The Shift from Romantic-related Insignificance to the Extreme Striving for Success at Work: The Role of Obsessive Passion

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Abstract

Drawing on Significance Quest Theory (Kruglanski et al., 2022), and the concept of 'substitutable mean' for significance restoration, we hypothesized that when people experience romantic-related feelings of significance loss, they should develop a work-related obsessive (but not harmonious) passion, which in turn should enhance their willingness to act in an extreme manner to reach professional success. To test this hypothesis, we ran a cross-sectional study (N=151). Results confirmed our hypothesis with respect to two different operationalization of work-related extreme behaviors – i.e., self-sacrifice, and workaholism. Interestingly, these results confirmed existing findings with respect to means substitutability in significance restoration while adding knowledge about the mediational role of obsessive and harmonious passion in this process. Also, this research represents an additional confirmation of the fact that significance is pursued as a superordinate goal independently on which life area cause the significance loss, or which is exploited to re-gain it.

Keywords: significance loss, passion, self-sacrifice, workaholism, motivational imbalance

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Introduction

In recent years, the prevalence of extremism in individuals' professional lives has raised significant concerns within scientific circles. Notably, a staggering proportion, exceeding 10 percent, of the U.S. general population appears to be wholly consumed by their occupational pursuits. This phenomenon has manifested in the emergence of various work-related disorders, including workaholism and work addiction (Andreassen et al., 2012; Sussman et al., 2011). Consequently, the repercussions extend beyond the workplace, including personal relationships, mood, and overall health (Andreassen et al., 2012; Griffiths, 2011; Sussman, 2012), often culminating in severe psychological afflictions such as the burnout syndrome (Falco et al., 2014). Thus, to lay a scientific groundwork for future interventions aimed at mitigating such behaviors, the present research has been carried out to delineate the motivational factors underlying these extreme work-related behavioral tendencies.

In our research, we formulated our hypothesis around the premise that extremism stems from a state of motivational imbalance. This suggests that when one psychological need becomes predominant and overshadows others, individuals may engage in extreme behaviors to fulfill that need (Kruglanski et al., 2021). Specifically, in this study, we pinpointed the pursuit of significance (Kruglanski et al., 2022) as a fundamental human need that when eclipses others, elucidates the occurrence of extreme behaviors. Furthermore, our research was based on the notion that individuals facing a pressing need for significance, originated from a specific aspect of their life, may seek to gratify that need through extreme actions in another — albeit equally significant — life domain. In essence, we examined whether the motivational imbalance resulting from a romantic-related loss of significance could prompt individuals to engage in extreme tendencies (i.e., self-sacrifice and workaholism) in the professional domain. Additionally, we explored the role of obsessive and harmonious passion as mediators in this process.

Significance Quest Theory

Based on socio-motivational psychology, the Significance Quest Theory (SQT; Kruglanski et al., 2022) asserts the universal humans' need for significance. This entails a striving for feelings of importance, deserving respect, and being valued within one's social network. Importantly, the fulfillment of the need for significance is contingent upon alignment with shared realities among individuals (Higgins, 2019). Specifically, individuals derive significance when the values and norms they adhere to are culturally embedded and articulated within a cultural narrative. Furthermore, validation from one's reference group regarding adherence to culturally prescribed values or norms is also imperative (Kruglanski et al., 2022; Webber & Kruglanski, 2016).

According to the Significance Quest Theory (SQT), the intensity of an individual's quest varies not only between individuals but also within individuals. In other words, the need for significance can be a consistent individual difference, or it can be activated situationally. Indeed, one's quest for

significance may be triggered by experiences of feeling a loss of significance or by perceiving opportunities for gaining significance (Kruglanski et al., 2014). For instance, instances of humiliation (Brown & Dutton, 1995; Otten & Jonas, 2014), social exclusion (Baumeister et al., 1993), or failure (Brown & Dutton, 1995) can undermine individuals' sense of importance (Elliott et al., 2004) and psychological well-being (Downey et al., 1994; Feldman & Downey, 1994), thus activating their need for significance.

Moreover, one of the fundamental assumptions of the Significance Quest Theory is the concept of substitutability regarding the mean that individuals utilize to achieve a sense of significance. Specifically, the theory posits that when individuals perceive a threat to their sense of significance within a particular context, they may be driven to restore this sense of importance through alternative actions in alternative contexts. For instance, if an individual experiences a loss of significance due to the end of a romantic relationship, they may feel compelled to regain their sense of importance by engaging in activities aligned with culturally valued norms. Using this example, the individual might seek to restore their significance through achievements in their professional life, thereby channeling significant energy into their work endeavors.

Consistent with this notion, the concept that individuals can address their lack of significance through interchangeable actions has garnered substantial support in social motivational psychology literature (e.g., Contu et al., 2023c; Greenberg et al., 2014; Sciara et al., 2023; Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1998; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). Furthermore, of particular relevance, Contu and colleagues (2023a) recently provided direct evidence supporting the idea of "means substitutability in significance restoration." Specifically, in their initial study, they observed that individuals who experienced a loss of significance within their romantic relationships were driven to pursue professional success, thereby exhibiting extremist behaviors within the workplace. Conversely, in their second study, they demonstrated that individuals who encountered a loss of significance in their work domain were inclined towards intrusive and violent behaviors aimed at maintaining their romantic relationships.

What romantic relationships and one's professional life have in common is that they are both two relevant life-domains. That is, they are life-domains that permit the achievement or the restoration of individuals' sense of significance because having an adequate romantic partner or a good job are culturally cherished and dictated facts (e.g., Andreassen, 2013; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Contu et al., 2024). In this respect, the present research specifically investigated the professional sphere as that significant life scope where individuals can seek social significance. Supporting this perspective, work plays a crucial role for most individuals by providing various benefits. It offers financial compensation, structures our daily routines, contributes to our sense of identity, fosters relationships, and imbues us with a sense of purpose (Andreassen, 2013). Furthermore, work represents a primary pathway to economic independence, earning income, and making meaningful contributions to society—factors that are closely linked to enhancing one's sense of significance. And, in contemporary societies, the measurement of life success often revolves around

professional achievements such as promotions and salary (Parker & Chusmir, 1992).

Significance Loss, The Dualistic Model of Passion, and Extremism

According to the dualistic model of passion proposed by Vallerand et al. (2003), passion for a particular activity is characterized by a strong motivational drive towards that activity. Vallerand and colleagues (2003) then delineated passion as 'harmonious' when it does not encroach upon other areas of life. Conversely, obsessive passion involves an intense pursuit of an activity to the extent that it suppresses other life domains. Pertinently, a growing body of research has established a connection between obsessive passion (but not harmonious passion) and psychological states akin to feelings of insignificance, such as ego-insecurity and diminished self-esteem (Bélanger et al., 2013; Donahue et al., 2009; Lafrenière et al., 2011; Rip et al., 2012). Moreover, Resta and colleagues (2022) recently discovered a positive correlation between ambition—viewed as an expression of the pursuit of significance (Jones et al., 2017)—and obsessive passion. Additionally, Contu and colleagues (2023b) demonstrated a positive relationship between a general sense of insignificance and the development of obsessive romantic passion towards a specific partner. Conversely, the same study identified a negative correlation between a general sense of insignificance and harmonious romantic passion.

The rationale employed in this research to justify the association between loss of significance and obsessive passion can be summarized as follows: When individuals experience a loss of significance, they enter a psychological state characterized by a motivational imbalance aimed at restoring significance. Consequently, they concentrate all their efforts on activities they perceive as conferring significance, such as maintaining romantic relationships or achieving professional success. For instance, if individuals view professional success as the primary source of significance, they will channel all their energies into their professional endeavors while neglecting other aspects of life. This pattern establishes a condition conducive to developing obsessive passion in the domain deemed significance-bestowing. In essence, when a loss of significance precipitates a state of motivational imbalance, it is likely to foster obsessive passion towards an activity perceived as significance-bestowing.

Relevantly, the link between loss of significance and obsessive passion has been demonstrated to have implications for the motivational drivers of extreme behaviors. For instance, Resta and colleagues (2022) discovered that individuals with ambitious tendencies exhibited a heightened readiness to engage in extreme behaviors only when they developed an obsessive passion towards a specific goal, as opposed to a harmonious passion. Extending this line of inquiry to romantic relationships, Contu and colleagues (2023a) determined that feelings of general insignificance led to an increased propensity for engaging in extreme behaviors within romantic relationships through obsessive romantic passion, rather than harmonious passion. Lastly, the prevalence of obsessive passion over harmonious passion was found to mediate the relationship

between feelings of significance loss and extremism in sports, such as doping attitudes (Chirico et al., 2021).

Workaholism and Self-sacrifice as Extreme Tendencies

As anticipated above, the present research examined two specific types of extreme behaviors that can be enacted within the professional domain as a response to romantic-related significance loss. The first extreme tendency that we examined was self-sacrifice, defined as the psychological readiness to sacrifice elements that one cares about in favor of a cause (Bélanger et al., 2014). Important to us, it has already been demonstrated to be acted in response to situations of experienced significance loss (e.g., Contu et al., 2023b). That is, when one strives to renew their sense of significance, they are disposed to self-sacrifice with respect a life domain that is perceived as able to convey social significance (e.g., Bélanger et al., 2014; Dugas et al., 2016). Specific to our case, people, in consequence of feelings of significance loss, should be disposed to practice work-related self-sacrifice in order to achieve professional success and respect, thereby restoring their personal sense of significance.

The second outcome that we examined was workaholism, intended as a negative psychological state akin to work addiction (Schaufeli et al., 2006). In fact, the term 'workaholism' was coined for the first time in 1971, and it was defined as the 'compulsion or the uncontrollable need to work incessantly' (Oates, 1971). As it will be clear from the definition alone, the concept of workaholism is parallel to the one of obsessive passion. Indeed, also obsessive passion entails an uncontrollable desire to practice a given activity, and results in an addiction for that (Vallerand et al., 2003). Moreover, as a kind of compulsion and addiction, workaholism also represents a clear example of extremism (Kruglanski et al., 2021), and, as such, it should be a probable consequence of significance loss experiences.

The Present Research

Given these recent findings, it appears evident that feelings of significance loss, when they lead to obsessive passion towards an activity, increase individuals' propensity to engage in extreme behaviors within that activity (Chirico et al., 2021; Contu et al., 2023b; Resta et al., 2022). Moreover, previous research has highlighted that when significance loss originates within a specific domain of life, individuals may resort to extreme actions in alternative domains to attain social significance (Contu et al., 2023a). However, it remains uncertain whether the development of obsessive (versus harmonious) passion also influences this latter process. Moreover, workaholism (Oates, 1971; Schaufeli et al., 2006), despite its clear proximity with the concepts of obsessive passion and extremism, has never been investigated as a possible tendency embraced by those who need to restore the proper sense of significance. To address this gap in knowledge, we investigated whether experiencing a sense of significance loss within one's romantic relationship domain could lead individuals to engage in extreme behaviors within their professional life through the cultivation of

obsessive (but not harmonious) passion. Specifically, we examined a) workaholism and b) work-related self-sacrifice as potential extreme reactions undertaken by individuals seeking to derive significance from the professional domain in response to a state of significance loss. This research was approved by the Ethics Committee of Department of Social and Developmental Psychology at "La Sapienza" University of Rome (protocol N. 572).

Method

Participants, design, and procedure

To test our hypotheses, we enrolled 151 Italian adults (47% females; M_{age} = 41.33, Sd_{age} = 7.42) in a correlational study. Given the nature of our hypotheses, we included only participants who had an ongoing relationship, and simultaneously were workers. The medium duration of participants' relationships was 173.59 months with an SD=158.776. Regarding the nature participants' romantic relationships, 3.3 percent of participants were dating, 51.0 percent were in a stable relationship, 1.2 percent were engaged, and 44.4 percent were married. Participants were contacted on social media (e.g., Telegram, Facebook), through an online procedure provided by Google Moduli. After giving their informed consent, each participant filled out an online questionnaire aimed at assessing the measures of interest (as described below). All items were administered in Italian, but in the following section we provide examples of the employed items translated into English.

Measures

'Romantic' loss of significance. Feelings of significance loss originated in the context of participants' romantic relationships were assessed with a five-item adapted from research by Contu and colleagues (2023b). Participants had to respond on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 7 (very strongly agree). Example of those items are: "My relationship makes me feel humiliated" and "My relationship makes me feel disrespected." Reliability was good (α = .87).

Work-related passions. Obsessive (6 items), and harmonious (6 items) work-related passions were measured by asking participants to respond to a total of 12 items on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 7 (very strongly agree). Items were the Italian translation of the Passion Scale by Vallerand and colleagues (2003). For obsessive romantic passion, one sample item is: "I have almost an obsessive feeling for my job"; for harmonious romantic passion, one sample item is: "My job allows me to live a variety of experiences". Reliability was good for both, obsessive (α = .81), and harmonious (α = .82) passions.

Workaholism. The proneness to workaholism was assessed through an Italian version of the DUWAS-R scale (Kravina et al., 2010). Participants were asked to respond to 10 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranged from 1 (Definitely disagree) to 7 (Definitely agree) e.g., "I am always in a hurry, and I feel like I am racing against the clock". Reliability was good (α = .84).

Self-sacrifice. Participants' disposition to self-sacrifice in order to reach professional success was assessed through a 6-item scale adapted from Contu and colleagues (2023b; Study 1). Specifically, participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale ranged from 1 (Definitely disagree) to 7 (Definitely agree) e.g., "To gain professional success, I am disposed to sacrifice the relationship with my friends". Reliability was good (α = .79).

Data Analysis

To test our hypothesis, we tested a path-analysis model in which significance loss feelings originated in the romantic context were the independent variable, obsessive and harmonious work-related passions were the mediators, and workaholism and the tendency to self-sacrifice were the dependent variables.

Tab. 1. N=151. Bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics

	LOSS	OP	HP	SS	WA	Age	Gender	RD	M	*SD*
LOSS	(0.87)								1.52(1.20)	1.20
OP	0.195	(0.81)							2.10(1.83)	1.83
HP	-0.010	0.026	(0.82)						4.55(4.50)	4.50
SS	0.229	0.470	0.135	(0.79)					1.90(1.67)	1.67
WA	0.100	0.594	0.065	0.315	(0.84)				4.09(4.00)	4.00
Age	0.183	-0.215	0.027	-0.290	-0.122	—			41.3(39.0)	39.0
Gender	-0.087	0.055	0.060	-0.110	0.054	-0.097	—		—	—
RD	0.192	-0.162	-0.063	-0.255	-0.103	0.801	-0.024	—	174(120)	120
RT	0.168	-0.156	-0.086	-0.202	-0.018	0.585	-0.200	0.716	—	—

Note. *p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001. LOSS=Relationship-related significance loss, OP=Obsessive work-related passion; HP=Harmonious work-related passion, WA=Workaholism, SS= Self-sacrifice, RD=Relationship duration, RT=Relationship type, GENDER coded as 1=males; 2=females. In bracket (Cronbach's Alpha).

Participants' age, relationship duration, type of relationship, and gender were considered as covariates. Analyses were conducted using Jamovi (The Jamovi Project, 2022).

Results

Bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1. It is particularly noteworthy that romantic loss of significance was significantly positively correlated with the difference obsessive work-related passion ($r = 0.195$, $p = .017$), but not with the harmonious one ($p = .900$). Further, workaholism ($r = 0.594$, $p < .001$), and self-sacrifice ($r = 0.470$, $p < .001$) were positively associated with obsessive work-related passion. By contrast, nor workaholism ($p = .431$), neither self-sacrifice ($p = .099$) was associated with harmonious work-related passion.

Path-analysis analysis

The model explained the 37.10% of the variance with respect to workaholism, and the 33.44% of the variability of self-sacrifice. As shown in Figure 1, the results of the path-analysis model revealed that feelings of significance loss originated in the scope of participants' romantic relationships was positively associated with obsessive ($b = 0.30$, SE = 0.09, $z = 3.15$, $p = .002$, 95% CI = 0.11; 0.48), but not harmonious work-related passion ($p = .975$). With respect to self-sacrifice, the total effect

of romantic significance loss was positive and significant ($b = 0.28$, SE = 0.07, $z = 3.85$, $p < .001$, 95%CI = 0.14; 0.42), and it became weaker when the mediators were inserted in the model so to obtain a direct effect of romantic significance loss on self-sacrifice of ($b = 0.19$, SE = 0.07, z=2.78, $p = .005$, 95% CI = 0.05; 0.32). Moreover, and as expected, obsessive work-related passion was positively and significantly associated to self-sacrifice ($b = 0.30$, SE = 0.06, $z = 5.39$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = 0.19; 0.41), meanwhile harmonious work-related passion had a weaker effect ($b = 0.09$, SE = 0.05, $z = 2.04$, $p = .042$, 95% CI = 0.004; 0.19). Most importantly, romantic significance loss had a positive and significant indirect effect on self-sacrifice via obsessive work-related passion ($b = 0.09$, SE = 0.03, $z = 2.72$, $p = .007$, 95% CI = 0.03; 0.16), but not via the harmonious one ($p = .975$).

A similar pattern of results was found in reference to workaholism. Indeed, the total effect of romantic significance loss was positive and significant ($b = 0.17$, SE = 0.10, $z = 1.60$, $p = .010$, 95% CI = 0.04; 0.37), and it became non-significant ($p = .777$) when the mediators were inserted in the model (i.e., the direct effect). Moreover, and as expected, obsessive work-related passion was positively and significantly associated to workaholism ($b = 0.65$, SE = 0.07, $z = 8.84$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = 0.50; 0.79), meanwhile harmonious work-related passion did not have a significant effect ($p = .435$). Most importantly, romantic significance loss had a positive and significant indirect effect on workaholism via obsessive work-related passion ($b = 0.19$, SE = 0.07, $z = 2.96$, $p = .003$, 95% CI = 0.07; 0.32), but not via the harmonious one (p=.975). All regression parameters, including standardized regression coefficients, are shown in Table 2.

Fig. 1. A path-analysis model showing the effects of work-related significance loss on workaholism and work-related self-sacrifice via obsessive and harmonious work-related passions.
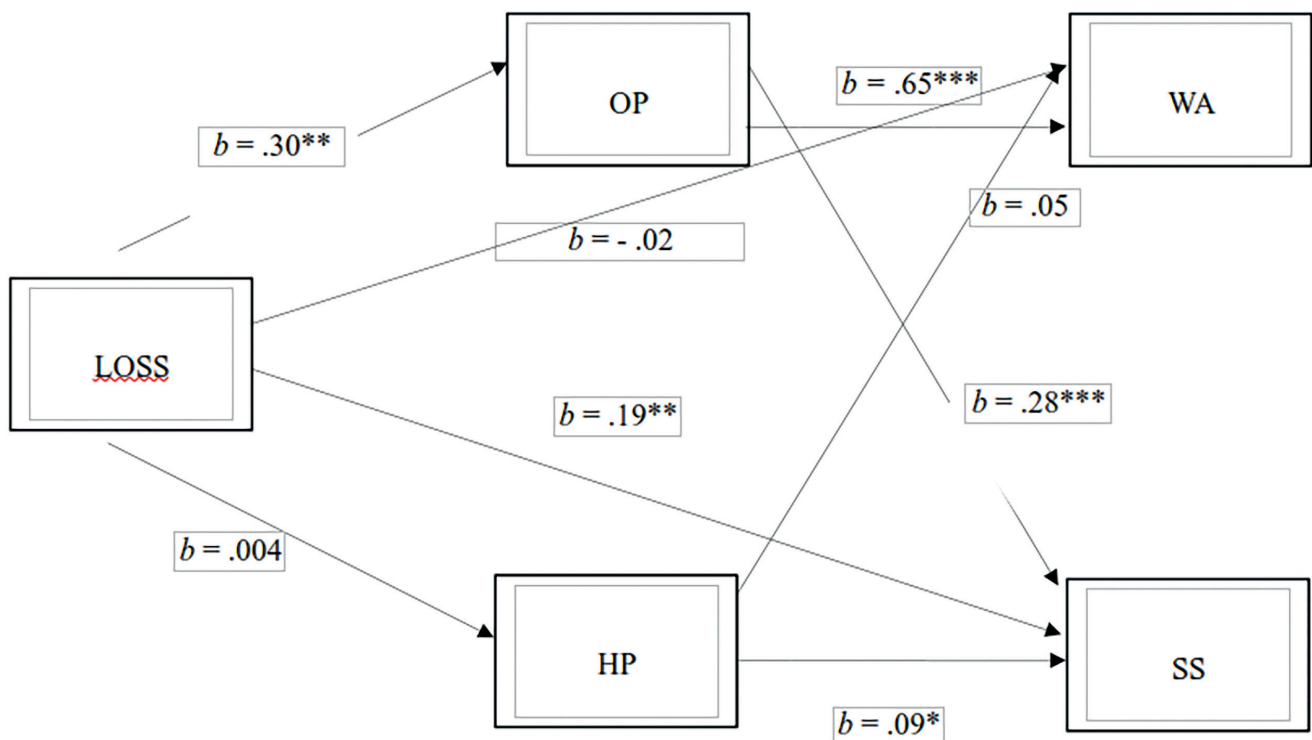
Note. All coefficients are unstandardized. *p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001. LOSS=Relationship-related significance loss, OP=Obsessive work-related passion; HP=Harmonious work-related passion, WA=Workaholism, SS= Self-sacrifice.

Tab. 2. Regression table

				95% Confidence Intervals				
DV	ID	*b*	SE	Lower	Upper	β	z	p
OP	LOSS	0.297	0.094	0.112	0.482	0.247	3.146	0.002
OP	Gender	0.081	0.173	-0.258	0.421	0.038	0.469	0.639
OP	Age	-0.019	0.010	-0.038	-0.001	-0.246	-1.897	0.058
OP	RD	0.001	0.001	-0.002	0.002	0.044	0.291	0.771
OP	RT	-0.086	0.119	-0.313	0.151	-0.078	-0.688	0.491
HP	LOSS	0.004	0.113	-0.219	0.226	0.003	0.032	0.975
HP	Gender	0.159	0.209	-0.248	0.567	0.064	0.766	0.443
HP	Age	0.020	0.012	-0.003	0.044	0.232	1.719	0.085
HP	RD	-0.002	0.001	-0.004	0.001	-0.201	-1.259	0.208
HP	RT	-0.078	0.142	-0.357	0.201	-0.065	-0.550	0.582
SS	LOSS	0.187	0.067	0.055	0.319	0.195	2.781	0.005
SS	OP	0.303	0.056	0.194	0.414	0.379	5.390	<.001
SS	HP	0.095	0.045	0.004	0.187	0.137	2.038	0.042
SS	Gender	-0.269	0.120	-0.505	-0.034	-0.156	-2.240	0.025
SS	Age	-0.014	0.007	-0.027	-0.001	-0.227	-1.984	0.047
SS	RD	-0.001	0.001	-0.001	0.001	-0.001	-0.008	0.994
SS	RT	-0.051	0.082	-0.212	0.110	-0.062	-0.625	0.532
WA	LOSS	-0.025	0.088	-0.197	0.147	-0.019	-0.283	0.777
WA	OP	0.650	0.073	0.505	0.793	0.604	8.844	<.001
WA	HP	0.048	0.061	-0.072	0.167	0.051	0.780	0.435
WA	Gender	0.124	0.157	-0.183	0.431	0.054	0.791	0.429
WA	Age	0.002	0.009	-0.015	0.020	0.030	0.267	0.789
WA	RD	-0.001	0.001	-0.003	-0.001	-0.157	-1.212	0.225
WA	RT	0.211	0.108	0.001	0.422	0.190	1.972	0.049

Note. LOSS=Relationship-related significance loss, OP=Obsessive work-related passion; HP=Harmonious work-related passion, WA=Workaholism, SS= Self-sacrifice, RD=Relationship duration, RT=Relationship type, GENDER coded as 1=males; 2=females.

Discussion

A series of recent research showed and demonstrated that significance quest theory (Kruglanski et al., 2022) can be well applied to explain and predict extremism within various domains (see for a review Da Silva et al., 2023). That is, the core concept that when the need for significance causes a state of motivational imbalance (Kruglanski et al., 2021) then extreme tendencies are embraced to satiate it has been extensively established (e.g., Contu et al., 2023b; Dugas et al., 2016; Resta et al., 2022). However, even if expected and anticipated by the theory itself (Kruglanski et al., 2022; see also Sherman & Cohen, 2006), the possibility that an activation of the need for significance referred to a specific life-domain (e.g., romantic relationships) could bring to the manifestation of extreme tendencies within an alternative scope, has been investigated by one study only (Contu et al., 2023a).

In fact, Contu and colleagues (2023a), showed that feelings of significance loss originated in the professional domain augmented the tendency to intrusive behaviors towards the proper partner. Also, they showed that the reverse was valid. That is, experiences of significance loss referred to the romantic scope, brought people to work extremely in order to satiate the initial need for significance. Building upon these findings, the present research aimed to further verify the possibility of 'means substitutability in personal significance restoration'. More specifically, we investigated the mediational role of the dualistic model of (work-related) passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) in the process outlined above. And, additionally, we also considered two new work-related extreme tendencies as

examined outcome – i.e., a) self-sacrifice, and b) workaholism. The hypothesis we draw was that significance loss feelings originated in the romantic life domain would have brought to work related self-sacrifice and workaholism via the work-related obsessive (but not harmonious) passion. We tested this hypothesis through a cross-sectional methodology and results confirmed our expectations.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The first theoretical implication is referred to the explicative power of the Significance Quest Theory in reference to extreme tendencies. To recap, it should then be evident that Significance Quest Theory can effectively elucidate extreme responses across diverse domains, including political activism (Adam-Troian et al., 2020), religious ideologies (Dugas et al., 2016), sports (Chirico et al., 2021), romantic relationships (Contu et al., 2023b), workplaces (Contu et al., 2023a), and self-care (Contu & Pierro, 2024). In this vein, the present research offers new insights in reference to the application of the significance quest theory in predicting workaholism, defined as a form of addiction (Oates, 1971), and work-related self-sacrifice. Despite a specific type of self-sacrifice – the romantic-related self-sacrifice – have already been investigated as a consequence of significance loss feelings, the present results also help to confirm that 'self-sacrifice' is a concept that can be well applied to a variety of fields, including romantic relationships (e.g., Contu et al., 2023b), religion (Dugas et al., 2016), politic ideologies (Bélanger et al., 2014), and occupations.

Interestingly, the present research does not only confirm the fact that SQT can be applied to work-related extremism. Also, it enriches the literature about the role of the dual model of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) in the process the links significance quest and extreme tendencies. In this respect, it was firstly confirmed that the type of passion that converts significance loss into extremism is the obsessive one and, secondly, a relevant novelty is offered. That is, research carried out by Resta and colleagues (2022), and Contu and colleagues (2023b) found that when quest for significance is activated by general state of ambition or significance loss, it brings to extremism only via the obsessive (but not the harmonious) passion. By contrast, the present pattern of results is different. Indeed, we found that significance loss originated in the specific life scope of one's romantic relationship, is associated with work-related extremism via work-related obsessive passion. Namely, an obsessive passion developed in the alternative context to that in which significance loss originated. Instead, the possibility that a domain-specific significance loss could bring to extremism in an alternative life-domain via the development of obsession in the context in which significance loss originally raised remains unexplored, and future research should shed light onto this.

The main theoretical advancement that the present research offers, obviously, regards the confirmation of the idea that significance restoration can be achieved by acting extremely within a life-scope that is different from the one in which the significance loss was generated (Kruglanski et al., 2022). In so doing, our results confirmed that means can be substitutable when one is pursuing the over-ordered goal to feel significant. Evidently, these results are aligned with those provided by Contu and colleagues (2023b) and add to our knowledge the successful application of the dual model of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) to the field examining the shift from a relevant life-scope to another.

Importantly, Significance Quest Theory (Kruglanski et al., 2022), in conjunction with the concept of motivational imbalance (Kruglanski et al., 2021), serves as a robust framework for identifying the motivational forces driving extreme behaviors in individuals (see Da Silva et al., 2023 for a comprehensive review). This understanding provides valuable insights for designing interventions aimed at mitigating extreme tendencies such as work addiction. The current research confirms that addictions like workaholism may stem from a persistent activation of the quest for significance, resulting in a chronic state of motivational imbalance triggered by feelings of loss in significance generated in a pivotal life domain. The key insight lies in recognizing that extreme behaviors driven by chronic motivational imbalances reflect a phenomenon known as means-end fusion (Kruglanski et al., 2018). This condition occurs when a means to achieving a goal (e.g., success at work) is perceived as the sole avenue to fulfilling a focal goal (e.g., attaining significance), to the extent that the means and the goal become indistinguishable. Understanding this perspective provides a clear pathway to counteracting means-end fusion. Individuals who become ensnared in work addiction, sacrificing significant interpersonal relationships such as familial bonds in pursuit of significance, need to be made aware of and trained to consider alternative means of achieving significance that are personally and socially adaptive (e.g., engaging in pro-social activities; Viola et al., 2023).

Limits and Future Directions

Given the correlational nature of our studies, we were not able to provide evidence about the casual relationship among the constructs we studied in this research. In this respect, further information about the consequentiality of the constructs were given by the research that Contu and colleagues (2023b) carried out in the romantic context. Indeed, in the third study that they carried out, significance loss was found to longitudinally predict obsessive passion, such as obsessive passion was found to longitudinally predict extreme behaviors within the romantic context. However, these findings were not specifically conclusive with respect to the model that we presently tested. Moreover, past research informed us about the causal relationship that linked the activation of the quest for significance with the manifestation of extreme tendencies (Dugas et al., 2016). However, again, this research was not carried out in the presently examined context. Hence, future research should address this limit by implementing true experiments, thereby providing casual evidence about the relationship among significance loss, passion, and extreme behaviors. As an additional limitation, the sample was numerically restricted. This was basically because of the difficulty about finding participants that were at the same time engaged in a romantic relationship and had a professional occupation. Notably, however, the results that we found were aligned with our original hypotheses, and also with previous research that demonstrated that the quest for significance brings people to extreme tendencies via obsessive – vs. harmonious – passion (Contu et al., 2023b; Resta et al., 2022). In this respect, future research should aim to replicate the present findings with a more consistent sample size.

Author Contributions
AP contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by FC, and AP. The first draft of the manuscript was written by FC. Reviews and editing were provided by AP. and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript.

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

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