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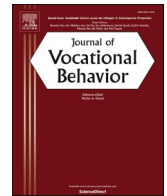
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Confinement during the COVID-19 pandemic: How multi-domain work-life shock events may result in positive identity change

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ABSTRACT

During the COVID-19 pandemic many countries enforced mandatory stay-at-home orders. The confinement period that took place may be regarded as a multi-domain work-life shock event, severely disrupting both the professional and the family sphere. Taking an identity lens, this study examines whether and how identity changed during confinement by drawing from a diary study consisting of 14 working parents who filled out a daily diary over a period of seven weeks of mandated home confinement in France. The findings suggest how both work-related and family-related identity change may occur when individuals are confronted with a multi-domain work-life shock event such as the pandemic. Further, the findings point to three identity responses to this event: work-life identity threat, work-life identity reflection, and work-life identity reconstruction. For most participants, the seven-week period resulted in significant and positive shifts in their work and family identities to better align with their internal beliefs rather than relying on societally imposed expectations about what it means to be a good parent and worker.

1. Introduction

In this study, we sought to understand the effects of the period of sudden home confinement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic by working parents in France. The mandated confinement forced working parents who were considered “non-essential” to work from home, often alongside family members. Although the confinement period was considered temporary, established routines around navigating the demands of work and family were severely broken as working parents experienced abrupt changes in their work patterns, hours, and status while simultaneously taking on more childcare and household responsibilities such as home-schooling. In this article, we view the mandated confinement period as a work-life shock event (Crawford et al., 2019), referring to a disruptive, novel and critical event (Morgeson et al., 2015). Work-life shock events theory captures the unfolding nature of the way individuals appraise and react to significant, unexpected shock events that affect both work and family lives (Crawford et al., 2019). Indeed, the disruption imposed by the pandemic generated shocks that while temporary, were likely to alter work and family identities as working parents reflected on what once was and what will be in the future.

Drawing on the literature on identity and work-life shock events theory, this study investigates how parents’ work and family identities changed as the confinement period evolved. Participants filled out a daily diary over a period of seven weeks in which they

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reflected on the past, present, and future of their work and family lives and how the content and meaning of their identities evolved during confinement. To do so, participants were asked to note their feelings, attitudes, and beliefs about their work and family roles in light of the COVID-related home confinement. We also conducted interviews at the end of the confinement period to gain insights on how participants felt about the overall experience and to reflect on how they felt they had changed during this time. The findings reveal that the COVID-19 confinement led to significant shifts in both work and family identities. We found that individuals reconstructed their identities to better align with their internally held beliefs about what it means to be a good parent and a good worker.

We make three contributions. First, we contribute to the emerging literature on work-life shock events. We offer a definition of a multi-domain work-life shock event that complements Crawford et al.'s (2019) definition of a single-domain work-life shock event, thereby extending work-life events theory. Further, by collecting and analysing longitudinal data, we provide insight into how multi-domain work-life shock events are appraised and acted upon over time, thereby responding to Crawford et al.'s (2019) call for longitudinal studies on such events. At the start of the confinement, participants experienced various forms of identity threats, referring to "experiences appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of an identity" (Petriglieri, 2011, p. 644). The participants reacted to multiple identity threats by engaging in identity work, referring to a range of activities to form, repair, maintain, strengthen or revise their sense of self (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Over time, however, participants slowly started to perceive the situation as an opportunity to reflect and act upon their aspirations and beliefs of who they want to be, rather than relying on social norms and expectations.

Second, we contribute to the literature on identity, identity threats, and identity work. Specifically, we shed light on the circumstances under which ongoing identity threat can lead to identity growth over time, thereby responding to Dutton et al.'s (2010) call for research on the necessary conditions in which identity threats result in positive outcomes. In so doing, we expand upon the notion that personal identities are malleable and subject to change (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). We suggest that identity threat can lead to identity growth, referring to the fostering of a positive identity that is "competent, resilient, transcendent and holistically integrated" (Kreiner & Sheep, 2009 p. 24), under certain circumstances; confinement during the COVID-19 pandemic represented such a circumstance. We show how the confinement threatened individuals' previously established identities and required them to engage in identity work. As a result of this work, individuals tended to reconstruct identities that were better aligned with their own desires and beliefs (Shepherd & Williams, 2018; Vough & Caza, 2017). To do so, they needed to recognize and selectively reject social norms and replace them with self-driven expectations.

Third, we integrate the work-life shock events and identity literatures. Prior theory and research have mainly focused on how singular events occurring either in the home or work domain threaten the identities that are most salient to that domain (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2007; Crawford et al., 2019; Elsbach, 2003), or have focused on the permeability of the work-family interface in which a threat to one's identity or a shock in one domain is likely to impact one's identity and functioning in another life sphere (Dahm et al., 2019; Ladge et al., 2012). In contrast, our findings show that the multi-domain work-life shock event represented by confinement during the COVID-19 pandemic—by throwing work, family, and most other life activities into turmoil—created multiple identity threats (Crawford et al., 2019; Petriglieri, 2011) that needed to be simultaneously managed. This triggered a process of cross-domain identity work by which multiple identities were reflected upon and reconstructed. Based on the findings, we propose a conceptual model of identity work in response to a multi-domain work-life shock event.

Next, we highlight theoretical insights informing our study, describe our methodological approach, and present our findings. The findings are organized by the different identity responses the participants collectively expressed. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of implications for theory, research, and practice.

2. Theory informing the study

The primary areas of research that guided our study design and theorizing are situated in the work-life shock events and identity literatures.

2.1. Work-life shock events

Crawford et al. (2019, p. 195) defined a work-life shock event as "a disruptive, novel, and critical event (Morgeson et al., 2015) necessitating that additional resources be invested in the domain the shock originated from." Examples of work-life shock events can consist of both positive and negative events such as the death of a family member or a promotion that requires a relocation. However, we know little about how individuals process work-life shock events and, in particular, how such events impact work and family identities. Further, Crawford et al.'s (2019) definition implies that a work-life shock event originates in only one domain. Previous research has shown that shocks in one domain are likely to affect other domains as well, by for example making the fulfilment of a given role in a different domain of life challenging or even impossible (Greer & Egan, 2012). The COVID-related confinement simultaneously impacted multiple domains.

For purposes of the present study, we define a multi-domain work-life shock event as a "disruptive, novel, and critical event that (1) occurs in multiple domains with which an individual identifies, (2) poses a threat to existing identities in these domains, and (3) calls for identity work by the individual." Note that Crawford et al.'s (2019) definition of a single-domain work-life shock event focuses on its impact on the investment of resources, whereas our definition focuses on the event's impact on personal identities and the need for identity work. We view both definitions and their application to particular aspects (e.g., resources, identities) of particular phenomena (in our case, confinement during the COVID-19 pandemic) as contributing to work-life events theory.

For non-essential workers, the pandemic posed a multi-domain work-life shock event; that is, it imposed simultaneous lockdowns of

the work and family/life domains (Powell, 2020). First, the pandemic-related confinement can be considered a work-life shock event because it was *disruptive*, requiring a change in the way in which things are usually done. Second, the confinement was *novel* in that parents had never faced such a confinement before; as a result, they could not draw on existing schemas or guidelines and had to invent a response themselves (Withey et al., 1983). Third, the confinement can be considered *critical* as it was “important, essential, or a priority” (Morgeson & DeRue, 2006, p. 273). Indeed, parents could not ignore the confinement but had to take immediate action to cope with the situation. Most working parents had to manage this challenging work-life shock event by adapting to working from home in addition to taking on additional caregiving roles (Craig & Churchill, 2020; Shockley et al., 2020; Vaziri et al., 2020). Work-life shock events trigger the need for sense-making (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Parents had to make sense of this novel and disruptive event that greatly impacted many aspects of both individuals’ professional and family lives. This sense-making process is intrinsically related to one’s identity (Weick et al., 2005) as the pandemic affected the roles individuals took on and the meaning they attached to these roles as well as the societal expectations related to these various roles.

Although identity-related concepts such as role salience hierarchy and future self have been linked to the impact of work-life shock events on individuals (Crawford et al., 2019), we show how individuals might appraise a multi-domain work-life shock event as an opportunity to act upon a different, future self that is of value to them, thereby leading to identity growth. We extend work-life shock events theory regarding the consequences of work-life shock events in two ways. First, we provide a longitudinal perspective as we captured individuals’ perceptions over time. Indeed, perceptions of and attitudes toward work and life are dynamic (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013) and evolve as the context changes. Second, work-life shock events are often multifaceted and entail both opportunities and threats. Given that the mandatory home confinement during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted both the work and family domains and that individuals have multiple domain-specific roles and identities related to those roles (Ramarajan, 2014), this work-life shock event was likely to influence multiple identities that working parents possess. Going beyond the notions of role salience hierarchy and future self, we elaborate on how identity threat and identity work are central to understanding how individuals process and respond to multi-domain work-life shock events.

2.2. Identity, identity threat, and identity work

Identity is a multidimensional and dynamic construct (Ashforth et al., 2008). We refer to identity as a “self-referential description that provides contextually appropriate answers to the question ‘Who am I?’ (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 327). Individuals hold multiple identities, and these identities tend to intersect with each other (Ramarajan, 2014). Moreover, individuals’ identities develop and evolve as they engage in identity work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Certain triggers, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and related period of confinement, can lead to an intensification of identity work as an individual’s sense of self is subject to change. While some triggers may only temporarily impact one’s identity and the need to engage in identity work, significant work-life shock events may be more life-altering in that they may force individuals to let go one of their identities that might have been important to their self-definition, leading to feelings of psychological loss that negatively affect their well-being (Conroy & O’Leary-Kelly, 2014). Indeed, individuals try to maintain a sense of continuity over time and yet adapt to shifting personal and social conditions. Identity work is a typical response when individuals experience significant changes in roles or when navigating a transition that is socially undesirable (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Perceptions of identity threat in which individuals perceive potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of one of their identities (Petriglieri, 2011) can spur identity work and eventually lead to positive outcomes for individuals (Dutton et al., 2010; Shepherd & Williams, 2018).

Individuals can respond to perceived identity threat in a variety of ways. They can respond in identity-protecting ways such as derogation, concealment, and positive distinctiveness, or in identity-restructuring ways such as identity exit, meaning change, and importance change (Petriglieri, 2011). Identities can change in response to identity threat, especially when the threat is strong. A strong threat occurs when either the potential future harm to identity is great or the threatening experience is encountered frequently. The COVID-19 related confinement presented a strong identity threat on both personal and professional levels. It has been argued that in such situations some form of identity-restructuring response is necessary to decrease the severity or likelihood of future identity harm (Petriglieri, 2011; Pratt et al., 2006). Further, whether the threatened identity is important to an individual influences responses to the threat.

When engaging in identity work as a reaction to a perceived identity threat, some individuals may adopt provisional or trial versions of themselves (Ibarra, 1999). They are also likely to reflect on who they are, should be, or desire to be as they consider the future (Ibarra, 1999; Ladge et al., 2012). Much of this psychological process may depend on how salient identities are to one’s overall self-concept (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). The more salient an identity, the more difficult it is to let it go (Hennekam & Bennett, 2016; Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Yet, identities are constructed in response to the environment. Indeed, the different roles individuals take on are interpersonally negotiated (Stryker & Serpe, 1982) and associated with a range of social expectations and norms (Stryker & Burke, 2000). As individuals hold multiple roles simultaneously, they might experience tensions or conflict between roles (Koerner, 2014) leading them to engage in identity work (Stets & Serpe, 2013) as a means to preserve and protect identities that feel threatened (e.g., Ladge et al., 2012).

Bridging work-life events and identity theories, we sought to understand how working parents experienced the mandatory confinement. Indeed, little is known about whether and how one’s professional and family identities evolve in the context of a sudden and unexpected event that involves simultaneous work and family disruptions for an uncertain period of time. In France, the government mandated a first national lockdown of a total of eight weeks. France had one of the most restrictive confinements during the first wave of COVID-19. While the pandemic can be considered a disruptive and novel experience for many individuals worldwide, the measures in France were more restrictive than in most other European countries in terms of the length of the confinement, the fact that

schools were closed and children were home, and the restrictions in terms of free movement (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020). France can therefore be considered an extreme context to study the impact of home confinement on the identity of working parents. The French national context and the way in which the pandemic was handled had an impact on the way in which individuals made sense of the confinement and how this affected who they are, can be and want to be in the future.

3. Methods

We conducted a qualitative diary study to examine the ways individuals experienced and coped with the COVID-19 confinement period in France. Fourteen individuals—eight women and six men—wrote about their experiences for seven weeks on a daily basis. Diary studies are used in organizational psychology (van Eerde et al., 2005) to study stress, emotions, and the work-home interface (Butler et al., 2005; Ilies et al., 2007), which were exactly the issues we were interested in. The diary method allowed us to collect data on the natural context of individuals and capture “life as it is lived” (Bolger et al., 2003, p. 597). Daily diaries were chosen in order to track variations on a daily basis as the confinement was supposed to last for only two weeks when it was announced by the French government. At the time of study design, we rejected the notion of obtaining weekly diaries as it was felt that they would not lead to sufficiently detailed insights. Participants were also interviewed by the first author upon the completion of the seven-week period.

3.1. Recruitment and sample

We used a snowball sampling technique (Berg, 2006) to recruit participants, a sampling technique that builds on contacts of individuals in different organizations and industries. It was appropriate to ask contacted individuals to self-select themselves for participation in the study, as diary completion over a relatively long period of time requires a high level of commitment to the study (Symon, 1998). Twenty-two individuals were contacted with the request to participate in the study out of which twenty agreed, giving a response rate of 91%. Fourteen out of the 20 participants (70%) completed their diaries throughout the entire seven-week period.

All participants were living and working in France and all had children. Participants held employment in a variety of sectors including education, healthcare, ICT, and the creative industries. None of them were required to work away from home as “essential workers” during the pandemic. Five of the participants had completely ceased any work activity since the outbreak of COVID-19, while two others had greatly reduced workloads. The remaining seven maintained the same workload as they had prior to the confinement but worked from home. The average age of participants was 41, ranging from 32 to 55 years. Table 1 provides an overview of the sample's demographic information.

3.2. Instruments and approach

The study started on the 16th of March 2020, the first day of the compulsory confinement in France, and ended the 4th of May, one week before the end of the confinement on the 11th of May. As we wanted to track the experiences of participants over time, we started collecting data on the first day of the confinement. Although the confinement lasted for eight weeks in France, we gathered data during the seven first weeks only as participants started to anticipate the upcoming end of the confinement during its last week. In addition, we wanted to conduct a final interview with each participant at the end of the seven-week period. As we anticipated that participants would have little time the weekend before the end of the confinement, we decided to conduct those final interviews one week earlier. The interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. The interviews were conducted in French and were translated into English using back-and-forth translation. We were mindful to reflect nuances during the translation process. Participants were asked to write every evening over a seven-week period about their experiences of the COVID-19 confinement for that day; they were told that they could either write their diary entries on paper or send them electronically to the research team by email. The nine participants (64%) who kept their diary electronically were asked to send their entries every evening in order to avoid the situation in which participants skip some days or write up multiple entries on the same day. The participants who held a written diary were explicitly asked not to “catch

Table 1
Demographic information of the sample.

Part.	Gender	Age	Profession	Marital status	Children	Work situation	Work situation of partner
1	Female	39	Teacher	Married	2 (aged 13 and 7)	Work from home	No activity
2	Female	42	Jurist	Single	2 (aged 11 and 15)	Work from home	Not applicable
3	Female	46	Architect	Married	1 (aged 2)	Work from home	Work from home
4	Female	32	Dancer	Married	2 (aged 6 and 3)	No activity	Work from home
5	Female	39	Psychologist	Married	3 (aged 4, 6 and 7)	No activity	No activity
6	Female	34	Designer	In relationship	2 (aged 12 and 9)	Work from home	Work from home
7	Female	51	Publisher	Single	1 (aged 16)	Work from home	Not applicable
8	Female	55	Engineer	Married	2 (aged 14 and 13)	Work from home	No activity
9	Male	42	Civil Servant	Married	2 (aged 10 and 8)	Work from home	No activity
10	Male	40	Physiotherapist	Married	3 (aged 6, 9 and 12)	No activity	No activity
11	Male	32	Homeopath	Married	2 (aged 4 and 6)	No activity	Work from home
12	Male	39	Writer	Married	2 (aged 1 and 3)	Work from home	Work from home
13	Male	41	Real Estate Agent	Married	3 (aged 10, 12 and 15)	No activity	No activity
14	Male	42	ICT Support Staff	Divorced	2 (aged 3 and 4)	Work from home	Not applicable

up” with missing entries. On average, the participants wrote about two pages per day, although this varied per person and per day. They were also told they could contact the first author any time by email or telephone in case of questions. No monetary reward was provided for participation.

We opted for a longer period of time (seven weeks, including weekends) and a smaller sample (14 individuals) instead of using a larger sample for a shorter period of time, as we were especially interested in how participants’ experiences evolved over time. Previous research has argued in favor of a prolonged smaller sample approach for tracking changes over time (Fuller et al., 2003). We sensed a strong motivation on the side of our respondents to participate in the study, and the increase in free time for most participants during the confinement might have positively influenced the response rate and could explain the in-depth information provided. Although 20 individuals initially began the diary study, two dropped out after week 3, two after week 4, and two more after week 6. Altogether, 14 participants continued their diary logs throughout the entire period of the study (49 days). We included only those 14 participants in the final sample for the study in order to shed light on how participants’ feelings, perceptions, and behaviors evolved over a longer period of time. The diary study sought to track experiences, feelings, perceptions, and attitudes over time related to how participants were feeling about themselves, their families, and their work since beginning confinement (see guiding questions in the Appendix). All participants received a daily reminder with some questions to guide their thinking. These guiding questions were generally the same but were slightly altered and put in a different order each day. For example, the theme “identity” was formulated in different wordings. Sometimes “the way you see yourself” was used, while other days we used “your self-perception” or “who you feel you are”. Moreover, participants were encouraged to reflect on both their work identity and family identity. Although most guiding questions did not specifically address issues of identity, the participants wrote extensively about their identities. The various themes came back in the guiding questions every day, but the participants were not asked to evoke each theme in their writing. Rather, the questions were aimed to guide their thinking and not all themes were reported on a daily basis. This semi-free-form diary approach encouraged participants to address the general topics we sought to study while leaving space for other themes to emerge and limiting the risk that participants would overthink certain topics.

At the end of the seven-week period, the first author contacted each participant for a conversation over Skype or by telephone. The aim of these conversations was to make sure that the research team’s interpretation of the diary data aligned with the way the participants had intended it. These interviews helped clarify any ambiguities and were included in the analysis. These interactions offered a chance for shared reflexivity and validation of findings (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000) and allowed the research team to arrive at communicative validation of our findings. This step provided greater confidence to our analysis and findings. The average duration of each interview was around 20 min.

3.3. Analysis

An interpretive phenomenological approach was used to analyze the diary study data in order to capture and make sense of individuals’ personal perceptions and experiences (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). More than 1000 pages of text were analyzed. Analysis of the data was iterative in nature and involved going back and forth between the diary entries and the short interviews at the end of the diary study in an effort to develop and refine our coding scheme. Accounts on changes in their identities were initially analyzed by comparing diary entries on a weekly basis. However, as the data did not naturally fall into weekly patterns, we adopted a subjective time perspective in which different phases were identified that did not necessarily align with chronological time. Our phenomenological approach focused on the unique characteristics of each individual participant as well as on patterns across participants. Our case-by-case analysis allowed us to reveal the perceptions and understanding of the participants.

It is important to acknowledge the role of the researcher in this dynamic process of sense-making. As we aimed to obtain an insider-perspective, it is the researcher who makes sense of the accounts of the participants, constituting as such a double hermeneutics (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). The analysis commenced by reading the diaries and transcripts several times to become familiar with them and by identifying emerging common themes. Every reading allowed us to identify additional themes that varied based on participant circumstances. For example, for participants who experienced a stop or decrease in their professional activity, the identity threat themes primarily consisted of feelings of loss of one’s work-related identity as well as boredom and frustration about having to take on a role they did not want. For participants who continued working from home while having additional caring responsibilities, the most common identity threat themes included difficulties with keeping professional and personal identities separately and increased fatigue and stress.

In the second step of the analysis, we looked for connections between the emergent themes. This step involved a more analytical and theoretical ordering as we tried to make sense of the themes. At this stage, themes were clustered and ordered. This was an iterative process in which the researcher made sense of the transcripts and diaries, while constantly checking that her interpretations aligned with what the participant had said and written. This process was continued and refined by checking the emerging themes as we included another diary entry and transcript. Data analysis was completed once all the data were analyzed through this interpretative process. Our final themes represented three identity responses occurring in phases observed in the data: work-life identity threat, work-life identity reflection, and work-life identity reconstruction.

4. Findings

Our findings reveal how a multi-domain work-life shock event in the form of the sudden and mandatory home confinement is experienced by working parents and how their work and family identities evolved during this period of time. We organize the presentation of our findings by the three identity responses resulting from this work-life shock event that emerged as final themes in the

data analysis. In phase one, participants experienced a threat to both their family and work-related identities as they experienced a partial or total loss or change in their identities in both domains as a consequence of the home confinement. Phase two consisted of identity reflection in which participants evaluated how they see themselves as parents and professionals in light of their past, present and desired future selves. Phase three involved the reconstruction of a new family and work-related identity that better aligned with their internal beliefs and was less dictated by social norms. The process by which parents' identities changed during the confinement as a multi-domain work-life shock event is depicted in Fig. 1.

The identity threat of phase one took different forms depending on whether participants continued to work during the confinement or not. One group of participants experienced heightened demands of work alongside the increasing responsibilities at home with childcare and/or home-schooling, challenging both their family and work-related identities, while the other group of participants experienced a steep decline in, or a hard stop to their professional activities leading to a loss of their work-related identities. In the text and tables that follow, we describe how work and family identities evolved over time for each participant (Table 2) and the trajectories of identity change exhibited by the two groups of participants including additional quotes for illustration (Table 3).

4.1. Phase 1: work-life identity threat

During approximately the first two weeks of the compulsory confinement, the participants were adapting to a completely new life in which they had to work from home while looking after their children. Almost all participants did not have a plan of action yet, as the mandatory domesticity was supposed to last only two weeks. Participants who were now forced to work from home reported that their professional and private lives had completely merged and that boundaries were blurred, which was perceived as a threat to their work and family identities causing harm to their overall well-being.

It makes me feel I should be able to split myself up. Now I'm simultaneously an employee and a wife and that doesn't work. I cannot be everything at the same time, but one after the other. At work, I'm a professional, then after school I'm a mother and in the evening I'm a wife. This having to be everything simultaneously is impossible and makes me feel I'm none of it fully anymore
(participant 6, week 1)

I feel constantly torn to address either the needs of my kids or the needs of my job. Result: I'm crap at both.
(participant 14, week 1)

The participants did not challenge the social norms governing work and parenting, such as being available for a phone call during typical working hours and being available for your child on demand. Rather than establishing new norms and rules regarding what parenting and work look like during home confinement, the participants seemed to continue to work in the same capacity as before, and in some cases overworked to make up for lost work hours due to caregiving. Consequently, those participants who were trying to navigate work and childcare and/or home-schooling responsibilities reported an increase in fatigue and stress. In order to manage their responsibilities on multiple fronts, some began increasing their work hours at unsustainable rates.

I wake up at six to have around 2 h of real quiet time I need, without being disturbed and without any background noise of screaming children. I really need this and it works. However, this is not a sustainable solution as I'm also going very late to bed, so I'm increasingly tired.
(participant 12, week 2)

The shifting work and family demands caused by the pandemic did not only lead to a decline in well-being due to less time for

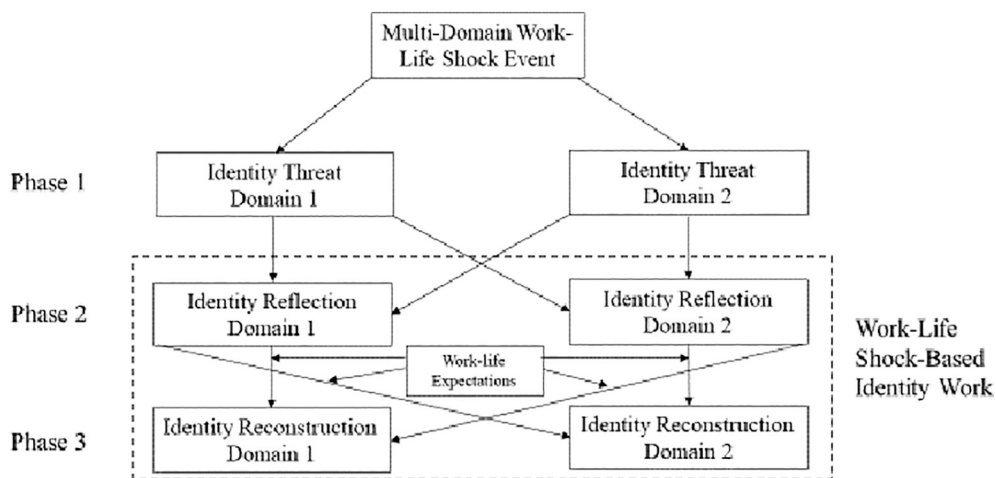


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of identity responses following a multi-domain work-life shock event.

Table 2
Main patterns week by week – by participant.

	Identity threat	Identity reflection	Identity reconstruction
1	Feeling overwhelmed trying to juggle working from home and homeschooling. Feeling guilty not being good enough (week 1). Feeling frustrated that one cannot be perfect on all fronts, leading to frustration about oneself (week 2). Growing anger about impossible expectations to do it all (week 3).	Realization that needs to initiate a change (week 4). Taking time for oneself to stay sane and avoid a burn-out. Feeling that one exists (week 5).	Rejection of over-perfect worker and parent. Realization that being imperfect or average is ok (week 6). Integration of work and non-work identities to create a more balanced identity. Perception that one can learn from the COVID (week 7).
2	Feeling torn between work and family identity. Feeling being nothing (week 1). Losing oneself, feeling that one no longer exists (week 2).	Questioning about who she wants to be: feeling in-between (week 3). Realization that one needs to take action, be in charge of oneself (week 4).	Let go of work identity and identity trials (week 5). Pandemic allows to see one's own strengths (week 6). Becoming a stronger person, more resilient. Shift in priorities. Strengthening of family identity and reduction in work identity (week 7).
3	No change as grandparents took care of child (week 1). Juggling child and working from home, finding is increasingly difficult (week 2).	Let go of ideal worker image. Work identity becomes less salient (week 4). Trying to work out an identity or balance that works for them (week 5).	Feeling that one has changed: development of a more authentic self. Less reliance on social norms (week 6). Strengthening of family identity: feeling more in line with one's own values (week 7).
4	Trying to maintain ideal worker image and work as if nothing changed (week 3). Mourning of loss of work identity. Feeling forced into family identity (week 1). Feeling angry and resisting loss of work identity (week 2).	Realization that one needs to accept the situation as resisting it goes nowhere (week 3). Let go and appreciation for family time (week 4).	Strengthening of other positive identities related to hobbies (week 5). Broadening of identities and being a bit of everything (week 6). Belief that one is a better, more balanced person (week 7).
5	Missed work. Dreading working from home with three children at home (week 1). Missed professional identity, the disconnect from family identity (week 2).	Realization that one needs to focus on non-work related identities to move forward (week 3).	Positive family identity change (week 4). Strengthening of maternal identity (week 5). Accepting the forced reinforcement of one's parental identity. Starting to see this as something positive (week 6).
6	Feeling being not fully family-identity and not fully professional identity (week 1). Continue to maintain the ideal worker image, leading to stress and exhaustion (week 2).	Realization that one cannot continue working as usual and that things need to change (week 3). Realization that one needs to control one's own life (week 4).	Refusal to rely on work identity. Change in priorities (week 7). Took pressure off both perfect family identity and perfect work identity. Found new balance that worked for them (week 5). Accepting oneself as an imperfect person (week 6). Being a more authentic, real, well-rounded individual. Feeling more comfortable with oneself (week 7).
7	Difficulty to work from home with child. Working lots as boundaries are blurred (week 1). Lack of time for oneself (week 2). Feeling to be on-hold, loss of self. Feeling stressed (week 3).	Realization that one cannot continue like this (week 5).	Focusing on the positives in life. Belief that one is lucky, that everything is relative (week 6). Feelings of gratitude for life (week 7).
8	Feeling overwhelmed, losing oneself (week 4). Feeling overwhelmed. Feeling being reduced to nothing (week 1). Trying to juggling everything, leading to strain and stress (week 2).	Rejection of reliance on work identity only. COVID forces to disconnect from work and rethink one's priorities (week 6).	See benefit in the lessons learned during crisis and feels more equipped to handle another crisis. Being able to act upon long-held beliefs (week 7).

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Table 2 (continued)

	Identity threat	Identity reflection	Identity reconstruction
	Exhaustion, frustration, feeling not being good enough both at work and at home (week 3).		
	No space for oneself, going mad (week 4).		
	Lowered expectations on all fronts to stay on top of things (week 5).		
9	Doesn't feel comfortable with the uncertainty inherent to the COVID. Perception of strain (week 1).	Seeing some positives in new routines. Enjoys being home more (week 5).	Does not feel one's identity has changed. Got used to working from home (week 6).
	The refusal to let crisis impact work (week 2).		Looking forward to going back to work once the pandemic is over (week 7).
	Behave as if nothing changed. Feeling on hold, waiting (week 3).		
	Feeling fed up with the crisis (week 4).		
10	Mourning loss of professional identity, feeling lost (week 1).	Realization that he needs to take on new activities/identities to move forward (week 3).	Reconnect with old, non-work-related self. Search for sense of existence (week 4).
	Feeling frustrated without work identity, feeling family identity was rejected by family. Down period (week 2).		Embracing parental identity (week 5).
			Being a more complete, well-rounded person: integration of multiple identities (week 6).
			Feeling that one exists beyond one's work identity. Feeling fuller, more complete (week 7).
11	Feeling lost, bored and useless without work identity (week 1).	Confinement as something positive to discover other aspects of oneself (week 5).	Strengthening of parental identity (week 3).
	Difficulty to let go professional identity (week 2).		Discovery of parental identity that gives greater satisfaction (week 4).
			Not going back to old self: permanent change of identity that aligns with one's values (week 6).
			Change in identity where work identity and family identity both have their place (week 7).
12	Feeling unprepared for confinement and denying the need to adapt (week 1).	Reduced work identity as juggling all became unsustainable (week 4).	Development of more balanced self that incorporates multiple social identities (week 7).
	Juggling identity and professional identities is unsustainable (week 2).	Time to reflect and an opportunity to learn about oneself (week 5).	
	Feeling stressed and overwhelmed when trying to maintain ideal worker standard (week 3).	Realization that one needs a balanced self (week 6).	
13	Feeling sad without work identity and angry about being forced into family identity (week 1).	Giving in to confinement and start seeing the positives. Time to think, time for oneself (week 4).	Aware of what he no longer wants to be after confinement. Belief that one has changed. Lack of societal expectations leads to exploration of one's own needs and wishes (week 6).
	Realization of importance of professional identity (week 2).	Exploration of non-work related identities: Feelings of existence beyond work identity (week 5).	Belief that COVID will lead to structural changes to his sense of self (week 7).
	Feeling one has nothing apart from work identity (week 3).		
14	Feeling torn between work and family identity and feeling being bad at both (week 1).	Let go of ideal worker image and open about multiple identities and commitments to employer (week 5).	Feeling one is true to oneself, feeling authentic and honest (week 7).
	Feeling that children and working from home fulltime is impossible (week 2).	Rejection of prevailing social norms in work context. Positive attitude about people showing their "full" self (week 6).	
	Feeling constantly overwhelmed, frustrated and guilty (week 3).		
	Finding pretending to do it all increasingly difficult. Increasing need to be authentic (week 4).		

Table 3
Main patterns per phase with additional illustrative quotes – by group of participants.

Group 1: working from home and care	Additional illustrative quotes	Group 2: loss of/reduction in professional activity	Additional illustrative quotes
<p>Work-life identity threat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private and professional spheres merge and blur, making it difficult to keep identities separate • Increase in fatigue and stress • Feelings of guilt toward employer and family • Feelings of inadequacy as professional and as parent • Lack of time for themselves: psychologically straining • Increasing feelings of vulnerability • Feelings of burnout and losing themselves 	<p>It's like you're a multitasking machine where you are everything all the time. You help the kids with school, while logging into a zoom for work and trying to buy some groceries online (participant 8, week 1).</p> <p>I feel torn as I'm neither a good mum, nor a good professional. I'm just nothing right now (participant 2, week 1).</p> <p>I need to show that I'm useful and important for the organization, so that makes things really hard. I wish I could just pretend that I'm working and look after the kids properly, but I just have to keep going (participant 6, week 2).</p> <p>I'm trying to do 200% right now, so I'm basically mediocre on all fronts which is frustrating and makes me feel bad about myself (participant 1, week 2).</p> <p>I'm very stressed out. I'm not managing this well and I don't see what I can do to change this (participant 7, week 3).</p> <p>I'm losing it. I feel overwhelmed and stressed. There are no breaks, I can't charge my batteries and that makes it too hard over time (participant 12, week 3).</p> <p>I'm not saying it's easy, because my partner and I are both working from home and we need to home school our children now too, but I have to outline that it is not all sadness and struggle either. To me it's also an opportunity to see life from a different angle. We tend to always go on and on and now we're forced to stop and stand still. This allows me to think about what I want in life and whether I may need to change (participant 12, week 5).</p> <p>I have stopped trying to continue work as usual and now let it all go. There's no recipe that works for everyone. You just have to try and find your own balance (participant 2, week 5).</p>	<p>Work-life identity threat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling lost without work • Not knowing what do to/boredom • Forced to take on a role they do not want • Grief over loss of work • Awareness that work took a lot of space in their lives • Feelings of anger over situation • Resistance to "give in" and accept situation 	<p>I'm so bored! I can feel every minute and want the days to pass. I feel useless without work (participant 11, week 1).</p> <p>I'm doing more at home right now, but I'm not too keen. I was happier being away a lot for work (participant 13, week 1).</p> <p>I love my job, it's my life! Now I feel I've lost it all because of this stupid virus (participant 10, week 2).</p> <p>So my work has been taken away from me and I'm supposed to just let that happen. Of course, I have no choice, but I find it really tough (participant 13, week 2).</p> <p>I hate this situation, but I suppose I just have to accept it or else I'll be upset forever (participant 4, week 3).</p> <p>Now that I can't be a psychologist I have to focus on other things I like (participant 5, week 3).</p> <p>When you're home all the time it does make you think. All of a sudden you do have a lot of time and you don't easily fill it up with painting a room for example. I really rediscovered myself, not my role as a parent necessarily, but my old self, the one I was before I started working and had a child. I loved lots of things before that I have lost over the years and now I reconnect to all of this, which is great (participant 10, week 4).</p> <p>I was probably afraid of the confinement at first as I just could not imagine being home all the time. I now see that it's not as bad as I thought as it allows me to discover other things. I usually do not spend a lot of time with my children and now I quite enjoy it to be around them (participant 11, week 4).</p> <p>Let's be honest. It's not like holidays, but it's pretty cool. The weather is great, I'm doing lots of sports, we do some do-it-yourself stuff in the house, we're trying out new recipes, work in the garden and the kids don't ask a lot of attention (participant 5, week 4).</p> <p>I've also felt strong about being an available mother, but this becomes even stronger now (participant 5, week 5).</p> <p>I'm really getting into gardening, which is taking me quite a bit of time. I'm lucky to have lots of other hobbies to occupy</p>
<p>Work-life identity reflection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong feelings of being fed up • Starting to take control of situation • Increasing feelings of agency as trying less to conform to the norm of the ideal worker and parent • Trying out what works for them 		<p>Work-life identity reflection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starting to give in to the situation/less resistance • Necessity to construct other identity • Starting to allow oneself to enjoy this period • Reconnect with hobbies and family 	

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Table 3 (continued)

Group 1: working from home and care	Additional illustrative quotes	Group 2: loss of/reduction in professional activity	Additional illustrative quotes
			myself (participant 4, week 5).
	The future will be different. I already know I want to work part-time and work more often from home. I think it helps to have a life that is not just about work but better integrates other aspects of life (participant 1, week 6).		I've picked up running again, while I did hardly any sport. It's good to feel you exist beyond work (participant 13, week 5).
			I have changed for the better. Although I like my work, I have realized that I like other things too and that I value my freedom. I think this will affect the way I work, that I need more autonomy and freedom in order to feel satisfied (participant 13, week 6).
Work-life identity reconstruction	This presenteeism doesn't make sense and I think we as employees now have proof that we can easily work from home without feeling guilty about it. It helps change those established norms that do not make sense business wise (participant 14, week 6).	Work-life identity reconstruction	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring new selves • Rejecting norms and current work practices • Wish for different balance • Notion of a new construction of the self that incorporates old self • Learning from the lockdown • Reflection on unexpected positive consequences 	Another 10 days before the end of the confinement. I feel excited, but not as excited as I had expected. The exceptional circumstances have become normal and what I hated so much in the beginning has become pleasant in many ways (participant 9, week 7).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening other identities • Rejection of old self • Exploration of new selves • Notion of a new construction of the self that incorporates old self • Learning from the lockdown • Reflection on unexpected positive consequences 	I've started to think about how I want to organize myself after the lockdown. It'll be different, I'll be a more complete person, well-rounded (participant 10, week 6).
	After all, the pandemic has been valuable, at least for the family. It's important to reconnect with one another and this forced us to become closer (participant 3, week 7).		We learn from our mistakes and the crisis has forced us to take a step back. This has actually been a good thing for nature for example, but also for my family as we spend more time together and have time for things we never had time for (participant 13, week 7).
			I've become a better person where I take the best of my pre-Covid self and will try to keep my more relaxed self I developed thanks to the Covid (participant 4, week 7).

themselves, but also posed a threat to their work and family identities as they did not adapt to the changing situation, but behaved as if the situation did not require any adjustments to both their family and work domain, which consequently made them feel as though they could not fulfill either role adequately:

The chronic lack of time breaks me up. I feel I'm easily annoyed by the kids, regularly snapping or shouting at them. I have become a worse parent because I'm trying to keep too many balls in the air right now
(participant 8, week 2)

I find it difficult to be as professional as before, there are simply too many distractions, too many non-work issues that need my attention.
(participant 12, week 2)

The participants who experienced a significant decrease in their professional activity or whose activity ceased altogether experienced significant work-related identity threat. These participants experienced a void and felt robbed of their work identities, leading to feelings of loss as portrayed in Table 3.

My profession has always been important to me, so it's kind of difficult for me now. I feel a bit lost to be honest. I'm wandering around at home, not knowing what to do. I'm reading the newspaper, but feel a bit left out as I've never been home much and the children are not engaging with me much as they are not used to my presence. It makes me feel worthless. Now that I don't have my job, what else do I have left? Not much I'm afraid.
(participant 10, week 1)

As my husband is still working, I'm obliged to take on this homemaker role, while it's definitely not what I wanted. I'm jealous he can still work.
(participant 4, week 1)

Throughout phase 1, the participants who had lost their jobs continued to mourn the loss of their work-related identities and experienced a certain level of grief now that they could not draw satisfaction from their professional activity. Moreover, as Table 3 suggests, they reported feelings of anger and, rather than accepting the situation as beyond their control, they tended to resist it.

I feel very frustrated and angry. I know it's ridiculous, because it's no one's fault, but I feel really bad about it. I should probably just let it go, but I can't. It's as if they've removed a part of me without asking. It's such a pain!

(participant 11, week 2)

It's not only the loss of work, it's also that I realize that I don't have lots of other things in life I identify with and that's confronting. I badly need other passions in life. (participant 10, week 2)

However, the work and family identities of those participants who continued employment while being confined to the home also experienced work-related identity threat as they felt they could not engage in work the way they once had.

It's changing the way I see myself as corona puts our lives upside down. I simply cannot be the same person at work as before. The situation has made that I'm less engaged with work and less engaged with the children. It makes me feel I'm not a good parent, nor a good worker, so that's quite a slap in the face as these are important roles for me.

(participant 3, week 2)

In summary, phase 1, roughly coinciding with the first two weeks of confinement, was characterized by identity threats, either in the form of total or partial loss of one's work-related identity, declines to overall well-being and feelings of inadequacy in both family and work identities.

4.2. Phase 2: work-life identity reflection

At the start of the third week, the French government announced that stay-at-home orders would continue for an additional four weeks. The news was not well received, generating further frustration and increased strain on participants.

Ok, so it's another month. In other words, we're only half-way. It just breaks me up. This is not doable. I'm losing the plot as it's just too much to handle.

(participant 7, week 4)

While this period was filled with anguish over the continued confinement directive, it appeared to trigger sense-making and identity reflection. As can be observed in Table 3, several participants expressed a need to take control over the situation and define for themselves what moving forward would look like in terms of their work and family identities.

Now that the confinement is going to take at least another month, I probably have to take action. I mean, my work is not going to adapt to me, nor is the school of the children, so the only thing I have control over is myself.

(participant 6, week 4)

I'm going mad here. It's either work or home-schooling and anything else has been put on hold. I think you can erase yourself only for a certain amount of time and I've reached a limit. I feel I'm dying, that my life has been reduced to pleasing or looking after others and that there's no space for myself...I need to redefine how I want to structure my life and who I want to be. (participant 8, week 4)

The participants reflected also upon the void of social pressure and implicit normative rules of behavior that came with the mandatory confinement and how this allowed them to think about what they, themselves, really wanted.

The positive side of the lockdown is that I no longer worry or think about what others are thinking of me. I can stay in pajamas whole day and I can also decide for myself how and when I want to work or when I want to be with the children. Overall, it gives me more freedom over how I live my life and where I put my priorities.

(participant 12, week 3)

I have to find something that works for me, my partner and the children. Maybe it's because I don't see my colleagues and I don't go physically to work, but in my head things are slowly changing. My priorities are changing. Society will change once this crisis is over, it's an opportunity to change this for good in my opinion and that includes work. I like my job, but I refuse to work all the time.

(participant 3, week 5)

The participants who were home due to job loss were beginning to make sense about the importance of their work identities to their overall lives.

It makes me think about what I have and who I am without work. It's a bit scary to think that we're all running around, feeling very important and that all of a sudden, there's nothing. you're no longer this real estate agent. At least it makes me realize how important work is to me and that it's important to have something to fall back on. Not financially, but in terms of who you feel you are.

(participant 13, week 2)

We started to see evidence that they were adapting to having more time with their families and seemed to grow increasingly ambivalent to the situation and how it had affected them both professionally and personally.

I have to find new, different activities, make myself useful and find a way to define myself that is not related to work. It's not easy, but it's the only way forward I have. (participant 10, week 4)

I probably didn't want to acknowledge that the crisis will affect me personally. Now that I can't work I need to find other things to do and be and since I have children, this is taking most of my time. I'm becoming a parent before anything else. (participant 11, week 3)

They reflected on who they wanted to become after the lockdown, which was in most cases very different from who they considered themselves to be before the confinement.

I'm not sure yet how things will be after the lockdown, but at least I know what I no longer want. That's already something.
(participant 13, week 6)

In sum, phase 2 consisted of a desire to reflect upon and decide for themselves how they wanted to give meaning to their lives and who they wanted to be both personally and professionally. The void of social norms as a consequence of the confinement spurred identity reflections on who they felt they could and wanted to be.

4.3. Phase 3: work-life Identity reconstruction

During phase 3, the participants who were caring for their children while working from home began to embrace an identity and lifestyle that felt more authentic and was less focused on societal norms. Table 2 reveals how this unfolded for each participant.

I've sent a mail to my manager to explain that I'm struggling and that right now, I cannot meet deadlines or always be available for meetings online. I just can't. He was very understanding, so I guess it's indeed up to me to set my boundaries. I want to be a balanced worker who doesn't have to hide my different commitments.

(participant 14, week 5)

The end of the confinement is in sight and I have changed a lot. The confinement puts your own role in society in perspective. Do you want to be a little piece in a big machine or do you want to be independent and self-sufficient? I've made up my mind as I no longer want to be part of this crazy machine. Being a good parent, a kind neighbor, someone who has time to help others is much more important to me. I might become less important in the eyes of others, but for me, it's growth.

(participant 3, week 6)

Society will never be the same and that's a good thing. It has made us all aware of the limits of the current system and ways of working. Now we can rebuild a society that works better, that includes other aspects of life and that is more inclusive. When I think about myself, I'll be a better person, both professionally and personally as I have understood how important it is to stand up for your own well-being in order to be a good writer, be a good parent and a loveable partner.

(participant 12, week 6)

Participants who experienced any degree of job loss also began to express how the confinement was fostering identity change and expressed a greater sense of appreciation for family and leisure time.

Now that I cannot remember what day it is, you get into this mood where you just let things go and go with the flow. I never have that, but it's enjoyable. I'm no longer this uptight, stressed person I usually am, but I'm way more relaxed, I think the whole family appreciates that too.

(participant 4, week 4)

As the kids are home I feel like a father more than ever. Home-schooling is very time-consuming, but since I have a lot of time, I'm taking my role seriously. It's different than before, but it's important too.

(participant 10, week 5)

I've picked up running again, while I did hardly any sports. It's good to feel you exist beyond work.

(participant 13, week 5)

Almost every participant had started to construct a revised self that reflected a more flexible approach to integrating work and family identities based on their own terms rather than what society expected of them. The participants highlighted that while they were looking forward to the end of the confinement, it had also led to some unexpected positive consequences in the form of deep reflections about their own needs and wishes, leading to a redefinition of their work and family identities. Table 2 provides a detailed description of this journey for each participant.

It's a bit early to say anything yet as we may all just continue where we left off, but I believe it will lead to structural changes also within our family and at work where we have to rethink how we're going to get work done in a way that suits the needs of the business and the individual employee.

(participant 13, week 7)

I'll never let myself be soaked up by work again. Life's too short to just work and sport, friends and family are way more important. My priorities have shifted as I'm now aware that other things are enjoyable and important too.

(participant 10, week 7)

In sum, in phase 3, participants reconstructed a renewed sense of self by rejecting old ways of working in place of new practices in which ideal worker and parenting norms were relaxed in favor of more authentic identity expressions and a greater balance between work and family identities.

To conclude, the confinement as a multi-domain work-life shock event led to an identity threat for working parents in France. Throughout a period of seven weeks, the participants started to use the confinement period to reflect upon and revise their work and family identities that better aligned with their internal beliefs. As summarized by one of our participants at the end of the seven-week period:

I have to admit that there are positive sides to it. If you can get rid of this idea that everything needs to be perfect, home-schooling actually gives you a lot of freedom over when you want to work, how you want to work....the biggest change is that I feel more comfortable with myself, my imperfect self and that I care less about what needs to be done or how I appear to others... It's no longer others who dictate who and how I should be, but it's myself, which changes how I see myself....it makes me a stronger, purer person.

5. Discussion

The present study investigated identity responses among working parents to the multi-domain work-life shock event posed by the sudden and mandatory home confinement in France during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on diary and interview data of 14 working parents throughout a period of seven weeks, the findings contribute to the work-life shock events (Crawford et al., 2019) and identity (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2008; Petriglieri, 2011; Shepherd & Williams, 2018) literatures by focusing on a unique event that impacted two important domains with which individuals tend to identify: work and family. Although work-life shock events may impact more than one life domain through spillover effects (Dahm et al., 2019), the direct impact of the COVID-related confinement on both one's professional and personal lives made this an extreme context in which to study work-life identity change.

The study adds to our understanding of the dynamic nature of the way individuals perceive and react to experiences in work and life domains (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). Collecting longitudinal data allowed us to uncover how responses to the confinement unfolded in multiple domains over time, thereby extending earlier research that focused on perceptions of and reactions to work-life shock events in a single domain (Crawford et al., 2019). Data analysis revealed three identity responses among the study participants: work-life identity threat, identity reflection, and identity reconstruction. While the confinement was initially appraised as a negative event disrupting their habits and routines, over time individuals seemed to perceive it as an opportunity to reflect on their past, present, and future selves and use these reflections as a starting point for identity change (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016).

We found that the loss of participants' work identities threatened their sense of self as they "struggled to establish a 'new normal' and a changing sense of self" (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014, p. 67). For example, those parents who continued their professional activity during the confinement initially tried to maintain their identity as the ideal worker and ideal parent, which aligns with earlier research that found that maintaining one's identities in the face of potential threats is "a core preoccupation in sense-making" (Weick, 1995, p. 20). However, this strategy for dealing with multiple threats turned out to be unsustainable over time, leading individuals to engage in identity work that resulted in reconstruction of their identities in multiple domains. Thus, the multi-domain work-life shock event represented by the COVID-19 related confinement appeared to drive shock-based identity work.

The study also provides insight into the conditions in which identity threat can lead to positive outcomes for individuals (Dutton et al., 2010). Three factors seemed important in the case of the COVID-related confinement: the severity of the shock, its enduring nature (lasting over several weeks), and the fact that multiple domains were involved. These factors pushed individuals to call into question who they are, can be and want to be. As the confinement evolved, participants reflected upon what they considered most important in life; for most, relationships with important others tended to be prioritized compared to their career.

The findings suggest that separate processes contributed to identity growth for the two groups of participants. For the group of participants who experienced both heightened demands of work and increasing responsibilities at home with childcare and/or home-schooling, the identity threat posed by the confinement was in the form of a suddenly blurred boundary between their work domain and family/life domain that required them to navigate the norms of what it means to be an "ideal worker" and "ideal parent." Upon reflecting on their identity in both domains, members of this group realized that they needed to engage in boundary work (Kossek et al., 2012; Kreiner et al., 2009) as well as identity work to take control over their own lives. As they reconstructed their identities in both domains, they tended to reject societally imposed notions and develop their own notions of what it meant to be a good working parent.

For the group of participants who experienced a steep decline in or hard stop to their professional activities, the identity threat posed by the confinement was in the form of a strong and sudden feeling of loss from being unable to fulfill their work identity, combined with a strong and sudden increase in their home responsibilities. Upon reflecting on their identity in both domains, members of this group realized they needed to give in to their drastically altered work and family situations and move forward by drawing upon new or long-lost identities. Thus, it appears that members of these two groups of participants tended to arrive at positive outcomes in the form of identity growth during the confinement, albeit by different paths.

Thus, the study extends earlier theory and research by examining a work-life shock event and related identity threats that called for identity work in both domains. Whereas prior research has considered threats and shocks within a single domain (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2007; Crawford et al., 2019; Elsbach, 2003; Petriglieri, 2011), our study shows that the simultaneous work and family confinements affected all areas of life. The findings stress the interconnectivity of the multiple identities that comprise an individual's sense of self and show how identity change may occur in response to crisis situations.

Fig. 1 presents a conceptual model that summarizes how we make sense of our own findings. It describes a three-phase process by

which individuals engage in identity work in response to identity threats triggered by a multi-domain work-life shock event such as (but not limited to) the COVID-19 related confinement. First, the event poses threats to identities in the multiple domains of work (which we refer to as “Domain 1” in Fig. 1 for convenience of discussion) and life (or family, “Domain 2” in the figure). Next, the simultaneous threats in Domains 1 and 2 lead individuals to reflect upon their identities in both domains; that is, the identity threat in each domain promotes reflection on one's existing identity in both domains. In turn, identity reflection in each domain leads individuals to consider the need for identity reconstruction in one or both domains.

In the model, the relationships between identity reflection in Domains 1 and 2 and identity reconstruction in Domains 1 and 2 are moderated by work-life expectations, which represent societal answers to the questions, “What makes an ideal worker?” and “What makes an ideal parent?” In reconstructing their identities in their work and life/family domains, individuals may be influenced both by reflecting on their own identity in each domain and by societal-level expectations for what their identity and behavior in each domain should be. We refer to the processes of identity reflection and reconstruction in both domains in response to identity threats in both domains as “work-life shock-based identity work.” Overall, the model in Fig. 1 depicts the interconnectivity of identity threats and identity work in one's work and life domains in response to a multi-domain work-life shock event. We recommend future testing of this model using longitudinal data collected in response to different multi-domain shock events.

However, as the findings suggest, some of the participants moved through the three phases of our model faster than others. Why was this the case? First, some participants may have experienced greater identity threats than others (Petriglieri, 2011). More severe identity threats were likely to have promoted greater (perhaps more painful) identity reflection, which in turn made identity reconstruction more challenging.

Second, some participants may have been more psychologically resilient in dealing with the identity threats posed by COVID-related confinement than others (Killgore et al., 2020). Resilience has been defined as “a dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma” (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000, p. 858). The pandemic certainly represented an experience of significant adversity for participants. However, some participants may have been better psychologically equipped (i.e., more resilient) than others to deal with the adversity and display more positive adaptation in the form of identity growth.

Third, some participants may have received more support from different sources than others to help them cope with the confinement (Greenhaus & Powell, 2017). Prior research has examined the effects of support received in the work domain for participation in one's family domain, and support received in the family domain for participation in one's work domain on how individuals manage their work-family interface (e.g., Greenhaus & Powell, 2003). During the pandemic, what may have mattered most was support received in the work domain for *changes in* participation in one's family domain (with family demands being even greater, especially for parents due to closed schools), and support received in the family domain for *changes in* participation in one's work domain (with work demands being even greater for many due to endless Zoom meetings and greater expectations for 24/7 availability).

Both family support and work support were more important than ever during the multiple-domain shock event represented by the pandemic. Family support may be viewed as having a supportive partner, as well as support from extended family members. Work support may be viewed as having a family-supportive supervisor or organizational culture (Greenhaus & Powell, 2017). The availability of social support from as many sources as possible was critical in helping people to cope with work-family lockdowns posed by the pandemic (Powell, 2020). For our participants, the presence or absence of support from multiple sources may have differentially affected their ability to achieve positive outcomes.

The three factors discussed in these speculations about why participants differed in their progression through phases in our model – identity threat severity, psychological resilience, and social support – may be considered as candidates for inclusion in an extended conceptual model of how individuals respond to identity threats posed by a multi-domain work-life shock event. Such an extended model would warrant future empirical testing.

We also note that our findings parallel research on role identity transitions in retirement (Bordia et al., 2020). Just as retirees actively engage in identity work as they navigate the transition from employment to retirement, the participants in the present study adapted and reconstructed new role identities. Moreover, the interdependent nature of work and non-work identities of both retirees and confinement-bound working parents seemed to help individuals as they made sense of a multi-domain work-life shock event, be it retirement or home confinement. Earlier research has shown that the transition to retirement challenges one's identity, thereby triggering identity work by the retiree to maintain or recreate a positive sense of self (Bordia et al., 2020), which mirrors the experiences of the participants in this study.

Finally, as identities in multiple domains were jolted during this highly disruptive and on-going work-life shock event, working parents were able to reflect for themselves on societal norms related to work and family. Indeed, work-family norms present working parents an image of both the ideal worker and the ideal parent (Ladge & Little, 2019). However, these norms are intended to apply to “normal” conditions for working parents and not those imposed by simultaneous work and family lockdowns (Hennekam & Shymko, 2020; Powell, 2020). We take into account the broader context of societal, ideal work, and family expectations and show what happens when it is impossible for individuals to live up to social norms both at home and at work. Prior research argues that trying to comply with such standards is unsustainable (Ladge & Little, 2019; Reid, 2015). The confinement forced non-essential working parents to work remotely while children were home with limited to no childcare, which suspended social norms of professionalism and parenting, paving the way for new identities to emerge. While prior research points to the persistence of ideal worker and ideal parent norms and the strategies individuals use to navigate them at home and work (Ladge & Little, 2019; Padavic et al., 2020; Reid, 2015; Reid & Ramarajan, 2016), we extend this research by highlighting how individuals can reject these norms under certain conditions as they define for themselves who they want to be.

5.1. Implications for practice

The findings have implications for the work-nonwork life boundary management literature. The mandatory confinement impacted the approaches of individuals used to demarcate boundaries and attend to work and family and other nonwork roles in that it blurred the boundaries (Cho, 2020). Although previous literature shows that individuals adopt various boundary management styles, depending on the centrality of their work and family identities as well as the perceived control they have over boundaries (Kossek et al., 2012; Kreiner et al., 2009), less is known about the impact of work-life shock events on the way individuals manage the boundaries between different life domains. The findings highlight that individuals have difficulties to put any boundaries between their family and work-related spheres, negatively impacting their psychological well-being. If (or when) a future pandemic occurs and countries worldwide move in and out of lockdowns, it will be important for organizations and managers to help employees navigate the challenges related to managing home-work boundaries in order to enhance their psychological and physical health and well-being (Perrigino & Raveendhran, 2020).

Our study suggests that individuals started to reject established norms during the confinement and engaged in work-family impression management strategies that highlighted positive distinctiveness and aligned with their true work-family identities (Ladge & Little, 2019). One challenge noted by our participants was the mixed messaging of their employers. While on the one hand employers expressed concern about their workers' well-being, many managers still held them to high expectations, which led to stress in the early weeks of the confinement. Post-confinement workplace practices should consider the expectations that are imposed on workers and how they may impact their lives. Ideally, employees should never feel they have to choose between their work and family (or other) responsibilities.

While our study focused on a work-life shock event that was unwanted and unwelcome, it calls attention to the notion that some people may benefit from breaks (or cracks) in their work-life. We found that the changes in a work identity, even when experienced as a negative event, can lead to positive work-life identity change. Extant research on work-life shock events such as paid leaves of absences has tended to focus on the negative implications of taking time off (e.g., Judiesch & Lyness, 1999). However, disruptive events that threaten existing identities may spur beneficial identity changes, prompting some to become more engaged in identities that may have traditionally neglected. For example, many men who were working from home due to the pandemic spent more time with their children than ever before, which was likely to have a positive impact on their role as fathers.

Identity changes are likely to impact the ways in which individuals prefer to work. The changes in identity that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic have implications for human resource management in a post-pandemic workplace. Employees may be less engaged or draw less satisfaction from their prior mode of working. For example, they may find that they prefer to work part-time, work remotely, or refrain from working overtime. Organizations and human resource managers will benefit from being responsive to employees' changing work preferences that reflect their work-family identity adaptation in ways that maintain or enhance their productivity and commitment (Ladge & Little, 2019).

The blurred lines between work and family roles during the pandemic caused stress for most individuals and placed the mental health of many individuals at risk in ways that may have had lasting consequences. As employees return to work following a work-life shock event, there may be a greater need for employee assistance programs (Cooper et al., 2011) to help them cope with their recent past as well as to strategize how to achieve their desired future based on their changed identities.

6. Limitations, suggestions for future research, and conclusions

This study was subject to several limitations, some of which have implications for future research. Participants completed their daily diaries at the end of each day in response to several guiding questions, which may have resulted in perceptual distortions associated with retrospective sense-making as well as exhaustion. However, our goal was for participants to reflect on their evolving perceptions, attitudes and feelings during the confinement, which were best assessed using this method. Also, we relied on a small sample size; future research on identity changes during work-life shock events should draw upon larger sample sizes across diverse groups of individuals in similar organizational roles or industries. Because of the small sample size, we were unable to examine whether identity change during the confinement differed according to demographic variables such as gender, age, industry, or type of work (white-collar versus blue-collar); future research is needed to explore such differences. Indeed, previous research shows men and women differ in the way they reacted to the confinement in France (Hennekam & Shymko, 2020) and that the self-schemas of men and women differ in that men tend to emphasize career-related roles and women tend to focus on family-related roles (Eddleston et al., 2006). Moreover, working parents seemed to be in a particularly challenging position as they were balancing working from home and dealing with family responsibilities simultaneously (Marchetti et al., 2020).

In addition, we acknowledge a selection bias, as we do not know in what way(s) the individuals who agreed to participate differed from those who declined the invitation. However, we checked whether the individuals who dropped out during the study differed from those who completed the full seven weeks and there were no notable differences in terms of gender, age, marital status, number of children, or work situation. We also explored potential differences in the themes reported on by the participants who dropped out but could not find meaningful differences here either. Although the study found evidence of identity reconstructions during the confinement, it is inappropriate to speculate about whether these changes would be long-lasting or temporary; additional longitudinal research is needed to address this question. Further, it is important to investigate the impact of the changed work and family identities on the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors at work of individuals. Moreover, identity evolution in other types of work-life shock events warrant research attention.

Although we did not collect couple-level data, our study involved working parents who were most often living with a partner, with

both partners facing the same work-life shock event simultaneously. Indeed, sense-making and identity reflection and exploration occurs not only at the individual level, but also within the couple (Crawford et al., 2019). A change in the roles or identities of one partner was likely to affect the possible roles and identities of the other in multiple domains (Greenhaus & Powell, 2012; Hammer et al., 1997), which added an extra layer of complexity to sensemaking and identity work for both partners. Future research at the couple level that examines the cognitive as well as interpersonal processes by which partners engage in identity work in response to a multi-domain work-life shock event is recommended.

The proposed conceptual model in Fig. 1, which was derived from our findings, differed from other models of how individuals respond to identity threats. For example, Petriglieri's (2011, p. 649) process model incorporates more detailed aspects of identity threats and responses in comparison with our three-phase model of identity threat, reflection, and reconstruction. However, our phased model explicitly incorporates the multi-domain aspect of shock events that may trigger identity threats as well as the interconnectivity of identity work across domains; in doing so, it captures more of the nuances that occur in response to multi-domain shock events and how the different domains intersect in different ways over time. We view the two models as complementing each other, in that they reinforce the importance of considering different aspects of responses to different kinds of identity threats. Further conceptual and empirical research on how individuals are faced with and respond to identity threats in one or more domains is recommended.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the particular context of France has influenced the findings, limiting its generalizability to other countries. The important restrictions as well as the frequent extensions of the confinement might have incited individuals to stay on top of their lives and show agentic behavior rather than letting the situation control them. Feeling the need to keep control of the situation might have been less strong in countries with less restrictive measures. In France, the government laid out a national strategy leading to an eight-week period of total confinement. However, that extended home confinement leads parents to question many aspects of their lives, including who they are and want to be, might be in our human nature and will therefore something that can be found in other countries in the world (Restubog et al., 2020).

In conclusion, in the wake of a work-life shock event in the form of COVID-19 related home confinement, working parents' perceptions and reactions evolved over time. While the mandatory confinement was initially perceived as a threat to their work and family identities, they gradually began to appraise the situation in a more positive light and engaged in identity work to reconstruct an identity that aligned better with their values and beliefs. As employers and employees adapt to a post-pandemic future, we show how a unique work-life shock event that severely disrupts both one's professional and personal life can result in positive identity change.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

	Sophie Hennekam	Jamie Ladge	Gary Powell
Conceptualization	X		
Methodology	X		
Validation	X	X	
Formal analysis	X		
Investigation	X		
Writing-Original draft	X	X	X
Writing-Review and editing	X	X	X

Declaration of competing interest

There is no conflict of interest to be reported.
There are no acknowledgements to be reported.

Appendix A. Guiding questions

Please describe your feelings and emotions of today.
Please report on any difficulties you have encountered today.
Please write about any positive aspects related to the confinement you have experienced today.
Please explain whether you feel the confinement changes who you feel you are.
Please write on your perception of work-life balance.
Please report on how it is for you to work right now.

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