UP IN THE AIR:

USING BLOGS TO STUDY THE IDENTITY AND EMOTION TRANSITIONS OF THE UNEMPLOYED

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ABSTRACT

The 2008 economic crisis led to massive job loss, motivating many of the recently unemployed to evaluate their work-related identity. In this dissertation, I qualitatively study work-related identity transitions and accompanying emotions during five phases, from role exit to role entry: (1) the event of involuntary job loss, (2) subsequent period of unemployment, (3) job search (4) (possible) underemployment and (5) reemployment. I analyze fifteen blogs of people who had been laid off from October 2008 to April 2011. Blogs, with their natural (non-researcher-influenced) discourse and back-and-forth interaction between blogger and readers, provide a rich medium for the study of people’s thoughts and feelings. Using grounded theory, I construct a model of the various transitions an individual’s work-related identity undergoes through these phases. I also note how opposing sets of emotions interact with cognitive ideological techniques during these identity transitions to produce varying outcomes.

Key words: Identity, Emotions, Grounded Theory, Job loss, Unemployment, Job search, Underemployment.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures ............................................................................................................................ iv
Acknowledgment .......................................................................................................................... vii
Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS ................................................ 1
  Overview of Relevant Theory and Research ........................................................................... 1
  Research Questions ............................................................................................................... 6
  Contributions Overview ....................................................................................................... 6
Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW ......................................................................................... 8
  Identity and Work-related Identity ....................................................................................... 8
  Emotions .............................................................................................................................. 16
  Job Loss, Unemployment and Job Search ............................................................................ 25
  Underemployment and Reemployment ............................................................................... 36
Chapter 3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY ............................................................................. 47
  Description of Research Setting: Blogs ............................................................................. 47
  Data Description and Collection Procedures ..................................................................... 51
  Building Grounded Theory .................................................................................................. 53
  Trustworthiness of the research ......................................................................................... 54
Chapter 4. FINDINGS ............................................................................................................. 56
  Job loss stage ...................................................................................................................... 56
  Unemployed stage .............................................................................................................. 69
  Job search stage ............................................................................................................... 77
  Underemployed stage ....................................................................................................... 93
  Reemployment stage ...................................................................................................... 109
Chapter 5. DISCUSSION ....................................................................................................... 124
  Job loss ........................................................................................................................... 126
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. OVERLAP BETWEEN THE FIVE STAGES .................................................. 170

Figure 2. WORK-RELATED IDENTITY TRANSITIONS AND ASSOCIATED EMOTIONS
THAT INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCE DURING EACH STAGE ..................................... 171

Figure 3. BASIC FORMAT OF GROUNDED THEORY MODEL .................................. 172

Figure 3a. EXAMPLE FROM JOB LOSS STAGE ....................................................... 173

Figure 3b. EXAMPLE FROM UNEMPLOYMENT STAGE .......................................... 174

Figure 3c. EXAMPLE FROM JOB LOSS STAGE ....................................................... 175

Figure 3d. EXAMPLE FROM UNDEREMPLOYMENT STAGE .................................... 176

Figure 3e. EXAMPLE FROM REEMPLOYMENT STAGE .......................................... 177
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As I am now completing the third week in my new position, I have had time to reflect upon the emotional roller coaster that I have experienced over the past several months… I had spent 13 years with my previous company... The experience of searching for a new position brought on many different emotions. I experienced the fear of the unknown. I had not searched for a job in a long time and had no clue where to start. I spent the first few weeks of my search focusing on the job boards, but with little success. I began questioning my qualifications, my identity, and wondered if I would ever find a position.

There were days where I received no phone calls or prospects of interviews and it was extremely disappointing and it affected my sleeping patterns. There were other days where I had an exceptionally good phone interview or was notified that I had been bumped up to the next stage in the interview process and I experienced the emotions of excitement and enthusiasm. A roller coaster of emotions is the best way to describe my search. There was no smooth ride. But at the end of the day, the ride did come to an end and I survived. I am pretty sure that I am not a fan of roller coasters any longer.

Now that I have started my new position… 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.

- Recently reemployed blogger

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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, including questions relating to who they were as a worker, their career path, and reflections on how their jobs did (or did not) enable or enrich their lives. Past economic crises have led to an examination of how people deal with job loss and unemployment psychologically (Fineman, 1983, 1987; Gordus, 1986; Kaufman, 1982; Patton & Donohue, 1998). The recent economic downturn has renewed this interest in the psychological effects of unemployment (Gabriel, Gray & Goregaokar, 2010; Wanberg, Zhu & Van Hooft, 2010).
I extend the job loss and unemployment literature by specifically examining what emotions are generated during the work-related identity transitions that occur for individuals who are laid off and consequently find employment. The role of affect/emotion on identity has received limited attention (Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008). By examining the role of emotion during identity transitions, I hope to begin to address this important gap in the literature. Further, 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; Ibarra, 2003; Kunda, 1992), to the best of my knowledge, no study so far has tracked identity changes through the *entire* transition process (from job loss, to unemployment and then possible underemployment, to reemployment). I studied blogs of fifteen individuals who experienced and blogged about either the entire gamut of (or parts of) the identity transition experience from the job loss event, to the period of unemployment, to job search, to possible underemployment (i.e. finding part time or temporary work) to being reemployed. I used a qualitative, grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which involved analyzing words in blogs posts, eventually leading to the creation of a model that captures the relationships of interest. Now, I briefly review each of the major literatures invoked by this research; the following chapter delves more deeply into them.

**Identity and Work-related identity**

Identity refers to the various meanings attached to a person by oneself (Gecas, 1982). These meanings might be represented as self-schemas that capture features or attributes that individuals associate with themselves (Markus, 1977), or they might be represented in a narrative form (McAdams, 1993), as individuals narrate a story of who they are in interaction with others (Gergen & Gergen, 1988) and over time (Carlsen, 2008; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). According
to Brewer (1991), “identity” at the individual level has two parts: 1) personal identity – those characteristics that differentiate one individual from others and 2) social identities – categorizations of the self into more inclusive social units. Amongst the social identities management research concerns itself with is the concept of work-related identity which are the aspects of identity and self-definition that are tied to participation in the activities of work (i.e., a job) or membership in work-related groups, organizations, occupations, or professions (Dutton, Roberts & Bednar, 2010). Thus, work-related identities concern the way that individuals construe themselves in their work domain and is an intentionally broad construct to encompass the variety of activities, tasks, roles, groups, and memberships that individuals can use to compose a work-related self (Dutton, Roberts & Bednar, 2010).

Being laid off is an instance of a particularly severe career transition: unemployment posits a very real threat to an individual’s work-related identity (Gabriel, Gray & Goregaokar, 2010). Indeed, there is ample research that identity changes accompany career transitions (Ashforth and Saks, 1995; Becker and Carper, 1956; Hill, 1992; Schein, 1978). But what are these changes, what outcomes do such changes have and what enables or constrains these changes? Further, for those undertaking a job search and thus are actively seeking reemployment, eventually finding part time employment (or other versions of being underemployed) or full time, permanent employment is fairly common. This would conceivably involve further identity transitions due to changes in external situation (Nicholson, 1987). How then does an unemployed professional navigate changes to their work-related identity during the various phases of (1) job loss, (2) unemployment, (3) job search (4) (possible) underemployment and (5) reemployment?
Emotions

Some studies suggest a role of emotions in the process of identity change post-employment. For example, Amundson (1994) states that the period of unemployment is a period of emotional turmoil where self-confidence is lowered, having an overall impact on one’s identity. He draws on the idea of identity negotiation, defined as the joint constructing of social reality where people mutually determine each other's identities, to suggest why some people’s sense of self crumbles while other people survive and thrive. However, the underlying role of emotions in identity negotiation during unemployment, while strongly alluded to, remains largely unexamined in Amundson’s (1994) study. Other research suggests that with regard to identity during job search, positive emotions play a role in finding employment. For example, Côté, Saks and Zikic (2006) show how positive affectivity predicted job search clarity. Further, emotions have been linked to identity more broadly (Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008). Emotions have been shown to be especially significant in times of trauma (Jahoda, Lazarsfeld, and Zeisel, 1933), and job loss is considered one of life’s most significant traumas that an individual can undergo (Spera, Buhrfeind, & Pennebaker, 1994) that leads to strong emotions. How, then, might emotions be associated with work-related identity transitions from role exit (job loss) to role re-entry (reemployment)?

Job Loss and Unemployment

At the outset it is important to note that this study deals with involuntary as opposed to voluntary job loss (Shaw, Delery, Jenkins & Gupta, 1998). In a comprehensive review on the subject, Murphy and Athanasou (1999) conclude that in general, regardless of age, sex or rank in the organization, involuntary job loss has been found to have negative psychological effects on individuals that include, amongst others, loss of identity (Berger, 2006) and depressive affect...
(Bolton & Oatley, 1987; Shamir, 1986). Indeed, some research proposes that involuntary unemployment has negative effects not just on a person’s current psychological state, but even future psychological states creating longer-term insecurity, distrust, cynicism, and lowered commitment (Fineman, 1983; Feldman & Leana, 2000).

**Job Search, Underemployment and Reemployment**

Job search is a key process undertaken by individuals in an attempt to transition out of the state of unemployment to working again. In their search for employment, individuals can be characterized as active agents who are able to undertake a wide variety of behaviors in order to adapt to their current situation. For example, individuals undertake processes of reflection, exploration of various career options, and engaging in developmental activities (Zikic & Saks, 2009). What are the various work-related identity transitions that are associated with undertaking such behaviors of reflection or exploration, and what outcomes might these identities affect?

It is also important to bear in mind that job search does not always lead to full time, permanent (re)employment. Sometimes part time jobs (or other forms of underemployment) can be found and undertaken as stop gap mechanisms while the individual continues to pursue job search towards suitable full time employment. Underemployment is a discrepancy between “satisfactory employment” and current employment (Kaufman, 1982). While some dimensions of underemployment (such as wages and amount of formal education relative to job requirements) can be “objectively” determined, other dimensions such as whether individuals are involuntarily employed outside their field of formal education or involuntarily working as contingent workers are subjective perceptions of the individuals themselves (Feldman, 1996). Research on underemployment finds that an unsatisfactory job can be detrimental to an individual (Liem, 1992). Thus, similar to the effects of unemployment, underemployment
typically leads to decreases in job attitudes such as job satisfaction, job involvement, relationships with coworkers, future job aspirations, and feelings of control (Khan & Morrow, 1991; Burris, 1983).

The above bodies of literature lead me to 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. (A) What are the (discrete) emotions most often expressed by individuals undergoing job loss and subsequent phases?
   (B) How are those emotions related to the work-related identity transitions of the unemployed?

Contributions Overview

In this dissertation, I develop three main contributions. First, I build an empirically-grounded model that captures the processes and outcomes of the various identity transition individuals undergo from role exit (job loss) to re-entry (reemployment), something that has not been longitudinally and holistically examined. While there is literature that provides cross sectional snapshots of identity transitions by examining role entry or exits (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 2003; Kunda, 1992), this study provides longitudinal data tracking identity changes across the gamut from role exit, experimentation with alternative identities to new role entry thus connecting these dots for the identity transitions literature. Second, this study also further connects the literature streams of emotions and identity which, while strongly suggested (Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008) are still largely unknown. Finally, studying individual
narratives of the experience of job loss and subsequent phases also provides managerial insight regarding how companies might better deal with role exits and entries.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

I begin by reviewing prior empirical and theoretical work in the areas of identity and emotions. I then present theory and research on unemployment and related topics, including job loss and underemployment, and discuss how this body of work has examined the effects of emotion on identity.

IDENTITY AND WORK-RELATED IDENTITY

Identity refers to the various meanings attached to a person by self (Gecas, 1982). Further, it has been shown that people’s identities are multiple (Cooley, 1902), multifaceted (Gergen, 1991), and dynamic (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), making identity 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). Below, I briefly discuss the two major types of identities (personal and social) and then define the identity of interest in this study: work-related identity.

Personal Identity and Social Identity

According to Ashforth and Mael (1989) the self-concept is comprised of a personal identity encompassing idiosyncratic characteristics (e.g., bodily attributes, abilities, psychological traits, interests) and a social identity encompassing salient group classifications. Further, identity is reflected in one's roles and relationships with others. For example, one's identity might include membership (social identity) in a particular organization. There is agreement in the literature that people differ in the relative importance they place on personal versus social aspects of their identities (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006; Sampson, 1978). Indeed, identities tend to vary along such dimensions as their centrality or importance to the individual, whether or not they reflect actual or potential achievement, and the extent to which
they are enduring vs. provisional (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Stryker & Serpe, 1982). There is
shared agreement among researchers that identities are multiple, mutable, and socially
constructed (Cooley, 1902; Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934) but coexist within a self that integrates
diverse experiences into a unity (Gecas, 1982; Markus & Wurf, 1987). In other words, identities
are changeable and often change when influenced by external circumstances and people. Indeed,
Swann (1987) noted that career transitions are times in which people are more prone to
modifying their self-conceptions based on their treatment by others (Nicholson, 1984) and this
idea forms the basis of my study.

**Identities as Narratives**

Some literature suggests that identities are formed through efforts to develop a coherent,
continuous, biography, where a person’s “life story” is the sensible result of a series of related
events or cohesive themes (Gergen, 1994; McAdams, 2001). One of the main advocates of a
narrative approach, Sarbin (1986) views story or narrative as a way of organizing episodes,
actions, and accounts of actions in time and space such that when there is a story, a teller and a
listener are always assumed (Hermans, 1999), and thus story telling is inherently social.

A considerable body of literature suggests that identities are subjectively available to
individuals in the form of self-narratives. Self-narratives are the stories people narrate of their
lives (Hermans, 1999), are composed of internal soliloquies (Athens, 1994), and are composed in
interactions with others (Beech, 2008; Goffman, 1959). Narratives are basic cultural forms that
render sequences of human experiences and intentions meaningful though time (MacIntyre,
1981; White, 1973). Thus the story or narrative is a central means through which people
construct, describe and understand their experiences and through this, their identities (Lieblich,
Within management studies there is an emergent consensus that, for their participants, organizations are sites “for realizing the project of the self” (Grey, 1994: 482). Thus, identities are increasingly being looked at as a person’s story to themselves of who they are, which in turn is influenced by their environment. Given the rich data source of blogs that I used for this study (elaborated on in the methods section), I am particularly interested in this perspective of “identity as a story”. Blogs afford people a place where they can express themselves and relate their life experiences (story teller) in light of an audience (story reader) (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004). Thus, to the extent that this story is about an individual’s life experiences (including professional experiences of job loss and consequent phases), this perspective would suggest that individuals’ stories on self (self-narratives) are actually identity stories.

**Professional Identity**

Amongst the social identities that management research concerns itself with is the concept of professional identity. Schein (1978) was amongst the first to develop the construct of professional identity, which he defined as the relatively stable and enduring collection of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role. Similar to the effects of membership in other social groups, membership in a profession influences self-definition and also shapes image, that is, how others think about the focal individual. Thus, professional identity is defined as the constellation of attributes, beliefs, and values people use to define themselves in specialized, skill- and education-based occupations or vocations (Benveniste, 1987; Ibarra, 1999). A basic assumption is that professional identity forms over time and is influenced by relevant experiences and meaningful feedback (Schein, 1978). Researchers suggest individuals adjust and adapt their professional identity during periods of career transition (Ibarra, 1999; Nicholson, 1984).
Work–related identities

Although the idea of professional identities is the most commonly used one in management literature when studying identities that are associated with a person’s work, this type of identity strictly defined applies only to “professionals” (doctors, lawyers, etc.). Dutton, Roberts and Bednar (2010) introduced the idea of work-related identities to create a broad definition that encompasses aspects of identity and self-definition that are tied to participation in the activities of work (i.e., a job) or membership in work-related groups, organizations, occupations, or professions. Work-related identities concern the way that 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 individuals can use to compose a work-related self.

In today’s world, contemporary careers are characterized by shifting boundaries in occupational, organizational, national, and global work arrangements (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999) such that identity is subject to social influences not just within, but also beyond the individual’s present occupation or organization (Arthur, 2008). This notion that identity is subject to influences beyond the individual’s present occupation or organization is another basis for my current study (where I examine identity transitions after a person has exited an organization). Further, the nature of modern careers tends to be fluid and often involves several rapid transitions between roles and even between jobs (sometimes precipitated by job loss). Hence, the literature on role transitions has often been studied with regard to its influence on an individual’s changing work-related identity.

Role Transitions and Identity Negotiations

Because identities (especially social identities) are constituted in social interaction, they must be negotiated in a social context to be accepted as legitimate (Gregen, 1999; Reissman,
There is a consensus in the socialization literature that identity changes often accompany work-role changes or transitions (Ibarra, 1999). But first 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 everyday as a transition from home roles to work roles (Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate, 2000), to something as “macro” and unusual like promotion from middle to senior management (Ashforth, 2001). Role transitions occur in three distinct phases: separation from the old status (or role), initiation into new status and incorporation of the new status into one’s self identity. Transitions involve taking on new roles, which in turn demand new skills and behaviors and thus produce fundamental changes in an individual's self-definitions (Becker and Carper, 1956; Hall, 1976; Schein, 1978; Hill, 1992). Role transitions are thus 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). Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate (2000) use “boundary theory” as a framework to describe role transitions as a boundary-crossing activity, where one exits and enters roles by surmounting boundaries (Schein, 1971; Van Maanen, 1982). Examples of role transitions in organizations include promotion (Ashforth, 2001) or demotions (downward job transition) (Sargent, 2001).

In a related vein, Ibarra (1999) suggests that role transitions create demands that induce people to draw from, elaborate, or create new repertoires of possibilities such that aspects of one's professional identity that have been relatively stable may change markedly. However, such a change in identity is not a unilateral process that only imposes conformity on the individual, but is instead a *negotiated* adaptation by which people strive to improve their person-environment fit (Schein, 1978; Nicholson, 1984; Ashford and Taylor, 1990). Over time, people
adapt aspects of their identity to accommodate role demands by modifying role definitions. This in turn helps them retain and utilize valued aspects of their identity, thus attaining a negotiated adaptation to the new situation (Ibarra, 1999). Identity negotiation is an ongoing process throughout life but becomes particularly significant during times of transition when boundaries are fluid (Amundson, 1994). Identity and role change, therefore, "evolve interactively such that a new synthesis is achieved that is more than simply a compromise of static role demands and static self-demands" (Ashforth and Saks, 1995:173).

Unemployment can be considered an instance of a particularly severe work or role transition. Indeed, while career transitions involving entry of managers and professionals into the organization have received much attention (Wanous, 1980), organizations have become increasingly concerned about exit transitions brought about by termination of employment (Hymowitz, 1985; Langley, 1984a, 1984b; Symonds, Kaufman, Guyer, & Frank, 1985). Further, unemployment posits a very real threat to an individual’s professional identity (Gabriel, Gray & Goregaokar, 2010). Amundson (1994) states that post unemployment, it is difficult for most people to maintain a strong sense of identity, even in situations in which there is a strong record of accomplishment. He draws on the previously mentioned idea of identity negotiation (the joint constructing of social reality where people mutually determine each other's identities), to suggest why some people’s sense-of-self crumbles while other people survive and thrive. 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 employment (or other forms of being underemployed) or full time employment is fairly common. This would conceivably
involve further identity transitions due to changes in the external situation (Nicholson, 1987; Ashford and Taylor, 1990).

Possible and Provisional Selves (during Unemployment and Reemployment)

One of the ways individuals undertake identity transitions is via the use of possible selves, which are ideas about who one might become, would like to become, or fears becoming (Markus and Nurius, 1986; Yosh, Strube & Bailey, 1992). Possible selves provide images of what end states are desirable and undesirable, and serve as cognitive and emotional filters by which people enact their environments. They also provide incentives for future behavior (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Ibarra (1999) used the idea of possible selves in her concept of provisional selves to explain how professionals transition to more senior roles by: (1) observing role models to identify potential identities, (2) experimenting with provisional selves, and (3) evaluating experiments against internal standards and external feedback (Ibarra, 1999). However, Ibarra’s findings are limited to professionals in transition from one work role to another (a more aspirational one). Since I am interested in the broader concept of work-related identity transition, the original concept or possible selves by Markus and Nurius (1986) is applicable to my study.

Possible (and by extension provisional selves) have been traditionally examined in the context of promotions (i.e. from one work role to another, more aspirational work role) (Ibarra, 1999). The question arises – can the idea of possible selves be extended to other work role transitions as well, including a transition from work to no work (unemployment). Also, can possible selves be observed during role transitions that are undesirable or stigmatized (like involuntary lay off)? An examination of the current research relating stigma to identity might provide some answers.
Stigma and Professional Identity

Stigma is understood as an invisible mark that signifies social disapproval and rejection (Goffman, 1963; Dovidio, Major, & Crocker, 2000; Falk, 2001). Stigma is deeply discrediting and isolating and causes feelings of shame, inferiority and a wish for concealment. A stigmatized identity is one in which members of a group are assumed to be tainted or inferior, resulting in a blemished identity that prevents easy inclusion in society (Goffman, 1963). This assumption of inferiority by members of society may result in poor outcomes such as interpersonal discrimination (Crocker & Major, 1989). Stigmas marginalize individuals by reducing their identity to one-dimensional characteristics (Prasad, D’Abate & Prasad, 2007). Being unemployed can be conceptualized as a social stigma (Latack & Dozier, 1986). Most established career theories are inadequately prepared to help us understand the relational and social processes of work-related identity construction occurring among members of stigmatized groups (Ibarra & Deshpande, 2007). The effect of a stigmatized career transition (such as unemployment) on an individual’s work-related identity has received scant attention. As mentioned earlier, for those actively seeking reemployment, eventually finding some form of employment (underemployment or reemployment) is fairly common, thus involving further identity transitions due to changes in external situation (Nicholson, 1987). How then does an unemployed professional navigate changes to their professional identity during the various phases of (1) job loss, (2) unemployment, (3) job search, (4) (possible) underemployment and, (5) reemployment?

The preceding discussion on identity transitions suggests the following research question:

1. What are the key components to the work-related identity transition process as individuals experience job loss, unemployment, job search, possible underemployment, and eventual reemployment?
EMOTIONS

Before we investigate how emotions might possibly affect identity transitions for the unemployed and underemployed, it is important to understand how emotions have been defined. Barsade (2007) states that affect can be thought of as an umbrella term that encompasses a broad range of feelings experienced by individuals. These including (1) feeling states – which are in-the-moment, short-term affective experiences and (2) feeling traits – which are more stable tendencies to feel and act in certain ways (Watson & Clark, 1984). Emotions and moods are the two established categories within feeling states (Barsade, 2007). Emotions are prompted by a particular target or cause, are relatively intense but short-lived and may include physiological reactions and action sequences (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991). Because emotions are focused on a specific target or cause, they have come to be regarded as discrete (Barsade, 2007), and are linked to specific tendencies to act (Frijda, 1986). The discrete emotions approach has identified many primary or basic emotions that have been seen in human beings irrespective of race, age or culture and thus are considered primary building blocks of emotional expression (Ekman, 1992; Izard, 1977; Plutchik, 1994). Barsade (2007) states that examples of these basic emotions include joy, love, anger, fear, sadness, disgust, and surprise, each with a unique set of prototypical antecedents and consequences—though the precise number and identity of discrete emotions are subjects of much debate (see Ekman, 1992; Ortony & Turner, 1990). While lists of basic emotions abound, Grandey (2008) posits that which emotions are on the list depends on whether the list derives from variations in expressions, physiological responses, cognitive appraisals, action tendencies, or feeling labels (see Russell & Barrett, 1999).

Moods, the other kind of feeling state, do not have a known cause and tend to take the form of a general positive (pleasant) or negative (unpleasant) feeling that is weaker in intensity
and potentially longer in duration than emotions (Frijda, 1986; Frijda, 1993; Russell & Barrett, 1999). Finally, feeling traits refer to affective dispositions, typically studied as positive and negative affectivity (Staw et al., 1986; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Measures of positive affect and negative affect are designed to capture the trait based feeling states and response tendencies of individuals which have been seen to stay relatively stable over the individual’s lifetime (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). In her review on the subject, Barsade (2007) notes that other affective traits that can influence work behavior include people’s propensities to feeling emotions strongly (affective intensity; Larsen & Diener, 1987); being prone to catching other people’s emotions (emotional contagion; Hatfield, Cacioppo & Rapson, 1994; Doherty, 1997); and how emotionally expressive people tend to be (emotional expressivity; Kring, Smith & Neale, 1994).

Emotions are an integral part of the decision making involved in the day-to-day functioning of the life of a human being. Research shows that people tend to take into account anticipatory emotions (emotions they anticipate they will feel) when making decisions (e.g., Mellers, 2000; Schwarz, 2000). Zeelenberg (1999), for example, finds that that prior to making a decision, individuals anticipate the pleasure or regret they will experience with possible outcomes, which they take into account when choosing among alternatives. At an even more basic level, Damasio’s (1994) research on patients with frontal lobe damage suggests not only that emotions and decisions affect one another, but that many kinds of decision making are not even possible without emotions.

Clearly affect (both trait and state) plays a significant role in the life of human beings, but what role does emotion have in the workplace? In summarizing why affect matters in organizations, Barsade (2007) states that it matters because employees are not isolated
“emotional islands”, but rather, bring all of themselves to work, including their traits, moods, and emotions, and their affective experiences and expressions influence others. Thus, an understanding of how these affective experiences and expressions operate and influence organizational outcomes is an essential piece in understanding how work is done and how to do it better. Further, even beyond the traditional boundaries of an organization/workplace, emotions affect people’s work-lives and productivity. For example, because people put so much of their emotional selves into their work (Barsade, 2007), being an employed professional becomes an emotionally invested identity. Hence, an unfortunate development (like job loss) can cause a significant amount of emotional distress (Kinicki, 1985) and affect even future productivity and commitment (Fineman, 1983; Feldman & Leana, 2000). Clearly, how emotions affect behavior and cognitions are central nuggets to understanding how individual emotion might eventually affect cognitions of self (identity) and behavior with regard to future career goals (identity transitions). But what kinds of emotions (positive or negative), can affect work-related identity and its’ transitions?

Positive and Negative Emotions at Work

At its earliest, the role of emotions at work was first investigated with regard to work productivity. For example, early longitudinal work by Hersey in the 1930s suggested that an unhappy railroad worker was less productive than one who felt more positively (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). The presumption generally is that the happy worker will be more productive because they will be more on-task and energized. Indeed, this general presumption has received a lot of support over the years. For example, in a comprehensive meta-analysis Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener (2005) found that an individual’s tendency to experience positive feeling states (emotions and moods) is associated with increases in a variety of work performance measures,
including more positive supervisory evaluations, higher income, enhanced negotiating ability, and performing discretionary acts for the benefit of the organization. Further, a review by Cropanzano & Wright (2001) shows a consistent, strong relationship between feeling traits (trait positive affect) measures and various measures of work performance. This relationship stayed consistent across experimental, cross-sectional, and longitudinal studies, even after controlling for possible confounding variables and using both objective and subjective ratings (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001). Research on the effects of positive emotions on decision making suggests that positive affect can facilitate the thorough, efficient, and flexible use of new information, which increases decision effectiveness (see Isen, 2001; Isen & Labroo, 2003 for reviews). With regard to goal setting, positive mood has been shown to elevate valence, instrumentality, and expectancy beliefs, subsequently increasing goal difficulty, quantity, and commitment (George & Brief, 1996; Ilies & Judge, 2005; Kanfer & Gaelick-Buys, 1991).

However, some research suggests the opposite – i.e., that negative and not positive emotions lead to better work performance. For example, positive mood could lead to poor decision-making due to unrealistic optimism and an over-reliance on heuristics (Forgas, 1999). Some research in fact indicates that positive affect can lead to the less concentrated analytical processing (Melton, 1995; Mackie & Worth, 1989). Correspondingly, negative and not positive affect decreased the escalation of commitment to a poor decision when personal accountability was involved (Wong, Yik, & Kwong, 2006). Further, negative mood increases effort expended by leading to more concentrated, detailed, and analytic processing (see Schwarz, Bless, & Bohner, 1991 for a review). Barsade (2007) in her review draws attention to a study done by Alloy & Abramson (1988) in the clinical literature that illustrates a “depressive realism effect” in
which people who are trait high negative affect (depressed) have more accurate judgments than non-depressed people.

Finally, Martin and colleagues created a “mood-as-input” model, which posits that negative affect will lead to more effortful processing since a person uses their moods as indications of the state of their environment and thus a negative mood would signal that something is wrong. Under the indication that all is not well, the person’s active cognitive processing will continue while trying to solve the problem. In cases of positive mood, the signal that all is well would lead a person to relax and stop analyzing, leading to decreased effortful processing. Even with regard to goal setting, negative emotions in response to feedback were less likely to result in goal reductions for employees with a strong learning or mastery goal orientation than those with weaker mastery orientations (Cron, Slocum, Vandewalle, & Fu, 2005). Carver & Scheier (1990) note that according to control theory, positive discrepancies between goals and current goal progress (i.e., making better than expected progress) leads to positive affect and a decrease in effort expended, whereas negative discrepancies (i.e., making worse progress than desired) results in negative affect and an increase in effort to diminish that discrepancy. A very similar set of competing arguments as were presented in the decision-making literature have been made for the influence of positive versus negative affect states and traits on creativity (see James, Brodersen, & Jacob, 2004 for a review). However, there is often normative pressure to express positive emotions while avoiding negative emotions since intense negative emotion expression goes against norms of rationality (Mumby & Putnam, 1992) and counter to common feeling rules of enthusiasm and good humor (Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989).

Some authors suggest that specifically examining discrete emotions research will illuminate some interesting directions to resolve this debate. For example, Grandey (2008) notes
a body of literature that shows that when emotions imply certainty (e.g., anger, disgust, joy) it may result in more automatic processing, whereas feeling emotions that imply uncertainty (e.g., hope, fear, surprise), result in more systematic processing and less risky decisions (DeSteno, Petty, Wegener, & Rucker, 2000; Lerner & Keltner, 2000; Lerner & Keltner, 2001; Tiedens & Linton, 2001). Grandey (2008), further notes that while the dimensional approach (i.e., treating positive and negative emotions as two internally homogenous groups) is a parsimonious way of studying affect, important differences may unfortunately be lost when aggregating across emotions. For example, both anger and fear are high activation – low pleasantness, but they emerge from different situations and result in different behavioral tendencies (Lerner & Keltner, 2000). Thus moving towards specifically examining particular kinds of discrete emotions (both positive and negative) will help move this body of literature forward.

Finally, whether or not positive or negative emotions have a positive relationship with work performance or work goals might come down to context. For example, Zohar, Tzischinski, & Epstein (2003) found that when hospital employees had a high workload they had a stronger association between goal-disrupting events and negative emotion, while goal-enhancing events were more weakly related to positive emotions, compared to when the workload was more manageable. Thus these relationships may depend on the available resources of the employee to cope with negative discrepancies or take advantage of positive discrepancies. But what if the context is a traumatic one, such as experiencing involuntary job loss? How do positive or negative emotions then affect one’s self concept? Further, how do positive or negative emotions affect future job search and identity transitions involved in taking on new roles? In the section below, I will walk the reader through some of the existing research on the effects of unemployment on emotions and vice versa. However, research on the effects on emotions on
self-concept (identity) during unemployment is very limited, and it is this intriguing domain that I address in my dissertation.

**Emotions and Unemployment**

Interest in the emotional impact of job loss was spurred by several classic qualitative studies dating from the 1930s, in particular Jahoda, Lazarsfeld, and Zeisel's (1933) landmark sociographic investigation of the citizens of Marienthal, Austria. These studies highlighted the emotional trauma and despair along with physical health problems that accompanied job loss when it extended to prolonged unemployment. Quantitative studies on job loss also show that job loss and unemployment is consistently associated with negative emotional outcomes such as stress and lowered self-esteem (Brenner & Bartell, 1983; Buss & Redburn, 1983; Cobb & Kasl, 1977; Jackson & Warr, 1984; Kessler, Turner, & House, 1987; Winefield & Tiggemann, 1990). Findings also documented the positive effects of job search training regarding people's mental health and reemployment (Caplan, Vinokur, Price, & van Ryn, 1989; Vinokur & Caplan, 1987; Vinokur, van Ryn, Gramlich & Price, 1991).

In Leana and Feldman’s (1988) model, job loss is depicted as a stressful event that evokes perceptual, emotional, and physiological changes in individuals who experience it. 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 job loss and establish new routines (Leana & Feldman, 1988). These coping strategies should influence whether and how quickly individuals obtain satisfactory re-employment that, in turn, will affect a variety of outcome variables. Personality, demographic, and situational factors are depicted as moderating important linkages in the model.
Two seemingly contradictory hypotheses about the impact of job loss on emotions have been frequently examined in the literature. On the one hand, job loss is 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). On the other, job loss is associated with increased feelings of apathy, passivity, and depression among terminated employees (Cohn, 1978; Warr, 1978). Another seeming contradiction is the idea that after a job transition some individuals may experience increased feelings of excitement, challenge, and aggression (Feldman & Brett, 1983). Although few would argue that job termination is a pleasurable experience, the negative emotion of anxiety that may accompany it may also in some cases be more facilitative than debilitating, and may lead to more active, positive approaches to dealing with job loss. This might be particularly true, for example, for young, highly educated employees. Finally, the increased arousal feelings of anxiety, excitement, and provocativeness are more likely to be precipitated by temporary lay-offs or the loss of a job that was disliked (Leana & Feldman, 1988).

Clearly, emotions generated due to organizational decision processes can range from the very subtle, as is the case when the decision is highly routinized, to very intense when the issue is provocative and personal (like job loss). Examples of decisions that provoke intense emotions are potential mergers, acquisitions, and downsizing, all of which can have dramatic effects on how employees feel about themselves and their organizations, and in turn, knowing this can have significant impact on the way these decisions are made (Brockner, 1988). Through a two year ethnographic study, Maitlis and Ozcelik (2004) show how emotions such as anxiety, fear, shame, anger, and embarrassment affect and are affected by the decision making process in firing 6 members from three symphony orchestras. We know from previous research that the way in
which an issue is interpreted—for example, as a threat or an opportunity—has significant effects on members’ responses to it (Dutton et al. 1983). Maitlis and Ozcelik’s (2004) study suggests that the emotions evoked by a particular workplace issue can also have an important influence on how employees behave. She also notes that the possibility of getting fired generates intense negative emotion in an individual because of (1) the significant implications it had for his or her future employment and (2) for his or her professional identity and, therefore, (as noted earlier) his or her social identity more broadly. Indeed when a person feels that their ability to do their job, and therefore, their identity is being questioned, they experience feelings of shame, worthlessness, helplessness, and humiliation (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Finally, only a few studies have examined how employees emotionally cope with organizational transition. Ashford (1988) found that emotional discharge (i.e., the sharing of emotions with others) was related to reduced stress/strain both prior to and 6 months following an organizational transition whereas cognitive avoidance was associated with more stress/strain.

Clearly, emotions generated due to job loss are varied and seem potent both to an individual’s self-concept as well as change in that self-concept. But how exactly are emotions connected to an individual’s work-related identity changes during transitions? It seems logical that the context of how emotions affect work-related identity will make a difference. Thus the question then becomes how might emotions be associated with work-related identity transitions when the identity transition is precipitated by the context of job loss and subsequent unemployment? The above discussion motives my second research question:

2. (A) *What are the (discrete) emotions most often expressed by individuals undergoing job loss and subsequent phases?*
(B) How are those emotions related to the work-related identity transitions of the unemployed?

**JOB LOSS, UNEMPLOYMENT AND JOB SEARCH**

Job loss has been a growing concern for a number of decades now. Between 1979 and 1983, over 11 million jobs were lost in the U.S. due to plant shutdowns, layoffs, and position eliminations (Buss & Redbum, 1987). The 1980s saw this trend continuing, where Fraze (1988) noted that 10.8 million people underwent involuntary unemployment between 1981 to 1988. Even during periods of rapid employment growth (e.g., from 1985 to 1989), 4.3 million people in the United States were displaced from their jobs (Herz, 1991). From June 1990 through July 1991, 1.6 million people lost their jobs (Greenwald, 1991). Indeed, periodic involuntary job loss is expected to remain a recurring problem (Bluestone & Harrison, 1982; Oskamp, 1988). McKee-Ryan & Harvey (2011) observe that unlike previous recessions, current job growth lags behind other economic indicators of an abating recession (Summers, 2010) in the economic downturn that began in December 2007 (National Bureau of Economics Research, 2010). Indeed, unemployment remains persistently high—hovering around 9% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011; Miller & McKee, 2009). Given this harsh economic environment, studying unemployment and its consequences on individuals becomes central to helping us understand, and therefore, effectively help those undergoing this experience. Of central importance to my dissertation is tracking the role of emotions over the various identity transitions that are precipitated due to the circumstance of being laid off. But before I delve into what has already been written about job loss and unemployment with respect to self-concept (identity) and emotions, it is important to be explicit about what I understand these terms to represent. Thus, what exactly is job loss and unemployment and how has it been examined in the literature?
Hanisch (1999) reviews the job loss literature and defines it specifically as a life event (Holmes & Rahe, 1967) that results in the involuntary removal of paid employment from an individual (Latack, Kinicki, & Prussia, 1995). Unemployment is the state of being unemployed or the state of not being engaged in a gainful occupation (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1981). Unemployment is a state that indicates a temporal continuity, whereas job loss is an event that typically ends in unemployment, unless a new job is immediately obtained (Latack et al., 1995). Latack et al. (1995) states that “job loss and unemployment thus form a continuum based on duration, with the job loss event at one end and prolonged, chronic unemployment at the other end” (p: 313). Indeed, a person's psychological health, financial reserves, and coping strategies may shift dramatically after a lengthy period of unemployment (Kaufman, 1982).

It is important to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary job loss. Most turnover literature assumes job loss to be a form of involuntary turnover (Campion, 1991; Shaw, Delery, Jenkins & Gupta, 1998), while some literature emphasizes the effects of voluntary turnover (DeWitt, Trevino, & Mollica, 1998). In my dissertation, I will be focusing exclusively on the former, i.e. involuntary job loss. Research on voluntary separations (i.e., employee resignations) is not included as its antecedents and consequences may differ from job loss, given its self-selected nature (Latack et al., 1995). While involuntary job loss is conceptualized as a situation of threat, based on experiencing negatively valent outcomes in the past (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985), this may not be the case for voluntary job loss. Indeed, the research of Walters and Muller (2004) shows that the employees who had experienced involuntary redundancy showed a “scarring” effect with higher levels of insecurity in their current job than those who volunteered for redundancy. They thus recommend that practitioners and researchers need to consider the
way in which a person exits their previous job in order to adequately understand reactions to unemployment as well as reemployment (Walters & Muller, 2004).

From the literature review, job loss research can be broadly be grouped into three buckets:

1) The first of these are qualitative case studies, which also happen to be the least popularly adopted form to study job loss. Early studies in this arena include Jahoda, Lazersfeld, & Zeisel’s (1933) study using interview and ethnographic methodologies to describe the reactions, emotional trauma, and distress of job loss.

2) The second category of job loss literature is the quantitative studies done that include linking job loss with various stress symptoms (strain) (e.g., Jackson & Warr, 1984; Jacobson, 1987; Vinokur & Caplan, 1987; Vinokur, van Ryn, Gramlich, & Price, 1991), with coping (Kinicki & Latack, 1990; Kinicki, Prussia & McKee Ryan, 2000; Sadeh & Karniol, 2011); with perceived fairness, individual differences and emotions (Bennett, Martin, Beis & Brockner, 1995; ), with potential positive outcomes (Zikic & Klehe, 2006), with finding another job or retiring (Kiniki, 1989; Prussia, Kiniki & Bracker, 1993) etc.

3) Finally the last major type of research in this field has been the development of conceptual models of job loss including models on coping (e.g., DeFrank & Ivancevich, 1986; Gowan & Gatewood, 1997; Latack et al., 1995; Leana & Feldman, 1988; Warr, 1987), relationship of job loss to aggression (Catalano, Novaco & McConnell, 1997) etc.

In the following sections I will summarize important theoretical underpinning and findings from the job loss and unemployment literature with an emphasis on individual (micro) and psychological (vs. physical or economic) constructs that relate to this field.
Theoretical Underpinnings

Coping is a central theoretical theme across psychological studies of job loss (Feather, 1990). It is defined as constantly evolving cognitive and behavioral efforts for managing the internal and external demands of stress transactions (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986). Stress transactions are situations in which a person’s resources are taxed or exceeded (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Therefore, job loss is a situation where individuals may exert cognitive and behavioral efforts to cope with the taxing demands of their situation (Latack et al., 1995). Unemployment, by its very nature, requires individuals to cope regardless of whether they view it as a positive or negative event (Hanisch, 1999). Coping is a situation specific phenomenon and thus its processes must be studied in relation to specific "stressful encounters" or transactions, because individuals typically exhibit more variability than consistency across coping situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Two general types of individual coping strategies—symptom-focused/emotion-focused/escape coping and problem-focused/control coping—appear in the unemployment literature. The first type of coping strategies has been defined as follows: symptom-focused coping consists of those activities, such as joining a support group or asking a friend for financial assistance that an individual engages in to attempt to decrease the hardship associated with the stressful event (Leana & Feldman, 1995a; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978); emotion focused coping is directed at regulating or managing one’s emotional reactions to the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984); and escape coping consists of actions and cognitive reappraisals that involve escapist, avoidance strategies (Latack, 1986). The second type of coping strategy has been variously referred to as problem focused coping and control coping. Problem-focused coping consists of attempts by the unemployed individual to change his/her environment in an effort to
moderate stress. For instance, individuals may consider geographical relocation or pursuing retraining in order to be employable in other jobs (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Leana & Feldman, 1995a; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Control coping consists of actions and cognitive reappraisals that are proactive, take-charge in nature (Latack, 1986). In a similar vein, Bennett, Martin, Bies, and Brockner (1995) discovered in their longitudinal study that as the negativity of emotions declined, problem-focused coping strategies started occurring more often than emotion/symptom focused coping. Further, stress research reveals that coping strategies differ based on whether or not individuals can perceive their control over a given situation. Folkman and Lazarus (1985) and Sutton and Kahn (1987) state that the individual’s appraisal of the situation may influence stress perception. Primary appraisals (an individual’s evaluation of the stressfulness of a situation) and secondary appraisals (an assessment of coping resources) are two process variables affecting coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Further, with respect to secondary appraisals, coping resources reside either within the individual (i.e., personal characteristics) or in the situation (i.e., environmental resources), and are postulated to affect the choice of a coping strategy (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

In other coping-related research, Leana and Feldman (1995a) observed that collective activities that were conducted by laid-off employees with a purpose of stimulating the creation of new jobs within their communities (or collective activism) were a type of (symptom-focused) coping mechanism. This coping mechanism helped the laid-off individuals feel more in control, maintain higher self-esteem and more optimism about their future job prospects, than those who were not involved in collective activism activities. Bennett, Martin and Bies (1995) found (contrary to their prediction) that individuals who blamed themselves for their layoff were very active in community efforts to help the unemployed. However, type of coping behavior choice
seems to be not either-or but rather both-and. In other words individuals use multiple strategies to deal with job loss. For example, Leana, Feldman, and Tan (1998) examined predictors of problem-focused and symptom-focused coping strategies on the coping behaviors of individuals who experienced a plant closing. They examined individual difference variables (i.e., demographic factors, initial emotional reaction, etc.) and their relations to the two coping strategies. Their longitudinal study showed that the two types of coping behaviors were highly correlated.

Research has found that individuals who engage in problem-focused coping experience less stress than those who engage in symptom-focused coping (Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman & Mullan, 1981; Wilhelm & Ridley, 1988). This is not to suggest that symptom-focused strategies are not useful. Indeed, Carver, Scheier and Weintraub (1989) have suggested that symptom-focused strategies can help individuals vent emotions which might otherwise exacerbate discomfort. At the same time, Carver et al. (1989) caution that such an exercise may take energy and attention away from problem-focused coping activities that may ultimately be a more productive endeavor. Now that we understand a little of how people cope with job loss, let us examine the effects and outcomes of job loss and unemployment.

**Negative and Positive Effects of Job Loss and Unemployment**

Do individuals react differently to being unemployed? Wanberg and Marchese (1994) in their study of unemployed individuals found four groups via cluster analysis, which they labeled: (1) confident but concerned (high financial concerns, employment commitment, and job-seeking confidence), (2) distressed (high financial concerns, employment commitment, low job-seeking confidence), (3) unconcerned and indifferent (low financial concerns, employment commitment, and job-seeking confidence), and (4) optimistic and coping (low financial concerns, moderate
employment commitment, high job-seeking confidence). Approximately equal numbers of males and females were in each of the four clusters. Their results suggest that the unemployment experience may be heterogeneous and that individual differences, along with situational variables, may possibly cause variances in the perception of and reaction to the experience of unemployment.

Involuntary unemployment is mentally distressing (Clark & Oswald, 1994). The idea that job loss is a negative event receives a lot of support in the literature. For example, on an individual and psychological level, job loss and unemployment is said to cause higher levels of personal distress (Kinicki, 1985), depressive symptoms (Tiggemann & Winefield, 1984), and lower self-esteem (Tiggemann & Winefield, 1984). Accordingly, job loss ranks in the upper quartile of unpleasant events that generate life stress (Holmes & Rahe, 1967), is one of the top traumatic life experiences (Spera, Buhrfeind, & Pennebaker, 1994), and is worse in terms of lost “utility” units than divorce or separation (Clark & Oswald, 1994).

The most prominent and frequent outcomes of unemployment are symptoms of psychiatric disorder and distress, particularly depression (Vinokur, Price, & Caplan, 1996). People with psychological problems are more likely to be laid off, and there is some evidence that psychological and physical health problems may reduce the chances for unemployed individuals to find a new job (Mastekaasa, 1996). Further, job loss and unemployment have been shown to be positively correlated with the increase in family dysfunction (spousal abuse, marital friction, marital dissolution, wife mortality, spouse depression, child abuse, harsh punishment etc.) as well as the negative psychological and physical effects on the unemployed individual (increase in depression, anxiety, worry, strain, stress, headaches, stomach aches, strokes, kidney
disease, ulcers, decrease in positive affect, self and social identity, self-worth, competence, life satisfaction, etc. (See Hanisch, 1999 for a review.)

However, the negative effects are not universal across, and possibly, within people. Although much less research has focused on the positive outcomes of unemployment, some researchers have suggested that it may create an opportunity for individuals to change career tracks and life directions (Latack & Dozier, 1986). Hartley (1980) notes that after a period of time the experience of job loss may be viewed positively because it allows one to redirect career goals and priorities, develop new competencies, consider new alternatives, or leave a dissatisfying or unchallenging job. Walsh and Jackson (1995) state that it is too simplistic to conclude that unemployment always leads to passivity and resignation, and cite studies that look at people who respond proactively to unemployment. Further, unemployment seems to increase employment motivation. For example, Gallie and Vogler (1994) evaluated employment motivation assessed as work commitment and found that overall, the unemployed had higher levels of commitment to employment than those employed (Jackson, 1994, reports similar results).

A moderator of the effects of job loss and unemployment on individuals is their economic situation. Unemployment may lead to other events such as the foreclosure of a loan, and changes in social activities or living conditions that exacerbate the negative effects of job loss (Grant & Barling, 1994), while one’s economic resources, on the other hand, can cushion the stresses of unemployment. Therefore, financially vulnerable workers may experience more severe reactions to job loss (Shelton, 1985).
Blame, Fairness and Job Loss

Some research suggests that fair layoff procedures are associated with positive outcomes such as less negative initial responses by victims (Bies, Martin & Brockner, 1993) and possibly problem based coping (which includes active job search) (Leana & Feldman, 1988). However Bennett et al. (1995) find that individuals who saw the layoff process as fair or just were in fact less likely to engage in job search activities. In addition to “what” employees receive, “how” they receive it, that is, procedural fairness, has been found to be important in the context of layoffs and job loss (Bies et al., 1993; Bies & Moag, 1986; Brockner & Greenberg, 1990; Folger & Konovsky, 1989). For example, when layoffs are accompanied by cogent and lucid rationale describing the reasons for the layoff, and when the management appears concerned about the victims’ fate, there is a greater perceived fairness regarding the layoff (Bies et al., 1993; Leana & Feldman, 1992; Schweiger, Ivancevich & Power, 1987).

With regard to the effects of attributions about causality, i.e., whether the job loss is attributed to oneself or to external factors or luck, some research suggests that when employees attribute job loss to themselves, they are more likely to become depressed and frustrated about future job searches (Feather & Davenport, 1981). Job loss is associated with reduced self-esteem (Kaufman, 1982; Tiggemann & Winefield, 1984), particularly when individuals blame themselves (Kirchler, 1985). Further, researchers have suggested that job loss is more stressful for individuals who take on high levels of internal responsibility (self-blame) for the job loss (Kaufman, 1982).

It is also found that those men who felt they had been treated unfairly about a personal state (e.g., age) experienced the most psychological distress (Miller & Hoppe, 1994). This indicates that rather than experiencing psychological distress that may arise from the
categorizations of being laid off vs. fired, individuals’ *attributions* for termination (and the fairness perception this entailed) played a stronger role in determining psychological consequences. For example, men who reported similar reasons for job loss had similar levels of distress regardless of whether they were fired or laid off (Miller & Hoppe, 1994). These authors also found that self-blame—whether individuals blame themselves—was not an important factor in an individual’s response to job loss. The important issue was whether or not individuals perceived that they were treated fairly.

**Age and Unemployment**

Much of the evidence suggests that job loss is most traumatic for employees in middle career stages. This is because middle-aged people may have the greatest investments in the local community (Dunn, 1979), and simultaneously may face the most difficulty in obtaining alternate employment (Dyer, 1973). There is also some support, for the proposition that older employees may have greater problems in disengaging from formerly important roles (Lazarus & DeLongis, 1983). In general, older individuals have been found to have a harder time getting reemployed than younger individuals (Rife & Belcher, 1994). This is possibly because older individuals have potentially many obstacles to overcome in regaining employment, including age discrimination and negative stereotypes about productivity, and the possible lack of education relative to younger individuals (Atchley, 1988). Additionally, unemployed older individuals often transition to retirement, which of course entails a change in their personal identity. Hanisch,(1994), for example, posits that such retired individuals must work at this transition, which often involves adjustments to psychological, social, and activity domains. Such change in status (unemployed to retired) involves major changes in employment commitment as well as in the increase in status (since being retired is a more socially valued status) (Jackson, 1994).
Wooten, Sulzer, and Cornwell (1994) examined the effects of age and financial strain on the stress-related anxiety of unemployed persons. Their sample was geographically diverse and heterogeneous and they found that older employees compared to younger employees had lowered career and employment expectations, making them particularly susceptible to anxiety and depression.

Models of Unemployment and Job loss

Two models are frequently referenced to provide a framework for understanding unemployment: Jahoda’s (1982) functional model and Warr’s (1987) vitamin model. Briefly, Jahoda’s (1982) functional model states that unemployment deprives a person of the by-products that are typically gained from being employed, such as time structure, contact with others outside the family, being part of others’ goals and purposes, personal status and identity, and activity. She believes that leisure is not able to afford these outcomes to individuals and unless they manage to locate alternative ways of achieving these outcomes, unemployment will be destructive, both from latent (psychological) and manifest (economic) perspectives. Warr’s (1987) vitamin model extends Jahoda’s (1982) model and accounts for differences in the quality of work experiences and social issues. He describes nine environmental factors that, if deficient, contribute to poor mental health of individuals. By including environmental factors, the model can explain individuals who exit unpleasant, dissatisfying organizations, to be psychologically refreshed and not oppressed, as Jahoda’s model would otherwise predict.

Additional models include Leana and Feldman’s (1988) model, with 24 variables related to how individuals perceive, react to, and cope with job loss. Leana and Feldman introduced the determinants and consequences of coping strategies through a focus on job attainment. The Latack–Dozier model of career growth (Latack & Dozier, 1986) states that the characteristics of
the individual (i.e., low job satisfaction at the previous job, being in the midcareer stage, and maintaining a high activity level), the environment (financial resources, social support, and family flexibility), and the transition process (how the dismissal was handled, resolution of grief and anger, and the length of unemployment) are related to career growth. Thomson (1997) presented an attributional model wherein he links three dimensions of attributions (i.e., locus of causality, stability, and globality) to the coping behaviors (i.e., problem- and symptom-focused) expected as a result of these different attribution dimensions. Latack, Kinicki, and Prussia (1995) offer an integrative process model of coping with job loss that individuals may use to maintain equilibrium across economic, psychological, physiological, and social aspects of their lives, and further integrates them with coping resources, coping goals, coping efficacy, and coping strategies.

Clearly job loss and unemployment have several adverse consequences. In terms of affect and identity, they seem to give rise to negative emotions and poor psychological conditions such as lowered self-esteem. Does then finding a job (any job) fix these maladies?

UNDEREMPLOYMENT AND REEMPLOYMENT

Individual's employment status following coping efforts may range from re-employment, to underemployment, to continued unemployment. Satisfactory re-employment may result from finding a new job or, in the case of a layoff, being called back to work in the previous job. McKee-Ryan & Harvey (2011) note that trends consistently point to underemployment becoming more prevalent in the future. They further report statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) that indicates that 8.8 million workers are forced to work part-time because they are unable to find full-time jobs. Similarly, a recent Gallup report noted that as the unemployment rate dropped slightly, underemployment (working part-time but desiring full-time
work) increased to 9.7% during the same period (Jacobe, 2010). When the definition is broadened to include workers who are overqualified for the jobs they hold, underemployment estimates range from 17% (Bureau of Labor Statistics) to 22% (McGuinness, 2006) to about one third of the current workforce (Green & McIntosh, 2007; Green & Zhu, 2010), including over 20% who are considered “highly overqualified” (Vaisey, 2006). As Feldman (1996) noted in his review, because underemployment has been conceptualized and measured in so many ways (cf. Clogg, 1979; Glyde, 1977; Gordon, 1972; Kaufman, 1982; Khan & Morrow, 1991; Rosen, 1987; Schiller, 1980), precise figures on the extent of underemployment are not readily available. Nonetheless, the figure of approximately 25% of the workforce being underemployed seems to be a reasonable estimate (Newman, 1988). But what exactly is underemployment? When does it occur? How has it been studied? And what are its effects?

Definitions of underemployment vary, both between and within academic disciplines (of management, economics, sociology and psychology noted below). Kaufman (1982) conceptualizes underemployment as a discrepancy between “satisfactory employment” and current employment. It can also be thought of as re-employment that is either part-time or outside of the individual's field of interest and/or expertise (Kaufman, 1982). Indeed, all definitions of underemployment share two primary elements: (1) Underemployment is defined as a somewhat inferior, lesser, or lower quality type of employment and (2) it is defined relative to some standard (e.g., relative to the employment experiences of others with the same education or work history, or relative to the person’s own past education or work history, or relative to the person’s past achievements, or even relative to the person’s own expectations and desires) (Feldman, 1996). Accordingly while some dimensions of underemployment (such as wages and amount of formal education relative to job requirements) can be “objectively” determined, other
dimensions such as whether individuals are involuntarily employed outside their field of formal education or involuntarily working as contingent workers are subjective perceptions of the individuals themselves (Feldman, 1996).

Feldman (1996) in his review summarizes the five dimensions of underemployment as the following: (1) person possesses more formal education than the job requires, (2) person involuntarily employed in field outside area of formal education, (3) person possesses higher-level work skills and more extensive work experience than the job requires, (4) person involuntarily engaged in part-time, temporary, or intermittent employment and (5) person earning wages 20% or less than in the previous job.

Underemployment occurs in three kinds of groups: (1) contingent workforce in the U.S. (i.e., people who have temporary or part-time jobs (Ansberry, 1993; Feldman & Doerpinghaus, 1992; Feldman, Doerpinghaus & Tumley, 1994; Morrow, 1993), (2) underemployment has seen to be high among laid-off workers re-employed in new jobs suggesting a correlation between the two constructs (Buss & Redbum, 1983; Gordus, Jarley & Ferman, 1981), and (3) underemployment appears to be prevalent among recent high school and college graduates as well (Borgen, Amundson & Harder, 1988; Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986).

With regard to the contingent workforce it is important to note that many contingent workers are voluntarily part-time or temporary workers (Tilly, 1991). Thus, for the purposes of this study, I consider underemployment to occur only when individuals want full-time, permanent jobs and cannot find them. Further, given my interest in underemployment and its consequences as relating specifically to identity transitions precipitated due to job loss, I exclusively focus on the second dimension – i.e. underemployment following unemployment (as
opposed to, for example, underemployment of recent graduates who are employed in their first job).

Another framework issue to consider is that underemployment is a multidimensional, complex construct that has been studied from a variety of research perspectives (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). Four primary fields that investigate the underemployment phenomenon include: (1) management (with an interest on individual and organizational outcomes); (2) economics (which is concerned with the underutilization of the labor force and its effects on the labor market and wages); (3) sociology (with a focus on the impact on society and social structures) and (4) psychology (particularly community psychology with a focus on the health outcomes and community effects of underemployment) (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). I will limit my review of underemployment to the management and psychology fields since the constructs of interest to me are individual and psychological.

**Theoretical Underpinning**

McKee-Ryan & Harvey (2011) in their review highlight that four major theoretical perspectives underpin underemployment: human capital theory, person–environment or person–job fit, relative deprivation theory, and the coping and control theory model of reemployment. Individuals acquire human capital through education, training, certifications, and so forth and the human capital approach explains outcomes for individual employees and organizations, reflected by a match between the employee’s human capital and the job’s requirements such that efficiency occurs when the human capital of employees matches the jobs they hold (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011).

*Person–job fit* typically refers to the match between employees’ knowledge, skills, and abilities and the demands of their jobs (Edwards, 1991; Kristof, 1996). This theory suggests that
when there are differences between employees’ abilities (i.e., education, skills, and experience) and the actual job requirements, there is a discrepancy or a lack of fit. *Relative deprivation theory* refers to the feeling of being relatively deprived in comparison to a referent standard when individuals compare their personal outcomes with some type of (internal or external) standard (Crosby, 1976). When a discrepancy is perceived, it leads to employees being less satisfied with their jobs, less committed to the organization, and more likely to quit (McKee-Ryan, Virick, Prussia, Harvey, & Lilly, 2009). However, the “standard” is entirely subjective to whatever the employee chooses it to be (Crosby, 1984; Martin, 1981). Crosby’s (1976) model also incorporates an individual’s tendency to blame themselves versus another for their circumstances and thus possesses elements of both equity (comparison with referent standard; Adams, 1965) and attribution (assignment of blame; Kelley, 1973) theories (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011).

Finally, Latack, Kinicki, and Prussia’s (1995) *coping and control theory model* of reemployment illustrates idea of equilibrium in the job search process. Using this, McKee-Ryan and colleagues argue that displaced workers do not return to a state of equilibrium until they are reemployed in high-quality jobs that are similar to the ones they lost (McKee-Ryan et al., 2009) and thus pushes the unemployment literature from the focal outcome of any reemployment to the quality of reemployment for the previously unemployed worker (e.g., Latack et al., 1995; Leana & Feldman, 1995; Wanberg, 1995; Waters, 2007).

**Antecedents of Underemployment**

Antecedents of underemployment include economic factors (e.g., recessions, labor markets in industries and firms), job characteristics (e.g., hierarchical level, staff vs. line, functional area), job search strategies (e.g., time and intensity of search, retraining, geographical
relocation), career history variables (e.g., layoff history, time unemployed, career plateaus), and
demographic variables (e.g., gender, race, age, and education) (Feldman, 1996). Given my
interest in work-related identity transitions, the last two antecedents—career history variables and
certain demographic variables are likely to be particularly insightful for this study. Research
shows that individuals who have already experienced being laid off are more likely to suffer
that this may be because individuals who have been laid off from their jobs may be viewed as
stigmatized in the marketplace, which in turn hurts their chances of finding new jobs at
comparable or better wages than in their last jobs. Thus Feldman (1996:393) proposes that
“individuals who have been laid off are more likely to experience underemployment than
individuals who have been continuously employed”.

Further, because many individuals who are unemployed for long periods of time tend to
deplete their financial savings/resources, they may face financial hardship forcing them to accept
less-than-satisfactory employment simply to make ends meet (Sandler, 1988; Tan, Leana &
Feldman, 1994). Thus, “the longer an individual is unemployed, the more likely he/she is to
become underemployed” (Feldman, 1996, p: 393). Also, individuals who have reached a plateau
in their career, defined as those who are unlikely to be further promoted or given positions of
increased responsibility in their firms (Evans & Gilbert, 1984; Near, 1985), are more likely to
become underemployed (Feldman, 1996). This may be because the external labor market may
view these workers’ records as unimpressive and not distinguished enough, leaving them with
few options but to accept new positions at lower wages and with fewer responsibilities,
particularly when the economy as a whole, or in their industry, is poor (Feldman, 1996). When
view from a work-related identity lens, the above body of research takes on interesting new
meanings and possible insights. For example, underemployment seems to be more likely to be acceptable to a person whose self-concept as a working person has taken a beating, either due to the experience of being laid off or due to a plateauing at their previous job.

In terms of the antecedent of demographic variables, the evidence on the effects of age and education on underemployment is more mixed (Feldman, 1996). For instance, while older blue-collar workers are somewhat less vulnerable to unemployment than their younger colleagues they also often have more difficulty finding re-employment when they are laid off (because of age bias) (Dunn, 1979; Kaufman, 1982; Mooney, 1966). Additionally, while more educated workers seem to be less vulnerable to layoffs and underemployment than their less educated coworkers, the absolute and relative amounts of income they lose when they are underemployed is greater (Burris, 1983; Leana & Feldman, 1992; Newman, 1988). Feldman (1996:395) posits that “age will be positively related to underemployment and education negatively related to underemployment”.

**Outcomes of Underemployment**

Feldman (1996) proposed that outcomes of underemployment include attitudes towards jobs, careers, and overall lives, job behaviors (e.g., productivity, organizational citizenship behaviors, and withdrawal), and quality of marital, family, and social relationships.). Much of the research on unemployment in general has as its ending point in reemployment without regard for the type of reemployment (e.g., underemployment) and individuals’ evaluation of the new job. In essence, the quality of reemployment has been neglected. This brings us back to the question raised at the end of the previous section: Does a job (any job) help allay the maladies of unemployment? Jahoda’s (1982) model, for example, is built under the basic premise that any type of job, even a bad job, would be better than no job at all. Work by Liem (1992) opposes this
view and argues that an individual who takes an unsatisfactory job is sacrificing personal control and damages his/her self-perception. Accordingly, this individual would incur greater psychological costs by accepting an unacceptable job than the costs of being without a job. Research notes that individuals often have high levels of distress and sometimes poor physical health during unemployment but both mental and physical well-being have been found to improve after reemployment (Jackson, Stafford, Banks, & Warr, 1983).

Some research indicates that reemployed individuals are very similar to the employed with respect to anxiety, depression, physical illness (Kessler, Turner, & House, 1988), and binge drinking (Dooley & Prause, 1997). These findings correspond with the intuitive belief that the best cure for the negative effects of unemployment is a job. However, the types of jobs obtained may influence individuals’ well-being. Research on underemployment primarily supports Liem’s view that an unsatisfactory job can be detrimental to an individual. For example, Dooley and Prause (1997) concluded that moving from unemployment to underemployment bodes ill for a person’s employment status 5 years later; in fact, it more than doubled the risk of being unemployed at that point. They also found that as a societal trend, underemployment in 1989 was associated with elevated binge drinking in the same year. They state that the correlates of underemployment seem more like those of unemployment than of adequate employment, which is a critical issue in evaluating any policies that promote well-being by increasing jobs. Similarly, the work of O’Brien and Feather (1990) and Winefield, Winefield, Tiggemann and Goldney (1991) suggests that young underemployed workers are just as badly off psychologically as the unemployed. Furthermore, difficulties in finding satisfactory employment and prolonged underemployment may lead to “learned helplessness” (Seligman, 1975), which results in lower self-esteem, increased depression, and decreased feelings of control. McKee-Ryan and Harvey
(2011) summarize that research suggests that not all reemployment jobs are created equal and that workers in dissatisfactory new jobs continue to cope with their job loss as though they were still unemployed (Kinicki et al., 2000; Leana & Feldman, 1995). Thus, in general, research has found underemployment to be positively correlated with depression, even suicide (Stack, 1982) and negatively correlated with self-esteem, locus of control, and general affect (Feather & O’Brien, 1986a, 1986b; Winefield & Tiggemann, 1989a, 1989b), all results similar to those found in the unemployment literature.

Thus, underemployment typically leads to poorer job attitudes such as lower job satisfaction, job involvement, relationships with coworkers, future job aspirations, and feelings of control (Khan & Morrow, 1991; Burris, 1983). The negative association between underemployment and job attitudes can be because underemployed workers may receive fewer extrinsic and intrinsic rewards from their jobs in terms of salary and feelings of accomplishment than “satisfactorily employed” workers do (Feldman, 1996) and also because of the possible discrepancy between the rewards they receive and the rewards they expect (Locke & Latham, 1990; Rousseau, 1990). Additionally, Borgen, Amundson & Harder (1988), show that underemployed workers trying to extricate themselves from their predicament would have less reason to be involved with, or committed to, their jobs, possibly because they see it as a temporary situation that they would like to change. From an identity lens, this can be viewed as instances of disidentification with their job (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Further, Burris (1983) found that underemployed workers expressed stronger feelings of frustration about the inability to grow and advance on the job. From an identity-emotion lens, this is an interesting insight into how negative affect is created by perceived stagnation in professional identity growth.
Other outcomes of underemployment include the desire to be active in job search. In other words, when underemployed, people look to leave the less fulfilling job and move to more full time/satisfying employment. For example, Leana and Feldman (1994) report that laid-off workers who were underemployed in their new jobs were more likely to continue to job hunt even after becoming reemployed. In some cases underemployed workers have intentions to quit even when there is no other job in sight. For example, Burris (1983) and Borgen and Amundson (1984) both found that underemployed workers were less likely to “give their jobs one year” to improve before leaving and returning to the state of unemployment. This was, however, mediated by the attributions individuals make about the reasons for their underemployment with more highly educated workers making external/poor labor market attributions of underemployment and hence being more hopeful about their abilities to locate better jobs. Finally, continued unemployment (either due to involuntary job loss of an “appropriate” job or quitting an underwhelming/”inappropriate” job) can take the form of early retirement, where the individual elects not to re-enter the workforce, or chronic unemployment, where the individual is unable and/or unwilling to seek re-employment (Leana & Feldman, 1988). Thus, unfortunately, underemployment, like unemployment seems to have primarily negative psychological effects which may include negative view of self as a working individual (since the individual is not in a satisfactory job).

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the identity and emotions literature and presented theory and research regarding unemployment, job search, underemployment and reemployment that might inform my study. I have suggested that job loss is an extreme case of work-related transition and have drawn on extant research to show that it triggers identity transitions – but what are these
transitions and how do individuals navigate them? Also, I have suggested that emotion, as an essential element to cognition, is likely to be experienced and expressed during these transitions and further, emotions may also be related to identity transition processes during times of unemployment. Therefore, I come full circle to repeat my research questions, stated in Chapter 1:

1. What are the key components to the work-related identity transition process as individuals experience job loss, unemployment, job search, possible underemployment, and eventual reemployment?

2. (A) What are the (discrete) emotions expressed by individuals undergoing job loss and subsequent phases?

   (B) How are those emotions related to the work-related identity transitions of the unemployed?
What about the emotional trauma. Aren’t any of you feeling it. Are you too embarrassed to admit it. I’m not….everything seems to be dark and gloomy–not only personally regarding job loss, etc., etc., but look at the govt’s b.s. with higher taxes looming. Should I ignore that news and just deal with my own? But that news affects all of us. We need a blog for our emotional stress. Anyone know of a good one?

- Comment from a blog participant

CHAPTER 3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

I studied blogs of 15 different individuals who have experienced and blogged about the gamut of the work-related identity transition experience (i.e., experiencing involuntary job loss, being unemployed, job search, finding temporary work and being hired in a full time position). I used a qualitative grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which involved analyzing words and patterns of thought in the blog posts. In the following section, I provide a description of the research dataset I used. In the next section, I describe how the data was collected and analyzed.

Description of Research Setting – Blogs

Today’s workplace is increasingly characterized by intra-organizational (and, by necessity, virtual) communication. Within this larger virtual context, blogs, in particular, afford a rich vehicle for the study of emotion and identity formation. Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz (2004) identified five major motivations for blogging, which among others include documenting one’s life (self-concept narrative) and expressing deeply felt emotions. These authors contend that blogs helped individuals explore issues about which they felt “obsessive” or “passionate,” and in fact, gave people a place to “shout,” or express themselves to a diverse audience that could include best friends, colleagues, family members, or even total strangers. I believe blogs are an ideal setting to address my 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, a reason why blogs make for a good data source is that this medium allows individuals to maintain anonymity (if desired by the writer), and express their true feelings without fear of social stigma. As a result, blogs might provide an unobtrusive way to detect the expression of true feelings.

However, in order to gain the benefits that might accrue from the use of blogs, organization-related blogs need to be seen as non-threatening (Ojala, 2005). In the corporate context there are two types of blogs: internal (usually part of an intranet project and sanctioned by the employer) and external (personal blogs of employees who fully acknowledge where they work) (Ojala, 2005). Blogs that are not imposed by management (e.g., either external/personal blogs or internal blogs that are employee initiated) are more likely to be seen as non-threatening and thus more likely to be utilized. In a context outside formal organizations (such as the case in this study, where individuals are not a formal part of an organization), studying personal blogs would allow researchers to understand how identity formation at boundary moments (LeBaron, Glenn, & Thompson, 2009) actually occurs. As mentioned in Chapter 1, LeBaron, Glenn and Thompson (2009) posit that identities are prominent during boundary moments when identities spring to life, such as at the boundaries of conversations (e.g., when coworkers meet and greet) and at the boundaries of careers (such as during employment interviews). They say that transitions are fertile places for noticing the identities of people within organizations and that while the identity work is ongoing, it is especially salient at the boundaries of careers (e.g., hiring, firing, and job appraisal) (LeBaron, Glenn and Thompson, 2009). They recommend analyzing dyadic encounters, focusing on the dialogic engagement of conversers. They suggest such a design since they consider identity work as co-accomplished, through negotiation life processes inherent to social interaction. This makes a choice of blogs, especially blogs of the
unemployed (people at boundary moments), ideal for studying identity transitions.

In addition, findings from blog data would help unearth the ways emotions are expressed and used in the virtual context, following recommendations by Fineman and his colleagues (Fineman, Maitlis, & Panteli, 2007). Fineman et al. (2007:555) recently expanded the study of emotions to include the virtual world – a context that includes “sites where people bond, trust, love, get angry, frustrated, make friends, create enemies, shape their identities, confront loneliness, feel oppressed or liberated”. Like any communication medium, blogs provide both opportunities and constraints for self-expression. First, the highly accessible nature of blogs allows for people from disparate locations to participate in a conversation, enabling them to support and reinforce each other and provide virtual social support. Social support has been seen to help in coping with trauma (Flannery, 1990). Since people form close bonds with virtual others through their blogs and such bonds are a source of comfort and strength (Nardi et al. 2004), social support online will probably somewhat mimic this relationship with trauma expressed online (i.e., virtual social support is likely to help cope with trauma expressed online).

In terms of constraints of the medium, the virtual, asynchronous nature of blogs means that this medium also constrains expression by not allowing for additional information such as tone of voice or facial expressions; thus providing somewhat limited data to determine the role of felt emotions in identity transitions processes. Thus I will be limiting my findings to the role of expressed emotions during identity transitions. The question then arises on how to identify expressed emotion in the virtual (blog) context.

Fineman et al. (2007) observe that researchers entering the virtual work territory face a heavy legacy of emotion research in “non-virtual” organizations. An issue arises about whether or not emotions in the virtual context are products in their own right or simply substitutes for
“real” emotions experienced in non-virtual settings (Fineman, 2003; Handy, 1995). These authors posit that while many organizations are likely to be a mix of virtual and non-virtual settings, virtual settings are best regarded as different and analyzable in their own right – a new social production. In other words, in virtual settings individuals can express feeling and negotiate novel emotion protocols, which may become institutionalized for the medium (e.g., emoticons – symbols to depict a facial and/or emotional expression). Indeed, virtual settings offer creative opportunities for individuals to experiment with the construction and expression of feeling (Fineman et al., 2007). Thus, one of the ways I ascribed emotionality to blog text is by noting when specific expression of emotion occurs through the use of what I called “emotion language”. As part of my data gathering for emotions, I captured passages in which emotion “language” that is unique to virtual written communication (such as using emoticons like 😊 or abbreviations such as LOL) as well as emotion words (happy, sad, scared, disgusted, etc.) are used. It is important to bear in mind that the claims that are made in this study pertain to the expression of emotion via the written medium. While this could be representative of actual felt emotion, this is not always necessarily the case (Sutton, 1991).

In terms of identity formation, blogs make for a good data source because organizational studies indicate that language and discourse are important tools for identity construction and maintenance (Barley, 1983; Li & Seale, 2008). Thus an ideal way of examining changing identity is to study identity narratives (stories of self) provided by individuals undergoing identity transitions. To the degree that this discourse is ongoing, shared in real time and natural (not influenced by researcher intervention), the conclusions drawn regarding identity transitions can be that much closer to the actual lived experience of an individual. Further, the time stamped and diary-like nature of blogs also makes it possible to track emotions and identity transitions of
the blogger longitudinally, which is highly recommended. Indeed, the importance of understanding identity as the product of an unfolding, dynamic process has been highlighted by careers researchers (Barley, 1989; Hall, 2002). For example, with regards to emotions, Kinicki and Latack (1990) note that since stress and coping are dynamic processes that change over time and across situations, the recommended procedure is a longitudinal process-oriented approach that examines how people cope in specific stressful encounters as they unfold over time (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

With regards to identity, Carlsen and Pitsis (2009) advocate a phenomenological approach where one follows people in their work settings over time and tries to capture the functions of hope in identity construction as part of change efforts and everyday work. This type of phenomenological approach is exactly what blogs allow for. Finally, blog “conversations” (back and forth dialogue in the comments sections between blogger and his/her audience) can provide insight into identity change due to (virtual) social interaction. For these reasons blogs become an ideal setting for the study of emotions during identity transitions.

**Data Description and Collection Procedures**

I identified blogs to study by using search strings that combine the words “unemployed”, “fired”, “laid off”, “sacked” with the word “blog”. Thereafter, I used snowball sampling method to find other relevant blogs that were linked to the blog sites I visited. To be included in my sample, the blog had to be written by a person who experienced involuntary job loss either during or post 2008.

In terms of the construct of underemployment, a question arises as to how to make a judgment of whether someone is indeed underemployed or can be considered as having transitioned to the stage of being re-employed. Feldman (1996) notes that while some
dimensions of underemployment (such as wages and amount of formal education relative to job requirements) can be “objectively” determined, other dimensions such as whether individuals are involuntarily employed outside their field of formal education or involuntarily working as contingent workers are subjective perceptions of the individuals themselves. Thus, I categorized the data as data concerning underemployment only if the poster identified their current job to be mismatched with their educational qualifications and/or falling short of their expectations (i.e., they think they should be in a much better job).

I gathered my data from 15 blogs that housed stories of various people’s employment. However, the dataset is not limited to only 15 individuals since I included blog posts from guest bloggers and commenters in my data and analysis. Each of these blogs was about unemployment written over a period of approximately three years (November 2008-April 2011), which is the period beginning after the most recent major economic downturn in the U.S. I 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 re-employment (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 they consider themselves a professional in. Since identity is formed via social interaction (Amundson, 1994), my data included blog posts as well as related comments to those blog posts. I analyzed a total of 253 blog posts within the 15 blogs studied.

Bloggers in my sample did not always experience all five stages, but 4 did. Some of them, for example, held out on taking temporary jobs, while others never blogged about finding reemployment. I read through thousands of pages of blog posts and comments and at the end included about 500 pages of relevant data that was analyzed in-depth towards findings reported
in this study. That is, I culled through thousands of pages of initial data, but then after applying my three above-mentioned criteria, analyzed approximately 500 pages in depth.

**Building Grounded Theory**

I followed Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) grounded theory methodology. Accordingly, I identified some salient concepts by engaging in “open coding,” in which I assigned broad open codes to sections of blog text. I then used a “constant comparative” process to analyze the data line-by-line and compare new data with old (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As do many grounded theorists, Corbin & Strauss (2008) acknowledge that researchers have certain theoretical lenses and encourage use of these lenses while coding, but they also encourage allowing for the possibility for other codes to emerge. Accordingly, I kept an open mind while coding and allowed for the data to dictate the initial codes. Allowing my data to dictate my codes resulted in *in vivo* codes (codes that use the natural language of those researched). Since the same blog text could possess elements of more than one open code, I 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).

I also performed axial coding (Strauss & 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 (deriving from both first and second order coding) become a part of my “coding dictionary”, which I updated as and when I assigned, changed or deleted a code. Axial coding is defined as “building a dense texture of relationships around the axis of a category” (Strauss, 1987: 64). While open coding breaks the data up, axial coding attempts to bring it together and helps relate subcategories to categories (Charmaz, 2006). This analytic process simultaneously blends first-order analysis (reflective of the subjects’ views) and second-
order analysis (reflective of researchers’ interpretations) and is consistent with recent grounded theory research in management (e.g., Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark, & Fugate, 2007; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006). Throughout the coding process, I took notes about the new codes/changes. These notes are what Charmaz (2006) calls writing “memos” to document potential theoretical relationships between the categories. Axial coding represents a second-order level of analysis (Van Maanen, 1979), i.e., an interpretation of the first order concepts through relevant theoretical lenses. Relationships emerging from second order codes provided the primary building blocks of the grounded theory model that emerged from this study which “set in motion” these second order categories (Nag et al., 2007: 829) by describing the dynamic relationships among them.

**Trustworthiness of the Research.**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) specify four criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To begin with, the credibility of my findings is ensured by the nature of the data I collected. The blogs from which I collected my data were not written for this study. Instead, they were entirely independent endeavors of individuals attempting to narrate their stories of the experiences regarding job loss and subsequent stages. At the time they were capturing their thoughts and feelings about unemployment, these individuals were unaware that their words would be the data for this study. Thus they had no reason to be untruthful or biased by my agenda or purposes lending credibility to the data as being authentic to what they wanted to express. Further, as I coded the data, I compared emergent concepts to the themes generated by the previous analysis. Such a constant comparative method allowed for “within-method” triangulation across multiple data sources as a cross-check and to establish the internal consistency of the interpretive findings (Jick, 1979).
Also, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted, a researcher can make a case for transferability of her results, but ultimately, it is a matter of future empirical confirmation.

To address the issues of dependability and confirmability, I relied on an informal independent audit of my research methods by an expert (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). My auditor, Dr. Glen Kreiner, is a grounded theorist who has overviewed my work every step of the way, from data analysis to write up. From the very beginning of this project, he has thoroughly examined most of the original blog posts that went into this study and the data analysis they were subjected to. He has also had an opportunity to view my memos on how the codes might be related to each other as well as the various iterations of my dictionary as I iteratively developed my codes (modified codes, added or deleted codes). He has thus been an independent observer of how closely I followed the grounded theory process and following the established precedent in qualitative research, was able to assess both the dependability and confirmability of this project as competent.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Longitudinal tracking of blogs resulted in observing repeated patterns of connections between 1) stage (job loss, unemployment, job search, underemployment and re-employment); 2) identity issues, 3) outcomes, and 4) opposing sets of emotions that affected the outcomes. In unfolding the findings connected to each stage, I will follow the following process: after briefly introducing the stage and summarizing its major findings, I will proceed to discuss the major identity issues associated with that stage. Following this I will explicate the various outcomes associated with that stage as well as (opposing sets of) emotions that affected the outcomes associated with that stage. Each identity issue, emotion and outcome is associated in my data with a “code”. Code is a term used in qualitative research for the names given to groups of data that share a common theme. In my findings below, I will first name (in italics) and then define the different codes that appeared in my data and the ways these are linked to each other. As an overview on how the different stages might overlap, please refer to Figure 1, which lays out the various stages and depicts how they might occur simultaneously during a period of time (for example, individuals were often found to be in the job search stage for almost the whole period that they were also in the unemployed stage.)

Insert Figure 1 about here

Job Loss Stage

The job loss stage is the time period during, immediately after and in some cases immediately before the actual firing episode. While tracking this stage, I captured all instances of people’s expressed thoughts and feelings regarding what they were experiencing at the time. This sometimes included, for example, concerns about layoff rumors or concerns about being let go as
part of layoff programs before the actual lay off episode had occurred. This (pre unemployment job loss stage) is diagrammed in Figure 1, with the block representing job loss not being completely overlapped by the box representing unemployment. The data for the job loss stage came from an individual’s recollection of the termination episode wherein they usually narrated how it played out – the setting, the people involved, what was said, what reasons were given, how the focal individual felt, immediate post job loss thoughts regarding what their career next step will be, immediate actions undertaken (e.g., clearing their desk or not tackling the work issue they had so far been concerned with) etc.

I found that the primary identity issue a person grappled with during this stage was a sudden jolt to their work-related identity, which I called work-related identity hit. Further as a result of this work-related identity hit, individual’s often expressed emotions of either shock or relief. Further they experienced an immediate mental withdrawal from the job they were just terminated from leading their identity to rest in an in-between or liminal state. Such mental withdrawal from the job also results in terminated individuals considering responsibilities associated with their ex-job, as no longer theirs to worry about since it is now all someone else’s problem and even possible disidentification with the job or the organization. Also, mentally withdrawing from the job and thinking of it as someone else’s problem sometimes led individuals to experience a certain sense of calm and relaxation (albeit temporary), in a situation that is otherwise stressful. Work-related identity hit associated with the emotion of shock often led to an individual questioning what happened and why it happened. Such questioning further led to blame assignment – either to the self or to another (manager, economy, organization, etc.), where the individual assigned blame as to the cause of their termination. Still other issues pertained to the focal individuals’ mental preparedness for job loss – i.e. did they see it coming
or were they blindsided by the news that they were being let go. Preparedness also often included financial preparedness to be able to handle the termination of their steady income. I found that upon being let go, the individual’s expressed that their thoughts often flew to how they and their family would be financially affected by the termination. Individuals with income earning spouses/partners/parents expressed less financial-related concerns immediately upon being fired than those whose paycheck supported a single income household.

The job loss stage was deemed ended in my study at the end of the first day when the individual was given the news that they were being let go. The next stage (the unemployed stage), technically begins the moment an individual is terminated from their job (as depicted in Figure 1). However, immediate post termination thoughts and feelings were captured under the job loss stage (rather than the unemployment one) since, for this stage, I was interested in a person’s experiences (immediately) before, during, and (immediately) after the job loss episode. Naturally, there were some overlaps of thoughts and emotions expressed between these two stages (job loss and unemployment). Such overlap between the two stages has been represented in diagrammatic form in Figure 1, which shows the unemployment stage as occurring during the same time as the job loss stage (post the job loss episode). The demarcation between the stages of job loss and unemployment (i.e., job loss stage ending at the end of the first day), is an artificial, researcher-given one. Technically an individual is “unemployed” the moment they are given the news that they are being let go (as represented in Figure 1). However, during my analysis, I found that thoughts and feeling regarding the termination (how it happened, how they felt etc.) was especially dwelt upon during the initial few hours post the job loss episode. The next morning, when an individual began their day with no workplace to go to, the findings associated with that time period onwards were marked as part of the unemployment stage. This
was because there was a concrete behavior (or rather absence of a behavior) associated with this time period—i.e., a breaking of the daily routine of going to work. In the next few paragraphs I will elaborate on the identity related issues expressed by individuals when writing about the job loss stage as well as the outcomes that grappling with these identity issues led to.

**Work-related identity hit.** When an individual recalled the experience of involuntary job loss, the prominent identity issue they grappled with was the sudden jolt their work-related identity took, which I called *work-related identity hit*. This can be described as a state in which the individual’s sense of work-related identity (or their self-concept of who they are as an employee/worker) is jolted, leading to a temporary mental paralysis of sorts. The fall out of work identity hit is that the person is often in a state of *shock* and is unable to clearly account for who they are as a working individual. For example, a commenter on blogger 14x’s site writes: “For me, being laid off was like diving into cold water…it was impossible not to feel a jolt.” This person is expressing the sudden shock felt by the disruption of their work-related self-concept due to being laid off by likening it to the physical jolt felt when diving into cold water. Work-related identity hit represents a disruption to the continuity of who the person thought they were as a working member of society. It is the marker for the beginning of the transition to new work-related identities. Individuals often expressed negative emotional outcomes (e.g., hurt, anger) as a result of such a work-related identity hit. Further, dealing with work-related identity hit often led individuals to *question why they were being terminated.* For example, (female) guest blogger on blogger 12x’s site writes:

Prior to getting laid off there were talks about possible layoffs. However the day before I was laid off everyone at the organization was basically assured that good news was coming and not to panic or worry. The very next day my day off the person that does human resources calls me and asks me if I can come in she needed to talk to me. So I head in to work go to the HR’s person’s office and the news is delivered. I melted down right there in the office cried and I am not one to cry in front of people. I was shocked, I
was told the day before things were looking up. The HR person... tried to reassure me it had nothing to do with my performance. But that still doesn’t help much, it’s like if I am such a good worker why are you letting me go?

In the quote above, we can see how this individual was not expecting to be laid off since she had been reassured this was not happening (“the day before I was laid off everyone at the organization was basically assured that good news was coming and not to panic or worry”). The person expresses sadness and shock as a result of being let go (“I melted down right there in the office cried and I am not one to cry in front of people. I was shocked”) and further suggests that these reactions were regarding the hit her work-related identity had taken since she is questioning why she was being laid off if she was a good employee (“if I am such a good worker why are you letting me go?”). Other example quotes for this code can be found in Table 1.

**Work-related identity liminality.** Work-related identity hit often leads to a mental withdrawal. During such mental withdrawal, the terminated individual’s thoughts start to pull away from their work responsibilities and relationships and rest in a liminal or in between state. The notion of liminality, meaning “betwixt and between”, has been developed in social anthropology (Turner, 1967, 1977, 1982). Specifically, liminality is defined as a social space that is ‘betwixt and between the original positions arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremony’ (Turner, 1977: 95). It is understood as a fluid and largely unstructured space where normal order is suspended and which is experienced as both unsettling and creative (Schwarz & Spicer, 2006).

The concept of liminality has been highlighted by some recent organizational research (Garsten, 1999; Tempest and Starkey, 2004; Sturdy, Schwarz & Spicer, 2006; etc.). For example, Garsten (1999) uses the concept of liminality, specifically as related to temporary work, to understand the dynamics and dilemmas of postindustrial organizations. Tempest and Starkey (2004) extend the idea of liminality to theories of learning in organizations. They suggest that as
more industries adopt temporary project teams to accomplish work goals, challenges are created to the concept of organization as an enduring social artifact. This in turn raising issues regarding how learning and knowledge development takes place. Sturdy et al. (2006) explore liminality in their detailed study of the activities of business dinners and back-stage management consulting. They argue that liminality can be a highly multi-structured, comfortable and strategic / tactical space.

The liminality I am interested in, is one of work-related identity – or the state between who a person was as an active employee and who they now are post involuntary job loss. In terms of liminality of identity, organizational researchers Zabusky & Barley’s (1997) work examines professionals (scientists) who identify neither with the role nor with the occupation that they are part of. Sturdy et. al. (2006) point out that finding oneself in a liminal space can be a profoundly unsettling experience because relatively settled identities, routines and rules disappear creating a space for new transitional identities, routines and norms. Indeed, I found that liminality between identities was often perceived as unsettling by the person experiencing it resulting in negative emotions like anger and hurt. For example, blogger on site 12x states:

I think everyone that gets laid off rests in a fuzzy “did that really happen” state of mind for a while after they get the ax. That’s certainly how I feel after being laid off just 2 days after my 2 year anniversary with my company. I also think everyone who gets hit in this position will be asking themselves the question to which they may never get the answer – “Why me?” My first response after embarrassingly being escorted out the building was a strange state of acceptance. But as that day kept going I kept getting what could only be described as an instant pop bubble appear over my head that read, “You don’t have a job anymore.” Now, as the weekend comes to an end and I begin to realize I have nothing to wake up to on Monday. I remain very upset with the situation, as well anyone in this situation should be.

In the quote above, the individual indicates an experience of work-identity hit resulting in shock (“did that really happen”), which in turn led to being in between two identities – their
accepted identity as an ex-employee (“strange state of acceptance”) and their new identity as an
unemployed person (“as that day kept going I kept getting what could only be described as an
instant pop bubble appear over my head that read, “You don’t have a job anymore.”” Now, as the
weekend comes to an end and I begin to realize I have nothing to wake up to on Monday.”)
Further, the outcome from experiencing such liminality is the negative emotion of anger (“I
remain very upset with the situation”).

On the other hand some researchers argue that liminality can be a creative and desirable
space (Garsten, 1999). My findings support this notion that work-related identity liminality,
while uncomfortable for most, can also sometimes be an exciting time for others. Indeed, it
provides a space of pursuing dreams for some people. I found that being kicked out of one’s job
sometimes led individuals to start thinking of what is it that really motivated them and what
would they be passionate about doing as a next career move. In other words, work-related
identity liminality triggered identity transitions, which albeit uncomfortable, also sometimes
served as starting points for exploring exciting new possibilities regarding what a person can do
and become in terms of work. For example, blogger 13x states:

I got a call from the general manager, asking to stop by his office. Oblivious, I tried to
figure out what he wanted. I still didn’t get it when the HR director was there when I
showed up. I thought it might be a disciplinary thing, but couldn’t understand what I
could have done wrong. And that’s when it started. “Hardest part of my job … I hold
myself responsible …

What was I going to tell my wife, who I’d moved down to start a new life? 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 the quote above we see how this individual experiences an unexpected lay off causing
him to question the achievability of his future goals and dreams (“Would I ever realize my
dreams of film school and filmmaking?). However, ultimately the lay off and the work-related identity liminality it forced motivated him to pursue his dreams and join film school (“I’m in film school now, making my thesis feature, and it was inspired by my layoff and nine months of unemployment).

**Someone else’s problem.** As mentioned in the previous paragraph on liminality, work-related identity hit often leads to a mental withdrawal during which the terminated individual’s thoughts start to pull away from their work responsibilities and relationships. Their earlier work responsibilities thus now become something the individual is no longer worried about and is instead someone else’s problem. For example, guest blogger on blog 12x’s site writes:

right before it was time for me to go home, my boss told that he needed to talk to me and then he gave me news that I was lay off … out the door I went. Tuesday late afternoon he called me at home and ask me if I could go back and finish the project for the other office which was due the following monday and that it was going to be very hard if not impossible to find someone who could translate the project due to the complexity and the use of technical terms and if I could come to the office and finish it… I started to analyzed what he had just asked me, so … I said to him “due to events of yesterday I believe that’s a company priority and not one of mine therefore he would have to find someone else to finished it.

In the above quote we see how this individual who had recently been laid off decided that their ex-organization’s needs are no longer their problem such that even when they are needed back in their job to help the company out (albeit temporarily), they feel no obligation to help the organization that laid them off. It’s now the organization’s problem, not theirs (“due to events of yesterday I believe that’s a company priority and not one of mine”).

**Disidentification.** Besides liminality, another outcome as precipitated by mental withdrawing is disidentification with the organization. Disidentification is defined as having occurred when an individual defines him or herself as not having the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). Several organizational
researchers have elaborated and expanded on the concept of disidentification (e.g., Dukerich, Kramer, McLean Parks, 1998; DiSanza & Bullis, 1999; Elsbach, 1999; Pratt, 2000; Ashforth, 2001; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Elsbach (1999) notes that disidentification is an active separation from the organization, not just a coincidental or benign mismatch of attributes between individual and organization. I found that such active separation from the organization can be triggered by involuntary job loss, with the recently unemployed individual disconnecting from what the organization represents. This was especially the case when the individual disliked their job to begin with and such disidentification is often accompanied with positive emotions (such as relief). For example, commenter blogger 2x, after being fired from the newspaper he worked for says:

… there was no sadness or vacant feeling or anything like that. I suppose that speaks to my level of (un)happiness at the paper those last few months… I'm happy I'm here at home and not there today. I'm not answering to anyone, not doing anything I don't want to be doing, blasting music at ear-ringing volumes and willfully, boastfully violating Associated Press style guidelines by using double quotations in my headlines and not the correct single quotations.

In the quote above we see how this person is expressing that they were unhappy at their job (“speaks to my level of (un)happiness at the paper those last few months”) and are thus glad they are not working there anymore (“I'm happy I'm here at home and not there today”). Further they indicate an experience of disidentification when they express that they are actively distancing themselves from/disregarding the norms of the organization (“willfully, boastfully violating Associated Press style guidelines”).

*Relaxing:* Interestingly, I found several examples where during the job loss stage, an individual experiences or decides/proposes to experience a state of relaxation and calm. This was often pursued via undertaking escapist activities that helped a person forget about their problems for a while, like going to a bar or sleeping. For example, blogger 3x said:
What’s the first thing you should do after being laid off from your job? Take the rest of the day off. Go out to your favorite restaurant – provided it’s not crazy expensive – and treat yourself. Then go to a movie or a bar or a show. Go home and play video games. Do whatever it is that you love to do but never have enough time for. You’ve had a rough day, and you deserve it. Then go to sleep and try not to worry about what you’re going to do for money. Worrying doesn’t help, and it’s a waste of time. (I know, easier said than done.)

In the above quote, a person who has himself experienced job loss and is then blogging about it, uses his experience to advise other individuals in similar situations (i.e. recently experienced involuntary job loss), that immediately after losing one’s job, one should first and foremost take time out to relax and recuperate for a while (“take the rest of the day off”, “Treat yourself”). Further, the individual suggests that such individuals use the down time of not having to work as a positive time where there is the possibility of “do what you love doing but never had time for”. In sum, immediately after experiencing involuntary job loss, some individuals responded with a reaction of taking a break and relaxing.

Reframing. Individuals experiencing job loss (and thus work-related identity hit) often responded to the shock that resulted from job loss by using an ideological technique called reframing (Ashforth et al., 2007). Reframing is defined as the process of individuals infusing something with positive value and/or negating its negative value (Ashforth et al., 2007). In the earlier quote above, blogger 2x can be observed to be utilizing this technique of reframing. This is because he infuses a negative situation with positive value (“Do whatever it is that you love to do but never have enough time for. You’ve had a rough day, and you deserve it”), while also trying to negate the negative value of the situation (“Worrying doesn’t help, and it’s a waste of time”). I found that emotions like fear and sadness were often precursors to the occurrence of reframing. In other words, reframing appeared to be undertaken in response to negative emotions (e.g., fear, shock, sadness) emerging from involuntary job loss. It is an attempt to turn a negative
situation into something positive. Techniques like reframing thus enabled an individual to experience outcome states of (temporary) relaxation and undertake behaviors related to escapism (problem avoidance). The outcome of relaxing due to escapism was a common one evidenced in various instances where bloggers or their commenters, when recalling the experience of the first few days after losing their job, shared how they undertook activities like drinking alcohol, watching movies or sleeping in to avoid thinking about the implications of job loss to their life and identity.

Recalibrating. Another cognitive process that enables an individual to deal with work-related identity hit is the ideological technique of recalibrating (Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark & Fugate, 2007). Recalibrating has been defined in the literature as a mental process of adjusting the implicit standards that are used to evaluate the scale and/or valence of a situation (Ashforth, et al., 2007). In the context of my study, the situation being subjected to recalibration is the former employment of the terminated individual with the firm that let them go. During the firing stage I found that it was common for individuals to downward recalibrate the importance of the job they had just been relived from. In other words individuals who recently experienced involuntary job loss were found to assign less valance/importance to the value and desirability of the job they had just been let go from. Indications that such a mental recalibration process was occurring included a downward assessment of the importance and desirability of work based friendships/relationships, work deadlines and work-related stressors. Indeed, a downward recalibration of an employee by themselves could also occur. For example, commenter on blogger 9x’s site says: “The oddest part of the universal process is still how one can transition (in a nanosecond) from valued resource to would-be criminal - I mean they typically don't even let you clean out your desk unattended!” Here the individual is downward recalibrating their
perception of their own importance to others in the company (“from valued resource to would-be criminal”).

**Blame assignment.** I found that individuals dealt with the trauma of involuntary job loss and the identity discrepancies it created by invoking processes such as blame assignment, which involved individuals’ attempting to answer the question of whether their termination was fair or not. Such questioning of fairness led to an assigning of blame to either self or other (economy, organization, etc.). For example, blogger 3x states:

> I was … laid off in November. I have had a lot of guilt and sadness. I was in sales and I missed my clients very much. I still think that they must wonder “what did she do wrong?”
> My job centered around the real estate market and when it went bust, our business got very slow…I was also totally humiliated when I was let go .. my manager …let me know that I was being laid off and then he went out and told the rest of the office. We only had seven people in the office, but really, how do you keep a smile on your face and say “hey! it’s fine! i understand that it is just business?” I remember feeling hot and my stomach churning. That was the worst of it … I am stressed. My marriage is stressed. My relationships are stressed. 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 the above quote we can see how this individual is experiencing a work-related identity discrepancy between image and identity as she grapples with issues regarding imagining what her clients must think of her vs. what she actually think of herself. She states that “I was in sales and … my clients … must wonder ‘what did she do wrong?’”, indicating that she is worried about the possibly tarnished image of her work-related identity that her clients might have. She, on the other hand, appears to assess herself as worthy of retaining the job she lost since she blames her job loss not on herself but rather on the economy (“when it [the real estate market] went bust, our business got very slow…I was let go..”). Further, there is evidence of the process of blame placing outside of oneself (it was the market’s fault, not mine), indicating that the
person’s work identity was that she was actually worthy of employment. Other outcomes of dealing with work-identity discrepancy can include effects on individual well-being (“I am stressed. My marriage is stressed. My relationships are stressed”), effects on future work identity (“tired of corporate America”) and negative emotional states (sadness, humiliation, guilt, fear etc.).

To recap, in this section of the findings, I discussed how upon experiencing an episode of involuntary layoff, many individuals expressed a hit to their work-related identity, which is often followed by a period of in-betweenness regarding work identities which I have coded as work-related identity liminality. Such periods of liminality were usually uncomfortable, undesirable periods in individuals’ lives resulting from negative emotions of shock and sadness but sometimes they also arose from feelings of excitement and led an individual pursuing their dreams (real work-related goals and desires). Further, I found ideological techniques to play a role during this identity transition. For example the (downward) recaliberating of the importance of the ex-job (or aspects of the job, such as their coworkers), enabled a person to deal with the shock resulting from work-related identity hit. Also individuals who had been laid off expressed a disconnecting from and distancing from their former company. I captured these idea under the codes name mental withdrawal and disidentification. Mental withdrawal often led an individual to experience a sense of calm and relaxation (albeit temporary) in a situation that is otherwise stressful. Another ideological technique that enabled laid off individuals to deal with identity shock was that of reframing where individuals infused something with positive value and/or negated its negative value (Ashforth et. al., 2007). Finally, I found that individuals experiencing negative emotions like shock in this stage often undertook the process of questioning what
happened and why (in terms of what went wrong and why they lost their job) which often resulted in assigning blame to either self or other (organization, economy etc.)

Unemployed Stage

The unemployed stage is the time period following the job loss episode. As shown in Figure 1, this stage has some overlap with the job loss stage (i.e. the time period following immediately after the job loss episode). What is distinctive about this stage is the shift in the person’s thoughts from musings related specifically to the job loss episode, towards thinking about what’s next for their careers.

The prominent identity issues during this stage revolved around different types of work-related identity discrepancies like the discrepancy between current and ideal identity or between past and present identity. Further, ideological techniques such as reframing were also observed to play a role during this stage. For example, I observed a reframing of the period of unemployment from a negative, stressful, uncertain time to instead a positive phase that enables an individual to take stock of their priorities. Such reframing was often seen to have the effect of a regain of control for the focal individual (via using techniques like structuring one’s day). Indeed, as I will elaborate on later, control – the loss and regaining of it – was a central theme during the unemployment phase. While tracking this stage I also attempted to capture codes related to issues such as how unemployment alters life plans (e.g., unemployment might affect the ability of a person to continue paying the mortgage and thus might result in them having to move back to their parent’s place). Codes that pertained to control included, for example, how the unemployed structured their day. I found that, in order to regain a sense of control and productivity, many of the unemployed individuals I tracked devised a routine that they would
then force upon themselves (e.g., schedule regarding when to wake up, how long to apply for jobs, when to take breaks, what to do during breaks and when/what to eat, etc.) Further, I also noted that individual transitioned from the shock that was predominant in the job loss stage to an acceptance of the reality of the unemployed stage. Such an acceptance of being unemployed is what I code as a *normalization of identity as an unemployed individual*.

Other codes of interest during the unemployed stage had to do with the amount and nature of cognition/thought the individual gave to their state of unemployment and the stress it motivated. For example, I found that unemployed individuals found themselves devoting a lot of mental energy to what was next for them (i.e. how would they find a job, what kind of job did they want). Such constant interplay of cognitions regarding their careers and what’s next is what I coded as *increased mental processing*. In the next few paragraphs I will elaborate on the identity related issues and associated codes for the stage of unemployment that I have briefly described above.

**Work-related identity discrepancy.** When an individual talked about the experience of the period of unemployment, the prominent identity issue they grappled with was work-related identity discrepancy. This is somewhat similar to what Higgins (1987) called self-discrepancy. When describing self-discrepancy, Higgins defined two domains – one is the domain of the self (which includes actual; ideal and ought selves) and the other is from the standpoint on the self (the idea of a “significant other”). He argues that these two domains constitute a type of self-state representation and proposed that different types of self-discrepancies represent different types of negative psychological situations. For example, discrepancies between the “actual” self-state (i.e., the self-concept) and “ideal” self-states (i.e., representations of an individual's hopes, wishes, or aspirations for themselves) signify the absence of positive outcomes. In contrast,
discrepancies between the “actual” self-state and “ought” self-states (i.e., representations of an
dividual's beliefs about his or her duties, responsibilities, or obligations) signify the presence of
negative outcomes.

Work-related identity-discrepancy is similar to Higgin’s self-discrepancies in that it is a
contrast between various identity related states – e.g., image vs. identity. However it is different,
in that it is referring specifically to only work and employment related identity discrepancies.
Image vs. identity discrepancy, for example, is the mismatch between what an individual thinks
others think of them regarding work and employment – image (e.g., employers thinking they are
not worthy of employment) vs. what they think of themselves – identity (e.g., they are worthy of
retaining the job they lost). In the unemployed stage the discrepancies most frequently noted were
twofold – one between current vs. ideal work-related identity and the other between past vs.
present work-related identity.

Current vs. ideal. I defined current vs. ideal work-related identity discrepancy as a state
where there is a mismatch between the work-related identity states of what is one’s current
reality regarding work/employment (e.g., the identity of being jobless) vs. what would be ideal
(e.g., being comfortably employed). Specifically in the case of the unemployed stage, the work-
related identity discrepancy between current and ideal was experienced when unemployed
individuals expressed how unemployment and its financial fallouts interfered with their life
plans.  As mentioned earlier, examples of such life plans ranged from buying/continuing to afford
a home to starting a family.  For example, blogger (blogger 4x) writes:

Back in February I wrote about reaching a very difficult decision — the decision to sell
my house and downsize.  I met with real estate agents. I learned the value of my home
and did the math on what I could afford in order to decrease my carrying costs… God, it
was very discouraging. Depressingly discouraging. Discouraging enough to think about
options.  Back when I wrote about the decision to sell, several people responded to my
first post asking if I’d consider taking in a renter or tenant.  The idea was so foreign to me.
I never entertained the notion. It didn’t fit my previous perception of middle-class comfort and attainment.

The above quote is an example of an individual experiencing an identity discrepancy between what is their current self and what is their ideal self. The discrepancy is between the current situation affecting their self-concept – that they are someone who cannot afford to continue paying their mortgage and thus have to either downsize or bring in a tenant vs. their ideal self-concept – as someone who wants to live independently and in the standard and style they have grown accustomed to. Further, this discrepancy is triggering the focal individual to experience several negative emotions (“God, it was very discouraging. Depressingly discouraging. Discouraging enough to think about options”), showing how an experience of identity discrepancy can lead to outcomes related to negative emotions such as sadness and anxiety. For more examples, please refer to Table 1.

*Past vs. present.* Another work-related identity discrepancy that I noted during the unemployed stage was a discrepancy between what a focal individual used to think of themselves as a working person vs. what their self-concept is now (during the unemployed stage). Examples of this identity discrepancy include instances of when an individual is comparing who they used to be with who they are today. For example, an unemployed person thinking back to the productive, achieving worker they once felt they were and comparing that with the unproductive person they now feel like would be an instance of work-related identity discrepancy past vs. present. Such work-related identity discrepancy involving comparison of present self to the past self was often found to be accompanied by thoughts about how one used to work vs. what one is doing now. For example, unemployed individuals were often found to lament on how having a job used to provide them with a sense of structure. Indeed a perceived function of having a job
was that it provided a routine in an individual’s life, including when the person wakes, sleeps, eats and feels productive. Being unemployed took away the necessity for such a routine. While such a loss of routine initially seemed to provide a sense of freedom and relaxation to the unemployed individual, it eventually became a source of discomfort, translating into a perceived loss of control over one’s life and productivity. I found that, in order to regain this sense of control and productivity, many of the unemployed individuals I tracked devised a routine that they would then force upon themselves. Thus job loss resulted in an accompanying loss of structure and consequently control (discussed in detail later in this section) of how accomplished and productive one felt during a day. Blogger 6x, for example, states:

> There's still a hint of the surreal in the air as I start my third week of unemployment. It's definitely sunk in, but the situation is still so strange. I think it has something to do with breaking the cycle of having to be somewhere every day, which more or less started with preschool. Or maybe it has to do with spending most of the day in the company of my brain. …this will be the first week I'm eligible for unemployment benefits. 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. The to-do list seems to grow by the day. And it's all good

In the above quote the person expresses how unemployment has led to him experiencing a loss of structure or routine (“cycle”) in his day that is discomforting (“surreal”). He further hints that he is self-imposing a structure to his day (creating and following a “to-do list”) that is making him feel like he is on the right path (“I'm doing what I should be doing”). Such a structuring of his day suggests a regaining of control that allows him to experience positive emotions or at least a reduction in anxiety/negative emotions (“it's all good”). He is further comparing his present self to his former self (“I feel busier than I was when I had a full-time job”), making this an example of an attempt to regain control by structuring one’s day to address the identity discrepancy of past vs. present.
Unemployed identity normalization. A final identity issue related to the stage of unemployment is an identity state that is the outcome of dealing with an identity discrepancy described above. It is a resultant identity state that emerges from having dealt with the identity discrepancy issue of past vs. present (where an unemployed individual is grappling with who they were vs. who they are). Once an individual has started to transition from their past identity to their present identity they begin to get over the shock from the job loss stage and start to accept their situation. This leads to an acceptance of the self-concept that they are now an unemployed person. The longer they live with this acceptance, the faster their identity as an unemployed individual gets “normalized”. This is signaled by a person expressing that being without a job and dealing with unemployment is no longer out of the ordinary for them.

Returning to the recently discussed quote from blogger 6x, we can see him in the midst of this transition from unemployment being surreal towards an acceptance of the situation, which is the normalization process. He goes from “It's definitely sunk in, but the situation is still so strange” to “I’m doing what I should be doing” to “it’s all good”. I found that the faster an individual made the transition to acceptance and normalization of identity as an unemployed person, the faster they transitioned to the next stage of job search, as can be seen in blogger 6x for whom the situation had started to sink in and (hence) he was doing what he should be doing.

Control. As mentioned in the introduction of the unemployed stage findings, control – the loss and regaining of it – are central themes in outcomes stemming from work-related identity discrepancy issues in this stage. Individuals attempted to regain control lost as a result of the work identity discrepancy between current vs. ideal. For example, blogger 5x advises (based on his own experience):

It's weird to say but: try to enjoy this time. I realize it's a nail-biter, but rarely in our adult lives do we get to enjoy this much control in what we do day-to-day. Don’t let it go to
waste; savor it as much as possible. I visited the library a good bit, went outside when the weather was nice, met a bunch of interesting people while tooling around looking for work, got to watch the inauguration ALL day and ... just relaxed.

In the above quote a person (who has experienced unemployment) is giving advice to another unemployed person to enjoy the time period of unemployment, i.e. to experience the positive emotion of *excitement*. He/she suggests that instead of seeing the situation as a stressful, uncontrollable one; to instead “savor” the control that it potentially affords over day to day activities. Note in this case the person quoted is using the ideological techniques of both *recalibrating* and *reframing* toward the issue of control by making the issue from one regarding the loss of control on a life level to a gaining of control (reframing) on a day to day level (recalibrating). Further, this is being done in response to the discomfort produced due to work-related identity discrepancy between what an unemployed person is experiencing vs. what he/she ideally wants (current vs. ideal). For more examples of control, please refer to Table 1.

*Small victories.* Another issue closely related to an attempt to regain control was the attempt towards and accomplishing of what I coded as *small victories*. The code *small victories* was used to capture the idea that for the unemployed person, any accomplishment however small, is another foothold in the metaphorical rock climb up the difficult mountain of unemployment and getting over it. For example, blogger 7x states: “I'll admit, however, that each day I have a momentary freakout and question my motives behind everything and wonder how we're going to get by, but then by the end of the day I feel good about what I accomplished. Even if it meant putting on pants.” In this example we see how even something as simple as “putting on pants” is an accomplishment that this unemployed person can feel good about. While here it might be stated more humorously, I found several similar examples where small accomplishments (like reworking one’s resume or attempting to overcome one’s fear of
networking by forcing oneself to take a networking seminar) made an unemployed individual experience a sense of accomplishment and productivity to his/her day.

To recap, the identity issues at the forefront of the unemployed stage was work identity discrepancy between either current vs. ideal or past vs. present work-related identity. *Current vs. ideal* work identity discrepancy is a state where there is a mismatch between the work identity states of what is one’s current reality regarding work/employment (e.g., the identity of being jobless) vs. what would be ideal (e.g., being comfortably employed). *Past vs. present* involved a comparison of present self to the past self. A final identity issue related to the stage of unemployment was what I named *unemployed identity normalization* and referred to when an individual started to accept their unemployment situation as their reality, signaled by the person expressing that being without a job and dealing with unemployment is no longer out of the ordinary for them.

I noted that the ideological technique of *reframing* (e.g., reframing of the period of unemployment from a negative, stressful, uncertain time to instead a positive time full of *excitement* and possibilities that allows one to take stock of one’s life priorities) allowed individuals to invest time in themselves, their families, their hobbies and their “real” work-related passions. Such reframing was often associated with the positive emotion of *excitement* and seen to have the effect of a regain of control for the focal individual. Indeed, *gain and loss of control* were major themes during this phase. For example, individuals often felt a loss of control as a fall out of unemployment and attempted to regain control over their lives by using techniques such as *structuring their day*. Another issue closely related to an attempt to regain control was the attempting and accomplishing of what I coded as *small victories*, which was the idea that for the unemployed person, any accomplishment however small, is significant.
Additionally the code of how unemployment alters life plans (e.g., unemployment affecting the ability of a person to continue paying the mortgage and thus forcing them to move back to their parent’s place) was found to be often associated with a loss of control in one’s life.

I demarcated the unemployed stage as complete in my study at the end of the period of unemployment (i.e., when the focal individual found another job – temporary or full time). Beyond that was what I labeled the underemployed or reemployed stages. As mentioned and briefly touched upon above, there was some overlap between the job loss and unemployed stages in terms of thoughts and emotions experienced (and expressed). Further, the job search stage (to be discussed next) and the unemployment stage also overlap to a large extent. Indeed in my study, the job search stage was noted as being largely subsumed within the unemployment stage; however, as I shall elaborate on in the findings section on the job search stage, there were job search efforts that continued beyond the unemployed stage (to the underemployed stage, since individuals did not usually stop searching for jobs, even if they were underemployed, until they found satisfactory full time employment).

**Job Search Stage**

The job search stage is intertwined with the previously discussed unemployed stage as well as in some cases with the (yet to be discussed) underemployed stage. This is depicted in Figure 1 with job search overlapping with both unemployment and underemployment. The job search stage is considered to have begun when the individual undertakes activities related to seeking a new job, including updating one’s resume, conducting online job searches, contacting people in one’s network to let them know she/he is on the market, sending out one’s resume to potential employers, etc. Similar to the previous sections, I will begin by naming (in italics) and
briefly outlining the various codes of interest during this stage. Then I will describe in detail each code with corresponding example quotes.

While tracking this stage I found that the major work-identity related issue at this stage was navigating the exploring of possible selves. This involved job seekers exploring the possibility of transitioning to one of several new work identities and occurred when an individual considered several different kinds of jobs in their field and/or jobs in entirely new fields. Jobs being considered could be temporary or full time. Such considering of several different possible types of jobs led an individual to be (either) more or less open to the new possible work-related identities those jobs might bring with them. In other words, exploring possible work-related identities initially led to these prospective work-related identities as being considered acceptable/doable or not. When an individual was open to the idea of a possible work-related identity they might have to undertake, I labeled this prospective work-related identity success and similarly, when the individual expressed that they were unable to imagine taking on certain roles (and associated identities), this was labeled as cases of prospective work-related identity failure. It is important to bear in mind that these identities during this stage were only possible or prospective ones, not actual or realized ones that had been experimented with. Thus exploring possible work-related selves led to either prospective identity failure or success. Further, the universe of potential job opportunities available to a person was affected by whether or not they were open to the idea of taking on the identity that job would require such that the more prospective identities the individual was open to, the more prospective jobs opportunities the individual was able to make available to themselves. In other words, prospective work-related identity success (i.e. being open to a prospective work-related identity) led to potential job
opportunities, while prospective work-related identity failure led to the lack of associated potential job opportunities.

Prospective work-related identity success or failure and the corresponding increase or decrease of potential job opportunities available depended on whether or not one was able to push oneself out of one’s comfort zone. When individuals were able to push themselves during the job search phases to undertake tasks or even imagine undertaking tasks that they normally wouldn’t be comfortable with, they were more successful at opening up possible selves and also made available to themselves potential new job opportunities. Pushing oneself out of the comfort zone could be either related to the process of the job search (e.g., networking) or be related to the possible job itself (e.g., new career). I also noted that during job search individuals often identified the job search related tasks they undertook and whether or not these were steps in the right direction. I found that the cognitive ideological technique of reframing via the use of social comparison affected these outcomes of exploring possible selves by arousing emotions such as hope or despair. Social comparison occurred when the unemployed, job seeking individuals compared themselves to another person in terms of career. When an individual undertook upward social comparison, i.e. their social comparison led to them assessing their work choices as questionable and their career prospects as wanting, they experienced negative emotions such as despair and were motivated to explore new identities. On the other hand, reframing could also occur via downward social comparison where a person compared their life and career choices favorably to another and experienced positive emotions such as hope. For example a person might chose to reframe the job search process as a time where they are not trapped in a terrible job (like some of their ex colleagues) and are now hopeful of being able to find something better or them. Reframing could also occur when an erstwhile negative situation or task was
represented as a more positive one allowed individuals to approach otherwise unattractive and uncomfortable tasks, thus making it easier for them to push their comfort zones and explore new possible selves. However, the process of attempting to push oneself outside of one’s comfort zone was not always met with success and thus I also found instances where individuals resist exploring new selves and thus prefer staying in their comfort zones. For the most part however, individuals in job search mode seemed to be more open to having malleable work-related identities. Indeed several of them actively sought a change in their work identity and attempted to explore entirely different careers / possible selves via building new skills.

I also found that their age seemed to be an important factor for job seekers. This was especially true for older individuals (closer to retirement age) who I found, often ascribed their senior age as the reason they were having difficulty finding a job or having difficulty exploring possible selves. I also explicate the role of certain discrete emotions in the job search process such as the role of fear in motivating a person to keep searching or the role of happiness in undermining a person’s continued job efforts due to complacency. Finally of interest in this stage were two other findings that had to do with how individuals dealt with rejection during the job search and how support (or lack thereof) from a partner/spouse (what I labeled spousal support) enabled or constrained the job search process. Further I note how one deals with rejection or how one perceives their support system are often the grounds in which ideological techniques such as reframing play out. For example one might reframe rejection as a positive thing since it indicates that the person is at least getting some response from the market. Below I will examine each one of these findings in detail.

**Exploring possible selves.** As discussed in the literature review, possible selves are defined as ideas about who one might become, would like to become, or fears becoming (Markus
and Nurius, 1986; Yosh, Strube, and Bailey, 1992). Possible selves provide images of what end states are desirable and undesirable, and serve as cognitive and emotional filters by which people enact their environments and provide incentives for future behavior (Markus and Nurius, 1986). While Markus and Nurius (1986) argued that possible selves are highly vulnerable to changes in the environment, they did not specify the processes by which possible selves are retained or rejected, nor did they develop ideas about what occurs when people enter situations that challenge them to create new possibilities or to put old ones to public test. Ibarra (1999) filled this gap with her concept of provisional selves where she found that professionals in transition to more senior roles undertook adaptation to the new role via three basic tasks: (1) observing role models to identify potential identities, (2) experimenting with provisional selves, and (3) evaluating experiments against internal standards and external feedback (Ibarra, 1999). In Ibarra’s conceptualization, professionals transitioning into a new role brought about changes in their professional identity by benchmarking against role models and trying on and eventually adopting new aspects into their professional identity. While this seems logical in situations where the role and attached identity is desired and aspirational, what about situations when the role is an undesirable one – like getting laid off? Further, from a broader work lens (not limited to only professionals), how do individuals navigate work identity related changes during the period of transitioning from one job to another?

I found that individuals usually successfully considered several work-related possible selves specifically during the job search stage. This in turn led to the opening up of potential new job opportunities for the person. Losing one’s job provided motivation to some individuals to revisit the universe of career possibilities not limited to the work field they were recently let go from. For example, 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.” I found that often such exploration of a new work-related identity via exploring one’s career possibilities led to the individual feeling hopeful in and discovering a passion for the process of the job search. For example, blogger 8x further writes (about the decision to peruse a college passion as his next career), “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…” This quote indicates that deciding to pursue a new career (prospective work-related identity success) leads to the person feeling positive emotions (joy), and an awareness of what they might have to do to make these desirable job in new careers available to them (i.e. expand their network), which in turn often took the person outside their ‘comfort zone’, which I will cover next.

**Pushing of comfort zone, success.** The ability or inability to push oneself out of one’s comfort zone seemed to be a central theme in the job search process. I found that individuals who expressed that they were able to push themselves out of what they were already used to and comfortable with claimed to make available many more possible selves and work-related identities for themselves than those who stayed in their comfort zone and held on to their previous identities. I attempted to capture all instances of individuals pushing themselves out of their comfort zone and when possible, further sub-coded as to whether such attempts were met with failure or success. One of the ways a person pushing themselves out of their comfort zone was apparent was via the approach the person had towards networking.

**Networking.** Networking is a key tool that individuals expressed as important /central. Most individuals I studied claimed that they either tried to or needed to use this tool extensively during their job search. Networking was seen to be important for both exploring jobs in one’s old career as well as for exploring new careers. Bloggers wrote about how networking was often
uncomfortable for them and required them to push themselves beyond their comfort zones. For example, blogger 4x says:

The other night I went to a seminar at Fordham 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. It’s really because I just don’t like people. (In case you’re wondering, I hate you too.) Seriously, I’m just comfortable by myself and don’t much like networking events. I don’t know the root cause (fear of rejection, maybe). I signed up this event because, when I’m unemployed, I try to do anything that can possibly help. Sure enough, it was very helpful, and I’m glad I went.

In the above quote blogger 4x is clearly not comfortable with networking (“I’m just comfortable by myself and don’t much like networking events”), but pushed himself out of his comfort zone and signed up anyway because he thought that networking might be helpful in his job search (“I signed up this event because, when I’m unemployed, I try to do anything that can possibly help.”). This turned out to be a successful case of when an individual pushes themselves out of their comfort zone. It is important to note here that I defined a case as successful based on the focal individual’s perception of it and not on an assessment of whether or not it ultimately helped the individual find a job. In this case blogger 4x states that “it was very helpful, and I’m glad I went”, making this a case of a successful attempt at pushing oneself out of one’s comfort zone when exploring possible selves.

**Social comparison.** This code was used to capture all instances of when someone compared themselves to another in a work-related context. I found that one of the incentives that allowed for people to entertain the idea of pushing themselves out of their comfort zones to explore new possible selves was when they unfavorably compared themselves to another who had a different career. I labeled this code as *upward social comparison* which was used to capture all instances of when someone compared themselves to another in a work-related context and found themselves as lacking. I found that when individuals saw another as better off because
of their career/work choices, they were often motivated to take a fresh look at their own choices and begin to entertain the notion of other possible selves. For example, blogger 4x writes:

I always poo-pooed a career in civil service, whenever my dad brought it up. The pay was low. The work was boring. And the opportunities for glory and riches, or even an upper middle-class life seemed to be nil. Besides, who wanted to sit at a small desk in a nondescript office building pouring over numbers or files or whatever it was that he did? Not me. I was going to realize my dreams in the music industry. I graduated from college in 1994 and received my MBA in 2005. I live in New York City, and have been laid off three times in the last three years, most recently this past October. Months of unemployment have followed each layoff. My music industry career—including stints at a website, a label and a now infamous trade organization—is likely over. I spend my days looking at job boards and sending out resumes. My dad continues to work for the same government agency, as he has since the early 1990s. The steady paycheck that I shrugged off growing up is looking pretty good right about now..

In the above quote the individual shares how he has changed from shirking from the possible self of a career in civil services (“I always poo-pooed a career in civil service…The pay was low. The work was boring… who wanted to sit at a small desk in a nondescript office building pouring over numbers or files …? Not me”), to viewing it as a stable, desirable work identity (“My dad continues to work for the same government agency, as he has since the early 1990s. The steady paycheck that I shrugged off growing up is looking pretty good right about now”). The quote demonstrates how work-related upward social comparison with another can prompt individuals to rethink the universe of possible selves that they would be willing to explore. In other words social comparison caused reframing of an otherwise unattractive career choice as a more attractive one and thus can provide motivation for pushing oneself out of one’s comfort zone.

**Step in the right direction.** Another finding from the job search stage was what I labeled *step in the right direction*. This was a code for capturing instances of when an individual expressed that they were making progress towards their goal of finding employment one step at a
time. These steps could vary from networking, to resume updating to site searching for jobs, etc. The idea was to capture when individuals felt like they were making progress in their job search even if they didn’t feel like they had it all figured out just yet. For example, a commenter on blogger 15x’s site says: “Naturally, beginning a career search immediately after a job loss regardless of the circumstance helps one’s chances in regaining employment sooner than later. As Kevin indicated, by brushing up on and increasing one’s skills by attending classes or training seminars certainly puts a positive spin on the daunting question, “What have you been doing with your time?””. This individual is expressing that wasting no time after job loss to begin the job search phase is the right thing to do in order to improve chances in regaining employment and thus is a step in the right direction.

**Reframing.** As mentioned, the ideological technique of reframing was found to play a central role in the job search process. As mentioned earlier, reframing is defined as the process of individuals infusing something with positive value and/or negating its negative value (Ashforth et al., 2007). In the quote below blogger 10x reframes the concept of networking to make it more approachable (less out of one’s comfort zone). He states:

> I have found it most helpful to stop thinking around the term “networking” and to think more around the idea of relationship building. From the earliest point in my career, networking meetings had been difficult for me because I had a tendency to approach them from the perspective of what the other person could do for me. As I began to think more in terms of how the potential relationship could be mutually beneficial, however, the process got much easier. Sure, I’m going to have a lot of meetings but not all of them have to result in making a life long pal. But recognizing the meetings that go well and expanding on those is, I think, one of the keys.

In the quote above the blogger attempts to infuse the idea of networking with positive value by viewing it as relationship building of a relationship that could be mutually beneficial.
instead of as a task that is forced, contrived and difficult because you are expecting something out of the person being networked with.

**Pushing of comfort zone, failure.** Such pushing of comfort zones while exploring of work-related possible selves was not always met with success. Sometimes individuals found that they longed for their comfort zone – i.e. the job or career they had and that they felt uncomfortable donning a new work-related identity (even if was temporary). They found themselves experiencing adverse emotional reactions (such as despair) to the entirely new prospective work-related identity they were considering, leading to a desire to revert back to their old self. I labeled this finding as a *failure of forcing oneself out of one’s comfort zone.* An outcome of such failure to push out of the comfort zone led to a *decrease in the number of potential job opportunities.* One of the mechanisms via which individuals stayed in their comfort zones and held on to their old identities while rejecting new ones was by *blame assignment outside of themselves* or ascribing their inability to explore new jobs to their *age* or the *salary* they made. These three factors are discussed next.

**Age and Salary.** I found that a person’s age, was often viewed by them as a factor that enabled or constrained them to be able to get the jobs they desired. This was especially true for individuals who were close to 60. Such job seekers often lamented that their age was holding them back from being considered for a position they desired. I also observed people expressing an association with age and their salary such that higher the age, more money they had made in the job they lost. Thus high salary was also a factor people ascribed for not being able to get jobs. Age and salary are both factors that are potentially integral to a person’s work-related identity. Further, perceived age discrimination was often met with negative emotional reactions from older job seekers. For example, guest blogger on blogger 6x’s site writes: “I was very good
at what I did, and could not understand why no one was hiring me. I know my age (58)— and high salary were a huge drawback”. This person ascribes her not being able to find a job to age and salary (“I know my age (58)— and high salary were a huge drawback”) and this ends up leaving her feeling confused (“could not understand why no one was hiring me”). A commenter on blogger 13x’s site writes about his experience: “Not many companies are going to look to hire anyone in upper management or anywhere else that is approaching 60. It’s just a fact because the company feels they will have to go through another hiring search in 3 or 4 years and at that level it is quite expensive. They would prefer to find someone that they feel will want and be able to work at that position for at least 10+ years.” Clearly, this person ascribes older age and expensive salaries (with its associated head hunting costs) as a factor toward being unsuccessful on the job market.

**Blame.** In previous stages of the findings, I have already introduced the idea that blame assignment (either on oneself or outside of oneself – on the old company management, the economy etc.). In the case of comfort zones and exploring new identities, I found that blame placing outside of oneself allowed an individual to hold on to their existing identities and reject new ones that they were attempting to explore. For example, blogger 9x states:

I took a job that made me feel like I was back in high school starting my first job. I hated it and needless to say, quit three days into it. So now I am back looking. I found some people were meant for fast food jobs, some for sales, and others are not. I am one, I hate to say, Am Not one of those people. As hard as I tried, I couldn’t do it. I am too old to start working fast food. 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. Anyway, life goes on and I will manage like everyone else and i will do what it takes, but hopefully, will find something I am more compatible with. We all do what we have to but no sense in sacraficing your self-esteem, your dignity, and your sense of being any further than this economy has done
In the above quote, this individual shares that she attempted to explore an unfamiliar identity (a fast food job), which she had an adverse emotional reaction to (“I hated it”, “I felt uncomfortable, unfamiliar, and unhappy”) and this led her to reject this identity (“quit three days into it. So now I am back looking. I found some people were meant for fast food jobs, some for sales, and others are not. I am one, I hate to say, Am Not one of those people. As hard as I tried, I couldn’t do it.”). This individual blames her age (“i am too old to start working fast food.”). She also blames the economy for her situation and this blame mechanism enables her to justify her rejection of the possible self she explored (“We all do what we have to but no sense in sacrificing your self-esteem, your dignity, and your sense of being any further than this economy has done”). The upshot is a failure case for new identity development and also a return to unemployment and further job search.

**Skill building.** Another finding from the job search stage was that individuals created opportunities for new identity development and explored possible selves by undertaking tasks and routines that would allow them to update their work skills or learn new ones. I coded this as *skill building* and used this code to capture all instances of when an individual uses the period of looking for a job, while being out of active employment, as a time to learn new skills that they can add to their resume or that might help them find employment. Blogger 10x, for example, states that “I have found that, with just a little effort, it is very easy to fill the hours while also preserving and building upon the skills I have developed over the years. Not going in to the office every day can result in a rapid atrophy of some basic business skills. However, it also represents a great opportunity to work on other skills that were not necessarily part of my old job, but vital nonetheless.” Here we can see that updating of one’s skills is being seen as a route
to new career avenues/new possible selves (“represents a great opportunity to work on other skills that were not necessarily part of my old job, but vital nonetheless”).

**Emotions affecting job search.** I found that various emotions affected the willingness of a person to undertake the job search process. Further, the pattern in terms of positive and negative emotions and it’s 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, a feeling of hope could either help or hinder a person in their job search efforts. Hope for a job could motivate someone to continue to apply for jobs despite all odds. For example, guest blogger on blogger 6x’s site 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 person 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 a person’s efforts on the job market if it leads to complacency. Many people expressed that after an interview that they felt went well, their efforts at finding employment dwindled since they were hoping on the job they interviewed for to materialize. For example, blogger 12x writes:

> Several weeks ago, I interviewed for a position with a large public company in Atlanta. It was a job that would be reporting directly to the CFO and the position would round out my financial skill set–fitting all of my criteria. 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 (for three weeks post-interview), 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 the quote above this person is indicating that they thought their interview went very well and that they were a good fit in the company and thus were hopeful that things would work out which
in turn made continuing to search for jobs challenging. Thus the same emotion of hope can inspire both continued job search efforts as well as dampen them.

*Rejection.* Another code of interest in the job search stage is how individuals deal with rejection during this stage. I tracked instances of rejection and found that rejection affected the identity issue of exploring possible selves during job search via the emotions it caused. For example, rejection was more often than not found to be a source of negative affect and demoralization (what I have coded as *despair*). For example, blogger 11x states – “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 (more than once) that Company Q had rejected him he felt hurt (wounded). However, rejection could also act as an enabler towards motivating further job search. For example, blogger 10x states about his experiences with job search and rejection:

> 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. But just like sales, that rejection has to be used as a motivator. If you are getting rejected, at least you are in the game. And that is certainly better than not having any interviews at all. While I would like for this process to be over with, I know that I can’t land a job without having an interview and I also know that, eventually, one of those interviews will be the one that lands me the position I have been seeking.

This individual is admitting that rejection can be painful (“devastating”), but *reframes* rejection into something positive (“If you are getting rejected, at least you are in the game.”) and suggests that rejection acts as a motivator (“just like sales, that rejection has to be used as a motivator”), that enables one to stay positive and optimistic to keep making progress towards one’s employment-finding goal (“eventually, one of those interviews will be the one that lands me the position I have been seeking”).
Spousal support. Finally, a code of interest during the job search stage was that of spousal support. This was a label I used for a code to capture instances of how the presence or absence of support from the unemployed individual’s spouse made a difference to that person’s job search experience. Further, as mentioned before, spousal support was often the basis of reframing a negative situation into a positive one. For example, regarding spousal support, blogger 10x after finding full time work again writes:

To the spouses and partners of those that are currently out of work: Please keep in mind that what your significant other needs right now is support. Being unemployed and looking for a new job in this market is far more stressful than many are willing to let on. Pressure from family members only makes the situation worse. I was unaware of how anxious my wife was about our situation until I received the offer letter from my new employer. The lifting of 10 months of fear and stress showed on her face almost immediately. It wasn’t until that moment that I realized just how supportive she had been. She encouraged me to do things for myself and never insinuated that I was not doing enough to find a job. As far as I could tell, she at times seemed almost indifferent to my situation, not putting any pressure on me but also not patronizing me as if I was emotionally fragile. I realize now that she was putting on a brave face because she understood all too well what this experience was like for me. So I thank my wife for being there for me. For encouraging me to go to the golf course when she could see the stress starting to build. For tolerating my little side projects like this blog. For trusting me to approach the search the way I wanted, and for not nagging me on the occasional days I decided to simply hang out and do nothing until noon. Her understanding and patience made the situation easier on me and allowed me to pursue the search in the way that I saw fit. I think it paid off.

In the quote above blogger 10x credits his wife with providing the emotional support he needed during the job search process (“Her understanding and patience made the situation easier on me”) and that allowed him to undertake the job search process on his terms without feeling pressure from her (“she at times seemed almost indifferent to my situation, not putting any pressure on me but also not patronizing me as if I was emotionally fragile.”), “allowed me to pursue the search in the way that I saw fit”) that eventually led him to achieving his goal of finding full time work (“I think it paid off.”). I found other similar instances of unemployed
individuals crediting their spouse with emotional and even financial support that allowed them to undertake the job search and even explore entirely new possible selves because they weren’t feeling emotional or financial pressure from their spouse. Thus the presence of emotional and financial support from a spouse allowed a person to undertake exploring possible work-related identities (e.g., looking for work in an entirely new field), even if that meant it would take longer to find a job.

To briefly recap, the major identity related issue at this stage was navigating the exploring of possible selves where job seekers explored the possibility of transitioning to one of several new work-related identities when they considered several different kinds of jobs in their field and/or jobs in entirely new fields. Such exploring possible selves led to a person to make decisions early on whether these prospective work-related identities being considered were acceptable/doable or not. When an individual was open to the idea of a possible work-related identity they might have to undertake, I labeled this prospective work-related identity success. Similarly, when the individual expressed that they were unable to imagine taking on certain roles (and associated identities), this was labeled as cases of prospective work-related identity failure. Being open to several prospective identities (prospective work-related identity success) in turn led to the opening up of several new potential job opportunities for the individual.

Further, whether or not one was able to push oneself out of one’s comfort zone affected one’s universe of job possibilities to increase or decrease. When individuals expressed an ability to push themselves out of their comfort zone, they were able to make available to themselves several potential job opportunities. Pushing oneself out of one’s comfort zone often involves undertaking tasks such as networking and self-promoting. Activities undertaken to make continuous progress towards finding full time employment constituted what individuals viewed
as steps in the right direction. Further, reframing a negative situation or task into a more positive one, allowed individuals to approach an otherwise uncomfortable task. Social comparison occurred when the unemployed, job seeking individuals compared themselves to another person in terms of career. When an individual undertook upward social comparison, i.e. their social comparison led to them assessing their work choices as questionable and their career prospects as wanting, they were motivated to explore new identities. The process of thinking of oneself in new roles and identities was not always met with success and thus I also found instances where individuals resisted exploring new selves leading to prospective work-related identity rejection (failure). Individuals who actively sought a change in their work identity attempted to explore entirely different careers / possible selves via building new skills. I also found older individuals (closer to retirement age), often ascribed their senior age as the reason they were having difficulty finding a job or having difficulty exploring possible selves. I also discussed the role of discrete emotions (like hope and despair) in the job search process. Finally of interest in this stage were two other findings that had to do with how individuals dealt with rejection during the job search and how support (or lack thereof) from a partner/spouse (what I labeled spousal support) enabled or constrained the job search process.

Underemployed Stage

The next stage I studied was the underemployed stage. As mentioned in the literature review, this stage is a discrepancy between satisfactory employment and current employment (Kaufman, 1982). It can also be thought of as re-employment that is either part-time or outside of the individual's field of interest and/or expertise (Kaufman, 1982). Feldman (1996) in his review summarizes the five dimensions of underemployment as the following: (1) the person possesses more formal education than the job requires; (2) the person is involuntarily employed in a field outside his/her area of formal education; (3) the person possesses higher-level work skills and
more extensive work experience than the job requires; (4) the person is involuntarily engaged in part-time, temporary, or intermittent employment; and/or (5) the person earning wages 20% or less than in the previous job. Feldman (1996) notes that while some dimensions of underemployment (such as wages and amount of formal education relative to job requirements) can be “objectively” determined, other dimensions such as whether individuals are involuntarily employed outside their field of formal education or involuntarily working as contingent workers are subjective perceptions of the individuals themselves. Thus I categorized my findings as concerning underemployment only if the individual indicated that their current job was mismatched with their educational qualifications and/or falling short of their expectations (i.e., they think they should be in a much better paying job/better kind of work). In other words, if the individual communicated that they were doing a temporary job (including part time consulting type gigs) or in a full time job that they were over-qualified for or did not feel sufficiently remunerated for and were still looking for appropriate full time work, I classified them as being underemployed.

Following from the above criteria to classify individuals as underemployed, there is overlap between the stages of job search and underemployment (as depicted in Figure 1), such that when an individual is underemployed, they are typically still undertaking job search activities. Interestingly, this is in stark contrast to work-related identity liminality where an individual is between two identities and therefore, possesses neither one. During underemployment, the individual has two (seemingly contrary) active identities- that of having a job and that of still looking for a job.

The underemployed stage is said to have ended if and when the individual finds suitable full time work (and thus enters the reemployed stage). In terms of labels, names referring to
underemployed job in my data ran the gamut of freelancing to temping (temporary work assignments) to consulting to jobs people felt overqualified for (like full time jobs in fast food restaurants). I observed a hierarchy of desirability of the kind of underemployment an individual undertook (for example, individuals preferred a consulting assignment in their field of choice to working a temporary job in a field they did not like). The common thread that ran through these different types of underemployed jobs was that individuals in them were nearly constantly looking for full time work and were not satisfied with their current state of underemployment as a permanent solution to unemployment. The only exception to this is when individuals began to view voluntary permanent underemployment as desirable. When this occurs, individuals stopped their job search and considered themselves as satisfactorily employed (reemployed) and thus ceased looking for full time work. This is depicted in Figure 1 as the overlap between the underemployment stage and the reemployment stage. The code of permanent underemployment becoming attractive is motivated by a mental shift in perception of full time work – a finding that is common to both this stage of underemployment and the next stage of reemployment. Similar to the findings on previous stages, I will begin by identifying the finding (naming the code in italics) and very briefly describing the related issues of interest for this stage. Following this brief introduction, I will describe in detail each finding with supporting quotes from my data.

The primary identity issue in the underemployed stage revolved around how individuals dealt with the temporary work identities that they adopted to enable them to perform temporary jobs. Other issues related to identity at this stage revolved around why individuals chose to undertake underemployment – i.e. did they undertake underemployment to survive or did they see it as a way to survive and thrive (for example, as a way to enter into a new career they had aspired to). With regard to the first – i.e. underemployment to survive, I found that often
individuals undertook underemployment in order to keep their heads above water (financially speaking) by earning an income. In other words, this code tracked when an individual approached underemployment as a (temporary) solution to surviving unemployment and its accompanying financial woes. On the other hand, sometimes orientation towards underemployment went beyond a survival mentality and became instead a positive, desirable opportunity that enabled one to thrive. For example, sometimes individuals used underemployment jobs as a way to stay active and gather experience in their existing field, or even in a new field altogether (and thus help them switch careers). Either way, the fact that an individual stayed in an underemployed job indicated an attempt to adopt a temporary work identity. However, sometimes underemployment job possibilities or actual experiences proved to be too unbearable for some individuals. Such individuals experienced either (1) prospective work-related identity failure (i.e. they did not even entertain the possibility of a work identity required by a certain work opportunity) or (2) experimented temporary work-related identity failure (i.e., they tried and failed when attempting to adopt a temporary work identity and thus quit the underemployed job).

A code of interest for this stage that I tracked regarded how future employers view underemployment. These findings arose from a discussion regarding whether a person is seen as more or less desirable by a future employer if they already have a job (albeit temporary and in many cases not even directly related to the future job they are looking for) versus if they spent their time getting further education or dedicating themselves solely to finding full time work in their field. Depending on how the individual perceived future employers to be viewing underemployment, they reframed the desirability of underemployed work. Another interesting finding from this stage was regarding time spent for underemployment, which raised the question
of how much time an individual should dedicate to underemployed jobs versus spending time searching for full time employment. Finally, as already mentioned, a finding of interest in this stage that is related to the next stage (of reemployment) was coded *permanent underemployment as attractive* and is the idea that a steady job and a steady source of income (even if an individual is overqualified for it) is better than being unemployed. It is a shift of an individual viewing an underemployed job as temporary (and thus simultaneously maintaining an ongoing search for full time work) to viewing it as the nature of employment that is their permanent reality. This was often the case if individuals voluntarily decided to be self-employed, such as when they decided to permanently become freelance consultants or start small businesses. Having now provided an overview of this section, below I describe each of the findings in detail.

**Temporary work-related identities.** The primary identity issue in the underemployed stage was how individuals dealt with the *temporary work-related identities* that they adopted to enable them to perform temporary jobs. The temporary identities I studied 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 (consulting) or (2) a part time employee in a field that was entirely new to them (temping) or even (3) a full time employee in a job they disliked/did not feel was worthy of them (in descending order of desirability). The central issue that decided the type of temporary identity an individual would adopt during the underemployment stage was an answer to the question of why individuals chose to undertake underemployment. I found that one of two reasons were stated in the blogs of why individuals undertook underemployment – (1) to survive (financially) or (2) to survive and thrive (survive financially but also polish old skills, build new ones etc.). Let us examine both of these in detail.
**Underemployment to survive.** I found that 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. Such individuals tended to view themselves as victims of unemployment and saw their circumstance as something that they needed to “survive”. While underemployed jobs provided an opportunity to make some income and thus survive unemployment, it also translated to time away from what they really thought they should be doing and was something that kept them away from the right jobs. Underemployment solely to survive often led to individuals experiencing negative affect (frustration, depression and anger, for example) and had negative effects on their well-being (e.g., demoralization). However, sometimes individuals could also experience positive emotions (such as gratitude) for being able to survive due to the job they had.

For example, a commenter on blogger 4x’s blog post writes:

“I totally understand applying for ‘survival’ jobs as I did just that in Oct. 2008 when I accepted a position with a professional association. 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 in an economy that was only going to get worse. 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.

In the above quote, the individual indicates that he/she undertook underemployment in order to survive (“I totally understand applying for ‘survival’ jobs as I did just that in Oct. 2008”). It was clearly a case of underemployment with the person accepting an “inferior” job (“the job paid $30K less than my previous position”, “I was overqualified for the position”) with the primary motivation being earning some sort of income to pay the bills (“But I accepted the offer because
… I had to pay the mortgage”). This is a case of someone viewing (undesirable) underemployment as a means to survive and thus avoiding experiencing negative effects on their well-being (“slide into discontentment”) by focusing on the gratitude they feel that they are able to pay their bills (“focused on being grateful to be able to keep the roof over my head and to stay ahead of all my bills.”).

**Underemployment to thrive.** On the other hand, individuals who viewed underemployment as a way to both survive and thrive worked in underemployed jobs they desired and viewed those jobs as opportunities that both helped them earn money to survive as well as helped them build new skills / stay active by utilizing their existing skills. Underemployment can also sometimes be the most accessible way to gain experience and build skills for a person who has been unemployed and is looking to switch to a new career path. For example, blogger 8x, (who as we have already seen in the previous section on job search) is someone who after being let go from his job, decided to peruse his original college dream, which translated to a switch in careers. He states about underemployment: “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.” From this quote we see that underemployment (“consulting on two projects”) is allowing this individual to build a new skill set (“I’m using many of my existing skills while adding some new ones”) toward a new career (“applying my skills to a new field”). Thus this is a case of when underemployment is not just for survival (“earning income again”), it also serves the additional purpose of helping a person thrive in a potential new career.
**Underemployment to reemployment.** 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. As the project has picked up momentum in the past couple of months, 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 was expecting his underemployment job (he was an “external consultant”) would become a full time job (“I was indeed expecting that this full-time opportunity might arise”), indicating that he viewed underemployment as a way to not just make money temporarily, but rather as a means to thrive in that firm and be accepted into a full time position and to see his work come to fruition (“I will now have the opportunity to see the team’s efforts to fruition as a consultant for this services company”).

The fact that an individual stays in an underemployed job indicates at least an attempt to adopt a temporary work-related identity. Sometimes, however, individuals are either unable to adjust and adopt a temporary work-related identity or sometimes find it impossible to even entertain the idea of a potential temporary work-related identity. Let us examine these two identity issues further.

**Experimented work-related identity failure and prospective temporary work-related identity failure.** Sometimes underemployment job possibilities or actual experiences prove to be too unbearable for some individuals. Such individuals were found to experience either *prospective work-related identity failure* or *experimented temporary work-related identity failure*. *Experimented work-related identity failure* during this stage 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. Thus in this case a person tries but fails to adopt a work-related identity for a job even if they view the job as a temporary one. We saw an example of this earlier in the job search section where a woman decides that (from her perspective) she is unable to work a fast food job even as a temporary way to tide herself over. Such a finding (related to failure to consider certain underemployed jobs) is a specific case of the earlier, more general finding during the job search stage of experimented work-related identity failure. In other words, during the job search stage, individuals could experience a failure to adopt the work-related identities they have already experimented with (that could eventually become permanent) for any type of job, but during the underemployed stage, the work-related identity being experimented with and rejected is specifically temporary in nature and also the job is not a full time position.

On the other hand prospective temporary work-related identity failure occurs when an individual decides he/she is not even able to entertain the possibility of a work-related identity required by a certain work opportunity. This happens when an individual is so mired in their pre unemployment identity that trying to adopt a new (especially undesirable) work identity, even if it is only temporary, is unfathomable to them. They thus reject outright even the idea of adopting any work identity but the ones they are comfortable with. For example, in a blogpost titled “More than two years later, still searching for the right fit”, blogger 15x shares:

I’ve been seeking my next chief financial officer opportunity for quite some time now… I’m sure that it’s taking longer than normal for everyone these days. 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, with the hope that there could be several possible financial positions for which my background might make me a viable candidate. Because there is only one CFO position in any company, I have only that one very specific position to target at any one company. (Yes, there are some who think that I should give up and take any financial position that might be available, but that’s not for me).
In the quote above this former CFO is focused exclusively on “specific senior management positions”. Indeed he indicates that for the past two years that he has been unemployed, his job search has focused on the CFO positions in organizations. Further, he indicates that he sees no point in broadening his search to include other types of financial jobs (“I don’t believe that there is any point in just sending out my resume to a number of companies, with the hope that there could be several possible financial positions for which my background might make me a viable candidate.”). Thus 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.

**How future employers view underemployment.** A big part of the findings 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 (albeit a temporary one and in many cases not something that is directly related to the future job they are looking for). Since identity is socially constructed and socially influenced (as pointed out in the literature review), these findings speak to how work-related image (i.e., how others view the person in terms of work) might influence work-related identity decisions (e.g., a decision of whether or not to undertake temporary jobs and thus temporary work-related identities while waiting for full time employment). 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 (rather than “wasting” time in temporary jobs), was a better investment of an unemployed individual’s’ time. For example, a commenter on 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 thats BS for the next best thing.
Employers need to watch out for people like you who are desperate and take any job offered with no company commitment until the next job comes around.

Here the person is arguing against underemployment in terms of qualifications needed for a job (“I understand lowering your salary expectations but not the actual job quality”) and suggests that he/she thinks that future employers should be wary of people who undertake such types of underemployment (“Employers need to watch out for people like you who are desperate and take any job offered with no company commitment until the next job comes around”).

More often, though, individuals were of the opinion that having a job (even a temporary one) made you more attractive on the job market and showed you to be enterprising and a survivor. For example, a commenter on 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. And it seems like it doesn’t matter that you may be more competent than the employed person sometimes.” Another commenter on that same site writes: “Add that to the fact that it is the worst job market in our lifetime and that we all have bills to pay then I think it’s perfectly reasonable to take a position that you may be over-qualified for and under-paid but at least you are working. Like it or not this is a strong indicator for would-be future employers and as the job market picks-up…” Both these quotes indicate that individuals were of the opinion that when job hunting, already working in a job – any job – is viewed by a future employer (image) as better than having no job. Thus these people advocate taking on temporary jobs (and consequently adopting temporary identities). In a similar vein, 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. This indicated that
individuals perceived that their underemployed jobs were being judged to be reinforcing or enhancing their work-related identity. 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. I have found that many weeks pass, and often months, from the first interview to the job offer so I am confident that I can wrap up any consulting work that I have started should I get offered a position.

In the above quote, we see how this individual views having an underemployed (consulting) assignment as a good platform on which to be looking for permanent jobs since it allows him the flexibility of leaving / wrapping up the assignment as soon as a full time position begins. He 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.

*Time spent for underemployment*. This was a finding which captured cases when an underemployed individual attempts to determine how much time they should be dedicating to underemployed job assignment versus spending time search for full time employment. As pointed out earlier, underemployment related identity is unique in that it is the simultaneous holding of two (seemingly contrary) identities – that of being employed as well as of being in active job search mode. This finding of how much time an individual chooses to allocate to underemployment (which is time away from job search) is indicative of identity choices an underemployed individual is -making – i.e. should they continue to hold on to the temporary identity that comes with the underemployed job they have or should they be trying to pursue full
time employment via spending time exploring possible selves in the job search mode. For example, blogger 8x writes:

The challenge remains: how do I allocate my hours? There are days when I feel as though I’m on a gambling junket in Las Vegas, playing a game of chance called Job Search Roulette. If my hours were chips, I would place most of them on the networking squares. I would place several others on the squares representing various Internet job sites and those of specific companies in which I am interested. I would place a few on the squares for writing cover letters and tailoring resumes to specific opportunities. Thinking positively, I would place one or two on the squares for interviewing. And when you play Job Search Roulette, you have to put at least one chip on the Job Offer square…But now there is a new square—consulting—on the roulette table. Each chip I put on that square takes away chips from the other squares, such as networking (which is essential to the job search). So how many chips do I put on the consulting square each day? Each consulting chip has the benefit of a guaranteed payoff, which is my hourly consulting rate. And each hour consulting could lead me closer to a permanent position. However that permanent position is neither well-defined nor guaranteed.

In the above quote blogger 8x shares that although underemployment in the form of consulting provides some definite benefits (“has the benefit of a guaranteed payoff, which is my hourly consulting rate”) and other potential benefits such as temporary employment might help gain permanent employment (“each hour consulting could lead me closer to a permanent position”); it still raises concerns for him in that time spent for underemployment is potentially time wasted for finding a suitable full time job (“Each chip I put on that square takes away chips from the other squares, such as networking which is essential to the job search”). The basic underlying idea that is of interest here was that individuals, while appreciating underemployment opportunities (to survive and potentially thrive), were always keenly aware that their real goal was full time employment (the last stage) and thus underemployment presented an interesting challenge in that it was both a boon and a bane to achieving that final goal.

**Permanent underemployment as attractive.** A final finding in this stage is the idea that any job (even if an individual is overqualified for it) and a (potentially) 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 (and thus simultaneously maintains an ongoing search for full time work). Instead they see underemployment as employment that is permanent and instead of looking for permanent (full time) employment they are now looking for permanent underemployment (a steady stream of temporary jobs). So their job search now becomes one where they are looking for their next temporary assignment. This was the case if individuals voluntarily decided to become self-employed (freelance consultants). This finding indicates that an individual’s definition of what constitutes their work-related identity in a job has undergone a transformation – from seeking to belong to an organization in a full time position to seeking instead a series of short term jobs that keep them in a constant state of temporary identity. Underemployment became more attractive when individuals experienced a mental shift in thinking about full time employment i.e. due to their experiences with unemployment, individuals no longer thought of any job as a “permanent” one. They began to look at all jobs as temporary “gigs” (assignments), putting them on the constant lookout for the next (temporary) job. What makes this code different from how it appears in the next stage is that here, the jobs individuals are employed in are inherently temporary or part time. In the next stage we will see that while the job they are employed in could be designated a permanent full time position, mental shifts in thinking about full time work could still lead individuals to think of their job as temporary.

As an example of how mental shifts in thinking about full time work lead individuals to accept a state of permanent underemployment and be happy with it, let us look at the following quote from a commenter on blogger 11x’s site: “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 mos., 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 (“There is no such thing as a “permanent job” these days”) enables them to view underemployment and the temporary identity it bring as an attractive option (“I have been a consultant for a long time & I prefer to remain one”). 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 that underlies the career model for recruiters, hiring consultants and for many here. A lot of real-world jobs have a beginning, middle, and end that are not so far apart — if done right. Consulting-as-occupation addresses these as middle-of-the-market revenue opportunities, rather than as “jobs with no future” . There’s real satisfaction (and usually satisfactory compensation, if one negotiates sensibly at the front end) in being able to leap into someone’s sea of problems, work yer 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. More so because the skills, once painfully learned, are applicable to many kinds of needs and requirements that are to be found everywhere, all the time; less so because future “unemployment” is not just a possibility but a dead certainty, if you’re doing it right. This perspective leads to very conservative financial practices and a tendency to accumulate assets in paid-for, low-maintenance form, along with enough liquidity to finance the in-between cycles and the occasional slow-pay (or no-pay) client.

In the above quote, we see that this person is an advocate for viewing a career in consulting (permanent underemployment) as an attractive option to full time work. He argues that this form of underemployment (where “future “unemployment” is not just a possibility but a dead certainty”) can be more secure than full time work. This is because it involves possessing and applying skills to all sort of work requirements thus exponentially expanding the universe of possibilities for where one can find work (“the skills, once painfully learned, are applicable to many kinds of needs and requirements that are to be found everywhere, all the time”). Additionally this person is also suggesting that consulting (voluntary part time work) when
compared to full time jobs, can be more interesting ("work activities – often the most interesting ones – do not match-up well with the ("get a job, keep it forever") philosophy"), more satisfying ("There’s real satisfaction … in being able to leap into someone’s sea of problems, work yer tail off for weeks or months or even occasionally years") and more flexible ("say “Goodbye” with a smile and a handshake") while also being financially rewarding ("usually satisfactory compensation, if one negotiates sensibly at the front end").

To recap – the primary identity issue in the underemployed stage was regarding how individuals dealt with temporary work identities adopted to perform temporary jobs. As of interest at this stage was why individuals chose to undertake underemployment – to survive or to survive and thrive. Either way, the fact that an individual stayed in an underemployed job indicated an attempt to adopt a temporary work identity. However, sometimes underemployment (either a possible opportunity or an actual experience), was so undesirable that it was rejected. Such individuals experienced either (1) prospective work-related identity failure (i.e. they did not even entertain the possibility of a work identity required by a certain work opportunity) or (2) experimented temporary work-related identity failure (i.e. they tried and failed when attempting to adopt a temporary work identity and thus quit the underemployed job).

Further, I also captured what people thought about how future employers view underemployment (i.e. is a person seen as more or less desirable by a future employer if they have a temporary job) indicating the possible influence of image on identity. Another interesting finding from this stage was regarding time spent for underemployment, which was regarding how much time an individual should dedicate to underemployed jobs versus spending time searching for full time employment. Finally, a finding in this stage that is related to the next stage (of reemployment) was the finding of individuals viewing permanent underemployment as
attractive. This code captured expressed opinions that a steady job (even if an individual is overqualified for it) is better than being unemployed. It represents a shift of an individual from viewing an underemployed job as temporary (and thus simultaneously maintaining an ongoing search for full time work) to viewing a steady stream of underemployed jobs as superior to striving to find “permanent” reemployment.

**Reemployment**

The last stage in my study was the stage that marked role re-entry – reemployment. Individuals were considered to be in the reemployment stage when they had found full-time, “permanent” employment they considered to be worthy of their educational and work qualifications at salary levels they were satisfied with. Again, I will briefly introduce the main findings (in italics) and after these introductory paragraphs, I will detail each finding with supporting quotes.

It is important to note that there was some overlap between the reemployed stage and the underemployed stage, specifically in two ways: (1) underemployed jobs that began as temporary/part time sometimes became full time permanent positions (I have already elaborated upon this in the underemployed section) and (2) sometimes even when the new position was full time, suitable monetarily as well as in terms of the individual’s qualifications, the person was so scarred by the experience of unemployment that they began to view every job as temporary. The latter issue is what I call scarred work identity which I define as a (temporary or permanent) change in an individual’s work-related self-concept, precipitated by the emotional baggage an individual is “carrying around” from one or more of the previous four stages such that an individual could no longer consider any position to be lasting and permanent leading to lose trust in organizations and thus not being very invested in any job. Outcomes related to scarred identity
include *learning one’s lessons* (e.g., to *emotionally withdraw* from work or to never trust again). Most reemployment, however, triggered positive emotions and a *reinforced work identity*.

*Keeping promises made during unemployment* was another finding for this stage that captured instances of when individuals said they would do / keep doing certain things after they got a full time position (like continue to help others etc.). I found that when the work identity that reemployment brought on (either scarred or reinforced) became *normalized* (i.e., it became normal or routine), it constrained individuals from keeping their promises. An individual who has transitioned to the reemployment stage could also be dealing with a *remnant identity issue*. Remnant identity issue from an earlier stage is an unresolved or lingering identity issue from an earlier stage which generates outcomes similar to the original identity issue. For example, if the individual is experiencing a remnant identity issue of identity hit from the job loss phase, they may find themselves suffering negative emotions such as hurt and shock (remnant of the job loss phase) when triggered by an incident that reminds them of that stage. Here the individual is susceptible to what I call *post unemployment stress* (a reaction to an incident that triggers traumatic memories and emotions related to job loss subsequent stages). I found that one of the enablers for an individual to experience post unemployment stress was via *catastrophizing*, which occurs when individuals used metaphors such as death and destruction to describe the job loss and unemployment related negative emotions they were experiencing.

Finally, another code of interest during this stage was the *reactions of other people* (blog audience/commenters) are referred to reactions of others when reemployed individuals shared their success stories and expressed their emotions regarding their reemployment. In the sections below I examine each of the codes I have described above about this stage, with corresponding example quotes from my data.
Scarred work identity. Scarred work identity is an identity issue found in the reemployment stage but really is an outcome of the identity setback issues and emotional trauma the individual experienced through the previous four stages. Scarred work identity refers to 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. This manifests itself as an individual no longer considering any position to be lasting or permanent and thus resists getting too comfortable in or becoming too committed to any new job.

With regard to outcomes of scarred identity, I observed that individuals experiencing scarred identity expressed that since they viewed all positions as “temporary gigs”; they wanted to never get comfortable or invested in any job. Instead they expressed that they made promises to themselves to keep their resume always updated, keep their network alive and constantly be on the lookout for the next gig. For example, in a blog post titled “Being Prepared for Another Layoff”, 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. (Note that I did not say ‘another permanent job’ or ‘my next permanent position.’) In today’s world, there is no such thing as a permanent job. People that are employed today are really just between job searches. The days of working for one company until you retire are long gone.

Having been in transition three times already in my 30 year career, I fully anticipate it will happen again at some point in the future before I call it quits and retire. That said, when I was gainfully employed, I never wanted to think about the possibility of a job loss, so preparing for it was not foremost in my mind. Even when I knew it was coming, my focus was on doing my job, meeting deadlines, or finishing projects as best as I could. But nowadays, while it may be difficult, hindsight tells me that this kind of preparation is important and there are lessons that I hopefully will heed next time.

In the quote above the blogger was still in the job search mode when writing this post. However she was forecasting to the stage of reemployment and states that even when
reemployed she will not consider her reemployed, full time job as the end of her job search ("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"). She vows to view all jobs as temporary and mentally prepare herself for the next job loss. Indeed, she does this despite the fact that she admits that she would probably feel like getting comfortable in a new full time job ("when I was gainfully employed, I never wanted to think about the possibility of a job loss, so preparing for it was not foremost in my mind….my focus was on doing my job, meeting deadlines, or finishing projects as best as I could"), but having experienced job loss and unemployment, even if it is not easy to do so, she will keep reminding herself that no job is permanent, indicating scarred work identity ("But nowadays, while it may be difficult, hindsight tells me that this kind of preparation is important and there are lessons that I hopefully will heed next time"). Further, this blogger also makes promises to herself of what she will do to ensure that future transitions are smoother and that she is better prepared for the next job loss. She states:

For one, I’ll continue to take the time to go to lunch with friends from the companies I used to work with. I intend on attending networking groups occasionally after obtaining a job so I can stay in practice performing my 90-second speech. Also, I plan on keeping up with what the strong companies are in the Chicago area, and which ones might be good to target when I find myself in transition again.

I now realize how important it is to keep my resume current at all times and plan to use my future performance reviews to determine accomplishments worthy of adding to my work history. I’ll also review the older position descriptions and edit what no longer applies to who I am. Periodically, I’ll try to take stock of my strengths and opportunities for improvement, preparing myself to tout the former with succinct examples and not only work on the latter, but be able to describe them in a positive manner.

As we can see, this individual is making several promises to herself after having experienced a scarred work identity where she does not view any full time job as a permanent position. For example, she is vowing to keep contact with her network alive and active ("I’ll
continue to take the time to go to lunch with friends from the companies I used to work with. I intend on attending networking groups occasionally after obtaining a job”) and plans to use this network to continue practicing her elevator pitch (“I can stay in practice performing my 90-second speech”). Further, she plans to stay knowledgeable of the firms of interest to her in her location (“I plan on keeping up with what the strong companies are in the Chicago area, and which ones might be good to target when I find myself in transition again”). She also indicates that she has learnt her lesson from the job loss/unemployment experience and realizes that she needs to keep updating her resume even after finding a full time job (“I now realize how important it is to keep my resume current at all times”) and that she would use performance evaluations to help her list her accomplishments in the new job (“plan to use my future performance reviews to determine accomplishments worthy of adding to my work history”) and that she would be better prepared to talk about her strengths and weaknesses in the next transition (“I’ll try to take stock of my strengths and opportunities for improvement, preparing myself to tout the former with succinct examples and not only work on the latter, but be able to describe them in a positive manner”). Finally, and of particular interest to my identity study, she also reflects specifically on her dynamic, morphing work identity during transition and promises herself that she will keep updating her resume to reflect her self-concept (“I’ll also review the older position descriptions and edit what no longer applies to who I am”). Thus, in sum, we can see that making promises on how to handle oneself even when one finds reemployment is an outcome of experiencing scarred work identity as a result of job loss and subsequent stages.

Learning lessons. Related to the code of making promises, I found some evidence to suggest that individuals learned their lessons (so to speak) from the traumatic job loss and unemployment experience. This was indicated by when a person said that they “now realize
something” or that they have become “wiser” because of the trauma they went through and subsequently decreased the importance of organizations in their own lives. Examples of such lessons learned were to *emotionally withdraw* from work and not trust future employers. Emotionally withdrawing enabled individuals to view all jobs as temporary and thus not get too comfortable and invested. Further, scarred work identity was found to be associated with the negative emotion of *bitterness*.

For example, blogger 7x states “I’ve been laid off before and it’s actually more painful when it happens again, not less. But, because I have been through this before, I know in a few years, I won’t feel this pain over this job anymore. And, hopefully, I won’t feel this pain over any job ever again.” This quote suggests that because of their job loss and unemployment experiences, this individual hopes to withdraw emotionally from work (jobs) to the point that they never feel negative emotions during transitions again enabling them to not care too much about work period.

**Reinforced work identity.** As mentioned earlier, though, most reemployment triggered positive emotions (such as *happiness*) and a reinforced work identity wherein the individual felt happy and relieved about their new full time job and the opportunity to be part of the workforce again, indicating a corresponding reinstating of their work-related self-concept. This is true even when reemployment was not an easy transition to make after a long period of not working. For example, blogger 2x (a media journalist), after months of searching for a position, states about reemployment: “Having a full-time job is a lot harder than I remember it. The days can be long. The work is often taxing, particularly as I dust off the little-used parts of my brain. But I enjoy being engaged. And my bank account enjoys receiving paychecks. And wifey enjoys having a gainfully employed husband. I work on websites and related projects for a huge media
company…They control TV and radio stations, not to mention web properties of all shapes and sizes.” This individual found a full time position in his field (“huge media company”) and this new job while not easy to transition to enables him to reuse his skills and knowledge (“the work is often taxing, particularly as I dust off the little-used parts of my brain. But I enjoy being engaged”). Further, he shares other positive elements of reemployment that he is experiencing (such as being “gainfully employed” and earning a steady “paycheck”), that allow him to reestablish a work-related sense of self. 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! …I’ve learned something in all the turmoil and stress and anxiety that have filled these recent years. What I’ve learned is that I miss working hard and making a difference. I miss working toward a goal worth achieving. I miss proving myself worthy of new opportunities while helping others find those opportunities as well.

I have often prayed for my next job, but even more I prayed and asked why that next opportunity was so slow to arrive. “God,” I frequently asked, “what am I supposed to learn in all this waiting; in this lack of apparent progress?” Only recently did I figure it out. In not having a job, and often feeling so far removed from ever finding one, I realized how much I missed working. Such a simple idea, but something that hadn’t always been so apparent to me in this job search. I realized not only how much I have to contribute to a company, but also how much that company can contribute to me.

In the quote above, this individual is expressing their positive emotions of joy and excitement in finding suitable reemployment (“I’m happy to announce that I was just offered a job with a great company, in an interesting position with a good salary”). Further there is evidence to suggest that this individual has experienced a reinforcement of his work-related sense of self. For example, he says that being unemployed made him realize that he really enjoyed working and keenly felt its’ absence in his life (“What I’ve learned is that I miss working hard and making a difference. I miss working toward a goal worth achieving. I miss proving myself worthy of new opportunities”); “In not having a job, and often feeling so far
removed from ever finding one, I realized how much I missed working.”), suggesting that being able to have achievable work-related goals was a big part of his sense of work-related self which was taken away from him during the period of unemployment and was reinstated and reinforced after finding a full time job. Further, being part of the structure of an organization while contributing to it enables him to feel enhanced and whole such that he has a stronger sense of work-related self, i.e., a reinforced sense of work identity, owing to the fact that his new job allows him to both contribute to the organization and be contributed to by the organization (“I realized not only how much I have to contribute to a company, but also how much that company can contribute to me”).

**Reemployment identity normalization.** This was a code I used to capture the idea that usually after a while the scarred or reinforced work identity that reemployment brought on became “normalized”, i.e., it became normal or routine. This was marked by when reemployed individuals expressed that they were either (1) over the view/the fear that no employment was permanent and that they had (despite their best intentions) become comfortable at their new job or (2) over the positive emotions (excitement and happiness) brought about by a reinforced work identity that was triggered by the new job such that they now find themselves viewing the work as routine, normal and even boring and something to get away from. For example, commenter on blogger 15x’s site says: “Heading back to work after a 9 month hiatus had it savory moments, the new badge, a paycheck and the positive news to pass along to friends. And then…after about 6 months it’s hard to remember how horrible being in search mode really was at the time. Not sure if this is good or bad. 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 as well as identity normalization. The person indicates that both the excitement and positive
emotions associated with reemployment (“savory moments, the new badge, a paycheck and the positive news to pass along…”), as well as the anxiety and other negative emotions associated with the job search (“how horrible being in search mode really was”) that led to this person making all sorts of promises to themselves to not get too comfortable in a new job indicating scarred identity (“The promises made during that period become harder and harder to keep”), becomes normalized since the work (and how the person feels about it) becomes part of a routine after a while (“Pretty soon it’s all routine again”).

This quote also provides a segue into another code of interest during this phase – i.e. of keeping promises one made during previous stages. This code is a counterpart of the earlier code making promises (such a vowing to keep one’s resume updates, network active etc.). Specifically, this was a code to capture instances of whether or not individuals did (or felt like they should/could) follow up on what said they would do after they got a full time position (like continue to write their blog to help others, continue to keep their resume updated, continue to keep in touch with their network, take more time to balance work and family or even to just not forget how hard the job search was when they finally got a job). I found that often reemployment work identity normalization in a reemployed person constrained their efforts and intentions to keep the promises they had made during earlier stages. For example, blogger 13x after finding a full time job states: “Now it is about living up to all the things I have told myself I would do after I found my job. I am not talking only about just replacing my old shoes. I am talking about continuing to stay actively engaged with my network. I am also talking about living up to my own words about helping others before I can be helped.” This individual is reflecting on the promises he made to himself and on his desire to keep those promises even now that he has found full time employment.
Reemployment identity normalization also enabled individuals to experience fewer negative and more positive emotions. For example, when individuals first began a new job, they were often anxious and fearful since the expectations from them in the new role were still unknown. The longer they were in their new job, the more they knew what to expect and where they fit in (normalization) and this often led to a decrease in anxiety and an increase well-being and positive emotions such as happiness and excitement. For example, blogger 16x states about the emotional journey reemployment has taken him on:

Now that I have started my new position, I have experienced another round of emotions. During my first week, I was overwhelmed and felt like a deer in the headlights. Meeting new people, not fully understanding the organization, and wondering if I was going to fit in was quite stressful. I had come from spending 13 years with the same company, and now I was starting all over with different people and a much different environment. As I entered my second week, I gained more comfort with my new role and the people that I am working with. Now as I am entering my fourth week, I am thrilled to be here. I look forward to coming in to 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 the quote above 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 (“During my first week, I was overwhelmed and felt like a deer in the headlights”… “entered my second week, I gained more comfort with my new role”… “as I am entering my fourth week, I am thrilled to be here”), thus leading a normalization of his work-related sense of self which in turn led to him experiencing more positive emotions (“thrilled”, “excited”) and less negative emotions (“stress”).

**Remnant identity issue.** I 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 example, a person could still have a remnant identity issue of exploring
possible selves even though they now have a permanent position. This could translate to a person continually checking the job boards and exploring new job possibilities. For example, blogger 12x states: “I still check the job boards every day. I know I have a job now, but it’s become a habit. I like to think about what else is out there for me.” On the other hand 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. This is what I labeled *post unemployment stress*. Further, I found that one of the ways that enabled an individual to experience post unemployment stress was via *catastrophizing*. Catastrophizing in the psychology literature has been used to describe the state of negative emotional cognition when patients are expecting the worst to happen (Schroevers, Kraaij, & Garnefski, 2008). It occurs when individuals liken an issue or a state they are experiencing to a catastrophe like a natural disaster or a death. I used the term “catastrophizing” 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. As some of you know, I’m now a working stiff again…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. Everyone was not only back to work, but back to easy office protocol, the witty banter that provides the connective tissue between colleagues. It was as if this person hadn’t existed. I know that’s not the case, but that’s the surreal part. Here’s a person who was integral to the company at a senior level, charting the strategic course of the business. Someone with whom many here spent more time than with their families. And who had come here every day for 15 years.

I was reminded of when my mother died. That week, I remember walking along a city street, watching people hurrying this way and that, and I wanted to scream, “Stop! Don’t you know someone has just died?!” 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. Worked alongside people day in and day out. Contributed a huge body of work. But
when they’re gone – or asked to leave – 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. And I wanted to yell “Stop! Don’t you know someone has just died?” In a manner of speaking, that’s what it’s like. And although I hardly knew this person…I wanted to grieve her passing.

In the quote above the blogger shares that although she is now reemployed (“I’m now a working stiff again”), she was still shocked and saddened (“Eerie. Surreal.”; “I wanted to grieve”) when she witnessed someone else losing their job (“a senior employee of 15 years, with a VP to her title, left the building”), while no one reacted (“Everyone was not only back to work, but back to easy office protocol, the witty banter that provides the connective tissue between colleagues. It was as if this person hadn’t existed”). 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 (“I just got to experience job loss from the opposite side of the company door. And it is so terribly, awfully surreal.”). Further, she catastrophizes when she likens job loss to death (“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.”; “I wanted to yell “Stop! Don’t you know someone has just died?” In a manner of speaking, that’s what it’s like”). She shares that she thinks that when someone is terminated from their job, their contributions and time spent in the organization becomes worthless and that no one cares about them (“They may have had an enormous impact on the organization. Worked alongside people day in and day out. Contributed a huge body of work. But when they’re gone – or asked to leave – it seems like a huge eraser came along and wiped out the place they held. And everyone carries on almost like nothing ever happened”) and that this realization makes her feel sad (“I wanted to grieve”).

Reactions of other people. One of the final codes of interest during this stage was the reactions of other people (blog audience/commenters) when reemployed individuals shared their
success stories and expressed emotions towards eventual reemployment. As mentioned earlier, more often than not, a blog audience is made up of people who like and support the blogger and thus most reactions of the blog commenters were positive when the bloggers shared that they had found a job. For example, a commenter on blogger 4x’s site states in reaction to the news that blogger 4x got a full time job: “Congrats!! I am glad to hear that there is hope for us unemployed. I am glad your unemployment mission has been accomplished! It is amazing how we have all survived this difficult time. I hope some of you luck could come our way. 3 years without a job and we are still looking. I am so excited for you and your new job! Good Luck!” Clearly this quote is an example of when a blog audience member, who is still unemployed, expresses a positive reaction to the news that the blogger they are following has finally found employment.

Every once in a while, though, some people had a negative, critical reaction to the news that the blogger they were following had found full time employment. This was especially the case when the blogger was seen as not having suffered enough (i.e., found a job fairly quickly). For example, blogger 16x talks about his journey to try and find employment after being laid off over an unemployment period of three months. While his blog post did inspire some congratulatory messages and positive comments that he had inspired them with hope, for example, a commenter said: “Sometimes hearing about someone getting a job is the only thing I have to hold on to that this is just for a time and that something will come along.” However, what is of particular interest here is that some of his blog audience did not find his experience to be enough of an ordeal to merit their congratulations that he was now reemployed. For example, another commenter says: “Please. Maybe he should talk to some of the people that have been out for a year plus, see what frustration really is. This guy got lucky where other’s haven’t, period.
Enough already.” And another commenter added “…he is talking about an emotional roller coaster for being out of work for three months? I have been out of work for six months and I cannot find any good opportunities for myself. There is nothing available, and it sucks. I am going through multiple emotional roller coasters. Based on your three month layoff, you must have had severance to carry you through. So stop whining.” From the comments above we can see how reactions to a person’s reemployment were not always positive and since identity is socially created and influenced by the “other”, it would be safe to argue that in processing such negative reactions to his reemployment could possibly have put a dent in this bloggers’ positive emotions regarding his reinforced work identity. In other words, given the nature of the medium (blogs) the “image” held by others possibly fed back into the emotions and identity of the focal individual.

To recap some of the major findings discussed in this section – the major identity issues during this stage were around either scarred identity (work-related identity changes such that individuals no longer consider any position to be lasting and permanent), or reinforced work identity (reinstating of an individual’s work-related self-concept). An outcome of scarred work identity is that the person was not being very invested in any job. Other outcomes related to scarred identity is emotionally withdrawing from work to not get too invested in their job. Keeping promises made during unemployment was another finding for this stage that captured instances of when individuals said they would do / keep doing certain things after they got a full time position (like continue to help others, etc.). I found that when the work identity that reemployment brought on (either scarred or reinforced) became normalized (i.e., it became normal or routine), it constrained individuals from keeping their promises. An individual who has transitioned to the reemployment stage could also be dealing with a remnant identity issue.
from an earlier stage (e.g., identity shock) and thus find themselves suffering negative emotions (remnant of the earlier stage). Here the individual is susceptible to what I call post unemployment stress (a reaction to an incident that triggers traumatic memories and emotions related to job loss and subsequent stages). I found that one of the enablers for an individual to experience post unemployment stress was via catastrophizing, which occurs when individuals used metaphors such as death and destruction to describe the job loss and unemployment related negative emotions they were experiencing. Finally, another code of interest during this stage was the reactions of other people (blog audience/commenters) which captured the reactions of others when reemployed individuals shared their success stories regarding reemployment indicating how image might matter.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Using grounded theory, I qualitatively studied the identity transitions and associated emotions of certain individuals who experienced involuntary job loss due to the recent economic downturn. I analyzed several blog posts and comments from 15 blogs to answer my two research questions:

1. **What are the key components to the identity transition process as individuals experience (1) job loss, (2) unemployment, (3) job search, (4) possible underemployment, and (5) eventual reemployment?**

2. **(A) What are the (discrete) emotions most often expressed by individuals undergoing job loss and subsequent phases?**

   **(B) How are those emotions related to the identity transitions of the unemployed?**

With respect to the first question I found that individuals transition between various work-related identity issues during the different stages from role exit (job loss) to role reentry (reemployment). Examples of these different identities issues 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. Further, I found that each identity issue (during the different stages) had a set of emotions (positive and negative) associated with it. Also, there were one or more cognitive ideological techniques that were also associated with each of these identity transitions. These emotions and ideological techniques resulted in a series of outcomes for each stage.

Insert Figure 2 about here
With regard to my second research question, I found that (sets of positive and negative) discrete emotions played a role in the process of identity transformation by acting as antecedents of and motivators to outcomes stemming from work-related identity transformations. Figure 3 shows the basic grounded theory model resulting from my data analysis. In this section I will first describe the basic format of the grounded theory model my analysis unveiled. Then using this grounded theory model, I will show one demonstrative quote from each stage (with corresponding figures) to illustrate examples of how an identity issues of a stage is associated with emotions, ideological techniques and outcomes from that stage.

Figure 3 is the basic format of the grounded theory model that emerged from my data. This general model was found to hold true across all five different stages, with the specific identity issues, sets of emotions, ideological techniques and outcomes changing between stages. (It is important to note that the arrows in this and subsequent models do not indicate any sort of causality. The arrows were used only for purposes of illustration.) This basic format follows the pattern of identity issue associated with each job stage, which in turn is associated with a set of two opposite emotions (a positive and a negative emotion) that was most common in this stage. Further, one or more ideological techniques used by individuals during this stage is shown to be associated with these emotions during the period when the individual is grappling with the identity issue. This in turn leads to a series of outcomes. The identity issue per stage, sets of emotions and ideological techniques are represented together in a cloud to suggest that these things are interconnected and “swirling around” affecting each other. The order of which came
first would not be possible to generalize based on the nature of my data. Rather than get into a chicken and egg issue about trying to determine which came first- the identity, the emotion or the cognitive ideological process associated with it, I have chosen to diagram these three together to be true to my data which suggests that these three issues swirl together and connect (like ions in a cloud) to produce outcomes. I will now provide examples from the five stages of how this general model might play out in each stage.

Job loss. Figure 3a illustrates an example of how my general grounded theory applied for a particular blogger in this stage. As described in the findings section, during this stage, the episode of being terminated from one’s job translated to individuals experiencing work-related identity hit. Identity hit in turn was often associated with the emotion of shock and sometimes with the emotion of relief. Note – it was not uncommon to see shock being followed by relief. Such relief resulted in mental withdrawal as an outcome. The figure demonstrates how in addition to mental withdrawal, other outcomes experienced by individuals are identity liminality (a state of being in between two identities) as well as the state of relaxation.

Further ideological techniques such as recalibrating (in addition to emotion) played a role in creating these outcomes. The following example demonstrates the positive emotion of relief in conjunction with recalibration and how these lead to outcomes associated with the identity issues in the job loss stage. In it, we begin to see how these findings operate together within the grounded theory model. While recalling the experience of involuntary job loss one individual (blogger 1x) writes:

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Insert Figure 3a about here

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….going through the actual layoff process is a bit surreal…For me, there’s a moment…when all those work responsibilities are lifted off my shoulders. I physically feel lighter. I realize that everything work-related that bothered me 5 minutes ago no longer matters. It’s all someone else’s problem. The people in front of me… to whom I had to answer just a minute ago, don’t matter either. I don’t have to defer to their opinions or try to impress them, because they no longer sign my check. They’re just average people. …There’s a certain calm, when you’ve lost one reality but not fully grasped another. Things slow down..

The above quote illustrates how involuntary job loss triggers an individual to experience a work-related identity hit associated with shock (“surreal”; “no forewarning and no time to prepare”; “you’re never sure exactly when”) but also with relief (“There’s a certain calm”; “I physically feel lighter.”). This leads to the outcome of mental withdrawal (“work responsibilities are lifted off my shoulders”; “no longer matters”; “someone else’s problem”). This in turn when associated with the ideological technique of a downward recalibration of the importance of work-related relationships (“people in front of me…don’t matter”; “they’re just average people”) leads to a person experiencing a transition in their identity to move from an affected (hit) space to an in-between (liminal) space (“your reality shifts”; “You’ve lost one reality but not fully grasped another”). Further, this individual is expressing the state of relaxation (“Things slow down”). In short, we see how some of the findings from this stage fit together i.e. job loss triggers the identity issue (work-related identity hit) which in turn is often associated with either shock or relief (or both as in the example above). When the emotion of relief is present this leads to outcomes such as work-related identity liminality and a state of relaxation.

On the other hand job loss can (and more often than not was) associated with the negative emotion of shock. When this was the case then individuals experienced outcomes such as trying to question what happened and therefore trying to assign blame (either to themselves or to another) which in turn led to other negative discrete emotions like anger and hurt. I have detailed
examples of this in the findings section in job loss (e.g.: quote from female commenter on blogger 12X’s site, page: 59)

Unemployed. During the unemployed stage the person thoughts shift from musings related specifically to the firing episode towards thinking about what’s next for their careers. As depicted in Figure 3b. I found that the prominent identity issue triggered by this stage revolved around different types of work-related identity discrepancies like the discrepancy between current and ideal identity. Control – the loss and regaining of it – was a central theme during this stage. Indeed as shown in Figure 3b, loss of control was often seen as an outcome of an individual dealing with the work-related identity discrepancy issue.

Further, such loss of control usually led to a person reconsidering and altering their life plans, which was accompanied with some negative emotions like shame or frustration. Finally, an individual feeling a loss of control (due to unemployment) and thus choosing to alter their life plans held true sometimes even in the face of contrary logic provided by others. In other words, the ideological technique of rebutting another’s logic led to an individual holding on to their decision (of altering their life plans). Let us take a look at an example for this pattern.

Commenter on blogger 3x’s site shares:

And speaking of nine months, I feel like this whole unemployment thing poses interesting challenges for women... especially for us thirty-somethings. If you're even thinking about starting a family, unemployment throws a real wrench in the plan. I, for one, feel like someone hit the "pause" button on my life. I've actually had friends tell me, "You should just have kids now. I mean, you're home." It almost sounds like a logical idea... except for the whole semi-important money issue. That and the odds of landing a job after getting pregnant. I mean, let's be honest. No news station is going to hire an anchor who's six
months pregnant. It's almost as if choosing to start a family is acknowledging that you will not be working for at least the next year...Now, if you choose to go the other route and bypass the family thing until a job rolls around, you then earn the fabulous title of stay-at-home non-mom

In the above example we see how the focal individual is attempting to negotiate the unemployment-induced discrepancy between her current work-related identity – that of being an “unemployed non-mom” and her ideal work-related identity – that of being an employed person who plans to eventually start a family while holding down a job. One of the reasons this individual states that she is ultimately unable to continue pursuing her life plans of starting a family is because of the financial effects that unemployment has, i.e., producing a lack of income that would be important for raising a family (what she sarcastically calls the “semi-important money issue”). This also hints at the idea that she is anxious about paying her bills and therefore anxiety associated with this identity discrepancy is what is driving outcomes in this stage. She states that unemployment is “throwing a wrench in her plan” of starting a family and she feels like “someone” has hit a “pause” button on her life. This individual is expressing a loss of control over her own life from a circumstance where she was proceeding down a path of her choice and under her control (she had a job and a plan to start a family) to suddenly this situation that she has no control over (her job being terminated and thus her being consequently unemployed) that is dictating how her life plans can (or cannot) proceed (i.e., she now feels like she no longer can be the sole controlling force as to whether she starts a family or not). In her view, the control has been taken from her by this undesirable situation (unemployment) leading to the decision of altering her life plans (not starting a family) being made for her because of the financial effects unemployment has (i.e., her inability to afford having a baby minus a job and an income). Further, she is able to experience these outcomes of loss of control and altering life plans, even in the face of contrary logic – i.e. rebut. As mentioned in the findings section, rebut
involves acknowledging and then countering someone else’s logic (much like a rebuttal in a debate). Here the individual is rebutting the logic being provided by her friends as to why she should actually go ahead with her life plans of becoming a mom since she has more time now that she is out of work (“I've actually had friends tell me, "You should just have kids now. I mean, you're home."”), which she acknowledges and then counters with her rebut (“It almost sounds like a logical idea... except for the whole semi-important money issue. That and the odds of landing a job after getting pregnant.”). Such rebuttal results in her holding on to her decision of altering her life plans. Lastly, the sarcasm being utilized by this individual (“semi-important money issue”, “fabulous title of stay at home non-mom”) indicated that she is expressing the negative feeling of frustration and the self-conscious emotion of shame with her situation.

Positive emotions such as excitement can also mark this stage (albeit I found more instances of negative emotions like anxiety than excitement). Excitement is often a result of ideological techniques of reframing being applied to the unemployment situation (seeing this as an exciting time for growth and to pursue one’s dreams rather than a negative stressful situation). When an individual is able to conceive of this stage as a positive one, this results in individuals having an approach orientation to the situation, resulting in them actively taking initiative to make their everyday lives better. This might play out for, for example, with an individual attempting to structure their day (i.e. have a routine even though they are unemployed) which in turn gives them a sense of regained control over their lives. Finally having identity of being unemployed can also get normal for an individual over time (unemployment identity normalization). We have already seen a good example of this in the quote from blogger 5X on page 74.
**Job search.** As detailed in the findings section, the job search stage is considered to have begun when the individual undertakes activities related to seeking a new job, including updating their resume, conducting online job searches, contacting people in their network to let them know they are on the market, sending out their resume to potential employers, etc. As show in Figure 3c, the primary work-related identity issue associated with job search was an individual exploring possible selves which involved them considering the possibility of working in (and thus taking on the identities required by) several different kinds of jobs in their field and/or jobs in entirely new fields. Jobs being considered could be temporary or full time. As a result of exploring possible identities by considering the universe of possible jobs (and related identities) the individual usually had some immediate reactions as to what they thought they were or were not capable of doing. In other words, exploring possible work-related identities initially led to these prospective work-related identities as being considered acceptable/doable or not. When an individual was open to the idea of a possible work-related identity they might have to undertake, I labeled this *prospective work-related identity success* and similarly, when the individual expressed that they were unable to imagine taking on certain roles (and associated identities), this was labeled as cases of *prospective work-related identity failure*. Being open to several prospective identities (*prospective work-related identity success*) in turn led to the opening up of several new *potential job opportunities* for the individual as can be seen in Figure 3c. The positive emotion of *hope* was associated with *prospective work-related identity success* and the subsequent outcome of *increasing the universe of possible job opportunities*.

____________________________________________________________________________

Insert Figure 3c about here
Further, the universe of potential job opportunities increased when an individual was able to push themselves out of their comfort zone. Often individuals undertook uncomfortable tasks like networking and self-promotion to expand their universe of job possibilities. Finally, when individuals undertook tasks they considered as helping them making progress towards their final goal of finding reemployment they often called these steps in the right direction. To make these ideas and the connections between them more concrete, let us consider an example.

Blogger 10x states:

Today I'm talking to someone about a possible long-term freelance project, which is encouraging — not the final solution, but a step in the right direction. Word-of-Mouth seems to be the way to go right now in this economy. Talk to people. Call in favors. Make deals. Eventually we'll all get out of this, but already I'm realizing it's gonna take new ways of thinking, fresh approaches and a whole lotta moxie.

Here the individual is exploring the possible new self of being a free-lance consultant (“possible long-term freelance project”) and this is associated with the positive emotion of hope (“encouraging”). Clearly the person has decided that they are open to this idea of being a consultant (prospective work-related identity success) since they are undertaking tasks to realize this goal (“talking to someone”). Their being open to the identity of being a consultant in turn opens up the potential job opportunity of consulting for them. Further the more this person is willing to push themselves out of their comfort zone the more they are able to increase the universe of job opportunities available to them. Here there is some evidence that this individual is willing to push himself out of his comfort zone – i.e. pushing out of comfort zone success (“Eventually we'll all get out of this, but already I'm realizing it's gonna take new ways of thinking, fresh approaches…”) enabling him to open up more potential job opportunities in consulting. Further, this individual is saying that they view networking and self-promoting to find consulting work (“I'm talking to someone about a possible long-term freelance project”; “Word-of-Mouth seems to be the way to go right now in this economy. Talk to people. Call in
favors. Make deals.”) as steps in the right direction towards their real career goal – reemployment (“not the final solution, but a step in the right direction.”). Often ideological techniques like reframing were applied to an uncomfortable experience like networking to infuse it with more

The negative emotion of despair also was associated with this stage such that experiencing despair impeded a person’s ability to push themselves outside their comfort zones and thus led to an inability to take on new identities. This in turn resulted in a decrease in the universe of job opportunities available to the person. For example we see an example of this in the comment left on blogger 11X’s site where the person says: “I was still out of a job. I was losing hope and getting desperate. I tried a couple call centers.. 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.” Here the person is talking about the possible self of working in a call center. The prospect of this identity is infused with despair for this person who ends up rejecting this possible self and experiences a work-related identity failure and subsequent decrease in the job opportunities available to them.

Underemployment. As already detailed in earlier sections, underemployment is a discrepancy between satisfactory employment and current employment (Kaufman, 1982). The primary identity issue in the underemployed stage revolved around how individuals dealt with the temporary work identities that they adopted to enable them to perform temporary jobs. Accordingly Figure 3d diagrams the identity issue of temporary work-related identities emerging from the stage of underemployment.

Insert Figure 3d about here
Other issues related to identity at this stage revolved around why individuals chose to undertake underemployment – i.e. did they undertake underemployment to survive or did they see it as a way to survive and thrive (for example, as a way to enter into a new career they had aspired to). Individuals who viewed underemployment as a way to both survive and thrive worked in underemployed jobs they desired and viewed those jobs as opportunities that both helped them earn an income to survive as well as thrive because it helped them build new skills and stay work active by utilizing their existing skills. For example, in the quote below, blogger 11x shares some of his current and past experiences with underemployment in a blog post titled “Can consulting help fill the job gaps?” He states:

Job searches can span months and years. But during this period of transition, I have been fortunate to have some consulting work to fall back on. Since September 2008 I have been helping a large IT organization develop and implement a cost-reduction process. I learned about this opportunity from a friend and former coworker. While the engagement so far has been less than full time at about 20 to 25 hours a week, it does provide some amount of income. I am able to work from home and am making a tangible contribution to the project. The last time I had an extended period of being ‘between jobs,’ I was also able to fill some of that time doing consulting work. I ended up working for four separate Chicago-area companies during my two-year transition. In each job I was able to learn something new and add to my skill set.

In the above example, this person states that they undertook a temporary job (“some consulting work”) and thus implicitly took on a temporary work-related identity. They express appreciation (gratitude) for their temporary consulting opportunity (“during this period of transition, I have been fortunate to have some consulting work to fall back on”) thus suggesting that the positive emotion of gratitude is often associated with the temporary work-related identity issue at this stage. Further, this person says that they have done this on more than one occasion (“The last time I had an extended period of being ‘between jobs,’ I was also able to fill some of that time doing consulting work.”) indicating that they have experimented with and accepted the
work-related identity associated with consulting. Further, this individual is able to earn an income (“it does provide some amount of income”) because of taking on this temporary identity and it also helps him stay active in his field (“I am able to work from home and am making a tangible contribution to the project”) and helps him build new skills (“I was able to learn something new and add to my skill set”). In other words both surviving and thriving were also outcomes associated with a person accepting and liking an experimented work-related identity. Finally we can see that the experimented work-related identity here refers to a temporary one since the person is not entirely satisfied with this work arrangement and ideally would like full time employment (“the engagement so far has been less than full time at about 20 to 25 hours a week”). Thus we see how temporary work-related identities when associated with positive emotions like gratitude lead to a series of outcomes including surviving and thriving.

The negative emotion of frustration also was associated with this stage such that experiencing despair impeded a person’s ability to push themselves outside their comfort zones and thus led to an inability to take on new identities. This in turn resulted in a decrease in the universe of job opportunities available to the person. We saw an example of this from the comment of a lady on blogger 9X’s site (page 87).

Reemployed. The last stage in my study was the stage that marked role re-entry – reemployment. Individuals were considered to be in the reemployment stage when they had found full-time, permanent employment they considered to be worthy of their educational and work qualifications at salary levels they were satisfied with. The primary identity issues during the reemployment stage had to do with individuals possessing either scarred or reinforced identity. I found that most reemployment triggered positive emotions like happiness and a reinforced work identity.
However, sometimes individuals were found to experience a *scarring* in their work-related identity, due to negative emotions such as *bitterness* from having experienced job loss and unemployment, such that an individual expressed that they no longer considered any position to be lasting and permanent. This in turn led initially to *losing trust in organizations* and subsequently *not being invested in any job* because of the *lessons they had learnt*.

A person was seen to have *learnt lessons* from their traumatic experience when they indicated that they “now realize something” or that they have become “wiser” because of the trauma they went through. Let us take a look at an example to see how these various codes are connected. While reading the analysis of the quote below, the attention of the reader is also directed to Figure 3e which diagrammatically depicts the connections between these findings.

Commenter on blogger 11x’s site writes:

I have my own theories as to why this happened and they have nothing to do with my work performance (read age). The lesson I learned from this is that I will never trust people in the work place again. When I get lucky enough to find another job… I will be looking over my shoulder when it comes to managers/supervisors for the rest of my working career! Being a good, loyal worker is worth nothing — employees have to look out for themselves!

In the quote above this person indicated that they are talking about identities when they get reemployed (“When I get lucky enough to find another job”). They say that even after finding a job they would not trust other organizational members (“never trust people in the work place again”). Indeed they feel like they can never trust organizational members again (“I will be looking over my shoulder when it comes to managers/supervisors for the rest of my working career”) indicating a *scarring in their identity* likely due to the job loss experience. Indeed, this
person hints at trauma inflicted by organizational members in previous jobs leading to job loss (“I have my own theories as to why this happened and they have nothing to do with my work performance... I will never trust people in the work place again.”). This lack of trust indicates a level of bitterness on the part of the individual. Thus this person indicates that in a future job their scarred identity would lead them to not trust anyone in the organization and this in turn leads to them decreasing the importance of work-related aspects in their lives (“Being a good, loyal worker is worth nothing — employees have to look out for themselves!”). As shown in Figure 3e, this scarred identity is associated with the negative emotion of bitterness and results in losing trust and consequently decreasing the importance of work-related aspects in one’s life.

On the positive side, reemployment could be (and often was) associated with feeling of happiness and a reinforced sense of self. We have seen examples of this in quotes from blogger 14X (page 115).

Thus, in summary, I established a general model depicting how each stage is associated with an identity issue, which in turn is associated with sets of opposite (positive and negative) emotions. These emotions (often in conjunction with ideological techniques) lead to a series of outcomes.

**Contributions to Theory and Practice**

This study contributed to organizational theory in several ways. First, it is the only empirical research of its kind so far that attempts to connect the dots between work-related identity transitions experienced from role exit to role reentry. As mentioned earlier, transitions involve taking on new roles, which in turn demand new skills and behaviors and thus produce fundamental changes in an individual's self-definitions (Becker & Carper, 1956; Hall, 1976; Schein, 1978; Hill, 1992). Role transitions are thus the sequential psychological departing from
one role (role exit) and entering into another (role entry) (Burr, 1972; Richter, 1984). While there is literature that provides cross sectional snapshots of identity transitions by examining role entry or exits (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 2003; Kunda, 1992), this study provides 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). It provides the reader with a roadmap of the various major identity issues at each stage as represented in Figure 2, in which we can see how each stage has associated identity issues and associated (sets of) emotions. It is important to note that the identity issues associated with the five stages noted in Figure 1 all come directly from the data (i.e., these findings of what identity issue is associated with which stage are grounded in the data).

Secondly, this study provides an empirically-grounded model that represents the connections between the various identity issues and their associated emotions and outcomes, providing some hypotheses for future quantitative testing. Figure 3 lays out for the reader the model emerging from the grounded theory analysis of data in this study. It represents how each stage in the transition process is fraught with different identity issues (e.g., work-related identity hit during the job loss stage or exploring possible selves during the job search stage). It also shows how each identity issue is associated with predominant emotions for that stage. These emotions and identity issues along with the ideological techniques they are associated with result in a series of outcomes for the individuals experiencing it. Further, by specifically exploring the construct of work-related identity, this study extends this relatively new construct in two ways. First, work-related identity can now be explicitly conceptualized to also include non-workplace settings. To date, work-related identity has been defined as the aspects of identity and self-
definition that are tied to participation in the activities of current work (i.e., a job) or membership in work-related groups, organizations, occupations, or professions (Dutton, Roberts & Bednar, 2010). However, contemporary careers are characterized by shifting boundaries in work arrangements such that identity is subject to social influences not just within, but also beyond the individual’s present occupation or organization (Arthur, 2008). Since identity is subject to influences beyond the individual’s present occupation or organization, research is needed that empirically examines work-related identity changes precipitated outside of a traditional work setting. Job loss and some of its subsequent phases provides for such a setting that is suited to study work-related identity changes that occur when a person is not within an organizational setting “at work”. Specifically, the first three stages of this study (job loss, unemployment and job search) provides the setting for an empirical study that allows us to examine identity transitions in non-work settings and thus further adds to our understanding of a person’s work-related identity.

Also, this study provides empirical 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 coined 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). Dutton, Roberts and Bednar (2010) cite the example of Maitlis (2009) who studied how people reconstruct their professional identities after encountering career related trauma in ways that represent growth. While this study provides evidence for this notion of positive identity as a result of progressing through the stages (what is captured in this study as reinforced identity), 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 negative/hurt/scarred identity that is representative of 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 literatures. While Markus and Nurius (1986) argued that possible selves are highly vulnerable to changes in the environment, they did not specify the processes by which possible selves are retained or rejected. Ibarra (1999) filled this gap with her concept of provisional selves. However, her findings were not appropriate for this study since they were based on professionals and people transitioning to senior roles (promotions). In the setting for this study, where I was examining the stories of people who were not necessarily professionals and also where they were transitioning to a stigmatized role (that of having now work), I found the concept of possible selves to provide a better explanation of how such people experiment with the various identities that they can take on. The findings of this study suggest that possible selves can be an identity mechanism via which individuals navigate work-related identity transitions (specifically during the job search stage). Specifically depending on how much individuals are able to push themselves out of their comfort zones, various possible selves can be experimented with and either accepted or rejected, leading to greater or fewer job opportunities.

Also, as noted earlier, a change in identity during role transitions is a negotiated adaptation by which people strive to improve their person-environment fit (Schein, 1978; Nicholson, 1984; Ashford and Taylor, 1990). Also, 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 and recalibrating. For example, downward recalibration of an ex-employer’s importance helps a recently terminated individual distance themselves from their former identity as an employee of that company (and a subordinate of that ex-employer). Thus the terminated individual is able to negotiate an ex-employer’s (real or imagined) expectations from them such that it is now all “someone else’s problem” thus allowing the terminated individual to transition from employee of that company to ex-employee creating an in-between (liminal) state where they are no longer answerable their ex employer.

In terms of contributions to the emotions literature, this study connects the literature streams of emotions and identity which, while strongly suggested (Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008) is still largely unexplored. Specifically, this study shows how sets of negative and positive emotions are associated with identity issues during the various stages which in turn lead to various outcomes. The unemployment literature notes that an unfortunate development (like job loss) can lead to a significant amount of emotional distress (Kinicki, 1985). Notably, such distress can conceivably affect even future productivity and commitment (Fineman, 1983; Feldman & Leana, 2000). This study provides empirical support for this notion and shows how emotions arising from identity trauma experienced due to job loss can affect even future identity (post reemployment). For example, as noted earlier, even after getting reemployed, individuals might grapple with scarred work-related identity such that they lose trust in organizations, which leads to them usually decreasing the importance of work-related aspects in their lives. This relationship between losing trust in organizations and decreasing the importance of work related aspects has been shown in this study to be moderated by the amount of pain or anger the individual experienced due to the trauma of job loss and unemployment. Thus certain emotions
arising from an earlier stage can affect work-related identity and associated outcomes in later stages.

I noted in my literature review that Grandey (2008) suggests that while the dimensional approach (i.e., treating positive and negative emotions as two internally homogenous groups) is a parsimonious way of studying affect, important differences may unfortunately be lost when aggregating across emotions. Thus in my study, I did not encompass emotions into the broad sweeping categories of positive and negative and chose instead to capture and identify particular discrete positive and negative emotions. One of the interesting findings this study suggests is that the role a discrete emotion plays depends entirely on context. For example, certain emotions (like hope) can have both positive and negative effects depending on the context. Hope can keep an unemployed person active in the job hunt when an individual doesn’t have an immediate prospect (e.g., recent interview they think will result in a job offer), but still chooses to focus on the positive and keep hoping for the best. On the other hand, hope can also lead to an individual decreasing their job search efforts when they are optimistic that a recent interview they gave will result in a job offer. This is particularly interesting because, as noted in the review section, the emotions literature suggests that feeling emotions that imply uncertainty (e.g., hope, fear, surprise), result in more systematic processing (vs. automatic processing) and less risky decisions (DeSteno, Petty, Wegener, & Rucker, 2000; Lerner & Keltner, 2000; Lerner & Keltner, 2001; Tiedens & Linton, 2001). However, the different roles that fear might play in the job search process and consequently the kinds of decisions it leads to implies that whether or not discrete emotions like fear lead to systematic or automatic processing depends largely on the context in which that emotion is experienced.
This study also added empirical evidence to some established theories in the emotions literature. For example, Fredrickson’s (1998) theory that thought-action tendencies impact motivation and behavior was seen to play out in this study. For example, we saw an example of when someone lost their job, they expressed feeling shock and this led them to the action tendency of mentally withdrawing from their former work role. Other emotion theories posit that negative and not positive emotions lead to better work performance. For example, positive mood could lead to poor decision-making due to unrealistic optimism and an over-reliance on heuristics (Forgas, 1999) and less concentrated analytical processing (Melton, 1995; Mackie & Worth, 1989). Further, negative mood increases effort expended by leading to more concentrated, detailed, and analytic processing (Schwarz, Bless, & Bohner, 1991). Further, Martin and colleagues’ “mood-as-input” model posits that negative affect will lead to more effortful processing. Accordingly, this study also showed how positive emotions like happiness (for a desirable job interview that went well) can sometimes have undesirable effects like decreased motivation for job search or alternatively how negative emotions like fear can increase efforts towards job search.

With respect to emotions associated with job loss specifically, this study provided 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 provided some evidence to the theory that sometimes individuals also experience positive emotions like excitement post losing a job (for example, if that job was disliked) (Leana & Feldman, 1988).

This study also provided additional empirical evidence to the theory that individuals use various coping mechanisms to deal with the stress brought about by job loss and unemployment.
For example, individuals in my study were found to undertake what unemployment literature calls “symptom-focused coping” to decrease the hardship associated with the stressful event of job loss and unemployment (Leana & Feldman, 1995a; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978) by starting or joining blogs to establish a support group, asking a spouse for financial assistance, etc. Individuals were also found to utilize “escape coping” which consists of actions and cognitive reappraisals that involve escapist, avoidance strategies (Latack, 1986), which was evident whenever individuals expressed that they were using the period of unemployment to “relax” and “enjoy themselves”. Further individuals were also found to undertake “problem focused coping” where they made attempts to change their environment in an effort to moderate stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Leana & Feldman, 1995a; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). For instance, individuals often pursued retraining what I called “skill building”) in order to be employable in other jobs.

This study also contributes to the job search literature with regard to the effects of attributions, i.e., whether the job loss is attributed to oneself or to external factors. Existing job search literature research suggests that when employees attribute job loss to themselves, they are more likely to become depressed and frustrated about future job searches (Feather & Davenport, 1981) versus when they attribute job loss to an external source (like the economy). Contrary to this I found that often, even individuals who made external attributions for their job loss (i.e. blamed the economy or others), expressed frustration and decreased motivation with regards to the job search process, suggesting that involuntary job loss negatively affects job search regardless of whether the individual thinks that they deserved to lose their job or not.

Finally, with regard to underemployment literature, this study provides additional empirical evidence for the theory that individuals who have already experienced being laid off are more likely to undertake underemployment (Kjos, 1988; Tan, Leana & Feldman, 1994).
Accordingly, I found that individuals who had experienced unemployment were sometimes more likely to view permanent underemployment as attractive. Further, underemployment literature suggests that many individuals who are unemployed for long periods of time tend to deplete their financial savings/resources, forcing them to accept less-than-satisfactory employment simply to make ends meet (Sandler, 1988; Tan, Leana & Feldman, 1994). I too found evidence for this established theory, as noted in my findings on “underemployment to survive”. Further, while most underemployment literature states that underemployment has primarily negative psychological effects (since the individual is not in a satisfactory job), I found that sometimes positive outcomes can result from underemployment. This happened when individuals viewed underemployment as a means to survive and also thrive. For example, individuals sometimes utilized their temporary assignments to learn new skills, expand their network, break into new careers etc.

This study also provides some valuable contributions to practitioners. First, the study and model 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. Secondly, scarred identity post re-employment suggests how some employees, even when reemployed, can feel less invested and committed to their new employer. Thus this study suggests the need for human resource initiatives towards such hires, to encourage the person to trust their new job and coworkers and thus become more committed to their new job.
Limitations and Future Research

This qualitative study provides rich, descriptive data and offers some interesting theoretical connections and managerial insights. However, given the nature of this kind qualitative research, the insights from this study, while grounded firmly in the data, are subject to my interpretations of it as a researcher. The grounded theory model that emerged suggested a pattern of connection between identity issues, emotions, ideological; techniques and a series of outcomes. Future quantitative testing could draw from this research to propose hypothesis and test the validity of the links between constructs, as suggested by the model. My dissertation examines the constructs of interest over multiple individuals from multiple diverse career fields (from journalism, to finance, to real estate etc.) working at middle to senior levels in their career. While this suggests transferability of the findings of this research to other individuals working at similar levels in diverse fields, the generalizability of these findings to blue collar workers and also to fresh graduates is limited. This is because, the blog participants that make up this study were all (coincidentally) white collar workers and further, my blog selection criteria excluded fresh graduated with no previous work-related identity. Future research can specifically examine populations of blue collar worker or fresh graduates to check if the concepts and interrelationships that emerged in this study hold true for those populations.

Another central limitation of this study is that given the nature of the medium of blogs, I cannot claim that the emotions expressed were indeed the emotions the individual was actually experiencing (or even think they were experiencing). It is possible, for example, that individuals may be have actually been experiencing one emotion (like fear) but given the public nature of blogs, chose to express another, more socially desirable emotion (like hope). Indeed, as noted earlier, there is often normative pressure to express positive emotions while avoiding negative
emotions since intense negative emotion expression goes against norms of rationality (Mumby & Putnam, 1992) and counter to common feeling rules of enthusiasm and good humor (Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989). Future studies could interview blog participants to establish if indeed the emotions expressed were the emotions the person really thought they were experiencing at the time. Note that even individuals claiming that they felt a certain emotion does not translate to research being able to establish definitively that that was indeed the “actual” emotion they were feeling. This is because often people can feel one emotion, but think that they are feeling another (e.g., fear or pain is often processed to be expressed as anger). Only neuroscientific evidence from examining brain activity allows researchers to definitively claim the actual emotion an individual was experiencing.

Another avenue for future research comes in the form of alternate methodology for the same data set. Since blogs are essentially identity narratives, a future (or follow up) study could examine the same data using the methodology of narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993). This type of narrative study will severely limit the number of bloggers that can be included (since only a handful of individuals actually blogged about all five stages and therefore provided a “complete” narrative). However, such a narrative analysis might provide interesting insights regarding individual identity stories from role exit to role reentry and might be able to speak further to the credibility of the grounded theory model emerging from this study.

Finally, the nature of my data (blogs that were not always updated) did not allow for me to definitively establish two different groups of individuals – those who found jobs and those who were still looking. It is entirely possible, for example, that some individuals who found reemployment just didn’t blog about it. Thus I am unable to conclusively establish differences between these two groups of individuals and make suggestions as to what differentiates them.
Future research can do follow up interviews with bloggers to overcome this problem and therefore attempt to answer what differentiates these two groups of individuals.

**Conclusion**

As a qualitative investigation of identity and emotion transitions during unemployment; my dissertation provides an inductive analysis of the rich, descriptive data gathered from the writings of individuals who blogged about their experiences regarding job loss, unemployment, job search, (possible) underemployment and reemployment. This analysis is firmly grounded in the data and leads to findings in the form of concepts and their interrelationships depicted in a grounded theory model (Figure 3). The findings of this research offer theoretical insights regarding identity transitions from role exit to role (re)entry as well as connections between the literature fields of identity and emotions. It suggests, for example, that individuals undergo identity transitions from a shock to their work-related identity (work-related identity hit); to discrepancies between who they are and who they were or even who they want to be (work-related identity discrepancies); to imagining the different possibilities of selves that can be (exploring possible work-related selves); to even sometimes taking on temporary selves for part time jobs (temporary work-related identity); to finally finding a full time job they are satisfied with and starting that job with either a scarred or a reinforced sense of self (scarred or reinforced work-related identity). These identity issues have been depicted in Figure 2. Also depicted in Figure 2 are the primary sets of emotions most often noted to be associated with each stage and it’s identity issue.

Further, processing identity issues that emerge from each stage forms the starting point of the grounded theory model emerging from this study (Figure 3). The model depicts that each stage (from job loss to reemployment) finds individuals grappling with the identity issues which
are associated with sets of emotions and ideological techniques. These interact to lead to a series of outcomes. Finally, this study also provides some managerial insights regarding how organizations might better handle role exits (e.g., helping terminated employees understand and prepare for the unemployment and job search journey they are about to embark upon) and role (re)entry (e.g., helping employees recover from scarred work-related identity).
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APPENDIX A

FIGURE 1

Overlap between the Five Stages

Job Loss Stage

Unemployment Stage

Job Search Stage

Underemployment Stage

Reemployment Stage
FIGURE 2

Work-related Identity Transitions and Associated Emotions that Individuals Experience during each Stage

JOB LOSS → Work-related identity hit → Relief and Shock

UNEMPLOYED → Work-related identity discrepancy → Excitement and Anxiety

JOB SEARCH → Exploring possible work-related selves → Hope and Despair

UNDER EMPLOYED → Undertaking temporary work-related identity → Gratitude and Frustration

REEMPLOYED → Reinforced or Scarred work-related identity → Happiness and Bitterness
Figure 3
Basic Format of Grounded Theory Model

Identity Issue

+Positive emotion

Ideological Techniques

Outcome

Outcome

Outcome

-Negative Emotion

Outcome

Outcome

Outcome
Figure 3a
Example from Job Loss Stage

Identity Hit

+Relief+

I ideological Technique: Reframing, Recalibrating

Mental withdrawal
Relaxing
Identity Liminality

-Questioning the past
Blame assignment
Anger / Hurt
Identity Liminality
Figure 3b
Example from Unemployment Stage

+Excitement+

- Anxiety -

I ideological
Technique:
Reframing,
Rebutt

- Anxiety -

I ideological
Technique:
Reframing,
Rebutt

Structuring
one’s day

Loss of
control

Regaining
control

Altering
life plans

Unemployed
Identity
Normalization

Frustration/
Shame

Identity Discrepancy

Identity Discrepancy
Figure 3c
Example from Job Search Stage

+Hope+

Pushing out of comfort zone: Success
Prospective work related identity success
Taking steps in the right direction (networking etc.)
Increase the universe of potential job opportunities

Ideological Technique: Reframing

-Despair-

Pushing out of comfort zone: Failure
Prospective work related identity failure
Decrease the universe of potential job opportunities
Figure 3d
Example from Underemployed Stage

Temporary Identity

+Gratitude+
Under employment to survive and thrive
Experimented work-related identity success
Surviving and Thriving

Temporary Identity

I ideological Technique: Recalibrating (including mental shift)
Under employment to survive
Prospective or Experimented work related identity failure
Return to unemployment

-Frustration-
Example from Reemployed Stage

+Happiness+

- Bitterness -

Ideological Technique: Recalibrating (including mental shift)

Keeping or breaking promises made during unemployment

Reinforced identity

Reemployment Identity normalization

Loosing trust/ Learning one's lessons

Decreasing the importance of work-related aspects

Reinforced/Scarred Identity

Reinforced/Scarred Identity
### APPENDIX B: TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Name of code</th>
<th>Description of code</th>
<th>Example quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job Loss</td>
<td>Work identity hit</td>
<td>A state in which the individual’s sense of work-related identity takes a significant hit.</td>
<td>“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.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“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 Fl... just sitting on a plane not knowing what was going to happen next and not being able to do anything about it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Loss</td>
<td>Shock</td>
<td>A sudden disturbance in the mind or emotions.</td>
<td>“The news hit me out of no where 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.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>“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.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|            |                     |                                                                                     | “I got fired by my company...I was left shattered and emotionally distraught, like I didn’t see it coming.” }
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Loss</th>
<th>Mental withdrawal</th>
<th>Cognitive pulling back from current situation (involuntary job loss)</th>
<th>“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”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 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.” |
| Job Loss | Disidentification | When an individual defines him or herself as not having the same attributes that he or she believes | “…I was scared about how I would pay the bills, but I kept thinking, whew, I’m so glad it’s over. I hated working there! … finally rid of prison that job was. I never felt part of the team anyway.”

“being fired came as a shock, kinda. I mean, I thought I was doing ok at my job but I guess my lack of enthusiasm showed…the work was draining… I don’t want anything more to do with sales. I’m done with dealing with irate customers and idiotic requests. It’s not me.” |
| Common to multiple stages | Recalibrating | A mental process of adjusting the implicit standards that are used to evaluate the scale and/or valence of a situation (Ashforth, et al., 2007). | “Your bio says you lost your job in March. That was only 2 1/2 months ago, and you consider that a “long” period of time in surviving a job search? What about people who are out of work and have been looking for a job for over a year, or even two years? You know how they survive—they take temp or “transitional” type of jobs paying low wages, but paying something to pay their bills.”

“From the looks of the bios of these eminently qualified people, I can relate in that no one expects to be in this position (I surly didn’t). But you gotta roll with it and pursue other opportunities. I do not see myself as “over the hill.” I’m just hitting my prime. And I will make it.” |
| 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.

- 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 | Refocusing | Shifting the focus from negative to positive | “Why don’t some of you get at least a part time job or something in a call center? May not be a 6 figure salary but it is a freakin job – STOP COMPLAINING” |
Job loss and Unemployment stages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work identity discrepancy</th>
<th>A contrast between various work identity related states – e.g., past vs. present, current vs. ideal, identity vs. image.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Example of past vs. present:)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“My husband is making about 1/4 or less his past income, and we have adjusted to it painfully, but we are surviving. We cut out many things that I have lost track of. To us, it’s not the struggle to make ends meet because we have adjusted well due to the fact that we never splurged even when we could do so. It’s the self-esteem thing: he feels lousy about his current salary—you see, it is a salary a teenager makes babysitting or working at a fast-food counter. It’s the commissions he struggles to make in this lousy economy that brings his salary to that 1/4 of what he made. He not only has to really take a lot of nasty abuse from customers, but he has to put in 6-day weeks and forfeit vacation time because time lost could be commissions lost—no selling, no money.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Example of current vs. ideal. Here it is between what is current identity of being jobless vs. what would be ideal – being comfortably employed:)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I was called into HR where they told me I was being laid-off. I was escorted to my desk and told to pack whatever I could. They gave me 3 weeks of severance and said “See ya!” I’ve now been unemployed for nearly 2 months and have not been able to find anything. I am a full-time stay-at-home house dad and watching my savings deteriorate by the day. Unemployment is a complete joke. Going from making over $100K/year to just over $22K/year is laughable. Your bills don’t change, but your income certainly does.”</td>
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Job Loss

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questioning the past</th>
<th>Occurs when individual’s attempted to figure out why they are experiencing involuntary job loss.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“We met our goals - reduced labor by attrition as work slowed. Then I was told that they decided to “eliminate the position of Production Manager.” Out the door I went without so much as a “Thank You” along with about 15% of the workforce. I beat myself up for a couple of weeks, trying to figure out where I went wrong.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“It has come to my attention that in a time of uncertainty in the job market, thoughts concerning life goals or career paths can put a damper on a person’s state of mind. Some of us may find ourselves questioning, “Where did I go wrong?” or “How did I get here?””</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Common to multiple stages Blame assignment An assigning of blame to self or other (economy, organization etc.). “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 harbor a sense that, deep down, it’s our doing. Why weren’t we one of the ones left standing”

“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.”

Unemployment stage Control (gain and loss) Code that captures the experience of the gain and loss of control “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 well being is definitely one of those things!”

“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.”

Unemployment stage Structuring the day Code that captures all instances of when individuals impose a “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.”
| Routine /structure on their day during unemployment. | “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.”

“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.” |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment stage</td>
<td>Small victories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| The idea that during unemployment, even small accomplishments are significant. | “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.”

“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 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.” |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unemployment stage</th>
<th>Unemployed identity normalization</th>
<th>Acceptance by an individual of the self-concept that they are now an unemployed person</th>
<th>“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.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job search stage</td>
<td>Exploring possible selves</td>
<td>Exploring ideas about who one might become, or fears becoming ((Markus and Nurius, 1986; Yosh, Strube, and Bailey, 1992).)</td>
<td>“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.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Search and underemployment stages</td>
<td>Prospective work-related identity failure</td>
<td>Rejecting an identity before even trying it out.</td>
<td>“I was still out of a job. I was losing hope and getting desperate. I tried a couple call centers.. 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.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Job Search and underemployment stages | Experimented work-related identity failure | Rejecting an identity after trying it out | “It hurt a lot to be out of work, but no job is better than a commesion-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.”

| Job search stage | Increased mental processing | The idea that unemployed individuals are constantly thinking about their situation (of being without work), its consequences (lack of income) and/or how to find a job. | “Make good use of your time. It’s easy to spend hours at a time just sitting and thinking. Too much sitting and thinking can lead to absolute disaster. Busy yourself with doing things you like. Just because you’ve got all the time in the world doesn’t mean you should waste it”.

“Are you sleeping? Because I’m not sleeping. It’s not like I have anything to get up for tomorrow. I don’t have to wake up early for that important meeting. It’s not my turn to pick up the donuts for the break room. If I don’t sleep at night I can just take a nap in the afternoon. So where does the anxiety come from that’s keeping me from sleeping? Well, I suppose the fear of never finding a job ever again could cause a little bit of anxiety. Also anxiety-inducing: the idea of running out of money or the question, “What am I really doing with my life?”

“We all have those off nights of not being able to sleep, but since the layoff it’s been egregious. How does a person get off their mind what won’t go away to aide in better and deeper sleep?... Trying to find “regular” work, formulating innovative methods that could lead to revenue streams and making mistakes while attempting to do all of that, meetings, phone calls, door knocking, marriage, raising children, aging parents…you know – life.”

“As our labyrinth of existence increases and, in turn, looking and finding the best path in which to set out to arrive at the finish line successfully is, no doubt, daunting. Patience wears thin and tempers run deep. I would like to know how the mind can put this aside and allow for decent sleep.”

| Job search stage | Step in the right direction | Undertaking tasks crucial to job search such as exercise | “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
networking, self-promoting etc. to make continuous progress towards finding full time employment 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?”

“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.”

“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 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 | Skill building | When an individual uses the period of job search as a time to learn new skills that they can add to their resume or that might help them find “For me, my contract has been extended, and during my “downtime” at work I have full permission from my boss to take all the classes I want on the company dime. Is it ideal? No. Do I miss my previous career? Yes. Am I thankful for the paycheck and using the training to my full advantage? No Doubt About It!” “If I had the money, I’d definitely be in school getting some sort of degree.” “I took a Spanish class at my local community center after I was laid off. The first thing I learned to say was ‘Soy unemployed’. I had leads from classmates in weeks! Most of all, don’t keep it a secret or be ashamed.” “when I was working, I didn’t have the spare time to put in the hard work necessary to prepare myself for a career shift. Since being laid off I’ve taken to adding web analytics to
**Employment.**

“I am going back to school and pursuing a dual degree MBA/MS in Finance. While I fit into the “over 50 category,” after sending out 100+ resumes in a year (and getting invited to only 4 interviews) I believed it was time to pursue the human capital investment approach. Granted, I’ll be $75K in debt when I get done but the alternative was even more frightening: trying to live on a $20K government pension.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job search stage</th>
<th>Rejection</th>
<th>How individuals deal with rejection during this stage.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>“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.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“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.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“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.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job search stage</th>
<th>Spousal support</th>
<th>a code to capture instances of how the presence or absence of support from the</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“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.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

187
unemployed individual’s spouse made a difference to that person’s job search experience.

| Job search stage               | Mental shift in perception of full time work | “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 then 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.”
|                              |                                             | “I have concluded that longevity in a job doesn’t pay. Keep on moving..”

| Underemployment              | Undertaking temporary work identities   | how individuals dealt with the makeshift work-related identities that they adopted to enable them to perform temporary jobs  
|                              |                                             | “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.”

| Underemployment              | To survive                  | When individuals felt like their “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
circumstances left them with no choice but to have to do an underemployed job that was undesirable, and often repulsive.

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 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.”

“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.”

“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.” “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.”

“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.”
"I was let go from a senior position a few years ago. I had seen how friends and acquaintances in similar circumstances 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. | “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.”

“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 | “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.” |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Underemployment</th>
<th>Time spent for underemployment</th>
<th>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 time search for full time</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>“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.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reemployed stage</td>
<td>Scarred work identity</td>
<td>Reemployed stage</td>
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<td>Reemployed stage</td>
<td>Scarred work identity</td>
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“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.”

“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.”

“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.”

“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 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.”

“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.”

“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 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 | “And I must continue documenting my experience and attempting to help others, because if I didn't, I'd be letting myself down.”

“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.” |
| Reemployed stage | Reactions of people | The reactions of commenters when they learned a blog poster they had been following is now reemployed. | “I’m glad that these are better times for you and your family.”

“Joel, I’m truly happy for you that you were able to find a new job so quickly. But you’re going to have to understand that there will be a lot of people who will comment here and perhaps rudely point out that your roller coaster was really very short. Some of the folks who haunt this site have experienced much, much lower lows simply because they have been out of work for much, much longer. What insight you might have to offer on dealing with the roller coaster might not be given much credibility because of your limited experience. Whatever insight you can offer on how you were able to land a job so quickly would be more interesting. You were lucky, but that’s a good thing. Enjoy.”

“While it’s nice when a company seems to have continued interest in you, I’m getting sick of all the false hope and empty promises that keep getting thrown at me. Several times I will get a job lead from someone credible, and then the position goes away or there was only talk about it. I realize prospective employers are trying to soften the blow by giving the “there’s a possible future position” spiel, but it’s frustrating when all that hope was for a fake job position.”

“Congrats Kevin! This gives me some hope”

(reaction to a blogger getting a job in the automotive industry):

“Thank god for gov’t bailout money to keep the US automotive alive, even though it should be dead! Whee!”

“Congratulations! All of your posts showed a positive attitude and diligent work on finding a new job. It has paid off! Hopefully, others will read your articles and use some of the constructive advice you offered. Good luck!”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common to multiple stages</th>
<th>Discrete emotions</th>
<th>Sadness, humiliation, guilt, fear, etc.</th>
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<td>“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.”</td>
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<td>“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.”</td>
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<td>“I have been out of work for about 1 1/2 years &amp; 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 &amp; others are in worse situations than mine, 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!”</td>
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<td>“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.”</td>
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<td>“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”.”</td>
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<td>“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...”</td>
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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.”

“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.”

“Fear and desperation do count, and they help character grow in leaps and bounds. Use that fear and desperation to think outside the box. I don’t mean yet another way to present your resume, I mean really think about something you’re great at and jump on the entrepreneurial bandwagon. Can it be much worse than the fear and desperation you’re feeling now?”
NIYATI KATARIA

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EDUCATION

Pennsylvania State University
Ph.D., Business Administration, 2012 (expected)

University of Cincinnati
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Indian Institute of Planning and Management
Post Graduate Diploma in Business Administration, 2004

St. Stephen’s College, University of Delhi
B.S., Computer Science, 2002

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS


*Tales of TEC: Narrating the Identity of The Episcopal Church*, Academy of Management Annual Meeting; Montreal, 2010.


*From One to Many: The Cross-Level Role of Affect in Response to Organizational Identity Threats*, Academy of Management Annual Meeting; Anaheim, 2008.

AWARDS AND DISTINCTIONS

2011 Grace G. Albrecht Women in Management Graduate Scholarship
2011 Smeal Doctoral Research Grant
2002-2004 Academic Scholarship, Indian Institute of Planning and Management
2002-2004 Dean’s List, Indian Institute of Planning and Management
2001 Dean’s List, St. Stephen’s College, University of Delhi
1996 Scholarship, All India Secondary School Examination