BLOGGING THE WAY THROUGH JOB LOSS:

A DIALECTICAL EXPLORATION OF THE SITUATED COPING NARRATIVES OF

DISPLACED WORKERS

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Blogging the Way Through Job Loss:

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Whereas the topic of job loss has garnered much scholarly interest in the fields of

management and psychology, it has yet to capture the attention of communication

scholars despite their traditional interest in contexts of work. This dissertation aims to

mitigate the dearth of communication-based scholarship on employment loss and

encourage theoretical and empirical examinations of this topic by making two

contributions.

First, this research challenges the cognitive and rational assumptions of extant job

loss models (e.g., Latack et al., 1995; Leana & Feldman, 1988) and offers an alternative

perspective on job loss and coping that foregrounds the constitutive role of

communication (e.g., Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009) as a guiding

ontology. Drawing on the theories of sensemaking (Weick, 1979, 1995), structuration

(Giddens, 1984, 1991), and dialectics (Bakhtin, 1981; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), the

proposed framework reconceptualizes job loss as a situated, emergent, and contested

experience, and casts displaced workers as agents whose quest to cope with their circumstances is both constrained and enabled.

This dissertation also makes an empirical contribution by using its proposed framework to examine the practice of blogging as a means of coping with job loss. Through in-depth analysis of interview transcripts and blog posts spanning six months, and using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006), this research probes the blogging practices of four laid-off professionals and identifies the coping tensions they grappled with, as well as the discursive strategies they used to navigate them.

Findings reveal that blogging was problematized both as a routine and a practice by the dialectic interplay of two overarching coping imperatives, namely the need to reverse job loss (*Resolution*) and the need to weather it in the meantime (*Endurance*). On one hand, bloggers grappled with the appropriateness of committing to a blog instead of dedicating themselves fully to their job search (*Productivity vs. Distraction*). In addition, they tried to harness the coping benefits of blogging while making sure that looking back on their experiences did not ultimately hold them back as well (*Looking Back vs. Moving Forward*). To manage these tensions, participants deployed a variety of transcendence and integration strategies (Seo et al., 2004). Specifically, *productivity display*s and *legitimization logics* enabled them to transcend tensional dynamics by reframing blogging, in turn, as a public record of productive time use and as a legitimate part of a productive routine. On the other hand, *humor*, *disclosure logics*, and *distancing tactics* proved useful for mitigating the constraining effects of blogging on participants' ability to move on emotionally and professionally from their job loss, while still allowing them to reap its coping benefits.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF APPENDICES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Between 2007 and 2009, the United States grappled with the worst and longest

financial crisis since the Great Depression of 1929. According to the Wall Street Journal,

this recession cost Americans 7.3 million jobs and 21% of their net worth, and left the

national economy mired in elevated joblessness (Murray, 2010). As in previous

downturns, the extensive damage to the job sector received ample coverage from formal

news organizations and media outlets in the customary form of market updates, layoff

announcements, commentary from economic experts, and field reports documenting the

impact of job loss on affected individuals. However, traditional forms of mass-mediated

journalism were not the only window into Americans' unemployment struggles in that

crisis. Supplementing them with intimate, interactive, and often real-time coverage of the

recession's fallout were the countless tales of post-layoff life generated by affected

individuals (and others) on blogs, discussion forums, social network sites, and other

social media outlets (e.g., Dizik, 2009; Dutta & Fraser, 2009; Herbst & Holahan, 2008;

Klaassen, 2009; LaGesse, 2009; MacMillan, 2008; Rose, 2009). Indeed, social media

emerged as popular outlets and coping tools for people affected by the recession, a space

to vent, come to terms with job loss, evaluate career options, network one's way to new

jobs or useful job leads, reach out to others in similar circumstances, and exchange

emotional and professional support (e.g., Alboher, 2008; Dizik, 2009; Herbst & Holahan,

2008; LaGesse, 2009; MacMillan, 2008; Rose, 2009).

Although noteworthy, this phenomenon is hardly new or surprising. A look at the

well-established literature on online social support shows that blogs, message forums,

and other social media applications are common destinations for people trying to cope

with stressful or disruptive events such as death (e.g., Williams & Merten, 2009),

illnesses and other health conditions (e.g., Eichhorn, 2008; Heilferty, 2009; Qian & Mao,

2010; Sanford, 2010; Shaw, Hawkins, McTavish, Pingree, & Gustafson, 2006; Shaw,

McTavish, Hawkins, Gustafson, & Pingree, 2000; Tanis, 2008;Wright, 2000; Wright,

2002; Yeshua-Katz & Martins, 2013), natural disasters (e.g., Macias, Hilyard, &

Freimuth, 2009; Procopio & Procopio, 2007), wars and political conflicts (e.g., Al-Ani,

Mark, & Semaan, 2010; Dutta-Bergman, 2006), and even occupational challenges (e.g.,

Babinski, Jones, & DeWert, 2001; Deryakulu & Olkun, 2007). A common theme in these

studies is that interacting with others via social media facilitates coping by allowing users

to express themselves, exchange information and emotional support, as well as

experience a sense of community. However, this line of research has yet to examine the

use of social media to cope with job loss and the processes through which such coping

occurs. This gap is surprising given the magnitude of the last recession, the proliferation

of social media use for communication and self-expression, and the emergence of several

trends that are changing people's perceptions about the meaning, role, and nature of work,

and thus compel an investigation of how they may also be shaping the way individuals

interpret and manage job loss. Such trends include decreased employment security, the

intensification of work and its increased centrality in people's lives, new views of career

as a carefully crafted individual and portable achievement grounded in entrepreneurial

spirit (see Edwards & Wajcman, 2005, for a discussion of the "portfolio career"),

generational shifts in work-related meanings and expectations (Long, Buzzanell, &

Kuang, 2016; O'Connor & Raile, 2015), the pervasive and ever growing use of

information and communication technologies (ICTs), and the advent of new

organizational forms and work arrangements (Cheney, Zorn, Planalp, & Lair, 2008; Weber, Fulk, & Monge, 2016; see also Ballard & Gossett, 2007 and Zorn & Townsley, 2008 for related discussions).

This lacuna is perhaps most salient in the communication discipline, which has traditionally attended to a wide variety of work-related contexts, issues, and processes – especially in the sub-field of organizational communication – but has yet to take much interest in the experience of job loss or the process of coping with it. However, with well-established lines of inquiry into topics such as organizational identity and identification (e.g., Agarwal & Buzzanell, 2015; Clarke, Brown, & Hailey, 2009; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Larson & Pepper, 2003; Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998; Scott & Timmerman, 1999; Williams & Connaughton, 2012), work-life balance (e.g., Golden, 2009, 2013; Hoffman & Cowan, 2008; Shumate & Fulk, 2004; Wieland, 2011), organizational change (e.g., Bird, 2007; Jian, 2007; Pepper & Larson, 2006; Yuxia, 2013), new forms of working and organizing (e.g., Ballard & Gossett, 2007; Gibbs, Nekrassova, Grushina, & Abdul Wahab, 2008; Hakonen & Bosch-Sijtsema, 2014; Hylmo & Buzzanell, 2002; Weber et al., 2016), as well as interest in issues of work meaning and meaningfulness (e.g., Cheney et al., 2008), it seems that an examination of the nature, meanings, and consequences of job loss and joblessness is a natural extension for our field.

Similarly, the communication discipline is well-positioned to study the use of social media to cope with job loss given its long and rich tradition of studying computer-mediated communication (CMC). Indeed, communication researchers across sub-disciplines have extensively investigated and theorized the properties of CMC, its advantages and shortcomings, the contexts in which it is used, the social processes that

characterize it, and the information and communication technologies (ICTs) through which it takes place. So far, nonetheless, studies of social media as coping tools have mostly been conducted in the sub-field of health communication and have, therefore, largely been confined to the context of illnesses, disorders, and medical conditions (e.g., Bochantin, 2014; Eichhorn, 2008; Keating & Rains, 2015; Qian & Mao, 2010; Rains, 2014; Sanford, 2010; Shaw et al., 2006; Shaw et al., 2000; Tanis, 2008; Wright, 2000; Wright, 2002; Yeshua-Katz & Martins, 2013).

Aside from contributions to topics of work life and mediated communication, however, the communication discipline has evolved theoretical traditions that can offer richer and deeper insights into the meaning and impact of job loss. Of particular relevance to this study is the constitutive view of communication (including CCO scholarship – see Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; Schoeneborn, Cooren, & McPhee, 2014 – as well as research by Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004) which casts communicative activity as the core process through which people construct and make sense of their world (Weick, 1995). From this perspective, the meanings individuals attach to various events are not static and do not exist *a priori*, but are emergent "artifacts" that are constantly produced and reproduced through communication, and serve to order the constant stream of life experiences (Putnam, 1983). When applied to job loss, this view invites communication scholars to question dominant notions of employment loss as a generically negative event that leads to predictable effects and coping choices (e.g., Latack, Kinicki, & Prussia, 1995; Leana & Feldman, 1988; Leana, Feldman, & Tan, 1998; McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005) and, instead, explore the emergent, constructed, and communicative nature of the

job loss experience (e.g., Buzzanell & Turner, 2003). This approach does *not* naively deny the disruptive and stressful impacts job loss often has or downplay the constraining circumstances people frequently face after losing a job. It does argue, however, that job loss is an emergent experience that unfolds and acquires meaning over time, as affected individuals interact with their circumstances and the world around them, construct narratives to make sense of their situation, and negotiate courses of action (see Buzzanell & Turner, 2003; Pederson, 2013). The nature and impact of this experience are not pre-configured or generically pre-labeled with positive and negative valences, but emergently and dynamically framed as constraining or enabling. Adopting this perspective allows communication scholars to enrich and expand current research about coping and job loss effects by highlighting the emergent, constructed, and contested nature of the job loss experience and the process of navigating and overcoming it (e.g., Buzzanell, 2010; Buzzanell & Turner, 2003).

A view of communicative and discursive practices as constitutive of meanings and experiences (e.g., Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Putnam, 1983; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; Weick, 1995) can also lead to valuable insights regarding the use of social media to cope with job loss. From this perspective, using social media to help overcome loss of employment is more than a rational strategy aimed at obtaining support or reducing the perceived economic, psychological, or social discrepancies caused by job loss, as cognitive models of job loss and coping might suggest (e.g., Latack et al., 1995). Instead, social media platforms can be more powerfully conceptualized as discursive settings for coping and sensemaking (Weick, 1979; 1995) that simultaneously shape and reflect, as well as enable and constrain, users' attempts to manage their job loss. By exploring how

social media platforms both condition the discursive agency of their users and emerge through it, communication scholars can challenge views of coping through social media as a mundane, if cathartic, practice. Such research can also contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the dynamics and issues involved in navigating job loss online, and hopefully inform programs, initiatives, and interventions aimed at helping individuals make a smoother transition through (and out of) job loss.

This set of objectives guides the present research. Premised on a view of communicative and discursive practice as constitutive of reality (e.g., Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004), this study aims to mitigate the dearth of communication-based research on job loss and the process of coping with it by making two contributions. First, it draws on the theories of sensemaking (Weick, 1979, 1995), structuration (Giddens, 1984, 1991), and dialectics (Bakhtin, 1981; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) to reconceptualize the job loss experience as emergent, contested, and grounded in ongoing sensemaking and communicative action. As will be elaborated below, job loss is re-cast as a rupture (Latack & Dozier, 1986; Pederson, 2013) in established patterns of activity and meaning whose impact is actively constructed in the moment-to-moment discursive practices of affected individuals, not passively or generically endured by them. Rather than lead to predictable effects, the disruption created by employment loss is posited to trigger processes of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) that shape the meaning and course of the job loss experience over time (Buzzanell, 2010; Buzzanell & Turner, 2003; Garrett-Peters, 2009; Pederson, 2013). These sensemaking activities are emergent, as they are continuously produced, reproduced, and modified as people affected by job loss engage with their circumstances and the world around them, and weave narratives about what job

loss means and what they can do about it. Sensemaking about job loss and coping is also situated, as it is always anchored in particular spatio-temporal contexts, and thus evolves at the juncture of the concerns, logics, values, and discourses that become salient in a particular space and time (e.g., Kuhn, 2006). Finally, sensemaking is constrained agency, as people both produce and reproduce the influences (i.e., priorities, concerns, values, discourses, etc.) that shape their outlook on job loss and the coping journey (see Giddens, 1984, 1991). These influences can intersect – or be juxtaposed – in both complimentary and conflicting ways (e.g., Broadfoot, Carlone, Medved, Aakhus, Gabor, & Taylor, 2008; Kuhn, Golden, Jorgenson, Buzzanell, Berkelaar, Kisselburgh, Kleinman, & Cruz, 2008), thus creating tensions that further challenge individuals coping with job loss to reconcile competing concerns or objectives. By transcending views of involuntary employment loss as a generically victimizing event and highlighting the enacted, yet constrained and contested, nature of coping, this study aims to offer a nuanced view of the ways in which people can shape and overcome their job loss experience.

Second, this study aims to bridge the gap in communication-based research on the use of social media to cope with employment loss. Drawing on the constitutive view of job loss and coping summarized above, it explores how blogging, as a context of technologically mediated discursive practice that is both personal and public, both constrains and enables displaced workers as they attempt to work through their loss and "bounce back" from it (Buzzanell, 2010, p. 1). Through in-depth analysis of interview transcripts and blog posts spanning six months, and using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006), this research examines the dialectical tensions that four laid-off professionals grappled with as they used blogging to cope with job loss, as well as the

various discursive strategies they deployed to manage them. Findings reveal that participants' use of blogging as a coping avenue was complicated by their concurrent pursuit of two competing coping objectives, namely Endurance (i.e., managing joblessness) and Resolution (i.e., overcoming joblessness). As they tried to manage their blogging practices and narratives in service of these two objectives, participants experienced tensions related to the investment in time and effort that blogging required (Productivity vs. Distraction), as well as the need, from a coping perspective, to both delve into the job loss experience and move on from it (Looking Back vs. Moving Forward). In each case, participants deployed a variety of discursive strategies that allowed them to mitigate, neutralize, or transcend the tension in question. Specifically, *productivity display*s and *legitimization logics* enabled them to blog about their experiences while continuing to demonstrate their commitment to getting reemployed as soon as possible. On the other hand, *humor*, *disclosure logics*, and *distancing tactics* proved useful for mitigating the constraining effects of blogging on participants' ability to move on emotionally and professionally from their job loss, while still allowing them to reap its coping benefits.

Exploring the constitution of coping in displaced workers' blog narratives is a timely research avenue given the proliferation of blogs about job loss in the recent recession (see above) and the continuing popularity of blogs as outlets for coping and self-expression in general. In May 2014, a quick query on Google Blog Search using the expression "I was laid off" rendered 7,930 blogs and approximately 1,200,000 blog posts. As of February 2016, a Google search of some of the most popular blog-publishing platforms using the similar, but wider reaching expression "I * laid off" yielded 13,900

results for Blogger.com, 971,000 results for Tumblr.com, and 2,920,000 results for Wordpress.com. According to the 2016 Nielsen Social Media Report, Wordpress and Tumblr ranked eighth and tenth, respectively, in the number of unique users (a combined total of 62 million) among social network platforms on smartphones in September 2016. When compared to social media platforms on PCs, Blogger, Wordpress, and Tumblr ranked fourth, seventh, and eighth in the number of unique users (a combined total of 51.9 million). Although research by NM Incite, a Nielsen/McKinsey company (2012) showed that more people blogged via social networks (12 million people) than on blogging sites (6.7 million people) as of the end of 2011, all indicators point to blogging being alive and well today. In fact, Technorati's State of the Blogosphere 2011 report suggested that rather than supplanting blogs, newer forms of social media may be helping bloggers spread the word to a larger audience. Based on a survey of 4,114 bloggers, the report showed that 82% and 89% of surveyed bloggers used Twitter and Facebook, respectively, and that almost 50% of Twitter-using bloggers and 74% of Facebook-using bloggers used these platforms to promote their blogs.

In addition to its longevity and continued popularity, blogging represents an instance of CMC that lends itself especially well to a conceptualization of job loss and coping as discursive and emergent. Indeed, blogs are self-disclosive (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), incrementally constructed, dynamic narratives that chronicle the experiences of their authors over time and in interaction with an audience (see Gurak & Antonijevic, 2008; Serfaty, 2004). Diary-like yet meant for public view (Gurak & Antonijevic, 2008; Serfaty, 2004), they constitute a unique, research-worthy form of public record and social testimonial that offers a window into events as they are unfolding, shows the evolution of

sensemaking over time, and illustrates the discursive, moment-to-moment construction of meanings, choices, and experiences.

By reconceptualizing job loss and coping from a constitutive perspective and extending that framework theoretically and empirically to the use of blogging as a coping avenue, this research aims to mitigate the dearth of communication-based research on job loss and the process of coping with it, as well as spark a lively conversation among communication scholars about the nature, locus, and merit of their possible contributions to the job loss literature.

The present dissertation is structured as follows. Chapter 2 reviews some of the major ideas and assumptions that have traditionally guided research on job loss and the process of coping with it, particularly in the fields of management and psychology. It also sets the stage for a subsequent theoretical examination of how job loss and coping can be conceptualized from a communicative perspective by summarizing some of the extant – and admittedly limited – research on employment loss in the communication discipline. Chapter 3 presents the guiding theoretical framework for this study. Drawing on a view of communication as constitutive of social reality (e.g., Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Giddens, 1984, 1991; Weick, 1979, 1995), and of reality as disorganized (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015) and contested [dialectical theory (Bakhtin, 1981; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996)], it argues that the experience of job loss and the process of coping with it are not generic or predictable, but emergently constructed and contested in ongoing sensemaking and communicative action. The chapter also paves the way for the empirical contribution of this study by exploring how the practice of blogging to cope with employment loss can be conceptualized in light of the proposed constitutive view on job loss and coping.

Chapter 4 lays out the qualitative methods used in this study for both data collection (blogs and interviews) and analysis (grounded theory). Then, Chapter 5 delves into the tensions that four laid-off individuals faced as they set out to blog about their job loss as a coping outlet. Finally, Chapter 6 interprets the findings of the study and positions them in the context of extant scholarship on job loss, coping, and organizational communication. This is followed by a discussion of limitations and future directions.

It is important to note at this stage that the focus of this dissertation is on job loss as the involuntary termination – as opposed to the voluntary cessation – of employment. Thus, the terms "job loss", "involuntary job loss", and "involuntary employment loss" are used interchangeably throughout this research. Moreover, individuals who have involuntarily lost their jobs are referred to as "displaced workers", as is common practice in the job loss literature (e.g., Garrett-Peters, 2009; Latack et al., 1995; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Although the word "displaced" may connote individuals who have been forced to move away from their home areas (or reduced to doing so), this certainly does not describe the bloggers in this study. As will be reiterated below, this research is conducted with the understanding that well-educated professionals who have the ability and means to blog about their job loss form a relatively privileged group, and that their experiences, decisions, and priorities in the wake of employment loss may not always reflect those of less privileged others. Nevertheless, blog narratives provide a valuable window into the experience of job loss and illuminate their authors' attempts to overcome it. The struggle to carve a space for agency in the midst of constraining circumstances will hopefully resonate with many.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As discussed above, communication-based examinations of job loss and its impact on the lives of affected individuals have been extremely limited (see Buzzanell & Turner, 2003; Buzzanell, 2010; Pederson, 2013 for rare examples). The present research aims to bridge this gap by reconceptualizing the experience of job loss as the emergent product of displaced workers' situated discursive practices and sensemaking efforts, and by exploring these dynamics in the context of blogging activities. In order to set the stage for a constitutive perspective on job loss, I will first examine some of the major assumptions that have traditionally informed scholarly thought on involuntary employment loss, its impact, and the process of coping with it, particularly in the fields of management and psychology. I will also review some of the extant research on job loss in the communication discipline.

Job Loss Research: Key Trends and Assumptions

The topic of job loss has garnered tremendous scholarly interest in many disciplines, including industrial and organizational psychology, management, and sociology (e.g., Amundson & Borgen, 1982; Borgen & Amundson, 1987; Kinicki, Prussia, & McKee-Ryan, 2000; Latack & Dozier, 1986; Latack, Kinicki, & Prussia, 1995; Leana & Feldman, 1988; Leana, Feldman, & Tan, 1998; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Payne, Warr, & Hartley, 1984; Solove, Fisher, & Kraiger, 2015; Spera, Buhrfeind, & Pennebaker, 1994; Zikic & Richardson, 2007). A common concern for scholars across these areas has been to determine the impact of job loss from both macro/structural and micro/individual viewpoints (Latack et al., 1995; Leana & Feldman, 1988). At the micro level of individual experience – the focus of this study - research has sought, for instance, to

understand the consequences of job loss for workers' physical and psychological well-being (e.g., McKee-Ryan et al., 2005), as well as to identify the factors that influence individuals' appraisal and experience of job loss (Borgen & Amundson, 1987; Latack et al., 1995; Leana & Feldman, 1988; Zikic & Richardson, 2007), their choice of coping behavior (Latack et al., 1995; Leana & Feldman, 1988; Leana et al., 1998; Solove et al., 2015; Thomson, 1997), and their ability to achieve positive outcomes such as a speedy return to employment (Solove et al., 2015; Spera et al., 1994), satisfactory reemployment (Kinicki et al., 2000; Leana & Feldman, 1988), and career growth (Latack & Dozier, 1986).

Across this literature, job loss has typically been found to be a disruptive, stressful event with dominantly negative consequences for the physical and emotional well-being of displaced workers (e.g., Borgen & Amundson, 1987; Leana & Feldman, 1988; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). For instance, a study by Borgen and Amundson (1987) showed that the loss of employment can, in many cases, result in an "emotional roller coaster" and elicit reactions of grief not unlike those typically associated with the loss of a loved one (see Kubler-Ross, 1969). In a comprehensive meta-analysis of the psychological and physiological effects of job loss, McKee-Ryan et al. (2005) examined cross-sectional studies that assessed differences in well-being between unemployed and employed individuals, as well as other longitudinal research that tracked changes in well-being as workers transitioned from unemployment to reemployment or vice-versa. They found that compared to employed workers, unemployed individuals experienced lower levels of mental wellness, perceived themselves to be less physically healthy, and were less satisfied with life and their marital or family situation. Moreover, whereas the

incidence of job loss was accompanied by a decrease in mental well-being,

reemployment was associated with better mental health, increased life satisfaction, and

improved perceptions of physical wellness. The disruptive effects of job loss documented

by research have not been confined to physical and emotional well-being, however, but

were found to extend, more dramatically, to displaced workers' identity and core sense of

self (e.g., Borgen & Amundson, 1987; McIntyre, Mattingly, Lewandowski, & Simpson,

2014; Papa & Maitoza, 2013). This is not surprising given the important role work plays

in shaping who we are, how we value ourselves, and who we affiliate and socialize with

(e.g., Doherty, 2009).

Given the accumulation of findings on the disruptive, stressful, and dis-

empowering effects of losing one's employment, much research has been dedicated to

examining how affected individuals cope – or should cope – to get their life back on track

(e.g., Kinicki et al., 2000; Latack & Dozier, 1986; Latack et al., 1995; Leana & Feldman,

1988; Leana et al., 1998; Solove et al., 2015; Thomson, 1997). Scholars have typically

conceptualized coping behavior as being either problem-focused or symptom-focused

(e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Latack & Havlovic, 1992; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). In

problem-focused coping, individuals engage in behavior aimed at resolving or

eliminating a problematic situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Symptom-focused

strategies, on the other hand, do not target the problem itself, but help individuals manage

the emotional toll of difficult circumstances (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Examples of

problem-focused coping behavior in the wake of job loss include looking for a new job,

moving to a location that affords better possibilities of finding employment, evaluating

one's financial situation and planning accordingly, reassessing one's mix of marketable

skills, and acquiring new knowledge or skills through training (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Alternatively, displaced workers can manage the emotional fallout of job loss by minimizing the perceived impact or significance of losing their employment, or relying on the help and support of family, friends, and others in their social network (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

Complicating empirical findings on the negative impact of job loss, however, is evidence that people affected by employment loss do not experience negative outcomes to the same extent or react to them in the same way (e.g., Borgen & Amundson, 1987; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). For instance, a qualitative study by Zikic and Richardson (2007) showed that for some older workers, job loss can turn out to be a "blessing in disguise" by providing opportunities for reassessment, exploration, development, and growth on both professional and personal levels. Another qualitative study by Borgen and Amundson (1987) revealed that participants' job loss experiences followed one of three trajectories. The first trajectory corresponded to men older than 25 and women, also over 25, who were additionally the primary bread winners in their household. For participants in this category, job loss was highly stressful and disruptive, akin to an "emotional roller coaster." Conversely, the emotional backlash of unemployment was less severe among high-school graduates and women who were secondary wage earners. The experiences of these two groups followed two distinct trajectories.

To explain and capture this variance in job loss effects and coping behavior, scholars have sought to develop models and frameworks that are complex and/or inclusive enough to account for the various factors and relationships at play (e.g., Kinicki et al., 2000; Latack & Dozier, 1986; Latack et al., 1995; Leana & Feldman, 1988;

McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Thomson, 1997). These frameworks exhibit several ontological and epistemological commonalities, which I outline below.

First, models of job loss and coping have been dominantly based on the assumptions of modernism and functionalism (see Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Putnam, 1983; Redding & Tompkins, 1988 for detailed descriptions of the modernist and functionalist paradigms). From this perspective, reality is presumed to exist objectively, independently of the actions and interpretations of individuals, waiting to be discovered (Putnam, 1983; Redding & Tompkins, 1988). Learning about reality is thought to require "objective" and "scientific" knowledge about its patterns, regularities, and the laws that govern them (Redding & Tompkins, 1988). Hence, research in the functionalist and modernist traditions emphasizes causality and seeks to identify the antecedents, effects, and other correlates of phenomena under study, with the aim of predicting and controlling these relationships (Redding & Tompkins, 1988). Consistently with these views, extant models of job loss and coping have reified employment loss as a stressful life event that occasions effects and coping choices in determinate, predictable patterns. Indeed, they have typically sought to unpack the impact of job loss and the process of coping with it through correlational maps that identify the various variables at play and specify the relationships between them using an inputs-processes-outputs logic (Gibbs et al., 2008). For instance, McKee-Ryan et al. (2005) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of empirical unemployment research and constructed a model of the factors that affect physiological and psychological well-being in the wake of job loss. They concluded that displaced workers' mental and physical health depended on the centrality of work in their lives, the way they interpret the loss of employment, the strategies they engage in to meet

the demands of the situation, and the array of resources (personal, financial, social, and time structure) available to them. Much effort has also been devoted to understanding and predicting individuals' coping behavior after job loss, resulting in a number of individual, situational, and cognitive variables that are posited to affect coping choices (Armstrong-Stassen, 1994; Kinicki et al., 2000; Latack et al., 1995; Leana & Feldman, 1988; Leana, Feldman, & Tan, 1998; Thomson, 1997). Another notable research strand has focused on identifying the factors that can help displaced workers attain positive outcomes after job loss, such as a quicker return to employment (Solove et al., 2015; Spera et al., 1994), satisfactory reemployment (Leana & Feldman, 1988; Kinicki et al., 2000), and career growth (Latack & Dozier, 1986). The value of these various models lies in their attempt to paint an inclusive yet simplified picture of complex processes like the unfolding of job loss effects or the choice of coping strategies, as well as enable practitioners to design interventions to promote positive career outcomes for displaced workers. However, by emphasizing the patterned and predictable nature of job loss effects and coping behavior, these models reinforce dominant views of displaced workers as disempowered individuals and as victims who can only react to their affliction, and who must do so in prescribed ways to guarantee positive outcomes (e.g., Latack & Dozier, 1986; Leana & Feldman, 1988). As a result, they greatly constrain the possible avenues for agency, creativity, and empowerment that these people might have.

Another feature job loss models have in common is their tendency to portray the process through which individuals interpret and react to being displaced as essentially cognitive and internal. Drawing on coping theory and particularly the work of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), their general assumption has been that job loss triggers cognitive

appraisal processes through which workers determine the extent to which their dismissal is a positive event or, alternatively, a source of harm, loss, or threat (Leana & Feldman, 1988; Latack et al., 1995; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Other appraisals include the extent to which job loss is considered reversible, reemployment is deemed likely, and displacement is attributed to internal (i.e., individual) or external (i.e., environmental) causes (see Leana & Feldman, 1988; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Thomson, 1997). According to Latack et al. (1995), these cognitive assessments constitute "the primary intervening variables between involuntary job loss and subsequent behavioral outcomes" (p. 320). In Leana and Feldman's (1988) model, cognitive appraisal joins a number of psychological and situational factors that mediate the effect of job loss on coping behavior.

Not surprisingly, the coping process has also been typically defined in primarily cognitive terms. A commonly referenced definition of coping by job loss scholars is that of "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the person's resources" (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986, p.993). Consistent with this view, Latack et al. (1995) have conceptualized coping as the cyclical and iterative process of reducing the economic, psychological, physiological, and/or social discrepancies that individuals may perceive in the wake of job loss, as they compare their current conditions to some desired state of affairs (Latack et al., 1995). From this perspective, the choice of coping strategies is a rational, goal-oriented, and planning-based decision made by the individual through cognitive and psychological mechanisms. Although perhaps intuitively appealing, this position does not acknowledge the often

organic and emergent nature of human action. For instance, research on sensemaking

suggests that rather than rationally plan their behavior, people often act first and

retrospectively try to justify what they have done (Weick, 1979, 1995). Moreover,

cognitive models of job loss do not take into consideration the role of communication and

social interaction, elaborated in detail below, in shaping the meanings displaced workers

assign to their displacement, as well as constraining and enabling various opportunities

for coping action. Instead, displaced workers' embeddedness or participation in social

networks is merely considered as a source of support and as a predictor of well-being

(e.g., McKee-Ryan et al., 2005) and coping choices (e.g., Leana & Feldman, 1988).

Finally, extant models of job loss and coping have not adequately accounted for

the fact that job loss effects and coping choices unfold and evolve over time. As

discussed above, these frameworks have mainly focused on identifying *what* variables

and relationships predict the type of impact displaced workers experience and the coping

strategies they use. Consequently, they have done little to explain *how* the relationships

they prescribe develop with time (Latack et al., 1995). However, scholars agree that

coping with job loss is a dynamic process and that more longitudinal research is needed

to capture its evolution over time (e.g., Kinicki et al., 2000; Latack et al., 1995; McKee-

Ryan et al., 2005; Solove et al., 2015). Moreover, several empirical studies point to the

importance of attending to the role of time and process in research on job loss and

coping. For instance, Borgen and Amundson (1987) showed that displaced workers'

emotional and psychological states varied over the course of unemployment, as they

grieved the loss of employment, embarked on a job search, and experienced the ups and

downs of that process. In related research, McKee-Ryan et al.'s (2005) meta-analysis

suggested that longer unemployment periods might intensify the negative effects of job loss on displaced workers' psychological well-being. In a longitudinal study about coping with job loss, Kinicki et al. (2000) found that people made different coping choices at different points in time and that the predictors of problem-focused and symptom-focused coping behavior also changed over the course of job loss. These findings led the authors to assert that "it is an oversimplification to study job loss as a single event" (Kinicki et al., 2000, p. 99). Finally, a qualitative study of older managers in Canada who had lost their jobs found that the meanings participants associated with their employment loss changed over time (Zikic & Richardson, 2007). Despite initial feelings of loss, stress, or even of relief and wanting to escape, some participants' attempts to make sense of their circumstances and explore career possibilities eventually allowed them to develop a more positive and empowered stance toward their employment loss, and even see it as a blessing in disguise.

Despite all this evidence, extant models of job loss and coping have seldom incorporated the notions of time and process. One notable exception is Latack et al.'s (1995) "integrative process model of coping with job loss," which I briefly outlined above. Predicated on the need to "[go] beyond the 'what' of coping to the 'how' of coping" in job loss research (p. 314), this framework portrays coping as the continuous, iterative, and cyclical process of planning coping strategies to reduce perceived discrepancies between current conditions and desired state of affairs, evaluating the outcomes of these choices, reassessing discrepancies and coping goals, making new coping choices, and so on (Latack et al., 1995). This cycle is posited to repeat itself until discrepancies disappear and balance is restored. Although the model emphasizes the importance of time and

recognizes that the various elements of the coping process (i.e., discrepancy appraisals, coping resources, and coping choices) change over the course of unemployment, the systems-theory tradition on which it builds prevents it from attending to the meaning-ful aspects of job loss. In other words, it does not capture how the job loss experience comes to have particular meanings or how such meanings, as well as the coping choices that emerge from them, are constructed, negotiated, maintained, and modified over time. Instead, the dynamic and processual nature of coping is reduced to an iterative cycle aimed at restoring a cognitively determined, or rather pre-determined, state of equilibrium.

In conclusion, extant research has predominantly portrayed job loss as a disruptive, stressful, and disempowering experience that is typically detrimental to the physical and psychological well-being of affected individuals, and that triggers coping responses in presumably predictable patterns (e.g., Leana et al., 1998; Thomson, 1997). From this perspective, blogging about job loss can be classified either as an instance of problem-focused coping aimed at networking and securing a new job or as a tool for symptom-focused coping given the avenues for venting and seeking social support it affords. Conversely, a constitutive perspective (e.g., Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009) can reveal added layers of complexity by casting the practice of blogging about job loss not as a coping strategy in reaction to a well-defined event, but as a constitutive, discursive process through which the meaning of employment loss and the range of possible or acceptable actions are emergently and dynamically constructed. It bears mentioning, however, that not all job loss research outside the communication field has subscribed to the functionalist and cognitive assumptions summarized above. For

instance, there have been several studies that have used qualitative methods like interviews, narrative methodology, and grounded theory to explore the disruptive effects of job loss on the self-concept of affected individuals, as well as the strategies used to cope with them (e.g., Fraher & Gabriel, 2014; Gabriel, Gray, & Goregaokar, 2010; Garrett-Peters, 2009; Norris, 2016). This study shares a similar interest in a qualitative and more complex approach to the coping process, but further seeks to explore the latter's discursive and contested nature. In the remainder of this chapter, I set the stage for a constitutive perspective on job loss and coping by summarizing extant research efforts about job loss in the communication discipline.

Job Loss Research in the Communication Discipline

Communication scholars have paid relatively little attention to the topic of job loss, despite its relevance to the interpersonal, organizational, mediated, and health-related contexts of social experience to which the field has traditionally attended. The modest research efforts in this area have mostly taken an organization-centric perspective, thus focusing on the strategic role of communication in announcing and facilitating the implementation of layoffs and other organizational change initiatives, and showing more interest in the effects of such decisions on the attitudes and work behaviors of layoff survivors than in their impact on layoff victims (DeKay, 2010; Johnson & Bernhagen, 1996; Ritchey & Turner, 2001; Susskind, Miller, & Johnson, 1998; Tourish, Paulsen, Hobman, & Bordia, 2004; Tudor & Sleeth, 1997; Warnick, 2010). Although this research represents an important contribution to the field and has helped underscore the strategic role of communication practitioners in organizations today, communication scholars can complement and further enrich it by transcending its dominantly managerial

focus, and honoring their discipline's tradition of showcasing a multiplicity of voices and foregrounding different meanings, interests, and concerns (Mumby & Stohl, 1996).

In addition to this research, there have been some noteworthy, though scarce, communication-based examinations of the experience of job loss. Buzzanell and Turner (2003) conducted one of the few communication-based studies that not only gave voice to the struggles of people affected by job loss, but did so from a social constructionist perspective (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966) that emphasized the discursive, co-constructed, and situated nature of the job loss experience, as well as the processes of emotion work that occur within it. Through interviews with men who had lost their jobs and their family members, the authors examined the discursive constructions through which respondents strove to "display feelings in socially appropriate ways" (p. 30). Their findings revealed three themes of emotion work, namely the backgrounding-foregrounding of feelings, the construction of normalcy, and the (re)institution of traditional masculinities. These themes showed how the men and their families tried to take control of their circumstances by collaboratively enacting acceptable emotional displays, sustaining a sense of normalcy, and (re)affirming traditional masculine roles.

Although Buzzanell and Turner's study highlighted the toll that job loss takes on people's lives, families, and sense of self, it also showed how individuals affected by job loss strive to regain control over their circumstances, and collaboratively enact agency and resilience by engaging with the constraining and enabling aspects of contextual discourses. These findings later informed Buzzanell's (2010) reconceptualization of resilience from an attribute a person might or might not have to ''the process of reintegrating from disruptions in life'' (Richardson, 2002, p. 309), a process she

described as "developed, sustained, and grown through discourse, interaction, and material considerations" (Buzzanell, 2010, p. 1). According to the paper, resilience is enacted through five communicative processes aimed at "(a) crafting normalcy, (b) affirming identity anchors, (c) maintaining and using communication networks, (d) putting alternative logics to work, and (e) legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action." (p. 3). It is this view of agency and resilience (i.e., in Buzzanell, 2010 and Buzzanell & Turner, 2003) as enacted, constrained, contested, and continuously negotiated in discursive practice that informs the conceptualization of coping espoused in this paper and that guides the subsequent examination of coping and resilience in blog narratives.

As discussed above, communication scholars have yet to attend to the dynamics of coping with job loss in online contexts. One exception is a study by Pederson (2013), which explored the disruptive impact of job loss on the self-concept and the way identities are continuously constituted and performed through narrative. Using narrative thematic analysis, the author examined evidence of identity work in the online job loss stories of 50 individuals. He found that, by narrating their experiences, the authors of these stories were able to make sense of their job loss and construct their identities as unemployed individuals. As they positioned their self-concept vis-à-vis the loss they had experienced, these authors drew on the cultural master narrative of the American Dream and, in so doing, worked to "reflect, construct, disrupt, and counter" it (p. 302). Five identities were discerned in the online stories, including victim, redeemed, hopeless, bitter, or entitled and dumbfounded.

Pederson's (2013) study is noteworthy because it conceptualizes identity work in the wake of job loss as emergently (re)constructed through discourse and as contextually informed by the master narrative of the American Dream. However, the author does not address how the online context factors into this sensemaking process in terms of its interactivity or public nature, for example. As a result, the fact that the job loss stories were produced online verges on being incidental. Conversely, the present study views that blogging, as a particular kind of technologically mediated discursive context, both shapes and reflects bloggers' coping practices, and generates situated coping narratives that are variously constrained and enabled.

CHAPTER 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theorizing Job Loss from a Constitutive Perspective

I will now begin to articulate a constitutive perspective on employment loss by drawing on a number of theories that can usefully inform a view of job loss experiences and coping processes as emergent discursive artifacts. The objective is to articulate a framework, in the loose sense of the word, that can guide future inquiry on the topic of job loss by communication scholars and act as a springboard for further theoretical development. I will first discuss how theoretical approaches that speak to the constitutive role of communication – specifically sensemaking (Weick, 1979, 1995) and structuration (Giddens, 1984, 1991) – and that foreground the disorganized (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015) and contested nature of social reality – dialectical theory (Bakhtin, 1981; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) – can illuminate the processes through which job loss is discursively enacted, experienced, and negotiated. Then, I will turn my attention to blog-themed research in the communication discipline and briefly examine how it has approached the role of blogging for coping with disruptive life events. The focus, however, will be on articulating the role of blogging, as a distinct genre of discursive praxis, in constituting the experience of job loss and the process of coping with it.

Contributions from the constitutive perspective on communication. One of the main premises advanced in this study is that communication is the core process through which people construct their world and make sense of it (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Putnam, 1983; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; Weick, 1995). From this perspective, objects and life events are not pre-packaged for our attention and do not "carry" intrinsic meanings or valences that are cognitively decoded

or inferred. Instead, an object or episode is bracketed as significant, brought into relief, and vested with particular meanings through discursive practices (Weick, 1995). In other words, meanings do not exist *a priori*, but are emergent and localized communicative "artifacts" that serve to order the stream of experience and mitigate the complexity and ambiguity associated with it (Putnam, 1983; Weick, 1995). Thus, making sense of the world does not involve the cognitive interpretation of pre-defined or pre-packaged events, but is the intersubjective process of creating the very world we then attend to (Weick, 1995).

In the field of organizational communication, the constitutive view of communication can be traced to the interpretive turn in the early 1980s, which challenged notions of organizations as objective, reified entities, and of communication as a distinct phenomenon that took place within organizational boundaries (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015). Indeed, early research in the field had framed communication in terms of the "conduit" metaphor (Axley, 1984), thus casting it as a transmission process in which messages were relayed across channels between communicators. Organizations, for their part, were viewed as real, material entities that existed objectively, independent of the actions and interpretations of their members (Putnam, 1983). They were containers (Krone, Jablin, & Putnam, 1987) in which communication circulated and members were "instruments of purposeful-rational action aimed at technological effectiveness and organizational efficiency" (Putnam, 1983, p. 36). However, this perspective received extensive criticism as part of the interpretive and critical movements in organizational communication, which led to alternative views on the nature of organization, communication, and the relationship between the two. These new perspectives

conceptualized organizations as subjective constructs that were continuously produced and reproduced through communication. Meanings, on the other hand, were emergent communication "artifacts" that served to order the stream of experience (Putnam, 1983).

These developments were precipitated and inspired by the work of Weick (1979), who famously proclaimed that "the word organization is a noun, and it is also a myth" (p. 88), and called on scholars to focus on the process of *organizing* instead (see Putnam & Krone, 2006; Taylor, Flanagin, Cheney, & Seibold, 2001). Organizing, from his perspective, refers to "a consensually validated grammar for reducing equivocality by means of sensible interlocked behaviors" (p. 3) - the ongoing, emergent, and interactive process by which people construct and make sense of their world. Organizations only appear orderly, coherent, rational, and purposeful in hindsight, as members orient to past behaviors and experiences, and retrospectively attribute goals, intentions, and rationality. Communication is the core process by which organizing is accomplished.

Today, the constitutive role of communication is the focus of a rich and diverse body of research and theoretical perspectives, collectively known as the CCO approach (for Communicative Constitution of Organization, see Putnam & Nicotera, 2009). According to Brummans, Cooren, Robichaud, and Taylor (2014), CCO research is defined by three major schools of thought, namely the Montreal School of organizational communication (e.g., Cooren, 2012; Cooren, Taylor, & Van Every, 2006; Robichaud, 2006; Taylor & Van Every, 2000), the Four Flows Model (Corman, McPhee, & Iverson, 2007; McPhee & Iverson, 2009; McPhee & Zaug, 2000), which draws on Giddens's (1984, 1991) Structuration Theory, and Luhmann's Theory of Social Systems (e.g., Luhmann, 2003; Schoeneborn, 2011; Seidl & Becker, 2006). All three perspectives posit

that organizations (and social reality) emerge through communicative processes and seek to explain how such emergence occurs. However, they diverge markedly in their stance toward the communication-organization relationship [i.e., how to "scale up" (Taylor & Van Every, 2000) from micro to macro levels of analysis], as well as the materiality of organizing, and the nature of communication and agency (human and non-human) (see Schoeneborn et al., 2014 for a detailed and systematic comparison; see also Ashcraft et al., 2009). In addition to these three perspectives, research on the constitutive role of communication in organizing has been informed by the work of Gail T. Fairhurst and Linda L. Putnam (Faihurst & Putnam, 2004; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015), who offered three orientations (object, becoming, and grounded in action) for understanding "how scholars could make the leap from organizing as enacted through communication to organization as anchored in discursive forms" (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015, p. 378). For them, discourse is not synonymous with communication, but a "broader" concept that "embrace[s] the unique properties of language as patterns for constituting organization" (p. 377).

When applied to the involuntary loss of employment, a view of communication as constitutive of meanings and experiences calls into question *a priori* notions of job loss as a generically or predictably negative occurrence and suggests that the meanings, experiences, and effects of this event are local and situated constructs that cannot be dissociated from the discursive practices from which they emerged. But how does such discursive construction occur?

In the remainder of this section, I start to answer this question by drawing on theoretical perspectives that lend themselves to a constitutive view of communication,

specifically Weick's (1979, 1995) notion of sensemaking and Gidddens's (1984, 1991)

structuration theory. The approach taken here sets the stage for an empirical examination

of blogging as a coping practice in the wake of job loss, and thus focuses on the

symbolic, interpretive, and situated aspects of the processes by which bloggers enact their

coping journeys. Although admittedly an inextricable part of reality (Orlikowski, 2007),

materiality is not directly addressed in this study. Moreover, this research focuses on the

individual (albeit interactive) experiences of bloggers dealing with job loss and, as such,

is not concerned with the emergence of organization through communicative or

discursive processes. For these reasons, I do not draw explicitly on any of the three CCO

schools of thought mentioned above. Although inspired by CCO, this study find its

"constitutive grounding" (theoretically speaking) in the work of Weick and Giddens,

which is reviewed below.

Contributions from sensemaking theory. I begin to articulate a constitutive

view on job loss and coping by drawing on Weick's research on sensemaking (1979,

1995), which he describes as the ongoing social process through which individuals attend

to disruptions and discrepancies in their lives, and attempt to reduce the complexity and

ambiguity that accompany them. Weick (1979) argues that breakdowns in people's

expectations and activity sequences elicit emotional responses and prompt attempts to

comprehend what happened and make sense of it. However, sensemaking for Weick is

not about interpreting a clear, concrete event that is "there," waiting to be explained. In

order to make sense of a situation, he argues, people must first define it and decide what

they will pay attention to. Hence, disruption and ambiguity are first tackled with action

by orienting to the flow of experience and segmenting certain portions for attention, a

process Weick terms "enactment." What gets bracketed as noteworthy, however, depends on what the sensemaker notices. Indeed, Weick explains, people only focus on select aspects of a given situation in their sensemaking efforts and tend to reduce the totality of the episode to those extracted cues. Furthermore, he argues, the cues that are singled out for attention and the specific meanings imposed on them from the constellation of possible interpretations are contingent on and constrained by the rules, norms, expectations, and politics of the context. The sense that is made of a particular situation also depends on the emotional state of the sensemaker and what is happening at the time of observation.

Once sensemakers have acted to define the situation at hand, they then attempt to interpret it by drawing on their repertoire of past experiences. The focus here, according to Weick, is not on accurate explanations, but on ones that are plausible, workable, and context-appropriate. These interpretations are then retained for future reference as "causal maps," thus constraining future sensemaking activities (Weick, 1979).

Unlike traditional, rational models of decision-making that call for diagnosing situations before acting on them, Weick (1979) foregrounds action and posits sensemaking and rationality as retrospective. He maintains that behaviors and experiences only appear orderly, coherent, and purposeful in hindsight, as people orient to them after the fact and retrospectively vest them with attributes, goals, intentions, and rationality. He famously asks: "How do I know what I think until I see what I say?" By extending this view to the study of job loss, one can wonder, in the same vein: "How do we know how people interpret job loss and cope with it until we examine what they say and do about it?" This question highlights another property of sensemaking, which is

crucial to the argument presented here. Namely, sensemaking is a communicative, intersubjective achievement, because it emerges from the interconnected behaviors and action-response sequences of the people involved in it, and because "[c]onduct is contingent on the conduct of others, whether those others are imagined or physically present" (Weick, 1995, p. 39).

The concept of sensemaking is particularly useful to the present discussion on job loss and coping because employment loss is a rupture in the established routines, resources, roles, and expectations of affected individuals, and a throw into unfamiliar territory that breeds ambiguity and sparks the need to take stock of what happened and make sense of it (e.g., Buzzanell & Turner, 2003). Based on the premises summarized above, displaced workers do not react to job loss as a universal, uncontested, or unequivocal event, but are initially mobilized by the perception of interruptions or discrepancies in their stream of experience, which prompts them to figure out what happened. According to Weick (1995), determining what took place and making sense of it do not involve the interpretation of circumstances that are "there," but requires individuals to define what the problem is in the first place and select what aspects of the situation to focus on. For instance, one person may primarily construct job loss in terms of financial impairment, whereas another may focus on the opportunity to reinvent his or her career. In doing so, they each create the environment in which they will act, and their inventions influence the meanings that they subsequently attribute to job loss and the range of actions they deem appropriate. These determinations are not the static or even cyclically changing result of individuals' cognitive appraisals, but the outcome of an ongoing, emergent, and dynamic process that is grounded in equally mutable processes

and contexts of social interaction. One important implication of this line of thinking is that people do not experience job loss differently because they bring different interpretations and situational contingencies to otherwise similar circumstances, but because the circumstances they face are essentially different as a result of enactment processes.

In sum, Weick's (1995) framework suggests that displaced workers find meaning and meaningfulness in their circumstances through situated and intersubjective sensemaking processes. However, it does not fully explicate how such meanings are constructed, constrained, and enabled. For instance, it is made clear that sensemaking narratives are not boundless, but conditioned by the social context, the sensemakers' need to maintain consistent and positive conceptions of themselves, and the causal maps, or recipes, retained from previous sensemaking attempts (Weick, 1979, 1995). Weick (1995) also suggests that causal maps can be appropriated from others in his description of organizing as "a mixture of vivid, unique intersubjective understandings and understandings that can be picked up, perpetuated, and enlarged by people who did not participate in the original intersubjective construction" (p. 72). Still, it is not clear how other influences on sensemaking might enter the picture.

Nevertheless, the latter quote by Weick (1995) is helpful because it foregrounds a question that is fundamental to the human condition: Are people deterministically constrained by reality in the form of external, reified, and imposed structures or do they live in a world of their own making in which reality is mediated by social constructions? Known as the action-structure dualism, this question is deemed to be "the defining characteristic of modern Western social and organizational theory" (Conrad & Haynes,

2001). With respect to job loss, the issue concerns the role of macrosocial and institutionalized systems of meaning and practice in constraining the meanings that displaced workers construct about job loss and the actions they negotiate in the process. As I explain in the following section, the position I take on this issue is based on Giddens's (1979, 1984) theory of structuration, which postulates that action and structure constitute one another and are bound in inextricable ways (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004).

Contributions from structuration theory. Structuration theory (Giddens, 1984 – see also Banks & Riley, 1993; Taylor, Groleau, Heaton, & Van Every, 2001b) has garnered great attention among communication scholars, especially those who espouse a view of communication as constitutive of reality. A key concept in this theory is that of the duality of structure, which rejects dualistic ideas of action and structure as separate and posits that they are mutually constitutive (see also Conrad & Haynes, 2001; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004).

According to Giddens (1979, 1984), structure refers to the rules and resources that people draw on in the course of interaction to produce and reproduce social systems. Structure is said to have a dual nature because it mediates social action and is reproduced by it in return. Indeed, people use rules and resources during interaction, but in doing so sustain or modify the very structural elements that made their action possible. Hence, structuration is an interactive, recursive process of mutual determination between system and structure.

Another important property of structure according to Giddens (1979, 1984) is that it is virtual and has no existence except in social practice. Hence, structuration theory subscribes to Fairhurst and Putnam's (2004) "grounded in action" perspective, which

assumes that macro social systems do not exist as entities and never crystallize as such from the practices of individuals because they are always "anchored at the level of social practices and discursive forms" (p. 16). They are thus no more than "sets of practices patterned in time and space and layered to form institutions" (p. 17). Institutionalization happens when the structural aspects of social systems have become highly embedded and achieved significant propagation or generalization across time and space (Taylor et al., 2001b).

A structurational view on job loss and coping is useful because it illuminates the constrained and enabled aspects of human agency. From this perspective, displaced workers construct the meaning of job loss and enact the range of possible and acceptable responses in the context of micro discursive activity, but in so doing both produce and reproduce broader-level systems of meaning and practice. The importance of attending to the recursive relationship between system and structure in meaning-making was repeatedly underscored in a 2008 *Management Communication Quarterly* forum on meaning/ful work. Indeed, several participating scholars have called for more examinations of the ways in which micro-level constructions about work meaning/fulness are simultaneously informed by a variety of intersecting organizational, occupational, economic, societal, historical, and cultural discourses (e.g., Broadfoot et al., 2008; Kuhn et al., 2008). Similarly, Cheney et al. (2008) called for an intersubjective, communication-based perspective on work meaning and meaningfulness that "acknowledge[s] historical, economic, and cultural contexts but also (…) recognize[s] shared conceptions of meaningful work within particular sites or networks at particular times" (p. 145). Discourses in this sense are conceptualized from a Foucauldian

perspective, as standardized and integrated "systems for the formation and articulation of ideas" (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000, p. 1126). However, it is important to note that Foucault (1976, 1980) vests discourse with significant constitutive and deterministic powers when it comes to the construction of reality and meaning (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000), a notion not intended by the authors cited above.

To explicate the processes though which displaced workers' micropractices both produce and reproduce macrosocial discourses, I draw on work by Kuhn (2006; Kuhn et al., 2008), which posits that organizational, occupational, and cultural discourses shape micro-level construals of meaning and meaningfulness by providing particular "arrays of discursive resources" (Kuhn et al., 2008, p. 163) that individuals draw on in the course of routine communicative practices. Discursive resources are defined as "concepts, expressions, or other linguistic devices that, when deployed in talk, present explanations for past and/or future activity that guide interactants' interpretation of experience while molding individual and collective action" (Kuhn, 2006, p. 1341). As such, they play an instrumental role in the discursive construction, negotiation, description, and rationalization of the meanings (Kuhn, 2006; Kuhn et al., 2008). However, the repertoire of discursive resources available to individuals is ultimately contingent on, and constrained by the locale (Kuhn, 2006). According to Pred (1990, p. 123), a locale is "a site-specific combination of presences and absences, a particular combination of physical resources, a specific conjunction of human artifacts and/or elements of the natural world, that serves to enable and focus the interaction or activities in question." It is not a box-like structure that encapsulates meaning construction, but a context of meaning and practice that affords particular repertoires of discursive discourses, and thus shapes the

construction of meaning (Kuhn, 2006; Kuhn et al., 2008). Moreover, Kuhn (2006)

cautions, "actors do not select discursive resources as if arranged on a menu, but rather

employ accounts that align with their own self-narratives and the expectations of relevant

others (…)" (p. 1354). In a study in 2006, he examined the agentic and structural

processes of identity construction by analyzing how employees at two different

companies accounted for the way they allocated time to their work. His results showed

that the extent to which employees' accounts reflected identity-based choices regarding

time allocation or the constraining effects of organizational and social expectations

depended on the repertoires of discursive resources made available by the organization

and the locale, as well as on the degree to which these repertoires afforded manifestations

of structure or agency.

By attending to the various meso- and macro- discourses (i.e., organizational,

occupational, socio-cultural, historical, economic, etc.) active in a particular setting and

the repertoires of discursive resources they make available (Kuhn 2006; Kuhn et al.,

2008), one can explicate how micro meanings and practices in the context of job loss are

shaped by broad contextual influences, and thus generate "more contextualized" (Kuhn,

2007, p. 3) accounts of the discursive construction of job loss and coping. The range of

relevant discourses need not be posited in advance, but should be determined in the

course of empirical investigation (Boczkowski & Orlikowski, 2004). In fact, Alvesson

and Kärreman (2000) caution researchers about presuming *a priori* the influence of

particular discourses in shaping organizational reality, as this would reduce empirical

investigation to a process of fitting collected data into pre-established and pre-assumed

categories, thus seriously compromising their richness, complexity, and variability.

Contributions from dialectical theory. As displaced workers strive to make sense of job loss and negotiate ways to cope with it, they do not engage with contextual discourses separately, but often contend with their intersections and overlapping influences (see Broadfoot et al., 2008; Kuhn et al., 2008). Indeed, discourses may either complement or undermine each other, and thus constrain and enable sensemaking efforts in various ways (see Broadfoot et al., 2008; Kuhn et al., 2008). For instance, Ainsworth and Hardy (2009) found that older unemployed workers experienced tensions at the intersection of two discourses, a physical discourse that led them to believe their career was over because of their age and a psychotherapeutic one that emphasized their ability to find a solution through "self-examination and self-improvement" (p. 1203).

To understand and theorize the fraught and contested nature of sensemaking in the wake of job loss, I draw on dialectical theory (see Bakhtin, 1981; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) for insights. Inspired by the work of Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) on dialogism, dialectical theory was initially elaborated by Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery (1996) for the study of personal relationships. One of its main premises is that relationships are beset by predicaments and tensions between opposing tendencies, and continuously evolve as people enact and manage those contradictory aspects in interaction. In recent years, researchers have been increasingly using dialectical theory to foreground and examine contradictions in organizational contexts (e.g., Erhardt & Gibbs, 2009; Gibbs, 2009; Gibbs, Rozaidi, & Eisenberg, 2013; Gibbs, Scott, Kim, & Lee, 2010; Jian, 2007; Tracy, 2004), with a keen interest in identity tensions (e.g., Clarke et al., 2009; Gotsi, Andriopoulos, Lewis, & Ingram, 2010; Kuhn, 2006; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2007; Larson & Pepper, 2004; Pepper & Larson, 2006).

A tension emerges when there are two tendencies or alternatives that conflict with one another, but are both necessary (Gibbs et al., 2013). Unlike simple contradictions, which involve polar opposites and require that only one of them be selected or pragmatic paradoxes, which "demand impossible choices between non-existent or mutually exclusive options," dialectical tensions make it possible to combine alternatives in creative, productive ways (Gibbs, 2009, p. 908, see also Putnam & Boys, 2006; Tracy, 2004). According to Trethewey and Ashcraft (2004; see also Putnam, 1986), tensions and contradictions are normal, common aspects of organizing, not anomalies or exceptional states, as portrayed by the "enduring myths of rationality and order that shape the prevalent logics of organization theory and practice" (p. 81). Thus, instead of focusing on resolving or eliminating them, the authors argue, effort should be made to expose and explicate them, as well as explore productive ways for managing them. Doing so enriches perspectives on organizational practices, opens up new spaces and possibilities for action, and contributes to theorizing efforts. Trethewey and Ashcraft's call was echoed by Putnam and Fairhurst (2015), who remarked that "discourse scholars have focused too much on order, organizing, and organization at the cost of examining disorder, disruption, and disorganization" (p. 384). By examining tensions, they argued, scholars could account for the disorganized aspects of organizational life and "capture the interplay between organization and disorganization" (p. 384). Applied to the context of job loss, a dialectical approach can foreground the ambiguity that follows the involuntary loss of employment and address how affected individuals negotiate conflicting coping concerns and priorities.

In the course of discursive practice, tensions manifest themselves at the juncture of macro-level structural influences and micro-level agency (see also Broadfoot et al., 2008), at the intersection of various meso- and macro-social discourses, as well within particular discourses (Kuhn et al. 2008). For example, impermanence is a discourse of contemporary capitalism that is associated with globalization trends and the rise of non-standard work arrangements (see Ballard & Gossett, 2007), and that "see[s] career as the possession of the individual" (Kuhn et al., 2008, p. 166). Although capitalism promises temporal flexibility to virtual workers and financial independence to entrepreneurs, these promises are often left unrealized because virtual workers commonly end up working longer hours (see Steward, 2000), and because jobs of a less stable nature seldom offer financial security (Kuhn et al., 2008). Thus, there are tensions within capitalism itself, between the discourse of impermanence and the discourse of rewards, that affect construals about the meaning of work (Kuhn et al., 2008). By approaching coping tensions in the wake of job loss as situated constructs, scholars can transcend the notion of coping as a purely individual predicament or achievement, and instead foreground how it is informed by shared and enduring patterns of meaning and sensemaking.

In addition to identifying tensions and contradictions in contexts of discursive practice, researchers who adopt a dialectical approach often seek to understand how these predicaments are discursively managed (e.g., Gibbs, 2009; Gibbs et al., 2013; Jian, 2007; Tracy, 2004). Seo, Putnam, and Bartunek (2004) identify four types of responses to tensions in the literature on contradictions, namely selection, separation, integration, and transcendence. First, *selection* involves denying or ignoring one of the poles, which leads to the selection of the other. *Separation*, on the other hand, acknowledges both poles, but

keeps them separate by deploying them in different contexts or at different times, then oscillating between them accordingly. Neither selection nor separation is considered productive, as both strategies ignore the tension at hand. The third response, *integration*, actively attends to the tension, but does so through neutralization or a forced merger, neither of which is conducive to the complete fulfillment of the two poles. As such, it can still be problematic. Finally, *transcendence* allows for surmounting a tension or duality by reframing and transforming it. Although creative, this strategy does not embrace tension and complexity, but seeks to resolve them. To address the shortcomings of these various approaches, Seo et al. offer a fifth strategy, *connection*, which fulfills both poles by casting them as mutually reinforcing. Unlike transcendence, this approach does not seek to eliminate the tension, but thrives on it.

Summary. To summarize, I argue that job loss is a disruptive event that calls into question the taken-for-granted roles, resources, routines, and expectations of affected individuals (see Giddens, 1991; Pederson, 2013). The ambiguity it breeds compels displaced workers to mobilize in order to understand what happened (Weick, 1995). Whereas extant research has typically treated job loss as a generic, unequivocal event and conceptualized coping with it using cognitive, contingency-based assessments and rationally determined strategies, I offer an alternative perspective that casts job loss and coping as emergent, discursive, and situated constructions. From this perspective, job loss is not vested with meanings *a priori*. What it means, what aspects of it are worthy of attention, and what actions are possible, acceptable, or desirable are instead posited to evolve in the context of displaced workers' interactions, as they attempt to come to terms with their circumstances (see Weick, 1995). They are thus the emergent, context-bound,

and precarious artifacts of discursive practices uniquely situated in time and space (see Giddens, 1984).

However, these local meanings and narratives are not invented *de novo*. They emerge as displaced workers selectively foreground and adapt in their narratives the meso- and macro-level discourses (e.g., organizational, occupational, historical, political, socio-cultural, etc.) that are variously afforded by the contexts they are in (see Kuhn et al., 2008; Scott et al., 1998). These discourses do not spontaneously or muscularly (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000) bear on meaning construction, but provide repertoires of discursive resources that are purposefully activated, reproduced, and modified in the context of situated discursive micropractices (see Giddens, 1984; Kuhn, 2006; Kuhn et al., 2008; Scott et al., 1998). Although they can constrain and enable micro-level practices in particular ways due to their affordances and structural characteristics, they do not determine them, and the balance between agency and constraint (see Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2009) is negotiated differently across interactional contexts (see Kuhn, 2006). Thus, the meanings displaced workers construct about job loss, as well as the coping behaviors subsequently envisioned, are emergent, intersubjective, and context-bound artifacts that both reflect and alter broader-level systems of meaning and practice. This structurational perspective (see Giddens, 1979, 1984) explains why each job loss experience is unique, and yet there are often commonalities in the way displaced workers interpret and manage their circumstances. It also casts displaced workers as constrained authors of their own experiences, not victims of their circumstances.

Important to note, however, is that this simultaneous engagement with, and juxtaposition of, micro and macro discourses in meaning making is not linear or

straightforward, but dynamic and rife with tensions. Indeed, it is a situated process in which displaced workers constantly act to position themselves vis-à-vis a number of overlapping or conflicting systems of meaning, value, and practice, as well as negotiate a balance between the opportunities for agency and the structural constraints these discourses afford (Eisenberg et al., 2009). The positioning moves and balances thus enacted, of which communication and sensemaking are core generative processes, are never final or static, but constantly maintained, reproduced, and modified through discursive practice and across contexts of interaction. They are at the core of how displaced workers construct, experience, and act to manage job loss in different time-space contexts. This is the essence of coping from a constitutive perspective as conceptualized in this study.

Blogging the Way through Job Loss: A Constitutive Perspective

So far, I have argued that displaced workers do not experience job loss as an unequivocal event with determinate effects, that coping is an emergent process that cannot be reduced to the rational and predictable choice of problem- or symptom-focused strategies (e.g., Latack & Dozier, 1986; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Pederson, 2013), and that attributing the well-documented variance in disruptive effects and coping behavior to different combinations of antecedent conditions does not adequately account for the complex and dynamic processes through which individuals come to experience and manage their forced unemployment. I have articulated a constitutive view that casts the meanings of job loss as local, intersubjective, emergent, and contested artifacts, and shifts displaced workers from the role of victims to that of agents whose sensemaking and

participation in micro and macro discourses both enable and constrain them as they construct their job loss experiences.

I shall now turn to the specific focus of this study, namely the practice of blogging to cope with job loss. In order to explain how blogging helps displaced workers come to terms with their displacement, I will first describe it as a communication genre that bears structural and functional similarities to traditional diaries (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004; Lindemann, 2005) and online social support platforms and, as such, provides avenues for self-expression, venting, and communion (e.g., Al-Ani et al., 2010; Balas, 2005; Macias et al., 2009; Sanderson, 2010; Sanford, 2010). Then, to capture the dynamic processes through which blogging facilitates coping, and in light of the theoretical perspective articulated above, I will argue that blogging can be usefully conceptualized as a social process of sensemaking though narrativization (Balas, 2005; Bird, 2007), in which displaced workers continuously (re)construct, in conjunction with a real or assumed audience, acceptable, plausible, yet precarious scripts about how they lost their jobs, what this loss means to them, and what range of coping action is possible or desirable. To weave these narratives, bloggers actively engage with the various discourses afforded by the setting, selectively foregrounding, backgrounding, reproducing, and modifying them, and carving out a space for agency. As argued above, these discourses may intersect in contradictory ways. Especially salient in the context of blogging, for instance, are the tensions inherent in managing the boundaries between one's public and private self (Serfaty, 2004), including issues of anonymity, self-disclosure, and self-presentation (e.g., McCullagh, 2008; Qian & Scott, 2007).

Blogs as online journals. Weblogs, or blogs as they are commonly known, are commonly defined as "frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence" (Herring et al., 2004, p. 1). They have gained considerable attention in recent years as alternative sources of news and commentary. Moreover, the accessibility of easy-to-use publishing software has contributed to the popularity of blogging among the general population (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004). In a 2004 study, Herring and her colleagues found that people blog for a variety of reasons: to share knowledge (knowledge logs), highlight and comment on information from other sources (filters), and/or express one's thoughts and feelings (personal journals). Interestingly, 70% of blogs in their sample could be categorized as personal journals. As sites for working out private thoughts and emotional states, blogs in this category (which are also the focus of this study) can be likened to online journals and by extension, to traditional handwritten diaries (e.g., Herring et al., 2004; Serfaty, 2004). Therefore, one can make a case for blogging as a helpful coping practice in the wake of job loss by drawing on the body of research that discusses the benefits of diaristic writing in times of stress. For instance, Balas (2005) highlighted the therapeutic benefits of narratives in coming to terms with a traumatic event. Having unexpectedly lost her aunt when she was eight years old, the author was finally able to work through her feelings of anger and sorrow, make sense of her loss, meaningfully order her experiences, and find some healing and comfort by telling her story in the context of what was meant to be a class paper. Similarly, blogging can be said to help displaced workers come to terms with their employment loss by giving them a space to vent their frustrations and sort through their circumstances.

Blogs as platforms for online social support. Unlike traditional diaries, blogs that resemble online journals are not kept hidden from prying eyes, but are written with a real or assumed audience in mind, and allow interaction with, and feedback from, readers through comments (Nardi et al., 2004; Serfaty, 2004) and perhaps direct messages to the blogger. In fact, the conversations between bloggers and their audience may also carry over to other settings, such as email, instant messaging, or face to face communication (Nardi et al., 2004). To the extent that personal blogs feature rants and musings and allow, or even solicit, audience feedback, they can be said to bear similarities to online social support platforms, where people grappling with physical or emotional difficulties go to seek (and offer) help, empathy, or advice. Indeed, several empirical studies have emphasized the usefulness of blogging as a valuable source of social support during disruptive and stressful times, including illness (Heilferty, 2009; Rains & Keating, 2011), eating disorders (Sanford, 2010), public relations problems (Sanderson, 2010), natural disasters (Macias et al., 2009), and war (Al-Ani et al., 2010). For instance, Sanford found that blogging emerged as a valuable source of social support for individuals trying to lose 100 pounds or more because it allowed them to find empathy and validation on their weight loss journey, held them accountable to their readers, and gave them an outlet for venting and seeking advice. Al-Ani and colleagues, on the other hand, showed that blogging provided Iraqi citizens in their sample with a safe haven in times of war and turmoil. Indeed, it allowed them to receive social support from friends, family, and strangers, engage in cultural dialogue and conversations about controversial issues that would be dangerous or impossible in the physical setting, transcend stringent social rules and obstacles to self-expression, and enjoy a sense of community in times of conflict and

divisiveness. In the same vein, blogging about job loss can be said to aid coping and promote resilience by allowing displaced workers to converse about their experiences with others and find comfort in displays of support, encouragement, and empathy.

Blogging as a process of sensemaking. Thus far, I have argued for the usefulness of blogging as a coping tool in the wake of job loss by linking it to online support platforms as well as online and offline forms of diaristic writing, both of which have been shown by research to promote coping and resilience in difficult times. Although informative, this approach does not capture the dynamic processes through which coping and resilience narratives emerge in blogging practices. Accounting for these processes is important, in part due to a key distinction between blogs and traditional diaries that is well articulated by Gurak and Antonijevic (2008). According to these authors, although blogging involves the diaristic function of "writing oneself" by meaningfully integrating one's experiences through narrative, the accounts it generates are evolved in interaction with the audience, and are thus continuously re-written and re-configured (p. 65). The researchers further underscore the emergent and dynamic nature of blogging by setting it apart from other modes of web-based communication: "Unlike personal Web presentations, structured around 'the essence of me,' blogs are structured around 'the process of me.' Unlike chatting, pointed toward 'hear me out at this moment,' blogging is pointed toward 'hear me out throughout time'" (p. 65).

In light of the above, blogging can be usefully conceptualized not only as a tool for coping and sensemaking that contributes to psychological well-being, but as a process of sensemaking in which narratives of job loss and coping are continuously and collaboratively (re)produced. The dynamics of this process are similar to the ones

elaborated above and involve the situated production of job loss and resilience in micro

discursive practices that both reflect and mediate the structural and structuring aspects of

the various discourses afforded by the locale (see Giddens, 1984; Kuhn, 2006; Kuhn et

al., 2008). This is an active (or even activist) process in which displaced workers attempt

to carve spaces for meaningfulness and self-expression by simultaneously engaging with

the agentic possibilities of sensemaking and the regulating tendencies of established

discourses, which results in a precarious balance between agency and constraint (see

Eisenberg et al., 2009) that is continuously re-negotiated.

As argued above, however, this process is fraught with tensions occasioned by the

intersection of contextual discourses in contradictory ways (see Kuhn et al., 2008).

Blogging is no exception. Indeed, extant research points to blogs as sites of ongoing

tensions between the private and the public, the genuine and the strategic, and between

omission and disclosure (e.g., Gurak & Antonijevic, 2008; Kendall, 2007; McCullagh,

2008; Qian & Scott, 2007; Serfaty, 2004). For instance, Kendall found that bloggers on

LiveJournal were simultaneously constrained and enabled as they interacted with the

features of the blogging platform. Since they viewed blogs as both personal journals and

public performances, they had to negotiate their self-expression and disclosure practices

at the juncture of conflicting expectations. Moreover, they had to weigh the convenience

and efficiency of a "blended" blog audience against the enhanced privacy afforded by

audience management and segmentation capabilities. In addition, bloggers in this study

found that their desire to connect with their audience was problematized by their desire

(and ability) to control narratives, exchanges, and relationships on LiveJournal, and that,

despite valuing their autonomy, they still sought readers' attention and approval.

The present research draws on the communication-based framework laid out in this chapter to explore the emergent, situated, and contested coping narratives through which bloggers construct and navigate their job loss experience. As argued above, blogging has retained its appeal and relevance as advances in mobile computing and the popularity of newer forms of social network platforms have continued to complicate the landscape of communication technologies. Moreover, given their co-produced (Gurak & Antonijevic, 2008; Serfaty, 2004) and cumulative nature (Viégas, 2005), as well as popularity as self-expression outlets, blogs lend themselves well to the study of coping as discursive, contested, and unfolding. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: *How are attempts to cope with job loss through blogging both constrained and enabled in practice? What discursive strategies are used to manage these tensions?*

CHAPTER 4. METHOD

To explore bloggers' situated, discursive, and contested coping practices in the wake of job loss, I conducted an in-depth, multi-method analysis of four personal blogs that were started by laid-off workers during the 2007 - 2009 recession to work through the trials and tribulations of post-layoff life. A qualitative approach is useful in this context because of its ability to capture the dynamics and complexity of social processes, patterns, and systems (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and generate rich and nuanced accounts thereof. As will be elaborated below, data included a large subset of blog posts and comments spanning six months, as well as in-depth interviews with each blogger. To analyze these data, I used a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006), which calls for theoretical explanations to be systematically and inductively based on the empirical data they are meant to explain, not logically derived *a priori* from "ungrounded assumptions" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 4). Given its roots in symbolic interactionism (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and conceptualization of theory generation as an emergent, dynamic, and iterative process aimed at achieving meaningfulness and relevance (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), grounded theory, and particularly Charmaz's (2006) constructivist approach to it, meshes well with the epistemological assumptions of this study and with the idea that coping with job loss is discursively constructed, unfolding, and non-linear.

Data Collection

Blogs. To understand how job loss is enacted and navigated in blog narratives, I conducted a content analysis of four personal blogs that were started by their authors during the Great Recession to cope with the challenges and experiences of being laid off. Since the purpose of this study is to examine coping and sensemaking processes, I

decided to focus on blogs that dealt with involuntary job loss because it is more disruptive than voluntary employment termination. As explained by Latack and Dozier (1986, p. 376), "job loss denotes involuntary termination of employment as contrasted with voluntary quitting, and thus focuses our attention on a transition that the individual does not control and does not desire." Blogs were classified as personal if they were written in a diaristic style, and if they explicitly and dominantly focused on the author's own experiences with job loss. Thus, I excluded all blogs that seemed to have been primarily conceived for "journalistic" (i.e., for providing commentary on job loss-related topics and news) or advice-giving purposes.

In order to identify blogs that fit these parameters, I conducted Google searches using keywords such as "laid off," "job loss," and "blog," and scoured bloggers' lists of recommended blogs, known as "blogrolls." Once I had generated a large enough list of 23 relevant blogs, I tried to get in touch with the authors of those sites using the contact information or contact forms they had provided. In total, I wrote to 17 of the 23 bloggers on my list, as the six remaining blogs did not expressly provide any means for contacting the author privately, and were therefore excluded.

In my message, I requested bloggers' permission to use their blogs in my research, and asked whether they would be interested in being interviewed. Although the contents of these blogs were publicly available and sampling them for research purposes did not require informed consent, I chose not to include any blogs in my analysis without their authors' express permission due to the personal and potentially sensitive nature of the subject matter (i.e., bloggers' struggles with job loss). I was specifically concerned that by highlighting certain excerpts and dissecting the issues and motivations behind them,

this research might involve a level of scrutiny that bloggers might not have intended or anticipated when they shared their personal experiences publicly. In fact, Bateman, Pike, and Butler (2011) argue that unlike physical settings, online spaces may not always lend themselves to a clear awareness of others' unfettered access to one's words or actions, and may "differ in their perceived publicness, or the degree to which users believe that others have unrestricted access to their information" (p. 82).

In the three months that followed, eight bloggers wrote back and agreed to let me include their narratives in my analysis. As I had already started with preliminary coding and analysis, I came to realize that in order to reconcile the need for in-depth analysis with time and feasibility constraints, I had to further narrow down my sample of blogs. Thus, I chose to focus my analysis on four of the eight remaining blogs. In finalizing my sample, I aimed for diversity in terms of gender, age bracket, occupational background, geographical location in the United States, as well as marital and parental status (see Table 1). Such diversity is desirable and important because it allows for an examination of the meanings and challenges of job loss across categories of difference. However, no *a priori* assumptions were made about the extent to which these categories would actually shape the way displaced workers experience and manage job loss. Instead, their salience and relevance were posited to be contingent on validation through theoretical sampling, a systematic process whereby qualitative researchers identify and substantiate all the theoretical concepts relevant to a phenomenon by repeatedly checking emergent concepts and categories against empirical data (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Still, it is important to note that the bloggers included in this study (two men and two women) are all well-educated, white professionals in the fields of journalism, research, marketing, or

anthropology, who have access to blogging technology and the means to use it and spend time on it, and for whom writing is a "tool of the trade". Thus, they form a relatively privileged group of individuals whose journey through job loss and coping priorities may not represent the experiences of less privileged others who may be affected by involuntary employment loss in America.

Despite the small number of blogs, I was able to cast a wide enough net for theory building by analyzing all blog entries and reader comments that were published during the first six months of each blog. Given that the disruptive impact of job loss is arguably at its most intense in the early stages of unemployment, a six-month period was deemed reasonable for capturing bloggers' sensemaking as they faced the new reality of joblessness, and as the novelty of their circumstances eventually began to wear off. Six months was also considered sufficient time for participants to "find their footing" as bloggers, and for coping tensions and discursive management patterns to emerge. A data-mining software called Mozenda was used to facilitate and expedite the compilation of the blog posts and related readers' comments into text documents. The resulting transcript included a total of 294 blog posts and was 661 double-spaced pages long.

In-depth interviews. Aside from blog narratives, the findings in this study were based on in-depth interviews with each of the four bloggers (i.e., a total of four interviews). By prompting participants to explicitly reflect on their blogging rationales and practices, as well as any tensions they might have faced in their quest to cope with job loss online, these interviews offered another valuable window into the sensemaking processes that informed how bloggers constructed public narratives about the job loss experience and the role of blogging as a coping platform. As such, they helped clarify,

enrich, as well as validate (through triangulation, see Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) the interpretations of blog data. At the same time, they allowed for an examination of potential disjunctures (Lindlof & Taylor) between what participants did on their blogs and what they said they did in retrospect.

All interviews took place between 2013 and 2014 via Skype (audio only) and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes each. Digital recordings were made using Pamela for Skype and later transcribed verbatim into 109 double-spaced pages of text. I followed a semi-structured interview format, allowing the conversation to flow naturally, yet ensuring topical consistency with the use of an interview guide (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). As explained by Lindlof and Taylor, this approach made it possible to raise questions in the order and phrasing that felt most natural to the dynamics of the exchange and to follow up as needed on interesting or unanticipated turns in the conversation. Moreover, each exchange raised themes and analytical insights that were used to inform subsequent interviews. In each case, I also tried to draw connections to posts and practices that had stood out to me on the interviewee's blog, and asked him or her to comment. This technique was intended to jog participants' memory and help them connect back to their thoughts and feelings at the time of blogging. Overall, however, interview questions probed participants' blogging rationales and experiences, their relationships with readers, how they managed issues of self-expression and self-disclosure in the context of a public blog, and the role blogging played in their coping journey. See Appendix A for the interview protocol.

Data Analysis

Blog and interview transcripts were analyzed in tandem in Atlas.ti – a content

analysis software- using the constant comparison method (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The purpose of this inductive and iterative approach is to articulate a theoretical, yet data-driven understanding of empirical findings. This is accomplished by coding raw data into conceptual categories and sub-categories that are repeatedly refined and tested for meaningfulness as new concepts and data come to light. According to Charmaz (2006), this coding procedure involves two main analytical steps, namely initial coding and focused coding. During initial coding, I read blog and interview transcripts line by line and attempted to get a sense of participants' job loss experiences and use of blogging as a coping platform. Codes were numerous and mostly descriptive at this early stage, and captured salient discussion topics (e.g., meaning of layoff, unemployment challenges, job search developments, etc.), emotional displays (e.g., humor/sarcasm, fear, worry, hope, etc.), and explicit reasons for blogging, among other dimensions.

Even as I coded transcripts with first-level concepts and categories, however, I scrutinized the data for preliminary insights into the ways in which participants wielded blogging as a coping platform and the issues they grappled with along the way. These emergent insights offered analytical leads that I elaborated in memos and tested in subsequent coding, and also served as sensitizing concepts that guided the categorization of data and enabled sharper (re)wording of codes. For instance, as I pondered the role of blogging as a coping practice in the context of job loss, I noticed that all four bloggers prioritized finding new employment as soon as possible and regularly posted about their job search efforts. As an additional coping avenue, blogging was intended to support these reemployment efforts (e.g., through self-promotion and increased visibility to employers) but also provide an outlet for sensemaking and self-expression in the

meantime. In other words, participants blogged about their post-layoff lives to both reverse their job loss and find a way to live with it. This concurrent pursuit of different, and potentially conflicting, coping objectives in blogging practices represented an intriguing insight, and became a theme of interest that I continued to explore and elaborate as I (re)reread blog and interview data. Another salient theme that emerged in the earlier stages of analysis concerned the public nature of blogs and bloggers' concern for self-presentation. Indeed, it became increasingly clear that although participants were willing to share their post-layoff experiences online, they were keen to cultivate a favorable image of themselves and how they were dealing with job loss, particularly in the eyes of potential employers.

Although still fragmented at this stage, these observations – which were confirmed through multiple readings of the data – clearly suggested that the use of blogging to cope with job loss was the site of tensions. With this analytical direction in mind, I was able to narrow down my expansive list of initial codes to the categories that were most salient and initiate (more) focused coding of the data (Charmaz, 2006). During this stage, I tried to categorize and flesh out evidence of tensional dynamics in participants' narratives. This was a lengthy and highly iterative process, driven by the search for a plausible, meaningful, and relevant grand narrative that would integrate the data and convincingly account for the dynamics at play (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Over time, it became apparent that participants' simultaneous commitment to reversing job loss (i.e., *resolution focus*) and weathering it (i.e., *endurance focus*) was indeed problematic, as it placed competing demands on their blog practices and narratives. This tension seemed to be at the heart of the way participants used blogs as a coping platform, which

led me to designate Endurance vs. Resolution as the overarching tension in participants'

attempts to cope with job loss through blogging.

With the contours of the grounded theory taking shape, I went back to the dataset

yet again and attempted to flesh out the tension between endurance and resolution, while

making sure to continuously test emergent categories against the data. This process

continued until saturation was achieved; that is, until analysis no longer revealed new

categories or prompted further refinement of existing ones, and when I had adequately

validated my categories (see Note on Methodological Interplay and the Role of the

Researcher below) and described them with sufficient detail, depth, and nuance (Corbin

& Strauss, 1990). Since saturation was reached, and since sampling in grounded theory is

based on concepts not populations in the statistical sense (Corbin & Strauss, 1990),

further data collection was not deemed necessary.

Over the course of focused coding, several sub-dialectical themes emerged and

were eventually consolidated into two categories. Specifically, data suggested that

bloggers' simultaneous commitment to endurance and resolution problematized blogging

both as a *routine* and a *practice*. Indeed, blogging about job loss involved investing time

and effort in an activity other than the job search, and immersing oneself in experiences

that were meant to be surmounted. This led to the identification of two coping sub-

dialectics, namely Productivity vs. Distraction and Looking Back vs. Moving Forward. I

used the same emergent and iterative process described above to identify the various

discursive strategies that bloggers deployed to manage each tension (see Table 3 below

for the emergent theoretical framework).

It is important to note that data analysis evolved well into the drafting of research

findings, as writing proved crucial for articulating the crux of the grounded theory and its various elements with analytical clarity, depth, and precision. Indeed, it was only at the advanced writing stages, for instance, that I realized the need to consolidate certain categories I had initially conceptualized as distinct. I also came to abandon certain analytical directions that had previously seemed interesting, but could not ultimately garner adequate support in the data. Although targeted follow-up with participants might have yielded more evidence and perhaps helped reinstate these abandoned categories among the findings, I decided against further data collection at that advanced stage due to the rich and nuanced narrative already generated. As a result, these areas will have to be explored in future research.

A Note on Methodological Interplay and the Role of the Researcher

Since the main purpose of this study was to examine how displaced workers were constrained and enabled as they used blogging to cope with job loss, blog transcripts served as the primary data source for documenting participants' blogging practices, the coping tensions they experienced, and the discursive strategies they deployed to navigate them (i.e., what they actually did on their blogs). However, since bloggers seldom wrote explicitly about their blogging practices or the role of blogging in their coping journey through job loss, their entries offered relatively little insight into their motivations or concerns as they crafted their online narratives or used the blog platform in particular ways. Thus, interviews proved crucial for probing how participants envisioned the role of blogging for coping with job loss and how that vision was reproduced and contested in practice. As a complimentary data source, they helped pinpoint, confirm, categorize, and elaborate the tensional dynamics reflected by blog data.

Interestingly, blog and interview transcripts painted consistent pictures of participants' motivations, concerns, and practices as they used blogging to work through job loss. Therefore, they were eventually combined in data analysis, and evidence from both data sources was used complementarily to substantiate emergent theoretical categories. While such convergence may be embraced as support for analytical findings, it potentially hints at an important caveat. In fact, although blogs and interviews provided different discursive settings for exploring job loss and the coping role of blogging, and although they each proceeded from different temporal frames of reference (i.e., public posts as the job loss experience unfolded vs. one-on-one conversations with a researcher about job loss in retrospect), they both generated narratives that were shaped by participants' self-presentation concerns. In other words, whether they were addressing their readers or answering the researcher's questions, it is likely that participants strategically crafted their narratives to project particular images of themselves. Therefore, the extent to which the methodological approach outlined here can address the concerns and challenges that emerge in the context of blogging to cope with job loss is contingent on participants' disclosure willingness. To mitigate this challenge, I strove to establish a good rapport with each interviewee. All four interviews flowed easily and lasted for an hour or more, and bloggers were willing to answer all my questions.

To ensure rigor in the present research, I aimed for "credible" explanations of the data (e.g., Creswell & Miller, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). According to Lindlof and Taylor, conventional standards of validity and reliability do not readily lend themselves to the assessment of qualitative interpretations. Instead, validity in qualitative research can be more usefully defined as "how accurately the account

represents participants' realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 124). To make sure that the interpretations provided by this study are accurate and plausible, I triangulated across methods and participants, looked for disconfirming evidence in the data, provided thick and detailed descriptions of each findings category, and relied on peer debriefing (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

As mentioned above, the use of both blog posts and interviews to learn about participants' blogging experiences (i.e., triangulation) helped validate emergent categories by allowing for the comparison of data from both sources and the identification of common themes (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). As I wrote about the coping tensions participants faced as bloggers and the discursive strategies they used to manage them, I tried to provide evidence from both blogs and interviews, if possible, and from different participants as well (see Creswell & Miller, 2000). Thus, I hoped to demonstrate that the themes and categories I had identified were well grounded in the data.

In addition to triangulating across methods and participants, I sought to validate my emergent themes and categories by making sure they were adequately supported by the data and by continuously monitoring for disconfirming evidence (Creswell & Miller, 2000). At the same time, I endeavored to explain each findings category with as much depth, nuance, and supporting evidence as possible, so as to generate thick, rich, and thus credible descriptions and interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Throughout the study, I also participated in regular research meetings with my Faculty Advisor and other doctoral students (peer debriefing – see Creswell & Miller, 2000), which resulted in valuable feedback and prompted me to clarify and refine my thinking.

CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS

RQ1a. How are attempts to cope with job loss through blogging both constrained and enabled in practice?

RQ1b. What discursive strategies are used to manage these tensions?

Analysis of blog and interview transcripts revealed that participants, all of whom were primary or secondary breadwinners in their households, viewed their job loss as a threat to their livelihood to be remedied right away. Thus, their main coping strategy, from a practical perspective, was to promptly initiate a job search and try to secure new employment as soon as possible. At the same time, they sought blogging as an additional coping avenue to help them endure job loss emotionally, and even facilitate reemployment by showcasing their professional experience and skills to potential employers. The need to both reverse job loss (resolution focus) and manage its various impacts in the meantime (endurance focus) propelled participants' blog narratives and shaped how they used the blog platform. However, the concurrent pursuit and enactment of these two coping objectives proved problematic in practice. Indeed, participants had to navigate conflicting coping considerations from an endurance versus resolution standpoint, while simultaneously contending with the public nature of blogging and working to project an "employable" image to readers and potential employers. First, participants had to legitimize their commitment to blogging and reconcile it with the demands of a diligent job search and their need for prompt reemployment. Second, they needed to find ways to delve regularly into the issues and challenges of job loss without compromising their ability to move on professionally and emotionally. One of the salient concerns at the heart of this second tension pertains to the management of self-

disclosures at the juncture of the concurrent, yet often conflicting needs for self-expression, from an endurance perspective, and self-presentation, from a resolution and reemployment standpoint. The following section elaborates on these findings, and sets the stage for a detailed discussion of each of the two coping sub-tensions introduced above, as well as the discursive strategies bloggers used to navigate them.

Blogging for Endurance vs. Resolution

For participants in this study, job loss was a significant disruption to finances, career path, emotional well-being, daily routines, and social relationships. However, since they were all breadwinners in their respective households on either a primary or shared basis, the need to restore lost income as soon as possible and preserve the ability to meet financial commitments was particularly salient. Thus, their coping priorities in the immediate term lay in quickly securing new employment, especially in light of the financial recession at the time.

The urgency of reversing job loss was especially palpable in the blog narratives of participants with dependents. For instance, Jeff, a 51-year old father of five and the main provider in his household, was overcome with fear and worry upon his layoff at the thought of not being able to support his family:

> Images of my daughters shivering in the winter's cold in a parked car came unbidden as I wondered how we would get through this without losing our home. And, if we did lose our home, how we would keep our belongings. And, if ... how would we ...? Unanswerable questions came in waves. That kind of fear can induce panic, and for hours I hovered on the edge, overwhelmed. (Jeff, Blog)

However, on the day after his dismissal, Jeff was already determined to move on from his grief and start looking for a job: "I was ready to move on to the next step, outlining a plan for finding new work and then keeping on task to do that, treating it as a

full-time job." (Jeff, Blog)

Like Jeff, Hannah, who was pregnant with her first child, felt desperate to find a job as soon as possible. She had actually received a layoff notice a few months in advance, and had already started her job search. However, when she discovered she was pregnant only days before she was due to stop working, the urgency to find a new job became much stronger:

> I was starting to panic. If there's ever a time to stanch the flow of money out the door, it's when there's a new baby on its way. I needed a job, fast. So while I was beyond ecstatic about finally getting the chance to become a parent, that exhilaration was dampened by my nausea at being unemployed at one of the most critical times to have a steady income. Or was that just the morning sickness kicking in? (Hannah, Blog)

Even Matt, whose wife still had a job when he was laid off and who had no children at the time, felt the pressure to get reemployed before unemployment depleted his finances:

> [W]hile I won't be sleeping on a park bench anytime soon, I do need to find something before the money runs out. In other words, I'm on the clock, and it's ticking. And in case you haven't noticed, the job market kind of sucks at the moment. (Matt, Blog)

To secure new employment, participants followed the conventional route which included job search efforts, networking, job training, and the like. At the same time, they were determined to blog about their journey through job loss and unemployment as an additional coping strategy. According to interview data, participants sought blogging as a way to manage the challenges and disruptions of job loss while they worked to get reemployed. In addition to that, albeit to various extents, they envisioned that it would bolster their traditional reemployment efforts by giving them a platform for improving and promoting their professional skills.

For instance, Matt sought blogging, on one hand, as an alternative and creative

path to reemployment in a dire economy. Indeed, he hoped it would improve his

prospects by allowing him to develop his digital publishing and website management

skills, as well as increase his visibility to potential employers:

> I knew I needed other skills, and I knew that just sending out my resume via email or online submission forms just wasn't going to work, particularly in that horrible job market, so I came over the idea of starting my own website, partially to teach myself those skills, and to learn Wordpress and all that stuff, and partially as a way to keep myself busy, give myself a project, and to hopefully gain some notoriety or at least put myself out there. (Matt, Interview)

At the same time, Matt used blogging as a therapeutic pastime during

unemployment. As mentioned in the excerpt above, he thought that publishing a blog

would keep him occupied. Later in the interview, he also described how blogging had

given him a writing and sensemaking outlet in the wake of his layoff:

> Well part of it was by doing it I could teach myself how to manage the website. A part of it of course was cathartic; it was an avenue for me to continue writing and for me to get the stuff I was thinking out in some form. (Matt, Interview)

Similarly, Martha thought blogging would support her reemployment efforts by

allowing her to expand her repertoire of professional skills and showcase her writing

abilities to potential employers. In addition, she was interested in blogging as a means of

capturing and chronicling her experience with job loss:

> I had a couple of different motivations. The first one was, I had experience as a writer, and I wanted to write something that I could use for actually job hunting purposes, to show my work and my skills, and also to keep a journal of that time in my life, for more personal reasons, and the third motivation was to learn more about blogging programs and online publishing as a job skill . . . (Martha, Interview)

Like Matt and Martha, Jeff had multiple objectives for blogging. On one hand, he

wanted to keep his writing and editing skills sharp during unemployment. Moreover, he

saw blogging as an avenue for emotional release and was determined to share his

experiences with other people affected by job loss, in the hope it would encourage and

inspire them:

> I wanted to do it for several different reasons. First off, I kind of needed to just let it out, let people know what had happened to me, not as a way of seeking sympathy, but more in line with, a lot of others who were going through what I was going through to know that they weren't alone, and I was just hoping to be a positive example of how to deal with it, you know, and then at the same time, I wanted to keep up on my writing and editing skills . . . (Jeff, Interview)

Unlike the other three bloggers, Hannah was not too invested in using her blog as part of her reemployment strategy. For her, blogging was an extension of her love of writing. She had started blogging years before her layoff (on a different blog), and used it as a means for creative self-expression, as well as a way to update her friends and family on what she was experiencing. Still, she was aware of the potential visibility of her posts to employers, as will be shown later, and this influenced how she expressed and presented herself on her blog:

> Well, I've been a writer for about 12 years now, but . . . my employment has been writing for other people, so primarily I've been writing for museums, writing museum exhibits for instance, but… and that's wonderful, I love to write, that's why I got into it, but when I was unemployed, or actually while I was still employed, it was just a creative outlet for me to start a blog and keep in touch with friends and family who were not anywhere near here. . . . so that they can see, you know, what I was going through. (Hannah, Interview)

Together, these multifaceted rationales point to "enduring job loss" and "reversing job loss" as the two needs - and objectives – at the heart of participants' coping efforts after their job loss. On one hand, participants needed to come to grips with the reality of unemployment and figure out how to navigate and survive it. They saw in blogging a much-needed outlet in a difficult time, a space where they could voice their thoughts and emotions, parse through them, and actively work through the challenges and disruptions of unemployed life. Thus, the meaning of endurance emphasized here is not one of passive suffering, but of active sensemaking and resolute resistance. According to

the Merriam-Webster dictionary, to endure can indeed mean "to remain firm under suffering or misfortune without yielding." Thus, the meaning intended in this study is the one that, according to the same source, "adds an implication of resisting destructive forces or agencies." At the same time, participants were committed to finding new employment as soon as possible. Thus, in addition to their job search, they sought blogging as a way to expedite reemployment by boosting their visibility to potential employers and both improving and promoting their professional skills.

This dual pursuit of endurance and resolution influenced how participants used the blog platform and expressed themselves thereon. This may seem unproblematic, at first glance, especially given the spontaneous and effortless way in which participants combined endurance-focused and resolution-focused coping objectives in their blogging rationales (see above). Moreover, enduring job loss and reversing it were both matters of practical necessity for participants. As illustrated above, the need to earn a living made it imperative for them to seek reemployment. In the meantime, however, they needed to "live with" unemployment and have the ability (e.g., financially, psychologically) to weather it successfully. Cultivating endurance was all the more important in light of the financial recession at the time, which threatened to lengthen and frustrate participants' job search efforts, as well as deplete their resources and resolve over time. If their well-being and endurance capability were compromised, their reemployment efforts would likely be stunted as well.

However, analysis of how participants discursively enacted endurance and resolution concerns in their blogs revealed tensions between them. Indeed, the concurrent pursuit of these two coping priorities required participants to juggle conflicting

considerations regarding the legitimacy and usefulness of blogging as a coping outlet in the wake of job loss. Given the public nature of the blog platform, these tensions were complicated by participants' heightened concern for self-presentation as they worked to project an "employable" image to readers and potential employers.

In all, two dialectical tensions emerged over the course of data analysis. The first tension, **Productivity vs. Distraction**, explored the legitimacy of blogging as a coping *routine* in the wake of job loss, and how participants publicly reconciled the investment in time and effort that blogging required with their commitment to getting reemployed as soon as possible. The second tension, **Looking Back vs. Moving Forward**, addressed the enabling and constraining aspects of blogging as a coping *practice*, especially in light of its public and immersive aspects. For instance, bloggers had to manage their self-disclosures in a way that enabled self-expression and catharsis, but did not compromise their public image or reemployment prospects. Moreover, some participants grappled with the extent to which blogging about job loss worked to entrench rather than reverse the "laid off" label they were keen to eliminate.

The following sections explain each tension in detail and describe some of the discursive strategies bloggers used to navigate them.

Blogging as a Coping Routine: Productivity vs. Distraction

As illustrated above, participants in this study were determined to secure new employment as soon as possible so they could continue to make a living. At the same time, however, they wished to blog about their journey through job loss both as a creative and sensemaking outlet and a means of expanding and showcasing their professional skills. Over the course of the six months included in this study, participants blogged

frequently[i], and their entries typically delved into the experiences, challenges, and emotional highs and lows of their post-layoff life and quest for reemployment. Blogging gave them a therapeutic routine and outlet that enabled them to work through their loss, find a way forward, and sustain themselves emotionally through unemployment and tedious reemployment attempts. However, for all its endurance-enhancing benefits, blogging also proved problematic from a resolution (i.e., reemployment) perspective. Indeed, it was a public endeavor that itself required a significant investment in time and energy, and thus involved the risk of impeding participants' job search efforts or at least being perceived as such. This was especially problematic given participants' need to secure new employment as soon as possible and, to that end, project a productive and employable image of themselves to potential employers.

Although it does not address blogging, the following excerpt from Matt's blog illustrates the larger tension between productivity and distraction by laying out the financial imperative of seeking reemployment and the demanding nature of the job search, which does not leave much time for indulging in distractions or leisurely activities:

> Unemployment offers so many wonderful and exciting opportunities. Those daydreams of a better life that distracted us from company-wide emails and excel spreadsheets can now be realities… well, most of them anyway . . . Joblessness means ample free time to travel, eat out at fancy restaurants, partake in local culture and follow that muse – all the things we never quite get around to while working. There's just one small problem – money. Now we're broke. Oh yeah, and we have to spend large chunks of our day looking for work, so we'll have – you guessed it – money. (Matt, Blog)

Thus, while unemployment may have cleared large blocks in participants' schedules, they still could not afford to spend their time however they chose because they had to focus on getting reemployed. As Matt once aptly commented on his blog, their

time was only free in the sense that it was unpaid. Therefore, despite the benefits they expected blogging to have in helping them manage and overcome their job loss (see rationales above), participants had to make sure it did not distract them from, or interfere with their reemployment efforts in practice. Moreover, the public nature of blogging exposed them to the possibility of scrutiny, particularly from potential employers, regarding the manner in which they were choosing to spend their time. Hence, they needed to prove, through their blogging practices and narratives, that they were determined to use their time productively and work diligently to secure new employment.

This tension regarding the appropriateness of blogging – from a productivity perspective – as a coping avenue in the wake of job loss was not one that participants explicitly discussed or addressed on their blogs. However, it was readily palpable through two tension management strategies, namely *productivity displays* and *legitimization logics*, which participants deployed in their blog and interview narratives to show their commitment to reversing their job loss and justify blogging as an appropriate and beneficial coping approach in the meantime. Moreover, this was a tension that some of the participants readily acknowledged during interview sessions, as will be illustrated below.

In the remainder of this section, the enactment of productivity displays and legitimization logics in participants' narratives will be explored in detail. Whenever possible, analysis and excerpts will focus on blogging specifically. At times, however, the discussion will be framed more broadly, as a tension between productivity – typically in the form of job search efforts – and elective or non-essential pastimes in general. Thus, it is important to clarify that the term "distraction" in the name of the tension is not meant

to connote frivolous pastimes or label the therapeutic and cathartic act of blogging about job loss as one. Rather, the term is simply intended to reference, as mentioned above, any non-essential pastime that might divert someone's focus from diligent reemployment efforts. In other words, this dialectic will not address how the need for reemployment conflicted with participants' other life responsibilities, such as taking care of their families or managing their households.

Productivity displays. One of the ways in which participants tackled the tension between productivity and distraction was by continuing to blog, yet demonstrating through the blogs themselves that their priorities lay in securing new employment, and that blogging was not an impediment to their productivity. Specifically, participants used their blogs to showcase their productivity during unemployment by chronicling their offline reemployment attempts and showing that they were duly prioritizing their job search over other pastimes, including blogging, and avoiding distractions. By turning blogging (i.e., the supposed "distraction" itself) into a means of validating their commitment to reemployment and productive time use, participants were able to *transcend* (Seo et al., 2004) the duality between productivity and distraction. This strategy also allowed them to eclipse or de-emphasize the potentially distracting influence of blogging, thus legitimately retaining their "license" to blog. As will be argued below, such productivity displays – and underlying self-presentation concerns – not only reflected participants' diligent reemployment attempts, but perhaps helped enact them as well by motivating bloggers to stay on track in their job search and keep their productivity in check. Productivity displays in blog narratives took the form of both job search updates and prioritization assurances. They are each elaborated below.

Job search updates. Participants showed their productivity and diligence in seeking reemployment by regularly chronicling - and thus foregrounding – their behind-the-scenes reemployment efforts (e.g., job applications filed; job fairs, career training, and networking events attended; interview requests and job offers received; etc.). Doing so allowed them to generate, over time, a public and enduring record – as well as testimonial – of their dedicated, but otherwise invisible, attempts to reverse their job loss. Moreover, it is possible that by blogging about their job search efforts, participants not only demonstrated their commitment to reemployment to their readers, but also enacted it for themselves, which in turn helped them to stay on track in their job search. In fact, Martha provided job search updates on her blog to make a public commitment to reemployment both to her audience and herself. The following interview excerpt illustrates her resolve to hold herself accountable for her reemployment efforts:

> **Interviewer:** I noticed in your blog that you would share when you had an interview, or the job fairs that you went on. How would you explain giving those updates?

> **Martha:** That was a part of it, yes, now that you mention it, that it was part of being accountable to myself and to the audience and I guess the world at large, although, thinking back, the world at large might not have cared, but I know my family and friends did, and I did, that I wanted to be *accountable* (emphasis added by researcher) and go out and look for something and find something, and also the aspect of trying to communicate what it was like to go through all that to people. (Martha, Interview).

Participants also commented on the large amount of time they spent looking for a job, thus providing additional proof of their productivity and diligence in seeking reemployment. Jeff, who had never lost a job before, observed that reemployment efforts took "a lot more time than someone who's never been unemployed before would think." Similarly, Matt summarized his post-layoff life by writing: "I spend my days looking at job boards and sending out resumes." Hannah, too, acknowledged that job hunting

occupied much of her time: "[A] lot of my time is spent looking for work, writing cover letters, and tweaking my resume. An awful lot of my time, actually."

Prioritization assurances. In addition to regular job search updates, demonstrations of productivity in blog narratives included prioritization assurances, which participants used to show that reemployment-focused activities took precedence in their daily schedules over other pastimes, including blogging. For instance, Martha demonstrated her commitment to finding new employment by *appending accounts of her reemployment efforts to mentions of blogging or non-reemployment-focused pastimes.* For instance, in her first entry, she described the purpose of her blog by writing: "Here, I hope to examine what's so funny (and not-so-funny) about unemployment here in my home state. After I go to a job fair later on today, though." By quickly stating her intention to visit a job fair before she spent time on her blog, Martha showed that she prioritized her reemployment efforts over blogging, thus preemptively diffusing potential criticism regarding her decision to blog during unemployment, as well as skepticism about her commitment to her job search. She followed the same tactic in another blog post, when giving an update on her day: "I am now resting and blogging (and watching daytime TV judge shows) after attending two job fairs in as many days." Here, too, she tried to show that the time she spent blogging was a non-issue by clarifying that she had already expended good effort on her job search. In yet another good example, Martha posted an entry on her birthday and let readers know she was not taking time off from her job search, but planning to complete a job application before she treated herself to a movie:

> It's my birthday … and I'll job hunt if I have to, job hunt if I have to, you would job hunt too if you were unemployed too …. So far, I've spent my favorite day of the year (besides the holidays, that is) filling out an application for a job I would really like to have. Instead of the retail and administrative assistant jobs I've spent the past few

weeks frantically applying for in order to just survive. Of course, I've written this latest application in between checking my Facebook page and email for birthday wishes. ;) Maybe it's lucky to fill out an application and write a cover letter on your birthday. I certainly hope so. Anyway, once I finish the application, I'm taking myself to the movies. (Martha, Blog)

During the interview, Martha confirmed that such foregrounding of job search efforts had, in fact, been an intentional attempt to showcase her productivity and diligence in seeking reemployment, and thus ward off potential criticism regarding how she was spending her days. As with job search updates (see above), public accounts of how she allocated her time allowed her to keep herself in check too, and hence avoid spending too much time on her blog:

Yes, it was conscious on my part exactly, so that, you're right, that I wouldn't be accused of "wasting time" or that I would not take over my time doing that, doing blogging, because I think I do have some obsessive tendencies to spend a little too much time on the Internet sometimes, and I did not want to do that. (Martha, Interview)

A similar instance of prioritization assurances can be found in the following excerpt from Matt's blog, in which the author shared a trip he made to the movies:

My wife, to her credit, keeps urging me to do something fun. Feeling like I'd made some strides these last couple of weeks, I finally gave in. In almost three months of unemployment, this would be my first real, honest-to-God slacking. I went to a 2:00 showing of Gran Torino (no fluff in my slacking, just morals, heavy themes and death). And it felt weird, like I was doing something wrong, like I should be doing something more important (sending out resume number 18,437, for example). (Matt, Blog)

Like Martha, Matt showed his commitment to productivity and prompt reemployment by clarifying that he only gave himself permission to enjoy some leisure time once he felt he had made adequate progress on his job search. Moreover, he indicated that his trip to the movies had been his first instance of "real, honest-to-God slacking" in three months of unemployment. At the same time, however, Matt sought to

underscore his diligence even further by downplaying the extent to which he desired or subsequently enjoyed his so-called indulgence. As indicated by the excerpt above, his decision to go to the movies came after his wife's repeated requests "to do something fun." Even when he finally relented, he felt guilty for taking time away from his job search.

Prioritization assurances in blog narratives also came in the form of *justifications of absence*. At times, the demands of the job search – and life, in general – were such that participants became too busy to post on their blogs. Thus, they took some time away from blogging, but often acknowledged and justified such disruptions once they resumed their posts. Consider the following examples from Jeff's and Martha's blogs:

> I'll start first with my apologies for not updating my blog for the past two weeks, as well as for straying from my planned subject matter -- I had planned to write about dealing with shock, anger and blame. But a rough two weeks it has been. (Jeff, Blog)

> I haven't been posting entries to this blog this week because I've been very busy applying for every halfway decent job I can find at the mall, on the Internet, or on craigslist. (Martha, Blog)

Whether or not they were intentional, breaks from blogging to attend to the job search or other pressing matters were significant because they were a way of showing that participants had their priorities straight and only blogged when they had the time. Moreover, whereas the decision to explain such absences could have been a courtesy move toward loyal readers, it also suggests a concern for projecting an image of productivity during unemployment.

Legitimization logics. In addition to using their blogs as platforms for demonstrating their commitment to productivity and diligent reemployment efforts, participants managed the tension between productivity and distraction by discursively

legitimizing distractions (i.e., non-search-focused activities) as a valid part of a productive post-layoff schedule. As will be elaborated below, participants deployed three different legitimization logics in their narratives, each characterized by a different level of "distraction tolerance," but all focused on productivity as key. These logics went from apologetically justifying distractions as necessary, at times, for enduring the tedium of reemployment efforts, to normalizing them as part of a "balanced" daily routine, and finally to advocating for productivity beyond job search efforts in the form of useful pastimes, like blogging, that are endurance-enhancing and/or conducive to better reemployment chances. By casting distraction as a necessary, valid, or even beneficial part of a productive schedule, participants were able to reframe the relationship between productivity and distraction as one of complementarity, and thus transcend the tension that pitted them against one another. Specifically, these legitimization logics helped participants illustrate how time off from the job search could in fact be a productivity-enhancing choice, and how attending to one's emotional endurance during unemployment could bolster one's ability to find reemployment. Moreover, whereas productivity displays helped participants de-emphasize the potentially distracting influence of blogging by using it to foreground their dedication to getting reemployed, legitimization logics allowed them to embrace the practice as a post-layoff routine by casting it as a valid, or even productive, addition to their daily schedules.

Distraction as necessary for sustained productivity. One of the ways in which participants legitimized distraction in their blog narratives was by highlighting the need, from an endurance perspective, for some time away from job hunting. Specifically, they acknowledged downtime as essential, at times, for sustaining themselves through the

demands and frustrations of an intensive job search, especially in an ailing economy that

threatened to prolong their unemployment. In other words, distraction was cast as a

much-needed respite without which participants' ability to endure the daunting journey

toward new employment would be compromised.

The following blog excerpts by Hannah and Matt are good examples of this

legitimization strategy. In each case, the blogger admitted to resorting to some diversion

while looking for employment, but painted it as a necessary outlet for withstanding the

taxing nature of the job search. Thus, rather than an impediment to productivity,

distraction was now a means to sustain and endure it.

> While we were in Las Vegas, I spent a ton of time looking online for jobs, by which I mean napping and listening to podcasts. And also looking for work. (They're really one and the same. Surfing the job listings would get me so discouraged at my prospects that I would shut the laptop and resume lying in the fetal position while listening to This American Life). (Hannah, Blog)

> On the way back I stopped in at one of my favorite cafes . . . to do a little work. You can only spend so much time in your apartment combing through endless job listings without going a little crazy. Not that job boards aren't supremely interesting but, well, they're not. I'd rather memorize the side of a cereal box (mmm, 25% riboflavin). Some days it's best to avoid the Netflix discs, the PS3 and all the other distractions at home. And some days it's just nice to have a change of scenery. (Matt, Blog)

> TV channel flipping – the granddaddy of all procrastination options – predates this computer mumbojumbo, at least for me, and seems to be holding its own. . . . I manage to limit most of my viewing to the late-night/early-morning hours through sheer force of will. . . . This procrastinating is more to avoid (or because I can't) sleep, not work. Maybe, on some level, I'm fending off another day of unemployment. Because another day of the same will be just a little harder to take. (Matt, Blog)

By framing distraction as a productivity-sustaining coping necessity during

unemployment, participants were able to legitimize a wide variety of diversions (e.g.,

listening to podcasts, going to cafés, watching television, etc.) regardless of how

productive they actually were. However, as reflected by the excerpts above, they had to

show every time that some downtime was absolutely necessary because their endurance was being tested to its limit. This allowed them to continue projecting a strong commitment to productivity and reemployment.

Among the three legitimization logics, this strategy offered the reformulation with the least "transcendence potential." Indeed, it emphasized a stricter view of productivity during unemployment as mostly limited to diligent reemployment efforts, and only made place for distraction as a "necessary evil" for boosting endurance and sustaining productivity during the job search. Although this logic was appropriate for validating straightforward distractions such as listening to podcasts or watching television, it reduced more productive pastimes, like blogging, to mere "guilty" diversions. A good case in point is the following excerpt from the interview with Jeff, in which he tried to justify his decision to publish a blog while searching for a new job. This passage is actually a part of his answer to whether anyone had questioned his decision to invest time in his blog instead of focusing on his job search:

> You know, when I was dealing with something particularly strongly, you know whether it was an emotional thing, or whether it was a reaction to something I'd read or whatever, those were the times I'd write, and sometimes it was a chore to write. I mean, if you're going to take up a blog, they say you should be writing regularly. Some bloggers write 2 or 3 times a day. I am not going to write a thousand words 2 or 3 times a day on purpose. (Jeff, Interview)

Interestingly, Jeff did not justify blogging in this instance by enumerating its various coping benefits. Instead he explained, rather apologetically, that he had mainly blogged when he had needed an emotional outlet (i.e., when necessary, for sustained endurance) and that he had even found it burdensome to post as frequently as some of the other regular bloggers. Although this logic allowed him to uphold his commitment to productive time use and validate his decision to blog, it turned blogging into a generic

distraction and overlooked its coping merits. Interestingly, Jeff had described his blog in one of his entries as a space for self-expression as well as skill promotion and development. Thus, more than a mere diversion, blogging had helped him both endure unemployment and improve his chances of reversing it. This nuance, however, was lost under a legitimization logic that cast blogging merely as a need-based, endurance-sustaining diversion.

Distraction as part of a balanced routine. In addition to painting diversions as a necessary respite during the daunting quest for reemployment, participants legitimized distraction by normalizing it as part of a balanced routine during unemployment. In other words, they framed time off from the job search as acceptable as long as one worked diligently toward reemployment and kept distractions in check. By drawing on the positively valenced notion of balance, this logic allowed bloggers not only to legitimately combine productivity and distraction in their daily schedules, but also to publicly own diversions as a deliberate and legitimate choice rather than an endurance-mandated recourse. A good example of this logic is the following excerpt from Matt's blog, in which the author casually admitted to procrastinating during unemployment, but legitimized it as a valid coping avenue as long as it did not encroach on productive pursuits:

> I get a lot done on an average day, enough to feel productive but not satisfied. My expanding to-do list is one reason. Procrastination is another. We all need a distraction from our daily rigors, right? A problem arises when that distraction starts to take over the day. (Matt, Blog)

Rather than attempt to explain or excuse his procrastination to demonstrate his continued commitment to productivity, Matt reframed it as a legitimate and commonplace way to cope with the challenges of unemployment, as long as one made

sure to keep it in check. He also employed this logic in another blog post, in which he

shared with readers a sample of his daily routine. Here, too, Matt did not frame

productivity and distraction as mutually exclusive, but emphasized balancing them

instead. Thus, rather than cast diversions as something to be eliminated, he argued for

"enjoying" them responsibly. At the same time, he underscored the importance of staying

productive. Indeed, he explained, overindulging in distractions negatively affected his

emotional well-being during unemployment, whereas productivity kept him moving

forward and accomplishing things, thus helping him feel better about himself:

> Time is easy to waste when you have a lot of it. So I'm trying to treat
> unemployment as a job, with goals and projects and deadlines. One goal, of course,
> is to find a paying job. But another important goal is to improve myself. The
> temptation is always there to sit around watching TV, eating junk food and
> generally doing nothing. But really, too much of this would just make me feel like
> more of a loser. It's all about balance (find the balance, Daniel-san), getting things
> done so I can be a productive loser, I mean winner (Just ask Joe Esposito). Keeping
> a schedule can help you feel productive or – dare I say it – actually be productive.
> See where it's gotten me? Here's a typical weekday schedule for me (actual results
> may vary). (Matt, Blog)

By drawing on the positively-valenced notion of balance (or a balanced lifestyle) in

his narrative, Matt was able to foreground and embrace the flexibility he had, as an

unemployed person, to structure his time as he pleased without undermining his

commitment to productivity and reemployment. A good case in point is the sample

routine he shared with readers after the excerpt above, which allocated three hours to

reemployment efforts (1 to 4 pm), but divided the rest of the day among other pastimes

such as exercise, blogging, administrative tasks (paying bills, etc.), family dinners, and

even some late-night television. By prefacing this routine with comments about the

importance of balancing productivity and distraction, Matt highlighted the notion of "a

balanced schedule" as the legitimacy criterion by which he wanted his routine to be

evaluated – as opposed to that of a search-intensive schedule – thus enacting a context that fostered validation of his time allocation choices as legitimate and appropriate. With this logic in effect, the variety of pastimes in Matt's routine was framed not as a sign of distraction, but as evidence that he could manage his time responsibly, while effectively attending to a variety of interests and responsibilities.

Thus, the key to deploying this balance-focused legitimization logic successfully was to demonstrate one's ability to stay disciplined and prevent distractions from interfering with reemployment efforts. In other words, flexibility in structuring one's time was a privilege that could be legitimately earned and exercised if one stayed disciplined and prevented distractions from interfering with reemployment efforts. This argument was clearly articulated in the following excerpt from Matt's interview:

> I miss the sort of lack of structure to my day…Well I tried to harness it and set goals and I'm going to do this at this time, and this at this time, and that at that time. If I wanted to sleep till 10 o'clock, nobody cared. Even my wife was so cool about it, she wasn't, you know, she knew I was going to get up and get stuff done, so if I stayed up till 3 o'clock the morning before, I mean, sleep till 10, it's fine! And it was like . . . she was always on me that why don't you, like, watch a movie during the day or play some video games or something? And I was like, I had this fairly strict rule of not turning on television before dinner. . . . Because I didn't want to get sucked in. Like I knew that if I turned on the television and I turned on the PlayStation, I was going to play a video game and there was three hours gone right there. (Matt, Interview)

In this passage, Matt spoke openly about the flexibility he had enjoyed during unemployment. However, he actively sought to legitimize it by showing how disciplined he had been in managing distractions and staying productive and on track. In fact, he argued, his wife had not only trusted his ability to manage his time responsibly, but she had even repeatedly encouraged him to enjoy himself more during the day.

Jeff and Martha also used this legitimization logic during interviews to defend the

time they had dedicated to blogging. Indeed, when asked how they had addressed (or would address) questions about their decision to blog instead of fully focusing on getting reemployed, they both drew on their time allocation routines to show that they had kept carefully balanced schedules. In each case, specific time ranges were offered to prove that the time allocated to reemployment efforts had far exceeded that typically spent on blogging.

> Well, excellent question. I don't think . . . that it was a waste of time, because even though I did spend maybe about 5 to10 hours a week or so at its peak, I still did do a lot of job hunting and interviews, and comprising the majority of my time doing them? sorts of things, and I think I pursued it more as a part-time activity. . . . I tried hard to not have it be an all-consuming thing. (Martha, Interview)

> That's a very good question to ask because I think my wife thought I devoted too much attention to it. You know, but she didn't realize that I was spending 12-13 hours a day in front of the computer, it was not all writing the blog. It was sending out post? letters and that kind of thing, I was searching the job board. I think every blog entry took, you know, I put 2 or 3 hours into writing it. Long or short, I wanted it to be good. (Jeff, Interview)

By foregrounding their ability to keep a productive and balanced schedule, Martha, Jeff, and Matt showed that they could be counted on to manage their time responsibly, and thus prevent blogging from encroaching on their job search. Compared to the first legitimization strategy, this balance-focused logic provided a more aggressive reframing of the tension between productivity and distraction because it gave participants more latitude to incorporate and acknowledge diversions in their schedules while continuing to project a strong commitment to diligent reemployment efforts. However, like its counterpart above, it treated the exact nature of the "distractions" in question as a rather secondary concern. Indeed, as long as participants made sure to stay productive and keep distractions in check, the particular pastimes they chose to partake in were of little consequence. Thus, here too, blogging was legitimized in a rather generic fashion, and

not based on its coping merits.

"Productive distraction" as beneficial and desirable. In addition to casting distraction either as an endurance-sustaining necessity or a privilege contingent on responsible time management, participants legitimized pastimes outside the scope of the job search by demonstrating their benefits for enduring or reversing job loss. In other words, they transcended the tension between productivity and distraction by broadening the realm of productive – and thus legitimate – activity to include useful pastimes that could boost their well-being during unemployment or even improve their chances of finding a new job. Although this logic continued to emphasize a diligent job search as key to reversing job loss as quickly as possible, it did not view it as the hallmark of productivity during unemployment. Instead, one could spend time away from the job search, yet still be "legitimately" productive by opting for useful pastimes with the potential to enhance one's endurance or reemployment odds. Productivity, however, was still key under this legitimization logic, which made it difficult to justify idle pastimes such as watching television, for instance. Indeed, by deploying this legitimization logic, participants framed the productivity-distraction dialectic not as a tension between the job search and non-reemployment-focused activities, but between productive and idle pastimes in general. Although this reformulation gave more choices for a varied, yet legitimately productive schedule, they now had to hold themselves to a higher standard of productivity in all pursuits.

To garner support for this broader definition of productivity, participants took on a more assertive stance and sought to convince readers that engaging in useful activities beyond the job search was not only healthy, but even necessary for improving one's

reemployment chances. Thus, rather than attempt to defend their time allocation practices as in the two strategies above, participants positioned themselves as experts with valuable advice to offer. The following excerpt from Martha's blog is a good example of this strategy:

> During that awkward time when I was first telling people about my job loss, someone misspoke the word "unemployment" as "unenjoyment" to me. . . . Since then, it's stuck with me: Unemployment, unenjoyment.
> No, unemployment is not meant to be an enjoyable time in anyone's life. You're broke, and you have to go out and look for a job. The funny thing is — and we here . . . always look for the funny thing — unemployment can be enjoyable. Enjoyable? Are you nuts, you say? I'm broke and I have to look for a job! Ah, but here's the thing: You still need to find ways to enjoy life. You've got time on your hands now, and you can only job hunt for so much time during the week.
> Here's [*sic*] some ways you can enjoy your unemployment:
> Spend a little time on your hobbies. Not too much, though: You still need to find that job.
> Don't forget your friends and family. Spend your free time with them.
> Volunteer. [This blogger] does. Find a worthy nonprofit which needs you.
> Join Toastmasters and improve your public speaking skills. Again, [this blogger] recommends this.
> Start your own blog. (Martha, Blog)

In this blog entry, Martha related an imaginary conversation with her audience, during which she sought to contest the common view that unemployment was a difficult time best spent looking for a job. In fact, she advised her readers, one could – and should – make unemployment more enjoyable by incorporating worthwhile activities beyond the job search such as volunteering or blogging, among others. By presenting these pastimes as recommendations based on her personal experience with unemployment, Martha took on the role of expert, thus giving herself the authority, rhetorically speaking, to influence what counts as a productive or legitimate schedule during unemployment.

Whereas Martha emphasized the well-being benefits of incorporating useful and worthwhile activities into one's unemployment routine, Matt advocated the practical

importance of investing in one's self improvement in a tight job market:

Unless you're in dire financial straits, looking for work all day is overkill, even in a good job market. Some time would be well spent learning new skills or practicing hobbies which could theoretically lead to work. Ever wonder how writers become employed writers? You have the time and hopefully the inclination to improve yourself. And online resources are abundant and cheap (or free). This is a great time to become more employable, and expand the realm of opportunities.
A bad job market is a terrible excuse to do nothing. But it's a perfect opportunity to get your ducks in a row and improve your skill set. And when the recession clears, you may find yourself in a better position than before. Turn off the news and get to work, you unemployed slacker! (Matt, Blog)

Speaking directly to his readers as well, Matt earnestly explained how spending

the majority of one's time on the job search was not only unnecessary in many cases, but

potentially limiting. Thus, unlike straightforward – and hence frowned-upon –

distractions such as following the news, improving one's skill repertoire was key to using

one's time effectively, productively, and legitimately during unemployment.

By reconceptualizing productivity to include useful pastimes beyond the job

search, participants were able to legitimize blogging not as a generic distraction to be

excused or earned, but as a worthwhile and beneficial activity in its own right. The

following excerpt from Matt's blog is a good case in point:

I started [this blog] to get back in the habit of writing everyday [*sic*], improve my marketing skills and stay off the streets. My thinking was (and is) that beefing up the resume with relevant skills could only help in the job search. . . . One pleasant surprise from [attending] SESNY [Search Engine Strategies New York, a search marketing conference] was just how much I knew already – that progress I mentioned at the outset. Months of reading and slaving over [this blog] are starting to pay off. Whether this elevates my unemployment blog into the Search stratosphere or leads to gainful employment remains to be seen. For now a little progress is reward enough. Tomorrow I may not be so positive about my situation. (Matt, Blog)

In this entry, Matt acknowledged the significant amount of time and effort he

dedicated to his blog, but confidently billed it as a sound investment given the online

marketing skills he had acquired. These skills, he explained, would hopefully improve his

chances of finding a new job. Another good example of this legitimization logic can be found in the following excerpt from the interview with Martha, in which she explained how blogging had helped her cope with job loss:

> [O]ther than the stress [relief], . . . [blogging] gave me something to do besides look for work and watch too much TV at the time, which were the two things I think I would have done if I hadn't been writing or besides writing. I tried to job hunt, spending too much time in the house. I believe I was doing some volunteer work also at the time, [and] I started the blog as well, off and on, but I just needed a bit of a creative outlet and also to keep a journal of things that, things that I was seeing around me… I think [blogging] helped because even if I was writing it indoors, I felt like I was doing something besides just feeling like I wasn't doing anything inside the house, just sitting around and . . . just wasting my time. I felt like, well, I can do this, I can still write. (Martha, Blog)

In order to justify blogging as a coping routine during unemployment, Martha positioned it as a welcome break from the tedium of the job search, but one that involved a creative, therapeutic, and confidence-boosting. As such, it was superior to idle distractions such as watching television.

In summary, the use of blogging as a coping routine in the wake of job loss emerged as a contested practice, as participants grappled with the appropriateness of investing in – and publicly committing to – a coping endeavor that could interfere with their job search or be perceived as such. Through productivity displays and legitimization logics, however, bloggers were able to creatively reformulate the relationship between productivity and distraction and transcend the tension between them. Productivity displays took the form of job search updates and prioritization assurances, and allowed participants to showcase their commitment to productivity through blogging itself. Legitimization logics, on the other hand, reframed distraction as either a necessary, acceptable, or recommended part of a productive schedule, and thus recast productivity and distraction as complementary constructs. Both strategies were productive because

they enabled participants to blog about their job loss experiences while continuing to showcase their commitment to reemployment.

Blogging as Regular Engagement with Job Loss Experiences: Looking Back vs. Moving Forward

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, participants hoped that blogging about their post-layoff experiences would help them endure their loss of employment and overcome it as well. Indeed, they expected that blogging would provide an outlet for sensemaking and self-expression during a difficult time in their lives, that it would sharpen and expand their skill set, and perhaps even improve their chances of reemployment. Although they were able to reap many of these benefits in practice, participants found that looking back at their job loss experiences in blog narratives could also prevent them, paradoxically, from moving on both emotionally and professionally. In fact, blogging regularly about the challenges of job loss proved psychologically daunting at times, thus compromising endurance and well-being instead of enhancing them. Moreover, given the public nature of blog narratives, participants found that they could not discuss their feelings or frustrations with unchecked candor, but had to censor their disclosures to avoid compromising their reputation or employability. Another consequence of this public aspect was that participants' role as "unemployed bloggers" threatened to become, in the long run, a defining aspect of who they were and how people, including potential employers, saw them. Although the support and attention that participants garnered from blogging provided a boost in morale and a taste of success at a challenging time, such interest served to cast them primarily as bloggers in the public's perception, thus deemphasizing their quest for reemployment as their main occupation

and preoccupation.

This section will first describe the ways in which blogging, particularly as the practice of looking back on personal job loss experiences, both constrained and enabled participants' ability to endure and overcome their job loss. Then, it will explain the various discursive strategies that bloggers used to manage these conflicting dynamics. In total, three tension management strategies emerged from participants' narratives and included humor, disclosure logics, and distancing tactics.

Blogging for endurance: constraining and enabling dynamics. By incorporating blogging as a coping routine during unemployment, participants got to engage with their job loss experience and think about it on a regular basis. This proved both therapeutic and enlightening, as it allowed them to take stock of their circumstances and work through their thoughts and emotions. As an interactive platform, blogging also allowed participants to feel heard and derive comfort and a sense of perspective from readers' personal stories and messages of support. More importantly, blogging gave participants agency over the meaning and impact of job loss in their lives, thus empowering them to shape their emotional journey through unemployment rather than merely suffer through it. For all its benefits, however, blogging about job loss and unemployment also proved counterproductive from an endurance perspective. Indeed, regular engagement with – and immersion in – the issues, challenges, and emotions related to job loss proved psychologically taxing for some participants and both reinforced and magnified joblessness as a defining aspect of their reality. As such, it worked to hold them back and prevent them from moving on emotionally from their loss. Moreover, the public nature of blogging compelled participants to consider how their

readers, including potential employers, might perceive them. Thus, though they may have sought blogging as an emotional outlet during unemployment, they still had to produce appropriate disclosures to avoid damaging their image at an already trying and face-threatening time (i.e., job loss). Such constrained catharsis likely challenged their ability to overcome job loss emotionally as well. Participants were also aware that writing publicly about their job loss experiences could expose them to disinhibited feedback or trolling attempts, which in turn prompted them to consider the nature and extent of their relationships with readers. These endurance-enabling and constraining dynamics are elaborated in detail below.

Endurance-enabling aspects of blogging about job loss. As an outlet for sensemaking and self-expression in the wake of job loss, blogging contributed to improved psychological well-being and productive emotional management among participants. On one hand, the ability to express the emotions and concerns triggered by job loss allowed bloggers to ease the emotional pressures they were under and derive a much-needed sense of relief. Jeff, for instance, referred to the detailed post he wrote about the day he got laid off – the first entry in his blog – as "a purging of what I was feeling" (Interview). In his second post, he described blogging as "unexpectedly . . . cathartic and therapeutic." Similarly, Martha explained how blogging helped her alleviate the stress of losing her job and trying to find employment in a bad economy:

> I think . . . that it was a stress relief, because . . . those first six months especially I was under a great deal of stress, losing a [job] I liked a great deal and that I'd had for almost ten years, and I had hoped that I would get another job right away, but with the economy being as it was in my state . . . that was not happening, and I believe that to blog in about it did help accomplish the objectives that I had outlined to you, both personally and professionally. . . but more personally I think. (Martha, Interview)

As a public and interactive platform, blogging also provided participants with a

therapeutic connection with their audience. Indeed, readers often reached out with messages of encouragement, support, and understanding, which helped participants feel heard and derive comfort as they strove to endure the challenges of unemployed life. In fact, there were several instances in Jeff's and Matt's blogs in which the authors thanked their readers for their support: "Thanks for the kind words, everyone. The compliments definitely make me feel good" (Matt, Blog). Bloggers also found solace whenever readers acknowledged that their writing and willingness to share their stories helped them in their own efforts to cope with job loss or unemployment:

> [Reader] wrote:
> I love your posts my friend. They totally make me feel like I am not alone and I laugh quite frequently, as I sit alone in my house pants. . . .
> Matt wrote:
> Thank you . . . That's very kind of you to say, and the praise comes at the right time. It's been a particularly rough day today. . . . (Matt, Blog)

Beyond its therapeutic benefits, however, the act of capturing thoughts and feelings in writing promoted emotional clarity and self-awareness, which in turn empowered participants to develop mindful and resilient emotional responses. Jeff, for example, found that blogging kept him emotionally in check during unemployment and allowed him to both recognize and resist depressive patterns of thought and emotion:

> I think it [blogging] also helped me keep in touch with my feelings about what was going on too. You know, I'd start recognizing when I was backing into the black dogs kind of thing, and I was like, ok, let's not do that, but the other side of it, you know, I think that it used to strengthen me in some ways . . . (Jeff, Interview)

Similarly, Matt found that blogging gave him more agency and control over his emotional well-being during unemployment by challenging him to examine his thoughts and feelings in depth and convey them in coherent narratives. Once instantiated in textual form, these cognitive and emotional states were no longer part of his stream of

experience, but reified and encapsulated in fixed, tangible snapshots that he could then

assess and act on with improved clarity and detachment (see Weick, 1979; 1995). For

Matt, this process of emotional instantiation was key to recognizing and avoiding the

"downward spiral" of depression during unemployment:

> Having a blog forced me to really examine [what I want to say] and to organize those thoughts into something coherent, whereas had I not, you know, I would have been in my apartment, and I would have felt good, and I would have felt bad, and I wouldn't have necessarily been forced to really consider it, and I think to some degree people can get into trouble that way, because you get stuck into a sort of downward spiral, feeling bad for yourself or wondering, you know, oh I'm not good enough, I'm never going to find another job, and it just feeds upon itself, and you should have any way to sort of figure it out, or to rationalize it or understand [that] ok, this is what is going on, I'm feeling sorry for myself, I need some way to turn this around. (Matt, Interview)

From a constitutive perspective (e.g., Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Putnam &

Fairhurst, 2015), one could also argue that by committing their thoughts to writing, Jeff

and Matt were not merely able to recognize and regulate their cognitive and emotional

responses. More importantly, they were engaged in a constitutive discursive process that

empowered them to enact those very thoughts and emotions, and thus actively shape their

journey through unemployment in productive, endurance-enhancing ways. Indeed, a

constitutive approach suggests that the narratives generated in the context of blogging

about job loss are not depictions of their authors' emotional and cognitive states, but the

constructed, artifactual product of bloggers' attempts to decide how to think, feel, and

write about job loss. Martha, for instance, was able to develop a more resilient attitude

toward her job loss by constructing and censoring her (public) blog narratives in a

manner that conveyed composure and strength to others. During the interview, she stated

that she had intended blogging in part as a form of "therapy or self-therapy to try and

make myself fake it till I made it." In other words, by projecting resilience in her blog

narratives, Martha enacted that resilience in her life as well: "In that aspect, I believe it did [help], to try to present a tough front to the world, and a tough, somewhat together front to myself as well." Like Martha, Hannah was also aware of the constitutive power of narration. For her, writing – and in this case, blogging – was not merely a reflection of her thinking, but the very process through which her thoughts emerged and took shape:

> Primarily to me, it's a way, like writing is how I work out how I think, so it helped me work through the emotions of that [being laid off], the sort of impact of that, and then what I was going to do about that. (Hannah, Interview)

Given the public and interactive nature of blogging, participants' sensemaking work and job loss narratives were enacted with an audience in mind (real or assumed), and, therefore, cannot be dissociated from it. In fact, audience feedback played a key role in the way bloggers constructed and managed their job loss, and often encouraged a more positive or resilient take on events. For instance, when readers shared their own anecdotes of loss and struggle, their input informed bloggers' view of their circumstances and prompted them to examine (or question) their sensemaking patterns. A good case in point is the following exchange between Matt and one of his readers, which took place after the blogger expressed his disappointment that the local café he frequented had restricted the use of electrical outlets, thereby limiting the amount of time he could work there on his computer:

> Hey Matt – a bright spot in your day here. You could (like me) be pushing hard on 64, recently laid off, and living in a rural town of 25,000 that's 100 miles from the nearest city. Panhandling is discouraged here – even as a 401K supplement. There's already a stack of resumes on Wal-Mart's greeter position table.
> Just thought I'd make your day!
>
> Matt wrote:
> I'm sorry to hear that . . . But your story does make me feel fortunate for living in the big city. At least you can see the stars at night… I'm tired, and that's the best I can come up with. Good luck. (Matt, Blog)

In this excerpt, the audience member responded with an account of his own circumstances, which were more challenging than Matt's and prompted the blogger to reassess his situation and even find a silver lining. Another good example is the following entry from Martha's blog, in which she mentioned that a friend had advised her to be more positive and focus on her eventual reemployment rather than current unemployment:

> I just got an e-mail from an old friend saying I should stop thinking of myself as "unemployed" and instead think of myself as "ready to be employed." That's an interesting way to put it. I admit I have been a bit down this last week: I received a few rejections out there in the job market, and let myself think negatively. I need to think positively that there is something out there for me and for everyone else who is in similar circumstances. (Martha, Blog)

Here, too, outside feedback helped the blogger adjust her perspective, recognize that she had let negativity get to her, and resolve not to be held back by her unemployed status.

To summarize, blogging enhanced participants' emotional resilience in the wake of job loss by giving them a cathartic, therapeutic, and interactive outlet for sensemaking and self-expression, allowing them to enact mindful and more productive narratives about themselves, and empowering them to shape the impact of job loss in their lives rather than suffer through it. For all its endurance-enhancing benefits, however, blogging sometimes interfered with participants' ability to weather and overcome the psychological toll of employment loss. These constraining aspects are elaborated below.

Endurance-constraining aspects of blogging about job loss. As discussed above, blogging about one's experiences with job loss proved to be a therapeutic and empowering coping avenue for participants. At times, however, it could also be

emotionally taxing, as it kept participants (discursively) immersed in the challenges of

unemployment, with constant reminders of – and thus little reprieve from – the fear,

anxiety, frustration, or discouragement they were grappling with. Hannah, for instance,

felt that delving too much into the challenges of her unemployment and job search would

be more discouraging than helpful, and preferred not to share those details so that

blogging would not become a burden:

> […] I didn't want blogging to become a chore or something that I dreaded going to
> during that time. I didn't want it to be a space where I was faced with more
> discouragement at that time, and so I made…That's another reason I made a conscious
> choice not to get into those details. (Hannah, Interview)

Similarly, Martha found that blogging about her job loss challenged her emotional

endurance at times. For her, this constraining effect was further compounded by the

recessionary economic realities of the time, which infused her narratives and added to her

discouragement:

> I think at times . . . it [blogging] brought me down because I would just concentrate on
> not only my life but . . . the news around me, and I would just get so angry at what was
> happening; that not only I was doing so badly, but like my state and by extension the
> country just was doing so badly about six years ago, and it just seemed like . . . I
> couldn't pull out of it and make it better, and that things around me weren't getting
> any better, and it just was so frustrating, and to concentrate on that, write about that
> didn't seem to be helping . . . (Martha, Interview)

By blogging about her job loss, Martha summoned to the fore not only the

experiences of her post-layoff life, but also the harsh and depressing economic conditions

that prevailed nationally at the time. In other words, the supposedly cathartic and

liberating act of venting about job loss served to make that experience, paradoxically,

even more salient and poignant in the blogger's reality, thus constraining her ability to

move on emotionally from it. Given the interactive nature of blogging, one could also

surmise that readers' comments about their own struggles was another contextual

discourse that deepened participants' exposure to the hardships of job loss and, perhaps, made it harder for them to maintain a positive attitude. Thus, while a source of comfort at times, the knowledge that others were in the same boat may have also been a discouraging factor for participants.

As bloggers, participants not only delved into their personal experiences and challenges in the wake of job loss, but did so on a public forum. This juxtaposition of the public and the private problematized the use of blogging for catharsis and emotional endurance during unemployment. Indeed, participants were pulled between their desire to express themselves freely on their blogs and the need to manage their public image and cast themselves in a positive light, especially amid already dispiriting circumstances. As will be elaborated further below, this tension often led them to censor their blog narratives and avoid unchecked displays of defeat and self-pity.

These self-presentation concerns readily emerged during interviews, as participants revealed they had felt conflicted about sharing their struggles with discouragement or depression on their blogs. Jeff, for example, stated that he had initially debated whether to blog about the impact of job loss in his life because he did not want to look like he was seeking sympathy:

> [T]he layoff gave me something to write about, and initially, when I entered, ventured into it, I thought about writing mainly about what it was like being laid off, but then I started thinking that's going to get boring really quick (laughs), because I really didn't want to be eliciting sympathy for what I was going through. (Jeff, Interview)

Similarly, Martha admitted that due to the public nature of blogging, she had chosen not to share certain "raw" details of her emotional struggles during unemployment:

I had days and nights where I was very depressed and very down, and wasn't sleeping well, and I had some days when I was crying and just felt like I was a mess, and that was stuff that I definitely wasn't going to put in public and on the Internet. (Martha, Interview)

Since participants could not publicly indulge in unchecked self-expression, their ability to cope with job loss through catharsis may have been constrained. Ironically, however, Hannah felt that had she publicly shared the challenges and disappointments of her job search, she would have had to relive them publicly, which would have hurt her pride and taxed her endurance levels even further:

From one perspective, just from a pride thing . . . I wasn't comfortable putting out there like, hey, I applied for this awesome job, and then, you know, have to blog a few weeks later that, like, I didn't even get an interview or whatever, or something that I was really excited about that didn't pan out, so there was that aspect in terms of what information I shared, but also, I just sort of wanted to focus on the bigger picture, because thinking about and writing about things like the everyday job search, or looking at job ads, or feeling really discouraged during that time was not helpful to me. (Hannah, Interview)

The public and interactive nature of blogging also exposed participants to unkind or disinhibited feedback from readers, which further constrained its potential for supporting emotional endurance during unemployment. Matt readily acknowledged this negative aspect of blogging in the following interview excerpt:

[C]omments sections are an interesting thing because on a small site, . . . people feel like they know you, they feel like they know me because I'm on some level baring myself to them. They do understand that, but if you've ever read comment sections on bigger sites, they have this sort of impersonal quality where people say things that they never would say, you know to, face to face . . . because, you know, if someone's faceless it's almost like they're not really a human being. (Matt, Interview)

In Matt's view, the ability to comment on blog posts anonymously and the impersonal nature of some online interactions or contexts are factors that enable "trolling." His weariness of anonymous feedback and the disinhibited behavior it can enable was also shared by Jeff and Hannah. Having explored the ways in which blogging

supported and hindered participants' ability to endure their loss of employment, this paper now turns to the constraining and enabling impact of blogging on participants' quest to overcome job loss professionally and personally.

Blogging for resolution: constraining and enabling dynamics. The incorporation of blogging as a coping routine during unemployment proved problematic from a resolution (i.e., job loss reversal) perspective as well, as it both supported and hampered participants' chances of finding new employment. Indeed, despite giving participants a platform to figure out their path to reemployment, expand their professional skills, and promote themselves to potential employers, blogging also worked, ironically, to entrench job loss as a defining aspect of participants' public profile. Moreover, to remain employable in the eyes of potential recruiters, participants had to monitor how they presented and expressed themselves in their blog narratives. These tension-filled dynamics are explored in detail below.

Resolution-enabling aspects of blogging about job loss. Blogging about life after job loss not only helped participants endure the challenges of unemployment, but also supported their efforts to find new employment. As personal webpages, blogs gave participants a platform to advertise their search for new employment, share their career interests and professional experience, and potentially increase their visibility to employers. Indeed, three out of the four bloggers in this study (Jeff, Martha, and Matt) provided public links to their resumes on their blogs, and two of them (Jeff and Martha) also linked their blogs to their LinkedIn profiles to allow employers (and others) to learn about their professional background and expertise. To reach a wider audience with their blog narratives, participants (Jeff, Martha, and Matt) posted links to their blogs and/or

shared new posts on social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter. The interactive

nature of blogs was also beneficial, as readers sometimes responded with professional

advice and job leads. In the following blog excerpt, for instance, Jeff expressed his

appreciation for the useful suggestions that a reader and fellow blogger had shared with

him:

> And the next day, I found a number of comments on the blog, including one from
> Steve . . . . He expressed his condolences and then added links to two blog posts he
> had written about looking for work in digital journalism. I've not found a job yet (the
> economy is still awful, no matter what the economists say on the news), but his advice
> has helped draw attention to my resume and I remain optimistic (if somewhat
> impatient) that I will find something that uses the skills I've developed over 27 years.
> (Jeff, Blog)

As a practice, blogging also allowed participants to improve their reemployment

chances by sharpening, expanding, and showcasing their skillset in areas such as writing,

digital publishing, and online marketing (e.g., search engine optimization). In other

words, blogs became part of participants' professional portfolio, as indicated by Jeff in

the following excerpt:

> This blog, which I'd actually been considering starting since the summer months, has
> unexpectedly proven to be cathartic and therapeutic. Further, it has given an
> unemployed journalist an avenue to post online writing samples while demonstrating
> (and honing) his own self-editing skills. (Jeff, Blog)

For a journalist like Jeff, blogging was valuable because it helped him stay in the

practice of writing and editing, both essential career skills, and thus continue to develop

his professional portfolio despite the layoff. As a public platform, blogging also allowed

him to showcase his skills to potential employers. Matt, on the other hand, had a

background in digital marketing and content writing/editing. For him, the benefit of

blogging came from the valuable skills he acquired in digital publishing and website

management, which eventually helped him secure new employment:

I'd been writing stuff for years and years and years long before [the blog], but I didn't know much about managing a website, I didn't know anything about tools, so to that extent, it was how I taught myself how to do those things, and I use those tools constantly, I'm on those tools all day long every day now, so that was what taught me that, and that was what helped me ultimately get another job, is because I knew that sort of thing. (Matt, Interview)

Beyond skill development and promotion, however, blogging proved especially valuable as a sensemaking platform. Indeed, as they wrote about the various challenges and decisions they faced in the wake of their layoff, participants had to flesh out and rationalize what they viewed as an appropriate path toward reemployment. This, in turn, empowered them to attend to their transition through unemployment with an increased sense of agency and mindfulness. The role of blogging as an enabling force in the quest to resolve and reverse job loss readily emerged during interviews, as participants considered their blogging stints in retrospect. Consider the following comments by Hannah:

I think as I was writing, it had already become clear to me that it was time to get out of my museum line of work prior to being laid off. You know, I'd been in museum work for a long time, and just was experiencing some burnout, and just not enjoying the work as much for a variety of reasons, so I knew that I needed a change, and I think that being laid off was, you know, the thing that really got that into gear, into thinking about what that change might be, but all I knew at that point was I think it's time to change, and I have no idea what direction this is going to take me in. So I think I just wanted to journal that uncertain time in my life, where it was like, I don't know what this skill set is going to lead to, and I don't know where I'm going to end up, but let's figure this out. (Hannah, Interview)

In this passage, Hannah explained how blogging helped her tackle the career uncertainty she had been grappling with even before her layoff and work out the direction she wanted her career to take beyond museum work. As mentioned above, she was clearly aware that writing was constitutive of her thinking and journey through job loss, not merely reflective of it. Similarly, Jeff found that blogging helped him clarify his

thinking and stay focused as he worked to navigate and reverse his job loss. Even more

importantly, from a resolution perspective, it kept him engaged in a continuous process of

(pro)active learning and problem solving:

> I think it [blogging] helped organize my thoughts in a way. When you're writing about it two or three times or four times a week, you're keeping it in front of you as a problem or an issue and you're tackling it from…you know you're trying to learn more about it. I guess for me a lot of it was trying to learn more about what was happening with the industry. I mean I knew, at the time I was laid off, I knew the industry was in trouble, but I started learning more about why the industry was in trouble . . . (Jeff, Interview)

These two quotes by Jeff and Hannah clearly suggest that blogging was not

merely a palliative coping activity during unemployment, but a catalyst of professional

growth that helped set the course for participants' transition to reemployment. Aside from

fostering agency and mindfulness in reemployment efforts, however, blogging enabled

participants to resolve job loss on a personal level as well by helping them emerge from

the experience with an enhanced sense of self-knowledge, growth, and resilience. This, in

turn, allowed them to have a more empowered, even more positive, view of job loss in

retrospect and cast it not as a life-altering affliction, but as a challenging, yet pivotal

period that spurred resilience and personal growth. Matt, for instance, described his job

loss and subsequent unemployment as a "valuable experience" during which he got to

learn about himself and figure out who he was. As a sensemaking tool, blogging was, in

his view, an enabling force in that process:

> I mean [blogging] forced me to really think about it [i.e., who he was as a person]. I had to convey what I was thinking and feeling into words on the page, as opposed to leaving them in my head where they could be some sort of vague thought or emotion. I got actually to turn them into words, verbalize them, well verbalize is the wrong word, but….I'd actually turn them into something that other people would understand. (Matt, Interview)

Similarly, Hannah stated that she would not take back that time in her life when

she was laid off and unemployed because she had learned and grown a great deal through that experience. Like Matt, she felt that blogging had been conducive to that learning and personal growth:

> It all worked out great (laughs). I learned a lot about myself from blogging, I learned a lot about myself from unemployment, I had gained a new perspective on the possibilities that I could explore both as a writer and a blogger and in my career, and as a mom, and all sorts of other things, so, I think it actually was a really wonderful point in my life . . . because even for the pain and the struggles and the challenges that I faced being laid off, what I gained from it is priceless. (Hannah, Interview)

In summary, blogging supported participants' efforts to reverse job loss by giving them an avenue to develop, showcase, and promote their professional skills, as well as a space where they could work through their circumstances and figure out their path to reemployment. As a sensemaking platform, blogging also fostered self-learning and personal growth, which helped participants overcome their job loss on a personal level as well, and adopt a more positive stance toward their experience in retrospect. However, as will be illustrated below, blogging also proved counterproductive at times, as it threatened to cement, in the long run, the "laid off" label that participants were eager to reverse. Moreover, bloggers had to monitor how they expressed and presented themselves publicly online, so they did not compromise their chances of reemployment.

Resolution-constraining aspects of blogging about job loss. Although blogging helped participants overcome their job loss professionally and personally, it also threatened to hinder their efforts in some ways. Indeed, by blogging regularly about their job loss, participants risked entrenching joblessness as a salient and defining aspect of their public profile instead of helping eliminate it. Martha, for instance, worried that people would conflate being unemployed with being unemployable and that her reemployment prospects would suffer as a result:

Martha: It [blogging] helped because it reminded me that yes, I can still write, which is a skill that I've always told employers I've had, that I can still communicate, that I can work . . . the mechanics of actually posting a blog and editing one, and using certain computer softwares [*sic*] . . . but on the other hand, writing about the subject and continuing to write about the subject for so long made me wonder at times, and at least, one or two people did bring up as well, that did I really want to specialize in that particular subject . . .

Interviewer: You mean specialize in unemployment as a blog topic?

Martha: Yeah, or more . . . picturing myself as being unemployed. (Martha, Interview)

Although blogging allowed Martha to develop her writing and digital publishing skills and showcase them to potential employers, she increasingly questioned the wisdom, from a reemployment perspective, of making job loss and unemployment the focus of her blog narratives and how she viewed and presented herself. As illustrated by her statements above, this concern had been echoed by other people in her entourage as well.

For Matt, the counterproductive effects of blogging about job loss became apparent when the press coverage he received – some of which was in prominent outlets – failed to improve his reemployment chances. In fact, he realized over time that instead of boosting his visibility to potential employers, press attention was merely flagging him as one of the voices of unemployment that news outlets could include in their coverage of the recession. Almost six months into unemployment, he complained that job interviews had been too slow to come by despite having been interviewed in the press many times:

I finally had another job interview, after four months of nothing. During the drought, I managed to secure numerous interviews with various press outlets. They all wanted to talk about my unemployment. None of them, of course, wanted to do anything about it. So while a little more famous, I remain equally unemployed. For those playing along at home, the score now stands at 8-3; press interviews are beating job interviews pretty handily. (Matt, Blog)

Rather than help generate momentum toward speedier reemployment, the press attention Matt received was instead directed at his blogging efforts and engagement with

job loss issues. As such, it was counterproductive because despite the fame it offered him, it mainly served to highlight his jobless status and cement him as an "unemployment blogger" in the public's perception, thus eclipsing his quest for new employment as his main concern. Even more problematically, job loss for an unemployed blogger is not just a disruption to be reversed, but also the blog's raison d'être, its main topic, and its value proposition. From this perspective, at least, there seems to be an inherent conflict between wanting to reverse one's unemployment and investing in narratives that perpetuate it and feed off of it.

Another constraining aspect of blogging, from a resolution perspective, stemmed from its public nature. Indeed, all participants understood that their blogs could come to the attention of potential employers and that the manner in which they expressed and presented themselves online could affect their reemployment odds. In other words, unchecked self-expression risked compromising their employability. Since participants needed to find new employment, particularly in the desperate economic climate of the Great Recession, they had to carefully manage their public profile, which constrained their ability to express themselves freely online. For instance, when asked whether his desire for honest self-expression on his blog conflicted with his pursuit of new employment, Jeff acknowledged that he often considered how his posts would be perceived by potential employers and whether they might negatively impact his employability. Similarly, Martha was aware of the public nature of her blog posts and their potentially long-term permanence online and, thus, wanted to maintain a positive, employable image:

> I think I always had in the back of my mind that . . . I knew it was public and could very well be on the Internet for a long time if not the rest of my life, and I knew I

didn't really want employers or anyone else to find a bad image of me. (Martha, Interview)

As they sought to overcome job loss both by looking back at their experiences and aiming forward to reemployment, bloggers particularly grappled with the extent to which they could share their emotional struggles during unemployment or their feelings toward previous employers. As will be illustrated further below, their responses to this tension focused on carving a space for legitimate disclosure and self-expression while simultaneously censoring blog narratives to preserve employability.

To conclude, although blogging about job loss helped participants both endure and overcome their job loss, it also emerged, over time, as a constraining factor that threatened to hold them back both emotionally and professionally. To manage these problematic effects, participants resorted to humor, disclosure logics, and distancing strategies. These tension management strategies will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

Humor. Analysis of blog and interview transcripts pointed to humor and sarcasm as an integrative strategy (Seo et al., 2004) participants used to mitigate the stressful, unemployment-entrenching, and disclosure-constraining aspects of blogging to cope with job loss. These different uses of humor are detailed below.

Humor for better endurance. The majority of participants indicated that maintaining a sense of humor after being laid off helped them maintain an emotionally healthier perspective toward their circumstances. Jeff, for instance, wrote that "[h]umor is fun, can take the edge off a sharp situation, can bring a little joy into an otherwise dull day and, when all else seems to fail, it can save your sanity." Matt and Martha also recognized the therapeutic effects of humor and incorporated it frequently in their blog

narratives. When a reader thanked him for injecting some humor into her circumstances, Matt stated that "[w]riting and making jokes has helped me keep what's left of my sanity." Similarly, Martha indicated during her interview that she purposely laced her narratives with humor and sarcasm so she could discuss her post-layoff challenges without getting overwhelmed with anger, sadness, or frustration. In fact, even the title of her blog explicitly stated her rationale as finding the funny side of unemployment. By making fun of her troubles, Martha was still able to externalize her thoughts and feelings and share her post-layoff experiences, but with humor and sarcasm as a surrogate emotional response to shield herself from the emotional toll of her circumstances:

> I think part of it was like the old saying, I think you know how people talk about laughing to keep from crying? I think that was more, one of my other big purposes too, because I think I was just trying to make fun of it all and be sarcastic about it all because people who know me say that [they] like my sense of humor . . . But on the other hand I also think that, yeah, over the years of my life it's been one of my bigger coping skills, and I do think that as I get older, the more I make fun of something and the more sarcastic I get about something - I am not like that all the time - but the more I try to make fun of something, I think it really is more of a coping skill for me. If I didn't make fun of it, I'd probably be enraged or in tears about it. (Martha, Interview)

As illustrated by the excerpts above, incorporating humor in job loss narratives enabled participants to cope with the psychological impact of their employment loss in a healthier way. One could also argue that by making light of their troubles, participants were able to defy their circumstances and resist being consumed by them. From this perspective, humor can be seen as an act of resistance and resilience. However, participants were not always able to laugh at their troubles. Although humor helped alleviate the weight of their challenges, there were many instances when their frustration and discouragement were readily palpable in their entries. In fact, Martha acknowledged the limitations of humor during the interview when she stated: "I was trying to take a

rather funny angle or a sarcastic angle at time, [but] it didn't always seem to work."

Similarly, Jeff wrote that although he found humor beneficial to his psychological well-

being and tried to incorporate it in his life every day, he was still susceptible to negative

states of mind:

> Decades ago, I learned a sense of humor can go a long way toward pushing back the blackest of moods. Consequently, I decided at some point to make humor, along with my faith, a part of my daily routine. . . . Now, that's no guarantee the day's first smile will last -- I am human, after all. Still, a sense of humor has saved me on more than one occasion from tripping into those dark chasms that frequently have threatened to engulf me during my adult years. (Jeff, Blog)

In other words, although humor enabled bloggers to better cope with their job loss

and resist giving into negative and counterproductive thoughts, it also depended on their

willingness and ability to laugh at their circumstances, both of which were continuously

tested and constrained by the challenges of being jobless during a major recession. Thus,

in the spectrum of tension-management strategies (Seo et al., 2004), humor was a

mitigation (i.e., integrative) tactic that partly alleviated the psychological toll of blogging

regularly about job loss but did not fully resolve it. Instead, the tension between looking

back at one's challenges and moving on from them persisted.

Humor as a public display of resilience. Humor also emerged as a useful strategy

for navigating the simultaneously personal and public context of blogging. Indeed, it

allowed participants to share the challenges and frustrations of job loss in a compelling

way, thus avoiding the stigma of appearing to give in to weakness or self-pity. In fact,

one could argue that by showcasing their ability to poke fun at their circumstances,

bloggers gave a public testament to their resilience and perhaps helped readers

contemplate their situations with some levity as well.

Martha was one of the bloggers who deployed humor to share her unemployment

struggles. During the interview, she revealed that she avoided sharing raw displays of

discouragement or depression on her blog because she had been taught not to indulge in

self-pity and had learned to try to soldier on despite feeling down:

> I think it's something . . . that I've done throughout my life because at various times I have had problems, . . . and yet I have always tried, even at my most depressed to still get up, get out of bed, go to work if I'm working, and still try to accomplish things. . . . I think as a kid and as a child and younger adult, I was either raised to try not to wallow and keep going regardless, or as a young adult I'd felt like well, I still have to go out, go to work, make a living, you can't sit around and be depressed all day. (Martha, Interview)

As an adult, Martha had also learned not to give in to tears in the face of trouble

and had instead shifted to humor as a more age-appropriate outlet for her emotions:

> When I was younger, I was more likely to cry about everything, but, like, as a child. But since I'm an adult, years later, I am more likely to not cry and just be more like you saw on the blog, just make sarcastic comments or . . . I guess throw my hands up and try not to be totally disgusted at something, otherwise I'd probably be crying and weeping in frustration or sadness, I think. (Martha, Interview)

Like Martha, Matt frequently used humor and sarcasm to discuss his post-layoff

experiences. Although he thought it was normal to face ups and downs during

unemployment and was willing to share his struggles on his blog, he shunned gratuitous

displays of despair and self-pity because they did not make for an interesting read and

only served to stoke readers' concern and sympathy:

> [I]f I just wrote twenty paragraphs of woe is me, woe is me, and I got to the end and that was that, I mean at a certain point people start reading… this is like, this guy just needs a suicide helpline or something. . . . This is not interesting anymore, this is not entertaining anymore, so I did understand on that level that . . . there needed to be a point to it. (Matt, Interview)

Even a cursory look at Matt's blog reveals the prevalence of humor in his posts.

As a case in point, the following excerpt humorously compares unemployment to Dengue

Fever and argues it could be even worse:

Unemployment is the new Dengue Fever. A side-by-side comparison reveals that it might even be worse . . . Symptoms of Dengue Fever include severe headache, muscle and joint pain, fever and rash. Sudden-onset Unemployment may lead to stress-related headache and fever, and muscle and joint pain from frantically clicking through online job listings. Dengue Fever is treated with timely supportive therapy that tackles shock due to haemoconcentration and bleeding. Unemployment is treated with government stimulus designed to shock the economy back to life before it hemorrhages its middle class into bankruptcy. The only real difference seems to be the rash I'd get from Dengue Fever. At this point, I'd endure a rash for a paycheck. And the longer I'm unemployed and the more bad news I read, the better that rash seems. Bring it on. (Matt, Blog)

Matt wrote the above post in early 2009, in response to expert opinions that predicted a continued rise in the unemployment rate. By using humor, he was still able to externalize his growing frustration and desperation, but he did so without publicly wallowing in self-pity. Instead, he poked fun at his troubles in a display of wit and resilience and perhaps encouraged the unemployed in his audience to do the same. In fact, several readers wrote to praise his sense of humor and thank him for injecting some levity into difficult circumstances.

In summary, humor helped participants navigate the tension between looking back and moving forward in a public online setting (i.e., blogs) by allowing them to carve a space for cathartic self-expression while simultaneously displaying resilience and composure. Although it offers a productive way to merge the two poles of the tension (i.e., integration – see Seo et al., 2004), this strategy may be hard to sustain in the long term if public displays of humor are used to mask internal turmoil. Martha, for instance, admitted that she endowed her online "alter ego" with more humor and sarcasm than she used in real life and that her blogger persona was like her in some ways, but unlike her in others:

I suppose it [i.e., her blogger persona] was kind of separate . . . it was and it wasn't separate now that I think about it, because . . . it was sort of like a persona that I had,

my more, like, sarcastic, humorous persona but yet trying to write about something that was very serious that was happening to me and around me, and yet it was kind of, it was me and it wasn't me, I guess. (Martha, Interview)

Humor for countering the entrenchment of joblessness. Humor also emerged as a strategy for countering the unemployment entrenching and, thus, professionally constraining effect of blogging about job loss in Matt's blog. As mentioned above, Matt received a good amount of press coverage as a blogger, and some of it was in prominent outlets.[ii] He both welcomed this attention and enabled it (e.g., through search engine optimization strategies), as he hoped that standing out as a blogger would increase his reemployment chances. Thus, during the six months of blog entries included in this research, he shared links to news articles and stories featuring him with readers. He also maintained a list of press/media coverage in the "About" section of his blog. At the same time, however, Matt was still keenly aware of his joblessness and need for reemployment and, thus, reluctant to fully embrace his success as a blogger. Consequently, when he announced to readers that he had been featured in a news story, he often did so with a mixture of sarcasm and self-deprecating humor, as illustrated by the following two excerpts:

Excerpt 1: Well, it seems that people are figuring out what I've known all along… that I'm great. So great that I may have reached the limit of how great someone can be and still not have a job. . . . In the meantime, here's the article . . . that clued me in…[Link to article] Near the bottom is a section on yours truly. Read and enjoy. Then fantasize about what it's like to be me. Or just take all the money out of your pocket and give it away. Then you'll know exactly what it's like to be me, and you can move on to something more interesting.

Excerpt 2: I'm starting to think that people actually like me, or my blog, or a career train wreck they can watch from a safe distance. Or maybe everyone is just bored to tears of job sites and their incessantly optimistic emails. Whatever the circumstances, a really cool site . . . has included me in an article about unemployment…(Matt, Blog)

In both instances, Matt chose to share the press attention he had received, but

simultaneously made light of it with self-deprecating humor that foregrounded his continued unemployment. Thus, here too, humor served as an integrative strategy (see Seo et al., 2004) that allowed Matt to publicize his success as a blogger while simultaneously tempering its importance with reminders of his joblessness and yearning for reemployment. However, the tension between the enabling and constraining aspects of blogging persisted, as Matt continued to be conflicted about his fame as a blogger, yet it eventually threatened to define him in the public perception and perhaps hinder his chances of reemployment. In fact, as mentioned above, Matt eventually came to doubt that press attention would help him get reemployed, as it had failed to increase the interest of potential employers in him.

Disclosure logics. In their bid to look back on their job loss and simultaneously find a path forward, participants were pulled between self-expression and self-presentation as two concurrent, yet competing coping concerns. On one hand, they viewed blogging as an outlet for catharsis and sensemaking at a difficult time and used it to externalize and work through their thoughts and feelings. At the same time, however, they hoped that blogging would help them promote their skills and professional experience, and perhaps expedite their reemployment. Given the public nature of blog posts and their potential visibility to employers, participants questioned the extent to which they could indulge in free self-expression and felt the need to edit their narratives to preserve and promote their "employability." During data analysis, this tension manifested itself primarily in two types of online self-disclosure, namely whether to discuss emotional struggles during unemployment and whether to share personal feelings or attitudes toward employers. Although participants felt that they controlled "the

microphone" on their blogs and could ultimately publish anything they wanted, they still recognized the wisdom of editing themselves from a self-presentation and reemployment perspective. In navigating this tension, they opted for an *integrative approach* (Seo et al., 2004) and sought to reconcile their desire for cathartic self-expression with their need for reemployment, and thus for advantageous self-presentation as well. Specifically, they enacted disclosure logics that emphasized their commitment to justifiable, responsible, and socially acceptable disclosure behavior. As will be illustrated below, participants' disclosure logics foregrounded culturally-valued standards such as resilience, service, honesty, or personal freedom to carve a space for self-expression. However, they inherently included stipulations for self-censorship as well, which set limits for self-expression based on personal convictions and/or social norms. These rationales were also informed by – and adapted to - bloggers' chosen anonymity levels and the reasoning underlying them. Although this strategy did not eliminate the tension between self-expression and self-presentation altogether, it allowed participants to navigate it over time by negotiating guidelines that they both accepted and controlled. The remainder of this section illustrates how participants deployed disclosure logics to discuss employers and emotional struggles during unemployment.

Disclosures about emotional struggles during unemployment. Although participants viewed blogging as an emotional outlet that could help them endure the hardships of job loss, its public nature and potential visibility to employers prompted them to consider the extent to which they could be open about their emotional struggles during unemployment. As illustrated above, they found unbridled displays of vulnerability or self-pity on a public forum either inappropriate or unhelpful. To manage

this tension, participants sought to reconcile their need for both self-expression and self-presentation by tempering their emotional self-disclosures. In addition to using humor (see "Humor as a Public Display of Resilience" above), they deployed integrative disclosure logics that allowed them to confidently share their emotional struggles, but inherently stipulated some level of self-censorship as well.

Matt, for instance, framed emotional ups and downs as a *normal aspect of unemployment*, which helped legitimize his emotional self-disclosures online. However, this normalization logic was predicated on a commitment to resilience. In other words, Matt felt it was acceptable to share his emotional struggles on his blog as long as he showed that he was trying to overcome them:

> I would realize when I was just feeling sorry for myself, and you know we all have good days, we all have bad days, and there were plenty of times where I was feeling sorry for myself, I'd let everybody know, but it was also a process of coming to terms with that and turning it around . . . (Matt, Interview)

From this perspective, resilience tested and forged in struggle was normal and honorable, but unchecked indulgence in vulnerability and self-pity was not. Instead, it suggested a desperate, unhealthy, and thus reemployment-hindering emotional state: "[W]hen you're unemployed, no one wants to hire a sad sack who comes in there and gives them the sob story. They want you to come in and be confident" (Matt, Interview). It is important to reiterate here that for Matt, blogging was primarily a way to boost reemployment chances in a difficult economy. In fact, he blogged under his real name, and his site included a prominent link to his resume. He also had a picture of himself in the "About" section. Therefore, his self-disclosure behavior could be directly tied to him, and the self-presentation stakes were higher than if he had withheld personally identifying information.

The following blog excerpt is a good example of Matt's normalization logic. It comes from a post entitled "The Cycle of Feeling Sorry for Myself," in which the blogger explicitly addressed his emotional struggles during unemployment:

Every so often a funk grabs a hold of me, for no good reason. . . . I feel sorry for myself. I lament my unemployment and the general state of my life. I start to envy all the things everyone else has and I don't – big apartments, cars, jobs, stuff. It's an ugly scene, and the envy can reach ridiculous proportions. . . . When in these funks, I feel like the only person who is struggling – a ridiculous notion, but true in the world of me, myself and I. This is a selfish and irrational way of looking at things. And people would be right to call me out on it in the forums and comments sections. Hell, you have my permission to walk right up on the street and slap me across the face if you have to. I forget to give equal weight to all the good things in my life – family, health, etc. They get minimized and pushed aside. The feeling sorry for myself isn't productive. But it happens every now and again, often enough that I recognize the cycle for what it is. . . . Something always pulls me back into real life. This time it was a two-year-old boy on the subway discovering the world outside. He stood on the seat watching the passing buildings, pointing and laughing as his mother held him steady. . . . Something about the scene made me feel better. . . . We all have ups and downs in our moods. They're part of life. But unemployment can make the peaks higher and, in my case, the valleys lower. I go through these cycles often enough to recognize them. If I could steer clear, I would. That hasn't worked so far, so I just try to just be productive and minimize the downtime. My best is the most I can ask of myself. (Matt, Blog)

Interestingly, Matt started his entry with an honest description of the dark depths of discouragement and self-pity that overtook him every once in a while. However, his admission read more like a "mea culpa" than a relieving moment of emotional purging. Indeed, as illustrated by the excerpt above, he immediately condemned those emotional excesses as "ridiculous," "selfish," "irrational," and unproductive (i.e., not acceptable), and even told his readers they could rebuke him in their feedback. Then, he tried to show his emotional resilience by stating that he had come to recognize the cycle of discouragement and self-pity in his post-layoff life and always found a way to pull out of it. Emotional struggles, he concluded, were normal and hard to avoid during unemployment, but he always did his best to overcome them by staying productive. By

normalizing these ups and downs and foregrounding his attempts to resist them, Matt was able to share the emotional challenges of job loss while playing up his resilience in the eyes of readers, in general, and potential employers in particular.

Another instance of emotional disclosure logics came from Jeff's blog. As mentioned above, Jeff emphasized during the interview that he did not share his journey through job loss to garner people's sympathy. Instead, he stated, he hoped to help and inspire – i.e., *be of service to* – people who had also lost their employment. This rationale was partly motivated by his history with depression and his awareness of the tragic consequences it could have:

 I've known several people over the years who committed suicide, and one was a member of our extended family, and some were just friends, and as somebody who has dealt with depression on and off throughout my life, I knew that was something that…the likelihood of suicide in a situation like this is higher than it normally would be for anybody, and so I…I was thinking, I guess that was partly in the back of my mind, it's like…I wanted to be an encouragement more than anything else, and you know, you talk about serving our community, well my community was…in the blog, it was largely a community of journalists. (Jeff, Blog)

In order to help others affected by job loss, Jeff argued, he *needed* to be honest about his struggles:

 From the perspective that I was offering this as a way of helping others cope, or helping others understand that they weren't alone, I had to be honest about that, because If you're not expecting that or if you're going through this for the first time like I was, you need to be aware that that's going to be one of the things that you're going to be dealing with, repeatedly, and you can make that what it is or you can make it worse. And for me, I think, facing up to it was probably very productive, because I think in the past, over the course of my life, I always kept that kind of stuff in, and when I started writing about it, I referred to it as the black dog, and I borrowed that from Winston Churchill, and he battled his whole life with depression. And I've dealt with that on and off throughout my life too. It was particularly bad during the layoff, but you keep it in front of you where you know it's at, and you address it, and you recognize that it's there but you recognize that it's not everything, and that's what I tried to convey. I didn't want people who were reading my blog to get false hopes, but on the other hand, I didn't want them to cave in to that part of it. You're going through so many changes, you're going through so many threats because when you're

unemployed, all of a sudden you've got no income, you've lost a social aspect of your life that was a very big part of your life for a long time. You lose a lot of things, and grieving is part of that process. (Jeff, Interview)

By positioning his narratives about his post-layoff journey as attempts to help people affected by job loss, Jeff could legitimately open up about his feelings of depression and the trials of unemployment without appearing to wallow in self-pity. However, while this rationale enabled self-expression, it inherently stipulated self-censorship as well. Indeed, as quoted above, Jeff realized that helping others required him to convey a realistic, yet hopeful portrayal of job loss. Thus, while he needed to disclose his struggles to disabuse his audience of "false hopes," it was also important that he display his own resilience in the face of job loss to encourage and inspire his readers. From this perspective, indulgence in weakness and self-pity was not only inappropriate, but counterproductive as well. By foregrounding service to others as a rationale and guide for emotional self-disclosure, Jeff was able to both share the challenges of job loss (e.g., the challenges of finding employment in his fifties) and play up his resilience in the eyes of readers and potential employers, thus reconciling his need to both look back at his experiences and find a way forward. This strategy was all the more productive because Jeff blogged under his full name as well, and his self-disclosure behavior, which emphasized the positive values of service, honesty, and resilience, could be directly tied to him in the eyes of employers.

The following two excerpts illustrate Jeff's disclosure logic as it manifested itself in his blog. The first passage shows how the blogger publicly presented his reasons for sharing his job loss experience online:

Excerpt 1: My intent when I started writing this blog, at least initially, was to sift through and tap into some of the emotions I was feeling, to make sense of things and

share them with the hope that perhaps someone going through something similar might realize he or she is not alone. (Jeff, Blog)

Although Jeff acknowledged that he had started blogging to cope with his job loss, he also framed his decision as an attempt to encourage others in similar circumstances. Thus, he was able to foreground his commitment to resilience and elevate his sharing of post-layoff experiences from a self-focused need to an altruistic effort.

The second excerpt, on the other hand, shows how Jeff deployed his disclosure logic "in practice," and resorted to both sharing and self-censorship in discussing his job loss challenges:

> Excerpt 2: But sometimes you just feel like that statue with a pigeon on its shoulder, where the discouragement slams you pretty hard between the eyes and casts a pall over an otherwise good day. Monday was like that for me. My Dad and Mom brought me up with a great respect for truth, honesty and keeping your word, among other good and wholesome things. Yet some of my greatest struggles personally have been keeping my word – to my wife or my kids, for example, when I let my dedication to work get in the way of being home at a certain hour or such. So when the credit card company called to say, hey, you're three months behind and we're 12 days away from deciding whether or not to sue you, I dropped into a funk. . . . And even as I explained to him the mortgage, utilities and groceries have to be my priority until my employment situation changes, inside, I knew that in essence, albeit unwillingly as hell, I was failing to keep my word. Now don't get me wrong – I'm not sinking into great depths of depression over this. I have no options at the moment to remedy this short of winning the lottery, and that's not going to happen. I can accept that and move on. But the phone call did knock the wind out of my sails. . . . And so, as I have done for years and became more focused about when this whole chapter of my life first opened on Dec. 2, I turned to my faith, seeking comfort and understanding. And, I remind myself as I also tell others, things could be worse. (Jeff, Blog)

In this passage, Jeff admitted to feeling discouraged after he received a collection call from the credit card company. However, he did not want his readers to "get [him] wrong" or think that he would give in to depression as a result. Thus, he quickly sought to showcase (or model) his resilience by putting things in perspective, assuring his readers of his ability to "accept [his financial situation] and move on," and highlighting

his faith as a source of comfort. Jeff's concern for self-presentation was also evident in his effort to justify his discouragement as the legitimate result of his frustrated commitment to an important value (i.e., the need to pay one's dues), which spoke to his strong ethics in the eyes of readers and potential employers.

Ultimately, however, Jeff felt equally strongly about being able to express himself on his blog. When his father questioned his decision to discuss depression in his posts, he asserted his commitment to honesty regarding a condition he considered, like Matt, to be commonplace and non-taboo. He even declared that employers who did not share this view were not right for him:

> Actually my dad was more concerned about [what employers might think] than I was (laughs). There were times he would read about my blog and he would say Ted you're writing about depression, you're not gonna be able to get a job if you're writing about depression, and I said Dad, it's something everybody goes through, I'm just being honest about it. If they don't want my honesty, then maybe they're not such good employers to have anyway. (Jeff, Interview)

A final example of the integrative disclosure logics in this study comes from Hannah, who viewed disclosures about job loss challenges as a matter of *informed personal choice.* Specifically, she negotiated the limits of her self-expression at the juncture of her personal preferences and the disclosure norms she derived from other bloggers:

> Excerpt 1: The thing about my blog is I have, really, they're not written anywhere and they're not firm, but I have rules with myself about what I will and won't share, and so I tried to stay to whatever I felt I was comfortable sharing. (Hannah, Interview)

> Excerpt 2: I think part of resolving that [public/private] tension is that I'm just a writer by trade, and so you know, writing is something that I needed to do regardless of whether I was employed to do it. And, I think, you know, just being aware of how others in the blogosphere, or whatever have you, have handled you know, sort of this public/private debate, you know, like I said I've just been…you know hesitant to just be completely open and forthright on online versus you know what's happening in my

personal life, so it is, as you point out, a very curated and edited version of what's going on. (Hannah, Interview)

As illustrated by the passages above, Hannah viewed herself as a writer, and thus writing about her experiences was integral to that identity. As a blogger, she also felt that she was *free* to decide what to share online. At the same time, however, she was aware of the public nature of blogging, and felt the need to censor online disclosures about her personal life to some extent. This was informed both by her reluctance to share certain details (e.g., she did not share too much about her job search because it hurt her pride to admit to rejections in job search updates), as well as disclosure norms used by other bloggers. By framing emotional disclosures as informed personal choice, Hannah was able to reconcile her self-expression and self-presentation needs in a manner she was comfortable with.

Disclosures about employers. In addition to grappling with online disclosures regarding their emotional struggles during unemployment, bloggers wrestled with the extent to which they could candidly discuss previous or prospective employers without jeopardizing their reemployment chances. On one hand, employers played a prominent role in their layoff stories and job searches, and blogging was supposed to be a platform for externalizing those experiences and making sense of them. However, participants were also unanimously aware that the manner in which they talked about employers in public could seriously affect their professional reputation and reemployment prospects. To reconcile these two concerns, participants enacted integrative logics that emphasized *considered online disclosure* and, in most cases (i.e., except Jeff), strongly favored the self-presentation/moving forward pole of the tension. Specifically, they carefully drew on personal rules of conduct, social and professional norms, as well as enacted anonymity

levels to keep their self-disclosures about employers both enabling (from a self-expression perspective) and appropriate.

In fact, three out of four bloggers in this study (namely, Hannah, Martha, and Matt) opted not to publish anything that could reveal the identity of their previous or prospective employers. This allowed them to blog about their job loss experiences without jeopardizing their professional relationships or reemployment chances, but also limited them to discussing generalities and restricted their freedom of expression when they likely needed to vent. Still, this was an acceptable compromise for most bloggers. Matt, for example, had an explicit policy not to name employers on his blog. He even declined to reveal his new employer during the interview and redacted company names in a layoff story by a guest blogger. In a comment about his naming policy, he explained that he did not want to ruffle corporate feathers during his job search:

> Just to be clear, it was my decision not to name actual companies. [The guest blogger's] original submission included them. This has been my policy from the outset. While I'd like the lines of communication between HR and applicants to be more open, I'm not in a good position to fire a shot across the bow of any large corporation. I'm engaged in my own job search, and don't want to annoy specific companies which could conceivably hire me. (Matt, Blog)

Given Matt's decision to identify himself on his blog, his concern for appropriate disclosure behavior was warranted. In fact, despite his vigilant no-naming policy, he was still called out once by an ex-employer who felt that one of his posts had been too revealing given the small size of the company. To "prevent the smoke from turning into fire," he explained, he subsequently decided to take the post down. Since Matt viewed his blog primarily as an alternative path to reemployment, his disclosure logic was productive because it meshed well with his blogging rationale, limits to self-expression notwithstanding.

Like Matt, Hannah and Martha also refrained from sharing personally identifying details or feedback about their employers. Both were aware of the professional damage that lax disclosure standards had caused other bloggers and were determined to avoid that risk:

 Hannah: I made another conscious decision not to share much detail about my employer, or my work, or anything like that. I don't know if you're familiar with [name of a blog] . . . but she is a blogger who's been around for a really long time, and she was fired, I believe, in 2001 or 2002 for blogging about her work. And so, having followed her for a long time, I was clearly aware of like, employers can find you online, and it just doesn't reflect kindly on you, for future employment especially. (Hannah, Interview)

 Martha: There was always the tension of trying not to reveal exactly where I might be going, or what I was doing, or how exactly I may have felt after a particularly frustrating experience, because I wouldn't want to give up the details of why I went to XYZ company, and I had an absolutely horrible interview with so and so, and that, would, to me, would be far too much information to share because of course, that might ruin my chances of getting any sort of job. . . I didn't want to use specific names and details because of that, because [of] . . . basically not wanting to burn professional bridges or damage anyone's reputation, whether it was my own or someone else's, being very conscious of that, and I think . . . that's one reason why, or one thing that I think people have done on social media, when they've talked about their jobs, were? complaining about their job and . . . venting their complaints about their job and saying exactly where they worked and what they were doing, people have lost jobs for that or less, even, or waitresses posting about bad tips have lost jobs for that, so that sort of thing . . . so I definitely didn't want to lose my job over saying that, or potential job, or any job, over saying that I went here, had a bad interview there, or…so I avoided that as you, I'm sure you saw. I just spoke in generalities. (Martha, Interview).

Although Martha only blogged under her first name, her concern for disclosure-related repercussions was still justified because her blog included, curiously, a copy of her resume that bore her full name. When asked to clarify this inconsistency, she explained that despite her desire to keep a certain level of anonymity, she had hoped that blogging would boost her reemployment chances. Unsure what to do, she had decided to "merge" both objectives and post a link to her personally identifying resume while continuing to use her first name elsewhere. Such integration (Seo et al., 2004) may have

helped draw attention to her resume, but it largely undercut her intended anonymity. Still, the restrained nature of her self-disclosures made that a low risk from a self-presentation perspective. Her answer below speaks directly to the tension between looking back and moving forward when blogging is used to cope with job loss:

> Yeah, I do have my, I did have a link to me resume on that, because I guess I was of two minds about it. I didn't want to use my whole name while writing about myself as a character, but on the other hand, I was thinking, well, I am looking for work, maybe I'll link my resume to it. (Martha, Blog)

Like Martha and Matt, Hannah sought to reconcile her simultaneous needs for self-expression and self-presentation by withholding personally identifying disclosures about employers. However, she achieved this using a creative, two-step editing process that temporarily allowed her some unbridled, therapeutic purging. Indeed, she first generated uncensored narratives about her experiences, then edited them for publishing by removing personally identifying details about her employers and coworkers, as well as instances of inappropriate language:

> I blogged sort of stream of conscious by writing whatever I'm feeling, in whatever format I want, saying whatever I want, using whatever language I want, naming whoever I want, whatever, and then that gets edited and posted. (Hannah, Interview)

Throughout this process, Hannah used "an internal gut check" to make sure she did not share anything that would negatively affect employers' assessment of her. She also looked to other bloggers for guidelines on appropriate disclosure and stayed anonymous for added caution:

> I think it's more of an internal gut check. I mean, I've been informed by other bloggers who I follow, who have had open debates on their blogs about what they choose to share and what they don't, but more along the lines of, like, especially seeking employment, specifically, what I was concerned about is what is . . . my potential employer going to find, should they somehow stumble across my blog in doing a background check on me. Like, what would that language reflect on me? And again, I've tried to keep it as separate from my real-life identity as possible in that

respect, in that I don't say: Hey I'm [Hannah], my email is this, you know, that sort of thing. But that was my concern at that time, with the blog . . .You know, because potential employers are going to Google me, what are they going to find? (Hannah, Interview)

By allowing herself to purge her emotions without restraint in the private drafting phase, Hannah reaped the therapeutic benefits of self-expression even if she subsequently censored her public narratives. In fact, she still felt better about herself knowing that she had had the courage to publish her thoughts online, as edited as they might have been:

> Even though I didn't share a lot of the personal details, yeah writing the first draft that didn't get published helped. But then ultimately getting published, even if I wasn't sharing like every last detail that people could relate to, or opening it up for comments, at least I knew on some level that, yeah, it was taking courage to hit publish and putting that information out into the world, even if my readers don't know who I am. (Hannah, Interview)

By combining her public emphasis on self-presentation with a private focus on self-expression, Hannah was able to balance her approach to the self-expression/self-presentation duality. This was both a creative and productive strategy for her since she viewed blogging as a sensemaking outlet and, thus, needed more space for self-expression.

Whereas Hannah, Martha, and Matt opted for "safe" logics that emphasized censorship in employer-related disclosures, Jeff took an ostensibly bolder approach. In fact, not only did he blog under his full name, but as illustrated by the blog excerpt below, he also revealed the name of his previous employer (which I redacted below) and critiqued the decisions of its leaders and those of the newspaper industry in general:

> For [my previous employer], many of my former colleagues and I apparently represented mere numbers whose omission would help balance a ledger. Ultimately, the company is decimating a depth and breadth of institutional knowledge and experience that will take years to replace; whether [my previous employer] actually has that much time left, and if it does, whether it even has an interest in rebuilding that remains to be seen. Large media companies elsewhere also are pulling back their

coverage areas, closing publications in less-profitable venues, laying off staff, consolidating operations, among many other cost-cutting measures. I want to be fair and emphasize that [my previous employer] is not the only company doing this, although I am more keenly aware of the details there. I worked there a long time and follow it more closely than others, largely because I still have a dwindling number of longtime friends and former colleagues there. Nearly the entire newspaper industry is in turmoil […] (Jeff, Blog)

When compared to the disclosure strategies of the other bloggers in this study, Jeff's approach seems decidedly riskier from a self-presentation and reemployment perspective. In reality, however, it was no less considered than the other bloggers' disclosure logics. As a journalist, Jeff defined acceptable and responsible disclosures about employers not as appropriately censored ones, but as those that were *fair and factual*. Although he identified his previous company by name and leveled pointed criticisms at it, he strove to be just and objective in his assessment. For instance, he was quick to clarify, in the quote above, that his ex-employer had not been alone in adopting cost-reduction measures that threatened to drain its knowledge and experience capital (i.e., through layoffs). Thus, the key self-presentation concern for him was not whether employers could find his posts online, but whether his comments were impartial, truthful, and constructive. In fact, as indicated by the excerpt below, Jeff knew that his audience included old coworkers (he had informed them about the blog himself), and he even hoped that leaders at his previous company would find value in his opinions. The crux of the tension for him, however, was that he did not want his honesty to be misconstrued as bitterness, which would then undermine his credibility as a journalist:

 Probably one of the greatest tensions I had was every time I wrote about the layoffs at XYZ, I mean, I took it for granted initially that my largest audience was from XYZ, because a lot of the people who I sent those first emails out were XYZ employees; they were my coworkers, and the tension I felt there is I did not want to come off as being sour grapes toward XYZ. Whether I succeeded at that or not is another question entirely, but, you know, I was grateful for the run I had at that company. You know, I

think they made some mistakes, I think they made some horrendous mistakes, particularly as it relates to digital media, not in how they implemented it necessarily, but in the timing. . . . and so anyway, I wanted to keep my fellow journalists abreast of what was happening at XYZ when the layoffs were occurring, because I'd loved and cared for those people dearly, but I wanted to do it in a way that was not necessarily sour grapes, and because, like I said, I did appreciate having the opportunity to work at that company for so long, and like I said, they made mistakes, I mean the entire industry is making those mistakes . . . There was a line I didn't want to cross…. If I came across being sour grapes toward XYZ for example, now I'm an agenda-driven opinion maker, and not necessarily somebody who's trying to figure out why things have happened . . . or how best to overcome it. You know, once you paint yourself as a sour grapes kind of person, I think you lose some credibility [because] anybody can complain. Not everybody can facilitate discussion or thinking that might bring solutions . . . I didn't want to be just a whiner out there . . . I was looking for ways to be constructive without being all negative, because there was enough negative things going on, and certainly the layoff, the continuing layoffs are negative enough. But I wanted to keep the discussion going. I wanted people to start, you know, if any of my former bosses were reading it for example, the VPs and the executives at the company were reading it, that maybe they would get some insights. (Jeff, Interview, pseudonym XYZ provided by researcher)

Thus, Jeff managed the tension between self-expression and self-presentation by reframing the latter as a question of accuracy and objectivity instead of self-censorship. However, this reframing did not help resolve or transcend the tension (see Seo et al., 2004). As per Jeff's admission above, it is not clear whether employers recognized the impartial and constructive nature of his honest comments. Moreover, the tension did not disappear. As illustrated by the excerpt below, Jeff frequently considered the potential impact of his honest disclosures on his reemployment prospects, and he edited his posts to make sure they did not cross the line (as he saw it). Thus, instead of helping transcend the tension between self-expression and self-presentation, it seems that Jeff's reframing strategy was rather integrative in nature, with a stronger emphasis on self-expression (see Seo et al., 2004). Still, it worked for Jeff who, as a journalist, valued honesty and accepted that he needed to own up to the consequences of what he said:

Oh yeah, I thought of that [i.e., the idea that honesty and the need to find a job were at odds], and frequently, that thought would cross my mind just before I pressed the button to post it. Have I gone too far? Is this going to put me at risk? Is this going to discourage somebody from employing me? And ultimately it's like, you know what? I've been honest about what I've written about. If I make mistakes, if I misstate something and somebody corrects me, I own up to that. This is the hallmark of what I've been as a journalist since I started in the profession, and it could be the hallmark of every question: If I make a mistake, I've got to own up to it and deal with the consequences. So you know, like I say, every time I press that button that said "post this blog," you know, that thought would cross my mind. I shouldn't say every time, because not every entry was controversial, but it happened enough times to where it was like, I always thought about it but I always…I don't think there was any blog post I ever held…I think if I had any concerns about it I sat on it for a couple of hours, then I'd go back and rewrite. (Jeff, Interview)

To conclude, the bloggers in this study grappled with the extent to which they could candidly share their emotional struggles or discuss their employers online without compromising their reemployment chances. In both cases, they deployed integrative logics that helped them enact acceptable disclosures while still allowing for various degrees of self-expression. Although these strategies involved compromises and did not eliminate or transform the self-expression/self-presentation duality, they represented individualized and satisfactory solutions that participants both accepted and controlled.

Distancing tactics. In addition to using the strategies above, some participants sought to manage the tension between looking back and moving forward by distancing themselves from the constraining aspects of blogging about job loss and placing more emphasis on moving on.

Distance from joblessness. Martha, for instance, tried to manage the coping-constraining potential of blogging by *taking a step back from her joblessness* and focusing instead on getting reemployed. As illustrated above, she had originally sought blogging as a way to overcome her job loss both emotionally and professionally. During the first five months, she blogged regularly: often daily, and sometimes more than once

per day. She announced new posts on Twitter and had a link to her blog on her LinkedIn page. She even shared such links with potential employers at times. Over time, however, she grew increasingly wary of viewing herself as unemployed and presenting herself as such to others. After several months of unemployment, she worried that if she continued to emphasize joblessness in her self-concept and public image, she risked holding herself back emotionally and professionally. To find a way forward, she realized, she needed to focus on getting reemployed and avoid being labeled or stigmatized as unemployable:

> I think I was somewhat conflicted about that, especially as time went on, to keep saying that I'm unemployed, I'm unemployed, and . . . especially after the first six months, I felt more and more conflicted about focusing on being unemployed when I really wanted to focus on being employed again. . . . I definitely wanted to switch my time from feeling like I was looking for a job yet again, and rejected for . . . jobs that I wanted, and I definitely wanted to get away from that, and finally get a job and also, also as I said before, stop focusing on being unemployed and wanting to think of myself as . . . employable, because I think some people think of being unemployed as being **unemployable** [emphasis by interviewee], and I wanted to avoid that . . . stigma as well. (Martha, Interview)

To counter the entrenchment of joblessness in her self-image and the public's perception of her, Martha decided to distance herself from blogging about job loss. She decreased the frequency of her posts over time and eventually stopped them altogether:

> **Interviewer:** So did you feel that blogging about unemployment or being unemployed entrenched that part of you? Did it define you in any way?
> **Martha:** Well, I'm not totally sure, I hope it did not, and I eventually did end it after, like, I know I haven't posted to that particular blog in at least 2 or 3 years, and I did post less as time went on, after the first 6 or 8 months. (Martha, Blog)

During the interview, Martha stated that she eventually felt that she "wanted to concentrate on that particular topic of unemployment less." Thus, it is possible that the cathartic and therapeutic benefits of blogging had become less salient or relevant to her over time (i.e., beyond the early stages of unemployment) and that job loss narratives had instead turned into an emotional burden and a signpost to her joblessness. As the

unemployment-entrenching aspects of blogging became more apparent and problematic, the need to move forward and stop lingering on joblessness may have overshadowed the need for catharsis and sensemaking, thus making the shift away from blogging a natural – and thus enabling - step in Martha's coping journey. Moreover, when she ultimately stopped blogging, Martha was not feeling despondent about her continued unemployment, but rather optimistic. Thus, it is also possible that in addition to the unemployment-reinforcing drawbacks of blogging, she simply no longer felt she needed an emotional outlet to cope with her job loss:

> I don't think it was so much giving up, I think at the time I was . . . rather hopeful because . . . for some reason, when I wrote the last post, . . . I'd either just taken a new part-time job which I thought I was going to have a future in, or I was applying for jobs that I thought were going to have something of a future for me, so I think at the time I was rather hopeful. (Martha, Blog)

By choosing to stop blogging, Martha opted for a tension management approach that privileged "moving forward" over "looking back." Although seemingly a selection strategy, the gradual nature of the shift toward the "moving forward" pole makes a stronger argument for *integration* (Seo et al., 2004). Indeed, Martha's decision came after several months of regular blogging, which means that the participant had already taken the time to make sense of her job loss online. Moreover, Seo et al. point out that integrative approaches, like selection strategies, often come to emphasize one pole over the other.

Interestingly, Martha used the same distancing strategy when she subsequently started a blog to cope with some serious health problems. During the interview, she described how she eventually tired of discussing her illness too, and amid optimism regarding her treatment decided once again that blogging would hold her back and

distract her focus on recovery:

> [F]or a while, I blogged about my experiences with [a serious illness], but I stopped about…I did it at the time of my diagnosis again as a coping skill, and stopped during the summer I was in [treatment]. I guess I was just rather hopeful at the point I stopped, and also felt like I, for some reason, I just couldn't write about it anymore . . . and that was about maybe half way to, almost three quarters of the way though my [treatment]. I guess I was both hopeful and yet tired of it all, at the same time [it was?] I can't do this right now, and let that blog just sort of die at the time too, although people who read it said wow, this is great, you should keep doing it, and at the time I stopped I was like I can't do this right now, because I was just so involved in trying to get well again, I think. (Martha, Interview)

As Martha stated during her interview, blogging for her had been "a coping tool that did have its time and place." At some point, it had outlived its purpose as a coping avenue and even become counterproductive. Thus, stepping away from it may have enabled the participant to better focus on her reemployment prospects and journey. Interestingly, Martha decided to keep her blog online, and her LinkedIn profile still links to it, making it a part of professional portfolio.

Audience exclusion. Whereas Martha distanced herself from her joblessness as a way of moving on, Hannah viewed readers' "access" to her as a potential obstacle to overcoming job loss and *kept her audience consistently at arm's length*. For instance, she created a separate blog for her unemployment-related musings when she got laid off even though she had already been publishing a blog for several years. "At that time," she explained during the interview, "I didn't want that experience on my other blog." Thus, as illustrated in the quote below, she kept the two sites separate (i.e., not linked) while she was unemployed and did not inform the readers of her original blog of her new venture, thereby excluding them from her coping journey. Moreover, she "largely abandoned" her first blog while she focused on her job loss, which was another way she kept her original audience out of the loop:

My close friends and family [knew about the job loss blog], but like the random subscribers that I have I didn't share that with them, and I didn't link you know the two blogs together, but my close friends and family did. But I just wanted it, again, like even though blogging was fun to me, like, I just wanted that to be anonymous, and I largely abandoned [the first blog] during that time, and focused only on my unemployment and struggles. So I wasn't blogging in both places at the same time. So even though [the job loss blog] is a little more serious in tone, it still was like a fun place for me to have a creative outlet at that time. (Hannah, Interview)

It is possible that Hannah did not want the stress – or perhaps stigma – of announcing her job loss on her established blog, especially when she was already feeling discouraged. That may explain why, as stated above, she only informed close friends and family when she started blogging about her job loss. By contrast, when she started her first blog, she was much more forthcoming and sent a "mass email to basically everyone" to announce it. It is also possible that, for Hannah, the original blog represented normal, everyday life, a space "to play and have fun, and share personal stuff whether it's serious or fun or whatever" (Interview). Job loss, on the other hand, was a stressful, dispiriting, but supposedly temporary disruption to normality, which may have explained the need for a separate, anonymous blog, one "a little more serious in tone" (see quote above). In fact, Hannah stated during the interview that she had planned to return to resume publishing her original blog once she got reemployed. For all these reasons, Hannah may have deemed it counterproductive, from an emotional coping perspective, to include her original audience in her job loss and coping journey. Instead, she focused on overcoming her circumstances on a separate, anonymous blog, thus *integrating her self-expression needs and self-presentation concerns with an emphasis on moving forward*. Interestingly, once she got reemployed (i.e., once she successfully moved forward and no longer needed to blog about job loss), Hannah felt she could indulge the self-expression pole of the tension again. Thus, she decided to publish a subset of her posts about job loss on her

original blog, making sure to "select posts that showed the range of emotions" that colored her post-layoff journey.

In addition to creating a separate blog for her job loss experiences, Hannah distanced herself from her audience by disabling the blog's commenting capability, which meant that readers could not respond to her posts with public feedback. However, she allowed her followers to contact her privately by using a contact form on the blog. When asked about her decision to turn off comments, Hannah noted the apprehension she felt at the prospect of unkind, disinhibited behavior from anonymous commenters:

> I just don't like bad behavior that you see online, period. You know, you see that people hide behind these cloaks of anonymity in order to post things that are just abhorrent, whether it's, you know, comments on a news article or on a blog or whatever, people say terrible things simply because they're anonymous. And even if I turned on that you have to disclose your identity and I have to approve the comments, like it's simply, since it's a journal for me, I really, to me it's like immaterial what your response is and your reaction is to my life. Like I simply have a need to share it, and you have the contact form on the website to contact me for more information. (Hannah, Interview)

By disabling the commenting features on her blog, Hannah sought to protect herself from harsh or hostile feedback on a public forum, which would have only exacerbated the stress she felt after her layoff. Not surprisingly, she was not the only blogger to voice concerns about bad behavior online. Indeed, both Jeff and Matt expressed weariness of impersonal or disinhibited feedback, although they each allowed comments on their blogs. Hannah, however, did not vest much importance in readers' reactions to her posts and choices, which explains her decision to turn off comments altogether instead of policing them. As stated in the passage above, she mainly thought of her blog as a journal, which is not a traditionally interactive genre. At other times during the interview, she also referred to herself as "an old school blogger" (i.e., as opposed to

bloggers with an expanded presence on social media who emphasize interacting with readers) and likened her blog to "postcards to friends and family," and to a published book that elicits reviews after the fact: "[M]y style is more like, you put a book out there, and the reviews come in, and people think what they think, and we all move on." Like journals, postcards and books are not interactive forms, and are therefore apt metaphors for understanding Hannah's decision to keep her readers at arm's length. By disabling commenting capabilities on her blog, Hannah was able to avoid exposure to discouraging feedback from readers, which she feared could constrain her ability to emotionally cope with job loss. By eliminating this obstacle to coping, she found it easier to reconcile (i.e., *integrate*) the need to look back at her job loss and move on from it through blogging.

Conclusion

In conclusion, findings revealed that blogging as a coping practice was used to both enable sensemaking and emotional resilience in the wake of job loss, as well as facilitate reemployment through skill development and promotion. In other words, it was deployed and negotiated at the juncture of the concurrent, yet conflicting needs to both look back at job loss experiences and move on from them. The dialectic interplay between these two coping objectives was further complicated by the fact that, in practice, they were each variously constrained and enabled by the public and immersive nature of blogging. At the heart of this tension, however, were issues of emotional resilience, self-disclosure, and the entrenchment of joblessness. To manage these dynamics, bloggers deployed integrative strategies including humor, disclosure logics, and distancing tactics, which enabled them to mitigate the tension between looking back and moving forward, and negotiate individualized and acceptable ways of navigating it.

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION

Having explored in depth the dialectical tensions that problematized the use of blogging as a coping avenue in the wake of involuntary job loss, this study now turns to interpreting and positioning these findings in the context of relevant research in the communication discipline. The present chapter will first recap the purpose and rationale of this dissertation, as well as its theoretical framework and methodology. Then, it will summarize its main findings, and analyze their implications for theory and practice. Finally, it will conclude with a discussion of limitations and future research directions.

Whereas the topic of job loss has garnered much scholarly interest in the fields of management and psychology, it has yet to receive the attention it deserves from communication scholars. This study helps to bridge this gap by making two contributions. First, it articulates a constitutive perspective on job loss and coping that questions dominant portrayals of employment loss as a generic experience and critiques approaches to coping as the cognitive, rational, and predictable selection of reparative strategies (e.g., Latack et al., 1995; Leana & Feldman, 1988; Leana et al., 1998; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Using the constitutive role of communication as a guiding ontology (e.g., Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009) and drawing specifically on the theories of sensemaking (Weick, 1979, 1995), structuration (Giddens, 1984, 1991), and dialectics (Bakhtin, 1981; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), the proposed framework reconceptualizes job loss as a situated, emergent, and contested experience that takes shape over time, as affected individuals make sense of intersecting needs and contextual discourses, and negotiate courses of action at the juncture of agency and constraint. Thus, instead of painting displaced workers as victims and reducing their agency to reactive

coping behaviors, a constitutive approach casts people affected by job loss as agents whose quest to manage their circumstances is both constrained and enabled.

This dissertation also extends the scant empirical research on job loss in the communication discipline (e.g., Buzzanell & Turner, 2003; Pederson, 2013) by examining the use of blogging to cope with employment loss, a popular practice during the 2007-2009 financial crisis. Consistently with the constitutive perspective on job loss and coping laid out in Chapter 3, it explores the constructed and contested nature of the job loss experience by examining the dialectical tensions that arise in the context of blogging about employment loss, as well as the discursive strategies used by displaced workers to navigate them. Blogging here is also recast in constitutive terms, as a discursive process through which displaced workers negotiate plausible and acceptable narratives about the meaning of job loss and the range of appropriate action. To tease out the coping tensions that play out in the context of blog use and bloggers' responses to them, this study probed the blogging practices of four individuals (two men and two women) through in-depth interviews and detailed analysis of blog posts and reader comments over a period of six months. A grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006) was used to discern, unpack, and flesh out tensions and their corresponding responses in a systematic, inductive, and highly iterative fashion.

The findings of this study revealed that participants enacted their coping journeys at the juncture of the concurrent, yet intersecting needs for endurance and resolution. As primary or secondary providers in their households, and in light of the financial recession at the time, they were each committed to reversing their job loss as soon as possible (resolution focus) and saw reemployment-focused strategies such as looking for a job as

crucial. In the meantime, however, they still had to "live with" their job loss and its impact on their lives, which made the ability to weather the journey to reemployment another important coping concern (endurance focus). Results also indicated that participants' simultaneous concern for enduring job loss and reversing it propelled their use of blogging as a coping platform. This was partly reflected in their multifaceted blogging rationales, which, in most cases, cast blogging simultaneously as a tool for sensemaking and cathartic self-expression, and as an alternative path to reemployment through skill development and promotion. In practice, however, the use of blogging for both endurance-focused and resolution-focused coping proved problematic, as these two coping needs often intersected in conflicting ways. Indeed, findings showed that bloggers grappled with two coping dialectics, namely Productivity vs. Distraction and Looking Back vs. Moving Forward. These tensions were framed by the public nature of blogging and participants' heightened concern for self-presentation, which further worked to exacerbate them.

The first dialectic, Productivity vs. Distraction, concerned blogging as a routine and problematized participants' public commitment to an endeavor that could interfere with their job search efforts or undermine their employability if perceived as a sign of a lax commitment to prompt reemployment. However, participants were able to transcend this tension (Seo et al., 2004) through productivity displays and legitimization logics. First, they turned blogging into a public testament to – and record of – their productivity by using it to showcase their diligent job search efforts, as well as affirm their commitment to prioritizing reemployment-focused activities in their daily schedules. In addition, they sought to legitimize distraction (i.e., non-reemployment-focused activities)

as a "necessary evil" for sustaining productivity, a valid part of a balanced routine, or, in the case of "productive distractions," a beneficial and desirable addition to a productive schedule. Both productivity displays and legitimization logics allowed participants to commit to blogging while showcasing their determination to getting reemployed.

The second dialectic, Looking Back vs. Moving Forward, relates to blogging as the practice of looking back on one's job loss experiences and shows how it can both help displaced workers move on professionally and emotionally and hold them back. Indeed, whereas blogging enabled catharsis, social support, as well mindful and resilient sensemaking, it also proved stressful at times and, given its public nature, problematized unchecked self-disclosures and even threatened to entrench joblessness as part of participants' reality and public image. To navigate this tension, participants deployed integrative strategies (Seo et al., 2004) that allowed them to mitigate the constraining effects of blogging and find ways to look back while moving forward. First, humor allowed bloggers to maintain an emotionally healthier stance toward their circumstances, project resilience and composure while sharing their struggles online, and counter the entrenchment of joblessness and blogging as defining aspects of their public image. However, this strategy was not always effective because participants were sometimes unable to laugh at their troubles, and because public displays of levity often belied internal turmoil and frustration. Moreover, humor likely did little to mitigate the entrenchment of Matt's jobless status and blogger role in the public's perception of him. In addition to using humor, bloggers enacted integrative disclosure logics that allowed them to share their unemployment struggles online and discuss their feelings toward previous or prospective employers while underscoring their commitment to appropriate

self-disclosure and employability. These logics foregrounded culturally sanctioned principles such as resilience, service, honesty, personal choice, or social appropriateness as rationales and guides for self-disclosure and, as such, both enabled and disciplined self-expression. They also allowed bloggers to navigate the sub-dialectic between self-expression and self-presentation in appropriate ways that still fit their needs. Finally, participants used distancing tactics including stepping back from joblessness (Martha) or excluding the audience (Hannah) to eliminate constraining aspects of blogging such as the potential entrenchment of joblessness in one's self-concept and public image (Martha), or the possibility of negative, face-threatening feedback from readers (Hannah). These tactics improved participants' ability to move on while blogging about their experiences.

Theoretical Implications

This study makes valuable contributions to research on job loss and the process of coping with it. It also adds to the literature on blogging and to the field of organizational communication in general. These contributions are discussed below.

Implications for job loss and coping. This research contributes to scholarship on job loss and the process of coping with it by offering an alternative conceptual framework that breaks with the functionalist and rational assumptions of traditional models (e.g., Latack et al., 1995; Leana & Feldman, 1988) and instead emphasizes the emergent, contested, and discursively constructed nature of the job loss experience. This constitutive perspective, along with the empirical findings of this study, have important implications for the process of coping with job loss.

First, this study challenges traditional views of job loss as an inherently disempowering event. Although all participants found employment loss to be disruptive and stressful, these meanings were not derived from the universal or predictable properties of the experience itself, but dynamically enacted, perpetuated, and questioned in bloggers' narratives (e.g., blog posts, interviews, offline conversations). This sensemaking (Weick, 1979, 1995) agency was not absolute, however, and did not occur in a contextual vacuum. Whereas traditional models have often reduced contextual factors affecting job loss assessments to personal attributes, goals, or resources (e.g., Latack et al., 1995; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005), this research shows that participants negotiated the meaning and impact of their job loss through plausible (Weick 1979, 1995) yet transient spatio-temporally situated narratives, which weaved the constraining and enabling possibilities of salient contextual discourses (see Kuhn, 2006). These discourses included, among others, prevailing economic conditions (i.e., the Great Recession), cultural notions regarding the value of productivity and work, religious faith, the job loss experiences of blog followers, as well as any discourses that intersected with job loss such as pregnancy, in Hannah's case. These findings provide a discursive basis for participants' emotional ups and downs over the course of unemployment and help explain why bloggers approached their circumstances differently across entries. By emphasizing the contested and context-specific nature of sensemaking, this study echoes other job loss research in the field of communication. For instance, Buzzanell and Turner (2003) revealed that male participants drew on traditional discourses of masculinity to uphold their identities as "real" men despite the "emasculating" aspects of job loss (p. 48). Similarly, Ainsworth and Hardy (2009) showed that in the wake of job loss, older

workers found it difficult to engage in identity work that challenged age-related

stereotypes due to the constraining effects – both combined and separate – of physical

and psychotherapeutic discourses. Taken separately, these discourses respectively

problematized aging and located unemployment interventions at the level of the

individual. When combined, they both helped perpetuate the notion that job loss should

be accepted and grieved in normative ways.

A related implication of the present study concerns the nature of the coping

process. Given their functionalist bias and input-process-output approach to explaining

coping behavior (e.g., Latack et al., 1995; Leana & Feldman, 1988 – see also Gibbs et al.,

2008), extant job loss models assume that coping is an integrated endeavor, a

consolidated process in which all relevant factors and influences are simultaneously – and

cognitively – digested, and from whose transformative dynamics all outcomes (i.e.,

coping strategies and their results) spring linearly or cyclically. Conversely, this study

suggests that pluralism, disjuncture, and tension may be the defining features of coping

from a constitutive perspective. Indeed, as explained above, participants negotiated the

use of blogging as a coping platform at the intersection of their simultaneous concern for

enduring job loss and reversing it. The interplay of these two coping objectives propelled

participants' blog narratives about job loss, but also problematized them by highlighting

conflicting concerns and priorities, and pitting these against one another.

Finally, this study questions what constitutes valid or productive coping in the

wake of job loss. As discussed above, extant research has traditionally conceptualized

coping with employment loss as either problem-focused or symptom-oriented (e.g.,

Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Latack & Havlovic, 1992; Leana et al., 1998, McKee-Ryan et

al., 2005). These two types of coping behavior have been treated as analytically and functionally distinct, and preference has generally been given to problem-focused coping because it emphasizes reversing unemployment instead of merely managing its psychological impact (Leana et al., 1998). Conversely, the findings of this study suggest that this separation of resolution-focused and non-resolution focused strategies is contrived and does not reflect how coping processes actually unfold. Indeed, participants' multifaceted rationales for blogging (e.g., for both sensemaking and reemployment) illustrate how endurance-focused and resolution-oriented coping needs are combined and entangled in practice. Moreover, a look at participants' blog posts shows how different needs and objectives are inextricably woven together in coping narratives, and variously emphasized or de-emphasized depending on salient contextual influences (e.g., job search developments, unemployment statistics and numbers in the news, the length of unemployment, etc.). Furthermore, whereas bloggers viewed reemployment as their primary coping objective in the wake of job loss, they actively tried to reconcile the endurance-enhancing and resolution-enabling potential of blogging, as reflected by their choice of transcendence and integration strategies (Seo et al., 2004).

Thus, for participants in this study, coping did not involve the cognitive selection of problem-focused or emotion-focused *alternatives* (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Latack & Havlovic, 1992; Leana et al., 1998, McKee-Ryan et al., 2005), but the discursive management of endurance and resolution as dialectically related *imperatives*. By framing coping as the dialectical interplay of intersecting needs, this study questions the assumption that successful coping should unfold in normative ways, and places the onus on displaced workers to navigate their job loss experience in satisfactory ways. It

also argues that coping with job loss is not merely about engaging in reemployment-conducive behaviors or securing new employment. Instead, it is about forging resilience (Buzzanell, 2010) in a holistic sense (e.g., emotionally, professionally, socially, etc.) by continuously harnessing and taking on, in turn, the constraining and enabling realities brought on by job loss.

Implications for blog research. This research adds to the literature on blogs, social media, and computer-mediated communication in general, and extends scholarship on the role of blogging as a coping platform to the context of job loss. Findings show that blogging was problematized both as a routine and a practice for coping by the dialectic interplay of two intersecting coping needs, namely reversing job loss (resolution) and weathering it in the meantime (endurance).

First, participants grappled with the appropriateness of committing to blogging (as a routine) instead of dedicating themselves fully to their job search (Productivity vs. Distraction). This concern for productive time use echoes research by Garrett-Peters (2009), which showed that time restructuring strategies such as keeping busy and making efficient use of time spent on the job search helped displaced workers repair their self-concept and "derive a sense of efficacy" (p. 563) in the wake of job loss. In the present study, ironically, the act of blogging both reflected participants' prerogative to control their time and problematized it by raising self-presentation concerns. Indeed, bloggers were pulled between the desire to invest in a practice they believed could help them weather the impact of job loss and the need to showcase and protect their employability by proving their commitment to getting reemployed.

To manage this tension, participants deployed strategies that emphasized their desire for positive self-presentation, but creatively transcended the tension (Seo et al., 2004) between productivity and distraction as well. Specifically, they used the blogs themselves to showcase their productive time use (productivity displays), and legitimized blogging by framing non-reemployment-focused activities (i.e., distraction) as an inevitable, valid, or even desirable part of a productive schedule.

Participants also experienced tension as they sought to harness the coping-enhancing aspects of blogging while trying to make sure that looking back on their experiences did not ultimately hold them back (Looking Back vs. Moving Forward). One of the main issues they grappled with along the way was the extent to which they could publicly share their emotional struggles or discuss their feelings toward employers without jeopardizing their employability. In fact, a study by Vitak, Blasiola, Patil, and Litt (2015) also found that Facebook users on the job market worried about employers viewing their profiles.

To navigate this tension, bloggers enacted strategies that allowed them to integrate (Seo et al., 2004) their concerns for self-expression and self-presentation. For example, humor and sarcasm made it possible to disclose feelings of discouragement or frustration in a manner that projected resilience and was compelling to the audience. This aligns with research by Smith and Brunner (2016), in which a cancer patient used humor "to articulate thoughts and experiences that might have been difficult to say, but also difficult for the recipient to read" (p. 17). On a related note, Buzzanell and Turner (2003) – whose study of emotion work in displaced workers' discourses does not focus on online settings – found that some participants foregrounded positive emotions while relegating

negative feelings to the background. In addition to using humor, participants enacted integrative disclosure logics that legitimized emotional and employer-related self-disclosures through culturally valued rationales (e.g., honesty, service to others, social appropriateness, etc.), but inherently regulated them as well. Thus, despite carving a space for legitimate self-expression, both humor and disclosure logics involved self-censorship. A similar finding was outlined by Vitak et al. (2015), who noted that Facebook users on the job market actively monitored and censored what they shared on their profiles, and did so with potential employers in mind.

Consistently with extant research on online social settings (e.g. Bortree, 2005; Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006; Marwick & Boyd, 2011), self-presentation was a salient concern for the bloggers in this study. In fact, as illustrated above, the public nature of the blog platform and the potential visibility of participants' posts to employers problematized blogging further as a coping avenue, and greatly affected how participants navigated the tensions between productivity and distraction, and between looking back and moving forward. However, whereas previous research has framed blogging in terms of a dichotomous relationship between the public and the private (e.g., Gurak & Antonijevic, 2008; Serfaty, 2004), this study points to a "softer", or more nuanced, tension between the two poles. Indeed, the fact that all four bloggers were able to negotiate integrative logics that allowed for cathartic, yet appropriate disclosures about employers and emotional struggles suggests a certain ease in navigating public contexts. Given the mass appeal of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, one can argue that people have grown more comfortable with sharing

information about themselves online, and may have become more adept at navigating the Public/Private divide.

The results of this study also converge with extant research on managing self-disclosure online (e.g., Bronstein, 2013; Chen, 2010; Hollenbaugh & Everett, 2013; Jang & Stefanone, 2011; Litt, 2012; Qian & Scott, 2007; Vitak, 2012; Vitak, et al., 2015). Indeed, bloggers' disclosures were influenced by their perceived or "imagined" (Litt, 2012) audience (potential employers and former colleagues from a reemployment focus, but also friends and family), as well as by the extent of their visual and discursive anonymity (i.e., the extent to which they withheld pictures of themselves or personal information, respectively; see Qian & Scott, 2007). However, findings also highlighted contextual discourses– such as occupational and professional standards, or the norms of acceptable disclosure in the blogosphere – as another important influence on bloggers' disclosure management practices. Whereas research on online self-disclosure has often conceptualized self-disclosure behavior in relation to anonymity preferences or audience composition, for example (e.g., Chen, 2010; Hollenbaugh & Everett, 2013; Jang & Stefanone, 2011; Qian & Scott, 2007; Vitak, 2012), this research addresses the complex interplay of these concepts (see Vitak et al., 2015) by conceptualizing self-disclosure management as individualized discursive logics that are negotiated at the juncture of audience-related considerations, privacy concerns, and relevant contextual discourses.

Finally, by casting blogging as the site of competing coping demands, this study joins a growing body of research that applies dialectical approaches to the study of online discursive contexts (e.g., Bochantin, 2014; Gibbs et al., 2013; Kendall, 2007; Malvini Redden & Way, 2017; Pederson, 2014). Moreover, it challenges assumptions about the

mundane nature of blogging. Indeed, findings show that although conducive to coping benefits such as catharsis, social support, emotional clarity, and mindful sensemaking (see also Nardi et al., 2004; Yeshua-Katz & Martins, 2013), blogging can constrain coping efforts as well. For instance, it can problematize free self-expression, entrench joblessness in bloggers' lives over the long term, and publicly de-emphasize reemployment as a coping priority for them. Thus, while it may be commonplace for people to blog about their experiences, displaced workers are encouraged to approach this practice mindfully and not assume that it is mundane or unproblematic.

The tension management strategies identified in this study may offer useful guides for navigating potential blogging pitfalls. For instance, humor may help mitigate job-loss-related stress that is "reactivated" in the process of blogging, as well as temper emotional disclosures for readers' benefit. Moreover, the distraction-legitimization logics used by participants in this research may empower displaced workers to take control of their time – both publicly and privately – in coping-enhancing, but still productive ways. The concept of "productive distraction" is especially useful in this context, and encourages limiting idle pastimes. By crafting disclosure logics that reflect personal identifications (Scott et al., 1998) and relevant norms, bloggers on the job market can also navigate online self-disclosure concerns confidently and satisfyingly. Finally, awareness of (and engagement with) the Endurance – Resolution duality promotes a mindful approach to blogging practices, especially as pertains to one's audience (i.e., in terms of inclusion/exclusion strategies and affordances, for example), or the potential of job loss entrenchment over time. To address the latter, Martha eventually decided to stop

blogging altogether. However, productivity displays may also help counter potential entrenchment effects by publicly affirming participants' commitment to reemployment.

Implications for organizational communication research. This dissertation adds to the field of organizational communication by bridging the gap in communication-based inquiries on job loss and the process of coping with it, a topic that has yet to capture the interest of scholars in our field. It also sets the stage for more theorizing efforts in this area by articulating a constitutive perspective on job loss and coping that grounds these concepts in situated, emergent, and contested discursive practice. With its emphasis on the centrality of communication and discourse in constituting reality, this research adds to CCO-inspired research as well (see Ashcraft et al., 2009; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009).

This study also makes an empirical contribution by using its proposed constitutive framework to examine displaced workers' use of blogging as a coping platform. Given its constitutive and dialectical approach to job loss, it upends the illusion of predictability, rationality, and orderliness perpetuated by traditional coping models (e.g., Latack et al., 1995; Leana & Feldman, 1988; Leana et al., 1998; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005), and foregrounds instead the ambiguity, disruption and "disorganization" (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015) that displaced workers grapple with as they try to put their lives back on track. Thus, it heeds Putnam and Fairhurst's call to "focus on analyzing tensions, contradictions, and paradoxes as discursive features that capture the interplay between organization and disorganization" (p. 384).

Conceptually, the framing of coping as the emergent and dialectical interplay between endurance and resolution is both interesting and useful because it lends itself

better to the pursuit of discursive, dialectical, or even longitudinal coping dynamics than traditional models (e.g., Latack et al., 1995). Moreover, this conceptualization of coping foregrounds the processes of negotiation and struggle at the intersection of competing demands, which complements Buzzanell's (2010) process-based view of resilience as "dynamic, integrated, unfolding over time and through events, evolving into patterns, and dependent on contingencies" (p. 2). Although the view of coping articulated in this study has been elaborated in the context of job loss, it can be readily adapted to other coping contexts as well, both inside and outside the field of communication.

Limitations

Despite its contributions to theory and practice, this study has some limitations that are worth noting. Like many qualitative studies, it can be faulted for using a small sample and delivering theoretical insights that, while grounded, rich, and nuanced, may not be generalizable to the population of displaced workers who blog about their experiences. A larger sample may have indeed uncovered more coping dialectics or a wider range of tension management strategies. However, a focus on traditional notions of generalizability and representativeness is not key to this study, which instead emphasizes emergent and situated discursive agency; that is, the unique and creative ways in which different people construct meaning and navigate structural constraints. Still, in terms of applicability to other job loss contexts, it is important to reiterate that the focus on bloggers in this study may have excluded people who are less educated or technologically savvy, have no regular access to the internet, or cannot afford to spend time writing about their job loss. In other words, bloggers may be privileged in ways that make their coping experiences and decisions less relevant to others going through job loss.

Another limitation – albeit an unintended one – comes from the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the sample of bloggers recruited for this study. All four participants are white Americans affected by the 2007-2009 recession and residing in the United States. As a result, this study has been unable to explore dynamics related to racial and ethnic discourses. Moreover, this research could be criticized for having a distinctly Western bias and for generating grounded theory that may not readily translate to other cultural contexts. Chen (2010), for example, found that American and Taiwanese bloggers differed in the emphasis they placed on social relations, as well as in their self-disclosure and self-promotion practices.

Finally, this study does not explicitly address the role of discourses pertaining to age, gender, or socio-economic status in shaping the use of blogs to cope with job loss. Although the data pointed to Hannah's pregnancy and Jeff's age as being potentially salient themes, I did not have sufficient evidence to adequately develop these categories.

Future Directions

This study represents a first step toward bridging the gap in communication-based research on job loss and the process of coping with it. More theorizing efforts are needed to develop the constitutive perspective on job loss and coping articulated above. For instance, researchers should consider the role of materiality and how it interacts with discursive practice to shape sensemaking and coping processes in the wake of job loss (see Orlikowski, 2007; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015). Whereas the current study takes a human-centered approach (Orlikowski, 2007), future research about job loss should account for materialities in different coping contexts.

Empirically, more CCO-inspired research is needed to examine how displaced workers navigate job loss in practice. Studies taking a dialectical approach can elaborate the endurance-resolution dialectic identified in this dissertation and reveal more context-specific sub-dialectics. This research can also explore other tensions that might frame displaced workers' sensemaking and coping efforts, and consider how they interact with the tension between endurance-focused and resolution-oriented coping. In addition, longitudinal approaches can illuminate how coping tensions unfold over time and how the interplay between their poles may be managed differently as time goes by. Effort should also be made to explain how economic, ethnic, gendered, occupational, and racial discourses (among others) are woven into coping narratives. Although this study has not explicitly addressed gender-related dynamics, data showed, for example, that Hannah's job search was complicated by her pregnancy. Thus, future research should examine how job loss intersects with other discourses in constraining or enabling ways. Finally, in the context of blogging about job loss, future research can explore how displaced workers include their audiences or keep them at arm's length, or how the tension between endurance and resolution can problematize reemployment-focused blog narratives through the potentially conflicting needs for job and career.

Conclusion

Communication scholars have generally shown little interest in the topic of job loss despite its relevance to the contexts of social experience the discipline has traditionally attended to. The present study attempts to bridge this gap by illustrating how communication-based research can complicate and enrich extant views on job loss and the process of coping with it. By articulating a constitutive perspective on job loss and

coping and extending it empirically to the context of blogging, this research challenges the idea that job loss is generically disruptive, and that coping is linear and ultimately predictable. Instead, the picture that transpires from this study is one of emergence, disjuncture, and situated agency that is both constrained and enabled. Hopefully, the views and findings presented here can spark the interest of communication scholars and prompt further theoretical and empirical examinations of job loss and coping.

Against the grim narrative of chronic economic troubles, decreased job security, and potent corporate interests, a constitutive perspective on job loss provides hope by foregrounding agency in shaping experiences and casting constraints to such agency not as reified obstacles, but as challenges to be taken on in discursive practice, and as the seeds to resilience. Thus, it reminds us that bouncing back in the face of job loss is not merely about achieving certain outcomes, but about having the courage to question our own definitions of what is good, important, and possible.

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Appendix A. Interview Guide

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself. What did you do in your last position?
2. What did job loss mean to you? How have your feelings about your job loss changed over time?
3. Why did you start blogging? What was your purpose? How did you think blogging would help?
4. Did you tell others about your blog?
5. How did you decide what to write about? What were some of the things you shared?
6. How did blogging affect your ability to cope with job loss? How was it helpful or unhelpful to you (professionally and personally)? Were there tensions that you faced?
7. How did you approach blogging while looking for a job?
8. How did the public nature of blogging affect how you wrote your posts and what you shared in them? How would you compare yourself to your blogger persona?
9. How did you manage your privacy as a blogger?
10. Tell me about your audience. How would you describe it? What was your relationship with your readers like? Did you receive many comments? What kind of feedback/comments did you receive? Were you able to build new relationships through your blog?
11. Do you think about blogging again?

Appendix B. Complete Qualitative Codebook (Organized by Group)

◎ Blog content

Members:
○ Confiding/Sharing: Daily life updates ○ Confiding/Sharing: job loss announcement/stories/reactions ○ Confiding/Sharing: Political preferences ○ Confiding/Sharing: Relevant Events/ News/experiences ○ Confiding/Sharing: Unemployment/Job search tips ○ Evolution of Blog Content: Figure it out over time ○ Multiple motivations for blogging

◎ Blogging for endurance

Members:
○ Articulate/ Express/ Organize thoughts and feelings/ Externalize them ○ Blogging for endurance: self-focused, touching/reaching people secondary ○ Blogging Gave a voice ○ Blogging is cathartic/therapeutic ○ Chronicle experiences ○ Cope with fear/ worries ○ Creative outlet ○ Diary for thoughts ○ Freedom of expression ○ Help others ○ Help others: Give advice ○ Help others: Realistic expectations ○ Help others: Share admin experiences ○ Help others: Share experience with others in similar circumstances/ encourage them and set positive example ○ Help others: Share resources ○ Helping/Touching people secondary concern ○ Keep friends and family updated ○ Participant misses blogging ○ Sensemaking/figuring things out/recognizing one's thoughts and feelings to avoid depression ○ Share difficult times ○ Stress relief ○ Venting

◎ Blogging for resolution

Members:
○ Benefits of blogging in retrospect: Continue writing ○ Benefits of blogging in retrospect: Reminded blogger he enjoyed writing ○ Benefits of blogging in retrospect: Skill improvement ○ Bloggers as writers ○ Blogging as a way to network for a job ○ Blogging as instrumental, not an end per se ○ Blogging as natural extension of writing profession ○ Blogging for Reemployment: Alternative Reemployment Tool ○ Blogging for Reemployment: Blog as part of one's portfolio/ track record ○ Blogging for Reemployment: Putting oneself out there/ Gain Fame/ Boost one's profile ○ Blogging for Reemployment: Skill Improvement ○ Blogging for resolution: Blog as portfolio ○ Blogging to continue writing ○ Career-related sensemaking

◎ Constraining aspects of blogging

Members:
○ Blogging about job loss can be stressful ○ Entrenchment of job loss ○ negative feedback ○ Press coverage

◎ Discourses

Members:
○ Discourses: Age & Discrimination ○ Discourses: Career Path to Date/ Regrets/ Assessment in retrospect ○ Discourses: Catholic guilt ○ Discourses: Government programs/policies/laws ○ Discourses: Great Depression ○ Discourses: other bloggers ○ Discourses: readers' job loss stories ○ Discourses: Recession/ Recession News ○ Discourses: Religion/ Faith ○ Discourses: state of industry

⊚ Emotional self-disclosure

Members:
○ Censorship for endurance: to avoid feeling discouraged ○ Censorship to save face ○ Confiding/Sharing: State of mind/Feelings ○ Coping benefit of projecting resilience: fake it till you make it ○ Disclosure concern: Bitterness/ Be a whiner ○ Disclosure Logic: Avoid looking "too" happy ○ Disclosure Logic: Censor negative emotions ○ Disclosure Logic: Face up to problems ○ Disclosure Logic: Focus on thoughts/feelings, not details ○ Disclosure Logic: Help Others ○ Disclosure logic: keep it professional ○ Disclosure Logic: Look good/ Avoid looking bad ○ Disclosure Logic: Negative disclosures impediment to coping ○ Disclosure Logic: Not elicit sympathy ○ Disclosure Logic: Project resilience ○ Disclosure Logic: Struggles are normal ○ Disclosure Logic: What interests people ○ Freedom of expression ○ Initial Reaction: no anger/ knows what industry is like ○ Looking for hope and staying positive ○ Show of commitment/determination/forbearance/resilience/strength

⊚ Employer-related self-disclosure

Members:
○ Blame industry leaders ○ Criticism/ questioning of former employer/ company executives ○ Disclosure guide: Other bloggers ○ Disclosure Logic: Assert control over disclosures ○ Disclosure logic: Don't come off as being sour grapes ○ Disclosure Logic: Employability ○ Disclosure Logic: Own up to what you have to say/ Take responsibility ○ Disclosure Logic: Stating facts/ Not personal ○ Disclosure management: editing/ censoring blog posts before publishing them ○ Disclosure Tension: Concern for anonymity vs Wanting to get reemployed ○ Industry commentary ○ Pregnancy: Disclosure on blog vs. in real life ○ Self-disclosure: Name ○ Sharing blog with employers

⊚ Endurance vs Resolution

Members:
○ Tension: Endurance vs Resolution

⊚ Humor

Members:
○ Humor for coping ○ Humor/sarcasm examples ○ Self-deprecating humor

⊚ Meaning / challenges of Job Loss

Members:
○ A blow to ego/pride/confidence ○ Absolve oneself from blame ○ Being unemployed can be depressing ○ Benefits of unemployment taken away by the lack (and need to secure) money ○ Benefits of unemployment: Do what you like ○ Bright side: Layoff as relief from work annoyances ○ coping with layoff: faith ○ Decreased time structure ○ Despair ○ Difficuly of Job Search ○ Disrupted Livelihood/ Finances ○ Disrupted plans ○ Disrupted Routine/ loss of routine ○ Disrupted Social Relationships ○ Downward Spiral of depression ○ Exclusion from working group/ outsider ○ Facing/telling Others ○ Feeling betrayed ○ Feeling down ○ Feeling like a loser ○ Feeling lost ○ Feeling rejected ○ Guilt: Feeling undeserving of holiday/celebration after layoff ○ Guilt: Should have seen the layoff coming ○ Highlight other vulnerabilities ○ Initial Reaction: betrayal ○ Initial reaction: fear/panic/overwhelmed ○ Initial Reaction: Grief and pain ○ Initial Reaction: Stunned ○ Job Search Challenges: Age discrimination ○ Layoff as a devastating loss ○ Layoff experience: nuanced ○ Losing touch with outside world ○ Loss of beloved job ○ Loss of benefits ○ Meaning of Layoff: Discourses: Sensemaking in the context of other experiences ○ Meaning of Layoff: Evolution ○ Meaning of Layoff: Evolution: Feeling worse as time goes on ○ Meaning of Layoff: Evolution: Learning new skills ○ Meaning of Layoff: Evolution: silver linings/ blessings during grief ○ Meaning of Layoff: Evolution: ups and downs ○ Meaning of Layoff: Less stressful when able

to pay bills ○ Monotony ○ Overcoming unemployment = Sacrifice ○ Pain/Unhappiness ○ Put things in perspective/ Focus on the positive/ silver lining ○ Sensemaking about feelings after job loss ○ Sensemaking about job loss/unemployment ○ stages of grief ○ Unemployment constantly on one's mind ○ Unemployment feels like a job ○ Unemployment/ job loss like a disease ○ Work as necessity

◎ Miscellaneous

Members:

○ About Hannah ○ About Jeff ○ About Matt ○ Blog Content: Process of deciding what to blog about ○ Disclosure issue: age ○ Disclosure Management Strategy: Reframe Job Loss as Change

◎ Productivity vs. Distraction

Members:

○ Admit distractions ○ Apology for not posting ○ Blogging as part of balanced routine ○ Blogging for productivity/structure ○ busy-ness ○ Chronicle job search/offers ○ Commitment to job search ○ Concern for productivity despite job loss ○ Confiding/Sharing: Job Offers/ Interviews ○ Importance of keeping busy ○ Justify time spent blogging ○ Need to be productive despite job loss ○ Procrastination ○ Productive distraction ○ Unemployment as a job

◎ Relationship with audience

Members:

○ Audience Exclusion ○ Audience exclusion: Turn off comments ○ Audience: Gratitude for blog ○ Audience: Other bloggers ○ Audience: Seek advice ○ Audience: Support: Confirm blogger's thoughts/feelings/logic ○ Audience: Support: Give Advice/ Suggest way to frame situation ○ Audience: Support: Make blogger feel like part of a community ○ Audience: Support: Offer support/prayers/good wishes/resources ○ Audience: Support: Praise blogger's work/writing/blog/humor ○ Audience: Support: recognition by blogger ○ Audience: Support: Share similar/relevant experiences/stories ○ Audience: Support: Suggest business ideas ○ Audience: vent ○ Blog metaphor: postcards ○ Blogger-Audience Interaction ○ Cater blog content to audience ○ Concern for trolling ○ Connection: Read other blogs ○ Connection: With other bloggers ○ Disciplinary action/ Response to trolling/ flaming ○ Engagement with audience: Accountability to audience ○ Engagement with audience: Ask questions/ Start conversation ○ Gratitude to audience for support ○ Hannah: Separate blog for job loss ○ Industry commentary from audience ○ Keep friends and family updated ○ Keeping one's distance because of trolling risks ○ Matt as moderator ○ Matt as moderator: Participation at blogger's discretion/ the exception rather than the norm ○ Nervous about socializing with readers face to face ○ Not worried about having readers ○ Reader opinions not important ○ Socializing with readers face to face ○ Why not diary? Need to have audience/ need to share

◎ Self-presentation in blogging

Members:

○ Affirm personal values ○ Affirm professional experience/ skillset/ values/ expertise/ relevance/work ethic ○ Avoid discussing benefits of being unemployed ○ Avoid overindulging in doom and gloom for the sake of it ○ Aware of public nature of blog ○ Become more employable ○ Casual language/curses ○ Confiding/Sharing: Past accomplishments ○ Extend personal and professional values even in unemployment ○ Not seeking sympathy ○ Show of hope ○ Show of work ethic

Table 1. Participants

Blog #	Blogger Pseudonym	Gender	Family Status	Industry	Location	Number of Posts	Total Number of Comments
1	Hannah	F	Married, pregnant with first child	Musem/History/ Anthropology	Arizona	24	0
2	Jeff	M	Married with 5 children, ages 9-25	Journalism	Illinois	35	44
3	Martha	F	Single, no children	Writing/ Research	Michigan	107	32
4	Matt	M	Married, wife pregnant with first child	Marketing/ Digital Media	New York	131	495

Table 2. Tensions and Strategic Responses: Sample Codes and Quotes

Endurance - Resolution
At the beginning, I do remember thinking that, as most people do, well, this will be over soon. And then as things went on, six months, a year, there were times when I would take shorter-term jobs, but still I was always looking for a permanent, full-time job doing the things that I wanted to do, writing, library science skills. Those are what I was educated to do, and what I have experience in doing, and finding it very elusive, and it was frustrating as time went on, and also affected my self-confidence at a time when I needed more self-confidence. (Martha, Interview)

Productivity - Distraction	Sample Strategic Responses
	Productivity Displays
	1- Interviewer: (…) How would you blog about unemployment and stay professional? Martha: That's a good question too. I think part of the way I did it was to keep saying that I was looking for jobs, and that I'd gone to interviews and did this or that, and keep searching and keep trying. (Martha, Interview) 2- Now well on my way to addressing my grief, I was ready to move on to the next step, outlining a plan for finding new work and then keeping on task to do that, treating
	Legitimization Logics
	Productive distraction: The one thing that I would do during the day that was personal was like I would try and go to the gym in the morning because on a Tuesday morning, there's nobody there. It's great, and that was another thing that made me feel like I was getting stuff done and being productive was going to the gym and staying in reasonably good shape . . . (Matt, Interview)

Looking Back - Moving Forward	Sample Strategic Responses
	Humor
	1- <u>For better endurance:</u> Still, a sense of humor has saved me on more than one occasion from tripping into those dark chasms that frequently have threatened to engulf me during my adult years. (Jeff, Blog) 2- <u>As a public display of resilience</u>: So I find myself with a little bit of free time, man of leisure that I am. The Hamptons are over for the season. The auction houses are all dark this week. And swimming in my big pool of money like Scrooge McDuck is getting a little old. (Who would've thought that was even possible?) Actually, I was just laid off… again. It's the 3rd time in a little over 3 years, and the 4th time since 2000. That's quite an accomplishment really, not that I set out to do it. But since this is my lot – to cycle between having a job and looking for a job every year forever – I'm going to embrace it. (Matt, Blog)
	Disclosure Logics (Emotional Struggles)
	<u>Share struggles to help others:</u> **Martha:** Some people out there think that it's just easy to get another job or, and I think I was trying to show that yeah, I'm trying, but at that time, it wasn't as easy as: You're unemployed, go out and get something; and that even if you're doing all the right things, that sometimes it's not as easy as it looks, or that you still have to do all those things to go out and job hunt and go to job fairs and go to interviews. **Interviewer:** Is that meant to help? **Martha:** I think so. I think it may well have helped somebody, although I'm not totally sure, besides myself, and I wanted, I think, somebody to see, whether it was me or my friends, or just some random stranger out there, that even if, if I was doing this, this, and this . . . it was still very difficult to get out of that situation. (Martha, Interview)

Looking Back - Moving Forward (Cont'd)	Disclosure Logics (Employer Related)
	Withhold employer's name and censor narrative: I mean I definitely remember removing supervisors' names and coworkers' names. I talked a lot about really the fundamental problems within these specific museums in which I've worked, and I stripped a lot of that out, and focused more, when I did talk about that sort of thing or referenced it, talked more about the industry in general, because a lot of the problems that I saw specific to the employers that I worked in are actually endemic to the museum profession, period. So, I sort of tried to take that step back as well. (Hannah, Interview)
	Distancing Tactics
	Audience exclusion: I actually did not have comments turned on on my blog, mostly because I'm, I'm a coward (laughs) and I didn't want to hear all the, just the ill behavior that people have on the Internet. (Hannah, Interview)

Table 3. Emergent Theoretical Framework

Tension	Endurance - Resolution	
	Productivity - Distraction	**Looking Back - Moving Forward**
Locus	Blogging as a routine (i.e., time investment)	Blogging as a practice (i.e., discursive engagement with job loss experiences)
Challenge	The need to get reemployed makes (publicly) committing to a blog problematic	Looking back on job loss experiences can help bloggers move forward, but also hold them back
Strategic Responses	*Productivity Displays:* 1- Job search updates (i.e. chronicle reemployment efforts) 2- Prioritization Assurances (e.g., append accounts of reemploment-focused efforts to mentions of non-reemployment-focused activities, including blogging; justifications of absence)	*Humor:* 1- Humor for better endurance 2- Humor as a public display of resilience 3- Humor for countering the entrenchment of joblessness
	Legitimization Logics: 1- Distraction as necessary for sustained productivity 2- Distraction as part of a balanced routine 3- Productive distraction as beneficial and desirable	*Disclosure Logics:* 1- Disclosures about Emotional Struggles (e.g., struggles as normal, disclosure needed to help others, disclosure as informed personal choice) 2- Disclosures about Employers: Considered disclosure (eg., withhold employer names or allow disclosures if factual)
		Distancing Tactics: 1- Distance from Joblessness (Martha) 2- Distance from audience (Hannah's exclusion tactics)
Response Type	Transcendence	Integration

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[i] Bloggers posted entries with varying frequency: typically, no less than once a week, but sometimes daily, or even more than once per day.

[ii] Matt listed 20 instances of press/media coverage on his blog.