identity that reemployment brought on became “normalized.” This was marked by when reemployed individuals expressed that they were either (1) over the fear that no employment was permanent and that they had become comfortable at their new job or (2) over the positive emotions due to a reinforced work identity that was triggered by the new job. For example, blogger 15x’s site says: “Heading back to work after a 9 month hiatus had its savory moments... And

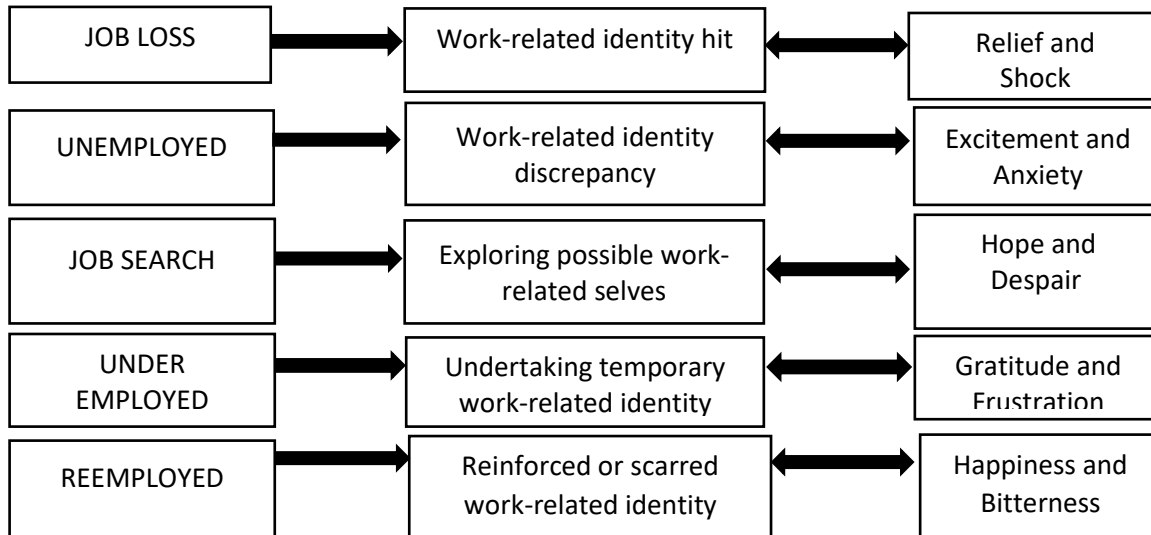
then...after about 6 months it's hard to remember how horrible being in search mode really was. The promises made during that period become harder and harder to keep. Pretty soon it's all routine again." In this comment, the individual refers to both scarred identity and identity normalization. Reemployment identity normalization also enabled individuals to experience fewer negative and more positive emotions.

Additionally, the longer they were in their new job, the more they knew what to expect and where they fit in, and this often led to a decrease in anxiety and increased well-being and positive emotions such as happiness and excitement. For example, blogger 16x states: "Now that I have started my new position, I have experienced another round of emotions. During my first week, I was overwhelmed. (it) was quite stressful...my second week, I gained more comfort with my new role... Now as I am entering my fourth week, I am thrilled to be here. I look forward to coming into the office each day and working with everybody. I am excited about the opportunity to make a significant contribution to the success of a growing company, and I can't wait to see what the future brings." In this quote, we can see that the longer this individual spent at his new full-time job, the more comfortable he became with his role and the expectations that were being placed on him, thus leading to a normalization of his work-related sense of self, which in turn led to him experiencing more positive emotions and less negative emotions.

We define "remnant identity issues" as those unresolved or lingering identity issues from an earlier stage which in turn generates outcomes similar to the original identity issue. For instance, if a person has a remnant identity issue of identity shock from the job loss stage, then possible outcomes include the individual experiencing stress triggered by memories of job loss which was labelled "post unemployment stress." One of the ways that enabled an individual to experience post unemployment stress was via "catastrophizing." The term "catastrophizing" is used here to capture instances when individuals used metaphors of death and destruction to describe the unemployment-related negative emotions they were experiencing. For example, Blogger 6x states: "I just got to experience job loss from the opposite side of the company door. And it is so terribly, awfully surreal...I'd barely warmed my chair here as a full-time employee when a senior employee of 15 years, with a VP to her title, left the building...The next day, hardly a word was said. It was as if this person hadn't existed...that's the surreal part. Here's a person who was integral to the company at a senior level...Someone with whom many here spent more time than with their families...I kept thinking, it takes years and years and years to live a life. But it takes a moment to just end it. And it's gone. Just like when someone leaves a workplace. They may have had an enormous impact on the organization...But when they're gone...it seems like a huge eraser came along and wiped out the place they held. And everyone carries on almost like nothing ever happened. Eerie. Surreal." In this quote, the blogger shares that although she is now reemployed, she was still shocked and saddened when she witnessed someone else losing their job, while no one reacted. She is suggesting that witnessing this person losing their job reminded her of her own job loss experience and the pain and identity shock associated with it. Further, she catastrophizes when she likens job loss to death which makes her feel sad.

In summary, the transition between various work-related identity issues from role exit to role re-entry include: work-related identity hit during the job loss stage; work-related identity discrepancies during the unemployment stage; exploring possible selves during the job search stage; undertaking temporary work-related identity during the underemployed stage, and dealing with either scarred or reinforced identity during the reemployed phase. These identity issues along with their associated stage are diagrammed in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2
WORK-RELATED IDENTITY TRANSITIONS AND ASSOCIATED EMOTIONS THAT INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCE DURING EACH STAGE



DISCUSSION

In this study, we qualitatively explore the identity transitions and associated emotions of certain individuals who experienced involuntary job loss due to the recent economic downturn. By analyzing the blog posts and comments posted by 15 bloggers, we identify several important contributions. First, this study is one of the only few studies that attempt to understand work-related identity transitions experienced from role exit to role re-entry. While prior research has provided cross-sectional snapshots of identity transitions by examining role entry or exits (Ashforth, 2001), this study further offers longitudinal data tracking identity changes across the gamut from role exit (job loss) to identity discrepancy (unemployment), to experimentation with alternative identities (job search), to new role entry (underemployment and/or reemployment). Thus, this study provides a roadmap of the various major identity issues at each stage as represented in Figure 2.

Second, this study provides an empirically grounded model representing the connections between the various identity issues and associated emotions and outcomes, thereby providing several hypotheses for future quantitative studies. It also shows how each identity issue is associated with predominant emotions for that stage. Third, this study provides qualitative evidence of how work-related identity can change through the various stages to ultimately result in a negative or scarred identity. Dutton, Roberts and Bednar (2010) who coin the construct work-related identities state that researchers usually assume that as individuals progress from one construction of self toward another, their identity changes are typically construed as positive (such as improvement, growth, or progress in some way). While this study provides evidence for this notion of positive identity as a result of progressing through the stages, there is also some evidence that the contrary might also occur. In other words, individuals may progress through the various stages with accompanying work-related identity changes but come out the other side with a scarred identity representing a diminishing of their former self.

Another identity-related contribution this study makes is that it extends the idea of possible selves into the unemployment and job search literature. While Markus and Nurius (1986) argue that possible selves are highly vulnerable to changes in the environment, they do not specify the processes by which possible selves are retained or rejected. Ibarra (1999) fills this gap with her concept of provisional selves. However, her findings are not appropriate for this study since they are based on professionals and people transitioning

to senior roles (promotions). In this study, we identify that the concept of possible selves provides a better explanation of how such people experiment with the various identities they can take on.

Moreover, identity negotiation is an ongoing process throughout life but becomes particularly significant during times of transition when boundaries are fluid (Amundson, 1994). This study contributes to the identity negotiations literature by suggesting how such negotiation may be achieved via ideological techniques such as reframing. With respect to emotions associated with job loss specifically, this study provides plenty of evidence for the established theory that job loss and unemployment primarily lead to individuals experiencing and expressing negative emotions like anger, fear, and sadness. However, this study also identifies some evidence to the theory that sometimes individuals also experience positive emotions like excitement post losing a job (Leana and Feldman, 1988).

Finally, this study offers some valuable implications for practitioners. The model in this study provides a framework whereby the human resource personnel of companies can help prepare a terminated employee for the identity transitions and associated emotions the individual will likely undergo. This, in turn, allows for a terminated employee to experience a smoother transition and possibly even decrease negative affect towards the ex-employer. Moreover, the possibility of scarred identity post reemployment suggests the need for human resource initiatives towards such hires to encourage the person to trust their new job and co-workers and thus become more committed to their new job.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study provides rich, descriptive data and offers crucial theoretical implications and managerial insights. However, given the nature of qualitative research, the insights from this study, while grounded firmly in the data, are subject to our interpretations. The grounded theory model that emerged in this qualitative study suggests a pattern of connections among identity issues, emotions and ideological techniques. Future quantitative testing could draw from this study to propose hypotheses and test the relationships among the constructs suggested by the model in this study. Additionally, while this study examines multiple individuals from diverse career fields, the generalizability of these findings to blue collar workers and fresh graduates is perhaps limited. Future research can specifically examine if the concepts and interrelationships in this study hold true for blue-collar workers or fresh graduates.

Another limitation of this study is the nature of the medium of blogs. In particular, it is possible that the emotions expressed might not be the emotions an individual was actually experiencing. For example, an individual may have been experiencing fear but given the public nature of blogs, chose to express hope. Indeed, there is often normative pressure to express positive emotions while avoiding negative emotions since intense negative emotion expression goes against norms of enthusiasm and good humor (Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989).

CONCLUSION

This qualitative investigation provides an inductive analysis of the data gathered from the writings of individuals who blogged about their experiences regarding job loss, unemployment, job search, (possible) underemployment and reemployment. The findings of this study offer theoretical insights into understanding identity transitions from role exit to role (re)entry as well as the connection between identity and emotions. This study also provides some managerial insights regarding how organizations might better handle role exits and role (re)entry.

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APPENDIX

Stage	Name of code	Description of code	Example quotes
Job Loss	Work identity hit	A state in which the individual's sense of work-related identity takes a significant hit.	<p>“There’s a time element involved, and it can be different for different people. Some people are so shocked by the initial layoff that they delve into instant introspection. With others, it takes a while — until they realize that, hey, they’re unemployed, and have been for some time.”</p> <p>“I was based out of Colorado and asked to move to London to help open a new branch of our company. I spent 6 months living and working in London ... FOUR days before I was scheduled to fly back to the Colorado office I was told I had been let go due to the economy. I had no idea while I was in London the company had let go of half of its staff...I had to move in with my parents in Florida because I had no place to live in Colorado and no job to go back to... It was quite a shock after being gone half a year...I had no idea how bad things were stateside. I will never forget that LONG flight from London back to Florida. just sitting on a plane not knowing what was going to happen next and not being able to do anything about it.”</p>
Job Loss	Shock	A sudden disturbance in the mind or emotions.	<p>“The news hit me out of nowhere and even with the crippling economy, I was very shocked to hear the words, “I have to let you go” spew from the lips of my former boss.”</p> <p>“I entered the room assuming that our meeting would address this issue of my outstanding bonus. To my shock, he leaned back in his chair and said “This is not good news... I’m going to have to let you go” There were so many signs that despite all of my education, career success and personal success, I now wonder if I am even half as bright as I think I am.”</p> <p>“I got fired by my company...I was left shattered and emotionally distraught, like I didn’t see it coming.”</p>

Job Loss	Mental withdrawal	Cognitive pulling back from current situation (involuntary job loss)	“As the words came out her mouth, I remember sitting there just feeling numb. I couldn’t process everything she was saying. Thoughts of how I would survive the next few mortgages flooded my brain”
Job Loss	Work identity liminality	The state in between who the individual was as an active employee and who they now are post involuntary job loss.	“I am not sure what my next step will be. I am still grieving the loss of the job I loved so much... but I know I will survive.” “the unreality of losing your job comes down to the reality of how your life changes, and mine was about to be transformed in ways I’d never imagined.”
Job Loss	Relaxing	An attempt to or an outcome of trying to decrease anxiety.	“What am I going to do? Like everyone else, look for work. And unwind. I'm giving myself at least two days to listen to records and stare at the ceiling. I'll probably self-medicate. I anticipate a few naps. I might take a soul-searching walk around town to "Dust in the Wind”” “Have you heard of "funemployment?" It's this totally kickass concept of not giving a fuck about losing your job and using the time to have the time of your life. I love my generation.”
Common to multiple stages	Reframing	As the process of individuals infusing something with positive value and/or negating its negative value (Ashforth et. al., 2007).	“Here are some additional things to help you get through low points. They have helped me. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every “No” means “Next”. My talent is going to the place that recognizes and needs it. There are more companies to discover. 2. My value as a person and a worker has not changed because I am unemployed. I am can do great things whether I am employed or not in other capacities. I have gifts to give to those in need. 3. Review 1 & 2 daily.” “There is an old saying in sales – “If you have never been fired, you are not trying hard enough”. It can be re-written today to say “If you never have been laid off, you do not understand business”. It will happen to virtually everyone eventually. The later in your career it happens, the harder it will be.”

Common to multiple stages	Blame assignment	An assigning of blame to self or other (economy, organization etc.).	<p>“goes straight to the heart of what so many of us feel in the face of job loss. That, at some level, it’s our fault. It doesn’t matter that thousands and thousands of others are also experiencing it. I think in some way, many of us still harbour a sense that, deep down, it’s our doing. Why weren’t we one of the ones left standing”</p> <p>“I’ve felt that it was my fault. Not a day goes by that I don’t wake up, drag myself out of bed, start the daily job search and wonder what could I have done or said or not done or not said to keep my job. During our meeting he expressed his sadness and blamed the recession. I noted that the recession was not making the decision to “let me go,” he was.”</p>
Unemployment stage	Control (gain and loss)	Code that captures the experience of the gain and loss of control	<p>“I am semi-unemployed in that I’ve got some consulting work but not enough in this economy to sustain me. I am searching for full time work. I started a routine of getting on the treadmill every single morning and I have rarely faltered in that. (no gym membership, treadmill is in the basement) I am convinced that this has kept the stress of the situation under control and has made me feel better about myself even under the circumstances! It will pay off I am sure! Your article is perfect and I am an example of someone who took full advantage of a little more time in her schedule. In an economy that seems to have taken control of all of our lives I adopted the motto “Control the things you can control.” Health and wellbeing are definitely one of those things!”</p> <p>“Whenever I have found myself questioning my progress, I take steps to create positive momentum. I contact new people and call friends. I tackle outstanding tasks. There are always more things to do – and accomplishing them re-establishes a sense of control. Looking back, I realize that these bursts of activity have actually generated a significant portion of my progress so far.”</p>

Unemployment stage	Structuring the day	Code that captures all instances of when individuals impose a routine /structure on their day during unemployment.	<p>“Because I am unemployed, I really have no set routine. I don’t have anything—aside from job hunting—that I have to do on a daily basis. So recently, I have realized that I need some sort of routine just for stability in my life, which is why last week I started to implement a daily routine into my life...I think that not having a routine is going to be detrimental to life after unemployment. So, implementing some form of routine is extremely important.”</p> <p>“I agree that maintaining a healthy routine is the key to staying sane during the process of looking for a new job. I lost my job as a National Account Manager for a small pharmaceutical company back in October and right from the start I committed myself to a routine that not only including looking for a new job, but to also to enhance my overall fitness level. Exercising is such an important part of my life and I know for a fact that it is also helping me to maintain my focus during my job search.”</p> <p>“The most important thing in times of unemployment is to keep a regular routine and ensure that you are doing everything to get work – any work to start with that will pay the bills and then focus on what you’d love to do.”</p>
Unemployment stage	Small victories	The idea that during unemployment, even small accomplishments are significant.	<p>“Things seem to have opened up a little. But now the severance is gone and I am burning through savings (retirement savings!) I agree the end will come when it comes. Getting there is the rough part. As I told my friend at the coffee shop this morning, it’s good just to get up and breath.”</p> <p>“There are so many factors I cannot control. This week, I’m trying to focus on more manageable, short-term tasks such as making three follow-up calls for the day. True, these small tasks lack the glamour of larger goals but they give my Type A personality the sense of accomplishment it craves. Being the</p>

			impatient sort, it also helps to have a list of completed tasks on hand to remind myself that I am doing all I can and that is all I can ask.”
Unemployment stage	Unemployed identity normalization	Acceptance by an individual of the self-concept that they are now an unemployed person	“I chose not to let unemployment status get to me. It was hard in the beginning. I went through self-doubt, but never asked for a pity party. I was mad that while the company I worked so hard for, who I know made big profits everyday, who busted their butts to get the higher ones in the corporation where they were. Without “Us” little people, where would they be? Yes, I was furious at first. I can’t tell you how many times I cried myself to sleep with worry. Then as the days passed, then weeks, I started cutting back on things. I cut my phone bill down to basics, the television, too, and groceries, and didn’t waste gas on running here and there. I went, and still do go to town once week to pick up supplies, put in applications where I can and to do what I have. I decided I won’t let this crisis get the best of me. I can still wake up, smile and do what I did before, only this time without a job.”
Job search stage	Exploring possible selves	Exploring ideas about who one might become, would like to become, or fears becoming (Markus and Nurius, 1986)	“When I announce to friends and colleagues that I’m currently committed to switching my career path in the middle of our great recession, I’m sure some of them regard it as a mild form of lunacy. I completely understand this viewpoint, but I’d like to think that I’ve found an optimal formula for switching careers in the middle of harsh economic times.” “I am so good at what I do, I will not lose my job even in this market.” Well, I was proven wrong. It’s time to consider all the things that you never thought that you had the guts to do. It’s amazing how open I have become toward all kinds of career possibilities.”
Job Search and underemployment stages	Prospective work-related identity failure	Rejecting an identity before even trying it out.	“I was still out of a job. I was losing hope and getting desperate. I tried a couple call centres.. sorry.. I’d rather be unemployed. What a sweatshop. boot on your neck kind of place... both of them. not worth it for 9 bux an hour.”

Job Search and underemployment stages	Experimented work-related identity failure	Rejecting an identity after trying it out	<p>“It hurt a lot to be out of work, but no job is better than a commission-based job. I tried it and it stinks. I hate being home staring at job board, calling people who are tired of hearing from me ask whether they’ve heard about a position or if they have a lead. But it beats putting up with nasty buyers who get you to show them everything, go over the prices, financing, and then go down the block and get a better deal for \$5 dollars less than your price, just to make themselves feel better.”</p>
Job search stage	Step in the right direction	Undertaking tasks crucial to job search such as networking, self-promoting etc. to make continuous progress towards finding full time employment	<p>“Exercise keeps me in a great frame of mind for my job search. I make it a point to exercise at a fairly intense pace for a few days leading up to a job interview. I’m convinced that I smile more, feel less stressed, and project more confidence just when I need all of these benefits. Be it endorphins or a placebo effect, I challenge everyone reading to give it a shot and report back. Plus, if we lose a few of those holiday pounds, won’t that only serve to bolster our confidence further?”</p> <p>“The only active lead sourcing channel that has worked for me in the last six months has been networking. Keeping in close contact with friends and colleagues, as we all know, pays dividends. I was at a holiday gathering last night when a former colleague of mine offered every avenue of introduction to me at his current and former companies. This goes to show that even our social engagements can be productive for our job search efforts. I make sure that I’m (unobtrusively) in job search mode at nearly any hour.”</p> <p>“I’ve found the key to my job search so far has been laughter. Whether it’s laughing at a mindless sitcom or a live stand-up routine is irrelevant. Heck, I’ve even found relief laughing at some of the poor souls on this site that I found in my (admittedly too long) travels: http://www.interviewfollies.com As long as your methods don’t have you</p>

			considering jumping off a bridge on a daily basis, I'd say you're doing something right. 😊”
Job search stage	Comfort zone	The ability or inability to push oneself out of one's comfort zone.	“I absolutely detest networking for the ungodly beast it is. It is so uncomfortable to reach out to people from my past life to ask for help with finding a job. I would rather chew off my left arm.”
Job search stage	Rejection	How individuals deal with rejection during this stage.	<p>“Months of networking, internet job board searching, resume matching, applying, calling, emailing, waiting and hoping were dreadful. I was shocked at the lack of respect potential employers had for me as a job seeker, as 90% of my applications were never given the simple courtesy of a response. Employers seemed unconcerned about the quality of their applicants, as almost none even asked for my references let alone checked them out”</p> <p>“Today, I'm still waiting to hear back from the recruiters conducting the current searches for those two companies. Since it's been over two weeks since I thought I'd hear back from them after their initial conversations with their client companies, I'm assuming that they've decided not to include me in their first round of interviews. I try not to be discouraged, but it's hard to feel that, although I'm convinced that I'd be a great candidate, I can't seem to gain an opportunity to make my case.”</p> <p>“I'm sure the incumbent is very well qualified, so I can't fault this type of decision making. If I had been the internal candidate, I'd have wanted the same outcome. Bad news for me; good news for him.”</p>
Job search stage	Spousal support	Instances of how support from the unemployed individual's spouse impacted the person's job search experience.	“It's difficult for me to confront the prospect of unemployment again, but I do know what to expect. Plus, my wife has a well-paying job now, so our finances should weather the storm.”

Job search stage	Mental shift in perception of full time work		<p>“I was lucky enough to find a contract job just 3 months after being laid off. At first, I was admittedly discouraged by the reduced responsibility, compensation and exposure. I found it difficult to be motivated knowing that the job could end in 3 months (and then every 3 months thereafter). Over time however, I began to embrace the reduced stress, the additional time with my family and the chance to focus on other interests. After 41 years, I now see there is so much more to life than the maze and cheese. I would be fine being a contractor for the remainder of my career. After all, the only difference between a contract and full time position is benefits. The job security is about the same”</p> <p>“I have concluded that longevity in a job doesn’t pay. Keep on moving..”</p>
Underemployment	Undertaking temporary work identities	how individuals dealt with the makeshift work-related identities that they adopted to enable them to perform temporary jobs	<p>“It’s been a number of weeks since I last posted to this blog. I’ve been really busy. Not busy making contacts, that could lead to my next full-time job; instead, I’ve been really busy working as a consultant.”</p>
Underemployment	To survive	When individuals felt like their circumstances left them with no choice but to have to do an underemployed job that was undesirable, and often repulsive.	<p>“after searching for 8 months and not being able to continue doing so, I took a so-called “interim” job. Now, I’m stuck in between: making money to pay bills, but not having any free time to devote to a thorough search, networking, and/or attending meetings and seminars.... I am letting all of you know that taking an “in-between” job may possibly cause an even greater emotional setback. When you feel as though you’re working for nothing, and you become more frustrated thinking about all the time you wish you could be spending searching or making contacts with people who may be able to assist you in your search, you become more frustrated and question whether the “in between” thing was the right decision. It’s not a roller-coaster for me, it’s more like a merry-go-round: working for pennies and wondering if I’ll ever get back the position I worked so hard to</p>

			<p>achieve, and more importantly, how will I ever find my self-esteem, dignity and confidence again? It keeps me busy-this “in between” job, but it makes me feel lousy at the same time and I feel I can’t get off the merry-go-round.”</p> <p>“Most of my freelance projects only use some of my skills. And that’s fine. I still do the best I can. A job well done sometimes leads to more and better work. But sometimes it just leads to a paycheck. One day I’ll have the perfect job, or at least one that draws on more of my skills. One day I’ll get paid like the marketing gangster I am. But today—two years and three months after losing my last full-time job—isn’t that day. Today I’m just trying to get my foot back in the stirrup before the horse rides away.”</p> <p>“Sit down, boys and girls, and let me tell you a story. It’s about someone you know, or at least someone like someone you know. Let’s call him “Our Hero.”</p> <p>“Superman” is already taken. He lives in the big city. He likes cookies. He dresses in grownup clothes. He rides the subway. He sits at a desk. And he works... for now. His job is freelance. Many mommies and daddies have jobs like this. If he works, he gets paid. If he doesn’t work, he doesn’t get paid. The job doesn’t come with health insurance, which is what he needs to see a doctor when his tummy hurts. And it doesn’t come with a 401K, which makes him think he won’t have to work when he’s old. A freelance job, and the paycheck, can go away at any time. Our Hero wants a full-time job instead. But he likes money and needs more of it now. So he works. And he works. And he works.”</p> <p>“As the days after the layoff turned into weeks, my confidence level started to decline. I went from applying for some positions that were a little above my reach, to exclusively applying to “survival” positions for which I was over-qualified.”</p> <p>“I was let go from a senior position a few years ago. I had seen how friends and acquaintances in similar circumstances</p>
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			took 12-18 months to find the “right” job, so instead I took an unsuitable, lower level job just to keep working. While this was absolutely the worst job experience of my life, it was still better than unemployment.”
Underemployment	To survive and thrive	When temporary job was seen as an opportunity that both helped the person earn money to survive as well as helped them build new skills / stay active by utilizing their existing skills.	<p>“I’ve been really busy working as a consultant....The assignment is extremely interesting. I work with solid and dedicated people, and the compensation is good.”</p> <p>“I’m also proud to say that I’ve been able to update my résumé with rigorous online marketing experience that supplements the theoretical knowledge that I’ve acquired. This consulting work has rendered my profile (as a full time web analytics professional) much more credible.”</p>
Underemployment	How future employers view underemployment	The idea of whether or not a person is seen as more desirable by a future employer if he/she already has a job (albeit a temporary one and in many cases not something that is directly related to the future job they are looking for)	“If you can wait it out for 2 years to find the right opportunity, more power to you, but I would say take something for now and keep your eyes open into 2010, ride out the market until things improve. Being out of work for 2 years is going to be major topic of conversation in your interview process.”
Underemployment	Time spent for underemployment	This code captured cases of when an underemployed individual attempts to determine how much time they did dedicate or should be dedicating to underemployed job assignment versus spending	“I’ve been really busy. Not busy making contacts, that could lead to my next full-time job; instead, I’ve been really busy working as a consultant.”

		time search for full time employment.	
Reemployed stage	Scarred work identity	A (temporary or permanent) change in an individual's work-related self-concept such that the individual is carrying around some sort of emotional baggage from the past that affects their work identity in the present.	<p>“Being laid off changes your viewpoint on life. You will never blindly give your heart and soul to a company again. It also forces you to see yourself as a person not an employee of company X. Do I wish layoffs on anybody – no. Do I think the experience makes you a wiser and better person – yes. Pain can do that for you.”</p> <p>“Three layoffs, six years and zero desire to go through any of it again. This last layoff was due to a perfect storm of absolutely horrible management, arrogant leadership and the slumping economy. Most assuredly a layoff builds character – three builds an extraordinary determination never to go through it again. So, with that determination in hand, I crunched the numbers and figured out the minimum amount of money it would take to keep a roof over my head and food on my table. It's called Noodleconomics – – making just enough profit to sustain a business and yourself on ramen noodles. It's my new way of life.”</p> <p>“Even though I am employed I am looking for my next job in case my current company goes under. Is it fun – no. But this is what we have to do to survive. I have learned from past 5 years and 2 layoffs. Rely on nobody but yourself.”</p>
Reemployed stage	Reinforced identity	Reinstating of the person's work-related self-concept after finding full time employment.	<p>“For me, losing my job was one of those defining moments in life. I knew I had a choice: I could choose to lose my way (my mind) or rise to the challenge and follow what my Spirit tells me to do, always remembering that I am more than a statistic on the news. I'll share with you what I was told the day I got “set free” (laid off) from my job: “This is a new chapter in your life. WRITE ONE HELL OF A CHAPTER!” And I did just that! “I have questioned whether some of the personal traits that I try to emphasize (like loyalty, honesty, and performance) are inconsistent with survival these days. But as a father and a husband, I have</p>

			<p>people relying on me to generate money and to exemplify good character. And the opportunities that have come about recently have been through friends and relationships that I helped along the way. So, I am optimistic that I will succeed by remaining true to myself, my family and my friends—and I’m sure build some character along the way.”</p> <p>“I have been out of work for almost 14 months and finally got a job offer last week. I may even get another tomorrow. Like everyone else, I had many frustrations. I was told that I was underqualified, overqualified and was left wondering what type of job was in the middle. I took classes to enhance my skills, volunteered, networked, attended career fairs, conducted dozens of informational interviews, joined professional organizations and served on their committees, worked with a recruiter, etc. Like the article said, I had the most success with job boards too. I ended up getting interviews for 10 positions, 9 of which I heard about and applied to through a job board. The other was a result of a career fair. Networking is important because people can help you look for postings, can serve as a reference, can get your resume in front of the hiring manager, give you insider information, etc. Keep trying. Do not give up hope. Nothing is wrong with you if you haven’t found something yet. Even though they say the economy is turning around, it will take awhile for all the displaced to regain employment.”</p> <p>“It was then that I seriously began contemplating starting my own business. I had considered the possibility at various times in my life before but always had a job that I liked well-enough and a steady paycheck which provided little impetus to take risks. My layoff changed that....My recent job search has also helped me identify what was most important to me in terms of type of work and type of environments where I thrive. Having worked for both small companies where I wore many hats and large corporations</p>
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			where I had a function very small in scope, the exposure has given me a solid range experiences to compare.”
Reemployed stage	Making and keeping promises	The idea that individuals make certain promises to themselves as a result of having suffered through unemployment and whether or not they keep these promises.	<p>“And I must continue documenting my experience and attempting to help others, because if I didn't, I'd be letting myself down.”</p> <p>“I hope to figure out some sort of writing schedule to keep me involved with (my blogs) going forward, but it might take a little time to balance the new demands on my time.”</p>
Common to multiple stages	Discrete emotions	Sadness, humiliation, guilt, fear, etc.	<p>“The feeling, I must admit, was not resignation but relief. I think my blood pressure dropped 30 points when I walked out the door for the final time. I have my days of frustration, worry and doubt, but overall, there's a strong sense of hope and encouragement.”</p> <p>“I can't deny that when I read Friday's news, I felt a little twinge of dopamine released into my system. A few days later I can't help but be more reflective. About 15 months ago, it was quite easy to wonder whether we would soon be revisiting the depths of 1929. I performed a thorough review of my investments, read the business news on a seemingly-hourly basis, and joined everyone else in my own quota of brooding. But Friday seems to point to the conclusion that, for the third time in my adult life, economic cycles are exactly that: cycles. What does this mean for my job search? It keeps me pressing onward and injects a healthy measure of the most effective fuel for any job search – hope.”</p> <p>“I have been out of work for about 1 1/2 years & what I am finding most difficult is staying motivated and upbeat. I have been doing all the recommended things: LinkedIn, networking, job boards, etc. and what's frustrating is the lack of prospects due to so many applicants for each job I apply for. I know that I will get my turn again at employment one day & others are in worse situations than mine,</p>

			<p>but it is just so frustrating to get no reward for doing all the so-called right things. Like spinning my wheels. This too shall pass!”</p> <p>“I’m so discouraged, but need to keep going. How could I give up? I have a family. After 6 interviews in the last few weeks, here I am at square one! It feels as if everyone else is getting jobs and I’m not. What is wrong with me? All I can do is continue my search.”</p> <p>“I start my day with a little humor. I say that when I wake up that I lift the sheets and look at my feet. If I do not see a toe tag then I have to get up and work the plan. My mantra is, “There is a career out there for you, you just have to find it”.”</p> <p>“Managing the volatility of emotions, aspirations and expectations is one of the more challenging aspects of my career-change process. The highs and lows are more frequent than in a full time job. In any given week there are a couple of days of great progress and promise. Calls are answered, emails are returned and meetings go well. Everything seems to be moving forward. Other days are challenging, such as when I am left waiting longer for a response or learn that a position isn’t actually getting filled. The hiring decisions are taking much longer than in the past. I understand enough about the world at this point to prevent myself from getting too excited when progress is made. However, it takes more effort to manage the challenging days.”</p> <p>“I have been intermittently employed on a contract basis since losing my job in March 2008. Am I scared? You bet! I will lose my home in December if no steady income materializes by then.”</p>
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