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Constructing Optimism as Anticipatory Resilience: Enacting Resilience Processes Over Time Following Pandemic-Related Job Loss Predicts Optimism of Lessons Learned

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The communication theory of resilience (CTR) conceptualizes resilience as both reactive (i.e., processes enacted in response to current disruption) and anticipatory (i.e., mindsets and resources cultivated proactively over time). To test CTR's assumption that enacting resilience processes helps cultivate anticipatory resilience, U.S. adults who involuntarily lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic were surveyed about their engagement in resilience processes in spring 2021 (wave 1), as well as two and four months later (waves 2 and 3). In the third wave, participants reported lessons they learned from experiencing

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job loss during a pandemic, and responses were rated for the degree to which their lessons expressed optimism. Self-reported enactment of CTR processes 2 and 4 months earlier predicted optimism in lessons learned at the final survey after controlling for social and material well-being. Findings extend CTR and have implications for supporting individuals and families experiencing disruption.

Keywords: communication theory of resilience, anticipatory resilience, optimism, lessons learned, job loss

> I have learned how to be optimistic and hope for a better future. I have learned how to be more sociable by engaging in friendly chats and making new friends on social media. My perspective about my career has changed . . . I now see the need to always improve myself, especially improving my skills and qualifications in order to stand a better chance for employment in my career. (48-year-old male with an associate degree, laid off from an information technology firm)

Involuntary job loss occurs when workers are fired or laid off during downsizing or business closures or feel forced to leave because of health or childcare concerns. During the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of Americans experienced involuntary job loss (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2022). Because job loss often disrupts people's finances, routines, and identities (Brand, 2015; Holmstrom, Russell, & Clare, 2015), scholars have explored how individuals communicatively enact resilience after job loss (e.g., Afifi et al., 2018; Wieland, 2020).

Buzzanell (2019) defines *resilience* as a "constitutive process through which people reintegrate and actively construct their new normal through language, interaction, networks, and attention to the identities and identifications, within their material environments and societal discourses" (p. 68). The communication theory of resilience (CTR) conceptualizes resilience as both reactive and cultivated over time. First, people create resilience during disruptions like job loss by enacting five interrelated processes (e.g., crafting normalcy, affirming identity anchors; Buzzanell, 2010). Second, people cultivate *anticipatory resilience*—mindsets and resources that they can rely on when future disruptions occur (Betts, Hintz, & Buzzanell, 2022; Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012). The IT worker quoted above describes ways he enacted resilience processes following job loss (e.g., maintaining and using communication networks by "engaging in friendly chats and making new friends on social media") and lessons learned in terms of new ways of thinking ("I now see the need to always improve myself") and resources ("improving my skills and qualifications") that leave him feeling optimistic about finding and sustaining future employment.

CTR proposes that anticipatory resilience and enactment of resilience processes are reciprocally related. On the one hand, anticipatory resilience can predict the enactment of resilience processes; for example, recalling hopeful memorable messages about how family got through hard times can offer a sense of efficacy when people encounter new disruptions, such as job loss (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012). On the other hand, enacting resilience processes in response to current disruptions (e.g., job loss) helps people learn lessons (Fanari, Cooper, Dajches, Beck, & Pitts, 2023; Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012).

Most CTR studies have explored how people enact resilience processes in response to disruptive events, including factors that predict enactment of processes and associated outcomes (for recent work, see Dorrance-Hall & Gettings, 2023; Kuang, Tian, Wilson, & Buzzanell, 2023a; Kuang et al., 2023b; Venetis, Chernichky-Karcher, & Lillie, 2020). Limited research, to date, on anticipatory resilience has employed qualitative methods (e.g., Fanari et al., 2023; Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012) or cross-sectional survey designs (Boumis, Kuang, Wilson, Hintz, & Buzzanell, 2023; Kuang et al., 2023a). To test CTR's assumption that enacting resilience processes helps cultivate anticipatory resilience, we recruited a sample of adults from the United States who involuntarily lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants completed measures of resilience processes and associated factors (e.g., mental health) at wave 1 (spring 2021) and again two and four months later at waves 2 and 3.[1] At wave 3, participants reported lessons learned from experiencing job loss during a pandemic. Because anticipatory resilience arises from interactions that create hope about being able to navigate future disruptions, we coded participants' open-ended responses for the degree to which their lessons learned expressed *optimism* (i.e., positive/favorable expectations about the future; Carver, Scheier, & Segerstrom, 2010). This design allows us to assess not only whether resilience processes and optimism of lessons learned (i.e., one form of anticipatory resilience) are associated cross-sectionally (i.e., at wave 3), but whether enacting processes at earlier survey waves predicts optimism at wave 3 after controlling for material and social factors.

Resilience Processes in the Context of Involuntary Job Loss

CTR argues that people enact resilience in response to *trigger events* or events that create disruption and spur strong emotions (Buzzanell, 2010, 2019). Involuntary job loss is a trigger event that typically extends over time and often creates multiple cascading disruptions. Research has linked involuntary job loss with economic uncertainty, reduced psychological and physical well-being, and family tension (Brand, 2015).

Participants in this study lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic, an event that caused unprecedented economic, public health, and political disruptions in the United States. During our first survey wave, unemployment in the United States stood at 6.1% (BLS, 2022), and between 5,000 and 6,000 individuals per week were dying from COVID-19 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2024). Throughout the three survey waves, COVID-19 deaths and unemployment fell as vaccines were rolled out, although COVID-19 infections and deaths spiked again during survey wave 3 because of the delta variant (CDC, 2024). In addition, views of the pandemic (e.g., mask mandates) were strongly polarized by political ideology (Connaughton, 2021).

According to CTR, people enact resilience following disruptions like job loss, via five processes (Buzzanell, 2010, 2019). *Crafting normalcy* involves talking and acting in ways that signal things are "getting back to normal" or a "new normal" is being created. For job loss, this process can involve maintaining important family rituals (e.g., mealtimes) and enacting new routines connected to a job search. People *affirm identity anchors* by performing (and others supporting the performance of) roles that may be

[1] This study is based on a subset of the data reported in Kuang and colleagues (2023b). No data on optimism of lessons learned from COVID-related job loss were reported in the earlier study.

threatened (e.g., breadwinner) but also offer meaning and guidance following a job loss. By reaching out to strong and weak ties for advice, assistance, and support, people *maintain and use networks*. *Constructing alternative logics* involves moving beyond traditional ways of thinking and responding, such as reframing job loss as an "opportunity" or finding humor under frustrating circumstances. Finally, *foregrounding productive action while backgrounding negative emotions* involves legitimating negative feelings associated with the job loss but choosing to take actions (e.g., presenting a positive image online) that help accomplish goals. These processes are interrelated; for example, when reaching out to their networks, people may have conversations that help them construct alternative logics (e.g., reframe events) and foreground productive action. Consistent with this thinking, the five processes are correlated to the extent that a single, higher-order latent construct of "resilience" underlies them (e.g., Kuang et al., 2023b; Wilson, Kuang, Hintz, & Buzzanell, 2021).

CTR assumes that when people can enact resilience processes during disruptions such as involuntary job loss, they should experience greater personal and relational well-being in the immediate future. Yet when job seekers encounter stigma or lack the needed social or material support (e.g., Gist-Mackey & Dougherty, 2021; Holmstrom et al., 2015; Lillie & Sánchez Sánchez, 2022), they may struggle to enact resilience processes. Kuang and colleagues (2023b) recently showed that enactment of resilience following job loss and associated factors (e.g., mental health, job search self-efficacy) were reciprocally related at the within-person level across three survey waves. In a sample of adults who had recently lost their jobs, when participants reported greater enactment of resilience processes at wave 1 than was typical for them in general, for example, they also reported better mental health than was typical at wave 2, which predicted greater enactment of resilience at wave 3. Yet when individuals experienced worse mental health than was typical at wave 1, they reported lower enactment of resilience processes at wave 2, which predicted lower mental health at wave 3. One question left unanswered by these findings is whether the degree to which individuals can enact resilience processes at various points after experiencing job loss is associated with the lessons they take into the future (i.e., anticipatory resilience).

Anticipatory Resilience as Optimism of Lessons Learned

Buzzanell (2019) argues that anticipatory resilience "can be cultivated through stories, phrases, *interactions with others during times of hardship*, and memories that capture our imaginations and carry momentum" (pp. 68–69, emphasis added). This definition highlights three aspects of anticipatory resilience. First, anticipatory resilience involves developing mindsets (ways of thinking about the future) and resources (social and/or material) that people can draw on when future disruptions occur. When individuals are asked to account for disruptive events, they simultaneously "make sense of the present and prospectively narrate the logic of the future" (Betts et al., 2022, p. 212). By describing lessons learned, the IT worker quoted at the beginning makes sense of his recent past while embracing an "always needing to improve" mindset and highlighting newly developed social ties and technical skills that may be helpful when future economic downturns occur. Second, anticipatory resilience may be developed in the past and/or present, such as by hearing stories on how (grand)parents overcome past disruptions (Lucas & Buzznell, 2012), struggling with others to overcome previous disruptions (Fanari et al., 2023), as well as learning lessons while reintegrating from current disruptions (Betts et al, 2022). Third, anticipatory resilience is created when people construct

a sense of optimism (Wieland, 2020) and hope (Kuang et al., 2023a) about their abilities to navigate future disruptions. Qualitative and cross-sectional quantitative studies illustrate these three elements.

Qualitative studies illustrate the varied forms that anticipatory resilience can take. For example, participants from blue-collar families who grew up in communities experiencing deindustrialization described how memorable messages shared during "teachable moments" or inferred from "watching their parents deal effectively . . . with hardship" enabled them to develop a resilient outlook for life (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012, p. 203). Fanari et al. (2023) explored how military spouses drew on lessons they had learned from having a partner deployed overseas to navigate disruptions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Given similarities between military deployments and the pandemic (e.g., uncertainty, government restrictions), military spouses described how their efforts to talk normalcy into being during previous deployments were helpful during the pandemic. These spouses "were able to transfer and transform their own resilience, offering promising implications for families facing future adversities" (Fanari et al., 2023, p. 14).

Cross-sectional survey research has shown how hopeful memorable messages about getting through previous hard times (i.e., another form of anticipatory resilience) are associated with the enactment of resilience processes and well-being. Kuang et al. (2023a) found that the extent to which Chinese adults recalled memorable messages about getting through hard times (e.g., cultural proverbs) that created a sense of hope was positively associated with enacting resilience processes during the COVID-19 pandemic, which, in turn, predicted greater well-being. In a sample of U.S. adults, Boumis et al. (2023) found that recalling memorable messages about getting through hard times that engendered feelings of positivity and efficacy mediated associations between family communication patterns and resilience processes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although promising, these cross-sectional studies cannot speak to how enacting resilience process and anticipatory resilience are associated over time.

Given qualitative evidence suggesting that people who can enact resilience processes learn lessons that bolster hope about the future, we explore whether greater enactment of resilience processes following involuntary job loss during the COVID-19 pandemic predicts people's optimism as they describe lessons they can take forward. Optimism refers to "the extent to which people hold generalized favorable expectations for their future" (Carver et al., 2010, p. 879). Communication scholars conceptualize optimism as being cultivated via interaction. In an ethnographic study of the 22 months between an announced and actual worksite closure, Wieland (2020) found that soon-to-be terminated employees constructed optimism by practicing positive thinking grounded in reality testing (e.g., encouraging each other to test the job market early to gain confidence they would find a new job when they were ready to leave), talking about the closure as an opportunity (e.g., a chance to try new things, even while experiencing sadness and fear), and emphasizing increased self-efficacy (e.g., confidence in their job search abilities). Employees also affirmed the value of their past and present work, framed work as only one part of life, and cared for one another via exit rituals. Participants "made sense of their situations in ways that acknowledged their status as replaceable while simultaneously constructing self-efficacy and hope for their futures" (Wieland, 2020, p. 486).

Although we conceptualize optimism as socially constructed, literature in psychology views optimism as a trait that typically is associated with favorable outcomes. Grounded in expectancy-value theories, Carver et al. (2010) argue that optimism and pessimism "are broad, generalizable versions of

confidence and doubt . . . Thus, optimists should be confident and persist in the face of diverse life challenges" (p. 880). Optimism is not the same as a Pollyanna mindset (i.e., unwavering optimism that ignores systemic barriers or potential negative outcomes). Carver and colleagues (2010) review evidence that when optimists encounter challenges, they experience mixed emotions (e.g., fear/anxiety but also eagerness), whereas pessimists experience primarily negative emotions (e.g., despair). Nes and Segerstom's (2006) meta-analysis showed that dispositional optimism was moderately associated with problem-focused (e.g., seeking advice) and emotion-focus (e.g., reframing) coping.

Based on this thinking, we expect that participants who report greater enactment of resilience processes (i.e., who report stronger agreement that statements tapping CTR processes describe how they have responded following their recent job loss) will report learning lessons that create a sense of optimism. When participants can enact resilience processes during a major disruption, they should gain confidence in their abilities to navigate future disruptions (e.g., Fanari et al., 2023). Using three-wave survey data, we test this prediction cross-sectionally and also longitudinally. Because people always enact resilience "within their material environments and societal discourses" (Buzzanell, 2019, p. 68), we control for multiple measures of material (e.g., household income, job status) and psychosocial (e.g., stress, job search self-efficacy) well-being when testing hypotheses. We do so to reduce the possibility of spurious associations (e.g., participants with less income before a job loss might face greater challenges enacting resilience at survey wave 1 and be understandably pessimistic about the future at wave 3). We predict:

H1: *At survey wave 3, participants who report greater enactment of resilience processes also will construct more optimistic responses when describing lessons learned from job loss (cross-sectional).*

H2: *Participants who report greater enactment of resilience processes at survey waves 1 and 2 will construct more optimism in their lessons learned at survey wave 3 (longitudinal).*

Methods

Participants and Procedures

Participants were U.S. adults recruited from Amazon's MTurk who had involuntarily lost their jobs during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (see Kuang et al., 2023b). Inclusion criteria for the Qualtrics survey included participants who (a) were 18 years or older, (b) lived in the United States, (c) were fluent in English, (d) had experienced involuntary job loss within the last eight months and were not employed at the first survey wave,[2] (e) had experienced a significant reduction in personal income because of the job loss, and (f) had completed 500 Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs) on MTurk and had an HIT approval rate of 98% and above. Of the 892 participants who completed the first survey wave, 595 also completed survey waves 2 and/or 3 and hence were retained in Kuang and colleagues' (2023b) final sample.

[2] At wave 1, participants were earning some income via MTurk but did not characterize this as being employed. By waves 2 and 3, some participants had found full- or part-time employment or started their own businesses, whereas others were still unemployed (see Table 2).

Following IRB approval, participants completed survey wave 1 between late February and early April 2021 and then survey waves 2 and/or 3 two and four months later.

The sample for this study includes *N* = 470 participants who completed survey wave 3 and hence responded to an open-ended question asking about lessons learned from experiencing involuntary job loss during a pandemic. Of these, coders (three of the authors) determined that responses from seven participants were not comprehensible or relevant to the question of lessons learned; hence, our final sample is *N* = 463.[3] At survey wave 1 participants were, on average, 37.67 years old (SD = 10.81), with 49% identifying as female, 49% as male, and 2% as another gender. Participants reported their highest level of education being high school/GED (11%), some college/associate degree (35%), a BA/BS degree (42%), or a graduate degree (12%). Most identified as White (76%) followed by Black/African American (11%), Asian (6%), Other (5%), or American Indian/Native American (1%), with 5% preferring not to answer. In a separate question, 10% reported Hispanic/Latinx ethnicity. Most (69%) reported that their 2020 annual household income was less than $75,000. More details are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample Demographic Characteristics (N = 463 participants).

Demographic Characteristics	*M* (SD) or *n* (%)
Age	37.67 (10.81)
Gender	
Male	225 (48.6%)
Female	230 (49.7%)
Transgender/Nonbinary	7 (1.5%)
Missing	1 (0.2%)
Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual	401 (86.6%)
Gay/Lesbian	21 (4.5%)
Bisexual	31 (6.7%)
Pan/Asexual	8 (1.7%)
Missing	2 (0.4%)
Relationship Status	
Single	172 (37.1%)
Married/Cohabiting	249 (53.8%)
Separated	7 (1.5%)
Widowed	4 (0.9%)
Divorced	30 (6.5%)
Missing	1 (0.2%)

[3] Although our sample size is N = 463 at survey waves 1 and 3, our sample size is N = 346 at wave 2 because Kuang and colleagues (2023b) retained participants who completed waves 1 plus waves 2 and/or 3. Participants who completed only waves 1 and 3 are missing when we analyze whether resilience at wave 2 predicts optimism of lessons learned at wave 3.

Education	
High School/GED or less	52 (11.2%)
Some college/Associates	162 (35.0%)
BA/BS/some grad courses	193 (41.7%)
Graduate degree	56 (12.1%)
2020 Household Income	
< $25,000	57 (12.3%)
25,001–49,999	162 (35.0%)
50,000–74,000	98 (21.2%)
75,000–99,999	77 (16.6%
100,000–149,999	38 (8.2%)
> 150,000	19 (4.1%)
Prefer not to answer/Missing	12 (2.6%)
Race	
Black/African American	53 (11.4%)
Asian	28 (6.0%)
Native American	3 (0.6%)
White	351 (75.8%)
Other	5 (1.1%)
Prefer not to answer/Missing	23 (5.0%)
Ethnicity	
Hispanic/Latinx	45 (9.7%)
Not Hispanic	412 (89.0%)
Prefer not to answer	6 (1.3)

Most demographics were reported only at wave 1, but resilience processes, as well as social (e.g., stress) and material (e.g., anticipated 2021 household income) controls, were reported at each survey wave (see Table 2). At wave 1, participants described themselves as unemployed and searching for a job (see footnote 2). Regardless of employment status, most were still searching for a (better) job at waves 2 and 3 (Table 2). Participants were paid $3.50, $4.00, and $4.50, respectively, for completing survey waves 1, 2, and 3. Data quality was assessed by reviewing IP addresses, reading open-ended responses, and examining response speed, attention-check questions, and "straight-lined" responses to scale items (see Kuang et al., 2023b).

Measures

Resilience Processes

To assess the enactment of resilience, participants completed the Communication Resilience Processes Scale (CRPS; Wilson et al., 2021) at all three survey waves. The CRPS contains seven subscales that tap the five CTR processes: (a) crafting normalcy—maintaining routines (e.g., "I made an effort to keep up with my daily routines"), (b) crafting normalcy—creating new routines (e.g., "I adjusted my daily habits

to the new circumstances"), (c) affirming identity anchors (e.g., "I held onto the most important parts of myself despite everything that was going on"), (d) maintaining and using communication networks (e.g., "I relied on my connections with others during the situation"), (e) alternative logics—reframing (e.g., "I tried to see the difficult situation in a new light"), (f) alternative logics—humor (e.g., "I relied on humor to get through the challenging times"), and (g) foregrounding productive action (e.g., "Despite how I was feeling, I chose to focus on things that were productive"). Participants rated the extent to which each item described how they reacted on a 6-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 6 = Strongly Agree). At wave 1, participants responded based on what they had been saying/doing since losing their jobs; at waves 2 and/or 3, they responded on their enactment over the last two months while they were looking for a job, starting a new job, and/or starting a business during a pandemic. Items for each subscale were averaged to retain the 1–6 scale; a total score was created by averaging means for the seven subscales. All subscales were reliable at each wave, with McDonald's omega (ω) being 0.79 or higher across all measurements (see Table 2). Reliability for the overall CRPS scale (i.e., all 32 items) ranged from ω = 0.94 to 0.95 across survey waves.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Time-Varying Variables and Demographics Across Survey Waves.

Variable (Possible Range)	*M* (SD), Omega Wave 1 (*N* = 463)	*M* (SD), Omega Wave 2 (*N* = 346)	*M* (SD), Omega Wave 3 (*N* = 463)
Resilience Processes (1-6)			
Maintain Routines	4.60 (0.98), 0.84	4.77 (0.87), 0.80	4.75 (0.91), 0.83
New Routine	4.64 (0.95), 0.81	4.64 (0.91), 0.81	4.64 (0.87), 0.79
Identity Anchors	4.64 (0.96), 0.87	4.77 (0.84), 0.85	4.75 (0.88), 0.88
Networks	4.35 (1.24), 0.91	4.27 (1.22), 0.92	4.27 (1.17), 0.91
Reframing	3.96 (1.21), 0.89	4.13 (1.15), 0.90	4.11 (1.17), 0.90
Humor	4.26 (1.05), 0.83	4.35 (1.01), 0.85	4.35 (1.01), 0.82
Productive Action	4.74 (0.95), 0.87	4.84 (0.88), 0.86	4.79 (0.89), 0.86
Total	4.45 (0.81), 0.95	4.53 (0.72), 0.94	4.52 (0.74), 0.94
Other Study Variables			
Perceived Stress (0–4)	2.89 (0.93), 0.90	2.65 (0.96), 0.91	2.56 (0.93), 0.91
Mental Health (0–100)	58.00 (22.73), 0.86	62.65 (23.24), 0.89	64.10 (22.50), 0.87
JS Self-Efficacy (1–7)	5.45 (1.11), 0.90	5.42 (1.20), 0.91	5.51 (1.10), 0.91
Life Satisfaction (5–35)	18.89 (8.13), 0.94	20.66 (8.36), 0.95	20.60 (8.38), 0.94
Time-Varying Demographics			
Anticipated 2021 Household Income	*N (%)*	*N (%)*	*N (%)*
< $25,000	101 (21.8%)	55 (15.9%)	71 (15.3%)
25,00–49,999	169 (36.8%)	121 (35.0%)	155 (33.5%)
50,000–74,999	88 (19.0%)	78 (22.6%)	108 (23.3%)
75,000–99,999	51 (11.0%)	46 (13.3%)	58 (12.5%)
100,000–149,999	23 (5.0%)	25 (7.2%)	42 (9.1%)
> 150,000	13 (2.8%)	12 (3.4%)	16 (3.5%)
Prefer not answer/Missing	18 (3.9%)	9 (2.6%)	13 (2.8%)

Current Employment		
Unemployed	153 (44.2%)	195 (42.1%)
Full-time job	90 (26.0%)	73 (15.8%)
Part-time job	54 (15.6%)	62 (13.4%)
Self-employed	49 (14.2%)	133 (28.7%)
Searching for New Job		
No	66 (19.0%)	142 (30.7%)
Yes	280 (81.0%)	321 (69.3%)

Note. JS Self-Efficacy = Job Search Self-Efficacy. At wave 1, all participants were unemployed and searching for a new job.

Optimism of Lessons Learned

At the final survey wave, participants responded to an open-ended question about lessons they learned from experiencing involuntary job loss during a pandemic, in terms of balancing their careers and lives or anything else. Participants read the following prompt:

> This is the last survey we are offering so we are interested to hear what you have taken away from the past six months. Please reflect on: (a) How has your perspective about your career, working, or work/life balance changed due to the pandemic, if at all? and (b) What have you learned from the past six months?

Participants' descriptions of their lessons learned, on average, were 60 words in length (*Md* = 50 words, SD = 41 words, range = 10 to 290 words).

Three coders, the first, second, and sixth authors, rated the degree of optimism participants expressed in their lessons learned on a 5-point scale. The coding scheme was created in two steps: (a) identifying optimistic and pessimistic themes and (b) establishing rules for rating the degree of optimism (vs. pessimism) in each answer. Drawing on the literature on communicatively constructing optimism (Wieland, 2020), state optimism (Carver et al., 2010), resilience processes (Buzzanell, 2019), and qualities associated with resilience (e.g., persistence, hardiness; Connor & Davidson, 2003), the coders initially read through participants' responses to identify optimistic and pessimistic themes. For each theme, coders created a name, definition, and interview exemplars, and then refined themes during additional coding rounds. Through this iterative process, eight optimistic and six pessimistic themes emerged (see Table 3).[4]

[4] The complete coding manual, along with the SPSS data file, can be found at the following OSF link: https://osf.io/4zwym/?view_only=e2dd143741fd42c98f1812f42a889745)

Table 3. Optimistic and Pessimistic Themes From Descriptions of Lessons Learned.

	Theme	Example
Optimistic Themes		
1.	Appreciating time with/ support from family.	"I have learned that no matter what, I have the most important thing in life—the love of my family."
2.	Appreciating virtual work.	"I really value working from home. I realized all the time I was wasting when commuting to and from work."
3.	Appreciating what you have.	"I have learned to be content having food and clothing and . . . not compare my failings to other people's success."
4.	Expecting things to get better over time.	"Resilience above all else will in time fix issues and life will return to normal."
5.	Feeling increased self-efficacy.	"I have learned that I can work at home effectively."
6.	Developing/valuing resilient qualities.	"It was important . . . to push through the hardships and have hope. I've learned to be more responsible."
7.	Viewing job loss as an opportunity.	"I was able to realize a much greater work/life balance . . . in some ways, I am now grateful for being laid off."
8.	Recognizing things could be worse/feeling fortunate.	"I have a husband who works so I don't just have to accept the first job that's offered to me . . . I am fortunate."
Pessimistic Themes		
1.	Seeing life as unpredictable	"The pandemic has changed the way that I view my life. Nothing seems to be stable."
2.	Feeling cynical/expressing strong distrust of others.	"I have learned how little I like conservatives for not supporting people who are hurting and for turning their backs on the unemployed even now!"
3.	Expecting the future to be bleak.	"Combined these two things ensure that the future will remain bleak."
4.	Expressing strong negative emotions/health concerns.	"Things have felt very bleak and hopeless. I am concerned for my well-being."
5.	Perceiving stable uncontrollable barriers.	"Not many companies want to hire people my age."
6.	Expressing strong regret about past/present choices.	"I wish I did a better job saving for my financial future so I could retire."

Several optimistic themes express positive changes in mindset, such as having a greater appreciation of family/virtual work and seeing job loss as an opportunity, whereas some pessimistic themes express negative changes (e.g., seeing the world as less predictable). Optimistic and pessimistic themes differ in their outlooks for the future (getting better vs. bleak), relations with others (feeling supported vs. expressing distrust of institutions/social groups), and feelings of efficacy (feeling hopeful vs. perceiving uncontrollable barriers).

Once themes were identified, the coders created a 5-point scale for coding answers to the question about lessons learned in their entirety, which ranged from 1 (the answer contains one or more pessimistic themes and no optimistic themes) to 5 (the answer contains one or more optimistic themes and no

pessimistic themes). For example, the quote from the IT worker at the beginning was rated "5" as it contains multiple optimistic themes (expecting things to get better, developing/valuing resilient qualities) but no pessimistic themes. The following response from a 59-year-old male with a B.A. degree, working in the construction industry, was coded as "1" because it contains multiple pessimistic themes (feeling cynical/expressing distrust, expressing strong negative emotions, expecting the future to be bleak) but no optimistic themes.

> I am *more cynical now than ever*. It *disturbs me greatly that the entire energy of the great America can be devoted into propping up the stock market* and no one seems to find this unusual or even bizarre. I am also *disgusted by the complete lack of media* who in olden days would have at least been inquiring about things like this. Combined these two things ensure that *the future will remain bleak*. (italicized text = pessimistic themes)

Answers scored as "2" contained a larger number of and/or longer/more intense pessimistic than optimistic themes. For example, a response from a 49-year-old male with a master's degree, working in financial operations, was scored "2" because it has one optimistic (appreciating family) but two pessimistic themes (perceiving stable/uncontrollable barriers, expecting the future to be bleak).

> *It is a very cruel and difficult world out there*. **I am glad I have a loving wife and supportive friends**, but it has been difficult keeping my head up. I thought that my skills would make me a good fit for a number of positions but *as the rejections have piled up, I am losing confidence that I will ever find something close to what I had in the past*. (italicized text = pessimistic theme; bold text = optimistic themes)

Responses scored as "3" contained either an equal balance of pessimism and optimism or no pessimistic or optimistic themes, and those scored as "4" contained more and/or longer/more intense optimistic than pessimistic themes. A response from a 44-year-old single mother, whose boss denied her request to work virtually and laid her off after her son's school closed, was scored "4" because it contained one pessimistic theme (strong distrust) but multiple optimistic themes (increased self-efficacy, expecting things to get better, developing/valuing resilient qualities).

> My perspective about my career has changed in that I'm no longer willing to settle for *crappy jobs, micromanaging bosses*, or poor pay/lack of benefits. **I know my worth and I'm not going to settle.** In the past six months, I've **learned that I am resilient** and that my attitude affects how my days go. **I'm optimistic. I've used my time to better myself, network (virtually), care for my son,** etc.

The coding manual in supplemental materials shows examples at all five levels.

The coders conducted multiple rounds of coding, individually scoring 40–50 responses per round, and then collectively revising the codebook to clarify themes or rules for scoring answers. The three coders achieved satisfactory reliability on the seventh round, Krippendorff's alpha = .78 for 40 responses, after which all three coders individually scored the remaining answers in batches of 40–50 responses and met

after each batch to resolve disagreements. To check on coder drift, the three coders assessed reliability again on the final batch of 40 responses (KALPHA = .92). Participants overall expressed fairly high levels of optimism in their lessons learned (M = 3.92, SD = 1.30, skew = −0.88, kurtosis = −0.44), but sufficient variation existed such that 35% of the sample scored 3 or lower on the 5-point scale. The length of answers about lessons learned (in words) was not associated with the level of optimism, $r(461) = .01$, $p = .98$.

Control Variables

To ensure that associations between the enactment of resilience processes and optimism of lessons learned were not spuriously related because of some third factor (e.g., mental health), four psychosocial factors were assessed as controls at all three survey waves. *Perceived stress* was assessed with six items from the PSS-10 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983; e.g., "In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly"; 0 = *Never*, 4 = *Often*); responses were averaged to retain the 0 to 4 scale. *Mental health* was measured with the 5-item MHI-5 (Berwick et al., 1991; e.g., "How much time, during the past month, have you felt calm and peaceful"; 1 = *None of the time*, 6 = *All the time*). Scores were converted to a 0–100 scale; higher scores indicate better mental health. Holmstrom et al. (2015) 8-item scale assessed *job search self-efficacy* (e.g., "How confident are you that you could . . . search for job openings using online resources" and "convince potential employers to give you a job?"; 1 = *Not at all confident*, 7 = *Very confident*); responses were averaged across items. *Satisfaction with life* was measured with Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin's (1985) 5-item scale (e.g., "In most ways, my life is close to ideal," 1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*); responses were summed into a total score. Reliabilities for all measures were ω = 0.85 or higher at each survey wave (see Table 2).

Results

Descriptive statistics at each survey wave are reported in Table 2. H1 predicted that resilience enactment would be positively associated with optimism of lessons learned at wave 3 (cross-sectionally), whereas H2 stated that enacting resilience processes at earlier waves would predict optimism of lessons learned at wave 3 (longitudinally). Correlations between the seven resilience subscales and overall resilience processes at each wave with optimism of lessons learned at wave 3 are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Correlations of Resilience Processes and Control Variables With Optimism of Lessons Learned.

Variable	r (CI_{95}) Wave 1 (N = 463) Longitudinal	r (CI_{95}) Wave 2 (N = 346) Longitudinal	r (CI_{95}) Wave 3 (N = 463) Cross-sectional
Resilience Processes			
Maintain Routines	.15*** (.06, .24)	.19*** (.08, .30)	.20*** (.10, .29)
New Routine	.13** (.04, .22)	.16** (.05, .26)	.19*** (.09, .28)
Identity Anchors	.16*** (.07, .24)	.20*** (.09, .30)	.23*** (.14, .33)
Networks	.11* (.02, .20)	.16** (.05, .26)	.22*** (.12, .31)
Reframing	.15*** (.06, .24)	.17*** (.07, .27)	.18*** (.09, .27)

Humor	.17*** (.08, .26)	.20*** (.10, .30)	.26*** (.17, .35)
Productive Action	.16*** (.07, .25)	.21*** (.10, .31)	.21*** (.11, .31)
Total Resilience	.19*** (.10, .28)	.25*** (.15, .34)	.29*** (.19, .38)
Other Study Variables			
Perceived Stress	−.13* (-.03, -.23)	−.13* (−02, −.24)	−18*** (−.09, −.28)
Mental Health	.13** (.02, .21)	.14** (.03, .25)	.14*** (.03, .24)
JS Self-Efficacy	.12* (.01, .23)	.21*** (.10, .33)	.23*** (.12, .34)
Life Satisfaction	.10 (−.01, .21)	.13* (.03, .24)	.18*** (.07, .28)
Time-Varying Demographics			
Anticipated 2021 Household Income	.12* (.01, .23)	.19*** (.08, .29)	.17** (.06, .28)
Employment Status	NA	.06 (−.05, .17)	−.06 (−.17, .05)
Time-Invariant Demographics			
Age	−.03 (−.13, .08)	NA	NA
Gender	.05 (−.05, .15)	NA	NA
Sexual Orientation	−.04 (−.14, .06)	NA	NA
Education	−.01 (−.10, .08)	NA	NA
Race	.02 (−.07, .10)	NA	NA
Ethnicity	.04 (−.06, .13)	NA	NA
Relationship Status	.10* (.01, .20)	NA	NA
2020 House Income	.11* (.02, .21)	NA	NA

Note. All correlations are with the optimism of lessons learned at Wave 3. JS Self-Efficacy = Job Search Self-Efficacy. CI_{95} are bootstrapped confidence intervals based on 5,000 resamples. For current employment status and searching for a new/better job, 0 = no, 1 = yes. For gender, 1 = male, 2 = female; sexual orientation 1 = heterosexual, 2 = LGB+; race, 0 = white, 1 = Person of color; Hispanic ethnicity, 0 = no, 1 = yes; relationship status, 0 = not married, 1 = married.
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

At all three waves, the seven resilience subscales shared small to moderate, statistically significant, positive associations with the optimism of lessons learned at wave 3, based on Cohen's (1988) conventions of r = .10, .30, and .50 being small, medium, and large associations. Consistent with H1, overall resilience enactment was cross-sectionally associated with optimism of lessons learned at wave 3 (r = .29, r^2 = .08). Supporting H2, total resilience at wave 2 (r = .25, r^2 = .05) and wave 1 (r = .19, r^2 = .04) predicted optimism two and four months later at wave 3.

To provide more stringent tests of H1 and H2, three separate hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted at each survey wave where optimism of lessons learned at wave 3 was the criterion variable. For each wave, control variables were entered in the first step (model 1), followed by overall enactment of resilience processes in the second step (model 2). The optimism of lessons learned at wave 3 was not associated with participant age, gender, sexual orientation, education, race/ethnicity, or employment status at waves 2 and 3 (see Table 4); hence, these factors were not controlled. Optimism varied by relationship status (married > single) and was negatively associated with perceived stress and positively with mental health and job search self-efficacy at all three waves and with life satisfaction at two

waves; thus, these relational and psychosocial factors were controlled. Optimism was positively associated with participants' wave 1 report of their 2020 annual household income as well as their anticipated 2021 household income at all three waves; thus, these material factors also were controlled.

For cross-sectional associations, wave 3 perceived stress and anticipated 2021 household income were significant predictors of optimism in lessons learned in model 1, with control variables as a set explaining 11% of the variance in optimism at step 1 (see the right two columns in Table 5). Job search self-efficacy also was positively associated with optimism in model 1, though it was no longer significant in model 2. Overall enactment of resilience processes was a significant predictor in model 2, explaining an additional 5% of the variance in optimism of lessons learned beyond the control variables. These findings further support H1.

Table 5. Regression of Optimism of Lessons Learned (Wave 3) Onto Total Resilience Process Enactment (Waves 1–3) and Control Variables.

	Wave 1 Longitudinal		Wave 2 Longitudinal		Wave 3 Cross-Sectional	
Predictor	*Model 1*	*Model 2*	*Model 1*	*Model 2*	*Model 1*	*Model 2*
Marital Status	.07	.07	−.02	−.01	.04	.05
Perceived Stress	−.07	−.07	−.02	−.04	−.19*	−.21**
Life Satisfaction	−.01	−.02	.01	−.04	.01	−.03
Mental Health	.01	−.01	.02	−.01	−.12	−.17*
JS Self-Efficacy	.07	.04	.15*	.10	.11*	.00
2020 Income	−.07	−.07	−.10	−.10	−.04	−.04
Anticipated 2021 Income	.18*	.17*	.21**	.19*	.15*	.16*
Resilience Processes		.11*		.17**		.27***
Overall R^2	.05**	.06***	.07***	.09***	.07***	.12***
R^2 change		.01*		.02**		.05***

Note. JS Self-efficacy = Job Search Self-Efficacy. For marital status, 0 = not married; 1 = married. *Ns* = 448 at wave 1, 335 at wave 2, and 443 at wave 3. *Ns* are smaller than total *Ns* because between 9 and 18 participants selected "prefer not to respond" for the 2020 Household Income and/or Anticipated 2021 Household Income variables at each wave (see Table 2). Coefficients are standardized regression coefficients.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

For longitudinal findings, wave 2 Job Search Self-Efficacy and Anticipated 2021 Household Income predicted optimism of lessons learned two months later (see the middle two columns of Table 5), though Job Search Self-Efficacy was not significant once resilience was in the model. In model 2, enactment of resilience processes explained 2% additional variance in optimism two months later above and beyond the control variables.

Finally, wave 1 Anticipated 2021 Household Income predicted optimism of lessons earned four months later (see the left two columns in Table 5). Overall resilience enactment explained a significant,

albeit only small, amount of additional variance in optimism beyond controls in model 2 (R^2 change = .01, $p < .05$). These findings from waves 1 and 2 are consistent with H2.

Discussion

Most resilience studies investigating CTR focus on responses to recent disruptive events rather than on people's anticipatory resilience or cultivation of mindsets and resources that foster a sense of optimism about getting through future disruptions. We tested the assumption that the extent to which people were able to enact resilience processes following pandemic-related job loss would predict whether they would subsequently report learning optimistic lessons using a three-wave longitudinal design. Results revealed that self-reported enactment of CTR processes: (a) shared a positive and significant association with optimism of lessons learned at the final survey wave (H1; cross-sectional), and (b) predicted optimism of lessons learned at the final survey wave even when reported two and four months earlier (H2, longitudinal). The finding that resilience processes predicted optimism about the future during a stressful period of people's lives did not simply occur for participants who were economically or socially advantaged. Although participants who were married, under less perceived stress, and experiencing greater mental health, job search self-efficacy and life satisfaction, as well as higher annual household income before and after the job loss reported more optimistic lessons learned, enacting resilience processes explained significant, albeit only small to moderate amounts of additional variance in optimism beyond these factors. At the zero-order level, greater enactment of all five CTR processes was positively associated with optimism of lessons learned, perhaps reflecting that the severity of pandemic-related job loss meant several processes (e.g., crafting normalcy, alternative logics via reframing and humor) were needed to reintegrate and emerge with optimism about the future.

Theoretical and Methodological Contributions

This study refines the concept of anticipatory resilience within CTR by highlighting how it involves the cultivation of both mindsets (ways of thinking about the future; Betts et al., 2022; Fanari et al., 2023) and resources (social and/or material; Gist-Mackey & Guy, 2019) that people can draw on when future disruptions occur. In the context of pandemic-related job loss in the United States, we contend that anticipatory resilience is reflected in the extent to which participants construct optimism (Wieland, 2020) when describing lessons learned during an extended period of economic, health, and political upheaval. It is important to stress that participants who reported more optimistic lessons learned did not downplay or discount struggles they faced; rather, they placed greater emphasis on how they learned to appreciate positive aspects of their lives, discovered they could count on others, were stronger than they had realized, and expected things eventually would get better. Like the soon-to-be terminated workers in Wieland's (2020) study, participants in our study may have framed their lessons learned from pandemic-related job loss optimistically to preserve dignity during an uncertain and threatening experience over which they felt a limited sense of control. In contrast, participants who reported pessimistic lessons focused primarily on how their lives were unpredictable and uncontrollable, expressed strong cynicism about relationships and institutions, and expected the future to be bleak. Because data on lessons learned were gathered during the final survey wave, our findings cannot speak to whether cultivating more optimistic lessons helped participants move forward. Yet prior literature has shown that holding optimistic expectations about the

future is prospectively associated with problem- and emotion-focused coping and greater well-being when serious new disruptions occur (Carver et al., 2010; Nes & Segerstrom, 2006).

Aside from providing greater conceptual clarity about anticipatory resilience, this study introduces a new way of measuring the concept. Two prior studies have had people recall memorable messages about getting through hard times and then rate whether those messages created feelings of hopefulness and efficacy (Boumis et al., 2023; Kuang et al., 2023a); however, neither study established connections between the enactment of resilience processes and the *content* of memorable messages. In contrast, we asked participants to provide open-ended answers about their lessons learned and had raters assess the extent to which those answers expressed optimism. Participants did not know their answers would be rated for optimism, and coders did not know how participants had scored on the CRPS or other variables. Although participants may have felt social pressure to "put on a happy face" when describing their lessons learned, over a third received low- to moderate scores (i.e., 1–3 on the 5-point scale), and optimism about lessons learned was predicted by reports of social and material well-being as well as resilience enactment in ways one would expect. Our findings offer initial support for the reliability and predictive validity of coding optimism expressed in lessons learned as a measure of anticipatory resilience, but future research should adapt and test our optimism coding system with other types of disruption. Our findings also show that the CRPS measure of resilience processes can predict related outcomes that are assessed using methods beyond Likert-type scales.

Although cultivating anticipatory resilience should be reflected in feeling optimistic about getting through the future in most contexts, we acknowledge there may be boundary conditions on this claim. In a historical case study of Palestine, Elhendi and Buzzanell (2024) argue that resilience too often has been treated as a politically neutral concept by the international community—one in which Palestinians are expected to "adapt" and "cope" without serious attempts to address the ongoing structural violence created by decades of Israeli occupation. Rather than conceptualizing resilience as optimism for a better future, they theorize transformative resilience as "a constitutive process that continually re-integrates the past, positions endurance as a temporary move in the long-term political-economic-legal-cultural-material struggles for those most vulnerable and perpetually exploited globally and works for social justice" (Elhendi & Buzzanell, 2024, p. 18). Even in this extreme case, one can see the core elements about how we conceptualize anticipatory resilience: the cultivation of mindsets (e.g., endurance is a temporary move) and resources (e.g., ongoing collective struggle) that can be drawn on during unthinkable disruption. The authors also argue that transformative resilience is situated in the postcolonial mentality of "generative hope" (Elhendi & Buzzanell, 2024, p. 18). In sum, our study shows that—consistent with CTR theorizing—the extent to which participants enacted resilience processes following job loss during a global pandemic predicted the level of optimism in their lessons learned two to four months later. These findings support our claim that constructing optimism is a valid way of operationalizing anticipatory resilience. Future research should continue evaluating our conceptual and operational definition of anticipatory resilience across cultures.

Practical Contributions, Limitations, and Future Directions

When cascading disruptions such as job loss during a pandemic occur, it may be helpful not only to support people in enacting CTR processes but also to assist them in making sense of the past in

ways that create optimism about mindsets and resources they can carry into the future (Wieland, 2020). Our point is not to blame participants in our study who expressed pessimistic lessons learned nor to ignore the material and sociopolitical nature of job loss and financial precarity but rather to stress how identifying and activating sources of instrumental and emotional support may help individuals cultivate mindsets and build resources that create optimism about getting through future challenges that inevitably will come (Gist-Mackey & Guy, 2019; Walsh, 2016). This may be important given that displays of pessimism can discourage individuals from reaching out to others as well as reduce others' willingness to provide support (Carver et al., 2010).

About limitations, we recruited MTurk workers from the United States who were employed before COVID-19 and lost their jobs during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic caused severe economic, public health, and political disruptions, and the specific content of some optimistic and pessimistic themes (e.g., seeing life as unpredictable) may reflect the unprecedented nature of the pandemic. Although our convenience sample was representative in terms of gender and racial identity and varied widely in household income, participants had more formal education and were less likely to be Hispanic compared with the U.S. population (see Kuang et al., 2023b). Second, although our longitudinal design is a plus, it is still possible that resilience enactment at earlier survey waves and optimism of lessons learned at the final wave both are driven by some unmeasured third factor (i.e., spurious association). To reduce this possibility, we included several sociopsychological (e.g., mental health) and material (e.g., household income) controls, but it is never possible to rule out all possible factors. Future research might employ experimental designs to assess whether supporting the enactment of CTR resilience processes helps build optimism about overcoming future disruptions, and how that, in turn, predicts well-being. Finally, longitudinal associations between resilience enactment and optimism of lessons learned two and four months later were small, though they remained significant after including a wide range of controls. Given the small effect sizes, the importance of our findings should not be overstated.

Despite these limits, this study is the first to link the enactment of resilience processes to optimism of lessons learned as a form of anticipatory resilience. Aside from providing evidence supporting a core assumption of CTR, our findings may have practical implications for programs that aim to help people cultivate resilience for the future.

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