

Grief and compassion in the workplace

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Abstract

Loss of a loved one often leaves individuals unable to function well in the workplace. This study examines workplace response to employee grief following the dissolution of a romantic relationship. Findings indicate that the loss of such a relationship contributes to a lack of focus, interest and energy that manifests in a perceived decrease in work performance; yet, employees report they do not receive the ongoing compassion and assistance they need from co-workers, managers and general organizational policies. The goal of this study is to increase understanding of this type of grief, its effects on the workplace, and the actions organizations can take to compassionately respond to and support grieving employees.

Keywords: workplace, compassion, grief, performance



INTRODUCTION

Loss is a part of life but the resulting grief often affects an individual's ability to function well in the workplace. Productivity can be lowered when the emotional turmoil following a loss causes an employee to experience difficulties in concentration and judgment, stress, depression, lack of motivation and substance abuse. This creates financial implications for the organization such as increased health costs, absenteeism, injuries, errors and missed opportunities (Stein & Winokuer, 1989; Hazen, 2009; Fitzgerald, 2002). A commonly cited figure from the Grief Recovery Institute estimates the annual cost of grief in the workplace, in both human and economic terms, at over \$75 billion. This is a persuasive indication that there are benefits in understanding how to help troubled employees.

However, this is a particularly challenging problem because the demands in the workplace can conflict with the needs of someone who has experienced a psychologically traumatic event. Bento (1994) refers to this as an interplay between "grief work" and "work life." While workplace goals are concrete, production-oriented and intellectual, loss is an affair of the heart that causes the individual to be drawn into emotional, psychological and spiritual labor (Stein & Winokuer, 1989; Bento, 1994). The resulting emotions, ranging from sadness through anger and exhaustion, can be misunderstood or even chastised by supervisors who see this as a barrier to getting the job done. Therefore, they may expect their employees to deal with these feelings only on personal time, and simultaneously may not view an upsetting state of mind as a valid reason to grant sufficient personal time for recovery. Unlike Japan where workers who feel too devastated to come to the office can take paid compassionate leave in order to mend a broken heart, studies of U.S. organizations have found that many managers do not understand the needs of grieving employees (e.g. Hazen, 2003; Bento, 1994; Stein & Winokuer, 1989). As a Wall Street Journal article titled The Workplace Can Seem Cold and Indifferent to a Grieving Employee states, "Bereavement is a blind spot for many bosses...workplace attitudes are stuck in the Industrial Age" (Shellenbarger, 1999a). Strong reader response recounted how grief over the loss of a loved one hits with such a force that one's ability to work is altered for months or years; yet many organizations treat bereavement like jury duty, warranting a few days off and little else (Shellenbarger, 1999b).

Many researchers label this lack of support by referring to the term "disenfranchised," defined as "grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publically mourned and/or socially supported" (Doka, 1989). Hazen (2003) and Bento (1994) are among those who argue that grief is disenfranchised in the workplace while Stein and Wenokuer (1989) explain that this is because "in the norms of the world of work, all losses become disenfranchised because emotions and feelings are discounted, discouraged, and disallowed." Eyetsemitan (1998) coined a related term, "stifled," to refer to recognized grief that is denied its full course due to workplace practices.

Whether disenfranchised or stifled, discounted grief is unsettling because human support is a necessary component for healing. Without the acknowledgement of others, the healing process is likely to be delayed and eventually become more severe and lengthy with effects on that worker's mental health and productivity (Bento, 1994; Eyetsemitan, 1998). Therefore, lack of concern in the present can cause the problem to become even more troublesome for both the employee and the organization in the future.

To be fair, the professional atmosphere in formal organizations and the artificial separation of work and personal life can make it easy for managers to believe that they do not

need to be concerned about their employees' private thoughts and feelings (Charles-Edwards, 2001; Bento, 1994). In addition, lack of training in appropriate ways to respond to employee grief is likely to cause managers and co-workers alike to question if a kindhearted response could cross workplace boundaries, offend someone, or break an HR regulation. Yet, there is a range of noteworthy incentives for organizations to learn more about grief in the workplace and have a role in helping employees mend. In addition to the productivity and financial implications, many argue that there are humanistic reasons for supervisors to respond to bereaved employees with compassion (e.g. Hazen, 2009). Individuals returning to work after a loss bring their grief to work with them; therefore, the responses of others in the organization will make a difference in their ability to heal and become productive again (Stein & Winokuer, 1989; Bento, 1994; Lilius et al, 2003). The response of managers is particularly significant because a demonstration of interest and understanding in the grieving employee's situation sends the message that the employee is important to the company and, on a wider scale, creates an atmosphere of trust, helpfulness and loyalty (Stein & Winokuer, 1989). For example, a study of more than 12,000 employees over a three-year period revealed that management's ability to be in tune with employees' perceptions, emotions and motivation and to "manage with a human touch" has a dramatic effect on work performance (Amabile, 2007). As Kahn (1998) points out, compassion is "part of, rather than separate from, work interactions" while Fineman (2000) responds that "Pain and compassion are not separate from 'being a professional' and the 'doing of work' in organizations. They are a natural and living representation of people's humanity in the workplace."

Yet, there is little evidence that a significant number of organizations are creating environments in which compassion for a grieving member is part of the workplace structure, policy and daily interactions. Even though it is well known that grief is often a lengthy, arduous process (Fitzgerald, 2002; Duff, 1999), studies that examined personnel policies from a wide range of organizations revealed that after the death of a loved one, employer response focuses only on the early days of bereavement (Stein & Winokuer, 1989; Hazen, 2008). Similarly, another study showed that 84% of respondents resumed full responsibilities upon return to work after attending a funeral even though these employees indicated a desire for more formal organizational support and understanding of their bereavement process (Eyetsemitan, 1998). An investigation of perinatal loss revealed that this type of grief, as with other types, is disenfranchised; three of the 14 female subjects were so devastated that they quit their jobs and only three others received regular acknowledgement and support from work colleagues (Hazen, 2003). This corresponds with a recent case study exploring the attempt to empower grieving employees at work—it concluded that individuals, in the face of bereavement, still experience insensitivity and indifference from co-workers, managers and human resource personnel alike. Findings such as these have led to a call for further exploration of the organizational actions and interpersonal behaviors that complicate or facilitate the healthy resolution of grief in organizations in order to add to the understanding of disenfranchised grief in the workplace (Charles-Edwards, 2009).

This paper contributes to this topic by examining an area that has not been given as much attention throughout the grief in the workplace literature—loss that occurs from the dissolution of a romantic relationship. The majority of studies focus on subjects whose loss has been the result of the death of a significant person in their lives. While much can be learned from these, there is still an important gap. At least one author identified the break-up of a romantic relationship as one of the two most common types of loss, along with death, that employees

found difficult to handle, affecting their ability to focus adequately at work (Charles-Edwards, 2009) while another pointed out that grief for people who are still alive is particularly misunderstood (Bento, 1994). Stein and Winokuer (1989) observed that employees are likely to find that the death of a non-marital or a non-blood loved one is often not recognized in the workplace (Hazen, 2008); therefore, one can conclude that the break-up of such a relationship would not be either.

Yet, the Institute for American Values reports that the average couple marrying for the first time has a lifetime probability of divorce or separation somewhere between 40 and 50 percent; in addition, it shows as an increase in the number of Americans choosing living together instead of marriage (Institute for American Values). Therefore individuals who experience loss through a divorce or break-up represent an important group to consider. The experience can be as devastating as the death of a loved one (LaGrand, 1989) but, in addition to the challenges already mentioned, there are some unique issues for the person experiencing a loss in this way. There is rarely a ritual or any formal recognition, such as a funeral, to aid with the healing. Individuals who did not choose the separation can become overwhelmed with anger coupled with feelings of rejection and even betrayal. Others will often minimize the experience by pointing out faults in the ex love, expecting that this should cause the griever to stop talking about the loss and “get over it” much too soon. These types of reactions are likely to cause the griever to believe that no one understands, leading to further isolation at a time when relationships are essential for coping with the significant loss (LaGrand, 1989).

This paper attempts to ease this dilemma by reporting the results of an exploratory study examining how co-workers, managers and organizational policies can assist employees who have experienced the dissolution of a marriage or other romantic relationship. It investigates how the workplace can be different when people notice and respond to employees who are in this type of pain. It challenges supervisors to care about how they manage with compassion and how their decisions can create a better organization for all.

The study had three objectives:

- To investigate the ability of employees to do their jobs following the dissolution of a romantic relationship
- To investigate the support employees receive from co-workers, supervisors and organizational policies following the dissolution of a romantic relationship
- To gather recommendations for organizations to improve the way they respond to these employees.

METHODS

Data were gathered through interviews with fourteen individuals who met the following qualifications: (a) were at least 18 years of age, (b) had experienced the dissolution of a romantic relationship, (c) were employed at the time of the loss, and (d) were willing to talk about this loss, their organization’s response to their grief, and suggestions for how the organization could better handle this type of employee grief.

Subjects were identified through convenience and snowball sampling. This proved to be effective for this delicate type of inquiry. Initial subjects agreed to participate because they were familiar with the researchers while recommendations from these subjects encouraged others to consent to an interview.

Hazen (2003) points out that numerical data cannot capture the serious toll that loss takes on a person. Therefore, open-ended questions were designed to encourage more comprehensive and meaningful answers using the subject's own knowledge and feelings.

Each subject was sent a copy of the questions prior to the interview. The sessions were not taped because the researchers felt this could impose on the comfort level and the candidness of the responses. Written notes were taken and transcribed; follow-up was made with some subjects when analysis indicated the need for clarification. The questions for the semi-structured interviews appear in Appendix B.

The questions reflected the three objectives of this study, as outlined above. After some background questions and a general summary of the relationship, part 3 of the interviews explored the first objective, the ability of employees to do their jobs following the dissolution of a romantic relationship.

Parts 4, 5, and 6 investigated the support employees receive from co-workers, managers and organizational policies following the dissolution of a romantic relationship. Because of the significance a manager's response and support can have on the employee and the atmosphere in the organization, particular attention was paid to part 5. The five questions in this part were based on Hazen (2009) who suggests that workplace managers of a grieving employee should: acknowledge the loss, account for the grief, work with the employee to minimize the potential damaging effects in the workplace, offer support, and educate other employees about how they may appropriately respond to their grieving co-worker.

Part 7 gathered recommendations about the ways in which supervisors, co-workers and organizational policies can improve the support for grieving employees. In the spirit of open-ended inquiry, part 8 provided an opportunity for further comments that were not covered in the previous questions.

RESULTS



The fourteen participants in this study represented fourteen different American organizations. Their average age was 35, ranging from 19 through 50 years. Twelve of the fourteen subjects were female; two were male. The sampling methods uncovered only heterosexual relationships. However, it was not the objective of this initial exploration to consider differences in gender or in the nature of the relationship.

A summary of each of the participants appears in Appendix A. The attempt to represent a range of ages and lengths of relationships may cause one to question whether grief can be as intense for a short-term as it would be for a long-term relationship or for a young person experiencing a break-up as it would be for a more mature person in a marriage. However, it was not the intention of this study to judge the validity of the grief. There is no value in doing this when the purpose is to investigate each person's perception of how the loss of the relationship affected his or her job performance.

Six of the participants had experienced a divorce and eight had experienced a non-marital break-up. Of these fourteen, only two initiated the dissolution of the relationship. One of these did not want to take this initiative but felt she was forced to do so because of her partner's substance abuse problem. The other also found the break-up situation to be difficult because she had to contend with the intense reactions of her ex partner for a long period of time.

When asked to tell the story of the loss, all fourteen participants reported a taxing process by using descriptive phrases such as "tumultuous," "intensely emotional," "total shock,"

“devastated,” “miserable,” “merri-go-round of ups and downs,” “horrible,” “affects on health,” “stressful,” “extreme grief,” “exhaustion” and “no self preservation.” Many struggled for words and admitted at least once during the interview that the discussion was difficult. This reaction was particularly interesting in some of the subjects who claimed, in the beginning of the interview, that they were “over” the relationship. It was rather clear to the researchers that all of the individuals had experienced powerful emotions that would not be easy to simply check at the door when they entered their workplaces.

Ability to do job

The first of the three objectives was to explore any changes in the ability to do a job. Eleven of the 14 participants reported that the loss had an effect on their job. Reasons included a lack of focus, reduced energy and passion, depression, panic attacks, preoccupation, distraction, strained patience and spontaneous crying. One subject reported, “I was miserable, either at work or at home. My mind was preoccupied with the break-up. I was functioning at my job, but nowhere near the capacity I should have been,” while another subject claimed that the passion and energy was no longer there—she saw her job as a chore to get through. A third subject reported, “I spent lots of time on the verge of tears and many times had to close the door of my office and cry for awhile... My productivity at work was very low at times and it was difficult to just do the minimum tasks some days.”

Among the three subjects who claimed there was no disruption in job performance, one explained that this was because she “rechanneled” energy into work. The second of these three reported that despite his irritability and decreased patience at work, he “put on a good face” while the third subject said she “hid stuff from people and didn’t show my emotions.”

This concealing of emotions and the attempt to redirect energy were two common findings among most of the subjects. The primary reason for not revealing to co-workers how they were truly feeling was contributed to the desire to keep the strong and professional demeanor that others were accustomed to seeing in them. For example, one subject explained that even though the break-up affected her health and caused her to feel sick, nauseous and mentally and physically exhausted at work, “people would walk up and compliment me on my performance and how it did not change.” Others explained they hid and compensated for their lowered productivity by working longer hours or taking work home—however, these subjects also admitted that this only added to the exhaustion they were already feeling.

This troubling type of situation is supported by the previously-described disenfranchising or stifling of grief in the workplace. Subjects in this study reported what past research has shown—employees perceive that workplace norms oblige them to suppress emotions and, despite what is happening in their personal lives, to continue their usual level of work performance. But Wortman and Silver (1989) explain that this is not likely to be effective in the long term because, “Those who show the most evidence of working through the loss are those who ultimately have the most difficulty in resolving what has happened.”

Some subjects reported a temporary increase in productivity because they redirected their energy into their work life as a type of “escape” from their personal life. One claimed that work made her “feel normal, like I was going to survive” while another claimed that the rapid pace of work “saved” her. Yet, despite the role their jobs played in distracting them, most admitted that they eventually realized work was not an effective way to cope with their grief. Research agrees that grieving employees may actually seem normal for a while (Stein & Winokuer, 1989). They

may, as these employees did, initially find refuge in work or may be in a state of denial and disbelief immediately following the loss. These early stages of grief may not allow true sorrow to surface for weeks or months. However, this perception of normality is difficult to sustain because the loss cannot be denied and the grief cannot be distracted forever.

Support from co-workers, supervisors and organizational policies

The first in a series of three questions examined whether and under what circumstances grieving employees informed co-workers about their loss and what, if any, support they received. Findings indicate that workers are more likely to immediately notify co-workers of their loss if they have some type of personal relationship with them, i.e. friend or close colleague. Reactions included shock, sympathy, advice, concern, encouragement and “kind words.” Subjects reported this was helpful but it appeared that these types of reactions were initial responses that did not continue during the lengthy process of grief described in the subjects’ stories. Some exceptions were found when a subject had a close friend at work or the subject was experiencing a divorce rather than a break-up of a non-marital relationship. This longer-lasting help came in the form of listening when the griever needed to talk about the loss, patiently attempting to calm distraught behavior, and providing space and time to mourn.

When asked about the reason other colleagues were not informed, subjects reiterated their desire to appear professional and to attempt to separate their work life from their personal life. Some subjects also reported that it was a matter of trust. Since grief is an emotional task, it makes sense that grievers tend to, at least initially, turn to individuals who have an emotional attachment to them, supporting the perception that “work life” and “grief work” must be separated.

Because of the role managers have in setting the workplace standards, this study attempted to gather more details about the responses from these individuals. Eleven of the subjects informed their managers—ten did so immediately and one waited five months. The primary reason given by those who withheld or delayed this information centered on the relationship they had with their supervisor, described with such phrases as “not someone I would take personal information to” and “we didn’t have that kind of relationship,” or the personality of their supervisor described as either not sympathetic, understanding and open or likely to be “uncomfortable in situations like this.” Two of these subjects were concerned that the supervisor might blame low productivity on them or “put [the employee] under a microscope of job performance.”

Additional questions were asked of the eleven subjects who did inform their supervisors in order to investigate whether managers are, as Hazen (2009) recommends, acknowledging the loss, accounting for the grief, working with the employee to minimize the potential damaging effects in the workplace, offering support and educating other employees about how they may appropriately respond to their grieving co-worker.

Seven of these eleven subjects described a caring acknowledgement with comments that, at least in the short term, expressed sympathy, encouragement, a request for more information and offers to help. Two others recounted a manager’s attempt to be funny—one as “crude jokes” about the employee’s ex love while the other described a manager who did not believe the news at first and, instead, joked about dating this employee. The third of the four subjects who did not receive a compassionate reaction reported that the supervisor said nothing while the fourth

thought the unsympathetic reaction was due to the fact that she did not offer any details about the break-up.

These eleven subjects were then asked how the managers accounted for their grief. As Hazen (2009) recommends, managers should allow for or consider the effects of grief when assigning projects, assessing work results, and so on. Four subjects described how their supervisors, at least initially, understood when they were late with an assignment, protected them from too much work and gave priority to their work needs. Two others reported that the managers offered to make adjustments but they did not accept. Hazen (2009) recommends that supervisors work with grieving employees to minimize the potential damaging effects in the workplace. It can be argued that these six managers who took actions when assigning and assessing work could have been driven by their desire to minimize the effects on the workplace. For example, one of these subjects reported her supervisors reacted only when they noticed emotions affecting her work while another said she was allowed to leave early when she was not feeling well enough to perform her job.

It is worth noting that among the six subjects who received some support from their managers, four of these were experiencing the loss of a marriage. For example, one of subjects spoke of the response to his break-up in this way: "people treated it like a flat tire and didn't give me equal treatment like a divorce might get." Since marriage is a sanctioned relationship with a widely-accepted contract to establish it and a well-known legal process for ending it, people may place more recognition on marriage and therefore, on the loss of a marriage. But in the case when the relationship is not socially sanctioned, Doka (1989) argues that the "appropriateness" of the grief is questioned and, as a result, disenfranchisement is likely to occur. Therefore, these results mildly suggest that the break-up of a non-marital relationship may receive less support than the divorce of a marriage.

None of the eleven subjects reported that their manager attempted to educate other employees about the grief process and how they may effectively respond to their co-worker. In two of the cases, the manager either encouraged the worker to keep it confidential or discouraged making this event the business of others.

Finally, since organizational policies and resources can support the individual efforts of managers and co-workers, part 6 of the interview inquired whether this type of assistance was available. Only three of the 14 subjects reported their organization offered some type of an employee assistance program. None were certain of their program's details but speculated it would have offered counseling in psychological issues if they had chosen to take advantage of it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The third objective in this study was to gather recommendations that would allow organizations to improve the way they respond to grieving employees. Part 7 of the interview asked subjects what they felt they needed from their supervisors, co-workers and organizational policies. Their wish list of needs follows. Items appearing first were mentioned by the largest number of subjects.

- Acknowledgement and recognition that it was a significant loss
- Continuing understanding, sympathy and empathy from supervisor and co-workers
- Checking in to see how person is doing and if anything is needed
- Adjustment of schedule, lighter workload, reduction of expectations

- Days off
- Supervisors and co-workers who were willing to listen to them talk about their loss
- Confidentiality and privacy
- Ability to temporarily step out of the office and recuperate
- Some type of employee assistance program
- Mental health option in health insurance
- Organizational-wide training on handling grief

There are a few things worth noting about this list. Each of these items also appears on the American Hospice Foundation list of recommendations for supporting an employee who returns to work following the death of a loved one. This suggests that those who experience the dissolution of a relationship may need the same assistance as someone who experiences the death of a loved one.

It was surprising to see that “acknowledgement” of the loss was the number one item, requested by eleven of the subjects. This lends further evidence that grief is disenfranchised, and therefore not adequately acknowledged in the workplace. One subject emphasized the importance of acknowledgement by insisting that she did not expect any disruptive actions from her co-workers and manager but was disappointed that most of these individuals provided little or no recognition of the strain she was experiencing. Hospice recommends that acknowledgement be honest and sincere while participants in this study also requested that it be ongoing, presumably throughout the grief process.

Subjects did not make large demands in their request for longer support, but rather suggested that it would have been helpful if supervisors and co-workers continued to ask about how they were doing and listen to them when they needed to talk. This agrees with the findings of Bottomley and Tehan (2005) who argue that a best practice model for supporting individuals affected by the clash of work and illness is one that creates time and space for “vital listening.” This includes continuous listening, clarifying, collaboration and evaluation that explores mutual ways to emotionally and practically support each other while continuing to meet production needs.

Most of the other recommendations on this list are under the direct control of each individual in the organization, the managers and co-workers. This is encouraging because it can be easier to convince individuals to make changes in their actions towards grieving employees than it can be to immediately adjust organizational policies. Yet, the actions of individuals, especially the managers, have the potential to eventually lead to changes in culture and in policy.

One of the items that could be categorized at the organization level, organizational-wide grief training, is particularly interesting. As two of the subjects pointed out, training in skills affecting physical health, such as CPR, is commonly found in the workplace while training in handling mental health issues is rare. One participant suggested that this training should provide a “language” and a process for communicating personal matters in a professional way in order to help shift institutions away from viewing the discussion of relationship loss as inappropriate for the workplace.

Two of the items on this list-- the request for days off and a reduction in workload-- are particularly thorny issues. Management can rightfully argue that break-ups can occur more often than death or divorces; therefore, adjustments to workloads can be recurring and become much too disruptive. The knowledgeable manager will watch for this continuing occurrence,

especially in any one employee, and determine whether that employee needs another kind of counsel.

All of the items on this list, from the desire for continuing understanding, sympathy and empathy to the need for mental health benefits, indicates organizations should appreciate that grieving is a long process. Therefore, even if some leave can be offered, it is still likely that an employee will return to work before truly healing. This study suggests that an employee's productivity is likely to be lowered during this time period, but it also shows that a compassionate response does not need to be complicated or inappropriate. Rather, participants' recommendations show that it can be relatively simple to cultivate a workplace that discourages the stifling of grief. Management and co-workers can provide considerable assistance by sincerely acknowledging a loss and then periodically taking the time to check on the employee for an ongoing period of time. As Lilius et al, 2003 explains, "Compassionate interpersonal acts are rarely large or dramatic, even though they may become so in the minds of the recipients. They tend, instead, to be moments of everyday human action in the places of work, where people live out a large portion of their lives." This should encourage organizations striving to foster a culture of compassion that it is possible to do so, one individual interaction at a time.

CONCLUSION

Most managers and co-workers have been, or will be, confronted with employee grief. This research shows that, when an employee experiences loss from the dissolution of a romantic relationship, the resulting emotions are brought into the workplace. The ramifications are visible; yet, they are not clearly understood. This research contributes to the understanding by: (a) providing a greater appreciation for the negative effects this type of loss has on employees' abilities to perform their jobs and, (b) proposing ways for supervisors and co-workers to offer compassion and support that could improve the situation. The findings were rather consistent among the 14 participants—their grief carried into the workplace but their primary needs call for relatively simple actions from managers and co-workers.

This does not suggest that the work has been completed. Although this study was a rather broad inquiry into the experience of 14 individuals, continuing the exploration with more subjects can only contribute to the understanding of the complex topic of grief in the workplace following the dissolution of a romantic relationship. The task ahead is to build on this work while at the same time challenging individuals to begin using the recommendations when opportunities arise.

These recommendations come with the appreciation that there could be influential realities that make the promotion of compassion in the workplace a challenging undertaking. Grief is an emotional issue that requires an emotional solution. However, the professionalism that drives the workplace does not normally encourage individuals to be emotionally invested in their co-workers. This is further complicated by the fact that emotional disorders are usually not as visible, and therefore not as easily recognized and appreciated as a physical ailment would be. In the daily life of a busy worker, it is unlikely that the grief of another employee, which is often hidden and therefore quite subtle, will be given as much priority as other competing demands. Managers may feel they have to choose between getting the job done and their desire to support their workers.

Yet, the results of this research provide evidence that integrating compassion and support for grieving employees will contribute to getting the job done. A call to action with this in mind

is likely to allow everyone to recognize that this is not only good for the individuals but it is good for the organization too. While manager and co-workers consider how the insights uncovered in this study will help build compassionate workplaces, researchers can aid in this endeavor by continuing to build on these findings in order to expand our understanding of grief and compassion in the workplace.

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APPENDIX A: Profile of subjects

| | Gender | Age at time of breakup | Job at time of breakup | Length of relationship |
|-----|--------|------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------|
| S1 | Male | 39 | Restaurant Manager | 3 ½ years |
| S2 | Female | 22 | Design Engineer | 3 years |
| S3 | Female | 44 | HR outsourcing consultant, bank | 22 years |
| S4 | Female | 36 | Data Analyst/Consultant | 10 years |
| S5 | Female | 19 | Food server | 1 year |
| S6 | Female | 45 | Professor | 8 years |
| S7 | Female | 50 | Database coordinator | 3 years |
| S8 | Female | 38 | Secretary, university department | 10 years |
| S9 | Female | 50 | Compliance Specialist, utility company | 2 years |
| S10 | Female | 26 | Veterinary Technician | 3 ½ years |
| S11 | Female | 31 | Registered Nurse | 10 years |
| S12 | Female | 28 | English teacher/consultant | 10 years |
| S13 | Female | 25 | Accountant | 3 ½ years |
| S14 | Male | 33 | General Manager | 2 ½ years |

APPENDIX B: Interview Questions

1) Background:

- Your gender
- Gender of your romantic partner
- Your age
- Job you had when the breakup occurred
- Describe the organization (size, etc.)
- Approximate salary you earned when the breakup occurred (optional)
- How long were you in a relationship with this romantic partner?
- How long ago did the breakup occur?
- Was it a divorce or breakup?
- Who initiated the breakup?

2) Tell your story of the loss of your romantic partner and the effect this had on your job.

3) After the breakup, how did you feel when you were going to work? Could you do your job as well as you usually did?

4) Did you inform your co-workers about your loss?

If no, why not?



If yes...

How did they react?

What did your co-workers do to help you?

5) Did you inform your supervisor(s) about your loss?

If no, why not?



If yes...

Did your supervisor(s) acknowledge the loss? How?

Did your supervisor(s) account for the grief when assigning projects and evaluating your work?

Did your supervisor(s) work with you to minimize the possible damaging effects of your grief on the workplace?

Did your supervisor(s) offer support? How?

Did your supervisor(s) educate other employees about how they could respond to and help you?

6) Was there any organizational support, such as policies and procedures, in place to support you?

7) To help you cope with your grief and minimize its effects on your job, what do you feel you need/needed from your supervisor(s)?... from your co-workers?... from your organizational policies?

8) Is there anything else you want to say that was not included in my questions?