

The Impact of Identity Management on Physician and Healthcare Professional Resilience

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GOALS/LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1) Describe the relationship between work and identity, especially for physicians and other healthcare professionals
- 2) Differentiate between professional/work and personal/nonwork identities and their importance for self and others
- 3) Identify benefits and consequences associated with stringent identity management or work-nonwork segmentation efforts

ABSTRACT & INTRO

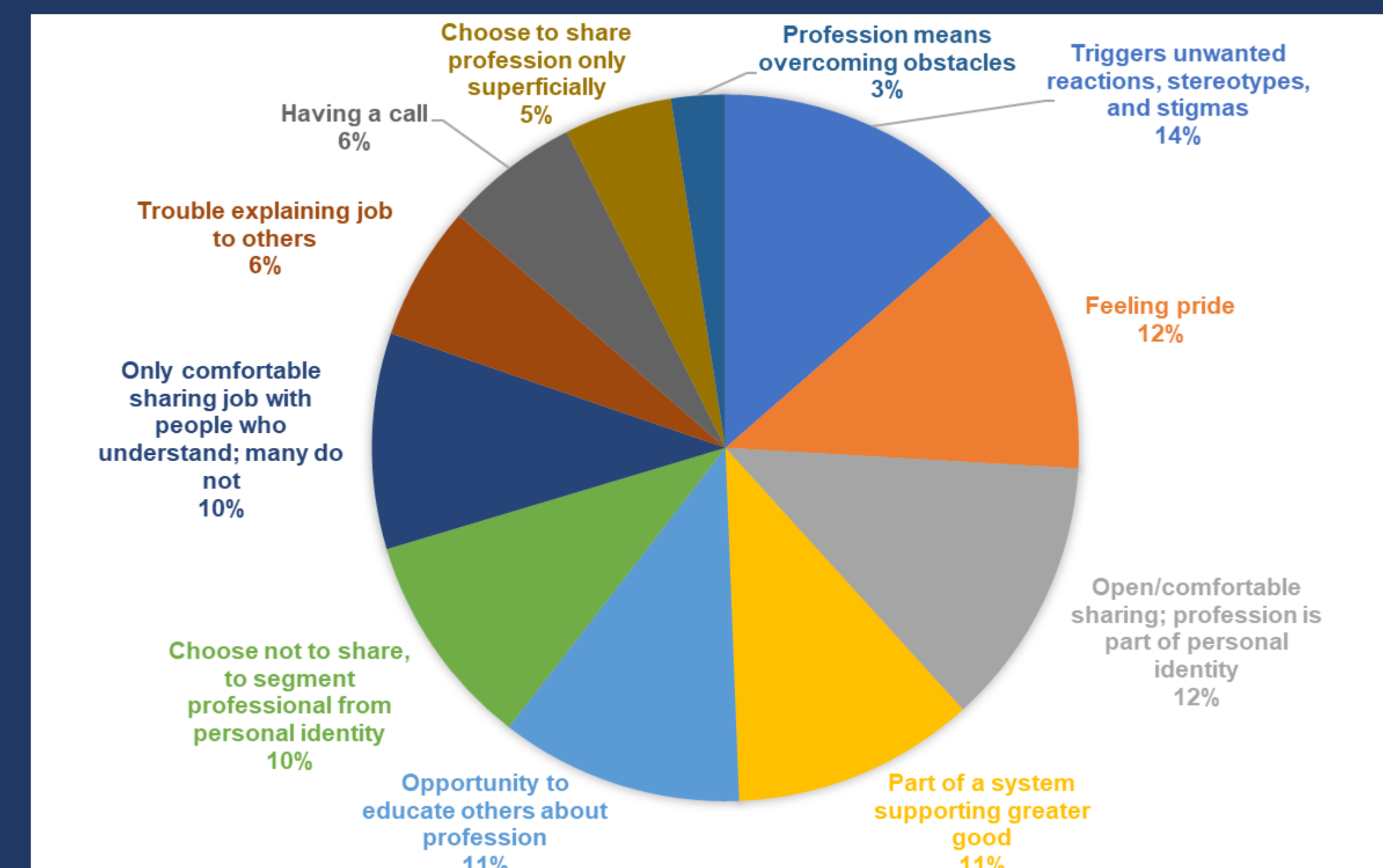
- Identity development occurs through an innate and imitative journey
- Provides essential resilience characteristics of self-esteem, meaning and purpose
- Professional identity is closely connected to sense of professional self
- Influenced by personal and external factors
- Physicians and healthcare professionals (HCP) are among the most highly educated and regarded individuals
- We explored the important complex role played by HCPs sense of professional and personal identity

METHOD

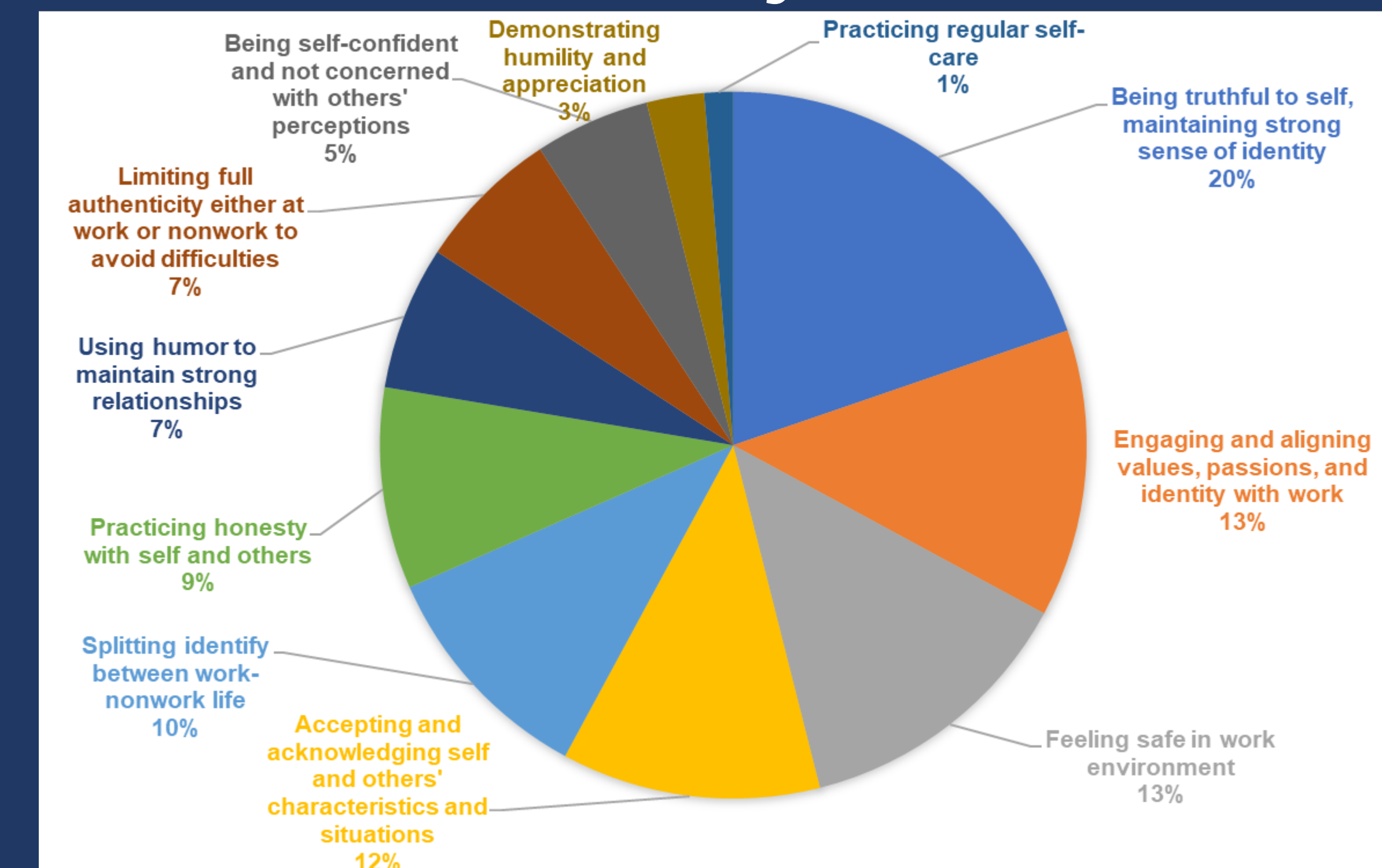
- Qualitative data were gathered from HCP working in a tertiary health system, as part of a larger, multi-method study
- HCP identified by peers and supervisors as consistently demonstrating resilience and general excellence
- The analyses presented here focus on final interviews with 33 participants who had previously responded to 6 or more monthly surveys in the broader study; the present focus is on responses to the following identity-related questions:
- (1) What does it mean to you when you tell others your profession?
- (2) How do you stay authentic (true to who you are and what you value or care about)? Or do you?
- Responses were analyzed through iterative content and thematic analysis by multiple trained researchers and summarized within-person and across respondents

Strong and authentic identities support resilience but may create additional demands that are difficult to address. Physicians need help managing their personal and professional identities.

What does it mean to you when you tell others your profession?



How do you stay authentic? Or do you?



For questions or a copy of the related paper, e-mail: chris-cunningham@utc.edu



Special thanks to the Drs. Millie and Jackson Yum Family Foundation for supporting this project, which is part of a broader longitudinal study of resilient healthcare workers, involving baseline + monthly survey data (for up to 8 months) and an in-depth final interview. Data were gathered during the COVID pandemic (mainly in 2021).

RESULTS

- Responses commonly indicated experiences of moral/other conflicts around sharing professional identities outside of work settings
- Common responses indicated, "It takes too much effort to correct misinterpretations" and reflected HCP decisions to anticipatorily avoid sharing their professional identities outside of work
- Some respondents also expressed challenges being true to their authentic selves in work settings
 - Challenges related to training/practice rigor, burgeoning technology, information demands, staffing shortages, market forces, precarious reimbursements, EHR, administrative tasks, pressure to meet metrics
- Findings regarding authenticity are particularly surprising, given that authenticity is generally seen in a positive light, linked to better wellbeing, engagement, and social relationships
- Complex relationship was observed with respect to professional and personal identity management.
 - Raises need to more carefully examine the potential negative consequences of rigid work/nonwork role boundary management (i.e., segmentation) if it comes at the cost of managing separate or strongly limited identities

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

- A strong professional identity is an element to resilience but can present a challenge and demand that may inhibit or hinder one's detachment and recovery outside work settings.
- There is need to reconcile the importance of a strong professional identity and evidence-based practices for boundary setting between work and nonwork life aspects, while also helping HCP maintain an authentic and coherent sense of self across their life domains.
 - This may be facilitated through intentional longitudinal training and coaching, GME curricula adjustments, professional mentoring, etc.