

# Critical Events at Critical Times? A Gendered Identity Approach on the Path to (Sustainable) Leadership

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9 **Keywords:** gender; shocks; setbacks; sustainability; identifying; work-family; work-life.

10 **Words:** 12,853 **Figures:** 1 **Tables:** 1

## 11 **Abstract**

12 The early career phase is a key period of identity maintenance and change. But, it is also ripe with  
13 important, attention-grabbing occurrences (i.e., critical events) that may modify these processes,  
14 particularly influencing women's leadership pursuit. Because previous research has overlooked if or  
15 how such events might alter identifying or if these processes differ for people who identify as men  
16 and women, we integrate the identity and critical events literatures to elaborate on how positive and  
17 negative critical events may shape men and women's identifying in the work- and non-work domains  
18 over time. We propose that critical events' effects on identity salience will occur both within and  
19 across domains, but that these effects will be stronger within (vs. across) domains. While both  
20 positive and negative events can exert negative effects on subsequent identity salience, we propose  
21 that the effects of critical events on identity salience may be stronger for women (vs. men). Finally,  
22 we connect work identity salience with subsequent leadership status, including contextual moderators  
23 that enhance or undermine these effects (i.e., inclusive organizational climate and mega-threats,  
24 respectively). We conclude with theoretical and practical implications of this research, including for  
25 workforce efficiency and social sustainability. We also highlight calls for future research stemming  
26 from our review (e.g., sustainability critical events and gendered analyses for [more] accurate  
27 science) as well as fruitful research areas and innovative practices at the work-nonwork interface for  
28 professionals on the path to leadership.

## 29 **Contribution to the Field**

30 The early career period is a key phase of personal and professional development, ripe with critical  
31 events that affect how young people define themselves and pursue leadership roles. However,  
32 research on critical events has been grounded in stress and motivation theories, while also  
33 overlooking gender and event valence as key boundary conditions and moderators of critical events'  
34 effects on organizationally-relevant outcomes. Here, we bridge the careers and gender/diversity  
35 literatures to enrich this existing research with an identity lens. We consider a co-evolution of work-

36 and non-work (often family) identities, which may be more strongly affected by positive (vs.  
 37 negative) events and for people who identify as women (vs. men). Recognizing the importance of  
 38 contextual influences on how work identity salience predicts downstream outcomes like (future)  
 39 leadership status, we also include how inclusive organizational climate and mega-threats shape  
 40 subsequent leadership attainment to more comprehensively consider early career employees in  
 41 context. This theoretical framework can help us to better understand the ways in which events in the  
 42 work and non-work domains shape men's and women's identifying in their earlier career stages—the  
 43 period when most women and men are lost from paid (i.e., leadership) and unpaid (e.g., family  
 44 caregiving) labor, respectively. In doing so, we aim to highlight how critical events affect early  
 45 career professionals at a critical time for gender equity and (social) sustainability more broadly, while  
 46 also challenging research and practice to more carefully consider the accuracy of our science and the  
 47 untapped potential of the nexus between diversity and sustainability.

## 48 **1 Introduction**

49 The early career phase comprises critical, time-sensitive periods of career development  
 50 (Ibarra, 1999; Modestino et al., 2019) and family formation (Grandey et al., 2020; Little &  
 51 Masterson, 2022). This dynamic period is further shaped by critical events such as receiving a  
 52 promotion/an award or getting married, which meaningfully affect early career professionals' identity  
 53 construction, resilience, and career success (Blokker et al., 2019; Ibarra, 1999; Kraimer et al, 2019).  
 54 Critical events are important and attention-grabbing occurrences that trigger appraisal, deliberation,  
 55 and (sometimes) change (Crawford et al., 2019; Morgeson & DeRue, 2006);<sup>1</sup> they are highly  
 56 subjective and can originate in the work- or non-work realm<sup>2</sup> with positive or negative valence.  
 57 While emerging evidence suggests that critical events shape individuals' life experiences, and thus,  
 58 can also trigger dynamic identity processes that inform people's conceptions of 'who they are'  
 59 (Crawford et al., 2019; Ladge et al., 2012; Ladge & Greenberg, 2015), we lack a comprehensive  
 60 overview of identity-based processes triggered by critical events during the early career phase.

61 The critical events literature (Blokker et al., 2019; Bright et al., 2005, 2009; Kraimer et al.,  
 62 2019; Seibert et al., 2013) is often grounded in stress (i.e., job demands-resources perspective;  
 63 Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and motivation theories (i.e., career self-management; Deci & Ryan,  
 64 2000). While scholars argue that identity is important to study in its own right (Haslam & Reicher,  
 65 2006; van Dick & Haslam, 2012), identity processes also predict concrete career attitudes, choices,  
 66 behaviors, and outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, stress and well-being, work effort, promotions, and  
 67 leadership pursuit; Bagger et al., 2008; Lobel & St. Clair, 1992; van Dick & Haslam, 2012; Zheng et  
 68 al., 2021) above and beyond other mechanisms that have received more attention in the literature  
 69 (e.g., stress, motivation, and/or resources; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Deci & Ryan, 2000). In other  
 70 words, identity-related processes might explain a more modest slice of the explanatory pie in an  
 71 empirical sense. Yet, we argue that they nevertheless represent an independent explanatory  
 72 mechanism in a theoretical sense. So, by accounting for these identity-based processes, we aim to  
 73 provide a more complete understanding of early career employees' paths to leadership.

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<sup>1</sup> We generally use "critical events" (i.e., distinguishable occurrences) throughout, but we occasionally reference "setbacks" and "shocks" (i.e., "a very distinguishable event that jars employees towards deliberate judgements about their jobs"; Lee & Mitchell, 1994, p. 60), as well as "chance events" (i.e., "unplanned events"; Hirschi, 2010), where relevant. Although their definitions vary slightly, we believe the overarching concept and its potential effects on identifying, career decisions and trajectories are similar enough to justify this cross-fertilization of terms and literatures. See Table 1 for examples.

<sup>2</sup> Considering the most common kinds of critical events that early career professionals might experience (see Table 1), the work and non-work (often family) domains seem to be particularly relevant. To be clear, we move beyond the two-domain approach of "work" and "family" to more comprehensively and inclusively reflect other roles from which a person might derive meaning and identity. But, much of the existing, relevant research has focused on "family;" with the rise of dual career couples and the fact that the concurrent periods of family formation and early career which we focus here, much of the work we review and the examples we include still reflects "family."

74 In doing so, we also explicitly integrate research on gender<sup>3</sup> and critical events. Specifically,  
 75 we theorize how patterns of identifying differ for people who identify as men and women. Although  
 76 gender is one of the most significant and sizeable predictors of career outcomes and success  
 77 (Catalyst, 2020; Frear et al., 2019; Zacher et al., 2019), existing research tends to group men and  
 78 women together when discussing and analyzing critical events and their effects (e.g., Akkermans et  
 79 al., 2020; Kraimer et al., 2019; Seibert et al., 2013). According to identity theory, gender is an ever-  
 80 present, highly visible, and salient identity, modifying and interacting with other identities (Brewer &  
 81 Lui, 1989; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999; Stangor et al., 1992). Yet, much of the research on  
 82 identity and role transitions—one type of critical event—is qualitative and focuses on only women  
 83 (e.g., Ladge et al., 2012; Ladge & Greenberg, 2015; Meister et al., 2017) *or* men (e.g., Humberd et  
 84 al., 2015; Ladge et al., 2015). Acknowledging the persistent and pervasive gender roles, stereotypes,  
 85 and social expectations that may modify critical events’ effects for men and women—even more so  
 86 for younger professionals (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2012; Eagly et al., 2020)—we bridge these  
 87 literatures by including both men and women in our theory building while also proposing if and how  
 88 critical events’ effects on identity salience may differ for early career men and women.

89 Finally, beyond the individual-level, we also consider two contextual moderators which affect  
 90 the magnitude of the effect of work identity salience on downstream employment outcomes (e.g.,  
 91 future leadership status): inclusive organizational climate (i.e., organizational cultures that value their  
 92 members, include them in decision-making, and treat them fairly—regardless of their social group  
 93 membership; Shore et al., 2011) and mega-threats (i.e., negative, identity-relevant societal events that  
 94 receive significant media attention; Leigh & Melwani, 2019). We theorize that the former strengthens  
 95 the positive effect of work identity salience on leadership status while the latter undermines it. With  
 96 this multi-level approach, we more completely consider employees’ everyday realities in context  
 97 while also opening up new avenues for theory and practice beyond single employees. While  
 98 individual approaches are indisputably valuable for understanding some phenomena and processes,  
 99 they can too easily overlook the practices, organizations, and systems within which these individuals  
 100 function; in doing so, they also (implicitly) place the onus on individuals to improve their situations  
 101 (i.e., a “fix the woman” approach; Ely & Meyerson, 2000) despite many factors being entirely out of  
 102 their control.

103 In summary, this theoretical framework provides a more holistic understanding of how  
 104 critical events shape early career men’s and women’s (future) leadership via their dynamic effects on  
 105 identity salience within and across the work and non-work domains. For a complete overview of our  
 106 theoretical model, see Figure 1.

## 107 108 **2 Theoretical Development**

### 109 **2.1 Critical Events’ Effects on Identifying Within and Across Life Domains**

110 Here, we explain how critical events shape early career professionals’ identifying (an ongoing  
 111 process of identity maintenance and change; Sugiyama et al., 2022), particularly for a specific aspect  
 112 of identity, namely: identity salience. People possess multiple identities which differ in salience.  
 113 “Identity salience is conceptualized (and operationalized) as the likelihood that the identity will be  
 114 invoked in diverse situations” (Hogg et al., 1995, 257). The more salient an identity, the more likely  
 115 it is to be evoked in a social interaction (Brenner et al., 2014). According to various identity theories

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<sup>3</sup> Here, we focus on gender as a binary construct rather than reflecting the more complex, continuous diversity in people’s gender identity (see Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018). By using “gender,” we mostly relate to cis women and men, largely due to constraints from the literature we review, which used a similarly binary approach. However, here, we proactively acknowledge the continuum of gender self-definitions as well as the multiplicity of gender identities; we also acknowledge the potential limitations that our binary conceptualization of gender might entail (e.g., our theorizing on gender can be affected by who the primary childcare-giver is, if a family is comprised by a couple of lesbian women or homosexual men, etc.).

116 (e.g., Epitropaki et al., 2017; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Serpe, 1994), people implicitly  
 117 arrange their identities into salience hierarchies, with more highly salient identities more likely to be  
 118 deemed situationally relevant and subjectively important (Ashforth, 2000; McCall & Simmons,  
 119 1987). Thus, because critical events or “shocks” may be often experienced and trigger important  
 120 identity processes (see Crawford et al., 2019; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010)  
 121 during this dynamic, uncertain early life and career stage, it is important to understand how critical  
 122 events shape young women’s and men’s identity salience.

123 Despite the more dynamic quality of identity as people grow and develop over the lifespan  
 124 (Ibarra, 1999; Kreiner et al., 2006; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), people generally maintain a  
 125 sense of identity continuity to behave effectively (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Shamir, et. al, 2013;  
 126 Petriglieri, 2011). That is, initial work identity salience at one point in time should be strongly and  
 127 positively related to subsequent work identity salience, and non-work identity salience at one point in  
 128 time should also be strongly and positively related to subsequent non-work identity salience. When  
 129 critical events occur in the work or non-work domain, it is highly likely that they affect identity  
 130 salience stronger in the domain in which they occur. For example, if a young woman gives birth or  
 131 has a miscarriage, the effects of this critical event in the non-work domain may be most noticeable in  
 132 her non-work identity salience. Similarly, if a young man is fired (or promoted) from his work, the  
 133 effects of this critical event in the work domain may be most noticeable in his work identity salience.  
 134 Because shocks research also supports the idea of valence-consistent effects within domains (e.g.,  
 135 Blokker et al., 2019, Kraimer et al., 2019; Seibert et al., 2013), we similarly propose that critical  
 136 events have stronger effects within its domain of origin.

137 But, the work-family literature also shows interrelated aspects of work- and non-work-related  
 138 self-concepts, which may have counterbalancing *or* enhancement effects on identity in the other  
 139 domain (Ladge & Little, 2019; Wayne et al., 2006). Much research supports the former idea, such  
 140 that individuals’ roles and responsibilities within one domain exert a compensatory effect on identity  
 141 and activities in the other domain (e.g., Bagger et al., 2008; see Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, for a  
 142 review), which we refer to as a cross-domain effect. This idea is consistent with the depletion  
 143 perspective (see Edwards & Rothbard, 2000, for a review; Rothbard, 2001)—a fundamental aspect of  
 144 work life theories—reflecting the idea that from a fixed pool of resources (e.g., time and energy),  
 145 engagement in one area reduces the resources available in another area (Lambert, 1990).

146 While identity is not necessarily a resource, identity salience hierarchies are necessarily  
 147 structured along subjective importance (Ashforth, 2000; McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stryker, 1987).  
 148 This implies a trade-off between various sources of identity salience. Indeed, following the “hat”  
 149 metaphor by Ashforth and Johnson (2001) to describe the relative salience of multiple identities in  
 150 organizational contexts, one person cannot truly wear “two hats” at the same time. While we do not  
 151 intend to singularly promote a zero-sum approach to all theorizing on cross-domain effects, at least  
 152 for identity salience, related empirical research suggests that compensatory effects may be more  
 153 likely than enrichment effects (e.g., Bagger et al., 2008; Lobel & St. Clair, 1992). However,  
 154 admittedly, there is only a paucity of work-family research on cross-domain identity processes in  
 155 response to critical events.

156 Thus, we propose that through identifying, a critical event may have manifold effects on  
 157 identity salience beyond its initial domain of origin to cross-over and impact multiple domains (e.g.,  
 158 work and non-work). We further predict that the effects of an individual’s critical event—in the work  
 159 or non-work domain—resonate more strongly in the domain in which it originated, shaping identity  
 160 salience more prominently in that domain than potential cross-domain effects.

161  
 162 *Propositions 1a-b: Critical events affect early career professionals’ work and non-work*  
 163 *identity salience, particularly (a) within the domain of its origin versus (b) across domains.*  
 164

## 165 2.2 Critical Event Valence and Identity Effects

166

167 Critical events can be positive or negative in valence. Existing research has shown that critical  
 168 events tend to have valence-consistent effects within their domain of origin. For example, a  
 169 promotion is an ostensibly positive critical career event associated with positive career outcomes  
 170 (Blokker et al., 2019; Kraimer et al., 2019; Seibert et al., 2013). Although these studies were guided  
 171 by stress or resource frameworks, meaning that positive events triggered their positive effects  
 172 because they decreased stress or increased resources (respectively), similar claims could also be  
 173 made based on identity theory for events within domains. To illustrate, a positive critical event in the  
 174 work domain (e.g., an assignment abroad to gain essential international experience and climb the  
 175 corporate ladder) may invoke a leaders' work identity, requiring investment in the work role and  
 176 identity (Crawford et al., 2019; Kraimer et al., 2019), and thus, increases work identity salience. But,  
 177 cross-domain effects may also occur with an opposite pattern of less magnitude. More specifically,  
 178 by increasing identity salience in one domain, other aspects of identity become inherently less salient,  
 179 decreasing in subjective importance (Ashforth, 2001; McCall & Simmons, 1987).

180 At first glance, negative events may be logically expected to trigger negative effects. For  
 181 example, if one experiences a major setback at work, they may respond by reducing their work  
 182 identity salience (and also their work effort, etc.). But in contrast to the valence-consistent effects of  
 183 positive critical events, negative critical events may also cloud or obscure identity consistency over  
 184 time, resulting in more variable responses on subsequent identity salience. For example, in a related  
 185 study of shocks, Blokker et al. (2019) found that positive career shocks strengthened the relation  
 186 between career skills and outcomes, while negative career shocks undermined this relation. This may  
 187 be especially likely for early career individuals (Miller et al., 2005) who may reconsider or postpone  
 188 having children or taking on a mortgage to prevent having "one more worry" during a difficult period  
 189 (e.g., see Akkermans et al., 2020). Hence, a negative critical event can strengthen identity salience in  
 190 some cases (e.g., losing one's job may enhance family engagement), but with a broader outlook, they  
 191 may simply reduce the strength of identity salience within or across domains over time.

192 This theorizing is also supported by the limited research on critical events and shocks that has  
 193 considered the role of event valence. Although this work tends to focus on positive *or* negative  
 194 events (e.g., Seibert et al., 2013) or propose specific effects of critical events regardless of event  
 195 valence (e.g., Crawford et al., 2019), existing research that has considered both types of critical  
 196 events shows more consistent empirical support for the valence-consistent effects of positive shocks  
 197 than negative shocks (e.g., Blokker et al., 2019; Kraimer et al., 2019). Related work on leader  
 198 identity development also suggests positive events strengthen existing identity salience and identify-  
 199 ing processes more so than negative events (e.g., Epitropaki et al., 2017; Seemiller & Priest, 2015).

200 In summary, we propose that positive events enhance positive, within-domain identity effects  
 201 as well as the negative, counterbalancing effects across-domains. In contrast, we propose that  
 202 negative events may generally decrease both effects. The idea that positive and negative events may  
 203 affect not only the direction but also the magnitude of subsequent effects is supported by theory on  
 204 critical events (e.g., Morgeson et al., 2015) and empirical research on shocks and chance events (e.g.,  
 205 see Blokker et al., 2019; Grimland et al., 2012; Kraimer et al., 2019; Seibert et al., 2013). Formally:

206

207 *Propositions 2a-c: Critical events' effects on identity salience within and across domains*  
 208 *depends on the valence of the events, such that (a) positive events are more likely to*  
 209 *strengthen identity salience in the domain of origin and (b) reduce it in the cross domain (e.g.,*  
 210 *a positive event in the work domain strengthens identity salience in the work domain and*  
 211 *weakens identity salience in the non-work domain and vice versa). Furthermore, (c) positive*  
 212 *(vs. negative) events should generally have stronger effects (within and across domains).*

### 213 2.3 Critical Events, Identity Salience, and Gender

214 Gender is a fundamental, deeply engrained, and prominent category by which we classify  
 215 ourselves and others (Hentschel et al., 2019; Martin & Mason, 2022). Gender-based taxonomies  
 216 emerge already in early childhood with such strength that even the multiple dimensions within one's  
 217 identity are cognitively nested within gender categories (Brewer & Lui, 1989; Ridgeway & Smith-  
 218 Lovin, 1999; Stangor et al., 1992). Thus, gender is a highly visible and ever-present identity,  
 219 modifying other identities which may be more salient.

220 Following this reasoning, the previously proposed effects of critical events on identity  
 221 salience may depend on the focal employee's gender. Chiefly important to our theorizing, women  
 222 may be more sensitive to context than men in their identity formation as well as in their reactions to  
 223 critical events within those contexts, because they are stereotyped as a minority (e.g., in career roles  
 224 or at work) and/or they are a numerical minority within the workplace and public sphere domain  
 225 (Gloor et al., 2020; Randel, 2002). Evidence from identity research supports this idea, as women  
 226 leaders in male-dominated fields are more strongly impacted by professional and personal identity  
 227 transitions (Epitropaki et al., 2017; Meister et al., 2017). Because women are more scrutinized while  
 228 also having to address multiple and paradoxical expectations (Kark et al., 2012; Meeussen et al.,  
 229 2016; Zheng et al., 2018a; Zheng et al., 2018b; Zheng et al., 2020), they may be more vulnerable  
 230 than men, which may translate to stronger effects of critical events on identity salience for women.

231 A related stream of work-family research shows that men and women have different work-life  
 232 boundary strength or permeability (Rothbard & Edwards, 2003). According to boundary theory,  
 233 individuals construct psychological boundaries between different domains in their lives (e.g., work  
 234 and private life) while also acknowledging that boundaries vary in permeability, namely, the degree  
 235 to which one domain can influence the other (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kossek & Lautsch, 2012; Leslie  
 236 et al., 2019). These work-family boundaries have been described as more fluid and permeable for  
 237 women than for men, because of women's relatively stronger need to integrate work and family roles  
 238 (Braun & Peus, 2018; Brown, 2015; Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Halpern & Murphy, 2005; Powell &  
 239 Greenhaus, 2010; Rothbard & Edwards, 2003). This suggests that women's work-family boundaries  
 240 are also likely to be more permeable than men's boundaries. More specifically, women may more  
 241 strongly identify with both the work and non-work domains, whereas men may relate more to the  
 242 work domain while also overlooking the need to integrate both domains.

243 Thus, we theorize that the previously formulated effects of critical events on identity salience  
 244 both within and across domains may also be stronger for women than for men. Formally:

245  
 246 *Proposition 3: Critical events' effects on identity salience will be moderated by gender, such*  
 247 *that the effects are stronger for early career professionals who identify as women (vs. men).*  
 248

### 249 2.4 Work Identity Salience and Leadership

250  
 251 While identity is an important outcome worthy of study on its own (Haslam & Reicher, 2006;  
 252 van Dick & Haslam, 2012), aspects of employee identity also predict concrete career attitudes,  
 253 behaviors, and outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, stress and well-being, work effort, promotions, and  
 254 leadership pursuit; Bagger et al., 2008; Lobel & St. Clair, 1992; van Dick & Haslam, 2012; Zheng et  
 255 al., 2021). Specifically, the identity literature focuses more on internalized perceptions that build the  
 256 basis for behavior (see Haslam, 2001; Haslam & Reicher 2016). So, if a person has a strong work  
 257 identity salience, they will also behave accordingly to prioritize job-related tasks over others, seek  
 258 professional development and career opportunities, etc. The leadership literature has highlighted that  
 259 identity motivates behavior in that professionals who identify as a leader will be motivated to take on  
 260 leadership responsibilities and search for opportunities to further develop in that direction (Lord &

261 Hall, 2005; Rehbock et al., 2022). Due to this strong link between identity salience and behavioral  
 262 enactment, building theory with an identity lens seems particularly fruitful to enhance our  
 263 understanding of how changes in work identity salience shape young professionals' work behavior.<sup>4</sup>

264 To illustrate, if an early career employee experiences a critical negative event in the work  
 265 domain (e.g., an incident with an abusive boss or an act of harassment), it likely weakens their work  
 266 identity salience, undermining subsequent leadership outcomes and steps along the way to leadership  
 267 (e.g., a weakened motivation to lead and/or ambition to apply for more senior projects/roles).  
 268 Alternatively, if an early career employee experiences a positive critical event in the work domain,  
 269 such as winning a valuable prize or receiving an early promotion, it likely enhances their work-  
 270 identity salience, strengthening subsequent leadership outcomes and steps along the way to  
 271 leadership (e.g., a greater motivation to lead and/or ambition to apply for more senior projects/roles).

272 Thus, we focus on how work identity salience predicts subsequent work outcomes related to  
 273 leadership. While not all employees strive for leadership roles, we have at least implicitly focused our  
 274 theorizing on early career professionals who have at least some initial leadership ambitions until  
 275 now, a point that we now aim to make explicit. So, to be clear: while years of time may pass before  
 276 employees achieve various leadership statuses—and it can also take on various forms (e.g., more  
 277 direct reports, more power in terms of control over resources and/or decision-making tasks, a position  
 278 that is formally higher in the hierarchy, etc.; see Figure 1); we keep it intentionally broad here to  
 279 include related leadership roles, tasks, and leadership responsibilities. Formally:

280  
 281 *Proposition 4: Early career professionals' stronger work identity salience positively predicts*  
 282 *subsequent leadership status.*

## 283 284 **2.5 Contextual Moderators**

285  
 286 Finally, there are also broader elements beyond individuals which may influence if or how  
 287 professionals' work identity salience affects their subsequent leadership. While non-work identity  
 288 salience could also be theoretically related to subsequent leadership, within-domain effects tend to be  
 289 stronger and more consistent (e.g., work- or career- identity salience predict work- or career  
 290 outcomes; Lobel & St.Clair, 1992), so we focus again on work-identity salience as in Proposition 4.

291 We review two key contextual elements here: inclusive culture (i.e., organizational cultures that  
 292 value their members, include them in decision-making, and treat them fairly—regardless of their  
 293 social group membership; Shore et al., 2011) and mega-threats (i.e., societal-level critical events,  
 294 which receive media attention, are negative in valence and identity-relevant; Leigh & Melwani,  
 295 2019). Inclusive culture and mega threats are situated at broader levels compared to most of the  
 296 previously reviewed critical events, which are largely situated at the individual level. Because such  
 297 higher-level critical events may entail more frequent cues (e.g., more people are involved in or  
 298 affected by the events, more media coverage of the events, etc.), this makes these contextual  
 299 moderators qualitatively different from the previously reviewed individual-level critical events,  
 300 necessitating a new part of our model and conceptual space in our theory-building.

301 As a first contextual moderator, we integrate recent theorizing on (gendered) identity  
 302 sensemaking and leadership 'imposterism' from Kark et al. (2022) to propose that inclusive  
 303 organizational climates affect the positive relation between work identity salience and (future)  
 304 leadership for three reasons. First, in more inclusive organizational climates, demographic factors

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<sup>4</sup> While non-work identity salience could also be theoretically related to subsequent leadership status, within domain effects tend to be stronger and more consistent (e.g., work- or career- identity salience predict work- or career outcomes; Lobel & St.Clair, 1992). Furthermore, while work identity salience and leadership status undoubtedly have bidirectional effects, and related work on career identity argues that career identity change typically follows employment changes (e.g., Ibarra, 1999), work identity can also precede changes in career trajectories (see Sugiyama et al., 2022).

305 (e.g., gender, age, motherhood, race, etc.) are not as strongly related to status, facilitating employee  
 306 evaluations which are more indicative of their ability and potential rather than their visible  
 307 characteristics (DiTomaso et al., 2007; Nishii, 2013). Thus, inclusive climates may reduce the extent  
 308 to which those who differ from the societal prototype of leaders (e.g., in terms of gender, age,  
 309 motherhood, race, etc.) feel that their identity is misaligned with their desired career role (e.g.,  
 310 leadership). Second, inclusive organizational climates are less likely to trigger identity-related  
 311 sensemaking processes among (future) leaders, because they encourage greater interdependence and  
 312 mutuality (Ferdman, 2014). Unlike more traditional, highly hierarchical organizations that expect  
 313 individual, “hero” employees to have all of the answers as they climb the organizational hierarchy  
 314 (Hollander, 2009), inclusive climates place less pressure on individuals. By definition, inclusion  
 315 comprises being fully oneself while also allowing others to be fully themselves in the context of  
 316 engaging in common pursuits. Thus, collaborating is a way that all parties can be fully engaged, and  
 317 yet at the same time, paradoxically believe that they have not compromised, hidden, or given up parts  
 318 of themselves in the process. Finally, some organizational initiatives and policies (e.g., if important  
 319 meetings and events are held in a common language—or perhaps multiple languages, as needed—  
 320 and within versus after typical work hours, childcare and parental leave offerings, etc.; Gloor et al.,  
 321 2021) can also be key signals of organizational inclusion—as well as organizational responses to  
 322 patterns of organizational exclusion (e.g., higher collective female turnover; Piszczek, 2020).

323 As a second contextual moderator, we integrate recent theorizing on mega-threats from Leigh  
 324 and Melwani (2019, 2022) to propose that mega-threats affect the positive relation between work  
 325 identity salience and (future) leadership for three reasons. Recent years have been peppered with  
 326 mega-threats at the broader societal level which have undeniable effects on organizations and the  
 327 people whom they employ. For example, COVID-19 could be a mega-threat for people of Asian  
 328 descent (because it triggered harassment and aggression toward people of apparent Asian decent),  
 329 while police killings of people of color could be a mega-threat for people of color (Leigh & Melwani,  
 330 2022). Similarly, the recent #MeToo movement (see Gloor et al., 2022) and the very recent  
 331 unraveling of *Roe vs. Wade* in the United States might constitute mega threats for women—the latter  
 332 particularly for women of childbearing age and those who may want (more) children. Of note, mega-  
 333 threats are negatively valenced by definition, in contrast to the subjectively positive and negative  
 334 critical events that we focused on previously (e.g., in Proposition 2). Mega-threats like these may  
 335 play a crucial role in how work identity salience impacts downstream outcomes like a future  
 336 leadership role, because they increase avoidance behaviors, increase work withdrawal, and decrease  
 337 social engagement in event observers who share identities with mega-threat victims (germane to the  
 338 current research, these observers include early career professionals who share identities with mega-  
 339 threat victims; Leigh & Melwani, 2022). Mega-threats theoretically enact these effects because they  
 340 blur work- and non-work identity boundaries (Leigh & Melwani, 2019)—which we previously  
 341 argued is a reason why women may be more affected by critical events than men (see Proposition  
 342 #3)—while also triggering vicarious harm and embodied threat (i.e., an appraisal that one is more  
 343 likely to personally encounter identity-based harm; Leigh & Melwani, 2022). For each of these  
 344 examples, they are also broader, societal—if not global—events that foster discussions at work,  
 345 affect multiple individuals with whom one might interact with at work, while also generating widely  
 346 shared media attention. For these reasons, mega-threats may also have (more) frequent cues.

347 Thus, more inclusive organizational climate can reduce the negative (and enhance the positive)  
 348 identifying processes resulting from more individual critical events predicting subsequent leadership  
 349 status. In contrast, mega-threat(s) can exacerbate the negative (and undermine the positive)  
 350 identifying processes resulting from more individual critical events predicting subsequent leadership  
 351 status. But while this theorizing explains how these two contextual moderators shape the dynamic  
 352 identifying processes proposed in the first stage of our model, we focus our theorizing here more  
 353 specifically on how these contextual factors affect the (positive) relation between work identity



354 salience and subsequent leadership status. In doing so, we more centrally build on Proposition 4 to  
 355 further theorize how these two contextual factors may individually affect the baseline positive  
 356 relation between work identity salience and downstream outcomes like leadership status.<sup>5</sup> Formally:  
 357

358 *Propositions 5a-b: Contextual factors moderate the positive relation between work identity*  
 359 *salience and subsequent leadership status, such that (a) inclusive organizational climates*  
 360 *strengthen this relation, while (b) mega-threats weaken this relation.*  
 361

362 In summary, we propose that critical events can shape identity salience both within and across  
 363 domains, but that they trigger stronger effects within (vs. across) domains. While positive events may  
 364 strengthen positive, within-domain identity effects and the negative, cross-domain effects, negative  
 365 events may weaken both effects. Furthermore, we propose that these effects are stronger for people  
 366 identifying as women than for people identifying as men, because women are more sensitive to  
 367 context and have more permeable work-family boundaries than men, which means that women may  
 368 react more strongly to critical events than men. We then connect identity salience to important  
 369 downstream outcomes such that work identity salience positively predicts early career professionals'  
 370 (future) leadership status. Finally, we also consider contextual moderators that shape the magnitude  
 371 of the positive relation between work identity salience and leadership status—inclusive organ-  
 372 izational climate and mega-threats: while the former enhances this effect, the latter undermines it.  
 373

### 374 **3 Discussion**

375  
 376 Integrating the critical events and gender/diversity literatures with an identity lens, we  
 377 explored the idea that positive and negative critical events shape early career professionals' identity  
 378 salience, particularly within—versus across—domains, generally triggering stronger effects for  
 379 women than for men. While we theorized that work identity salience predicts downstream outcomes  
 380 like leadership, the downstream effects of these dynamic identifying processes in response to critical  
 381 events are moderated by key aspects of the context: how inclusive the organization is and the  
 382 presence of mega-threats. Next, we discuss the implications of our model for theory and practice.  
 383

#### 384 **3.1 Theoretical Implications**

385  
 386 First and foremost, we built theory about how critical events affect identifying over time. In  
 387 doing so, we could more accurately predict and outline the effects of positive and negative critical  
 388 events and their effects on employees' identity salience. This builds on prior literature that has treated  
 389 work and non-work (often family) identities as separate (e.g., Amatea et al., 1986; Bagger et al.,  
 390 2008; Lobel & St. Clair, 1992; Greenhaus, 1971, 1973). Instead, and in line with more recent  
 391 theorizing on identity processes at the work-family interface (e.g., Crawford et al., 2019; Ladge &  
 392 Little, 2019), we theorized that work- and non-work (family) identity salience likely enjoy a process  
 393 of co-evolution through cross-domain effects, particularly in the wake of positive events.

394 Second, we also conceptually explored the idea that the effects of critical events are stronger  
 395 for women than for men. In doing so, we aim to extend existing knowledge of critical events and  
 396 shocks which has grouped employees together to analyze the effects of critical events (e.g., Blokker  
 397 et al., 2019; Kraimer et al., 2019; Seibert et al., 2013). By considering gender as a primary identity  
 398 component and a major aspect of the process through which critical events affect work- and non-

---

<sup>5</sup> While these moderators may also interact with each other (i.e., a more inclusive culture buffers employees from the negative effects of mega-threats; Leigh & Melwani, 2019), preserving the positive relation between work identity salience and leadership status), we focus here on their independent, individual effects as a first step.

399 work-related outcomes, we may better understand if and how early career men and women respond  
 400 to critical events. In doing so, this research also aims to complement research in related areas (i.e.,  
 401 critical events and identity transitions), which tends to focus on men *or* women (e.g., Crawford et al.,  
 402 2019; Ibarra, 1999; Ladge et al., 2012; Ladge & Greenberg, 2015; Meister et al., 2017).

403 We theorized that women are more susceptible or sensitive to critical events and their  
 404 identity-related effects than men due to their relatively lower power and status in organizations  
 405 (Catalyst, 2020; Henningsen et al., 2022) and because of the dual and multiple societal expectations  
 406 and pressures that women may experience and internalize in earlier adult ages (Meeussen et al., 2016;  
 407 as previously described). However, this idea also builds on recent theorizing on the physical, bodily  
 408 changes that may also make women more vulnerable to critical life events, particularly within this  
 409 early- to mid-career period (e.g., Grandey et al., 2020). Because women may be more vulnerable at  
 410 work and more involved in childbearing and rearing at this stage than men (Gersick et al., 2000;  
 411 Grandey et al., 2020; Little & Masterson, 2022), they are likely more attuned to or affected by critical  
 412 events, many of which are related to their personal life experiences. Related research supports this  
 413 idea, because women are also more field dependent than men (i.e., more reactive to external stimuli;  
 414 Haaken, 1988; Martin, 2000). While this field dependency has been interpreted as a “lack of  
 415 independent thinking and a regrettable inability to separate one’s reactions from contextual  
 416 influences” (Calás & Smircich, 1992, p. 232-233), this “contextual sensitivity” may also be a strength  
 417 (e.g., see Haaken, 1988). For example, leaders who are more sensitive to context may also perform  
 418 better along progressively vital social and environmental sustainability outcomes (see Byron & Post,  
 419 2016; Matsa & Miller, 2013; Post, 2015). Hence, instead of focusing on women’s sensitivity as a  
 420 weakness to be overcome, it may (also) indicate a need to help men in strengthening their sensitivity  
 421 to context—including, but not limited to critical events. Indeed, young men may be more influenced  
 422 by new norms that prescribe men to invest more in their family, suggesting a potential opportunity  
 423 for change (Meeussen et al., 2016), perhaps especially in the wake of a (positive) critical event.

424 Considering the greater permeability of work-life boundaries for women than for men, one  
 425 could also expect gender to function as a moderator for cross-domain effects of a critical event in one  
 426 domain on identity salience in the other domain. For example, getting married, a critical event in the  
 427 non-work domain, may have stronger effects for women’s work identity salience than for men’s  
 428 work identity salience. This is because women may be more sensitive to—and more often confronted  
 429 with—external expectations about their new role identity as a legal partner and/or a potential parent  
 430 (see Gloor et al., 2018a; Gloor, Sander, & Meister, 2021; Rivera, 2017). Similarly, the latter part of  
 431 our model might also be more precisely depicted with a moderation by employee gender. That is,  
 432 inclusive climate and mega-threats might be more influential for women (vs. men)—just like the  
 433 front-end of our model—for some of the same reasons (e.g., women are more sensitive to context and  
 434 have weaker boundaries between work and non-work domains compared to men) and because  
 435 women are often the target of mega-threats (e.g., the recent undermining of women’s [reproductive]  
 436 health and rights in the United States). But, many of these mega-threats are driven primarily by  
 437 race/ethnicity (e.g., mass shootings, police brutality and killings of specific groups; Leigh &  
 438 Melwani, 2019, 2022)—not gender; so, while an intersectional approach may be fruitful here to  
 439 explain the process and predict leadership outcomes, it becomes quickly complicated due to the  
 440 multiplying number of categories (e.g., race/ethnicity, plus gender, and oftentimes age) as well as  
 441 diverging predictions (e.g., for Asian women vs. Black women; see Hall et al., 2019, for a  
 442 particularly lucid review). Thus, while out of scope here, we encourage future research to more  
 443 thoroughly explore if and how our model might be depicted (e.g., with an intersectional lens).

444 Finally, despite increasing research on critical events, shocks, and related concepts, our  
 445 review of the literature—and thus, also our theory-building—was admittedly limited, because it  
 446 focused on “typical” professional and personal events (e.g., job loss or childbearing) and largely took  
 447 a human resource management perspective. Together, these factors limit our understanding of how

448 sustainability affects gendered critical events (and vice versa), as well as the implications of these  
 449 dynamics for (future) leaders—critical issues to better tackle grand challenges. For example, climate  
 450 change creates social perils like conflict and extreme weather (Zhang et al., 2007), which may trigger  
 451 one (or more) critical events; these events may not only differ from those we previously reviewed,  
 452 but they may also trigger more critical events (see Gloor et al., 2022; United Nations, 2018). We also  
 453 know that social and environmental sustainability are deeply related, because vulnerable  
 454 populations—including, but not limited to women—are more frequently and severely affected by  
 455 climate change and related issues while women may also be uniquely positioned to lead towards  
 456 more (social) sustainability (Byron & Post, 2016; Chang et al., 2022; Gloor et al., 2022; Matsa &  
 457 Miller, 2022).<sup>6</sup> Given the short timeline to meet environmental goals, paired with widespread global  
 458 talent shortages (Franzino et al., 2022) and the increasing numbers of (climate) migrants who may be  
 459 particularly prepared to tackle these challenges, scholars and organizations should not overlook these  
 460 “sustainability *mega-critical-events*” and their multifaceted implications for theory and practice.

### 462 3.2 Practical Implications

463  
 464 One recommendation from our research for early career professionals could include active  
 465 identity-based reflections. In doing so, these early career professionals may grow more aware of their  
 466 valued identities in various domains, and thus, be better prepared to consciously adapt their self-  
 467 views, if/when needed (see Roberts, 2005). For example, professionals can implement regular  
 468 reflection sessions on a monthly or semi-annual basis by answering questions such as “Who am I as a  
 469 professional?”, “What is important to me?”, “What (un-)expected events took place and what do they  
 470 mean to me?”, “How did/do critical events in the past month or year change what I want from my  
 471 career and/or in my personal life?” (see also Rehbock et al., 2021, for suggestions of active identity  
 472 reflections for organizational leaders). Managers and leaders can support these reflections by  
 473 introducing them in regular conversations with their employees, annual meetings, etc.

474 Extending from our theorizing around inclusive organizational climates, leaders (e.g., group  
 475 leaders, supervisors, and other leaders such as deans and heads of departments in academia) would do  
 476 well to promote a culture where employees do not feel that they are alone or that they need to decide  
 477 between their career *or* their personal life to succeed or climb the organizational hierarchy into a  
 478 leadership role. Because supervisor support strategies often take the form of informal arrangements  
 479 (Kossek et al., 2016), an open and trustworthy relationship between employees and leaders may help  
 480 to meet individual employees’ needs. However, leaders can further promote inclusion and supportive,  
 481 compassionate cultures toward employees in their teams (Leigh & Melwani, 2019) by showing value  
 482 for and acceptance of employees during critical events—and perhaps especially in the wake of mega-  
 483 threats—for example, by showing commitment to employees’ needs (Ladge & Little, 2019) and  
 484 assuring psychological safety around identity-related discussions (Leigh & Melwani, 2022).

485 More generally—and building on our brief discussion of workplace initiatives and policies in  
 486 the previous section about inclusive organizational climate—flexible work arrangements, policies,  
 487 and practices at the organizational level could also enable employees to balance their multiple needs  
 488 in work and family domains (Ladge & Little, 2019). To facilitate long-term success, such efforts  
 489 must be career enabling—rather than career enclosing (Bourdeau et al., 2019)—and offered to *all*  
 490 employees, ideally in an opt-out rather than opt-in fashion (e.g., see Erkal et al., 2022; Gloor et al.,  
 491 2018b) to reduce bias and career consequences that may systematically (dis)advantage those from

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<sup>6</sup> These effects may not only be limited to female leaders of organizations, because prominent examples and research suggest that the critical event of childbearing—when gaining a female child—can also motivate fathers to become more (socially) sustainability (e.g., venture capitalist and billionaire philanthropist John Doerr; Meyer, 2021; see also Cronqvist & Yu, 2017).

492 particular social groups. Emerging evidence also suggests that an opt-out approach (vs. the more  
493 common opt-in) may also increase qualified women’s pursuit of leadership roles (Ercal et al., 2022).

494 With the broader career scope in mind, and because the largest share of trained female talents  
495 is lost (or pushed out) during the early career phase on which we focused, we hope that this research  
496 might also inform the persistent and pervasive gender gaps in leadership positions across academia  
497 and organizations (e.g., Catalyst, 2020; Henningsen et al., 2022; Kossek et al., 2016; Rehbock et al.,  
498 2021). Women often leave and/or are lost after critical events and shocks like the ones we highlighted  
499 here (e.g., pregnancy; see Arena et al., 2022; Gloor et al., 2018a; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2019;  
500 Zacher et al., 2019). However, men and women in more advanced career stages or leadership roles  
501 can proactively offer support as mentors, sponsors, and allies—by speaking openly about how to  
502 successfully integrate multiple identities from the work and non-work domain without having to  
503 choose one over the other. Increased awareness of how early career women’s and men’s identity  
504 salience and leadership pursuit differ in response to critical events may be fruitful areas for  
505 organizational allyship, thereby facilitating workforce sustainability and advancing more gender  
506 balance in representation and power where it is still particularly needed at later career stages.

507 Finally, some policies show promise to facilitate female retention regardless of the identity  
508 processes underway (e.g., reliable and affordable childcare provisions; Piszczek, 2020). Because  
509 biased turnover undermines workforce and economic sustainability, innovative approaches may also  
510 be fruitful here. For example, one organization successfully retained their employed female talents  
511 around a specific critical event—childbearing—by providing all pregnant women with a small,  
512 discretionary budget they could use to meet their diverse needs (e.g., hiring a research assistant to  
513 monitor data collection while on leave or paying for childcare help)—they only needed to formulate a  
514 concrete plan with their supervisor prior to childbirth (Hering, 2019). This approach is flexible to  
515 meet the diverse needs of early career female talents, delivered in an opt-out approach while also  
516 creating accountability—all of which are effective mechanisms from behavioral science (Bohnet,  
517 2016). Thus, such innovative strategies could also help other organizations to retain early career  
518 female talents, fortifying their leadership pipeline, and increasing workforce efficiency more broadly.

519

### 520 **3.3 Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research**

521

522 Two key limitations related to our theorizing are particularly worthy of note. First,  
523 conceptually, identity is a vast concept answering the question “who am I?” (Stryker & Serpe, 1982,  
524 p. 206). Here, we focused on one specific aspect of identity: salience. Thus, we encourage future  
525 research to expand beyond this singular, albeit critically important and influential, facet of identity.  
526 While identity centrality is a more stable aspect of identity which may be less affected by the  
527 context—including, but not limited to—critical events (Kreiner et al., 2015), posing challenges for  
528 theoretical and empirical work, the concept of misidentification (i.e., internal identity asymmetry; see  
529 Meister et al., 2014, 2017) might provide fruitful grounds for both types of research.

530 Second, critical event valence is a key factor related to the form and magnitude of effects on  
531 identity salience. While valence can be very subjective, we largely focused here on the more  
532 normative interpretations of key critical events (e.g., in Propositions 2a-c and Table 1). While we  
533 believe this event-oriented approach (a la Morgeson et al., 2015) represents a conceptual and  
534 methodological improvement by disentangling cause and effect compared to existing shocks research  
535 which tends to conflate event valence with its effects (e.g., an event is considered to be “negative” if  
536 it has a negative effect on a downstream career outcome; Kraimer et al., 2019; Seibert et al., 2013),  
537 this approach also represents an oversimplification of reality. To remedy this, we encourage future  
538 research to prospectively analyze critical event content and individuals’ subjective evaluations of  
539 event valence separately from their subsequent effects on various outcomes (e.g., identity salience,  
540 leadership status, etc.).

541 Beyond individual identity processes, structural shocks may also influence more relational  
 542 and collective identity processes. For example, there are three different levels of self (Brewer &  
 543 Gardner, 1996; Brickson, 2000) which are triggered by the context in ways that can affect identity  
 544 salience. The personal self refers to the individual level of the self-concept, mainly focused on one's  
 545 characteristics, attributes and self-interest; the relational self is derived from dyadic and small group  
 546 relationships, as well as from the roles individuals hold in relations to others (e.g., manager,  
 547 employee, etc.). Thus, this aspect of identity is mainly focused on the responsibilities and  
 548 responsiveness that comes with their roles and relationships towards others' needs. This more  
 549 collective self is based on the individuals' connections to a collective, a group or wider community  
 550 (e.g., organization, state, country, etc.) and is mainly focused the obligation and commitment to the  
 551 group's welfare (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Following this logic, different critical events and the  
 552 associated identifying processes do indeed affect individual employees across these multiple levels.  
 553 Thus, changes in the social structure, manifested in changes in relationships (e.g., organizational  
 554 layoffs or restructuring of many colleagues), can also influence early career professionals' identity  
 555 salience. These changes can influence the relational levels, but also the collective level (e.g., if a  
 556 person leaves the organization or takes a leave of absence due to some critical life event), possibly  
 557 reducing early career employees' work identity salience. Future research is needed to more  
 558 thoroughly explore and test these ideas.

559 Similarly, men and women often have partners who also work (i.e., dual-career couples; see  
 560 Crawford et al., 2019). Thus, while we focused on individual men and women in our theorizing, it is  
 561 also possible that the critical events and the subsequent identity-related processes triggered by these  
 562 events also affect the focal men or women's partners' identity salience. While new research by Little  
 563 and Masterson (2022) considered the direct, indirect, and shared crossover mechanisms of specific  
 564 critical events (e.g., having a child and returning to work) on organizationally-relevant outcomes  
 565 grounded in resource- and stress-based theories, sensemaking processes at the partner-level may also  
 566 facilitate identity-spillover effects among couples (see Crawford et al., 2019). Thus, even if critical  
 567 events more strongly affect women's identity salience, they may still meaningfully affect women's  
 568 partners (often men) and these partners' identity salience, as well.

569 Finally, previous research has called for explorations of gendered effects in the context of  
 570 critical events or shocks (e.g., Kraimer et al., 2019); here, we take this request one step further: at a  
 571 minimum, future research should not only consider the potential main effects of gender or including  
 572 it as a covariate, but scholars should also consider its potential moderating effects. In light of our  
 573 Proposition 3, for example, it could be that the previously reported effects of critical events or shocks  
 574 not only differ for men and women but may be entirely driven by women. If true, this is no minor  
 575 issue, because social scientists' inaccurate over-generalizations about empirical findings—even if  
 576 unintentional—impedes progress in our understanding of empirical phenomena *and* social justice  
 577 gains in terms of assessing and improving professional experiences and career progression for more  
 578 equity in leadership positions and in organizations more broadly (see Eagly, 2016).

#### 579 **4 Conclusions**

581  
 582 We theoretically explored the effects of critical events on early career professionals' work-  
 583 and non-work identity salience over time, including if these effects differ by event valence or for men  
 584 and women. We further considered the effect of work salience on (future) leadership status, including  
 585 the roles of inclusive cultures and mega-threats. Thus, this theoretical work highlights key insights  
 586 for a more holistic understanding of early career professionals' work- and non-work experiences and  
 587 their identity-related effects, such that not all critical events may trigger changes over time. Instead,  
 588 positive (vs. negative) critical events may trigger stronger effects on women's (vs. men's) identity

589 salience within (vs. across) domains—especially in less inclusive climates and/or in the presence of  
590 mega-threats—with implications for leadership pursuit and (social) sustainability more broadly.

591 **5 Conflict of Interest**

592 The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial  
593 relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

594 **6 Author Contributions**

595 All authors contributed to the Conceptualization; Writing - original draft, review & editing.

596 **Funding**

597 This research was supported by a Swiss National Science Foundation grant (PR00P1\_193128)  
598 awarded to Jamie Gloor. However, the funder had no role in study design, data collection and  
599 analysis, decision to publish, or the preparation of the manuscript.

600 **7 Acknowledgments**

601 We thank Jamie Ladge, Alyson Meister, and Kim Peters for their feedback on earlier versions of this  
602 research; we also thank Eugenia Bajet Mestre for her help with formatting and editing. This work  
603 began as a project led by Stephanie Rehbock when she was a doctoral student. Previous versions of  
604 this work were presented at the Mid-Year Careers Division Conference in Vienna, Austria (2020) and  
605 the Academy of Management Annual Meeting (AOM 2020), the latter of which also won a “Best  
606 Symposium Award” (Management Education and Development Division) at AOM 2020.

607 **1 Data Availability Statement**

608 There are no datasets available, because this paper is theoretical (i.e., not empirical).

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Critical Events	Valence	
	Positive	Negative
<b>Work Domain</b>	(Early) Promotion	Passed Over for Promotion
	New Position/Employment	Contract Ending
	Further Education	Job Loss
	Award/Honor for Achievements	Act of Harassment/Discrimination
	Career Choice (Desired)	Career Change (undesired)
<b>Work- and Non-Work Domain</b>	(Available) Parental Leave	(Lack of/Too Much) Parental Leave
	Moving (Desired)	Moving (Undesired)
<b>Non-Work Domain</b>	New Relationship	Separation/Divorce
	Moving in with a Partner	Forced Removal from One's Home
	Sabbatical/Decision to Travel	Health Issues, Accident
	Marriage	Death of a Loved One or Partner
	Pregnancy/Having a Baby	Having an Abortion/Miscarriage

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Table 1. Overview of Examples of Key (Early Career) Critical Events

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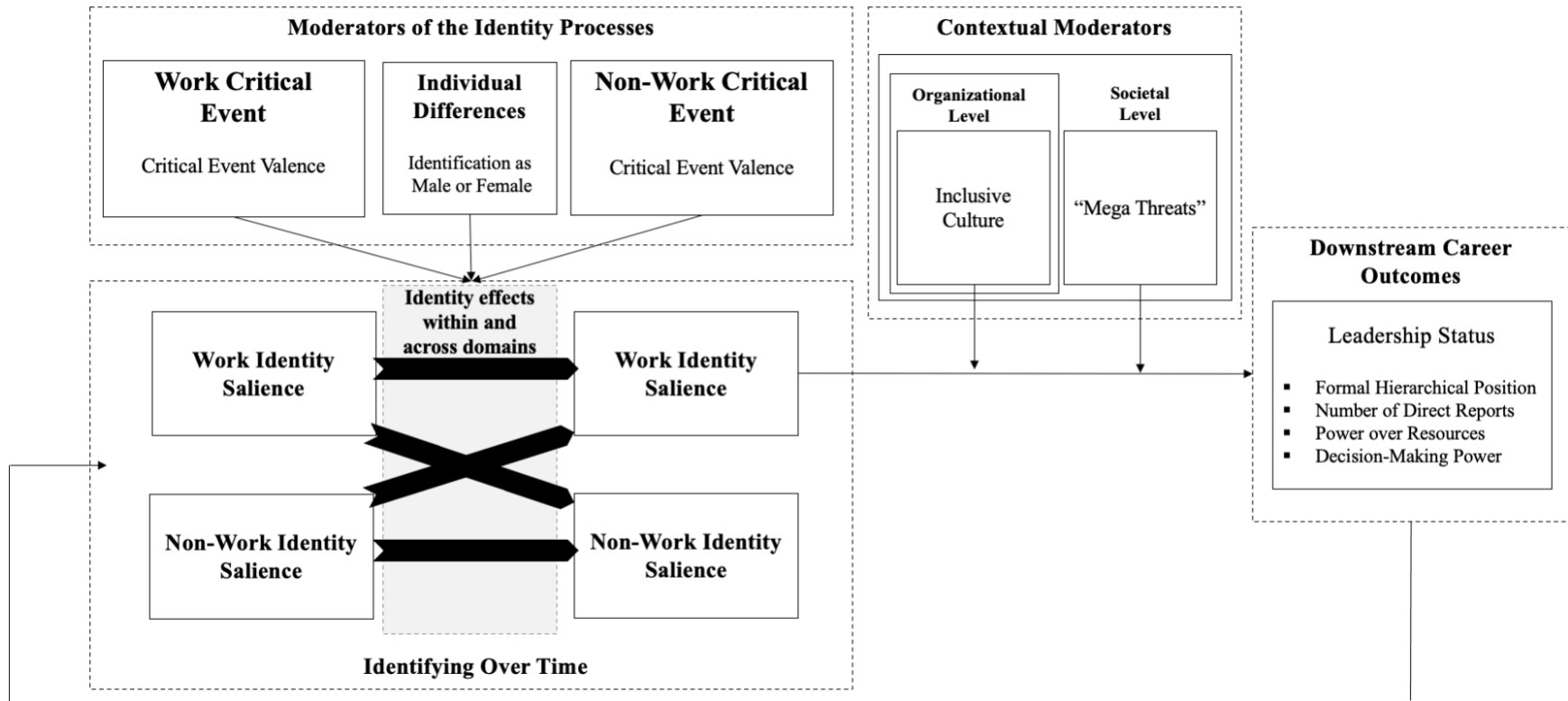
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*Note.* The aim of this table is to provide a clear overview of some key examples of early career critical events originating in various domains that may be normatively positive or negative in valence. However, that these events are highly subjective and not always uniformly experienced as positive or negative; we tried to explicitly account for this in some cases (e.g., parental leave can be quite positive for women's health and recovery after having a child, as well as men's and women's bonding and adjusting within the family; but, it can also be quite negative for one's workplace experience and trigger negative career penalties—particularly with longer maternity leaves; e.g., Gloor et al., 2018a; Hideg et al., 2018). However, we also explicitly acknowledge the trade-off between trying to build inclusive theory—generalizing to a broader number of events in our theorizing—while also attempting to accurately depict (the average) individual's experience(s).



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Figure 1. Overview of Complete Conceptual Model

Note. The block arrows represent processes.