

**The Experience of Well-being Following Job Loss: A Case Study**

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Thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Doctorate in Philosophy degree in Educational Counselling

Educational Counselling  
Faculty of Education  
University of Ottawa

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## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank the twenty participants who so openly shared their accounts of job loss so that others could benefit from their experiences. Your stories have not only formed the basis of my dissertation, they also continue to be a powerful source of wisdom and inspiration in my personal life. I would also like to acknowledge the wonderful students that I have had the pleasure of working with in a variety of counselling, teaching, and mentoring roles at Carleton University, Algonquin College, and the University of Ottawa throughout my career transition to counselling. I will forever carry your stories with me.

I would also like to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. Nick Gazzola. Your mentorship and guidance throughout my Ph.D. and M.Ed. studies has been invaluable. I appreciate both the creative freedom and encouragement to pursue my passion for positive psychology, and to do so in a meaningful, authentic way. Thank you for your high standards of research, writing, and clinical excellence. I will no doubt continue to aspire to your “Gretzky-like” standards in the future. I also appreciate your hard work and outstanding responsiveness, not to mention your patience and understanding with the various life challenges that have accompanied this big journey. Thanks for always keeping the faith. I also extend my gratitude to my thesis committee – Dr. Cristelle Audet, Dr. David Smith, and Dr. Anne Thériault. I appreciate the constructive feedback and insight which have shaped my research, along with the clinical and life mentoring.

I would also like to thank to my amazing research assistants, Jennifer Neufeld, Jasmin Banaei, Zeinab Almieme, Sabrina Virjee, and Amelia Dowell, for your hard work in pushing this thesis over the finish line. Not to mention my very long list of research volunteers who so generously gave their time in support of my dissertation. I also extend my gratitude to the various individuals who assisted with participant recruitment, including Anita Caputo, Kevin Chapman, Len Faradella, Margo Hoyt, Rob Notman, and Jeff Singer. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the generous funding support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Ontario Graduate Scholarships program.

On a personal note, I would like to thank my amazing group of friends from so many different parts of my life. I never would have made this journey without your encouragement, friendship, and laughter (not to mention help from my various “mechanics”!). I also extend my appreciation to my family for your help and support. I especially thank my parents, Jean and Jerome, for their strong example of caring, hard work, and commitment to family. I also would like to thank my two amazing kids, Jonathan and Beth, in no particular order (other than their birth!). Being your mom continues to be the greatest source of meaning and joy in my life.

Finally, I thank my husband Mike. I thank you for all of the sacrifices you have made in supporting our family throughout this long journey. Words cannot express my gratitude to you for being such an amazing father and husband. (Not to mention proofreader extraordinaire!). I appreciate you being “my rock,” particularly given the Everest-like challenges that life has thrown our way. Your unfailing positivity is admirable—that very same positivity that drove me to notice you for the first time so many years ago. Thank you for your ‘glass half-full’ approach to life, and for supporting my inclination to always fill it right to the top! I will be forever grateful for the gift of being able to pursue my long held dream of a Ph.D.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to my dad who continues to be my lifelong role model of positivity. Quick to laugh, always pleasant, and being able to understand others and put them at ease are just some qualities that come to mind. What most stands out is your inspiring resilience. Always unfailingly optimistic, strong, and calm in the face of difficulties, I have long admired your ability to pragmatically face life's challenges head on. All while being able to find the humour in the midst of it all. Yes, indeed "A problem today, is a story tomorrow." Or make that a thesis!

## Abstract

Positive psychology has significantly advanced our understanding of well-being, yet there remains a need to better understand the *how*, *what*, and *why* of both positive and negative well-being. This study combined positive psychology and job loss perspectives to investigate the subjective experience of well-being following job loss. Using a qualitative-focused case study methodology, this three article dissertation explored the experiences of 20 workers who were displaced from the Ottawa, Canada technology sector from 2000-2006.

The first article explored the experience of well-being from a bottom-up, naturalistic point of view and compared these inductive notions with existing a priori theories. Findings support integrated conceptualizations of hedonia and eudaimonia, while also potentially identifying new notions of well-being. Identified themes include (a) life evaluation, (b) transitory experiencing, (c) growth and grounding, (d) environmental mastery/stability, (e) mental ill-being/ill-health, and (f) motivational mindsets/conditions. This study showed well-being to be a rich, pluralistic construct. It included the non-dualistic notions of both subjectivity and objectivity, as well as encompassing notions related to the *what* and *how* of well-being.

The second and third articles present inductively derived themes which helped to explain the relationship between job loss and well-being (i.e., the *how* and *why*). Three externally focused themes were reported in the second article: (a) systemic factors (e.g., broader business environment), (b) interpersonal factors (e.g., social support), and (c) chance (e.g., luck and serendipity). The third article identified two internally focused major themes: (a) differential coping responses and processes and (b) protective and sensitizing processes. Coping specifically consisted of problem-focused coping, meaning-making, attitudes and expectancies, behavioural processes, and emotional processes. Protective and sensitizing processes included identity and self-esteem, the impact of past adversity, and personal resources and characteristics. Implications for theory, research, and practice for both positive psychology and job loss are discussed.

Keywords: positive psychology, job loss, unemployment, qualitative research, case study, hedonia, eudaimonia, coping, meaning, meaning-making, resilience, post-traumatic growth, social support, relationships, theory, processes

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## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>BRS</b>	Brief Resilience Scale
<b>MIL-Q</b>	Meaning in Life Questionnaire
<b>PANAS</b>	Positive and Negative Affect Schedule
<b>PERMA</b>	Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement
<b>PHQ-4</b>	Patient Health Questionnaire-4
<b>PWB</b>	Psychological Well-Being
<b>SDT</b>	Self-Determination Theory
<b>SHS</b>	Subjective Happiness Scale
<b>SWB</b>	Subjective Well-Being
<b>SWLS</b>	Satisfaction with Life Scale

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

How do people maintain their well-being in the face of life's challenges? Why do some individuals bounce back higher than before, while others suffer longer lasting declines in well-being? Understanding the answers to such questions is critical for counsellors given the implicit goal of helping our clients optimize their well-being (Corey, 2005). Positive psychology, which is philosophically congruent with counselling psychology, provides a logical theoretical framework to explore such questions (Lopez et al., 2006; Waterman, 2013c). Within positive psychology, there is also a strong need to enhance both theory and practice given the relative newness of the field (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

### **Positive Psychology Research Areas Requiring Further Development**

Positive psychology's field-defining mandate is to explore the science of well-being and flourishing (Seligman, 2011). A wealth of positive psychology research confirms the intuitive notion that positivity (e.g., attitudes, emotions) is correlated with well-being and that well-being is indeed changeable (Seligman, 2011; Sheldon, Kashdan, & Steger, 2011). Looking ahead, there are three key challenges which the field needs to address.

Firstly, there are calls to integrate the varied theories and constructs of well-being as even the basic notion of well-being itself is being examined and refined (Jayawickreme, Forgeard, & Seligman, 2012; Kashdan & Steger, 2011; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Sheldon et al., 2011; Wong, 2011). Seligman (2011) argues that well-being is a construct defined by a number of separate and measurable "real things" (e.g., happiness which has been operationalized as subjective well-being) but that "no single measure defines it exhaustively" (pp. 14-15). Secondly, there is a need to build from a strong understanding of the correlates associated with well-being to next focus on identifying the processes which lead to positive well-being (Kashdan & Steger, 2011; Luthar, 2006). Thirdly, positive psychology has been criticized as being too 'Pollyannaish' and focused on the positive, at the expense of also considering the negative realities of life (Becker & Marecek, 2008; Christopher & Campbell, 2008; Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008; Wong, 2011).

This research study explores these three areas via a case study of displaced technology workers (i.e., the telecommunication and information technology industry). The focus is on well-being, with a secondary emphasis on job loss which helps inform our understanding of well-being.

### Statement of the Problem

Given the early empirically supported promise of positive psychology, a question begs: “How can positive psychology help people to improve their well-being, particularly under negative circumstances?” Job loss, an increasingly common life event, provides a relevant realm to explore this question since job loss often (but not always) negatively impacts well-being (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005). With some exceptions (e.g., Blustein, Kozan, & Connors-Kellgren, 2013), very little is known about the actual lived experience of well-being following job loss and the exact processes which differentially influence positive and negative well-being outcomes (Blustein, 2008; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). This study synthesizes positive psychology and job loss research to address the following overarching research question: *What is the subjective experience of well-being following job loss?*

More specifically, following the life event of job loss:

- (a) *How do individuals describe their self-perceived sense of well-being?*
- (b) *What do individuals describe as being the key factors<sup>1</sup>, conditions, and critical events (i.e., potential process factors) which have impacted their self-perceived well-being?*

A variety of theories and perspectives inform the construct of well-being, making it difficult to concretely operationalize (Jayawickreme et al., 2012; Seligman, 2011). Most theories privilege psychological and emotional well-being (Wong, 2011). The need to consider and integrate a variety of theoretical well-being perspectives has been identified by many scholars (Delle Fave, Brdar, Friere, Vella-Brodrick, & Wissing, 2001; Jayawickreme et al., 2012; Seligman, 2011; Wong, 2011). There is also a lack of participant-defined notions of well-being since, until recently, “no study has explicitly asked people what they mean by happiness” (Delle Fave & Bassi, 2009, p. 205). Consequently, this study adopted an open-ended perspective of well-being which is defined via participants’ personalized interpretations. This nature of well-being is further investigated by the first research sub-question, “*How do individuals describe their self-perceived sense of well-being?*” For the purpose of overall study design, it was necessary to develop a broad, preliminary definition of well-being. Based on literature review,

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<sup>1</sup> The word *factors* is used here as a term of convenience which refers to exploratory, qualitative variables which may also include conditions and events. It does not denote statistically validated factors.

well-being was defined as broadly encompassing hedonia (e.g., happiness) and eudaimonia<sup>2</sup> (e.g., life meaning, growth, self-realization), plus self-perceived resilience (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Wong, 2011) in the face of job loss. The mental health lens of well-being as the absence of psychopathology will also be considered as a counterbalance to the positive psychology viewpoint (Elkins, 2009).

Job loss, in contrast, is more tightly defined and operationalized in the literature, which includes recent conceptual distinctions which delineate between job loss and unemployment (Gowan, 2014). Job loss is specifically defined as “a life event that removes paid employment from an individual *involuntarily* [emphasis added]” (Latack, Kinicki, & Prussia, 1995, p. 313). Latack et al. (1995) distinguish between the *event* of job loss which occurs at a single point in time versus unemployment which is a state that persists over a period of time until an individual is re-employed. The latter logically includes the former. The latter *event* of job loss is related to, yet distinct from, the *state* of unemployment since the effects of job loss can extend beyond re-employment (Gowan, 2014; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Historically, the terms have often been used interchangeably in the literature since it can be practically difficult to distinguish between the two (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). More recently, job loss is considered to be a more inclusive construct (Gowan, 2014) since the impact of the event of job loss itself on elements such as identity and overall well-being is “considerable” (Latack et al., 1995, p. 313), even when there is a shorter duration of unemployment. Thus, this study will typically refer to job loss.

For positive psychology, job loss is a specific, highly-relevant phenomenon which can inform a more general understanding of human well-being (Lucas, 2007). Job loss, along with divorce and disability, is one of three major life events which typically lead to negative, long-lasting changes in well-being that spill over into other life domains such as health and relationships (Lucas, 2007; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). That said, positive aspects of job loss have also been identified (Caputo & Wallace, 2007; Zikic & Richardson, 2007). However, the experience of well-being following job loss is neither uniformly positive nor negative and varies by individual (Blustein et al., 2013; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Zikic & Richardson, 2007).

Finally, the juxtaposition of positive psychology and job loss research reveals interesting points of contrast as well as similarities. Positive psychology has tended to focus on the positives at the expense of the negatives while job loss research has tended to emphasize the negatives

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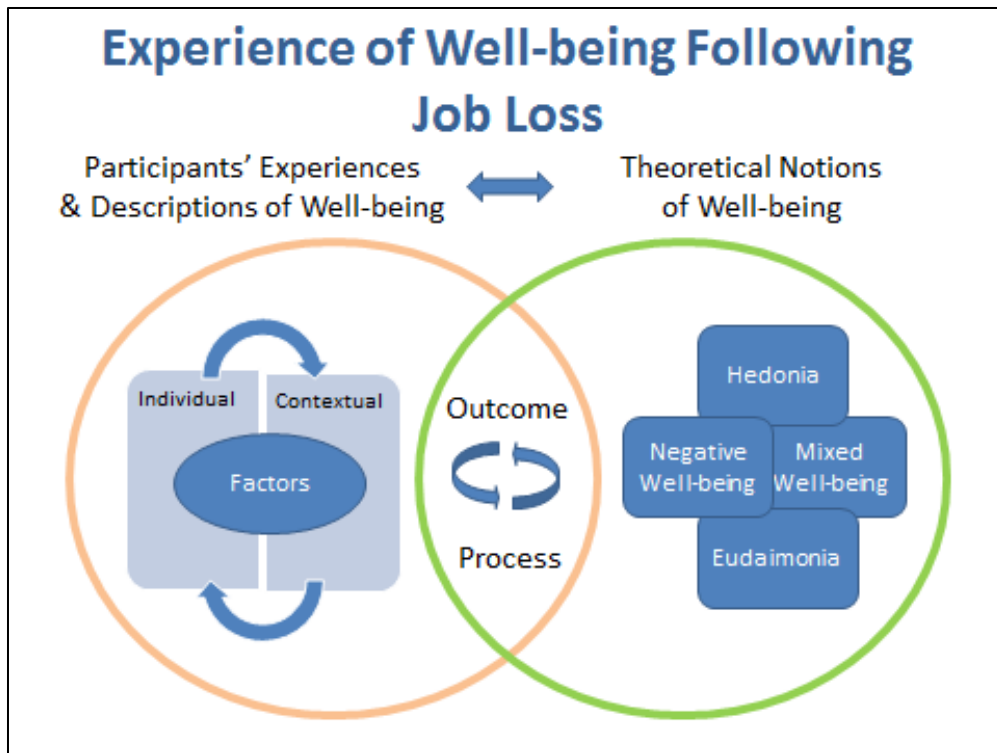
<sup>2</sup> These terms will be defined in detail in the literature review.

over the positives (Blustein, 2008; McKee-Ryan et. al, 2005; Wong, 2011). These fields share common quantitative research traditions which have clearly identified the statistical correlates related to well-being (Blustein, 2008; Delle Fave & Bassi, 2009; Friedman, 2008; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Both fields have seen calls for more qualitative research which: (a) includes participants' viewpoints; (b) considers contextual influences on well-being like societal discourses; (c) identifies well-being processes; and (d) informs interventions like counselling, as we enrich our understanding of the lived experience of well-being (Blustein, 2008; Delle Fave & Bassi, 2009; Delle Fave et al., 2011; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

This study builds from three macro-theoretical principles of well-being. Specifically, it draws from Seligman's (2011) notion that well-being is a complex notion informed by various sub-constructs; Delle Fave and Bassi's (2009) valuing of participant-informed notions of the experience of well-being; and Luthar's (2006) view of well-being (via resilience as simultaneously being an outcome and a process). As will be described in the literature review, four notions of well-being are explored: (a) hedonia (e.g., happiness, life satisfaction); (b) eudaimonia (e.g., life meaning, self-realization); (c) negative well-being (e.g., depression, anxiety and other forms of psychopathology); and (d) mixed well-being which includes resilience and post-traumatic growth (Elkins, 2009; Luthar, 2006; Wong, 2011).

As indicated in the conceptual framework in Figure 1, this study focused on identifying participants' subjective experiences of well-being and compared these emergent notions of well-being with a priori theories of well-being. This approach recognizes the constructed notion of the lived experience of well-being (*vis-à-vis* the interaction of individual and contextual factors and events), the intertwining of outcome and process, and the inextricable contextual influence of theories of well-being such as the discourse of happiness (Luthar, 2006; Polkinghorne, 2005).



*Figure 1.* Conceptual framework for studying the subjective experience of well-being.

### **Outline of Dissertation**

This three article format dissertation will now elaborate on the experience of well-being following job loss. Chapter Two presents a literature review of positive psychology and job loss research. Chapter Three details the methodology. Chapter Four summarizes the first article which describes how participants describe their experience of well-being following job loss. Chapter Five presents the second article which details the internal factors (i.e., those that primarily reside within the individual) that help to explain the relationship between job loss and its subsequent impact on well-being. Chapter Six consists of the third article as it similarly describes external factors (i.e., contextual factors that mainly lie outside of the individual). Finally, Chapter Seven provides a summary discussion of the study, which specifically includes (a) a summary of key findings; (b) implications for theory, research and practice; (c) limitations, and (d) contributions to knowledge. Discussion will now shift to a review of the positive psychology and job loss literature.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This section reviews well-being literature related to positive psychology and job loss, both of which will now be discussed in detail. The below table provides a detailed overview of the areas covered by this literature review (see Table 1).

Table 1

### *Well-Being Literature Related to Positive Psychology and Job Loss*

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#### **Key Themes and Subthemes**

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#### **1.0 Positive Psychology**

##### *1.1 Theoretical Conceptions of Well-Being*

- Hedonia and eudaimonia
- Key areas of debate within positive psychology
- Negative well-being
- Mixed well-being

##### *1.2 Processes of Well-Being*

- Changeability of well-being
- Role of meaning-making
- Resilience
- Positive emotions

#### **2.0 Job Loss**

##### *2.1 Conceptualizations and Theories of Well-being Following Job Loss*

- Meaning of work theories
- Stress, appraisal, and coping models

##### *2.2. Impact of Job Loss on Well-Being*

- Negative impacts
- Positive impacts

##### *2.3 Factors Which Explain the Relationship Between Job Loss and Well-Being*

- External factors
- Internal factors

##### *2.4. Typologies on Differential Responses to Job Loss*

- Typologies seen in literature
- Synthesis of typology

## Positive Psychology

This positive psychology literature review discusses: (a) *theoretical conceptualizations of well-being* and (b) *processes of well-being*.

### Theoretical Conceptualizations of Well-being

*Well-being theory* proliferates across multiple disciplines including psychology, philosophy, economics and sociology, with positive psychology dedicated to well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Tiberus, 2013). Well-being, despite its intuitive nature, resists precise definition as a tightly defined construct per se (Jayawickreme et al., 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2001). It instead functions as a ‘catch-all’ term both within and across disciplines, which helps to facilitate discussion (Tiberus, 2013). Mirroring common parlance, well-being generally refers to a state where life is going well (Soutter, Gilmore, & O’Steen, 2011). This section specifically discusses four central considerations regarding well-being: (a) eudaimonic and hedonic theories, (b) key areas of debate within positive psychology, (c) negative well-being, and (d) mixed well-being.

**Hedonia and eudaimonia.** Within positive psychology, two broad views of well-being exist—*hedonia* and *eudaimonia* (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008). *Hedonia* refers to notions of the ‘good life’ as being one that is characterized by the presence of pleasure and absence of pain (Waterman, 2013a). Hedonia is often equated with happiness (Haybron, 2007) and is commonly operationalized as subjective well-being (SWB; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). SWB has both an affective and cognitive component; it refers to a preponderance of positive rather than negative emotions, as well as the holistic cognitive judgment that one’s life is satisfying.

Hedonia has its origins in philosophy which, in turn, has strongly influenced positive psychology theory (Haybron, 2007). Philosophy generally equates well-being with happiness (Haybron, 2007). Brülde’s (2007) critique of philosophical happiness theory rejects a hedonic model based purely on pain and pleasure as being too situational and circumstance based. He instead argues for a hybrid view of happiness as a “complex mental state” (p. 7) with both affective and cognitive aspects. This view resembles that of SWB (Diener et al., 1999). Haybron (2007) too endorses an integrated view and sees well-being as a hybrid function of life satisfaction and pleasure, with the former being a holistic gestalt which goes beyond life satisfaction in various life domains. Haybron also stresses the affective aspects of well-being,

and argues that one must ‘feel’ satisfied not just ‘be’ satisfied. He further affirms the motivational impacts of emotions and suggests that well-being is a composite of felt satisfactions/dissatisfactions. Finally, some philosophical traditions of inquiry discount mood states and the emotional aspects of happiness to focus on the holistic gestalt of life satisfaction (Brülde, 2007).

*Eudaimonia* originates from Aristotle with *eu* translated as good (e.g., virtuous) while *daimon* refers to one’s true self (Waterman, 2013a). Theoretical conceptions of eudaimonia include: (a) becoming one’s best self/self-realization (Waterman, 2013a); (b) pursuit of excellence and virtue (Aristotle, 1953/2004); (c) life meaning (Steger, 2012); (d) personal growth (Ryff, 2013); and (e) autonomous self-congruence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Eudaimonia, as an operationalized research construct, has also been subject to multiple interpretations which have described it as behaviours, cognitive-affective and other experiences, orientations, and/or indicators of psychological functioning (Huta & Waterman, 2014). To add further complexity, eudaimonia has also been termed ‘happiness’ and ‘flourishing’ with much debate centered around the translation of Aristotle’s original *Nicomachean Ethics* text (Keyes & Annas, 2009).

There are a number of more specific eudaimonic-oriented positive psychology theories (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & King et al., 2009), with four now being highlighted. Ryff’s (1989, 2013) well-validated theory of psychological well-being (PWB) was a key early theory that was developed based on a review of a vast body of multidisciplinary well-being theory and writings. The theory identifies six core dimensions of positive psychological functioning: self-actualization, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships, purpose-in-life, and personal growth. Keyes (1998) expanded on this theory by adding the notion of social well-being which includes the subcomponents of social integration, contribution, coherence, actualization, and acceptance.

More recent is Seligman’s (2011) well-being flourishing theory, which is more commonly known by the acronym PERMA. This approach relates well-being to presence of (a) positive emotions, (b) engagement, (c) relationships, (d) meaning, and (e) achievement. This theory represents a modification of Seligman’s (2002) earlier authentic happiness theory, with both relationships and achievement being included as additional factors.

A third seminal theory of eudaimonic well-being is Ryan and Deci’s (2000) self-determination theory (SDT) which relates well-being to the satisfaction of three universal human

needs: (a) autonomy (“volition and self-endorsement”), (b) relatedness (“social significance and connection”), and (c) competence (“efficacy and a sense of control”; Ryan, Curren, & Deci, 2013, p. 57). This theory stresses the “how” rather than the “what” of well-being, with a focus on need fulfillment and living in an intrinsically-motivated way that reflects one’s true desires. SDT theory is backed with a strong base of empirical findings (Ryan et al., 2013).

Finally, Waterman’s eudaimonic identity theory focuses on the central role of identity and the process of self-discovery (Waterman & Schwartz, 2013). Here, eudaimonia is experienced as feelings of personal expressiveness and the development of one’s true self. Both of these factors can subsequently be a source of life meaning and positive emotions.

**Key areas of debate within positive psychology.** There are two key areas of theoretical debate within positive psychology that may have a bearing on how well-being is further understood: the relationship between hedonia and eudaimonia (Waterman, 2013b) and the subjectivity versus the objectivity of well-being (Tiberus, 2013).

*Relationship between hedonia and eudaimonia.* There are two core views regarding the relationship between hedonia and eudaimonia. Some argue that hedonia and eudaimonia are related yet separate constructs (Huta, 2013; Keyes & Annas, 2009; Waterman, 2013a). Others suggest that they represent different traditions of research rather than distinct forms of well-being (Biswas-Diener et al., 2009) as they critique the lack of consistent operationalized definitions and call for clearer empirical distinction between the two (Kashdan et al., 2008). Keyes and Annas (2009) refute such claims, citing empirical support for eudaimonic notions of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989) as being related to, but distinct from, hedonia. They also distinguish between the hedonic-labelled notion of “feeling good” (p. 197) from “functioning well” in life (p. 197), which they associate with eudaimonia (Keyes & Annas, 2009). A detailed review of seven years of articles (2006-2012) in *The Journal of Positive Psychology* and *Journal of Happiness Studies* also highlighted the inconsistent operationalization of both notions of well-being, such as the inconsistent use of the term happiness and SWB studies which did not measure affect (Synard & Gazzola, 2012, 2013).

There is consensus that both hedonia and eudaimonia lead to well-being (Huta, 2013). Quite significantly, the highest levels of well-being stem from adopting both hedonic and eudaimonic pursuits (Huta, 2013). Waterman (2013a) suggests that eudaimonia cannot exist independent of hedonia since eudaimonic pursuits also intrinsically bring pleasure. In other

words, hedonia can exist without eudaimonia but eudaimonia always co-exists with hedonia. Huta (2013) adds that eudaimonic ends are valued unto themselves with pleasure being the by-product rather than the goal of eudaimonia. In fact, hedonia might be sacrificed in the present to achieve eudaimonia in the future, with hedonia being a present-oriented rather than a future-oriented state. Hence, eudaimonia has been characterized by some scholars as an orientation or way of living rather than simply an outcome (Huta, 2013; Huta & Waterman, 2014; Ryan et al., 2013). Tiberus (2013) further argues that eudaimonic pursuits can lead to positive hedonic outcomes in terms of life satisfaction such that eudaimonia is a path to hedonia rather than being merely a by-product.

Well-being factor analysis has consistently shown two distinct yet related constructs which parallel notions of hedonia and eudaimonia (Huta, 2013). Hedonia tends to be associated with positive and negative affect and carefreeness, while eudaimonia was more related to meaning, elevating experiences (i.e., inspiration, awe, moral elevation) and a sense of transcendence/connection with a greater whole (Huta, 2013). Both constructs share a common association with life satisfaction, vitality, and self-esteem. In the midst of this complexity, Huta (2013) specifically provides a conceptual framework which helps to organize the types of theories. She delineates organized theory as representing (a) ways of living or well-being orientations (e.g., motives goals, and behaviours) and (b) well-being outcomes (e.g., experiences/feelings and functions), with the latter outcomes also being articulated by Keyes and Annas (2009).

*The objectivity versus the subjectivity of well-being.* A second area of debate concerns the subjectivity versus the objectivity of well-being (Brülde, 2007; Haybron, 2007; Sirgy & Wu, 2009; Tiberus, 2013). The objectivity view posits that there are identifiable life conditions and “worthwhile pursuits” (Sirgy & Wu, 2009, p. 184) which characterize well-being (e.g., achievement) while the subjectivity view argues that well-being lies within the eye of the beholder (Tiberus, 2013). The objectivity stance concurs with theories like PERMA and PWB which cite the importance of specific conditions like positive relationships for well-being (Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011). Furthermore, many objective-oriented philosophical theories (e.g., (Nussbaum, 1992 as cited in Sirgy & Wu, 2009; Sen, 1985 as cited in Sirgy & Wu, 2009) relate well-being to one’s ability to function given the current situation (unlike subjective-oriented theories which do not address functioning).

Proponents of the subjectivity view argue against prescriptive objective notions of well-being, such as achievement, which can be culturally-bound or even elitist (e.g., Kashdan et al., 2008). There is further disagreement even amongst subjectivity proponents (Brülde, 2007). While some endorse a purely subjective approach (i.e., one's self-perceptions are valid, regardless of circumstances), others contend that subjectivity needs to be grounded in reality, values, and experiences – informed desire (Brülde, 2007; Sumner, 1996 as cited in Brülde, 2007). For instance, believing that you have a happy marriage without knowledge of your partner's infidelity would violate the latter assumption (Brülde, 2007). Sumner (1996, as cited in Tiberus, 2013) further argues that life satisfaction must be genuine and not simply due to adapting to adversity (e.g., learning to tolerate oppression when freedom is actually the desired state).

Tiberus and Hall's (2010) value-based life satisfaction theory posits that values are central to life satisfaction and that they go beyond ideal principles to also include other factors such as activities and behaviours. They further contend that values must meet three tests: (a) offer a person "good reasons for doing things" (p. 218), (b) provide positive affective experiences, and (c) be stable (Tiberus & Hall, 2010). Arguments that values must be autonomously chosen (Haybron, 2007; Tiberus & Hall, 2010) are also congruent with self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Finally, Haybron (2007) offers a blended view of objectivity and subjectivity. He disputes the idea that one's well-being is purely subjective due to the inherent influences of objective elements like culture and norms.

**Negative well-being.** The major theory of negative well-being, which comes from general psychology, centers on mental illness and disorder (Elkins, 2009). This model is operationalized via the American Psychiatric Association's (2013) classification of mental illness which is represented by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) of mental disorders (e.g., major depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder). Now on its fifth major revision, this 60-plus year-old taxonomy aims to objectively define ill-being according to formal clinical diagnosis and associated symptoms (e.g., depression being associated with sleep disturbance). Additionally the disturbance must impair functioning such that it causes "clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of functioning" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 21). Disorder is assessed based on the clinical judgment of a trained mental health professional (which can include diagnostic testing), both of which are

further critiqued as a social constructions onto themselves (Elkins, 2009; Strong, Gaete, Sametband, French, & Eeson, 2012). This medical model of well-being has also been criticized for its negative and often stigmatizing focus on psychopathology (Elkins, 2009; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Strong et al., 2012). In fact, positive psychology was conceived as a paradigm-shifting antidote to mainstream psychology's traditional focus on deficit and ill-being (Kashdan & Steger, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Within positive psychology, Keyes (2002, 2005) introduces another notion of negative well-being – languishing. This notion refers to poor mental health with adequate functioning, which is distinguished from mental illness (e.g., clinical depression) where there is poorer functioning. Languishing specifically refers to poor emotional, psychological and social functioning without any associated mental illness. Conversely, flourishing refers to the opposite state of very positive functioning, which has been empirically validated (Keyes, 2005; Keyes & Annas, 2009).

**Mixed well-being.** Wong (2011) critiques the perceived dichotomy between positive and negative well-being. He suggests that negative well-being (i.e., negative experiences and emotions) may function as a pathway to positive well-being (e.g., resilience in the face of adversity). This perspective on well-being logically brings us to the notion of mixed well-being. The co-existence of positive and negative well-being becomes particularly pertinent if we look at well-being over multiple points in time via the constructs of resilience (Luthar, 2006) and post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), both of which pre-date the field.

The exact nature of resilience has been debated in the literature, with multiple notions and constructs of resilience (Bonanno & Diminich, 2013; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013, Tusaie & Dyer, 2004). Resilience generally refers to either (a) the recovery and/or (b) relatively steady maintenance of well-being following adversity (Smith, Tooley, Christopher, & Kay, 2010; Tusaie & Dyer, 2004). A recent review of the resilience literature suggests that the various conceptualizations are united by two core concepts: adversity and positive adaptation (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). Bonanno (2004), who contends that resilience is different than recovery, further delineates between resilience in the context of a time-limited event (i.e., minimal-impact resilience) versus chronic adversity (i.e., emergent resilience) where the outcomes of adaptation manifest over a longer periods of time. In terms of adversity itself, notions can range from

coping with daily hassles to potentially traumatic events like bereavement (Bonanno & Diminich, 2012; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013).

Resilience, despite its intuitive nature, is actually quite complex (Luthar, 2006). Resilience can refer to well-being outcomes, personality traits, and adjustment processes. In terms of outcomes, the literature generally shows that people bounce back from adversity and that resilience promotes well-being (Bonanno & Diminich, 2013; Bonanno, Westphal, & Mancini, 2011; Luthar, 2006; Tugade, Fredrickson, & Barrett, 2004; Yates & Masten, 2004). For instance, Masten's (2001) 'ordinary magic' hypothesis specifically posits that resilience is common rather than being limited to the chosen few, which suggests that resilience is the norm in the face of adversity. The impact of the other aspects of resilience (i.e., traits and adjustment processes) will be further discussed under well-being processes.

Post-traumatic growth refers to "positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances" (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014, p. 312). Post-traumatic growth, which includes related concepts such as stress-related growth and benefit-finding, has been conceptualized in a variety of ways which include finding meaning, life lessons, altered life narratives, and action-focused growth (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014). The most common view of post-traumatic growth centers around the growth-related benefits of adversity which include (a) improved relationships, (b) a sense of new possibilities, (c) a greater appreciation for life, (d) improved psychological strength, and (e) spiritual growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Post-traumatic growth research has been subject to both earlier and more recent critique (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014; Lechner, Tennen & Afflect, 2009; Tennen Afflect 1998, 2002). Recent criticisms of post-traumatic growth include (a) lack of consistent empirical findings (e.g., positive, negative, mixed, and null well-being outcomes); (b) methodological limitations of the research (e.g., cross-sectional rather than longitudinal, reliance on self-report rather than observation); and (c) questions as to whether post-traumatic growth is more of positive illusion and/or a cognitive coping mechanism, as opposed to representing actual, lasting changes in personality and/or behaviour (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014). Despite that, perceptions of meaningful growth have been shown to be positive predictors of adjustment (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014).

Resilience and post-traumatic growth are intuitively related vis-à-vis notions of positive adaptation but are also different (Levine, Laufer, Stein, Hamama-Raz, & Solomon, 2009). Here, both definitions and processes of well-being matter. If resilience refers to maintaining one's well-being in the face of adversity without significant negative distress (Bonanno, 2004), then post-traumatic growth differs in that negative well-being was experienced and acted as a catalyst for personal growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). For instance, it has been shown that individuals who exhibit post-traumatic growth are more likely to have experienced post-traumatic stress disorder (Levine et al., 2009). The recovery model of resilience often refers to bouncing back from adversity to previous levels whereas post-traumatic growth can sometimes imply improvements to pre-adversity well-being via use of terms like flourishing (Bonanno & Diminich, 2013; Ramos & Leal, 2013). Such conclusions point to the importance of considering both conceptualization and operationalization of well-being as we assess what aspects of well-being are measured over specific timeframes (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014; Tusaie & Dyer, 2004; Wortman, 2004). Regardless of debate, it can be said that both resilience and post-traumatic growth have been associated with positive well-being in the face of the adversity.

In summary, the well-being literature is richly infused with a variety of theories, conceptualizations, and constructs — both within and outside of positive psychology (Elkins, 2009; Jayawickreme et al., 2012; Waterman, 2013b). Hedonia and eudaimonia are most commonly associated with positive well-being, whereas negative well-being is most commonly associated with psychopathology (Elkins, 2009; Huta & Waterman, 2014; Wong, 2011). The mixed well-being notions of resilience and post-traumatic growth suggest that well-being likely exists along a continuum of responses and notions which, in turn, tend to vary across time, circumstances, individuals, and cultures. Given the importance of well-being and the newness of the field, a stance of openness to a variety of perspectives rather than rigidity is advocated. This approach, in contrast to theoretical divisiveness, would help to advance the relatively nascent field of positive psychology via a collective focus on identifying higher-order theoretical principles and processes to guide how we can attain/maintain well-being.

Moving forward, the field would benefit from more research that helps to integrate a variety of theoretical well-being perspectives (Delle Fave et al., 2011; Seligman, 2011; Wong, 2011), including the need to identify common theoretical principles. A second need concerns a lack of bottom-up, participant-defined notions of well-being since, until recently, “no study has

explicitly asked people what they mean by happiness” (Delle Fave & Bassi, 2009, p. 2005) and other lay notions of well-being (Delle Fave et al., 2011). This latter gap coincides with calls for more qualitative research in positive psychology which elaborates on the experience of well-being (Delle Fave et al., 2011). A bottom-up inductive approach would be a valuable complement to the field’s focus on top down ‘a priori’ theory. Using an open-ended approach further suggests the value of adopting a subjective-oriented, phenomenological lens rather than presuming the components of well-being for individuals. A final opportunity for development concerns critiques of the field as being too singularly focused on the ideals of positive human experience at the expense of ignoring the realities of the negative well-being (Wong, 2011). The discussion will now shift to processes of well-being.

### **Well-being Processes**

*Well-being process research*, while more limited, has focused on four main areas: (a) the overall changeability of well-being, as well as the specific role of (b) meaning-making, (c) resilience, and (d) positive emotions (e.g., Kashdan & Steger, 2011; Lopez & Snyder, 2009).

**Changeability of well-being.** The changeability of well-being has been a source of debate, with most of the research focused on subjective well-being (Lucas, 2007). Three reviews, citing both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, have refuted the idea that subjective well-being is unchangeable (Diener et al., 1999; Lent, 2004; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). In the past, well-being was seen as static (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Ideas that well-being is completely genetically predetermined (i.e., genetic set-point theory) and that one’s level of happiness eventually returns to its basic level as humans adapt to positive and negative circumstances (i.e., hedonic treadmill theory) have since been challenged (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). In addition, the life events of job loss, divorce, and disability often negatively impact well-being over the long term (Lucas, 2007).

The influence of personality on well-being positively links both hedonic (i.e., SWB) and eudaimonic well-being (i.e., PWB) to the personality traits of high extroversion, low neuroticism, and high conscientiousness (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002), whereas high agreeableness has been shown to be more related to SWB and open-mindedness more associated with PWB. Stones, Worobetz, and Brink, (2011) contextualize such findings by suggesting that well-being tends to remain stable for most individuals, but selected others can experience long-term changes in well-being. Other research suggests that linkages between personality and SWB

might be better explained by the (a) individual facets which make up the big five personality traits and (b) traits such as optimism and self-esteem, more than the big five traits themselves (Marrero-Quevedo & Carballeira-Abella, 2011). Interestingly, an examination of the actual facets of the personality inventory (i.e., the NEO-PI Personality Inventory, Costa & McCrae, 1992) shows some key facets are confounded with the actual outcome measures of well-being. For instance, the neuroticism facet includes both anxiety and depression which also represent a key well-being outcome. Similarly, positive emotions are both a facet of extraversion as well as a well-being outcome measure, which points to the overlap between processes and outcomes of well-being.

Notwithstanding the influence of personality (Stones et al., 2011), Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) suggest that happiness is proportionally influenced by three main factors: genetic set point (50%), life circumstances (10%), and intentional activity (40%), vis-à-vis changeable cognitive and behavioural factors. Examples of the latter include thinking positively and socializing more (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

***Meaning-making processes.*** The definition of meaning itself is both complex and richly debated (Martela & Steger, 2016; Steger, M. F., Shin, J. Y., Shim, Y., & Fitch-Martin, 2013; Wong, 2012b). Life meaning has been associated with three dimensions (Martela & Steger, 2016): (a) coherence (e.g., comprehensibility, making sense); (b) purpose (e.g., goals and direction in life); and (c) significance (e.g., the inherent value of one's life). Meaning also consists of cognitive, motivational, behavioural, and emotional components (Wong, 2012c). Park (2010) distinguished between two types of meaning. Meaning can include the macro notion of making sense of one's world (i.e., global meaning) as well as micro notion of making sense of new experiences and events (i.e., situational meaning), with the latter often informing the former.

Meaning-making refers to the process of creating meaning, via “psychological methods or adaptive efforts in the quest for meaning” (Wong, 2012a, p.xxxi). This process can include re-crafting meaning in the face of interruptions in meaning (Park, 2010). Meaning-making processes are shown to be complex (Davis, Wortman, Lehman, & Silver, 2000; Park, 2010; Steger, 2012, Steger et al., 2013; Wong, 2012b). Meaning-making research has often focused on meaning-making in the context of stressful life events like loss and trauma, which includes Park's (2010) recent comprehensive review.

Building from her model, Park (2010) identifies the following types of meaning-making processes: (a) automatic versus deliberate processes, (b) assimilation versus accommodation processes, (c) searching for comprehensibility versus significance, and (d) cognitive versus emotional processing. Examples of automatic processes include intrusive thoughts and unconscious avoidance, while deliberate processes can include meaning-focused coping, positive reappraisal of events, revisiting goals, and benefit-finding. Assimilation refers to the incorporation of new events into one's existing global meaning structures while accommodation represents the challenging task of adjusting one's global meaning due to changes in situational meaning. These notions are predicated on Janoff-Bulman's (1989) premise of meaning-making as being triggered by shattering of one's worldview and assumptions, which has not been fully supported in the empirical literature (Park, 2010). Searching for comprehensibility refers to making sense of why the event happened versus significance which explores the question of 'For what broader purpose?' (Park, 2010). Finally, different researchers have stressed cognitive versus emotional processing, with suggestions that this is a matter of emphasis given the integrated nature of cognitive-emotional processing (Park, 2010).

Other notions of meaning-making include Wong's (2012b) dual systems model which is predicated on three key tenants. First, he stresses the influence of both positive and negative conditions as well as outcomes, with the positive as well as negative aspects naturally co-existing. Secondly, meaning-making is influenced by both individual differences/resources as well as cultural/contextual models which naturally interact. Finally, meaning-making includes the bi-directional influences of both approach motives for meaning-making (e.g., positive affect, striving for goals, intrinsic motivators, behavioural rewards) as well as avoidance factors (e.g., negative affect, threats, discomfort). He also postulates that meaning-making includes both active processes (*vis-à-vis* the stimulus of approach versus avoidance motives), as well as the default neutral system of passive monitoring plus effortful mindful attention. Finally, other notions of meaning-making include existential contentions that meaning is best discovered not sought (Frankl, 1959; Yalom, 1980), narrative processes of meaning-making (McAdams, 2012; Neimeyer, Burke, Mackay, & van Dyke Stringer, 2010), and the social construction of meaning-making (Polkinghorne, 2005).

The literature differentiates between the process of meaning-making versus the meaning made, which centers on the distinction between the presence of meaning versus the search for

meaning (Steger, 2012; Steger et al., 2013; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). The outcomes of meaning-making in the context of meaning disruption include: (a) a sense of having made sense of events, (b) acceptance, (c) re-attributions regarding the cause and/or meaning of an event, (d) perceptions of growth or positive life changes, (e) changing one's identity and/or re-integrating the event into one's identity, (f) changed global beliefs/goals, and (g) restored or changed meaning in life (Park, 2010).

Finally, it is important to consider the impact of the process of meaning-making itself on well-being. Despite vast bodies of research, definitive conclusions based on empirical research are challenging given variations such as different definitions/operationalized notions of meaning, and lack of prospective longitudinal studies (Park, 2010). There is strong evidence for (a) the near-universality of meaning-making in the face of negative life events, (b) disruptions in meaning being associated with distress, and (c) the idea that both the quality and quantity of meaning-making matters for well-being (Park, 2010). Well-being is also associated with outcomes of meaning processes, such that those who search for meaning and fail to find it tend to fare worse than both: (a) those who search for meaning and find it and (b) those who never search for meaning (Bonanno, Papa, Lalande, Zhang, & Noll, 2005; Davis et al., 2000; Park, 2010; Wortman, 2004). The aforementioned findings concur with Frankl's (1959) view that meaning is spontaneously discovered rather than something that can be actively sought and found. King and Hicks (2009) suggest that positive and negative events each trigger different meaning-making processes. Negative events tend to trigger an active process of searching for meaning. In the case of positive events, however, changes in meaning tend to be passively discovered rather than actively sought.

Overall, it is difficult to generalize regarding the impact of meaning-making on well-being due to contextual factors such as the situation and time frame (Park, 2010). For instance, repetitive search for meaning without resolution can lead to negative outcomes via rumination (Bonanno et al., 2005; Davis & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2009). However, well-being could potentially shift if the person decides to accept the situation (Davis & Morgan, 2008). Meaning-making, like life meaning, is both personalized and contextualized (Park, 2010; Wong, 2012a, 2012c).

**Resilience.** Luthar's (2006) analysis of five decades of resilience research has identified a key gap - our limited understanding of resilience processes. Previous resilience research has been typically descriptive and correlational (Luthar, 2006). The vast body of interdisciplinary

research is positivistic which limits our understanding to statistical correlation. Much of the resilience literature has focused on children and preventative psychosocial interventions like education and improved parenting. There has been limited research as to how to intervene once adversity strikes, particularly in adult populations. In general, the impact of resilience on well-being has been explained by two key factors: *protective factors and traits* that precede adversity and *dynamic processes* that occur in response to adversity (Luthar, 2006; Masten & Reed, 2005). These factors will now be further discussed.

*Protective factors and traits.* The resilience literature strongly emphasizes protective contextual factors (e.g., family and community) as well as individual factors (e.g., social skills) whereas positive psychology tends to focus mainly on the individual (Becker & Marecek, 2008; Bonanno, Romero, & Klein, 2015; Masten & Reed, 2005). Ungar's (2011) ecological perspective conceptualizes resilience as a contextual interaction between person and environment. He further argues that resilience is a cultural construct, which includes Westernized notions of individualism (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). In general, resilience has been positively associated with contextual factors (Yates & Masten, 2004) which include: (a) family (e.g., positive childhood attachments, stable home); (b) community (e.g., neighbourhood safety, religious affiliation); (c) socio-economic status; and (d) public policy (e.g., education, healthcare, housing). Social support is particularly critical, which includes having positive role models and peer relations for youth (Masten & Reed, 2005; Yates & Masten, 2004).

Individual traits have also been a cornerstone of resilience research (Bonanno & Diminich, 2013). Examples include ego resilience, which further includes characteristics such as optimism, curiosity, energy, resourcefulness, strength of character, flexibility to respond to environmental demands, and the ability to conceptualize problems (Block & Block, 1980 as cited in Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). Other traits cited in the literature include: (a) extraversion (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013), (b) low negative affectivity (Bonanno & Diminich, 2013), (c) high dispositional positive affect (Lee et al., 2013); (d) humour (Masten & Reed, 2005), and (e) having characteristics/skills valued by society such as talent (Masten & Reed, 2005). Also valued are cognitive skills/attitudes such as problem-solving skills (Yates & Masten), an internal locus of control (Luthar, 2006), and intelligence which includes practical and emotional intelligence (Luthar, 2006). Emotional and behavioural self-regulation skills are also specifically associated with resilience (Yates & Masten, 2004). Finally, resilience is also associated with having a

positive view of one's self which includes a positive sense of self-esteem, self-efficacy (Lee et al., 2013; Yates & Masen, 2004), and a tendency towards positive self-enhancements in the face of adversity (Bonanno & Diminich, 2013).

The ascribed importance of such traits varies in the literature. Bonanno and Diminich (2013) suggest that the influence of a resilient personality type is overstated and that resilience is actually a combination of many complex factors. Lee et al.'s (2013) recent meta-analysis of protective, risk, and demographics factors in resilience cites the relatively high impact of protective factors, in comparison to the medium effect of risk factors (e.g., anxiety, depression, stress), and demographic factors (i.e., gender and age). The protective factors that were most prevalent, in order of greatest positive impact, were: self-efficacy, positive affect, self-esteem, life satisfaction, optimism, and social support.

*Dynamic processes.* Fletcher and Sarkar's (2013) review of a wide range of resilience theories reports that many theories commonly describe resilience as a dynamic process which changes over time, as well as also being influenced by a wide range of factors (which are often population-specific). They also note that resilience overlaps with other psychological constructs, particularly coping. This review now discusses the following individual-oriented resilience processes: (a) *coping*, (b) *psychological flexibility*, (c) *hardiness*, (d) *impact of past stress*, and (e) *positive emotions* (to be discussed in the next section).

*Coping* is related to but distinct from resilience (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). Resilient people tend to cope well, yet their resilience is not simply a function of coping (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). Fletcher and Sarkar (2013) suggest that resilience is a broader construct which comes before the adverse event while coping comes after the event, such that resilience influences appraisals of adversity (e.g., threat versus challenge) which, in turn, informs coping responses. They also suggest that resilience is intrinsically positive while coping can have both positive and negative impacts.

In concurrence with the general coping literature (Kleinke, 2007), resilience is associated with the flexible application of coping styles tailored to the situation, rather than one type of coping being superior (Bonanno & Diminich, 2013). Resilience is also associated with situationally appropriate repressive coping which disengages from the stressor (Bonanno, 2004). Expressive flexibility, which refers to the ability to enhance or suppress emotions, is also an asset when dealing with adversity (Bonanno & Diminich, 2013). These findings point to the broader

notion of *psychological flexibility* (e.g., adaptability, being able to shift mindsets and behaviours) which has been associated with positive well-being in general (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010).

*Hardiness* has also been associated with positive adaptation, with positive effects being demonstrated from hardiness training (Maddi, 2002). Maddi (2002) refers to the three “C’s of hardiness: (a) challenge – appraising stressors as challenges rather than threats; (b) control – focusing on what you can influence rather than being passive; and (c) commitment – remaining involved not detached.

*The impact of past stress* on future resilience has had mixed findings in the research (Bonanno & Diminich, 2013). Past stress can often sensitize one to the effects of future stress, but it can also improve one’s ability to cope with future stresses (Bonanno & Diminich, 2013, Seery, Holman, & Silver, 2010). For instance, effects of childhood adversity can be mitigated by high-quality early childhood attachments which serve as a protective factor (Masten & Reed, 2005). Longitudinal well-being research has also highlighted the importance of recovery time between adverse events due to the effects of stress accumulation and resource depletion (Seery, Holman, & Silver, 2010). Quite significantly, Seery et al. (2010) also showed higher differential well-being for those who have experienced some lifetime adversity, in comparison to those who have experienced either no adversity or large amounts, which points to curvilinear dose effects such that adversity is positive until a certain point. Resilience has been strongly linked with positive emotions (Cohn, Fredrickson, Brown, Mikels, & Conway, 2009), which will now be discussed in the next section.

**Positive emotions.** Positive emotions such as love are a key process of positive psychology, with much of the empirical evidence centered on Fredrickson’s (2001) broaden and build theory of positive emotions. According to this theory, positive emotions tend to expand one’s awareness, and action/thought repertoires which, in turn, leads to increased creativity and problem-solving (i.e., broadening). This broadening also helps to build more resources, including social support since others are attracted to positive people (i.e., building). These broaden and build effects tend to lead to positive outcomes which generate more positive emotions, creating an upward spiral.

Positive emotions have been shown to undo the effects of negative emotions, and have also been linked with both meaning-making and resilience (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Tugade and Frederickson’s (2004) series of studies showed that positive emotion helped college

students rebound from laboratory-induced stressors, as demonstrated by decreased negative cardiovascular activation and more adaptive cognitive appraisals. Resilient people also leveraged positive emotions to find positive meaning when faced with negative circumstances (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

Another study of 86 college students showed that positive emotions served to predict gains in resilience over the course of a month (Cohn et al., 2009). Furthermore, gains in resilience were identified as the key process which mediated the beneficial effect of positive emotions on life satisfaction gains, which suggests that positive emotions are a central well-being process. Finally, data collected from 46 college students before and after the events of “September 11, 2001,” show that resilient people tend to leverage positive emotions in the midst of crisis (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003). Emotions such as gratitude, interest, and love were associated with less depression, as well as positive changes in life meaning. Overall, this body of work shows strong linkages between happiness, resilience, and life meaning via the process of positive emotions

Experimental research also suggests that positive emotion primes the experience of meaning in life. Specifically, the presence of positive emotion was more likely to lead to judgements of life as meaningful (i.e., mood as information about meaning), with this effect being strongest in the case of limited meaning in life (King & Hicks, 2012).

Finally, it is important to note the complexities of positive emotions, such that different emotions have been shown to each have specific effects on well-being (Algoe, Fredrickson, & Chow, 2011). Examples here include admiration, amusement, awe, compassion, gratitude, interest, moral elevation, joy, love, and pride. Furthermore, positive emotions do not act in isolation but instead interact with negative emotions (Algoe et al., 2011). It is also important to consider cultural notions of positive emotions, which have been shown to differ (Algoe et al., 2011). For instance, findings suggest that more Eastern-like positive emotions such as serenity may be more understated than Westernized emotions such as enthusiasm (Leu, Wang, & Koo, 2011).

In summary, well-being has been shown to be changeable – even in the context of negative life events (e.g., Luthar, 2006; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Wong, 2011). Knowledge of the exact processes, however, remains limited due to a focus on correlational and experimental research which often excludes longitudinal studies (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014; Kashdan &

Steger, 2011; Luthar, 2006; Park, 2010). The intertwined nature of meaning-making, resilience, and positive emotions are early candidates for further exploration (Cohn et al., 2009; Fredrickson et al., 2003; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). For the future, the field would benefit from more qualitative research in order to better understand the *how* and *why* of well-being (Delle Fave et al., 2011; Luthar, 2006). For instance, Luthar's (2006) analysis of five decades of resilience research suggested that more attention to process was critical in order to better inform interventions. The use of inductive, naturalistic research would be particularly valuable in order to help identify both process factors and their subsequent interactions. Discussion now shifts from a positive psychology-informed general overview of well-being to a review of the job loss-specific well-being literature.

### **Job Loss**

This review of the job loss research discusses (a) conceptualizations and theories of well-being following job loss, (b) the impact of job loss on well-being, (c) factors which help explain the relationship between job loss and well-being, and (d) typologies on differential responses to job loss.

#### **Conceptualizations and Theories of Well-being Following Job Loss**

According to McKee-Ryan et al.'s (2005) meta-analysis, psychological well-being in the context of job loss has been mainly studied via three lenses: (a) psychological mental health (e.g., depression, anxiety); (b) life satisfaction (e.g., quality of one's life); and (c) life domain satisfaction (e.g., family and marriage). In congruence with a negativity bias, mental illness was the most commonly adopted perspective (i.e., 77% of variable correlations), followed by that of subjective well-being. The literature has emphasized the study of the negatives of well-being (e.g., mental illness) over more positively-valenced notions such as life satisfaction (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Also job loss research has focused more on the outcome of re-employment over that of well-being (Gowan, 2014; Wanberg, 2012). Gowan's (2014) review of the involuntary job loss research identified two major foci: (a) theories related to the meaning of work (i.e., phase/stage theories and latent deprivation models), and (b) stress, appraisal, and coping models.

**Meaning of work theories.** The first set of meaning-related theories refers to the impact of the absence of work in an individual's life (Gowan, 2014). Phase/stage theories, which are akin to psychological models such as Kübler-Ross' (1969) model of death and dying, suggest

that individuals must move through stages such as shock, optimism at job search, anxiety and fatalism following the event of job loss (Borgen & Amundson, 1987; Fryer & Payne, 1986; Gowan, 2014). According to this lens, well-being is presumed to be a function of faster acceptance of unemployment which leads to faster movement through the stages.

The latent deprivation group of theories center on Jahoda's (1982) seminal work regarding her process-latent deprivation model (Gowan, 2014; Selenko, Batinic, & Paul, 2011). This qualitatively-derived and quantitatively-validated model argues that the impact of job loss on well-being is not simply due to the loss of the tangible benefits of financial income – the manifest benefits (Gowan, 2014; Janlert & Hammarström, 2009). Impacts also stem from the loss of the latent benefits of employment which include work as a source of (a) time structure, (b) activity, (c) status/identity, (d) collective purpose, and (e) social contact. This theory also predicts that shifting to non-work sources to fulfill such needs can help mitigate the negative effects of job loss on well-being (Gowan, 2014).

Jahoda's theory has been tested empirically in a number of studies, including Selenko et al.'s (2011) recent four-wave, two-year longitudinal study of 360 participants. The lower well-being of the unemployed was correlated with lack of financial benefits, diminished social contacts, and lack of time structure. Activity had a lesser effect while status was not a predictor. This study reconfirmed that unemployed people experience worse mental health than those who are employed or simply out of the workforce for other reasons. Waters and Muller's (2003) longitudinal unemployment study showed that financial deprivation and a lack of time structure led to psychological distress. Knabe, Rätzler, Schöb, and Weimann's (2010) day reconstruction study showed that having extra time to participate in valued non-work activities (e.g., leisure) helped to compensate for the negatives of unemployment. Janlert and Hammarström (2009) tested a number of theoretical explanations for the effect of job loss on both depression and mental health in their 14-year longitudinal study of job loss. Jahoda's (1982) model was shown to better predict depression than explanations related to stress effects, social support, and work involvement. The negative effects of Jahoda's latent deprivation model were similar to those related to lack of control. However, economic deprivation (e.g., financial factors) explained more variation in well-being than Jahoda's model.

Another model of interest is Warr's (1987) vitamin model which builds from Jahoda's model. This model posits that that even small deprivations (e.g., social contact) can, over time,

culminate in negative health effects just as a lack of vitamins can impair health (Gabriel et al., 2010). Warr (1987) specifically focuses on loss of positive benefits from work vis-à-vis (a) opportunity for control, (b) opportunity for skill use, (c) externally generated goals, (d) variety, (e) environmental clarity, (f) availability of money, (g) physical security, (h) opportunity for interpersonal contact, and (i) valued social position (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

The last major deprivation theory is Fryer's (1986, as cited in Waters & Strauss, 2016) agency restriction theory which stresses the strong role of financial deprivation in unemployment, which he purports to be underestimated given the emphasis on latent functions. This deprivation goes beyond direct financial needs, to include indirect deficiencies related to having to adapt one's lifestyle and the thwarting of striving for goals related to meaningful purpose due to financial limitations. Finally, Fryer's emphasis on the importance of financial deprivation concurs with Janlert and Hammarström's (2009) findings regarding the relative value of manifest versus latent benefits.

**Stress, appraisal, and coping models.** Job loss models related to stress, appraisal and coping have been strongly influenced by Lazarus and Folkman (1984)'s work related to stress and coping (Gowan, 2014). This approach has generally focused on the development and testing of quantitatively-grounded, empirical models rather than theories per se (Gowan, 2014). Many of these models lack explanatory power since different individuals tended to experience job loss differently, with heterogeneity being the norm rather than the exception (Fryer & Payne, 1986; Gowan, 2014; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

These models have generally focused on both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping models (Gowan, 2014; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Problem-focused coping generally refers to attempts to address the cause of stress, with job search being the most prominent conceptualization (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Emotion-focused coping includes attempts to deal with the symptoms of the stressor and managing one's emotional response to the stressor (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). This approach has been frequently conceptualized as distancing one's self from the stressor. Distancing has been operationalized in a number of ways, including distracting one's self with activity, seeking social support, trying not to think about what has happened, focusing on other aspects of life, and recalling that others have successfully coped with job loss (Gowan, Riordan, & Gatewood, 1999; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Solove, Fisher, & Kraiger, 2015). Three specific models will now be discussed.

First, Latack et al.'s (1995) integrative coping with job loss model focuses on the role of personal control and response to feedback. This systemic input-output model assumes that people modify their response to job loss based on inputs from the environment. The model emphasizes two key processes: cognitive appraisals and coping responses, both of which are posited to be dynamically interrelated. Cognitive appraisals include comparing the effects of job loss with one's goals and environmental feedback (e.g., economic, psychology, physiological, and social) and can lead to appraisals such as harm, loss, or threat. These cognitive appraisals then inform coping goals and strategies (e.g., control, escape, seeking social support) which, in turn, are influenced by one's perceptions of coping resources and coping self-efficacy. Finally, self-evaluations of one's coping efforts provide dynamic feedback which, in turn, impacts future cognitive appraisals.

Secondly, Leana and Feldman's (1990) study of individual's responses to job loss showed that responses were not uniform. Their work strikingly revealed a lack of consistent patterns regarding the impact of factors such as duration of unemployment, demographics, personality traits, coping strategies, and use of corporate support. Overall, the greatest impacts were seen with financial distress and one's attachment to the eliminated job. They further assert there is a need to consider both the outcomes of coping (e.g., getting a job) as well as the costs of coping (e.g., stress of job search).

Finally, Waters' (2000) CoPES model (i.e., coping, psychology and employment status) emphasizes the mutually interactive effects of (a) the stressors of unemployment (e.g., job search, relationship, financial, boredom), (b) cognitive appraisals, (c) coping efforts (i.e., problem and emotion-focused coping), (d) psychological status during unemployment, and (e) re-employment/employment status. Schmeer's (1993) work also stresses the widespread importance of negative cognitive processes related to (a) financial insecurity, (b) change in social status, and (c) re-employment changes. However, she suggests that different individuals experience these effects for different durations and that a lesser duration is associated with better well-being (Gowan, 2014).

In summary, job loss research has generally focused on studying well-being through the lens of mental health impacts (i.e., psychopathology), with lesser emphasis on positive notions of well-being like life satisfaction. Key theoretical explanations for the impact of job loss on well-being have centered around need deprivations following job loss, which include financial as well

as the latent benefits of employment such as time-structure and collective purpose as proposed by Jahoda (1982). Coping models have also been developed, and they have emphasized factors such as cognitive appraisals and coping approaches.

Looking ahead, there is an opportunity to enhance the study of job loss by applying a well-being perspective that goes beyond the lens of mental health to “explore a broader range of well-being variables” (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005, p. 66). Job loss research could also benefit from a more specialized and nuanced focus on well-being, which includes attention to factors such as sense-making in the wake of job loss as well as the need to better understand the broader experience of job loss (Gowan, 2014). Such topics will now be further explored in the subsequent discussion of the impact of job loss on well-being.

### **Impact of Job Loss on Well-being**

This section discusses both negative and positive aspects of job loss on well-being, with the former being more commonly reported in the literature (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

**Negative impacts.** The impact of job loss on well-being is typically negative, pervasive across many aspects of life, and may persist despite re-employment (Lucas, 2007; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009). For instance, longitudinal panel studies have shown that unemployment can lead to long-lasting and even permanent changes in life satisfaction which have extended beyond seven years (Lucas, 2007). McKee-Ryan et al.’s (2005) meta-analysis, which included both longitudinal and cross-sectional studies, showed the negative impact of unemployment on psychological and physical well-being. Psychologically-oriented effects included declines in both mental health ( $d = -.57$  cross sectional,  $d = -.38$  longitudinal), life satisfaction ( $d = -.48$  cross sectional), and marital and family satisfaction ( $d = -.21$ ). It is also important to note the effects on well-being were heterogeneous rather than universal (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005), which points to differential responses to job loss.

Mental health has been the most studied facet of well-being in the job loss research, accounting for over three quarters of variable correlations (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). The literature strongly demonstrates that job loss/unemployment does, on average, have a negative effect on mental health. Meta-analyses revealed that poor mental health is more likely to be a consequence rather than a cause of job loss; people are more likely, on average, to become depressed due to job loss than vice-versa (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009). Paul and Moser’s (2009) recent meta-analysis of 324 studies (27% longitudinal) showed that just over

a third of unemployed people experience mental health problems, which is double the rate of the general population (i.e., 35% vs. 16%). Poor mental health is not simply a selection effect. Controlling for pre-existing levels of mental health, Paul and Moser concluded that unemployment results in a medium-sized negative effect on mental health ( $d = -.54$ ). McKee-Ryan et al. (2005) were more cautious in their interpretations (due to the inclusion of cross-sectional studies), but still concluded “results are suggestive that unemployment has, on the average, a negative effect on mental-health” (p. 57). Reported negative mental health effects include depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic symptoms (Paul & Moser, 2009), as well as increased substance use (Blau, Petrucci, & McClendon, 2013; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Price, Choi, & Vinokur, 2002). Notwithstanding the need for more information on the underlying mechanisms of such processes, job loss has also been linked with completed suicides as well as para-suicidal/self-injurious behaviour (Wanberg, 2012).

Job loss, as expected, can negatively impact both career and finances. Negative career impacts can include underemployment in poorer quality, lower paying jobs (Gangl, 2006; Gowan, 2014; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005); increased vulnerability to future job loss (Eliason & Storrie, 2009; Mooi-Reçi, 2008); and even early exit from the workforce (Gabriel, Grey & Goregaokar, 2010). Negative financial effects include increased financial stress and diminished financial resources (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Weller, 2012). Economists specifically cite the scarring effects of job loss due to permanent reductions in both post-employment wages and lifetime earnings (Eliason & Storrie, 2006; Gangl, 2006).

Unemployment has been associated with negative well-being across other aspects of life. Reduced self-esteem and sense of identity are common with job loss (Fryer & Payne, 1986; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009; Price, Friedland, & Vinokur, 1998). Negative effects on families and relationships such as marital strain have also been reported (Brewington, Nassar-McMillan, Flowers, & Furr, 2004; DeFrank & Ivancevich, 1986; Marinescu, 2015; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Price et al., 2002; Price et al., 1998). Unemployment has also been associated with declines in physical health (DeFrank & Ivancevich, 1986; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Price et al., 2002; Wanberg, 2012). McKee-Ryan et al.’s (2005) analysis of cross-sectional studies identified negative effects on both (a) objective physical health ( $d = -.89$  cross-sectional) as well as (b) subjective physical health ( $d = -.45$  cross-sectional,  $d = -.36$  longitudinal). Examples of health effects include increased incidence of hypertension, arthritis, diabetes, aches,

and pains (Wanberg, 2012). Increases in mortality have also been noted (Wanberg, 2012), with variable effects which depend on factors such as boom and bust cycles of employment (Noelke & Beckfield, 2014). Overall, the literature suggests both causal and selection effects, such that job loss leads to worsened health above and beyond the fact that individuals with poor physical health are more likely to lose their jobs (Wanberg, 2012).

**Positive impacts.** Job loss is not all negative. The positive dimensions of job loss, however, have been traditionally understudied (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Waters, Briscoe, and Hall's (2013) analysis of 475 job loss articles since 1980 showed an overwhelming strong focus on negative versus positive outcomes (i.e., a 33:1 ratio), as they stressed the need to study positive deviance.

Some of the positives of job loss resemble "blessings in disguise" which may only become apparent over time (Zikic & Richardson, 2007, p. 63). Perceptions of growth following job loss have been one of the key overarching benefits cited in the literature (Waters et al., 2013; Waters & Strauss, 2016; Zikic & Richardson, 2007). For instance, job loss also provided the impetus for growth and self-exploration by forcing displaced workers out of both their comfort zones and daily routines (Zikic & Richardson, 2007). Having time to reflect due to not working also served to enhance growth (Zikic & Richardson, 2007). Waters and Straus' (2016) qualitative investigation of post-traumatic growth in unemployed workers showed that all participants reported growth following job loss. Participants cited growth on personal, professional, and relational dimensions (e.g., making choices for one's happiness, career growth, and improved relationships). Other examples here included openness to new experiences, a greater sense of personal strength, being less concerned about pleasing others/others' opinions, discovering one's strengths, and spiritual development.

The career benefits associated with job loss include increased career exploration and growth which, in turn, can inspire future career choices (Waters & Strauss, 2016; Zikic & Richardson, 2007). Such benefits are reported to have emanated from enhanced self-awareness/knowledge of one's strengths, forced change, and increased time to reflect on oneself as well as one's environments (Waters & Strauss, 2016; Zikic & Richardson, 2007). Although job loss was generally seen as a defeat rather than an opportunity, job loss was sometimes seen as an opportunity to pursue new opportunities and challenges, rediscover one's self, and "be released from the working world" in the case of negative employment experiences (Forret,

Sullivan, & Mainiero, 2010, p. 653). Finally, participants have reported the paradoxical benefits of feeling ownership for one's career while at the same time feeling more vulnerable (Waters & Strauss, 2016).

Relationship benefits from job loss included improved personal and family relationships (Forret et al., 2010; Waters & Strauss, 2016; Zikic & Richardson, 2007). These benefits stemmed from factors such as increased gratitude for one's relationships (Waters & Strauss, 2016) and having more time to spend with others (Zikic & Richardson, 2007). For instance, women with children were most likely to perceive job loss as an opportunity rather than a defeat, with "having a positive impact on my children and family during that time" being endorsed as one measure of perceived opportunity (Forret et al., 2010, p. 653).

Finally, other perceived benefits of job loss have included (a) increased possibilities for one's life (Waters & Strauss, 2016); (b) increased time freedom/opportunities for leisure (Knabe et al., 2010); (c) engagement in learning (Niessen, 2006); (d) increased compassion for others who have lost their jobs (Waters & Strauss, 2016); and (e) gains in self-identity which co-exist with losses (Waters & Strauss, 2016). Finally it should be noted that the positives of job loss typically co-exist with negatives aspects such as (a) perceptions of distress (Waters & Strauss, 2016), (b) negative emotions such as anger and grief (Gabriel et al., 2010), and (c) job loss as being more of a defeat than opportunity (Forret et al., 2010). Such findings suggests a non-dualistic "both/and" stance where positives and negatives co-exist (Wong, 2011).

In summary, job loss is clearly a major life event which has been shown to impact overall mental health and life satisfaction, as well having far-reaching impacts on many domains of life (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Overall, research shows the impact of job loss on well-being to be primarily negative (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009). However, the positive aspects of job loss have been understudied in the literature (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). The positive aspects of job loss likely co-exist with the negatives (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Waters & Strauss, 2016; Zikic & Richardson, 2007). Ironically, this negativity bias in the job loss literature exists in direct contrast to the positivity bias in the positive psychology literature (Wong, 2011). Moving forward, there is an opportunity to consider both perspectives in the job loss and positive psychology fields (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Wong, 2011). Discussion will now shift to specific factors that explain the relationship between well-being and job loss.

## Factors That Help to Explain the Relationship between Job Loss and Well-being

This section reviews both external and internal factors which help to explain the relationship between job loss and well-being. External factors refer to factors which primarily reside outside of the domain of the individual, while internal factor refers to factors that tend to reside within the individual (Blustein et al., 2013). These factors naturally overlap (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

**External factors.** Higher well-being following job loss is associated with three key external factors: (a) *re-employment outcomes*; (b) *economic and sociopolitical factors*; and (c) *social support/resources* (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009). This review will focus on the first factor, with a briefer discussion of the others.

*Re-employment outcomes.* Job loss research has focused strongly on the outcome of re-employment as the key area of interest, with well-being itself being a secondary consideration (Gowan, 2014; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Wanberg, 2012). Re-employment following job loss has been associated with improvements in mental health (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009), including the restoration of pre job-loss well-being (Gowan, 2014). Paul and Moser (2009) noted that the reduction of distress upon re-employment ( $d = .25$ ) was slightly greater than the increased distress that came with job loss ( $d = -0.19$ ). The well-being effect of re-employment was even stronger in McKee-Ryan et al.'s (2005) analysis of longitudinal studies ( $d = -.89$ ). Re-employment was also shown to more strongly impact life satisfaction over mental health, which must be cautiously interpreted due to smaller sample sizes (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Conversely, other research shows that overall life satisfaction is diminished by the event of job loss, and that well-being is not fully recovered upon re-employment (Lucas, 2007).

Re-employment success has been linked to a host of both external and internal factors. These factors include (a) the job market, (b) the job seeker's skills, (c) job search intensity and quality, (d) social capital/networks, (e) self-esteem, (f) job search self-efficacy, (g) personality factors, (h) the financial need to work, (i) situational constraints (e.g., illness, disability), and (j) discrimination (Wanberg, 2012). Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth (2004) further stress the importance of employability. This specific construct contains three components (Gowan, 2014): (a) career identity (e.g., knowing oneself and goals); (b) personal adaptability (e.g., adjusting to changing situations, optimism, openness to learn, flexibility, agency, self-efficacy); and (c) social

and human capital (e.g., information opportunities, age education, work experiences, occupational knowledge, emotional intelligence, and cognitive ability).

However, a closer analysis of job loss research shows that well-being is not simply a matter of re-employment. The quality of re-employment also matters (Gowan, 2014; McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). Such findings go counter to Jahoda's theory which asserts "even a bad job is better than no job" (Gowan, 2014, p. 260). Satisfactory re-employment is crucial for well-being (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). Perceived underemployment is particularly negative (Feldman, 1996; Gowan, 2014; McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011; Wanberg, 2012).

Underemployment has been defined in a number of ways, which can include notions such as low skill utilization and being underpaid, overeducated, and overqualified (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). The underemployment literature suggests that subjective perceptions of underemployment are more impactful than objective factors such as diminished status or pay (Gowan, 2014). The level of skill utilization is also important (Gowan, 2014).

The process of re-employment, vis-à-vis the impact of job search itself, also impacts well-being. Overall, job search was shown to be negative for mental health ( $d = -.11$ ) but not life satisfaction (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). This finding is important given that job search is a major factor predicting re-employment which, in turn, predicts well-being (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Wanberg, 2012). Yet, it is difficult to get re-employed without job search – hence the well-being/job-search conundrum. Job search efforts and intensity differs among individuals due to factors such as personality (e.g., meta-cognitive planning skills) and the self-regulation of effort, emotions, and attention (Wanberg, 2012).

Finally, two other aspects of re-employment outcomes are relevant: job loss duration and multiple job losses. Both of these factors respectively refer to the duration of unemployment as well as re-employment. The impact of job loss duration on well-being is less definitive. McKee-Ryan et al. (2005) showed declines in well-being over time (particularly  $> 6$  months), while Paul and Moser (2009) identified curvilinear effects where the decline in well-being stabilized at year two but further declined with long-term unemployment. Multiple job losses have been associated with mixed impacts on well-being, with both adaptation and sensitization effects seen in longitudinal research (Booker & Sacker, 2012; Luhmann & Eid, 2009). The well-being effects depend on whether one considers mental health versus life satisfaction. Adaptation was seen in the case of mental health effects where multiple job loss was associated with lessened

psychological distress (Booker & Sacker, 2012). When life satisfaction was considered, however, a sensitization effect was observed such that repeated job loss led to a worsening of life satisfaction during both times of unemployment and re-employment (Luhmann & Eid, 2009).

*Economic and sociopolitical factors.* The second external factor typically referred to negative well-being in the face of job loss and was specifically associated with less developed economies, unequal income distribution, factory closings leading to mass layoffs, and blue collar occupations (Paul & Moser, 2009). There is a lack of clear agreement about the impacts of social protection systems (e.g., unemployment insurance), with research by Paul and Moser (2009) showing mitigating effects and McKee-Ryan et al. (2005) showing insignificant effects for both social protection systems as well as the national level of unemployment.

Another factor included the actions of employers, both those who had laid off employees (e.g., terminating employers) as well as potential hiring employers during job search. Blustein et al., (2013) reported that well-being was affected by how the layoff was done by the employer, with anticipated layoffs being less negative. Furthermore, some individuals reported being more ready to start a job search upon receiving notice due to having grieved their loss. Employer-paid outplacement support for job search was also positive for well-being by enhancing both the career exploration and sense-making process (Zikic-Richardson, 2007). Negative well-being has also been associated with perceived discrimination due to immigration or health status (Blustein, et al., 2013). Such conditions were often experienced as both despair and frustration, with both the number and degree of severity of barriers being key factors (Blustein et al., 2013). Zikic and Richardson's (2007) qualitative work also identified the importance of both resources and barriers in the process of career exploration, which included factors such as market demand for one's existing skills and education/training barriers. (They also cited the positive role of proactive serendipity via planned happenstance in the job loss experience.)

*Social support/resources.* Finally, the presence of social support/resources was associated with more positive well-being following job loss (Blustein et al., 2013; Gush, Scott, & Laurie, 2015; Huffman, Culbertson, Wayment, & Irving, 2015; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). The literature has tended to focus on the role of instrumental support (e.g., information, job leads, and financial support) over emotional and general relational interaction. Often synonymous with social capital, instrumental support has been primarily associated with positive benefits related to job search and re-employment (Blustein et al., 2013; Houssemand, Pignault, & Meyers, 2014;

Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001; Ślebarska, Moser, & Gunnesch-Luca, 2009; Solove et al., 2015; Wanberg, 2012). Overall, McKee-Ryan et al. (2005) concluded that social support (i.e., both instrumental and emotional) was associated with well-being following job loss, with stronger effects seen for life satisfaction ( $r = .43$ ) versus mental health ( $r = .26$ ). Conversely, perceived social undermining (e.g., damage to one's reputation via others' gossiping) was negative for well-being (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Blustein et al. (2013) also reported negative impacts from lack of perceived social support.

Relational support emerged as one of the key factors in the qualitative experience of unemployment (Blustein et al., 2013). Research also shows the role of a variety of social support resources, with family, friends, and wider support networks playing different roles during unemployment (Gush et al., 2015). Family support included financial support and helping job seekers to find a new direction in life which includes drawing from knowledge of job seeker's personality and preferences. Friends also used their knowledge of the job seeker to provide information for job search/career exploration. They were regarded as providing a general atmosphere of trust (Gush et al., 2015).

The relationship between social support and well-being is not simple (Huffman et al., 2015; Ślebarska et al., 2009). For instance, the perceived adequacy of social support was a positive factor in that it led to increased self-esteem for job seekers with low self-esteem (Ślebarska et al., 2009). Conversely, social support could be perceived as a threat to self-esteem for those with higher base levels of self-esteem (Ślebarska et al., 2009). The perceived adequacy of support, not just its mere presence, was also important. The effects of family support on psychological well-being helped to compensate for effects of latent deprivations of unemployment (e.g., collective purpose, time structure), but only in the case of financial strain. Finally, Paul and Moser (2009) concluded that marital status had neutral effects on mental health which led them to speculate that this null finding was related to variations in the quality of the relationship (Paul & Moser, 2009). As Jahoda's (1982) theory predicts, social contact in general can be important for well-being as a means of compensating for the lack of social contact via work (Waters & Strauss, 2016)

**Internal factors.** Understanding the internal factors which explain the relationship between job loss and well-being is critical. The impact of job loss on well-being is not homogeneous, with individuals demonstrating differential responses to job loss (Gowan, 2014;

McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009; Wanberg, 2012). McKee-Ryan et al.'s (2005) meta-analysis identified five specific individual factors which explain the impact of job loss on well-being. These factors, listed in order of greatest impact, consisted of: (a) *work role centrality*, (b) *coping resources* (both internal and external), (c) *cognitive appraisals*, (d) *coping strategies*, and (e) *human capital and demographics*.

*Work role centrality.* Work role centrality, which refers to the importance of work to one's sense of self, was shown to negatively impact both mental health and life satisfaction. It was speculated that such impacts were related to the role of work as a source of identity, meaning, and fulfillment.

*Coping resources.* Coping resources were the second most prominent factor, with internal-focused resources consisting of three subcomponents: (a) personal core-self evaluations, (b) financial resources, and (c) time structure. Core-self evaluations were the most important subcomponent in terms of mental health and the third most prominent predictor of life satisfaction. The positive impacts of core self-evaluations centered on the beneficial effects of favourable self-judgements related to self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability.

In terms of other coping resources, financial strain and time structure impacted both mental health and life satisfaction, while the level of one's financial resources had the greatest effects on life satisfaction. Time structure referred to the positive effects of non-work sources of routine, structure, and activity on well-being, which are presumed to fill the void created by job loss. The negative effect of financial resources has been broadly cited in the literature (e.g., Blustein et al., 2013; Fryer & Payne, 1986; Price et al., 2002; Warr, 1987; Waters & Muller, 2003). The importance of time structure concurs with Jahoda's theory (1982) and has also been validated by subsequent research (e.g., Janlert & Hammarström, 2009; Kanabe et al., 2010; Selenko et al., 2011; Waters & Muller, 2003; Waters & Strauss, 2016). Financial resources and time structure have been shown to interact, with time structure mediating the relationship between financial resources and psychological distress (Waters & Muller, 2003).

*Cognitive appraisals.* Cognitive appraisals were also significant for well-being and they produced a stronger effect on life satisfaction than mental health (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Three major type of cognitive appraisals were identified: (a) degree to which job loss is appraised as stress, (b) re-employment expectations, and (c) attributions regarding the cause of

job loss which included internal attributions (e.g., blaming one's self for job loss) versus external attributions (e.g., downturn in the economy). Stress appraisals and re-employment expectations had the strongest impacts on well-being, whereas casual attributions had smaller impacts (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Participant explanations for unemployment for 'the why of job loss' had different effects on the experience of unemployment (Blustein et al., 2013). External focused attributions had mixed effects. For example, attributing job loss to a change in the job market may have resulted in less self-blame (i.e., a positive effect), but also influenced the perception that it was more difficult to find a new job (i.e., a negative effect). Conversely, internal attributions such as seeing one's self as deficient were associated with the negatives of personalizing job loss as well as the positive sense that more training and experience could improve job prospects. Given that each attribution style created both positive and negative impacts on well-being in one qualitative study, it is possible that the overall effect of attribution styles on well-being might be more moderate due to mixed effects on well-being which cancel each other out.

*Coping strategies.* The coping strategies of problem-focused coping (including job search) and emotion-focused coping have been prominently featured in the literature (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Overall, coping strategies in general produced smaller, yet significant effects for mental health. Job searching, as previously-mentioned, was associated with negative well-being. Interestingly, problem-focused coping had slightly stronger positive effects than emotion-focused coping on mental health but had a small negative effect on life satisfaction in comparison to emotion-focused coping. In terms of re-employment outcomes, mixed effects have been seen, with both problem-focused coping (e.g., Solove et al., 2015) and emotion-focused coping each being positively related to re-employment (e.g., Gowan et al., 1999). Such findings again highlight the importance of distinguishing between well-being versus re-employment outcomes, with job search being negatively associated with well-being and yet positively linked to re-employment (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

Coping strategies were also influenced by one's coping resources. The use of problem-focused coping was predicted by both self-esteem and social support, with problem-focused coping mediating the effect of these factors on re-employment outcomes (Solove et al., 2015). Interesting effects occurred in the case of financial factors (Solove et al., 2015). Perceived financial urgency predicted problem-focused coping, whereas fewer financial resources predicted

use of emotion-focused coping (Solove et al., 2015). The use of the emotion-focused strategies of distancing and involvement in non-work activities was positively associated with decreased distress (Gowan et al., 1999). Regardless of approach, Gowan (2014) stresses the broader role of both context and coping, particularly given the individualized, heterogeneous approach to job loss (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Wanberg, 2012).

Waters' (2000) critique of the coping literature argues that coping (a) represents a dynamic response (as opposed to simply being a trait), (b) is shaped by cognitive appraisals, and (c) is bi-directionally shaped/linked with the environmental context. She further cites the need to separate out the process of coping from its outcomes. Gabriel et al. (2010) argue against purely rational approaches. Their narrative-focused lens suggests that a coping story can help make sense of job loss and one's resulting sense of identity, thus providing a sense of meaning-making and consolation. They further state "Coping, we argue, is not rational purposeful behavior aimed at returning a person to equilibrium. In dealing with a painful event, such as job loss, people try to make sense by constructing a story that 'emplots' the event, offers consolidation and sustains their sense of selfhood" (Gabriel et al., 2010, p. 1688). McKee-Ryan et al. (2005) conclude with a call for more research to "identify new coping strategies, understand why they may be differentially helpful and why individuals having the same circumstances during job loss may approach situations differently" (p. 69).

*Human capital and demographics.* Both *human capital* (e.g., education, skills) and *demographics* (e.g., gender, age) have been shown to have relatively small effects on well-being relative to the aforementioned factors (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). In the case of gender and age, contradictory and inconclusive effects have been noted, such as determining which gender fares worse with job loss (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009). Blue collar workers have been shown to fare worse than white collar workers (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009).

*Other factors.* Finally, positive outcomes in the face of job loss have been linked to other factors not specified by McKee-Ryan et al. (2005). Having a protean career orientation, which is defined as being self-directed and values-driven, was associated with increased self-esteem as well as job search activity and re-employment (Waters et al., 2013). Resilience, which was characterized by self-reliance, independence, determination, resourcefulness, and perseverance, has also been linked to decreased incidence of depression despite extended periods of job

searching (Moorhouse & Caltabiano, 2007). Other factors such as optimism have also been identified in the literature (e.g., Wanberg & Marchese, 1994) but in the context of broader typologies which will now be further discussed.

In summary, the literature cites a broad array of both internal and external factors which help to explain the relationship between job loss and well-being. Not surprisingly, the re-employment context dominated external factors. This context also included the broad systemic factors such as the economic and sociopolitical context, as well as the more distal contribution of social support/resources. Internal factors were also important, and included the importance of work, coping resources/strategies, and cognitive appraisals. Human capital and demographics played a smaller role.

Understanding the real-world integration of these factors would be valuable for the field of job loss, with particular attention to discussing well-being outside of a mental illness lens (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). McKee-Ryan et al. (2015) cite the requirement for a better understanding of process, which includes the need for “process-oriented empirical studies” (p. 70). Attention to contextual factors is also critical (Blustein et al., 2013). Additionally, there is a particular need to develop “new models that explore the processes and mechanisms by which individuals manage a job loss experience” (Gowan, 2014, p. 265). There is also a particular need to understand how the experience of job loss differs by individual (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005), which brings us to the subsequent discussion of typologies of responses to job loss.

### **Typologies of Responses to Job Loss**

Typology refers to the categorization of displaced workers into different groups which reflect differing individualized responses to job loss. This heterogeneity of well-being outcomes has been historically shown in the literature, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches (e.g., Gowan, 2014; Jahoda, Lazarsfeld, & Zeisel, 1933/1972 as cited in Waters, 2000; Jones, 1989; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). This section reviews seven studies of typologies from the literature and concludes with a hypothesized synthesis of these types of responses to job loss.

Jahoda et al.’s (1933/1972) ethnographic research identified four types of family-level responses to job loss: (a) ‘unbroken’, (b) ‘resigned’, (c) ‘in despair’, and (d) ‘apathetic’. The first two categories of unbroken and resigned represent generally positive well-being which was characterized by good functioning (e.g., active with childcare, household chores, and job search). These two groups were distinguished by their degree of positivity as well as future orientation,

with the ‘unbroken’ group experiencing more vitality and future-orientation and the ‘resigned’ group being resigned to the notion of unemployment and planning less for the future. Categories three and four experienced more negative well-being and had limited-to-no job search activity. The ‘in-despair’ group functioned better on the domestic front, while the ‘apathetic’ group was almost completely disengaged on all life fronts and often had substance use issues.

Starrin and Larsson’s (1987) grounded theory study of 36 unemployed women similarly made reference to various levels of acceptance, demoralization, and future orientation. Participants were classified according to a two-by-two matrix based on their (a) focus on non-work activities versus wanting to be engaged in wage labour, as well as (b) active or passive commitment to pursuing either work (via job search) and non-work focused activities. The four styles were (a) ‘giving up’ (i.e., a negative, passive approach towards non-work and employment-seeking efforts); (b) ‘re-focusing’ (i.e., positively focused on non-work activities); (c) ‘clenching’ to previous life status (i.e., passive regarding non-work activities but anxiously committed to working), and (d) being ‘ambivalent’ (i.e., doing well vis-à-vis being committed to both non-work and employment)<sup>3</sup>.

Borgen and Amundson (1987) studied the experiences of individuals who were unemployed. Their phenomenological study of 29 participants revealed three models of response: (a) roller coaster, (b) seeing job loss as an opportunity to grow, and (c) frustrated and disengaged from job search. The authors referred to a range of emotions associated with joblessness as a roller coaster, where participants vacillated between enthusiasm/optimism (as they explored new opportunities) to feeling worthless, discouraged and isolated (due to a lack of job search progress). The latter led them to turn to friends and family for support and re-moralization, with re-moralization becoming increasing harder with each cycle. This two part-model includes the process of grieving based on Kubler-Ross’ (1969) model of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, as well as a job search burnout stage model of enthusiasm, stagnation, frustration, and apathy. The ‘opportunity seekers’ were primarily women with less financial pressure who used time to explore new options which gradually declined into feelings of boredom, mild depression, and worthlessness as the duration of unemployment increased. The ‘frustrated and disengaged’ group were young, less educated

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<sup>3</sup> These findings should be contextually interpreted due to references such as choosing to be a housewife versus paid work. This 1987 study may represent a different normative era of female workforce participation in some cultures.

workers who were frustrated with not finding employment easily and focused on leisure over job search in an adolescent-like fashion.

Jones' (1989) 15 week, mixed-methods longitudinal study (i.e., 153 surveys, 8 interviews) explored psychological distress/depression in displaced workers. The workers were categorized into two main types based on low versus high stress which, in turn, were divided into separate subtypes. The low-stress adaptation group included: (a) 'the unaffected' (e.g., positive well-being, actively seeking work, motivated, optimistic, self-confident, without financial strain); (b) 'blessing in disguise' (e.g., negative event yet seeing positives due to be feeling liberated from negative work situation and the opportunity for career change), and (c) 'cyclers' (e.g., used to unemployment in cyclical industries, social contact with others in the same situation, occupied with non-work activities, drawing from planned financial reserves). The high stress adaptation type included (a) 'anxious but coping' (i.e., fearful, functional despite stress, low self-esteem, identity via work, missing of routine, social withdrawal, activity being a buffer to job loss), and (b) 'dysfunctional adaptations' (i.e., clinically depressed, bitter, hopeless, pessimistic regarding employment, older workers/younger unskilled workers, substance use issues). The dysfunctional adaptations group was further split between those who displayed frantic job searching versus a sense of apathy and disengagement,

Wanberg and Marchese (1994) used a variety of scales to conduct a quantitative cluster analysis of 247 unemployed workers which revealed four categories which varied in terms of distress, coping and functioning. The categories were: (a) 'optimistic but coping', (b) 'confident but concerned', (c) 'unconcerned and indifferent group', and (d) 'distressed'. The 'optimistic but coping' cluster was generally positive and functioned well. They were also confident, time structured, had low negativity, good mental and physical health and had fewer financial concerns. The next two groups, experienced medium well-being and functioning. The 'confident but concerned' cohort was more engaged with getting back to work, had stronger financial concerns, experienced medium mental health and physical symptoms, and had more negativity due to unemployment. In contrast, the 'unconcerned and indifferent group' was less committed to re-employment, had lower confidence, and more financial concerns. Finally, the 'distressed' group was committed to re-employment, yet experienced negative mental health/physical symptoms, and low time structure.

Gabriel et al.'s (2010) narrative-informed study of 12 newly unemployed managers over 50 revealed predominantly negative experiences of job loss which included intense negative emotionality, inflexibility/rigidity, job loss as a major life landmark, re-examination of the past, individualistic focus on self/work, and concerns that their experience/expertise was not valued by the labour market. The authors identified three groups which are distinguishable based degree of acceptance, closure, and emotionality. The three narratives of job loss are (a) 'temporary career disruption', (b) 'the end of career', and (c) 'prompt for moratorium'. 'Temporary career disruption' was categorized by lack of closure regarding job loss and by unrealistic denial/repression (e.g., job loss being a setback from which one could easily recover). 'The end of career' was experienced as a traumatic sense of resignation and cognitive closure, yet was also an emotionally open wound. Finally 'prompt for moratorium' included an attitude of seeing some positives and making the best of it. Participants were open to returning to work but also looked to other options which included self-employment and involvement in non-work activities. The lack of closure was not distressing since job loss was attributed to external factors rather than blaming oneself.

A follow up study on a subset of these participants two years later showed three types of responses: (a) feverish search for a new job, (b) resigned downshifting to a lower level job, and (c) positive reinvention through different work or non-work activities (Gabriel, Gray, & Goregaokar, 2013). Once again, there were commonalities in the experience which included emotional swings and a sense of trauma that remained despite the passing of time and re-employment. Despite similar circumstances, different responses were noted. Such variations again strengthen the case for differential responses to job loss.

Houssemand et al. (2014) used quantitative cluster analysis to classify 384 newly-unemployed workers based on an extensive number of factors which predict re-employment. Five key categories were identified (a) 'integrated', (b) 'willing', (c) 'outsider', (d) 'anxious' and (e) 'dispossessed'. The 'integrated' group displayed good well-being vis-à-vis low psychological distress/stress/depression, positive core self-evaluations/strong self-esteem/self-efficacy, and good social support/skills. They were also characterized by openness, extraversion, and conscientiousness, and being intelligent. The 'willing' group was committed to employment, conscientious, and had good self-efficacy but had lower social support and intelligence. The other three groups had more negative experiences of job loss: (a) 'outsiders' (i.e., lower

employment commitment and conscientiousness), (b) ‘anxious’ (e.g., depressed/stressed, low self-esteem/core self-evaluations, social anxiety with low social support, lack of perceived control, and lesser intelligence and openness), and (c) ‘dispossessed’ (e.g., higher depression/distress/stressed, low core evaluations/self-esteem, social anxiety with low social support and extraversion, low employment commitment, and avoidance coping).

Synthesizing these typologies, some commonalities emerge with respect to positive versus negative well-being, functioning, and engagement in both job search and life in general. Based on published article write-ups, the following well-being groups of *positive*, *mixed*, and *negative* experiences are hypothesized given this review’s interpretation of typologies depicted in the literature (see Table 2). Although further detailed analysis would naturally be required, this preliminary interpretation does help to synthesize common themes in the literature that can, in turn, inform further study.

Table 2

*Typologies of Job Loss*

<b>Well-being in the Face of Job Loss</b>	<b>Typologies Seen in the Literature</b>
<b><i>Positive/Steady Well-being &amp; Functioning</i></b>	
Functioning Very Well, Moving Forward	Unbroken Ambivalent Unaffected Optimistic but coping Integrated
Functioning Well, Re-focused	Refocusing Opportunity seekers Blessing in disguise Prompt for moratorium Positive re-invention
<b><i>Mixed Well-being &amp; Functioning</i></b>	
Distressed Yet Functioning	Resigned Roller coaster Anxious but coping Confident but concerned Resigned downshifting Willing
Denial and Avoidance	Unconcerned but indifferent Temporary career disruption Outsider
<b><i>Negative Well-being &amp; Functioning</i></b>	
Stressed, Anxious, and Panicking	In-despair Clenching Dysfunctional adaptations (half of group) Distressed Feverish search for a job Anxious
Apathetic Disengagement	Apathetic Giving up Frustrated/disengaged from job search Dysfunctional adaptations (half of group) End of career Dispossessed

*Note.* See main text for references.

Two levels of relatively *positive* experiences were noted. First, there was the highly positive, high functioning subgroup that went well beyond coping to include a sense of moving forward. This group consisted of: (a) ‘unbroken’ (Jahoda, 1933/1972), (b) ‘ambivalent’ (Starrin & Larsson, 1987), (c) ‘unaffected’ (Jones, 1989), (d) ‘optimistic but coping’ (Wanberg & Marchese, 1994), and (e) ‘integrated’ (Houssemand et al., 2014). There was a second group that also functioned well and was refocused as it shifted the emphasis from the job that was lost to refocus on new opportunities, activities, and/or new work. This subgroup consisted of: (a) ‘refocusing’ (Starrin & Larson, 1987), (b) ‘opportunity seekers’ (Borgen & Amundson, 1987), (c) ‘blessing in disguise’ (Jones, 1989), (d) ‘prompt for moratorium’ (Gabriel et al., 2010), and (e) ‘positive re-invention’ (Gabriel et al., 2013).

There was a mixed well-being group with limited mental health issues and good-to-moderate functioning, yet this group still experienced lessened positive well-being as a result of job loss. The two subtypes were ‘distressed yet functioning’, and ‘denial and avoidance’. The first ‘distressed yet functioning’ subgroup consisted of: (a) ‘resigned’ (Jahoda, 1933/1972), (b) ‘roller coaster’ (Borgen & Amundson, 1987), (c) ‘anxious but coping’ (Jones, 1989), (d) ‘confident but concerned’ (Wanberg & Marchese, 1984), (e) ‘resigned downshifting to a new job’, and (f) ‘willing’ (Houssemand et al., 2014). The second subgroup of denial/avoidance included: (a) ‘unconcerned and indifferent’ (Wanberg & Marchese, 1994), (b) ‘temporary career disruption’ (Gabriel et al., 2010), and (c) ‘outsider’ (Houssemand et al., 2014).

Thirdly, there was a two subcategory negative well-being group which varied according to engagement in life, re-employment, and mental health status. The two groups were: (a) ‘stressed, anxious, and panicking’ and ‘apathetic disengagement.’ The ‘stressed, anxious, and panicking’ subgroup seemed to exhibit high stress and a panic-like disposition as they frantically grasped at job searching. This subgroup consisted of: (a) ‘in despair’ (Jahoda, 1933/1972), (b) ‘clenching’ (Starrin & Larsson, 1987), (c) ‘half of the dysfunctional adaptations group’ (Jones, 1989), (d) ‘distressed’ (Wanberg & Marchese, 1984), (e) ‘feverish search for a job’, and (e) ‘anxious’ (Houssemand et al., 2014). The second subtype of ‘apathetic disengagement’ displayed a sense of apathy towards job search and often life, which sometimes translated into poor mental health. This group included: (a) ‘apathetic’ (Jahoda, 1933/1972), (b) ‘giving up’ (Starrin & Larsson, 1987), (c) ‘frustrated and disengaged from job search’ (Borgen & Amundson, 1987),

(d) one half of the dysfunctional adaptations group' (Jones, 1989), (e) 'end of career' (Gabriel et al., 2010), and (f) 'dispossessed' (Houssemand et al., 2014).

In summary, the literature presents a very rich picture of variations in the experience of job loss. Positive exceptions are also noted, and these are characterized by different combinations of well-being and functioning. These typologies also point out the important distinctions between well-being in the context of life satisfaction versus the mere absence of mental illness, as Keyes' (2005) notions of flourishing and languishing predict. These findings also highlight the value of future research that studies variations in well-being both for job loss (Gowan, 2014; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005) and within positive psychology (Bonanno et al., 2011; Kashdan & Steger, 2011).

Overall, this broader review of the positive psychology and job loss literature illustrates the need to better understand the experience of well-being – both for well-being in general and also contextually via job loss. There is a particular opportunity to enhance our understanding of both well-being theory and processes using a bottom-up inductive approach informed by qualitative research (i.e., the “what”, “why” and “how” of well-being). Being open to emergent notions of well-being, rather than drawing exclusively from existing theories of well-being, suggests the value of adopting an open-ended, phenomenological lens and subjectivity as the starting point. Openness to both the positive and negative aspects of well-being helps to address the positivity bias in the positive psychology research and the negativity bias in the job loss literature (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Wong, 2011).

The discussion now shifts to methodology, as I restate the following overarching research question: *What is the subjective experience of well-being following job loss?* More specifically, following the life event of job loss:

- (a) *How do individuals describe their self-perceived sense of well-being?*
- (b) *What do individuals describe as being the key factors, conditions, and critical events critical events (i.e., potential process factors) which have impacted their self-perceived well-being?*

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This study explored the experience of well-being following job loss using a case study of 20 technology sector workers who experienced at least one involuntary job loss from 2000-2006 in the Ottawa, Canada area. Adopting a qualitative-focused lens, this embedded mixed methods study drew from three major sources of data: unstructured written narratives, semi-structured interviews, and qualitative debriefing of six well-being instruments<sup>4</sup>. Data were collected in two parts. Part one, which was independently completed at the participant's home, consisted of an unstructured written narrative writing exercise, a demographic questionnaire, and providing a copy of one's résumé. Part two was conducted one to two weeks later and included an in-depth interview, followed by the completion of six well-being questionnaires.

This chapter will elaborate on the study's methodology, as it discusses: (a) the rationale for study design, (b) the research paradigm and researcher personal positioning, (c) piloting procedures and study modifications, (d) participant recruitment, (e) screening, (f) selection and final sample profile, (g) data collection, and (h) data analysis procedures.

#### **Rationale for Study Design**

##### **Case Study Choice and Parameters**

Case study is a research methodology which “explores a bounded system (or case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). Case study was chosen based on its strength of providing an in-depth understanding of the intersection of the complex phenomena of well-being and job loss via multiple data sources (Yin, 2014). Given the exploratory, theory-enhancing aims of this study (Gerring, 2004), case study was well-suited to explore the “what, why and how” of changes in well-being following job loss (Swanborn, 2010, p. i). Case study was especially appropriate for studying contextualized contemporary events like job loss (Swanborn, 2010).

Studying job loss over a period of time using a retrospective lens allowed participants to reflect on how their sense of well-being evolved from the time of the initial job loss event to more recent perspectives (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Wong, 2011; Yin, 2014). This approach was critical in capturing a broader sense of the job loss experience as well as helping to uncover

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<sup>4</sup> The quantitative questionnaire data were used to characterize the well-being of participants, as compared to instrument norms. It should be noted that more detailed analysis of the questionnaires will be conducted for further articles developed from this study (e.g., post-doctoral work beyond the three article thesis).

processes. The technology sector was chosen for study based on inspiration from the book *Learn to Bounce* (Caputo & Wallace, 2007) which profiled the stories of 32 technology sector workers who were laid off in the Ottawa region. This rapidly-changing sector was well-suited to illustrate the effects of job loss given boom and bust cycles of unemployment from 2000-2006.

Furthermore, adopting a longer-term perspective was appropriate given both persistent and latent impacts of job loss (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005), including positives such as post-traumatic growth which may often only be realized after the event (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

A single case design was chosen since participants are naturally bounded by place, time, and context, namely job loss in Ottawa, Canada during a period of decline in the technology sector. This instrumental case explored the particulars of this contextual event using an exploratory, inductive approach in order to help generate bottom-up theoretical understanding of well-being, with attention to both potential negative as well as positive aspects of both well-being and job loss.

### **Qualitative-focused, Mixed-methods Rationale**

This study followed an embedded mixed-methods design which emphasized qualitative data which included written narratives, interviews, and qualitative debriefing of well-being questionnaires (Creswell & Plano-Clarke, 2007). The term “embedded,” within a mixed methods study (rather than a case study context), is defined as an approach which grounds the study in one type of data with the other type of data playing a “secondary, supportive” role (Creswell & Plano-Clarke, 2007, p. 100). Specifically, qualitative data was the primary emphasis of this QUAL(quan) study (Creswell & Plano-Clarke, 2007). A qualitative lens was warranted given the exploratory nature of the study’s research questions (McLeod, 2001; Rennie, 2004) which aimed to uncover elements of participant-defined notions of well-being as well as potential well-being factors and possible processes.

Quantitative instruments were used for two purposes. Firstly, they were used to characterize the well-being of participants by comparing their scores with instrument norms. Secondly, and more fundamentally, the questionnaires were qualitatively de-briefed to obtain insight on how participants responded to a priori notions of well-being represented by the questionnaire constructs. Using questionnaires in this non-traditional way was inspired vis-à-vis the technique of ‘questerviews’ wherein participants are interviewed following their completion

of questionnaires (Adamson, Gooberman-Hill, Woolhead, & Donovan, 2004, p. 139). This questionnaire debrief was thus used (a) to explore participant impressions of the well-being constructs measured by the questionnaires and (b) compare how these constructs related to participant notions of well-being discussed in the written narratives and interviews, which preceded questionnaire completion. In essence, this approach allowed for the comparison of emergent notions of well-being with a priori notions (as per the conceptual framework). It should be noted that the latter, deductive-oriented analysis was a minor portion of the study that helped to triangulate and contextualize the inductive notions of well-being which were a central focus of the study (Morgan, 2007, Yin, 2014). It also helped to enhance understanding of how everyday people interpret traditional well-being concepts and to see how such interpretations fit with operationalized notions of well-being.

### **Research Paradigm and Researcher Personal Positioning**

#### **Research Paradigm**

This study is grounded in the research paradigm of dialectical pragmatism (Greene & Caracelli, 2003). Pragmatism is a new, emerging paradigm (Morgan, 2007). As articulated by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), this practical ‘what works’ (Maxcy, 2003) orientation is open to both qualitative and quantitative methodologies where the exact approach is guided by the research question. This study is grounded in pragmatism’s key knowledge-making assumptions (Morgan, 2007): (a) intersubjectivity (i.e., objectivity and subjectivity); (b) transferability (i.e., context-sensitive generalizations); and (c) abduction (e.g., moving back and forth between induction and deduction).

Dialectical is a term from Green and Caracelli (2003) which asserts that “All paradigms are valuable and have something to contribute to understanding” (p. 96). This stance represents a departure from traditional purist notions of paradigm incommensurability (Morgan, 2007). In this study, dialectical refers to the blending of both constructivist and post-positivist notions – a common stance for counselling researchers vis-à-vis the scientist-practitioner model (Ponterotto, 2005; Rennie, 2004). Ontologically-speaking, I espouse the multiple, socially-constructed realities which concur with constructivism (Usher, 1996). That said, learnings from social sciences research can be combined to form approximated groups of multiple realities which can be used to support heuristic-like knowledge claims (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This view coincides with existentialism which suggests that the precise meaning of life is

phenomenological to the individual (Yalom, 1980), yet humans share common life meaning themes (e.g. relationships and achievement) and processes (Wong & Fry, 1998).

Epistemologically, my “subjectively-objective” stance leads me to *both* acknowledge my personal experiences *and* open-mindedly compare them to those of others. Thus, I am intersubjectively informed by biases rather than dismissive of them (Morgan, 2007). This stance concurs with Dewey’s idea of non-dualism (Maxcy, 2003). Although paradoxical, I believe it is possible to fully recognize one’s subjective ‘self’ and yet be able to stand outside of it and open one’s self to the ideas of the ‘other’ (Ladkin, 2005; Poonamallee, 2009). This “both/and” position falls between constructivism and postpositivism (Ladkin, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005; Poonamallee, 2009; Rennie, 2004). As a counsellor-researcher, I embrace the notion of co-constructed meaning which implies a stance of closeness with participants who are first and foremost people rather than research subjects (Morrow, 2007; Paré, 2012). This naturally leads to an axiological stance of sensitivity to ethical impact of research on participants, as well as the responsibility to respectfully portray the lived experience and voice of participants (Haverkamp, 2005; Morrow, 2007; Polkinghorne, 2005, 2007).

### **Researcher Personal Positioning**

My personal perspective on job loss and well-being is shaped by three separate technology job losses over a decade. I experienced both positives and negatives due to job loss, which included a very positive career transition from strategic marketing to counselling and the blessings of extra time with my family. That said, multiple job losses were stressful at the time. Over the longer term, they have also contributed to a sense of life and career disruption which includes a feeling of not being settled in my career at mid-life. This perspective sensitized me to both the positives of job loss, as well as the value of adopting a long-term view of job loss which extends beyond the experience of unemployment. I recognize that my positive outcomes were enhanced via both a strong social support network and my relative socioeconomic privilege (e.g., having a severance package, my partner’s financial support, and a good education). Such factors have allowed me the opportunity to take advantage of the positives aspects of job loss.

My passion for the study of well-being stems from a lifelong existential curiosity about the meaning of life and what makes some people happier than others. My attraction to positive psychology is profoundly shaped by positive family-of-origin role models, as well as growing up in rural Newfoundland, Canada with its strong cultural influences of resilience, humour, stories,

and community. Reading positive psychology literature during my masters/doctoral studies has further whetted my curiosity for the “how” of well-being. A number of life challenges since then have served as very practical tests to espoused ideals of positive psychology. The sum of these experiences, I feel, brings me to a place of equal respect for the both the positives and negatives of life – a “both/and” stance.

Finally this study is also shaped by being an experientially-oriented counsellor-researcher, who blends humanistic-existentialist principles with positive psychology in an eclectically-integrated manner. In particular, my humanistic-existential counselling orientation shares similar philosophical underpinnings as positive psychology (e.g., a focus on client strengths not deficits, valuing of growth). My exposure to process-experiential therapy and psychotherapy process research also influences this study due to attention to both the ‘processes’ and the ‘outcomes’ of change. As a positive psychology researcher, I am particularly interested in eudaimonic notions of well-being (e.g., growth, self-realization), as well as processes related to both meaning-making and resilience. Finally, my study will be influenced by (a) my previous experience with mixed methods research as a market researcher in business where I pragmatically used both qualitative and quantitative methods, as well as (b) my earlier training and introductory research in science.

### **Ethics, Piloting Procedures, and Subsequent Study Modifications**

This study was approved by a University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board via a full-board review given the sensitive nature of job loss (see Appendix A). To minimize the potential for harm, participants were also provided with a list of community counselling resources which they could optionally consult in the case of participation distress. Subsequent study modifications were also approved, including: stratified quota sampling, the addition of new research assistants, and the use of transcription support.

Extensive pilot testing with four participants was conducted in order to confirm study quality and to refine the study protocol (especially the integration of multiple data collection instruments). A complete dry-run of the study protocol was conducted, including telephone screening, obtaining written informed consent, completing Part one at home (i.e., the written narratives, demographic questionnaire, and résumés) and doing Part two in person, on campus (i.e., the in-depth interview followed by well-being questionnaires). Piloting was also used to

refine interview logistics such as audio and video recording, obtain supervisor feedback, and build interviewer familiarity with questions to allow for better rapport with participants.

Four ex-colleagues of the researcher were recruited for pilot-testing, with special care given to ensure free and informed consent. This diverse sample included (a) both genders (i.e., 3 females and 1 male), as well as equal proportions of (b) single versus multiple job losses, (c) currently employed versus unemployed, and (d) downsizing from both large and small technology companies. The elapsed time since the most recent job loss went up to 11 years which helped to confirm that participants could recall significant events given the recruitment criteria of having experienced job loss in the 2000-06 timeframe.

The results of pilot testing validated the feasibility of the study's design. Pilot participants reported that they highly valued the opportunity to reflect on the life event of job loss, including both negative and positive aspects. These participants reported that they were able to recall significant aspects of the experience which, in turn, was further shaped by the act of study participation. Participants also reported having a broader picture perspective on this life event which allowed pilot participants to relate job loss to other life events (e.g., divorce, having a special needs child). In the case of multiple job losses, the two affected participants indicated that this was the first time they had holistically integrated their multiple job losses. All participants, regardless of their degree of reported positive versus negative well-being, reported that they felt better after participating in the interview and that the study participation was helpful rather than harmful. When asked, participants felt that the amount of data collection was not a deterrent to participation since they particularly enjoyed doing the written narratives and the interview.

Study modifications were generally minor since pilot participants generally endorsed the study's protocol and the content of the data collection instruments. Key modifications included minor changes to data collection instruments, tighter integration of written narratives and questionnaires into the interview protocol, and a switch to stratified sampling.

Data collection instruments remained generally unchanged, with only minor modifications which included slight wording changes, as well as changing the order of interview questions to improve flow. The key modification occurred with the written narrative such that the final writing prompt was changed to include an open-ended sentence stem (e.g., "I would describe my experiences of job loss as ..."), in lieu of a question (e.g., "How would you

describe your experience of job loss?”). The open-ended approach tended to prompt richer, more personalized accounts of job loss, whereas questioning produced more closed, ‘packaged’ stories that tended to focus on outcomes of job loss with less rich information on the experience and processes of well-being.

Integrating written narrative and questionnaire debrief into the interview protocol was done to follow the lead of participants as revealed by pilot testing. Specifically, participants naturalistically discussed their narratives at length at the start of the interview which led to the addition of a rich unstructured written narrative debrief which was discussed at length during the start of the semi-structured portion of the interview (Ayres, 2008). The second adaptation concerned the questionnaires which participants felt were more limiting and less rich in reporting their experience of job loss. Questionnaire completion led to spontaneous discussions about participant notions of well-being, even though the formal interview had ended. It was thus decided to do a short questionnaire debrief where participants were asked about their experience of filling out the questionnaires and to identify which instruments most and least resonated with their ideas of well-being. This section was kept very brief in the interest of minimizing the demands on participants. These two modifications served to create more open-ended, naturalistic discussion, ensure a holistic participant-constructed view of well-being, and better integrate the three main sources data (Bryman, 2007).

Finally, the pilot led to a switch to stratified sampling for the study’s selection and screening criteria. Consistent with the job loss literature, the pilot sample revealed qualitatively important variations in the well-being experience based on the subgroup dimensions of single versus multiple job loss, gender, and current employment status (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009). Employment status was particularly relevant as it highlighted important variations based on the dimension of underemployment rather than the more simplistic dichotomy of being employed versus unemployed. These observations, coupled with a very strong recruitment response, led to the decision to adopt a stratified purposeful sampling approach which was subsequently approved by the thesis committee and Ethics Review Board (Creswell, 2007). Sampling will be further discussed in a subsequent section.

### **Participant Recruitment**

A large number of potential participants responded to the call for study participation

via (a) high interest in the study topic, (b) a broad base of technology workers in the region, (c) employing a variety of recruitment sources, and (d) using participant incentives. The latter included a \$40<sup>5</sup> gift card to participants' choice of coffee shop or bookstore and reimbursement of parking costs as a thank-you for participation. Participants were free to drop out at any time, without having to forfeit their incentive.

The study was promoted via posters, e-mails and letters (see Appendix B), with the bulk of study promotion occurring mid-December, 2012. In total, 77 inquiries were received and came from four main sources: (a) e-mail job lists (71%); (b) job placement consultants (9%); (c) community posters (5%); and (d) individuals whose job loss stories were profiled in the book *Learn to Bounce* (Caputo & Wallace, 2007) via recruitment from the book's authors (15%)<sup>6</sup>. Interestingly, two e-mail distribution lists (i.e., *Peter's New Jobs* and the *Kanata Career Group*) surprisingly included a larger number of responses from employed as well as unemployed subscribers.

Potential participants cited three main reasons for their interest: wanting to help others with the challenges of job loss, the opportunity to reflect on one's own experience of job loss, and general interest in study findings. Both screened out and selected participants placed lesser emphasis on the participant incentive as a motive. For instance, one potential participant offered to donate his/her incentive to purchase a subscription to an e-mail job loss for a new Canadian immigrant.

### Screening

All 77 interested participants were screened to determine eligibility for the study, based on the following key criteria:

- having worked in the Ottawa region technology sector (i.e., telecom, IT/information technology, and/or software/hardware development) during the 2000-06 timeframe; and
- having experienced one or more involuntary job losses (i.e., layoff and/or firing) while permanently employed in this sector during the same timeframe.

In support of stratified purposeful sampling, potential participants also provided information based on gender, number of job losses, and current employment status at the time of recruitment. Finally, participants were asked to self-screen for (a) the risk of negative well-being due to

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<sup>5</sup> Note: This was slightly altered from the originally proposed \$50 to account for parking costs.

<sup>6</sup> As per ethics board approval, the book's first author sent pre-approved recruitment materials to individuals featured in the book. Participants were then asked to contact the researcher directly.

participating in a research study and (b) their ability to speak English at the level required for research study participation (see Appendix C for complete screening checklist).

Most ineligible participants were screened out on the basis of not having had a job loss from 2000-2006 (61%) and for not having experienced job loss while working in the technology sector (22%). Other less prominent factors include exclusion on the basis of (a) not working in Ottawa, (b) not having been permanently employed, (c) voluntary job loss, and (d) potential conflict of interest.

Participants were screened by e-mail and telephoned as appropriate. E-mail was used to screen out ineligible participants during their initial responses (e.g., “I lost my job in 2010, but I’m still very interested in your study”) as well as to confirm whether screened-in potential participants met purposive sampling criteria regarding current employment status which often changed since a number of unemployed individuals secured a job in the time interval between screening and selection. Telephone screening was used to build participant rapport and trust, explain the study (including the purposive sampling selection process), and to give participants the opportunity to ask questions to ensure better informed consent (Haverkamp, 2005).

### **Selection and Final Sample Profile**

Participants were selected on a first-come, first-served basis until the saturation for each of the three purposive sampling categories was reached in order to ensure broad representation based on gender, number of job losses, and employment status. This process was complex since each selected participant contributed to the quota for each of three subcategories. For instance, Ted<sup>7</sup> met the criteria for the subcategories of male, single job loss, and being currently unemployed while Mike contributed to the categories of male, multiple job loss and being currently employed. Selection was also challenging since employment status was not static.

This complexity resulted in the selection of a relatively large qualitative sample of 20 participants which also had the advantage of increasing the potential for theoretical saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The final white collar sample (N=20) was virtually balanced by (a) gender (n=11 males, n=9 females) and (b) employment status (n=10 employed and n=10 unemployed), but skewed towards (c) multiple rather than single job loss (n=13 multiple, n=7 single) which was logically expected given the industry’s history of frequent mass layoffs (Caputo & Wallace, 2007). For those experiencing multiple job losses, the number of lifetime

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<sup>7</sup> All participant names used herein are pseudonyms.

job losses ranged from two to six (which averaged out at 3.1 job losses since 2000 and 3.7 over the entire lifespan).

Underemployment, which participants defined as working below their past skill level in less challenging jobs, was more difficult to classify ( $n=4$ ). This self-defined state included both involuntary and voluntary underemployment. Involuntary unemployment included two participants who felt stuck in government jobs after switching from the technology sector (e.g., limited upward mobility due to not being bilingual), while one employed participant was voluntarily working a lower-level, part-time job to better balance family and work demands. Interesting, one participant self-identified as being both unemployed and underemployed (i.e., due to working part-time as a security guard to earn income while job searching). Since he identified most strongly with being unemployed, this self-categorization was respected.

The average unemployment duration associated with each job loss was 6.3 months, which varied widely from 0-13 months and produced a skewed standard deviation of 6.9 months. Currently-employed participants had been re-employed in permanent full-time jobs or self-employment for an average of 6.9 years, with both government sector workers and the self-employed experiencing the longest periods of steady re-employment.

Demographically, the final sample varied from 37 to 65 ( $M=52.3$ ,  $SD=7.0$ ) years in age. They are best categorized as university-educated ( $n=17$ ); medium-high socioeconomic status ( $n=20$ ); being married or long-term partnered ( $n=17$ ); and being parents ( $n=18$ ). Most participants also self-identified as Canadian ( $n=15$ ), with the remainder self-identifying as Canadians who have immigrated to Canada from Asia ( $n=3$ ), Eastern Europe ( $n=1$ ), and the Middle East ( $n=1$ ).

### **Data Collection**

Data collection occurred from January to May, 2013 and was preceded by signed informed consent (see Appendix D). There were three key sources of primary data: (a) unstructured written narratives, (b) semi-structured interviews (recorded and transcribed), and (c) qualitative debrief of six well-being instruments, all of which were holistically integrated at the time of the interview. There were two other sources, namely (a) demographic questionnaires and (b) participant résumés, which were used to collect background information. There were no drop-outs and all of the participants completed all of the study components. One participant orally recounted his written narrative reflection due to technical issues. For each participant, data

was collected in two phases approximately one to two weeks apart. Each phase will now be discussed, along with more detail on each of the data collection instruments (see Appendix E for summary).

### **Phase 1 Data Collection**

The first phase of data collection consisted of: (a) *written narratives*, (b) *demographic questionnaires*, and (c) *résumés* (which were optional). Following the signing of consent forms, the written narrative and demographic questionnaire were sent to participants via e-mail as well as a list of community counselling resources to be used in the case of participant distress. These instruments were completed at home at the participant's convenience prior to proceeding to the next phase (see Appendix F). Participants also sent their *résumés* at this time.

*Written narratives* refer to a minimally-structured writing exercise where participants wrote freely for at least 15 minutes on their experience of job loss and its impact on their well-being (see Appendix G). The written narratives were purposely unstructured in order to allow participants to write freely about their lived experience of job loss and well-being without concern for spelling, grammar, length, or providing the correct answer (Niderhoffer & Pennebaker, 2005). This naturalistic approach encouraged participants to reflect on their experience of job loss without the constraints of pre-imposed conversational norms and theoretical suppositions (Frattaroli, 2006; Usher, 1996; Van Manen, 1990). Frattaroli's (2006) meta-analysis of written disclosure research concluded that the administration of narratives can be flexible since results do not depend on participant literacy, use of hand-writing versus typed narratives, location of administration, and so forth. Pennebaker's vast body of written disclosure research revealed that writing helps to deepen insight in the face of negative life events (Niderhoffer & Pennebaker, 2005). Furthermore, both job loss and life meaning research suggested that the degree of narrative resolution in stories (e.g., searching for meaning) can be indicative of one's well-being (e.g., Gabriel, Grey & Goregaokar, 2010; Park, 2010).

*Demographic questionnaires* and *résumés* were used capture general background information on participants such as educational background, age, and job loss history which helped to inform the broader case (see Appendix H). This permitted the interviewer to focus on the holistic experience of job loss rather than trying to chronicle the complicated details of the various job losses.

### **Phase 2 Data Collection**

Phase 2 data collection consisted of (a) *qualitative interviews* and (b) *well-being questionnaires* (including a qualitative debrief), both of which were completed approximately one to two weeks following the completion of Phase 1 (see Appendix I).

*Qualitative interviews* were chosen since they provide a rich, open-ended means to tap into participants' lived experience (Van Manen, 1990) as well as providing flexible, in-depth data collection (DiCiccio-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Knox & Burkard, 2009; Polkinghorne, 2005; Rennie, 2004). Interviews were divided into two major parts: (a) an unstructured written narrative debrief followed by (b) an in-depth semi-structured interview (see Appendix J).

The open-ended written narrative debrief was motivated by participants' strong engagement with the narratives and the quality of experience recounted via an unstructured approach (as per pilot testing). Participants were given opportunity to freely expand on their narratives during the interview which served to supplement their already rich written stories. This debriefing, which also included questions from the researcher, typically took 20-30 minutes per interview. However, this did not detract from the interview time since many later items on the interview protocol had already been naturalistically covered in depth via the narrative and subsequent debrief. Consistent with a constructivist paradigm, participants reported that writing the narrative and discussing it in length led to new insights regarding the impact and meaning of job loss (Paré, 2012; Polkinghorne, 2005).

During the semi-structured portion of the interview, participants were asked to: (a) describe their experience of both job loss and well-being following job loss; (b) discuss the impact of this event on their lives; (c) tell how well-being changed at different points in the experience; (d) identify the factors which affected their well-being, (e) provide suggestions to help individuals impacted by job loss; and (f) describe their experience of research participation.

The average interview lasted 110 minutes. The combination of unstructured and semi-structured portions of the interview allowed participants to further deepen and co-construct the stories which emerged from their narratives (Firmin, 2008), while exploring both general as well as emergent themes (Ayers, 2008).

Transcription of the audiotaped interviews was outsourced to a professional transcriptionist who transcribed 17 of 20 interviews as well as reviewed the other three transcripts to ensure consistency (i.e., those prepared by the researcher and two student research volunteers). Transcription was done strict verbatim, which included capturing the nuance of

pauses, laughter, etcetera. The overall quality from the transcriptionist was estimated at 99% accuracy based on a verification audit from the researcher. This audit also included correcting technical jargon, filling in inaudible segments, and proofreading. It also helped to enrich the quality of coding since the final auditing was done after the first round of open coding on paper which allowed the researcher to validate the nuance of language against the recorded conversation. Finally, member checking allowed participants to review their transcripts, in concurrence with a constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 2003).

*Well-being questionnaires* including having participants complete six well-being instruments as well as obtaining their impressions of the questionnaires via a qualitative debrief following questionnaire completion. These brief questionnaires represented a variety of well-being notions; namely, life satisfaction, positive/negative emotions, happiness, life meaning, resilience, and sense of anxiety/depression. The questionnaires were completed after the interview (following a break), and then were immediately debriefed upon completion. Most of the questionnaires were completed within 1-2 minutes, with a typical elapsed time of 20-30 minutes for the entire questionnaire process.

For the qualitative debriefing of the well-being questionnaires, the instruments were used as discussion prompts, with participants being asked to indicate which instruments most and least resonated with their ideas of well-being and why. This approach was inspired by the technique of ‘questerviews’ whereby questionnaire respondents are interviewed after completing questionnaires in order to explore participants’ actual interpretation of operationalized constructs and general impressions of instruments (Adamson et al., 2004). This conceptual-focused use of questionnaires enhanced the case study by triangulating emergent, naturalistic notions of well-being with existing a priori theoretical conceptualizations which were proxied by the questionnaires. For instance, do participants endorsing the happiness questionnaire naturally talk about happiness in their interviews?

The choice of specific questionnaires was informed by the need to approximate four key theoretical conceptualizations of well-being: hedonic, eudaimonic, mixed, and negative well-being (Elkins, 2009; Huta & Waterman, 2014; Wong, 2011). All instruments were chosen on the basis of favourable psychometrics, being brief and user-friendly, and allowing participants maximum flexibility to interpret their own view of the construct (e.g., ‘I am happy’ without presupposing components such as good relationships).

*Hedonic well-being* is usually operationalized as happiness or subjective well-being (SWB; Haybron, 2007). Drawing from Marrero-Quevedo and Carballeira-Abella's (2011) example, hedonic well-being was operationalized by three instruments: Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffen, 1985), and the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The SWLS, although often synonymous with subjective well-being, only measures the cognitive aspect of the SWB and ignores affect (Busseri & Sadava, 2011; Pavot & Diener, 1993). Thus, the emotion-focused PANAS scale was included.

All three hedonic instruments have good psychometric properties<sup>8</sup>. The four-item SHS (see Appendix K) has good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .79-.94$ ), good test-retest reliability (.55-.90 from 3 weeks to 1 year), and it is moderately correlated yet distinct from other measures and correlates of well-being such as mood and extraversion (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999).

The five-item SWLS (see Appendix L) demonstrates strong internal consistency ( $\alpha = .87$ ), low social desirability effects, and is negatively correlated with mental illness (Pavot, Diener, Colvin, & Sandvik, 1991). Most critically, the SWLS has been shown to balance both stability and sensitivity to changes in well-being (Pavot & Diener, 1993). It is both stable over a two-week period, with a .82 test-retest reliability, but is also sensitive to change over longer periods in response to life events with a two month test-retest reliability of .54. Average scores typically fall between 20-24, with 10 or less being dissatisfied and 25+ representing high satisfaction (Diener, 2006).

Finally, the 20-item PANAS has good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .84-.90$ ), with positive and negative affect shown to be distinct from and yet moderately correlated with constructs which predict well-being, depression, and anxiety (Crawford & Henry, 2004; Watson et al., 1988). The PANAS measures perceptions of positive and negative emotions, with a two month test-retest reliability in the range of .48-.71 depending on the time frame over which emotions are measured (Watson et al., 1988).

*Eudaimonic well-being* was explored via the ten-item Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MIL-Q) where the questions are equally split between assessing: (a) the presence of, and (b) the search for meaning, which concurs with Park's (2010) call to measure both aspects (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). This instrument (see Appendix M) is unique in that it simply asks

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<sup>8</sup> Note: Ranges are reported where multiple participant samples were used to validate a measure.

respondents whether they feel that meaning is present in their lives rather than pre-supposing dimensions of life meaning (e.g., having a fulfilling job), thus allowing participants to construct their own sense of meaning (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). The MIL-Q's psychometric properties include strong internal consistency ( $\alpha = .81-.92$ ) and a one-month test-retest of  $.70-.73$  (Steger et al., 2006). It correlates with other well-being measures and is shown to be independent of participants' values (e.g., religious beliefs) as well as social desirability (Steger & Shin, 2010; Steger et al., 2006).

*Mixed well-being* was explored via the six-item Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) which, like the MIL-Q, simply tests self-perceptions of resilience (e.g., "I tend to bounce back after hard times") without presupposing the underlying dimensions of the construct such as religiosity (Smith et al., 2008; Windle, Bennett, & Noyes, 2011). It has strong psychometric properties such as good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .80-.91$ ) and test-retest of  $.62-.69$  over 1-3 months (Smith et al., 2008). Windle et al.'s (2011) review of resilience instruments concludes that the BRS is suitable for stress situations such as job loss.

*Negative well-being* was explored via a four-item instrument known as the Patient-Health-4 Questionnaire (PHQ-4; see Appendix N). The PHQ-4 combines two psychometrically-validated, two-item ultra-brief measures of depression and anxiety, the most common outpatient mental health disorders (Kroenke, Spitzer, Williams, & Lowe, 2009). Cut-off scores of 6+ are considered yellow flags while 9+ is a red flag (Lowe et al., 2010). This instrument, tested in both community and patient samples, has strong psychometrics including good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .78-.85$ ), has confirmed the presence of depression and anxiety as separate yet correlated factors, and has been validated against longer instruments, other measures of functioning and mental health, and mental health demographic predictors (Kroenke et al., 2009; Lowe et al., 2010).

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Data analysis was based on Braun and Clark's (2006, 2013) thematic analysis approach which provided optimal flexibility given the large volumes of data from multiple sources. Thematic analysis consisted of six steps: familiarizing one's self with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The written narratives, interviews, and the questionnaire debrief were thematically

analyzed as a whole, in concurrence with the pre-planned integration of data (as informed by pilot testing).

As endorsed by Yin (2014), the quality and rigour of this case study was further enhanced by using inductive data analysis principles/techniques borrowed from other qualitative approaches. Specifically, this study was enhanced via (a) the use of detailed open coding to inform subthemes (with the former mirroring participants' actual verbal descriptions of well-being); (b) theoretical saturation for open codes; and (c) the use of constant data comparison when analyzing data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Yin, 2011, 2014). Other enhancements included using participant member checks (i.e., transcripts and the article); reviewing of coding structures by the research supervisor; and the reflexive recording of researcher biases/ideas which was particularly important given the first author's experience with job loss (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999).

Data analysis included both *within-participant* and *between-participant* analysis of participants' notions of well-being which, in the spirit of constant data comparison, was done in an iterative, recursive manner (Yin, 2011). Understanding well-being from a within-participant lens fits with the need to better understand how well-being changes within the person over time and within different contexts, rather than just looking at well-being on average (e.g., Kashdan & Steger, 2011). Yin's (2014) case study analytical technique of comparative pattern matching was used to compare results between unprompted versus directly-solicited notions of well-being. This triangulation specifically compared naturally-emergent themes and subthemes with directly-solicited reflections of well-being. Participants were asked to do two things: to directly define well-being in the interview and to qualitatively comment on the questionnaires. The latter occurred as the very last data collection step to avoid biasing discussion. It should be noted that questionnaires were used primarily in a purely qualitative sense (i.e., the questionnaire debrief which is presented in the first article). (However, the quantitative data may be used at a later date for further analysis.)

In conclusion, this qualitative-focused case study drew from written narratives, interviews, and a qualitative debrief to inductively explore the subjective experience of well-being following job loss for 20 Ottawa technology workers who experienced job loss from 2000-2006. Study results will now be reported in a series of three articles, which will include brief bridging/connecting sections between each of the articles. The first article is a theoretically-

focused positive psychology article which explores how participants describe their experience of well-being following job loss. The subsequent two articles report on the inductively derived factors which participants cite as explaining the relationship between job loss and well-being. Due to the richness of this information, this discussion is split into two articles; the second article reports on external factors (e.g., the job market) while the third article reports on factors internal to the individual (e.g., coping strategies).

**Chapter 4: Happiness, Eudaimonia, and Other Holy Grails:  
What Can Job Loss Teach Us About “One-Size-Fits-All” Theories of Well-Being?**

Happiness, Eudaimonia, and Other Holy Grails:  
What Can Job Loss Teach Us About  
“One-size-fits-all” Theories of Well-being?

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*This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article for publication  
by Taylor & Francis in The Journal of Positive Psychology on Aug 30, 2016 (advance on-line  
publication), available online:*

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17439760.2016.1225116>

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This research was funded in part by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research  
Council of Canada and the Ontario Graduate Scholarships program, with early findings being  
presented at three conferences. We would also like to acknowledge our research team volunteers,  
Ms. Anita Caputo, and Dr. Veronika Huta (for her comments on the manuscript).  
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### Abstract

Positive psychology has made significant advances in our understanding of well-being, yet agreement about the definition and nature of well-being remains elusive. This study explores the *experience of well-being* from a bottom-up, naturalistic point of view and compares these inductive notions with existing a priori theories. Using a qualitative-focused case study methodology, this paper explores how everyday people describe well-being in the context of job loss amongst a sample of 20 workers from the Ottawa, Canada technology sector. Findings support integrated conceptualizations of hedonia and eudaimonia while also potentially identifying new notions of well-being. Identified themes include (a) life evaluation, (b) transitory experiencing, (c) growth and grounding, (d) environmental mastery/stability, (e) mental ill-being/ill-health, and (f) motivational mindsets/conditions. This study shows well-being to be a rich, pluralistic construct which includes the non-dualistic notions of both subjectivity and objectivity as well as encompassing notions related to the “what” and “how” of well-being.

*Keywords:* well-being, hedonia, eudaimonia, qualitative research, job loss

### Happiness, Eudaimonia, and Other Holy Grails:

#### What Can Job Loss Teach Us About “One-Size-Fits-All” Theories of Well-Being?

Well-being is, paradoxically, both simple and complex. Humans naturally strive for well-being and intuitively use everyday terms such as happiness to refer to positively-perceived states of being (Haybron, 2007). Well-being, which is synonymous with life going well, acts as an umbrella term to facilitate discussion of various theoretical notions in fields from psychology to philosophy (Delle Fave, Brdar, Freire, Vella-Brodrick, & Wissing, 2011). Despite its intuitive nature, well-being resists precise definition as a tightly defined construct per se. Seligman (2011) suggests that well-being is a notion defined by a number of separate, measurable “real things” but that “no single measure defines it exhaustively” (pp. 14-15). The Occam’s Razor-inspired ideal of conceptual parsimony is strikingly elusive in a sea of very rich theoretical debate (Jayawickreme, Forgeard, & Seligman, 2012). Like the famed religious quest, both theorists and practitioners wonder – ‘Is there a holy grail of well-being?’

Within the specific field of positive psychology, the need to integrate a variety of theoretical well-being perspectives has been identified by many scholars (e.g., Delle Fave et al., 2011; Seligman, 2011; Wong, 2011), including the need to identify common theoretical principles. A second gap includes the lack of bottom-up, participant-defined notions of well-being since, until recently, “no study has explicitly asked people what they mean by happiness” (Delle Fave & Bassi, 2009, p. 2005) and other lay notions of well-being (Delle Fave et al., 2011). This latter gap coincides with calls for more qualitative research in positive psychology which elaborates on the experience of well-being (Delle Fave et al., 2011). A final gap concerns critiques of the field as being too singularly focused on the ideals of positive human experience at the expense of ignoring the realities of the negative well-being (Wong, 2011).

Moving outside of positive psychology to the field of career counselling, the life event of job loss provides an interesting realm to explore both the negatives and positives of well-being. In direct contrast to positive psychology, the study of job loss has generally focused on negatives while the positives of this life event have been understudied (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005). The use of a positive psychology lens provides a new perspective for individuals, career counsellors, employers, and policymakers in the wake of this typically negative life event (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Research in this field, like positive psychology, is predominately quantitative and includes similar calls for more qualitative research (Blustein, 2008; Blustein,

Kozan, & Connors-Kellgren, 2013) focused on individuals' subjective experience in order to "develop a more complex understanding of the correlates (of well-being)..., and their role in the unemployment experience" (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005, p. 69). Consistent with a post-positivistic stance, even seminal qualitative research (i.e., Jahoda, 1982) has been extensively quantitatively tested (e.g., Janlert & Hammarström, 2009).

This article combines both positive psychology and career counselling lenses as it aims to explore both the positive and negative aspects of the *experience* of well-being following the specific contextual event of job loss. It open-endedly explores well-being constructs which naturalistically emerge as participants describe their experience of well-being following job loss. This bottom-up, inductive approach compares these notions of well-being in the context of job loss with existing a priori theories and notions of well-being from positive psychology. The main research question guiding the broader study<sup>9</sup> is, "What is the subjective experience of well-being following job loss?" This article also addresses the following, more specific research sub-question, "Following the life event(s) of job loss, how do participants describe their self-perceived sense of well-being?"

Two points of conceptual clarity are important to note. Job loss, rather than unemployment, was chosen as the key construct since both the negative and positives aspects of job loss can often extend beyond unemployment, just as the effects of divorce do not automatically disappear upon remarriage (Lucas, 2007; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). For instance, the excitement of moving to a new job can co-exist with the disappointment of losing old friends from one's previous job. Secondly, the mere act of reflecting on the specifics of well-being following job loss naturally led participants to reflect on their general experience of well-being which often went beyond a pure job loss context (e.g., family made me happy regardless of whether or not I had a job). The holistic nature of participants' stories, which articulated both general and job loss-specific experiences of well-being, was thus honoured in constructivist tradition (Polkinghorne, 2005). To better ground the study, a review of both (a) well-being notions and (b) well-being in the context of job loss now follows.

### **Key Notions of Well-being**

Within positive psychology, two broad views of well-being exist—*hedonia* and *eudaimonia* (Huta & Waterman, 2014). *Hedonia* refers to a good life as one characterized by the

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<sup>9</sup> This article is a part of a broader study that also explores well-being factors and processes.

presence of pleasure and absence of pain (Waterman, 2013a). Hedonia is often equated with happiness (Haybron, 2007) and is commonly operationalized as subjective well-being (SWB; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). SWB has both an affective and cognitive component; it refers to a preponderance of positive rather than negative emotions, as well as the holistic cognitive judgment that one's life is satisfying.

*Eudaimonia* originates from Aristotle with *eu* translated as good (e.g., virtuous) while *daimon* refers to one's true self (Waterman, 2013a). Eudaimonia thus extends well-being beyond pleasure and has a variety of interpretations and translations, such as flourishing (Keyes & Annas, 2009). Theoretical conceptions of eudaimonia include (a) becoming one's best self/self-realization (Waterman, 2013a); (b) pursuit of excellence and virtue (Aristotle, 1953/2004); (c) life meaning (Steger, 2012); (d) personal growth (Ryff, 2013); and (e) autonomous self-congruence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Eudaimonia, as an operationalized research construct, has also been subject to multiple interpretations which have described it as behaviours, cognitive-affective and other experiences, orientations, and/or indicators of psychological functioning (Huta & Waterman, 2014).

At present, there are two key areas of theoretical debate within positive psychology with regard to these areas: (a) the relationship between hedonia and eudaimonia (Waterman, 2013b) and (b) the subjectivity versus objectivity of well-being (Tiberus, 2013). Some argue that hedonia and eudaimonia are related yet separate constructs (Huta, 2013; Keyes & Annas, 2009; Waterman, 2013a). Others suggest that they represent different traditions of research rather than distinct forms of well-being (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & King, 2009) as they critique the lack of consistent operationalized definitions and call for clearer empirical distinction between the two (Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008). Keyes and Annas (2009) refute such claims, citing empirical support for eudaimonic notions of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989) as being related to, but distinct from, hedonia. They also distinguish between the hedonic-labelled notion of "feeling good" (p. 197) from "functioning well" in life (p. 197), which they associate with eudaimonia (Keyes & Annas, 2009).

Secondly, the objectivity view posits that there are identifiable life conditions and "worthwhile pursuits" (Sirgy & Wu, 2009, p. 184) which characterize well-being (e.g., achievement) while the subjectivity view argues that well-being lies within the eye of the beholder (Tiberus, 2013). Even within the subjectivity view, some contend that subjectivity

needs to be autonomously chosen (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and be grounded in reality, one's values, and experiences, rather than simply being just one's desires (Brülde, 2007; Tiberus, 2013). Haybron (2007) disputes the idea that one's well-being is purely subjective due to the inherent influences of objective elements like culture and norms.

Outside the field of positive psychology, the major theory of well-being is one of mental illness/psychopathology which results in impaired functioning according to general psychology (Elkins, 2009). Keyes (2005) goes beyond this view with his notion of languishing, which distinguishes mental illness from poor mental health. Languishing refers to poor emotional, psychological, and social functioning without any associated mental illness. Conversely, flourishing refers to the opposite state of positive functioning.

Wong (2011) critiques the broader dichotomy between positive and negative well-being. He suggests that negative well-being (i.e., experiences and emotions) may function as a pathway to positive well-being (e.g., resilience in the face of adversity). This article thus considers both positive and negative perspectives on well-being, which logically brings us to the notion of mixed well-being. The co-existence of positive and negative well-being becomes particularly pertinent if we look at well-being over multiple points in time via the constructs of resilience (Luthar, 2006) and post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), both of which pre-date the field. Resilience refers to either the recovery and/or maintenance of well-being following adversity (Tusaie & Dyer, 2004) while post-traumatic growth refers to "positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances" (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014, p. 312).

### **Well-being in the Context of Job Loss**

In the field of job loss, well-being has been studied via the lenses of (a) mental illness (e.g., depression), (b) overall life satisfaction (including SWB), and (c) life domain satisfaction (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009). More specifically, two meta-analyses have shown job loss to have a profoundly negative, lasting effect on well-being (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009). Job loss often reduces satisfaction in many areas of one's life including career, finances, identity, and relationships (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). It is also associated with double the incidence of mental illness (Paul & Moser, 2009). Although the benefits have been far less studied, job loss can also include positive benefits like new career opportunities and improved family relationships (Zikic & Richardson, 2007). The primary theory

of well-being and job loss is based on Jahoda's (1982) process-latent deprivation model (Janlert & Hammarström, 2009). This qualitatively derived and quantitatively validated model argues that the impact of job loss on well-being is not simply due to the loss of the tangible benefits of financial income. Impacts also stem from the loss of the latent benefits of employment which include time structure, activity, status/identity, collective purpose, and social contact.

Despite a plethora of positive psychology constructs, theories, and quantitative research (Jayawickreme et al., 2012), the precise answer to the broad question of "What is well-being?" remains elusive. This study aims to explore the subjective experience of well-being following job loss in the hopes of improving our theoretical understanding of well-being which, in turn, helps inform intervention.

### **Methodology**

This study explored the long-term impacts of job loss using a case study of 20 technology sector workers who experienced at least one involuntary job loss from 2000-2006 in the Ottawa, Ontario, Canada area. Using a case study methodology, a longer-term, retrospective lens was adopted given that job loss impacts might be both persistent and latent (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005), including positives such as post-traumatic growth which may often only be realized after the event (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Case study is a research methodology which "explores a bounded system (or case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information" (Creswell, 2007, p.73). Case study was chosen based on its strength of providing an in-depth understanding of the intersection of the complex phenomena of well-being and job loss (Yin, 2014). This multi-temporal perspective allowed participants to reflect upon how their sense of well-being evolved from the time of the initial job loss event to the more recent perspectives on this naturalistic life event (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Wong, 2011; Yin, 2014). A single case design was chosen since participants are naturally bounded by place, time, and context, namely job loss in Ottawa, Canada during a period of decline in the technology sector. This instrumental case explored the particulars of this contextual event using an exploratory, inductive approach to help generate a bottom-up theoretical understanding of well-being in the context of negatives as well as positives of this life event.

This study follows an embedded mixed methods design which combines qualitative data with quantitative questionnaires (Creswell & Plano-Clarke, 2007), with an emphasis on a

qualitative lens given the article's exploratory aim of uncovering bottom-up, participant-defined notions of well-being (McLeod, 2001)<sup>10</sup>. This study is grounded in the research paradigm of dialectical pragmatism (Green & Caracelli, 2003), with the latter referring to a practical, *what works* epistemology which remains open to multiple methods that are informed by the specific research question. Dialectical here blends aspects of constructivism and post-positivism, with a focus on the former. Finally, the first author is a doctoral student researching positive psychology who has also experienced multiple technology job losses which have led to a positive career change to counselling. This perspective sensitized the first author to both the positives of job loss, as well as the value of a job loss lens which extends beyond the experience of unemployment. The second author is a qualitative researcher with over 20 years of experience as a counselling psychologist, with both authors appreciating the clinical realities of negative well-being.

### **Instruments**

Data was collected in two phases. In the first phase, data collection consisted of (a) unstructured written narratives, (b) demographic questionnaires, and (c) résumés for background information. The second phase of data collection consisted of (a) semi-structured interviews, and (b) six well-being questionnaires which were administered and discussed immediately post-interview to explore a priori notions of well-being. For this article, it should be noted that the questionnaires were used in a purely qualitative sense as a discussion prompt (i.e., participants were asked to indicate which instruments most and least resonated with their ideas of well-being and why<sup>11</sup>). This conceptual-focused use of questionnaires enhanced the case study by triangulating emergent, naturalistic notions of well-being with existing a priori theoretical conceptualizations which were proxied by the questionnaires. Debriefing the questionnaires also gathered valuable insight into participants' actual interpretation of operationalized constructs.

All instruments were chosen on the basis of favourable psychometrics, being brief and user-friendly, and allowing participants maximum flexibility to interpret their own view of the construct (e.g., 'I am happy' without presupposing components such as good relationships). On the basis of the above criteria, instruments were then chosen to represent the major concepts of hedonic, eudaimonic, mixed and negative well-being. Hedonic well-being was operationalized

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<sup>10</sup> This specific article does not report on quantitative questionnaire data, which will be reported in a further article which disseminates findings from the broader study.

<sup>11</sup> The actual quantitative results were, however, used for the broader study.

by three instruments: the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffen, 1985), and the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Eudaimonic well-being was proxied by the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MIL-Q) which also doubled as a process measure for another part of the study (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). Mixed well-being and negative well-being were respectively gauged by the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS; Smith et al., 2008) and the Patient Health-4 Questionnaire (PHQ-4; Kroenke, Spitzer, Williams, & Lowe, 2009) which measured anxiety and depression.

### **Participants**

A community sample of 20 was recruited from subscribers to e-mail job lists, job placement consultants, and individuals whose job loss stories were profiled in the book *Learn to Bounce* (Caputo & Wallace, 2007) via recruitment from the book's authors<sup>12</sup>. All screened-in participants experienced at least one involuntary job loss from 2000-06 while working as a full-time, "permanent" employee (i.e., not a contractor) within the region's technology sector during that timeframe. A balanced quota sample was recruited on the basis of gender, single versus multiple job losses, and *current* employment status at the time of data collection (i.e., currently employed versus unemployed). This approach ensured a broad representation of perspectives since well-being tends to vary according to these dimensions (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005), as was further confirmed via a four-person pilot study. Selection was first-come, first-served and a \$40 gift certificate was provided, regardless of study completion. There were no drop-outs and all of the participants completed all of the study components. One participant orally recounted his written narrative account due to technical issues.

The final sample was in essence balanced by gender (n=11 males, n=9 females) and current employment status (n=10 employed, n=10 unemployed), but was skewed towards multiple job loss (n=13), which was expected given the norms of frequent mass layoffs in the technology sector (Caputo & Wallace, 2007)<sup>13</sup>. The average duration of each self-reported unemployment period for all participants was approximately 6.3 months. Currently-employed

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<sup>12</sup> As per Ethics Board approval, the book's first author sent pre-approved recruitment materials to individuals featured in the book. The book's author was blind to those who responded directly to the study's first author.

<sup>13</sup> The following participants were employed at the time of data collection (all names herein are pseudonyms): Eric, Pam, Todd, Karen, Jane, Alan, Lucy, Mike, Sharon, and Dawn. Single job loss was, by definition, confined to currently employed participants (with the exception of Heather who was unemployed due to voluntarily quitting her job).

participants had been re-employed in permanent full-time jobs or self-employment for an average of 6.9 years, with both government sector workers and the self-employed experiencing the longest periods of steady re-employment. Participants tended to self-identify as university-educated ( $n=17$ ); medium-high socioeconomic status ( $n=20$ ); being married and/or partnered ( $n=17$ ), and being parents ( $n=18$ ). Ages ranged from 37 to 65 ( $M=52.3$ ,  $SD=7.0$ ). Most participants self-identified as Canadian ( $n=15$ ), with the remainder self-identifying as having immigrated to Canada from Asia ( $n=3$ ), Eastern Europe ( $n=1$ ), and the Middle East ( $n=1$ ).

### **Procedures**

Prior to data collection, participants were provided with a list of optional community counselling resources which were approved by the university's Research Ethics Board in case study participation became distressing. The first phase of data collection consisted of written narratives completed at home, with participants writing freely for at least 15 minutes about their experience of job loss and its impact on their well-being. To avoid imposing on participants' lived experience, unstructured narratives were used with instructions to write freely without concern for grammar, spelling, word counts, or providing the right answer (Niderhoffer & Pennebaker, 2005). The first author's self-disclosure regarding multiple job losses also served to minimize the researcher-participant power differential, build rapport, and helped to put participants at ease, particularly when being interviewed by a counsellor. The second phase, approximately two weeks later, included in-depth, semi-structured interviews followed by questionnaires which were immediately debriefed as participants discussed what measures most resonated with their notions of well-being. During the interview, participants were asked to (a) debrief the written narrative, (b) discuss their experiences of both job loss and well-being following job loss, (c) describe the impact of this event on their lives, (d) tell how their self-defined well-being changed at different points in the experience, (e) identify factors affecting their sense of well-being, (f) describe their experience of study participation, and (g) comment on the well-being notions represented by questionnaires. The three main data sources (i.e., written narratives, interviews, and questionnaire reflections) were integrated by asking participants to freely elaborate on their written narrative at the beginning of the interview and to debrief questionnaires at the end (Bryman, 2007).

### **Analysis**

Data analysis was guided by Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis approach which consisted of six steps: familiarizing one's self with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This general method of data analysis was chosen on the basis of affording the maximum flexibility given the large volumes of data from a variety of sources. As informed by pilot testing, the written narratives, interviews, and the questionnaire debrief were thematically analyzed as a whole since participants naturally and extensively elaborated on their written narratives during the first part of the interviews which also concluded with the questionnaire debrief.

As endorsed by Yin (2014), the quality and rigour of this case study was further enhanced by using inductive data analysis principles/techniques borrowed from other approaches. Specifically, this study was enhanced via the use of detailed open coding to inform subthemes (with the former mirroring participants' actual verbal descriptions of well-being); theoretical saturation for open codes; and the use of constant data comparison when analyzing data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Yin, 2011, 2014). Other enhancements included using participant member checks (i.e., transcripts and a draft of this article), reviewing of coding structures by the second author, and the reflexive recording of researcher biases/ideas which was particularly important given the first author's experience with job loss (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999).

Data analysis included both *within-participant* and *between-participant* analysis of participants' notions of well-being which, in the spirit of constant data comparison, was done in an iterative, recursive manner (Yin, 2011). Understanding well-being from a within-participant lens fits with the need to better understand how well-being changes within the person over time and within different contexts, rather than just looking at well-being on average (e.g., Kashdan & Steger, 2011). Secondly, Yin's (2014) case study analytical technique of comparative pattern matching was used to compare results between unprompted versus directly-solicited notions of well-being. This triangulation specifically compared naturally-emergent themes and subthemes with directly-solicited reflections of well-being, with participants being asked to do two things: (a) directly define well-being in the interview and (b) qualitatively comment on the questionnaires. The latter occurred as the very last data collection step to avoid biasing discussion.

## Results

As previously discussed, results are presented in two groups: (a) key themes and subthemes across the written narratives and interviews and (b) directly-solicited notions of well-being as defined above. As mentioned, direct notions functioned as a key source of triangulation with the study's core results (as expressed by the themes and subthemes) which helped to refine the important distinction between one's definition of well-being versus one's experience of well-being.

### Key Themes and Subthemes

Analysis of open codes across written narratives and the interviews produced six major themes<sup>14</sup>: (a) life evaluation (i.e., an evaluation of the state of one's life), (b) transitory experiencing (which was focused on emotional well-being), (c) a sense of growth and grounding, (d) environmental mastery and stability, (e) mental ill-being/ill-health, and (f) the presence of motivational mindsets/conditions (see Table 1 which also includes subthemes). Both themes and subthemes varied in their prominence as well as in the depth and richness of content (e.g., some subthemes were complex constructs while others were simply derived from open code verbatims). This difference is reflected in the subsequent level of elucidation, with the two first major themes being most prominent.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

**Theme 1: Life evaluation.** Well-being was most commonly described by the participants in terms of *life evaluation*, which refers to a holistic assessment of the state of one's life, both generally and by specific area(s) of one's life. The latter notion is represented by the first of three subthemes, *domain well-being and balance (DWB)* which refers to the degree of satisfaction in specific life domains such as career, relationships, finances, leisure, and health. This subtheme emerged as the most prominent one, with all participants naturally articulating their experience of well-being by describing how well things were going in particular life domains. Commenting on her well-being in general, Lori stated:

You know, you're happy with your job, your marriage, your children and you are at peace with that, you know. You're doing the best that you can type of thing, that you have good relationships and you are able to manage all of those areas of your life, you

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<sup>14</sup> All themes/subthemes refer to both positive and negatively-valenced descriptions of well-being (e.g., both growth and lack of growth were singularly coded as growth).

know. You are able to contribute, you know, be a caring person and have positive relationships in your life... and having a balance between all of those areas.

Well-being, as reported by participants, was seen as a holistic combination of domain satisfaction. Participants strived to balance various life domains, such as parenting and work. In particular, a lack of work-life balance when employed tended to detract from one's well-being. Cross-domain impacts were high, with circumstances in one domain impacting well-being in other domains. For instance, unemployment allowed more time for family but also created financial stress which sometimes contributed to marital strain. On the whole, participants reported experiencing mixed well-being within each domain such as the positive benefit of enjoying more time for leisure along with the negative aspect of not affording travel.

Of the various life domains, participants reported that their overall well-being was most influenced by relationship satisfaction. Among the relationships cited, parenting, marriage/co-habiting partners, family-in-general/extended family, social-in-general, friends, and co-workers were experienced as most impactful. The next most impactful well-being domains were areas related to (a) finances, (b) career, (c) identity/self-esteem, (d) leisure, and (e) physical health. Three other areas were also mentioned, namely: (a) learning, (b) contribution (e.g., prosocial behaviour, making a difference), and (c) spirituality, with participants citing these as important parts of their lives.

The second life evaluation subtheme referred to the degree of one's perceived *life satisfaction and happiness* as suggested by Tim's statement, "I'm happy with my life where it is now. Yes I'd like to be employed but I am not experiencing too much stress." Furthermore the cognitive notion of happiness under this subtheme was often paired with the affective notion of feeling happy (which will be discussed under the theme of transitory experiencing). Kent, for instance, uses the word happy to refer to both: "And I was quite happy in the end when it (the job loss) happened.", and "Umm, sometimes I feel a bit down, umm...that's unhappy." Concepts like fulfilment and contentment were also used, as with Sharon who talks about her well-being in general: "Maybe that's a better definition of well-being is things that make you feel good. Not necessarily super ecstatic, happy and jumping off ... But just contentment." For some, like Jane, life satisfaction was seen as a superordinate notion which encompasses multiple notions of her overall well-being:

Umm... I'm not happy or satisfied with my life, I think happiness and meaning and resilience all kind of tie in to life satisfaction... an over-arching one. Umm... anxiety and worry and being down and depressed, I mean, I absolutely understand that it's out there, but to me it's a waste of time.

The final subtheme of *accomplishment, achievement, and success* included both the presence and absence of these in one's life, as with Sharon who referred to the impact of not having a job on her well-being: "So, it was not, umm, not very positive at all, umm, no sense of accomplishment." Karen made reference to both internal and external evaluations of success as she talks about turning down a higher paying job: "Some people probably take it (success) as wealth. Some people view success as personal growth. I would probably ... most definitely go (with) personal growth."

**Theme 2: Transitory experiencing.** The second most common theme, *transitory experiencing*, refers to more discrete, time-bounded notions of well-being vis-à-vis the two subthemes of (a) *emotional well-being* and (b) *experiences of pleasure/absence of pain* which are inherently transient. Lucy passionately discussed studying spirituality, which helped to improve her well-being given that she was underemployed. She stated, "But there are moments within those courses that I have immense joy, tremendous joy which is not something I have experienced before... And, umm... and those are definitely way up there in terms of well-being."

*Emotional well-being* was mentioned by all but one person, and was second only to the domain well-being subtheme in terms of overall prominence. Heather, reflecting on her well-being in general, commented, "I think it's how you feel emotionally . . . because everything goes from being emotional." Participants also named specific emotions— both positive (e.g., joy) and negative (e.g., dread), as well as describing more generic states without labelling the specific emotion(s). For instance, reference was made to the positive state of feeling emotionally stronger but no emotion was named (e.g., such as feeling inspired to job search).

The valence of emotions was important to the overall experience of job loss, with participants making reference to negative emotions much more frequently than positive emotions. This pattern also appeared in general discussions of well-being. Furthermore, negative emotional states had a richer descriptive vocabulary, with participants using more specific words to describe negative emotional well-being (e.g., anger), whereas positive emotionality was more likely to be articulated as general emotion states (e.g., having positive feelings). Mixed

emotional states of both positive and negative affect were common, particularly as participants articulated their experience of well-being following job loss (e.g., children as a source of both worry and joy during times of unemployment).

Participants' experience of positive emotions included concepts such as excitement, joy, feeling ecstatic, love, pride, and feeling energized, which were referenced when talking about well-being following job loss and well-being in general. Warren talked about feeling "calm and relieved" to be laid-off as "it was clear that there was no future for me there." As forementioned, participants referred to "feeling" happy, which was related to but distinct from the notion of evaluating one's overall level of life satisfaction and happiness as discussed previously.

Negative-valenced emotional well-being had two main subcategories – activating and deactivating emotions. Activating emotions centered on anxiety regarding the future (e.g., worry, concern, dread, fear, and panic) and anger (e.g., annoyed, hurt, and envious), whereas deactivating emotions encompassed emotional states associated with feeling down (e.g., demoralized, disappointed, discouraged, grief, and sadness), and emotions related to job loss adjustment (e.g., numbness, feelings of shock). Karen describes feeling, yet "not festering," on negative emotions:

Initially on the job loss, I was so shocked to even think forward, all I could think of was my family and how we would manage in the next coming month since my compensation package was only two months' worth (of salary). I was scared and frustrated all (at) the same time. . . . I did not have the luxury of sitting around to mope. I had family responsibilities and renewed motivation to make things better for myself and my family. I choose to live a positive experience.

Other negative emotions included guilt, embarrassment and shame, all of which point to concerns about how one was perceived by both self and others. Paul stated, "What was less helpful...I guess...like sort of turning inward, like a sense of shame associated with your situation (of being unemployed)." Negative well-being was also expressed as the absence of positive emotions (e.g., not too excited).

Finally, some participants described emotional well-being as a process. More specifically, they valued being able to balance both positive and negative emotions. Examples included references to being even-tempered, not being too excited or down/disappointed, and

aiming for the midpoint of emotional peaks and valleys. Participants also consciously mentioned strategies to manage negative emotions (e.g., not letting them weigh heavily).

A second, much less prominent subtheme referred to experiencing *pleasure and/or the absence of pain* which also included novelty as well as the absence of discomfort or hassles. Pleasure often overlapped with positive emotions (e.g., enjoyment, feeling good) and included concepts like fun. Dawn described this, “Our friends, we adored, came and (we had) fun... even though it was a stressful time, ... we engaged in fun! I engaged in ... my life.” Conversely, participants also reported the absence of pain/discomfort such as with Tim who talks about not having to deal with the hassles of rushing to work:

“Well...I don’t have to get up early. ... And I don’t have to rush around in the morning. So, showers are around lunch time or 1:00. ... And I’m also working hard at learning how to go slow. I’m very good at going really fast.”

The latter example also reflected a sense of positive relief due to being able to slow down the intense pace of life often required to work in the demanding technology sector.

**Theme 3: Growth and grounding.** Here well-being is discussed in terms of both growing as a person and staying grounded in the face of change, with two specific subthemes emerging: (a) *self-development, self-realization, and self-congruency* and (b) being *centered and steadfast*.

This prominent subtheme of *self-development, self-realization, and self-congruency* was richly represented by notions which included personal growth, as with Dawn who stated, “I would describe my personal sense of well-being since losing my job as an experience of growth – of blessings in disguise.” Other notions for this sub-theme included self-exploration, along with authenticity/autonomy which encompassed being true to one’s values (e.g., “sticking to who I am”, as Heather stated). Participants also referred to ideas such as appreciating new experiences, self-awareness, and self-actualization. Conversely, the absence of various notions (e.g., lack of growth) was also mentioned in the context of well-being deficiency, as with Lucy’s sense of not reaching her full potential due to underemployment:

I enjoy my work but I feel that I am not using my abilities to their fullest. Overall, I think being laid off caused a setback in my career but helped me to grow more mature as a person. . . . but the bigger picture is more like ‘Have we done something ... in our life?,’

(is it) that we have reached our full potential. I think that is very important to well-being, not just the job itself.

The second subtheme of being *centered and steadfast* emerged in contrast to the tumultuous nature of the technology sector. Participants suggested that this notion of well-being helped them stay centered in the face of change as it encompassed ideas like being grounded, knowing one's bearings, trusting one's self, and knowingness. Notions of acceptance and steadiness were also prominent with the former reflected in ideas such as letting go, surrendering, and moving on. Steadiness is well-illustrated by Ted's emotional even-temperedness:

Maybe their well-being [i.e. others' overall well-being] is more situational. Mine is... I try to keep the steadiness no matter what is going on around me. Don't get too excited; don't get too down [chuckle]. Just notice and be ready.... Well-being... is sense of peaceful invisibility – quiet self-assurance. The knowing of the knowing that all is good [chuckling]. Your emotional state has different ... degrees of ups and downs, but in the middle ... is a calm, quiet, logical thing that ... I call "contentment." Not happiness, contentment. It's just this quietness that it's okay. So that is well-being to me.

Finally, some participants mentioned calmness and peace as they described markers of overall well-being using terms such as quietness, being at-ease, and having peace-of-mind which were also sometimes used in the context of job loss (e.g., peace-of-mind from financial savings).

**Theme 4: Environmental mastery and stability.** This person-environment centered theme referred both to how one anticipates and responds to change in the environment as well as to the inherent stability in one's environment via the two subthemes of (a) *adaptability, coping and resilience* and (b) *certainty, security, stability and control*.

*Adaptability, coping, and resilience* referred to dynamic environmental adaptation/coping as well as participants self-labelling themselves as resilient. Problem-focused coping in the face of job loss was common, as with Ted who referred to actively "working the problem." Other notions include coping self-efficacy/confidence; being aware of one's environment and adapting to it; having clarity of mind in the face of challenge, goal-setting and prioritization; and learning from the past. Karen reflects on her resilience as she discusses what she learned from her two job losses:

The high-tech industry has taught me so much, especially how to be resilient. Whether it was from being competitive in nature, learning how to play the game, acquiring the stepping stones to get ahead, and staying two steps ahead of your competition – all these attributes had provided me with the necessary personal strength to push forward and never regret the past.

The second subtheme of *certainty, security, stability, and control*, generally referred to negatively-valenced verbatim concepts like uncertainty, loss of security and wanting to be in control, along with the positively-valenced notion of desiring stability. This subtheme was central to Eric's negative experience of well-being, as he stated:

I'm a very strong person but this event challenged my personal sense of well-being by introducing a sense of a future that was unknown and not entirely in my control to resolve. This led to fear, stress and worrying.... It was the uncertainty of not knowing when, where and what I'd be working at again that was the most disturbing.

Such statements were typically made in the context of employment instability within the rapidly fluctuating technology sector.

**Theme 5: Mental ill-being/ill-health.** *Mental ill-being/ill-health* referred to the presence and absence of such challenges related to mental strain and psychopathology (e.g., being stressed and depressed). Specifically, *stress* was cited by most participants, including Boris who answered the question of well-being following job loss by stating, "Well, it's obviously a stress." The next most prominent notion was *depression* which was sometimes referred to in a clinical sense (e.g. taking antidepressants), but was more commonly used to self-label one's well-being, such as with Pam who stated:

However, after months of hard work and classes, I was rolling into May with still not so much as a single interview to show for my hard work. I was depressed. I had absolutely nothing to show for months of hard work. 'What's wrong with me?' With my experience, I can't believe I'm not even getting interviews.

There were also self-reported mentions of *burnout* and *suicidal ideation* (though much less common). Todd talked about the long-term cumulative effects of multiple life stressors which began with job loss, and were further exacerbated by other concurrent life events (i.e., new baby, death of parent, parent with dementia) and landing a stressful new job with a difficult boss. He states:

All was good until the following spring. I was under tremendous stress and did not know what to do. Looking back I know that I had never really gotten over my Mother's death or my Father's steady decline (due to dementia) afterwards. I tried to talk to my boss but it did not do any good. I ended up taking a few days of leave on my doctor's orders. I came back but was still not better. My boss started applying the pressure and one day I cracked. I knew I was in trouble when (jumping off) the highway overpass looked like a good solution.

There were also verbatim references to *anxiety* and other expressions of concern about the future. Alan stated, "Looking back from the day I lost my job, I have gone through, at the high level, the following stages (which include) ... a sense of fear, doubt, anxiety and hopelessness." Such concerns often went beyond temporary negative emotions (i.e., transitory experiencing) to include a more severe and sustained experience of negative well-being which included negative thinking (e.g., wondering if will ever get a job) and impaired functioning (e.g., withdrawing from friends). Finally and quite significantly, participants tended to bring up notions of mental illness even if they did not experience ill-being (e.g., not being depressed).

**Theme 6: Motivational mindsets/conditions.** Motivational mindsets/conditions respectively refer to ways of thinking and/or the presence/absence of environmental conditions that influence one's motivation. *Purpose and life meaning* was the most common subtheme as participants cited the importance of the presence or absence of these mindsets in specific life domains. Boris stressed the role of family for overall well-being, "But, this is the purpose. The family and actually all of this stuff." The career domain was also referenced as participants talked about how work provided a sense of purpose as well as the role of "meaningful work," as with Sharon who stated: "The key realization is that it is not the layoff by itself, it is the inability to find meaningful work to replace what was lost, that is so debilitating – or at least it was for me." Finally, meaning was experienced as spirituality for Lucy:

There is something that, umm, life is meaningful—explained all the things that I thought, 'Why this?', and 'Why that?', 'Why we are on this earth?' And all of these different questions. It seems there is an answer to them, not just rational answers, but my heart feels right.

*Optimism and hope* was the second most common subtheme with participants using both positive and negative terms like optimism, pessimism, hope, and hopelessness which were

related to factors such as (a) conditions of the job market, and (b) perceptions of progress on job search, as well as (c) self-defined, trait-like mindsets. An example of the latter would be Heather who cited optimism as a key life philosophy which helped motivate her through the tough process of job search as well as navigating life challenges in general. She stated, “And I think you have to kind of live that way. You have to continue and that’s part... is the optimism as well. ... You have to believe that the world is good and everything is good.” Hope was often referenced in terms of hopelessness, as with the previous quote from Alan as he talks about his “sense of fear, doubt, anxiety and *hopelessness*” following job loss.

The third subtheme, *positivity-in-general*, cited notions such as a positive attitude, positive environment, and positive experiences. Avi, much like Heather, embraces positivity as central to his overall well-being and cited this mindset as a positive factor which helped him access social support in the face of job loss. He stated:

It’s a philosophy; it’s an outlook on life. It’s a—for me at least. And staying positive. Believing in the goodness of people. Not everyone is evil. That’s my philosophy at least. And when given a chance, people will try to help. You just have to usually ask for that or indicate that you need help.

Avi further suggested that his positive attitude was a key motivational factor which spurred him forward in the face of challenges such as job searching. Conversely, when employed, he found working in a negative work environment to be demotivating. A discussion on the specifics of participants’ direct reflections on well-being now follows.

### **Direct Reflections on Well-being**

Participants were asked to directly reflect on well-being by (a) personally defining well-being and (b) identifying which of the well-being questionnaires they most and least resonated with (i.e., a qualitative debrief of the well-being instruments). Overall, the collective responses for direct well-being were generally consistent with indirect notions expressed in other parts of interviews and narratives.

**Definitions of well-being.** Participants’ directly-solicited *definitions of well-being* included five of six major themes for the sample as a whole. The three dominant themes of (a) life evaluation, (b) growth and grounding, and (c) transitory experiencing were cited by half or more of participants (See Table 2). Similarly, participants also mentioned subthemes in their definitions. The most prominent subthemes were: (a) domain well-being, (b) emotional well-

being (which included feeling happy), (c) self-development, realization, and congruency, (d) being centered and steadfast, and (e) life satisfaction and happiness. These themes were cited by a quarter or more of participants. In the case of domain well-being, relationships were once again dominant, with contribution, physical health and self-esteem also being mentioned.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Looking at *within-participant definitions of well-being*, each participant generally resonated with multiple well-being themes ( $M=2.2$ ) and subthemes ( $M=2.8$ ). All participants cited one or more of the six key themes which continues the pattern of multiple-theme endorsement. Alan's view of well-being illustrates both the multifaceted and the holistic quality of well-being for participants as participants were asked to define well-being:

To me, well-being is holistic... one way to talk about it is 'How I am feeling?, right' right? 'What is my energy level?' umm, kind of sometimes 'What mood I am in?' ... 'How do I see the world?' So, if I have a positive good well-being, then I will feel like I feel now. I feel calm, I feel peace, I feel grounded. I wouldn't mind sharing anything ... I feel connections. ... So, I'm in a good state so I feel that. I feel optimism... I would be in a good state of mind and I would even extend to my family too, right?

When they were asked to compare how their personalized notions of well-being compared to that of others, the majority of participants felt that well-being is personalized to the individual and attributed these differences to variations in one's values.

**Qualitative debrief of well-being instruments.** The instruments that participants most commonly resonated with were (i.e., the *between-participant* level): life satisfaction ( $n=15$ ), happiness ( $n=11$ ), meaning ( $n=10$ ), resilience ( $n=10$ ), anxiety/depression ( $n=8$ ), and emotional state ( $n=5$ ). On the *within-participant* level, once again participants endorsed multiple notions of well-being, with each participant typically endorsing three instruments.

*Life satisfaction* was more strongly endorsed in the questionnaire debrief as compared to written narratives and the interview. When asked why they endorsed the SWLS, participants primarily cited their agreement with specific SWLS by quoting items like "The conditions of my life are excellent" (Diener et al., 1985, p. 72). Conversely, emotional well-being was less endorsed by the questionnaires, with participants typically viewing emotions as a component of broader notions like happiness and life satisfaction. Eric stated:

Life satisfaction. Yeah. [Sigh], that's another big one and if you are satisfied with life—if I'm satisfied with my life, I'm happy. And I'm emotionally pretty stable. And if those all link up then I feel there's meaning and I don't have any need to be resilient or definitely don't have a need (for) anxiety, worry or (to be) depressed. So, I would say life satisfaction is the big one, right. And then everything else is a sub-component of that.

Like many participants, Eric most resonated with life satisfaction on the whole, which was seen as an umbrella construct.

### Discussion

Well-being following job loss was shown to be both rich and multilayered. What most stands out is the variety of well-being themes and subthemes which parallel the diversity of constructs in the literature. This multifacetedness is particularly striking since it captures the lived experience of just 20 people with similar demographics experiencing the same life event of job loss. Delle Fave et al. (2011) drew similar conclusions regarding the complex, multifaceted nature of well-being in their large scale mixed methods study (N=666) which included an open-ended component asking participants to define happiness and identify sources of meaningfulness. Equally noteworthy is the current study's endorsement of multiple constructs even within the same person. The pluralistic nature of both between-participant and within-participant well-being strongly suggests that it would be limiting to view well-being as a singular construct rather than a holistic lived experience. There is no holy grail of well-being, at least not in this contextualized study.

A juxtaposition of the major themes shows well-being to be a multi-temporal construct that holistically combines past, present and future (Yalom, 1980), with *life evaluation* referring to the past, *transitory experiencing* being focused in the present, and *motivational mindsets/conditions* serving to help orient one towards the future. The often paradoxical nature of well-being was further demonstrated by non-dualistic notions of *growth and grounding*, coupled with *environmental mastery and stability* which refer to states characterized by a sense of dynamic adaptation (i.e., growth and environmental mastery) as well as a sense of being rooted (e.g., grounding and stability) which suggests the adoption of a *both/and* rather than *either/or* lens. Similarly, we also have the co-existence of positive notions such as *motivational mindsets/conditions* (e.g., optimism and hope) which also co-occurred with negative notions *mental ill-being/ill-health*, even amongst participants who did not experience depression. The

latter concurs with recent calls for integration of both positive and negative well-being (Ivtzan, Lomas, Hefferon, & Worth, 2015; Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014; Wong, 2011), which ideally considers the broader social discourse of psychopathology (Elkins, 2009).

The emergence of multiple notions of the experience of well-being raises the question of how these notions operate together. Here it is helpful to shift from discussing major themes to take a more nuanced look at subthemes for greater insight. Domain and emotional well-being were, by far, the most prominent open codes which strongly suggest that these two subthemes are central to well-being. Looking at the remaining well-being subthemes, it is theorized that the value placed on other dimensions is personalized and varies by participant.

The remaining notions can be further categorized into the “what” and “how” of well-being which are posited to dynamically interact to construct the experience of well-being (see Figure 1). The “what” thematic group relates positive well-being to *having* one or more of the following: (a) absence of mental ill-being/ill-health; (b) pleasure and absence of pain; (c) purpose and life meaning; (d) certainty, security, stability, and control; and (e) accomplishment, achievement, and success. Well-being in the “how” thematic group relates to *being*: (a) self-developing/self-realizing/self-congruent; (b) adaptable, coping well, and resilient; (c) centered and steadfast; (d) optimistic and hopeful; and (f) positive-in-general. In summary, this data-informed model posits that well-being is inherently personalized and holistic as participants dynamically select and combine various aspects of well-being to form unique gestalts of well-being which themselves may vary over time and be influenced by major life events like job loss.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Given the need to better understand the subjective experience of well-being following job loss, selected results will now be further discussed in the context of (a) the dominance of *domain well-being*, (b) the emergence of the new notion of *centered and steadfast*, and (c) discussion of traditional notions of hedonia and eudaimonia. This selection was informed by the need to focus on key findings which can better inform our theoretical perspectives, as opposed to well-known concepts like hope, optimism, and mental ill-health/ill-being which have been subject to less theoretical debate (Lopez & Snyder, 2009).

### **Domain Well-being and Balance**

Looking at themes and subthemes, the degree of emphasis on *domain well-being and balance* in people’s lived experience was particularly striking. This notion was, by far, the most

frequent of all open codes. All participants made multiple, unprompted mentions of their well-being within various life domains in their narratives and interviews, with the majority also directly referencing domain well-being when asked to define well-being. Multiple life domains were typically mentioned in an integrated manner, with balance between domains being important, as Sirgy and Wu (2009) contend. Delle Fave et al. (2011) noticed a similar emphasis on domain well-being with it accounting for 50% of their study's happiness conceptualizations. A domain well-being lens also aligns with Frisch's (1994) quality of life theory which posits that well-being is a product of the quality of life experienced in a domain times the value placed on that domain. However, studies from both Rojas (2006) and Delle Fave et al. suggest that overall well-being is not simply a weighted average of life domains, adding further evidence that well-being is both personalized and complex.

Moving to the job loss literature, domain well-being was also shown to be a key focus of research via McKee-Ryan et al.'s (2005) meta-analysis. Furthermore, the domains of relationships, finances, and physical health emerged in Blustein et al.'s (2013) narrative analysis of unemployment/underemployment while Waters' quantitative studies of the unemployed highlighted the importance of (a) financial domain, (b) time structure provided by work versus other life domains (Waters & Muller, 2003), and (c) self-esteem and identity (Waters, Briscoe, Hall, & Wang, 2014). The latter was further related to a protean career orientation which was interestingly characterized as being self-directed and value-driven.

Also noteworthy are the specific domains which too align with specific positive psychology theories and studies in the field. Relationships, for instance, are components of key theories including Seligman's PERMA (2011) theory (i.e., positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement); positive relations under Ryff's (1989) psychological well-being (PWB) theory; and relatedness for self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Relationships, particularly family, also represented the dominant life domain in Delle Fave et al.'s (2011) study. Secondly, the emergence of *accomplishment*, *achievement*, and *success* (coupled with the high value placed on the career domain in this study) is also consistent with engagement and achievement, as mentioned by PERMA (Seligman, 2011), SDT's competence pillar (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and eudaimonic identity theory (Waterman & Schwartz, 2013). Furthermore, work was the second most meaningful domain after family in Delle Fave et al.'s study. Finally, Ashfield, McKenna & Backhouse's (2012) qualitative exploration of elite

athlete's experience of flourishing showed both relationships (i.e., friends and family) as well as achievement to be central well-being themes which corroborates with this study's findings.

Although this domain emphasis could arguably be a product of the job loss context, counterevidence also points to the thematic dominance of this category amongst both employed and unemployed participants, all of whom spontaneously cited a domain well-being lens even as they talked about well-being generally. Domain well-being is arguably both generally and contextually important, with the latter likely heightened in the context of a major life event like job loss.

### **Traditional Notions of Well-being: Hedonia and Eudaimonia**

*Hedonia*, based on traditional research conceptualizations, was strongly endorsed via the key subthemes of (a) *emotional well-being* and (b) *life satisfaction and happiness* which were virtually universally-endorsed. The notion of *pleasure and absence of pain*, by definition, also fits with hedonia. The emphasis on the former two subthemes is congruent with notions of subjective well-being where both positive emotionality and cognitive judgments of life satisfaction are valued (Diener et al., 1999).

The hedonic notion of *emotional well-being* was the second most common subtheme in both this study and Delle Fave's (2011) research. Interestingly, in this study, emotional well-being was more strongly mentioned as a key well-being notion in the interview and written narratives more so than during the questionnaire debrief when participants were asked to indicate which instruments they most resonate with. While the latter could potentially be related to participant critiques of the PANAS instrument, the questionnaire debrief revealed that participants cited emotions as being necessary for well-being but that they do not operate in isolation, as SWB theory suggests (Diener et al., 1999).

This finding also highlights the critical distinction between the actual lived experience of well-being compared to conceptual/definitional notions. For instance, participants not only named the *content* of their emotions but also talked about the *process* of regulating them. Also interesting is the relative dominance of negative over positive emotions which goes beyond obvious explanations vis-à-vis the negatives of job loss (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005) and human tendencies to focus on negativity (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001) given the "greater potency of negative emotions" (Algoe, Fredrickson, & Chow, 2011, p. 116). This finding concurs with the prevalence of more negative than positive emotion words in

Pennebaker's extensively developed computerized word analysis program (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). It is also consistent with Schrauf and Sanchez's (2004) work where both US and Mexican participants could quickly name more negative emotions than positive emotions in two minutes due to a larger working emotional vocabulary for the former. Such findings raise the question as to whether having a lesser vocabulary for positive emotionality affects one's perceived lived experience of positivity.

The *life satisfaction and happiness* subtheme was common amongst participants, with frequent mentions of happiness in both the interviews and written narratives (e.g., happy with my life). The SHS and the SWLS, which respectively measure happiness and life satisfaction, were the two most participant-endorsed questionnaires. Debrief of these instruments suggests that one should not automatically equate notions of happiness and life satisfaction with hedonia without context. Some participants linked these ideas with life meaning, which is considered more eudaimonic in nature, as well as other broader well-being notions. The dominance of SWLS in operationalizing hedonia raises an important question for further research: Can we assume that all participants are exclusively referring to hedonia (if at all) when they provide self-reports of their life satisfaction, particularly in the absence of measures of emotions? This study's findings suggest a strong need for more qualitative research to explore the assumption that operationalized research constructs mirror lay conceptualizations of well-being. These findings also lend support for the idea that experiences do not always fit neatly into discrete "bins" like hedonia and eudaimonia (Biswas-Diener et al., 2009, p.210). That said, clearly articulated conceptualization remains important to promote comparison across studies.

*How* people go about evaluating their overall well-being is similarly important in understanding the potential role of various constructs. In this study, life satisfaction and happiness appeared to act as an umbrella construct for some which represented an evaluation of domain satisfaction on the whole. Domain satisfaction, in turn, was seen to influence well-being outcomes such as stress/depression as well as both positive/negative emotions. Emotional well-being was not exclusively an output of life evaluation, with some participants using the input of emotions to evaluate how well their life was going which likely pertains to the related notions of "feeling happy" and "being happy." This duality raises questions about the exact role of emotional well-being as both an input and an output of life evaluations. These findings suggest

that emotions are not only central to the lived experience of well-being, they also play a complex role in the process of well-being (Algoe et al., 2011).

Finally, *eudaimonia* was also naturalistically endorsed. It was most strongly supported via categories of *self-development*, *self-realization*, and *self-congruency* and the notions of *purpose and life meaning*. Generally, there was strong inductive support for major eudaimonic theories, including Seligman's (2011) PERMA. All of the components of Ryff's (1989) PWB theory also emerged in the study: purpose in life; personal growth and autonomy (within self-development, self-realization); environmental mastery; positive relationships; and self-acceptance (as a notion within the domain of identity and self-esteem). SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) was similarly validated via autonomy (i.e., self-congruency), relatedness (i.e., relationship domain well-being), and competence (i.e., accomplishment, adaptability/coping/resilience).

### **Newer Notions of Well-being: Centered and Steadfast**

We now shift from traditional concepts of well-being to the potentially more novel well-being notion of *centered and steadfast*, which evokes Eastern philosophy-inspired (Delle Fave et al., 2011) concepts like mindfulness through components like calmness and groundedness. Notably, the latter notions tend to be of lower emotional intensity than traditional views of hedonic well-being. This is congruent with Leu, Wang, and Koo's (2011) findings that more Eastern-like positive emotions such as serenity may be more understated than Westernized emotions like enthusiasm. Centered and steadfast also mirrors Delle Fave et al.'s (2011) notion of harmony/balance which encompassed concepts like inner peace and serenity, as well as Gruman and Bors' (2012) idea of halcyonic well-being which refers to "the serene and contented acceptance of life 'as it is'" and a form of "in-the-moment" happiness (Gruman & Bors, as cited in Hefferon, 2013, p. 3). It also fits with Kjell, Daukantaitė, Hefferon, and Sikström's (2016) *Harmony in Life Scale*.

Also interesting was the frequent pairing of *centered and steadfast* (which included the notion of acceptance) with *adaptation, coping, and resilience*. Together, these concepts resemble the dual notions of acceptance and change as espoused by the Serenity Prayer<sup>15</sup> (Reinhold Niebuhr, n.d.). This dynamic view of internal-focused adaptability also co-exists with the notion

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<sup>15</sup> "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." (Reinhold Niebuhr, n.d., p.1).

of environmental control (i.e., *certainty, security, stability, and control*) which is contextually-logical given the instability of the technology industry (Caputo & Wallace, 2007).

### **Theorized Tenants of Well-being**

Finally, the myriad of well-being notions leads us to again revisit a central question – *What are some guiding principles which could potentially underlie the holistic gestalt of the experience of well-being?* Here, two non-dualistic tenants are theorized: (a) the objectivity *and* subjectivity of well-being; and (b) the intertwined nature of the “what” *and* the “how” of well-being. It is conjectured that well-being is “subjective-objective” (Poonamallee, 2009, p. 71), due to having common elements like pleasure and relationships which, in turn, vary in importance according to an individual’s values. Values are naturally-shaped and socially-constructed by factors like culture and life experiences, among others (Polkinghorne, 2007). Secondly, the experience of well-being was shown to be related to ways of living such as being self-congruent (i.e., the “how”) as well as outcomes of well-being such as *life meaning* (i.e., the “what”). Together, these perspectives point to the inextricable nature of the experience of well-being as both an *outcome* and *process*. This idea concurs with Luthar’s (2006) analysis of five decades of resilience research which concluded that resilience is both an outcome and a process, and Delle Fave et al.’s (2011) view of well-being as both a state and process. Most significantly, empirically-validated positive psychology theories such as SDT and PERMA similarly point to the “how” and “what” of well-being. For instance, SDT prescribes a “how” of well-being such as acting autonomously (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which is inherently subjective. PERMA prescribes a “what” of well-being via components like accomplishment, which itself has been labelled as an objective indicator of well-being (Seligman, 2011).

### **Limitations**

Results are best viewed as transferable rather than generalizable given the contextual limitations of job loss which are industry, region, and time-frame specific (Morrow, 2005). It also reflects the views of Westernized, medium-high socioeconomic status white collar workers which, for instance, excludes blue collar workers who typically fare worse with job loss (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). This sample may also be eudaimonically-predisposed given workers’ high education levels (Ryff, 2013) and their attraction to working in a growth-oriented industry.

This research would ideally be conducted as a prospective, longitudinal study that explores well-being before and after job loss, which creates the current limitation of memory

recall effects based on events which have occurred over a number of years. The latter was mitigated by prompting deep reflection via written narratives and providing an interview guide in advance. That said, a constructivist lens (Polkinghorne, 2005) suggests that we remember the most meaningful experiences and that the mere act of reflection serves to construct and shape one's experience (e.g., some participants reported that this was the first time that they ever simultaneously reflected on all of their job losses). Final limitations include a lack of anonymity when completing questionnaires which may have created a self-presentation bias, as well as the primary researcher's dualistic epistemological stance which influenced exploring well-being from an objectivity-subjectivity lens.

### **Further Research Directions and Applications**

Further research directions include: (a) expanding this research beyond a job loss context, (b) longitudinal studies to see how well-being changes with time/life events, (c) continued qualitative exploration of lay conceptualizations of well-being, and (d) quantitatively testing findings with a broader population (e.g., factor analysis of themes/subthemes). Future mixed method/qualitative studies could also explore processes of well-being, including interactions between overall and domain well-being along with the role of values. Job loss research could also explore the impact of changes in well-being due to job loss in one domain on other domains, as well as determining which domains most significantly impact domain well-being overall.

Finally, counsellors, coaches, and others conducting well-being interventions are generally reminded not to presume what constitutes well-being for others. This is particularly important in a job loss context given the impact of job loss on multiple life domains and how individuals are shaped by this major life event (e.g., revisiting the role of work in one's life). Instead, a stance of open-minded curiosity is suggested as practitioners ask clients to reflect on the client's own personal notions of well-being when setting goals with clients. Carefully guided reflection in and of itself may also be therapeutic, as with one depressed participant who reported feeling better as a result of study participation which led her to reflect on both the positives as well as the negatives of her life situation overall.

### **Conclusion**

Well-being, in the context of this study, has indeed been shown to be a pluralistic concept which naturally eludes precise definition and operationalization. The conceptualizations of well-being by everyday people are rich and varied, just as theories of well-being have been. This is

arguably not coincidental as people too are rich and varied. The diversity of both between-participant and within-participant conceptualizations of well-being strongly suggests there is no “one-size-fits-all” theory of well-being in the context of job loss. That said, the quest for the Holy Grail of well-being should not be abandoned. The need to better understand the nature of well-being remains more, not less, important in the face of its inherent elusiveness. Indeed, well-being is both intuitive and complex.

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Table 1

*Key Themes and Subthemes*

<b>General Themes and Subthemes (In Order of Overall Thematic Frequency)</b>	<b>Number of Participants Endorsing Category</b>
<b><i>Life Evaluation</i></b>	<b><u>20</u></b>
Domain Well-being and Balance	20
Life Satisfaction and Happiness	20
Accomplishment, Achievement, and Success	7
<b><i>Transitory Experiencing</i></b>	<b><u>19</u></b>
Emotional Well-being	19
Pleasure and Absence of Pain	16
<b><i>Growth and Grounding</i></b>	<b><u>19</u></b>
Self-development, Self-realization, and Self-congruency	17
Centered and Steadfast	14
<b><i>Environmental Mastery and Stability</i></b>	<b><u>18</u></b>
Adaptability, Coping, and Resilience	16
Certainty, Security, Stability, and Control	8
<b><i>Mental Ill-Being/Ill-Health</i></b>	<b><u>18</u></b>
Stress	16
Depression, Burnout, and Suicidality	11
Anxiety	3
<b><i>Motivational Mindsets and Conditions</i></b>	<b><u>17</u></b>
Purpose and Life Meaning	11
Optimism and Hope	10
Positivity-in-General	5

Table 2

*Themes Mentioned in Direct Definitions of Well-being*

Direct Definitions of Well-being: Key Themes	Number of Participants Endorsing Category
Life Evaluation	15
Growth and Grounding	11
Transient Experiencing	8
Mental Ill-being/Ill-health	5
Motivational Conditions and Mindsets	4

**Lived Experience of Well-Being Following Job Loss -  
Personalized and Holistic Criteria**

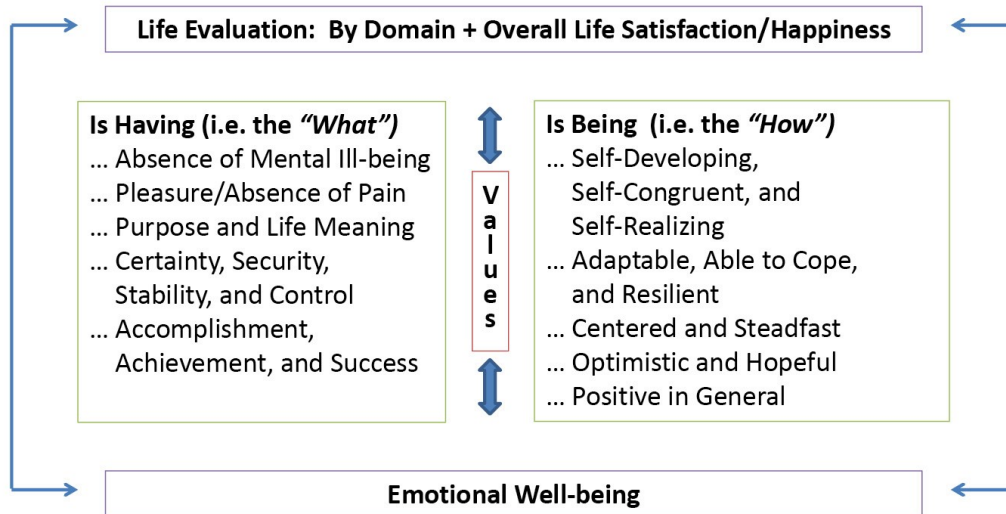


Figure 1. Inductive notions associated with the experience of well-being following job loss.

### Linking First and Second Articles

The preceding first article enhanced our understanding of the overarching question of “*What is the subjective experience of well-being following job loss?*” by exploring how participants intuitively conceptualized well-being. This emphasis was important given the valued outcome of well-being, as well as the vast conceptual diversity of well-being notions and theories (Jayawickreme, et al., 2012). By adopting an open-ended, inductive approach, this study stepped outside the potential restrictions of relying solely on a priori theories and having to restrictively choose just one or two theories.

This approach also enhanced our understanding of this very rich notion by avoiding premature operationalization of the frequently debated construct of well-being (Seligman, 2011). As Jayawickreme et al. (2012) put it, “The study of well-being is hampered by the multiplicity of approaches, but focusing on a single approach begs the question of what ‘well-being’ really is” (p. 327). Using the context of job loss also helped to address the need for positive psychology to focus on the negatives as well as the positives of well-being. This first article focused on the research sub-question: “*How do participants describe their experience of well-being following job loss?*”

This expansion of the first article will (a) summarize key themes, (b) discuss the broader implications for the study of well-being (both generally and in a job loss context), and (c) show how articles one and two link together in determining the overall subjective experience of well-being following job loss.

The first article identified six major well-being themes: (a) life evaluation, (b) transitory experiencing, (c) growth and grounding, (d) environmental mastery/stability, (e) mental ill-being/ill-health, and (f) motivational mindsets/conditions. In terms of well-being in general, three findings regarding the broad nature of well-being are particularly noteworthy.

First, participants described a variety of well-being notions which points to both the individualized and multidimensional nature of well-being (i.e., one-size-does-not-fit-all). This finding also raises the question as to whether notions of well-being change over time, particularly in the case of major life events. For instance, would someone who overcame depression in the wake of getting laid off from a prestigious job now shift to define their well-being in terms of mental health rather than accomplishment? In the case of job loss research and intervention, it is important to ask individuals what they most value rather than pre-suppose what

matters. It would also be valuable to interview participants after completing questionnaires vis-à-vis the technique of ‘questerviews’ (Adamson et al., 2004) to understand how everyday people interpret traditional well-being concepts. This approach could also be helpful in developing an inductively derived well-being questionnaire which considers a variety of well-being notions and/or considers broader unifying theoretical principles.

Secondly, emergent inductive notions of well-being were aligned with major theoretical notions of well-being, both within positive psychology generally (i.e., hedonia, eudaimonia, and other specific theories) as well as with general psychology’s focus on psychopathology. The latter finding is particularly interesting, given that a shift away from negative well-being is central to positive psychology’s *raison d’être* (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The co-existence of naturally positive and negative valued notions of well-being adds further support for a “both/and” philosophical stance which remains open to both negative and positive aspects of well-being.

Also interesting is the field’s implicit framing of well-being in a positive or neutral manner (e.g., the positive pressure of happiness, the neutral pressure of a lack of anxiety). This assumption exists in contrast to the overall experience of well-being which is often mixed. This observation was further apparent from participants’ direct definition of well-being. Quite significantly, no participant cited resilience in their definition of well-being – not even those who made unprompted mentions of resilience in their narratives and interviews. This finding might relate to the intuitive assumptions that well-being is positive, despite the inevitable challenges of life. There could thus be value in shifting towards more realistic, less polarized notions of well-being (e.g., flourishing versus mental illness). In the case of job loss and other life events, this stance could include a focus on moving through life’s challenges rather than resisting and fearing change.

Third, this study uncovered two potential guiding theoretical principles of well-being; namely: the subjective and objective nature of well-being, and the intertwined notion of well-being as being both an outcome and a process. The objective-subjective dimension could be incorporated into future research by presenting participants with a number of well-being constructs (e.g., growth, happiness, meaning in life, lack of anxiety) and then asking participants to assign value to their importance and comment on the current degree of satisfaction on these dimensions. To further enhance our understanding of the lived experience of well-being,

participants could be asked questions about what such a state might look like, and how they would know if they or others have achieved it. Qualitative research would also be well-suited to exploring well-being as both an outcome and a process by using longitudinal diary studies where participants write about their well-being at both pre-determined points in time and for self-defined critical moments. Job loss research would particularly benefit from this approach which would show the impact of critical events, as well as identifying how *different* well-being processes interact over time (e.g., the interaction between hopelessness and growth in the

Finally, an analysis of the quantitative questionnaire results provides important context for the study by helping to characterize the overall well-being of participants in comparison to instrument norms (See Table 3). A single-sampled t-test was performed which compared the participant means against published norm values for each of the six instruments. Generally-speaking, participants demonstrated average-to-above average well-being. Statistical significance was determined based on t-tests conducted at the .05 significance level. Participants specifically showed higher well-being in terms of life satisfaction (SWLS), positive affect (PANAS – positive affect subscale), meaning-in-life (MLQ – greater presence, less search), and resilience (BRS). Participant scores for happiness (SHS), negative affect (PANAS – negative affect subscale), and overall mental health (vis-à-vis the PHQ-4) were not statistically different from the norm. A more detailed view of the PHQ-4 mental health anxiety and depression subscales shows that participant anxiety was significantly higher than the norm, in contrast to depression scores which did not differ significantly. The presence of increased anxiety could add further evidence for the case of mixed well-being, as it demonstrates that both positive and negative well-being can co-exist (Wong, 2011). Overall, these results collectively suggest a sample which is characterized by relatively positive well-being compared to the norm.

[Insert Table 3 here]

Table 3

*Comparison of Participants' Average Well-being (WB) Scores with Instrument Norms*

Well-being Constructs & Instruments	Study Population (N = 20)			Well-being Instrument Norms	
	M	SD	<i>t</i> -statistic	M	Comparison
Happiness: SHS <sup>16</sup>	5.41	0.95	-0.97	5.62	Not statistically significant
Life Satisfaction: SWLS <sup>17</sup>	5.34	1.12	+5.09	4.06	<b>Higher WB than norm</b>
Positive and Negative Affect Scale: PANAS <sup>18</sup>					
Positive Affect: PA	37.85	4.96	+5.90	31.31	<b>Higher WB than norm</b>
Negative Affect: NA	15.85	5.69	-0.12	16.0	Not statistically significant
Meaning-in-Life: MLQ <sup>19</sup>					
Presence	27.15	4.67	+2.92	24.10	<b>Higher WB than norm</b>
Search	20.60	7.14	-2.44	24.50	<b>Higher WB than norm</b>
Resilience: BRS <sup>20</sup>	3.97	0.55	+3.58	3.53	<b>Higher WB than norm</b>
Mental Health: PHQ-4 <sup>21</sup>	2.30	2.70	-0.89	1.76	Not statistically significant
Depression	0.80	1.40	-0.45	0.94	Not statistically significant
Anxiety	1.50	1.47	+2.07	0.82	<i>Lower WB than norm</i>

*Note:* Instances of greater than average well-being (WB) are in bold, while negative well-being is in italics.

<sup>16</sup> Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999

<sup>17</sup> Bickman et al., 2007; Diener et al., 1985

<sup>18</sup> Crawford & Henry, 2004; Watson et al., 1988

<sup>19</sup> Steger et al., 2006; Steger, Kawabata, Shimai, & Otake, 2007

<sup>20</sup> Smith et al., 2008

<sup>21</sup> Lowe et al., 2010; Kroenke et al., 2009

Having established that the experience of well-being is best left to the open-ended interpretation of the individual, this dissertation now shifts from the foundational “what” of well-being in article one to the fundamental question of the “how” and “why” of well-being. The latter is represented by the next sub-research question, “What do individuals describe as being the key factors, conditions, and critical events (i.e., potential process factors) which have impacted their self-perceived well-being?” A rich plethora of factors were uncovered in the study, which likely stem from both the in-depth nature of multiple data sources as well as the use of a relatively large, diverse qualitative sample (Creswell, 2007). In order to ensure optimal understanding of the total experience, the authors decided to distribute reporting of study findings over two articles to ensure that this study went beyond a simplistic reporting of factors to provide insight as to how these factors interacted. Article two reports on external, contextualized factors like the job market while article three focuses more on personalized factors that lie more within the domain of the individual. This approach fits with Blustein, et al.’s (2013) report of the complex interplay of both personal and contextual factors in their qualitative study of the experience of unemployment.

**Chapter 5: Weathering the Storms of Technology Sector Job Loss:  
Well-being Barriers, Buffers, and Beacons**

Weathering the Storms of Technology Sector Job Loss:  
Well-being Barriers, Buffers, and Beacons

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This research was funded in part by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Ontario Graduate Scholarships program. We would also like to acknowledge our research assistants (Jennifer Neufeld, Sabrina Virjee, & Amelia Dowell), our research team volunteers, and Ms. Anita Caputo. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jacqui Synard, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa, 145 Jean-Jacques Lussier, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5 Canada. E-mail: [jsynard@uottawa.ca](mailto:jsynard@uottawa.ca)

### Abstract

The impacts of job loss on well-being, which are most often negative, are well-known. Missing from the field, however, is a more in-depth understanding that explains *how* and *why* job loss impacts well-being. There is also a need to explore the potential positive aspects of job loss. Using a positive psychology lens, this qualitative case study explored the experience of job loss with 20 technology sector workers from Ottawa, Canada who have experienced involuntary job loss, with a focus on identifying the external factors, conditions, and events that help to explain the relationship between job loss and well-being. Three major themes were identified: (a) systemic factors, (b) interpersonal factors, and (c) chance. This article further elaborates on these categories, with an emphasis on identifying potential well-being mechanisms. Implications for individuals who lose their jobs, as well as for their support networks, counsellors, policy makers, and employers are discussed.

*Keywords:* job loss, unemployment, well-being, positive psychology, social support, relationships, job search, qualitative research

Weathering the Storms of Technology Sector Job Loss:  
Well-being Barriers, Buffers, and Beacons

In an era of frequent career disruption due to forces such as new technologies, outsourcing, and globalization, job loss has become increasingly common (Gowan, 2012; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). The impact of job loss on well-being is typically negative, pervasive, and may persist despite re-employment (Lucas, 2007; McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005). With a meta-analysis suggesting that over 34% of unemployed people experience mental health issues, the impacts of job loss can extend beyond one's career (Paul & Moser, 2009). This life event has also been associated with other examples of negative outcomes, including substance abuse, suicide, mental illness, poor health (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009), and increases in mortality (Noelke & Beckfield, 2014; Sullivan & von Watcher, 2009). Negative career impacts can include re-employment in poorer quality, lower paying jobs (Gowan, 2014), increased vulnerability to future job loss (Eliason & Storrie, 2009), and even early exit from the workforce (Gabriel, Grey & Goregaokar, 2010). Moreover, job loss can cascade into other losses: financial (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005), health (Wanberg, 2012), relationships (DeFrank & Ivancevich, 1986), identity/self-esteem (Fryer & Payne, 1986), and even one's sense of meaning and purpose (Jahoda, 1982; Maglio, Butterfield, & Borgen, 2005). The challenges of job loss do not simply fade away with a new job; underemployment can sometimes be just as devastating as unemployment to one's well-being (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011).

Job loss, however, is not all negative (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). For a subset of individuals, as Zikic and Richardson (2007) showed, the positives of job loss can include more time freedom (Knabe, Rätzl, Schöb, & Weimann, 2010), strengthened relationships (Forret, Sullivan, & Mainiero, 2010), downsized lifestyle expectations, and the opportunity to re-craft one's sense of identity and purpose which can include new career paths (Forret et al., 2010; Gabriel et al., 2010). Even when job loss is positively perceived, negative emotions like anger and grief may also manifest, which suggests an open-minded stance where both positives and negatives can co-exist (Gabriel et al., 2010). Further research is needed to deepen our understanding of both positive and mixed repercussions of job loss (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

### **Current Study**

This case study explored the lived experience of well-being following involuntary job loss in the technology sector. This article<sup>22</sup>, which is extracted from a broader study, specifically focuses on inductively derived factors that help to explain the relationship between job loss and psychological well-being, as reported by participants (see Synard & Gazzola, 2016). This article reports on external factors which lie outside of the individual (e.g., job market conditions), while a second, related article reports on inductively derived internal factors which lie within the domain of the individual (e.g., coping). A positive psychology lens rooted in the science of well-being (Seligman, 2011) was used to help counterbalance the negativity emphasis of job loss research (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). A qualitative focus fits with calls for more process-oriented research, which goes beyond pre-determined variables, to better understand the *how* and *why* of well-being following job loss (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005) and for well-being in general (Kashdan & Steger, 2011). To better contextualize this study, a brief overview of (a) conceptualizations of well-being and (b) known external factors linking job loss and well-being now follows.

### **Conceptualizations of Well-being**

Psychological well-being, in the context of job loss, has been mainly studied via three lenses: (a) psychological mental health (e.g., depression, anxiety); (b) life satisfaction (e.g., quality of one's life); and (c) life domain satisfaction (e.g., family and marriage). Well-being, in the context of positive psychology, is considered a broad umbrella term which captures a variety of notions (Seligman, 2011; Synard & Gazzola, 2016). Hedonia and eudaimonia are the two most common positive psychology conceptualizations (Huta & Waterman, 2014). Hedonia makes reference to the experience of pleasure and absence of pain, and is often associated with the operationalized construct of subjective well-being (SWB; Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008). SWB specifically refers to the prominence of positive versus negative emotions, as well as the judgment of one's life as being satisfying (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Eudaimonia includes a variety of interpretations, including notions of self-realization, self-actualization, life meaning, virtue, excellence, and growth (Huta & Waterman, 2014).

### **External Factors Linking the Impacts of Job Loss to Well-Being**

According to recent meta-analyses, better well-being outcomes following job loss have been associated with the following external factors: (a) *re-employment in a satisfactory job*, (b)

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<sup>22</sup> The broader study used an embedded mixed methods approach that involved both qualitative data and quantitative well-being questionnaires. (The latter data were not used for this article).

*economic and sociopolitical factors*, and (c) *social capital* (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009). Although the quality of *re-employment* was the key factor, the impact of the duration of job loss was less definitive. McKee-Ryan et al. (2005) showed declines in well-being over time (particularly > 6 months), while Paul and Moser (2009) identified curvilinear effects where the decline in well-being stabilized at year two but further declined with long-term unemployment. *Economic and sociopolitical factors* associated negative well-being with less developed economies, unequal income distribution, factory closings leading to mass layoffs, and blue collar occupations (Paul & Moser, 2009), as well as perceived discrimination due to immigration or health status (Blustein, Kozan, & Connors-Kellgren, 2013). There was a lack of clear agreement about the impacts of social protection systems (e.g., unemployment insurance), as well as the exact nature of the moderating effects of gender and age (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009), which included determining whether males or females fared worse with job loss. Finally, the positive effects of *social capital* included both instrumental and emotional social support (e.g., broader social networks that helped lead to jobs). Perceived social undermining (e.g., damage one's reputation via others' gossiping) was negative for well-being (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005), whereas marital status had neutral effects (Paul & Moser, 2009).

This study addresses both the positive and negative aspects of psychological well-being following job loss as it explores the following research question: *What do individuals describe as being the key factors<sup>23</sup>, conditions, and critical events (i.e., potential process factors) which have impacted their self-perceived well-being following job loss?* This approach addresses the lack of attention paid to the positive aspects of job loss in the literature (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Conversely, critics contend that positive psychology has disregarded the negatives of human experience (e.g., Wong, 2011). This article reports on external factors that were perceived to reside outside of the individual as they cope with the life event of job loss. The latter *event* of job loss is related to, yet distinct from, the *state* of unemployment since the effects of job loss can extend beyond re-employment (Gowan, 2014; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

### **Methodology**

A qualitative-focused case study methodology was used to provide a long-term perspective of the experience of well-being amongst a sample of 20 workers who experienced at

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<sup>23</sup> The word *factors* is used here as a term of convenience which refers to exploratory, qualitative variables which may also include conditions and events. It does not denote statistically validated factors.

least one involuntary job loss while previously employed in the Ottawa, Canada technology sector from 2000-2006<sup>24</sup>. This timeframe coincides with rapid ‘boom and bust-like’ changes in the region’s technology sector employment levels (Caputo & Wallace, 2007). The in-depth nature of an instrumental case study is well-suited to study the complex interaction of both job loss and well-being which, in turn, helps inform well-being interventions (Yin, 2014). A single case design was chosen in light of the importance of contextualized factors such as the job market (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Yin, 2014). A qualitative lens was adopted to align with the exploratory objectives of this portion of the study, which specifically aimed to identify the factors impacting well-being following job loss and to determine how and why they impact well-being. This study was informed by a stance of dialectical pragmatism that specifically blends aspects of constructivism and post-positivism in a practical matter (Green & Caracelli, 2003).

### **Participants**

Based on the criteria previously outlined, a first-come, first-served community sample of 20 participants was recruited by advertising the study (a) to e-mail job lists, (b) with job placement consultants, and (c) to participants whose stories were featured in the book *Learn to Bounce* (Caputo & Wallace, 2007) via recruitment from the book’s authors. As informed by pilot testing and the literature (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009), a balanced quota sample was recruited for the dimensions of gender, single versus multiple job losses, and current employment status at the time of data collection (e.g., currently employed versus unemployed). The final sample (N=20) was balanced on the dimensions of both gender (n=11 males, n=9 females) and employment status (n=10 employed, n=10 unemployed) but contained more multiple job losses (n=13) compared to single job loss (n=7). The average duration of unemployment for each period of job loss averaged 6.3 months, and ranged from 0 to 13 months. The final white collar sample ranged from 37 to 65 (M=52.3, SD=7.0) years in age. They are best described as university-educated (n=17); medium-high socioeconomic status (n=20); being married or long-term partnered (n=17); and being parents (n=18). Most participants also self-identified as Canadian (n=15), with the remainder self-identifying as Canadians who have immigrated to Canada from Asia (n=3), Eastern Europe (n=1), and the

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<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that this article is extracted from the broader mixed methods case study which also included the use of quantitative well-being questionnaires (See Synard & Gazzola, 2016a).

Middle East (n=1). Participants were thanked with a \$40 gift certificate. They were also provided with optional community counselling resources in the case that participation became distressing.

### **Instruments and Procedures**

The two key qualitative instruments used to collect data were unstructured written narratives completed at home, followed by in-depth, semi-structured interviews completed approximately one-to-two weeks later. Participants also discussed (a) their experience of both job loss and well-being following job loss, (b) the impact of job loss on their lives, (c) how well-being changed at different points in the experience, (d) self-identified factors which impacted their sense of well-being, and (e) their overall impressions of research participation. Demographic questionnaires and résumés were also provided for background information. The written narratives were purposely unstructured in order to allow participants to write freely about their lived experience of job loss and well-being without concern for spelling, grammar, and length (Niderhoffer & Pennebaker, 2005). As informed by pilot testing, participants were then invited to elaborate upon their written narrative to begin the interview, which served to better integrate both data sources which were thematically analyzed as a whole. In-depth interviews began with an unstructured, open-ended discussion as participants elaborated upon their written narratives in detail, which was then followed by semi-structured questions. Interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist and then reviewed for accuracy by the first author and participants.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis of the combined written narratives and the interviews followed Braun and Clark's (2012) thematic analysis approach which focuses on identifying and refining themes/subthemes. In order to enhance study rigor, principles of data analysis were borrowed from other inductive qualitative approaches (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) in accordance with Yin's (2014) recommendations. Specific enhancements included: (a) detailed open coding based on participant verbatims, (b) the use of constant data comparison, (c) sampling to theoretical saturation, (d) participant member checking, (e) auditing of code structure from the second author, and (f) recording of first author's biases/ideas. The latter was particularly important given the first author's experience with multiple technology job losses which have led to a positive career transition from strategic marketing to counselling.

## Results

Inductive analysis of external factors impacting well-being following job loss revealed three themes: (a) broad-based, systemic factors related to the business, organizational, employment, and governmental context; (b) interpersonal factors which consist of social support and the intrinsic value of relationships; and (c) the role of chance. Table 1 provides an overview of the themes and their associated subthemes. Results are presented using sample verbatim quotes which use pseudonyms for participant, company, and other proper names.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

### Systemic Factors

Systemic factors referred to macro environmental factors that combined to impact the broader context of job loss. There were four subthemes: (a) the *broader business environment*; (b) the organizational context/actions of *terminating employers* (e.g., fairness); (c) *job replacement processes and outcomes* (e.g., job search); and (d) *government policy and programs*.

**Broader business environment.** Participants reported that their well-being was influenced by the *broader business environment* which consisted of the economy, volatile financial markets, and the fast-changing nature of the technology sector due to technology innovation, intense competition, and rapid changes in the job market. Avi commented on these boom and bust cycles of employment:

In some cases, I walked from one position to the next within a few days. But, as time passed, the economy shifted direction and gear, this became harder and harder. I'd say that in today's marketplace, it is almost impossible – for a high tech professional – to switch jobs on a dime.

Such conditions created a constant state of uncertainty which included a lack of job security (e.g., “paranoid high-tech syndrome,” as described by Karen) and diminished financial well-being (e.g., savings lost due to declining technology stocks). That said, participants also reported some positive aspects of working in the technology sector, including challenging work, opportunities for learning, and extensive professional/personal development. These co-existed along with the negatives of stress, long hours, and low work-life balance.

**Terminating employers – context and actions.** This subtheme consisted of three key dimensions: (a) work environment prior to job loss (e.g., positive, negative); (b) employer integrity and human resources (HR) processes; and (c) the provision of employer-paid

outplacement services. The loss of a positive *work environment*, both before and at the time of job loss, was a key factor. After job loss, participants missed their work, their companies, and, most critically, their co-workers who were often friends. Mike stated, "Losing my job ... was a bit traumatic after working there for ten years and making many friends ... I kind of miss the people I'd worked with." Particular employers were often missed, even years after the layoff (e.g. mourning the eventual sale or closing of a company). Pam stated, "The day I actually took back my computer and badge etc., I lost it. It was like someone died. Couldn't stop crying all day. This is when it became real for me." These negative experiences often co-occurred along with a positive sense of relief due to being let go from a bad work environment characterized by poor work life balance and the stress of constant downsizing. Heather commented on how mass layoffs often shifted the work culture from positive to negative, prior to her job loss:

As the situation at GlobeCo disintegrated, the environment became one of stress, with people worrying if they would be next, worrying if the work they were doing was seen as valued. Changes had occurred with some individuals, as their survival instincts kicked in. And they would do things in an attempt to try to save themselves. For myself, it came to a point that I would prefer to get a [severance] package and move on... It was better than sitting and waiting and never knowing when the day would arrive.

Even when the layoff was desired, participant well-being was often impacted by lingering negativity (e.g., harbouring anger against former employers) and accumulated stress.

The second dimension of *employer integrity and HR processes* included positives such as perceptions of employer honesty and fairness, having a good severance package, and empathy from HR/management, which helped buffer the negativity of job loss. Conversely, the absence of these conditions (e.g., perceptions of unfair termination, inadequate severance/pension, and/or an impersonal process) often led to ongoing negative thoughts and emotions. *How* the termination was handled by the employer was particularly important. Olivia wrote:

My first job loss was in the early 2000s. I was working for GlobeCo and had been with GlobeCo for 14 years. It was a good job, stimulating and working with smart people. There was no thought of leaving the company - ever. But all that came to an abrupt end when we returned from work after the Xmas/New Year break to find an e-mail in our inboxes telling us that we had all been let go. [...] I had conflicting feelings about a company that so heartlessly emptied out an entire building with one e-mail.

It was particularly difficult being singled out for a layoff (versus being laid off at the same time as others) which led to a sense of rejection, questioning (e.g., ‘Why me?’), and self-doubt/blame despite knowing one was not at fault in the case of mass layoffs. Kent stated:

You know, ultimately, that part of what takes place is a selection process. And ‘What is it about you that got you onto the selection list?’ you know, ‘Why didn’t someone protect you?’ ‘Or why didn’t someone try to recycle you?’ [...] I know that I know that some of it is unavoidable and has absolutely nothing to do with you... [yet] your heart probably doesn’t get as influenced by your head as it should.

The provision of advance notice by employers was perceived differently by participants. Some preferred to know in order to plan and reduce the uncertainty, while others felt it contributed to dread and anxiety. Regardless of anticipation, most participants reported a sense of shock at the actual moment of job loss notice.

Finally, the provision of employer-paid *outplacement consulting* was generally positive. Positive aspects included job search support (e.g., preparing résumés) as well as personal and professional development (e.g., courses, personality tests). Other benefits included having structure/something to do and connecting with others in the same situation in networking groups. Lucy stated:

The outplacement support was essential to me during that time. I attended the courses, learned the skills needed to find new jobs and found the support I needed from the counsellors and the colleagues who were in the same situation. ... I put a lot of effort into helping the group. [...] It helped me to feel that I was doing something valuable for myself and others.

Outplacement negatives were generally minor (e.g., group competition, services too general).

**Job replacement – processes and outcomes.** The process of job replacement included (a) *the broader job market and specific job market requirements*; (b) *job search and hiring processes*; and (c) *unemployment duration, multiple job loss, and re-employment outcomes* (i.e., whether one obtained a satisfactory replacement job).

A positive *job market* created less distress, while a poor job market was often both competitive and discouraging. That said, some participants reported buffering from demoralization due to self-confidence, an optimistic disposition, and lack of financial urgency for re-employment. Also disconcerting were changes in hiring employers’ *specific job*

*requirements* which included (a) having to meet all, not just some, job description attributes (e.g., formal credentials, French skills) and (b) the valuing of specialist rather than generalist skills. The latter was formerly quite valued in the fast-changing technology sector. Paul stated:

You have a great education (technical and business) and will be highly employable. And one would think so, but it's not turning out that way. And it seems to be I haven't really specialized in something. [...] But I chose, again, more of a generalist path. The workforce is so demanding and the job descriptions are just unreal. Like, you can't ignore them if they're unreal... they have two pages of 'must have this and this' and speak Swahili.

*Hiring and job search processes*, in the face of negatively perceived HR processes, were challenging given the amount of effort required to look for work and figure out the HR system. Specific frustrations included poorly-written, non-legitimate job descriptions (e.g., positions were already filled, internal hires only) and computerized job screening, which Heather described as being "more computer-dependent where they are looking for hits on keywords, which removes the notion of the HR (or) hiring manager thinking, reading and evaluating one's résumé."

The "roller coaster" of job searching, as Mike termed it, was fraught with emotional ups and downs which included feeling hopeful/excited after getting a job lead or interview and then anxiety/disappointment due to lack of response/feedback from potential employers. Lack of employer feedback, which was one of the strongest negative well-being factors in the study, led to self-doubt, a sense of depression, and feeling discouraged/pessimistic about re-employment. Olivia stated:

The worst part is actually sending in all of these résumés and not hearing back from anybody... And you, ... do have doubts in your mind—moments of doubt ... 'Have I been out of work for so long that nobody wants to hire me anymore?'

Near misses and coming in second for a job were also difficult. Negative emotions were common; Eric reported having "a sense of guilt of not doing enough stuff ... to move on." The positives of job searching were much fewer, and included connecting with others via networking, exploring career paths of interest, and being reminded of one's strengths/interests. Olivia stated:

Even if it... didn't end up with a job, [an interview] is good because it stirs my, umm, enthusiasm about the stuff that I do. ... You know, it kind of reaffirms, at least to myself, that I still got what it takes.

Outplacement groups were helpful due to mutual support, a sense purpose, and connection.

Lastly, *unemployment duration, multiple job losses, and re-employment outcomes* were important to well-being. A longer *duration of unemployment* was associated with negatives such as (a) loss of confidence; (b) decreased finances; (c) anxiety regarding decline in skills, knowledge, and perceived employability; (d) decreased mental energy; and (e) sense of life on hold and disconcerting uncertainty. Significantly, no participants cited positives associated with longer periods of unemployment. Lori commented, "Well the longer I am unemployed, I guess the worse it gets." In fact, even the positives of job loss tend to get tempered with time. Tim, who was enjoying the break and time for hobbies, stated: "Well, I'm still kind of happy, but a bit depressed occasionally if I start to dwell on the, umm—the likelihood of finding a job."

*Multiple job losses*, in contrast, resulted in mixed well-being amongst participants. Key negatives centered on perceived career disruption, which continued even with subsequent re-employment, as with Paul: "I feel like I've been going through this since 2000... It hasn't ended. So, in the last 18 months I've worked four months, and in the last 12 or 13 years I've worked for... six or seven companies." The benefit of growth was initially stressful, but later led to positives that included improved coping with subsequent job losses, boosting of self-confidence, and new career/personal experiences. Warren described "mixed" well-being after his four job losses, which became "less stressful" each time:

I would say it's a shock whenever you lose a job; although it's less of a shock each time. I'd say it's negative in that, you know, there's a lot of uncertainty and, umm, there's a negative side to it, umm, but there's also a really positive side to it. ... I wanted to move on and so it's also a relief and, you know, whenever one door closes another door opens. ... Each time I have left, I have moved on to something that I was pleased to move onto.

*Re-employment outcomes* centered on the positives of landing a satisfactory work, as Lori stated: "The best moments [of well-being] would always be when I got another job." Sharon, conversely, talked about her sense of long-term career disruption after leaving GlobeCo. "The other thing that I really realize is that it's not the lay-offs. It's not finding new work... it's not being able to find anything to, umm, replace what was there." Long-term re-employment

satisfaction depended on factors like a positive work environment, meaningful work that makes a contribution, and interesting work with continued learning, growth and challenge. Alan stated: “So, bottom line is, I found my passion; I love my job. I can actually say I love my job and I’m not going anywhere.” In contrast, Pam talked about her perceived underemployment in her stable government job due to lack of challenge and limited internal mobility due to bilingualism requirements. The positives of less stress and more work-life balance also co-existed along with her discontent. She wrote:

After my initial happiness to have a job, the difference in culture and management made me really frustrated and bitter. Having grown up in a high-performance, high-tech workplace, I seem to have a different set of values than the organization that I now work for. ... People still tell me ‘That’s a private sector idea.’ Like I’m from another planet called ‘private sector’ ... I have been working with the same government department for 9.5 years now and I expect I will be at this grade until I retire or am laid off.

Finally, some found self-employment to be positive (e.g., following one’s passions, flexibility, employment stability, and being one’s own boss), but owning one’s business was also a poor fit for others due to time demands, needing to generate business, and more limited social interaction.

**Government policy and programs.** This subtheme referred to participants views’ about the degree and type of government intervention required to support people who have lost their jobs (e.g., unemployment income replacement programs). Generally speaking, participants did not embrace a strong role for government beyond creating positive conditions for economic growth/job creation. That said, some did critique governments’ lack of intervention in the technology sector after bailing out the automotive sector, plus the need for better trained staff. There were also calls for more investment in re-training, unemployment insurance, and entrepreneurship programs, which included increasing both access and awareness.

### **Interpersonal Factors**

Interpersonal factors were central to well-being, and included: (a) *social support* and (b) *the intrinsic value of relationships*.

**Social support.** Both the presence and absence of perceived *social support* in the face of job loss was considered important for participants. Key *sources of social support* included one’s family (e.g., spouse/partner, children, and extended family), friends, ex-colleagues, other job

searchers, networking groups, and other professionals (e.g., outplacement consultants). As Todd stated, spousal support was particularly critical: “I couldn't have picked a better wife... because again through thick and thin she was there.” Jane, like many, relied on family: “I'd never really been subjected to any sort of sudden adversity. [...] If I hadn't had my parents close by I think I would have spiralled downward pretty quick.” The *how* and *why* of well-being via social support was due to four main factors: (a) *providing positivity in the face of job loss*, (b) *practical support*, (c) *a broader relational stance of supportiveness*, and (d) *reduced social contact*.

Providing *positivity in the face of job loss* was critically important, given the turbulence of the technology industry and the emotional ups and downs of job search. This subtheme included others who (a) encouraged you, (b) pointed out strengths, (c) were positive and optimistic, and (d) boosted one's self-esteem (e.g., in the absence of feedback). Olivia stated:

And that's when your friends come in handy, right, because most of my friends are in the high-tech world and they've all gone through their lay-offs... And that's when your friends really sort of like give you that boost to say, 'Yeah I've been through this' and 'You know what, you're very employable, this is going to happen.'

Some participants reported a preference for surrounding themselves with people who have a positive attitude, while consciously avoiding negative people.

*Practical support* centered around instrumental job search and financial support such as reviewing résumés, providing job leads, spousal income, and financial help from family (with the latter two often negatively impacting one's pride). Positive practical support also included ideas, feedback, and advice from others, particularly those who shared their experiences of job loss in an open, genuine manner. Although receiving practical support from others was not as important as other aspects of social support, it should be noted that *not* receiving support (e.g., perceptions of unmet expectations) did negatively impact relationships. Heather stated:

For those on the job search, there is an understanding of helping each other and the attitude of paying it forward. It is unfortunate that people who have managed to escape the job loss step with the tech bust do not always understand or want to help.

A third dimension, a general *relational stance of supportiveness*, emerged in contrast to the specificity of practical support. This stance included perceptions of others being there, being present, and looking out for you. It had the quality of a positive feeling rather than being associated with tangible actions. Paul stated:

Sometimes it's just being present. Because there are no magical answers. And I found this when I lost my wife and son (who both died in short order) is that sometimes all you can do for a person is just be present. Like, just be there. Because there aren't really words, you know, for job loss. So that's what my friends have been really, really good at. As with practical support, perceptions of not being there negatively impacted relationships. General supportiveness was also associated with being non-judgmental, avoiding unhelpful comments and questions (e.g., 'Have you gotten a job, yet?'), and not feeling pressured by others, especially one's spouse. Also critical was simply talking, just listening (e.g., letting the person vent), unconditional support, and providing the occasional push when needed.

Finally, *reduced social contact* emerged as a factor that ironically eliminated the opportunities for social support at a time when it was most needed (e.g., loss of co-workers who were friends). A sense of loneliness and isolation was a commonly reported experience. Eric referred to his home office as "the lonely space... that's the place where you're sitting up there on the computer all by yourself looking for a job." Reduced socialization was sometimes self-generated due to finding it hard to project positivity in the face of negativity. For Lori, this 'social mask' caused her to withdraw from her support network and negatively impacted job searching. She stated:

I was envious of my friends who didn't work in high-tech... I was always putting on a brave face pretending ... that everything was fine, that job hunting was no effort at all, that unemployment was a great opportunity to do different things... In reality I found the job hunt experience very stressful, always having to act a role and try to answer those awkward interview questions in the most positive way. [...] 'Tell me about a situation where you?' blah blah blah. Always pretending that I felt energetic and enthusiastic when really I was feeling very depressed and insecure about myself. During my job hunt I ... really just wanted to hide away, not go out into the world.

**Intrinsic value of relationships.** The importance of relationships went beyond social support to include (a) *the strong valuing of relationships*, and (b) *relationships as a source of positivity/demands in general*. The *strong valuing of relationships* meant that participants' perceived well-being – both overall and in a job loss context – as very much influenced by the quality of their relationships. In fact, two of the key benefits of job loss included having more time for others and greater valuing of relationships (relative to work and in general). Todd stated:

Again, I've strengthened my relationship with my wife and my family overall because I've realized everything comes back to them. And if you don't have that rock, then when you deal with the down parts in life, then it's not worth it.... invest in your family.

Conversely, some of the key negatives related to job loss were relational, including (a) participants being concerned about the impact of job loss on close others (e.g., being able to support the family), and (b) close others being concerned for participants (e.g., kids worried about their parents). Both situations often led to negative emotions like fear, guilt, and shame. Looking back years later, many participants reported that, despite their worries, their children actually benefitted from job loss due to better understanding of the world, being more grounded, and being less materialistic. Overall, most participants reported that their relationships generally remained the same or were strengthened despite the presence of conflict and concern.

Relationship loss centered on the loss of friendships with co-workers and one marital separation. Boris stated:

Well...umm, one thing is...after being quite supportive, my wife decided I'm actually a loser. No job prospects ... Again it's a personal (thing)—but 'What the heck did you get together with me (for)? For the money I'm making?'

Some participants reported that overcoming past negative relationships in their family-of-origin (e.g., forgiving an alcoholic father) gave them the life skills to cope with job loss.

Relationships also proved to be an important *source of positivity* that helped buffer the negativity of job loss, by helping to fill gaps created by job loss via (a) providing a sense of meaning, purpose, and contribution; (b) creating opportunities for personal growth; and (c) boosting self-esteem and identity via relationship roles (e.g., being a parent). That said, strong identification with life roles did bring challenges (e.g., pressure felt by males in the breadwinner role), particularly with the presence of concurrent life events such as caring for aging parents which coalesced to increase the stress and demands of job loss. Karen stated:

Yeah, I mean, some things happen for a reason. My son came at the right time—as difficult as it was—because I had to raise a newborn and take care of a dying parent. There's no way to make that simple. And there's times you were just living through the moment and you didn't have time to live really. I look back on it now and I'm like, 'That was so tough' and 'How did I do it?'—you just do.

Even with such challenges, participants reported satisfaction and meaning from their relational roles as well as a sense of coping self-efficacy from getting through difficult times. Finally, relationships were an important source of positive emotions. Parenting was particularly positive for many participants like Paul who talked about the joy of spending time with his children:

Like, I'm very hands-on. Like, just down on the floor and roll around and wrestle. And I love taking them outside and on adventures in the woods. And so I love that, and I make up silly stories and tell silly jokes.

Notably, the benefits of extra time with children (e.g., spending a summer at the cottage with your son) were best reflected upon and appreciated years later as kids grew up and moved away. Participants also reported that parenting was a source of meaning, purpose, pride, achievement, and personal development (e.g., learning to be more patient).

### **Chance**

This third factor pointed to the value of happenstance as participants specifically cited (a) *the role of both serendipity and luck*, as well as (b) *the historical event of September 11, 2001*. Although these themes were generally less rich and prominent, they were important for those participants who cited them and will now be discussed briefly. *Serendipity and luck* were generally seen as positive, as with Pam who talked about bumping into her first boss from GlobeCo on the exact day she was laid off, which she interpreted as a positive sign. Good luck was mentioned more than bad luck (e.g., being the last non-French person hired by the federal government). Finally, the historical event of *September 11th* was cited as inspiring gratitude and perspective-taking in the midst of a global technology sector meltdown in 2001. Dawn wrote about her husband's concurrent job loss:

Only a few days later, Sept 11, 2001 happened in New York City. Both my husband and I agreed that losing our jobs seemed small in the scale of what just impacted the world and for the people, families and friends that just lost loved ones in an instant... There was such a shift on the planet ... that people had to step back and say, 'Wow, my family is so important to me.' ... 'Work is not going to be the be-all, end-all for my life.'

### **Discussion**

In general, these participant-identified external factors aligned well with the literature. Each of the three major themes will now be individually discussed.

The emphasis on *systemic factors* concurs with the highlighted importance of the broader economic and socio-political context from past job loss research (Blustein et al., 2013; Paul & Moser, 2009). Participants may also have been more sensitive to these factors given their attunement to business context (e.g., seeing the impacts of rapidly fluctuating stock prices). The espoused role of government, however, was not as strong in this study (Blustein et al., 2013; Paul & Moser, 2009). The lesser role could be related to factors such as lesser economic need (e.g., severance, higher socio-economic status); a strong Canadian social safety net (Paul & Moser, 2009); and the slanting of participants' opinions in favour of minimal government intervention.

On the employer level, participants' emphasis on employer actions is consistent with findings regarding the importance of how and why employees were terminated (Blustein et al., 2013) and the positive impacts of job loss interventions like outplacement support (Liu, Huang, & Wang, 2014; Paul & Moser, 2009). Notably, the benefits of outplacement (e.g., connection with others, purpose, and a sense of structure) fits with Jahoda's (1982) seminal latent deprivation theory which emphasizes the importance of non-financial factors in explaining the relationship between well-being and job loss. These findings also raise the issue of the potential role of hiring employers in providing feedback to job seekers, ensuring well-crafted and legitimate job descriptions, and considering the impact of computerized recruitment systems.

The re-employment context was very important in this study. In congruence with McKee-Ryan et al. (2005), participants suggested that satisfactory re-employment was a central factor in helping to reverse well-being declines following job loss. This study also helps to highlight the *why* of the job search conundrum. Specifically, job searching is known to negatively impact well-being; yet finding satisfactory re-employment is critical to reversing negative well-being, and this logically requires job searching (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). These negative impacts of job search stemmed from factors such as negative emotions and diminished self-esteem. The literature also supports findings regarding the negative effects of involuntary underemployment and protracted unemployment, which can diminish well-being due factors such as diminished self-esteem and optimism as well as continued uncertainty (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

That said, counsellors and other helping professionals should not exclusively focus on the *outcome* of re-employment given the importance of external factors during the *process* of job search. The current job search literature emphasizes the discourse of individual agency via notions like effort and being proactive (Liu et al., 2014), with lesser regard for external barriers

such as lack of feedback from employers and the emotional ups and downs of the “roller coaster” process (Amundson & Borgen, 1982, p.563). Such barriers suggest the need for education, re-moralization, and emotional support during the job search process since discouragement can lead to reduced job search efforts, social withdrawal, and depression (Song, Uy, Zhang, & Shi, 2009). Counsellors should also closely attend to potential changes in the job market such as increased specialization, which may run counter to oft-promoted re-employment strategies such as leveraging transferable skills (Bolles, 2009).

Finally, it is important to attend to the individual’s story and history of displacement. The loss of a positive work environment, co-workers and such concurs with the grief and job loss literature (Brewington, Nassar-McMillian, Flowers, & Furr, 2004). Conversely, a negative pre-job loss environment may create a vulnerability risk factor which may resonate with Paul and Moser’s (2009) findings of the potential sensitization effects of prior mental health. One’s history of job loss is also important. This factor includes the profound impact of being singled out versus being laid off as a group, as well as multiple job losses which had a mixed impact on well-being. Multiple job loss included negatives like repeated stress, life disruption, and a sense of non-finite loss where losses have a repeated, unpredictable quality (Schultz & Harris, 2011). These challenges sometimes co-occurred with positives like new experiences and perceptions of increased strength (e.g., better coping skills) which concurs with positive psychology notions of post-traumatic growth following adversity (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

*Interpersonal factors*, as expected from the job loss and positive psychology literature, were important and included factors such as social support. Social support went beyond the expected value of tangible instrumental support like financial and job search help (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005) to encompass factors such supportiveness which included being present, non-judgemental, and empathic. Findings also fit with Maisel and Gable’s (2009) focus on supportive relationship processes during positive events, such as others validating one’s excitement after getting a much coveted job interview. Supportiveness also relates to Rogers’ (1961) notions of the psychotherapeutic relationship, with empathic and non-judgmental support being highly valued by participants in this personal, rather than professional, context. Variations in the quality of support may help explain the null finding of the effect of being married on well-being following job loss (Paul & Moser, 2009).

The quantity of support was also important, as evidenced by the variety of both proximal and distal social sources of social support, which ranged from one's spouse to fellow job searchers. The value of a broad support network is also strongly linked with positivity in the face of job loss which helps to bolster self-esteem and optimism which, in turn, are shown to be critical to well-being (Carver, Scheier, Miller, & Fulford, 2005; Kernis, 2006; Wanberg, 2012). Notably, different well-being benefits were cited depending on the relationship (e.g., friend versus spouse). Relationships with friends, spouses/partners, and family were most associated with the supportiveness, whereas a parenting role was mostly strongly associated with enhancing one's identity and self-esteem in the face of job loss. In terms of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, parenting, friends and family relationships were a key source of positive emotions (i.e., hedonia) while helping others who had also lost their jobs and parenting provided a strong sense of meaning, purpose, and contribution (i.e., eudaimonia). Overall, having a balanced scope of relationships appears to help individuals to satisfy a diversity of well-being needs.

We also must consider the extent of the importance of *intrinsic valuing of relationships*, which participants expressed as being central to their well-being (even beyond the job loss context). This valuing of others concurs with the strongly demonstrated importance of relationships in positive psychology (Maisel & Gable, 2009), as expressed by Chris Peterson's (2008) oft-quoted notion of "Other people matter." Relationships are key components of central theories in major, empirically-validated positive psychology theories like self-determination theory (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2000), flourishing (Seligman, 2011), and psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989). Within the job loss context, the negative impact of reduced social contact concurs with Blustein's (2011) relational theory of working which "conceptualizes working as an inherently relational act" (p. 1). This idea may also explain the distress associated with the loss of valued co-worker relationships, as well as the positives of networking groups as a substitute for relational connection normally found at work. This loss of social contact, at the time when the need for social support was heightened, served to amplify the negative impact of job loss on well-being.

Finally, adoption of a social mask of positivity (despite feeling the opposite) also relates to positive psychology's broaden and build theory (Fredrickson, 2001). This theory describes the beneficial effects of the expressions of positive emotions in attracting support from others. Although participants appear to have implicitly internalized the value of being positive (e.g.,

acting positive, being around positive people), it also raises the possibility that over-adherence to the social discourse of positivity may prevent individuals from getting the support they need if their distress is masked. This idea warrants further exploration in future research.

Such findings regarding interpersonal relationships point to the need to understand more about potential relational mechanisms for overall well-being. Some of the effects of job loss on well-being appear to operate via relational pathways that, in turn, depend on the quality of the relationships that can further change with time. Research should also identify the specific functions that relationships perform for well-being, noting that both positive and negative well-being can co-exist (e.g., the joys and worries of parenting).

This final theme of *chance* concurs with mention of the impact of chance historical events on careers (Rice, 2014). It also resonates with happenstance theory (Mitchell, Levin & Krumboltz, 1999) which mentions the positive career impacts of serendipity due to following one's curiosity and being optimistic, flexible, persistent, and taking risks. Perceptions of serendipity were also noted in Zikic and Richardson's (2007) study of job loss in older workers. The far-reaching impacts of rapid technology industry change also fit with career chaos theory, which discusses the domino effects of changes to one part of a system on individuals (Bright & Pryor, 2005). Finally, the positive implications of the historical event of September 11th fits with the role of gratitude in well-being (Emmons & Shelton, 2005) as well as Viktor Frankl's notion of de-reflection, which suggests focusing less on self and more on others (Cooper, 2003).

### **Limitations**

Study transferability is impacted by the context of job loss (versus other life events like divorce); situational factors (e.g., the industry, geographic area, job market, study timeframe), and participant demographics, which represent a generally Westernized sample of well-educated, white collar workers with medium-high socioeconomic status. The study's retrospective lens creates memory recall effects as participants reflect on events from years past. Ideally, this research would compare participants' well-being both before and after job loss using a prospective, longitudinal study (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Using written narratives and providing the interview guide in advance did aid both recall and reflection, while the lens of constructivism suggests the most meaningful events will be remembered (Polkinghorne, 2005).

### Further Research Directions and Implications

Further research directions include (a) prospective, longitudinal investigation of how well-being following job loss changes over time; (b) in-depth exploration of the processes of well-being (e.g., relational); (c) researching the interaction of job loss and multiple life events on well-being; and (d) quantitatively testing external factors with larger and more diverse samples.

Individuals who have lost their jobs, along with their personal and professional supports, should acknowledge the strong role of external factors as an important antidote to job loss stigma and self-blame. It is also critical to allow time for grief processing rather than automatically assuming that all will be simplistically ‘fixed’ upon re-employment. Secondly, a focus on high quality, diverse relationships is critical given the positive benefits to well-being, regardless of job loss. A proactive stance of articulating one’s needs during times of challenge is also important since perceptions of social support during this critical time can make or break relationships. Thirdly, counsellors should acknowledge the inextricable, intertwined nature of both personal *and* career counselling (Blustein, 2008), paying particular attention to the impact of concurrent life events like divorce. It is also critical to provide emotional support while normalizing the tough process of job search. When identifying the potential positive outcomes of job loss (e.g., more time for others), it is important to remember that empathy must precede positivity.

On a systemic level, policy makers could further evaluate the potential impact of public funding for high quality, job search support, which also addresses emotional needs of displaced workers. Finally, both hiring and firing employers can adopt an empathic stance – even when business decisions are inevitable. They arguably could consider adopting well-being friendly HR practices (e.g., offering outplacement consulting, providing feedback, being fair), with particular emphasis on personalized processes. Human capital is, after all, fundamentally human with people being more than just a number on a spreadsheet.

In conclusion, well-being following job loss was strongly impacted by external factors which included systemic, interpersonal, and chance influences. Despite the barriers imposed by systemic factors, the storms of job loss could be partly buffered by the actions of employers. Most critically, relationships provided lighthouse-like beacons of social support and positivity. When it comes to well-being, other people truly do matter— both in good times and in bad.

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Table 1

*External Factors Impacting Well-being Following Job Loss*Key Themes and Subthemes

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**1.0 Systemic Factors****Broader Business Environment**

- Economy
- Financial markets
- Technology industry characteristics

**Terminating Employers - Context and Actions**

- Work environment prior to job loss
- Employer integrity and HR processes
- Employer-paid outplacement services

**Job Replacement - Processes and Outcomes**

- Broader job market/specific job requirements
- Job search and hiring processes
- Unemployment duration, multiple job loss, and re-employment outcomes

**Government Policy and Programs**

- Philosophy regarding government intervention
- Programs, awareness, and access

**2.0 Interpersonal Factors****Social Support (in Face of Job Loss)**

- Sources of social support
- Positivity in face of job loss
- Practical support
- Relational stance of supportiveness
- Reduced social contact

**Intrinsic Value of Relationships**

- Valuing of key relationships
- Relationships as a source of positivity/demands

**3. Chance****Luck and serendipity**

**Historical event of “September 11”**

### **Linking Second and Third Articles**

This second article enhanced our understanding of the experience of well-being following job loss by open-endedly exploring the important linkage between the life event of job loss and the subsequent impact on well-being. It specifically focused on reporting the external factors as inductively uncovered by the research sub-question: “*What do individuals describe as being the key external factors, conditions, and critical events (i.e., potential process factors) which have impacted their self-perceived well-being?*”

This bridging expansion of the second article will summarize external factors, briefly discuss potential processes (both job loss and in a general context), and explain the linkages between articles two and three. Three major internal factors were identified: (a) external systemic factors, (b) interpersonal factors, and (c) chance. External systemic factors specifically included the broader business environment, the actions and context of terminating employees, the job replacement context, and government policy and programs. Such findings also suggest the importance of context in studying well-being, which is consistent with critiques of positive psychology as being deficient in this regard (Christopher & Campbell, 2008). Results here also highlight the distinction between job loss versus unemployment (e.g., lingering feelings about how the layoff was done), which challenges broader ‘fix-it’ societal discourses which can presume that job loss is a problem that can be simplistically remedied with finding a new job. From a counselling perspective, it also suggests the potential use of narrative-therapy techniques such as externalizing the problem of job loss as being somewhat outside of the individual (White & Epston, 1990).

The interpersonal factors associated with job loss (i.e., social support and the intrinsic value of relationships) point to the often neglected role of relational well-being in job loss (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). This factor also challenges embedded assumptions that relationships primarily have value for instrumental reasons (e.g. broader relationships lead to broader networks which provide leads/connections for re-employment). Instead, relationships in general have value for well-being – period. Although relationships are theoretically valued in positive psychology (e.g., Seligman, 2011; Ryff, 1989), the discipline still tend to study well-being at the level of the individual (Becker & Marecek, 2008) in contrast to a social constructivist paradigm where individual experience is naturally contextually embedded (Creswell, 2007). Lastly, the perceived role of chance also points to the value of assuming a

naturalistic lens when researching lived experience. Life does not follow simple patterns such that the independent variable of job loss has a perfectly predictable impact on the outcome variable of well-being (Sugarman, 2007). Other, unknown ‘variables’ can matter. This includes the influence of historical events (e.g., September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001), which one again shows that well-being occurs within a broader social context.

The “how” and “why” of these factors is also quite important as we shift to understanding potential process factors. One thing that stands out is the impact of big trends like globalization and technological advances which both create and reduce employment opportunities in short order as well as changing the nature of the work world in the form of market-driven instability (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). The potential for massive, tsunami-like ripple effects are not insignificant. In short order, one’s life can be dramatically impacted as a new company in another part of the world develops a new technology which causes competitor stock prices to drop leading to layoffs. Just as earlier era well-being was very much subject to acts of God, current well-being is very much subject to the impact of coalescing market and technological factors. The often espoused role of environmental mastery and coping skills thus becomes even more critical (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Ryff, 1989).

Relational processes become especially important as a stable base which helps to buffer against the negative effects of rapid, far-reaching change. They are also important sources of positivity which help balance the inherent negativity associated with environmental challenges. Finally, the significance of work for individuals is also noteworthy. This includes the direct role of a source of meaning, self-esteem, and identity (Waterman & Schwartz, 2013), as well the indirect (yet equally critical) role of valued relationships with co-workers.

Having identified the external factors in article two, many of which are largely outside of the control of the individual, the third article then specifically focuses on the internal, personalized factors which inductively emerged in answer to the research sub-question, “*What do individuals describe as being the key factors, conditions, and critical events (i.e., potential process factors) which have impacted their self-perceived well-being?*” The third article helps to complete our understanding of the subjective experience of well-being following job loss by providing insight to differential experiences of well-being amongst different participants, which is a key gap in the job loss literature (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). This article also provides insight into positive factors, which have generally been neglected in the study of unemployment

(McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Conversely, it also shows the role of negative factors and their potential interaction with positive factors and this fulfills a key gap in positive psychology (Wong, 2011).

**Chapter 6: Shifting the Well-being Pendulum from Negative to Positive: What Factors Explain Individual Variations in the Experience of Well-being following Job Loss?**

Shifting the Well-being Pendulum from Negative to Positive:  
What Factors Explain Individual Variations in the Experience of Well-being following Job Loss?

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This research was funded in part by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Ontario Graduate Scholarships program. We would also like to acknowledge our research team volunteers, research assistants (Jasmin Banaei, Zeinab Altnieme, and Jennifer Neufeld), and the past presentation of study findings at three conferences.

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### Abstract

A vast body of research has detailed the negative, often pervasive impacts of job loss on well-being. Yet, there is a lack of information in the literature about the potential positives of job loss. There is also a need for more detailed insight into the factors and potential processes which help to explain the relationship between well-being and job loss. This article drew from a positive psychology perspective to inductively identify both positive and negative factors that help explain the relationship between well-being and job loss using a case study approach. Specifically, it explored the lived experience of well-being following job loss for 20 workers from the Ottawa, Canada area who have experienced involuntary job loss as employees of the highly volatile technology sector. This article specifically reports on internal factors that lie within the domain of the individual. Two major themes were identified: coping responses and processes, and protective and sensitizing processes. Coping responses and processes consisted of (a) problem-focused coping, (b) meaning-making, (c) attitudes and expectancies, (d) behavioural processes, and (e) emotional processes. Protective and sensitizing processes included (a) identity and self-esteem, (b) impact of past adversity, and (c) personal resources and characteristics. Implications for both practice and research are discussed.

*Keywords:* job loss, unemployment, well-being, positive psychology, qualitative research

### Shifting the Well-being Pendulum from Negative to Positive:

#### What Factors Explain Individual Variations in the Experience of Well-being following Job Loss?

Job loss is a major life event which significantly impacts individuals' careers and lives (Gowan, 2014). The negative impacts of job loss on well-being are well-known, and have included broad effects such as diminished life satisfaction (Lucas, 2007) and mental health (Paul & Moser, 2009). Job loss also has been shown to negatively impact specific life domains via effects which can include career disruption, financial and relationship strain, poorer health, and a diminished sense of identity and self-esteem (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009). McKee-Ryan et al.'s (2005) meta-analysis of well-being following job loss identifies two areas for further research that were explored in this study using a positive psychology lens: (a) uncovering the positive aspects of job loss and (b) identifying factors and underlying processes which explain the impact of job loss on well-being as it varies by individual.

#### **Positive Aspects of Job Loss**

Positive outcomes of job loss such as personal growth following adversity, new career paths, and improved relationships have received less research attention relative to negative outcomes (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Waters, Briscoe, & Hall, 2013; Zikic & Richardson, 2007). Other reported positive aspects include greater self-awareness and increased career exploration (Zikic & Richardson, 2007), as well as enhanced awareness of one's strengths and increased gratitude (Waters & Strauss, 2016). Notably, many of these benefits may only become apparent over time (e.g., growth) and thus represent "blessings in disguise" (Zikic & Richardson, 2007, p. 63). McKee-Ryan et al.'s (2005) analysis of 104 empirical studies showed a tendency to focus on mental illness outcomes over life satisfaction. Similarly, another analysis of 475 job loss articles since 1980 showed an overwhelmingly strong focus on negative versus positive outcomes (i.e., a 33:1 ratio) and a need to study "positive deviance" (Waters et al., 2013, p.19).

#### **Factors That Help Explain Differential Impacts of Job Loss on Well-being**

The impact of job loss on well-being is not homogenous (Gowan, 2014; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009). Given that the outcomes vary by person, there is a need to better understand why individuals have differential responses to job loss (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). There is a further need to identify factors and link them from a process perspective (Gowan, 2014), given a "lack of process-oriented empirical studies" (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005, p. 70).

McKee-Ryan et al. (2005) attribute individual variations in well-being outcomes following job loss to four main factors: (a) work role centrality (i.e., importance of work to one's sense of self); (b) coping resources (i.e., personal, social, financial, time structure); (c) coping strategies (i.e., problem-focused versus emotion-focused); and (d) cognitive appraisals. Collectively, these factors had a greater impact on well-being than human capital and demographics (e.g., skills, age). Coping resources included core self-evaluations which were defined as self-esteem, self-efficacy, internal locus of control, and emotional stability. Financial resources and perceived financial stress were also important, as well as positive structuring of one's time to replace the void from not working. Finally, cognitive appraisals include re-employment expectations, the degree that job loss was stressful, and whether job loss was attributed to internal or external factors (e.g., blaming oneself versus the job market).

### **Adopting a Positive Psychology Perspective**

The aforementioned gap in positive-focused research provides an opportunity to approach job loss from a positive psychology perspective by tapping into a field which focuses on the science of well-being in pursuit of the idealistic goal of human flourishing (Seligman, 2011). Positive psychology includes concepts such as happiness, meaning, hope, optimism, gratitude and strengths, many of which predate the field (Lopez & Snyder, 2009). In direct contrast to job loss research, positive psychology has been criticized as being too idealistically focused on the positive rather than the negative aspects of well-being. A focus on the positive aspects of human functioning, however, is not new for counselling which has been founded on humanistic psychology principles, including maximizing human potential via processes of growth and self-actualization (Lopez et al., 2006). Despite the acknowledged philosophical similarities between positive and humanistic psychology, there is a history of scholarly division. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) seminal article on the vision of positive psychology suggested that positive psychology was more scientific and less self-help focused than humanistic psychology. These continued debates over the years (e.g., Lopez et al., 2006; Waterman, 2013) have largely resulted in an entrenchment of each field's respective identities rather than attempts at rapprochement that could allow each field to learn from the other (Waterman, 2013).

Within positive psychology, there are two broader theoretical conceptualizations of well-being – hedonia and eudaimonia (Huta & Waterman, 2014). Hedonia refers to a striving to maximize pleasure and minimize pain, which is typically operationalized as subjective well-

being (i.e., preponderance of positive versus negative affect, plus a cognitive sense of life satisfaction). Eudaimonia has multiple conceptualizations which include growth, meaning, self-realization, self-congruence, virtue, and excellence. Two other positive psychology notions, resilience and post-traumatic growth, are especially relevant to job loss (Luthar, 2006; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Resilience refers to the ability to either maintain or recover one's well-being in the face of significant challenge (Tusaie & Dyer, 2004), while post-traumatic growth refers to improvements in well-being as a result of struggling with significant adversity (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014).

Resilience, despite its intuitive nature, is actually complex (Luthar, 2006). Resilience can refer to (a) well-being outcomes, (b) personality traits, and (c) an adjustment process (Luthar, 2006). The literature generally shows that resilience is common in the face of adversity (Bonanno, Westphal, & Mancini, 2011). Resilience has been positively associated with protective traits (e.g., optimism, problem-solving skills, intelligence, self-esteem) as well as environmental factors (e.g., positive childhood attachments, community) which further inform contextual processes of well-being (Masten & Reed, 2005).

Conceptions of post-traumatic growth center around the growth-related benefits of adversity which include (a) improved relationships, (b) a sense of new possibilities, (c) a greater appreciation for life, (d) improved psychological strength, and (e) spiritual growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Post-traumatic growth also includes related concepts such as stress-related growth and benefit-finding (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014). Criticisms of post-traumatic growth include (a) a lack of consistent empirical findings (e.g., positive, negative, mixed, and null well-being outcomes); (b) methodological limitations of the research (e.g., cross-sectional, not longitudinal, reliance on self-report rather than observation); and (c) questions as to whether post-traumatic growth is more of a positive illusion and/or a cognitive coping mechanism, as opposed to representing actual, lasting changes in personality and/or behaviour (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014). Regardless of debate, perceptions of meaningful growth do predict positive adjustment (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014).

This paper, which is based on a broader study, combines both job loss and positive psychology perspectives to explore the experience of well-being following job loss as it considers both the positives and negatives of this life event. It specifically focuses on the

following research question: *What do individuals describe as being the key factors<sup>25</sup>, conditions, and critical events (i.e., potential process factors) which have impacted their self-perceived well-being following job loss?* This article reports on the inductively-derived internal factors that reside within the individual (e.g., personal characteristics). It should be noted that this study focuses on the life *event* of job loss which is conceptually distinguished from the *state* of unemployment since the effects of job loss often extend beyond finding new work (Gowan, 2014; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Well-being, in the context of this study, focuses on psychological well-being as broadly self-defined by participants (Synard & Gazzola, 2016a), which includes both positive and negative notions of well-being such as life satisfaction and mental health (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

### **Methodology**

A case study methodology was used to explore the experience of well-being following job loss using a qualitative-focused case study<sup>26</sup>. The case identified for study is a sample of 20 technology sector workers who had at least one involuntary job loss from 2000-2006 in the Ottawa, Canada area. The in-depth nature of case study is advantageous when exploring the confluence of the complex phenomena of both well-being and job loss (Yin, 2014). An inductive, qualitative approach is well-suited to exploring emergent factors rather than being bound to a priori notions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). By studying a naturalistic event in a real-world context, this instrumental case study is useful in informing our understanding of job loss specifically as well as providing more insight regarding well-being in general (Stake, 1994). In an instrumental case study, “a particular case is examined to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory. The case is of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else” (Stake, 1994, p. 237).

A single-case design was appropriate given the importance of contextualized factors, which included the boom and bust cycles of Ottawa-area technology sector employment in the first half of the 2000's (Caputo & Wallace, 2007). A long-term perspective was adopted (i.e., using the 2000-2006 timeframe) given that many of the latent effects of job loss are often only realized after the event (Zikic & Richardson, 2007).

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<sup>25</sup> The word *factors* is used here as a term of convenience which refers to exploratory, qualitative variables which may also include conditions and events. It does not denote statistically validated factors.

<sup>26</sup> It should be noted this article is extracted from the broader mixed methods case study which also included the use of quantitative well-being questionnaires (See Synard & Gazzola, 2016a).

### **Researcher Reflexivity**

This study was grounded in the research paradigm of dialectical pragmatism (Green & Caracelli, 2003), with pragmatism being open to multiple methods such that final selection is practically determined by the approach which best answers the research question. Dialectical refers to the blending of both constructivist and post-positivist notions, which is a common stance for counselling researchers (Ponterotto, 2005).

The first author is a Caucasian-Canadian female doctoral student who researches positive psychology, with a specific interest in eudaimonia. She also identifies as an experientially-oriented counsellor/researcher, who blends humanistic-existentialist principles with positive psychology. Her research is further shaped by her experience of multiple technology job losses in the 2000s which led to a positive career change from strategic marketing to counselling. The second author is a Caucasian-Canadian male with over 20 years of experience as a counselling psychologist. He is a professor of counselling psychology, identifies with humanistic and eclectic theoretical orientations, and favours qualitative research methods.

### **Participants**

A community sample of 20 participants were recruited using three key sources: (a) e-mail job lists, (b) job placement consultants, and (c) individuals whose job loss stories were profiled in the book *Learn to Bounce* (Caputo & Wallace, 2007) via the one-way forwarding of study promotional materials from the authors. Participants received a \$40 gift certificate as a participation thank-you and were provided with optional community counselling resources to be used in the case of participation distress. There were no drop outs.

Participants who met the screening criteria (i.e., experiencing at least one involuntary job loss while working as a full-time, Ottawa-based employee from 2000-2006) were selected on a first-come, first-served basis, according to a balanced quota sample. A quota approach was informed by both pilot testing and the literature (McKee-Ryan et al., 2015) which showed differential well-being outcomes in the face of job loss which varied by three key dimensions. Specifically, the final sample (N=20), was balanced by (a) gender (n=11 men, n=9 women) and (b) employment status (n=10 employed, n=10 unemployed), but skewed towards (c) multiple rather than single job loss (n=13 multiple, n=7 single) which was expected given the industry's history of mass layoffs (Caputo & Wallace, 2007). The average unemployment duration associated with each job loss was 6.3 months, which varied widely from 0-13 months.

Demographically, the final white collar sample varied from 37 to 65 ( $M=52.3$ ,  $SD=7.0$ ) years in age. This group is best categorized as university-educated ( $n=17$ ); medium-high socioeconomic status ( $n=20$ ); being married or long-term partnered ( $n=17$ ); and being parents ( $n=18$ ). Most participants also self-identified as Canadian ( $n=15$ ), with the remainder self-identifying as Canadians who have immigrated to Canada from Asia ( $n=3$ ), Eastern Europe ( $n=1$ ), and the Middle East ( $n=1$ ). All participant names used herein are pseudonyms.

### **Instruments and Procedures**

There were two main sources of qualitative data: unstructured written narratives completed at home, and in-depth, semi-structured interviews which were completed approximately one-to-two weeks later<sup>27</sup>. For the purpose of background information, participants also provided résumés and demographic questionnaires at the same time as the written narratives. The written narratives were deliberately unstructured in order to allow participants to write freely about their lived experience of job loss and the resulting impact on their well-being. Participants were instructed to write for at least 15 minutes, without concern for spelling, grammar, page limits, or providing the “right” answer (Niderhoffer & Pennebaker, 2005). As informed by pilot testing, the in-depth interviews began with detailed elaboration on participants’ written narratives. This approach served to integrate both the narratives and interviews, which were then subsequently analyzed as a whole. Participants also discussed (a) their experience of both job loss and well-being following job loss, (b) the impact of job loss on their lives, (c) how well-being changed at different points in the experience, (d) self-identified factors that impacted their sense of well-being, and (e) their overall impressions of research participation.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was guided by Braun and Clark’s (2013) thematic analysis approach which provided optimal flexibility given the large volumes of data from multiple sources. Study quality and rigour were further enhanced by drawing upon data principles from other inductive qualitative approaches (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), as endorsed by Yin (2014). Specific enhancements include: (a) use of open coding which was closely mapped to participant verbatims and sampled to theoretical saturation, (b) the use of constant data comparison when

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<sup>27</sup> Well-being questionnaires were also completed at the end of interviews for another part of the broader study (See Synard & Gazzola, 2016a).

analyzing data, (c) member checking by participants, (d) auditing of coding structures by the second author, and (e) memoing to record researcher biases (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Yin, 2014).

## Results

Inductive analysis across the combined interviews and written narratives identified a large number of rich internal factors. Two major themes emerged: (a) coping responses and processes, and (b) protective and sensitizing factors (see Table 1).

[Insert Table 1 about here]

### Coping Responses and Processes

This theme refers to how individuals responded to the challenges of job loss, which also includes pre-existing response tendencies in the face of adversity (e.g., tending to think positively). There were five subthemes: (a) problem-focused coping, (b) meaning-making, (c) attitudes and expectancies, (d) behavioural processes, and (e) emotional processes.

**Problem-focused coping.** This subtheme refers to adaptation responses aimed at directly confronting the challenges of job loss and includes both *cognitive* and *behavioural* components, such as defining the problem, exploring solutions, and taking action. Jane stated:

The next day I sat down with my parents and they helped me plan out my job search and what I would have to do next—apply for EI, reduce my car insurance coverage, etcetera. And then every day for 6 months I would get up, ... apply for jobs, look for jobs on the internet.

*Cognitive* aspects included: (a) acceptance/realism, (b) environmental scanning/analysis, (c) goals/planning/focus, and (d) decision making/choice. A stance of acceptance grounded in reality included surrendering to events rather than fighting what happened, psychologically moving on, and taking behavioural steps to move forward. Todd stated, “You live with it, you move on... you can't do anything about it and you just keep moving on.” For some participants, this approach was a broader, pre-existing life philosophy. Boris talked about the choice to “be miserable or actually accept the situation” which included the need to “acknowledge that there is a problem,” “address it,” and “do something about it.” Environmental scanning/analysis included attending to one’s external milieu (e.g., being aware of company/industry happenings) without overanalyzing and getting stuck. Participants were then better able to anticipate job loss, focus their job search, and depersonalize mass layoffs (which helped to preserve self-esteem). Alan wrote about the need for “on-going reflection” to “adjust plans where necessary” and subsequently modify “expectations” based on learning from the environment.

Goals/planning helped to inspire action, channel energy, and mitigate negative emotions, rumination, and stress, all of which also led to a more positive job search process. Working towards valued goals provided a sense of structure, purpose, and accomplishment. Conversely, goals were negative for well-being in the case of lack of progress (e.g., sending out multiple résumés per week with no feedback) which sometimes related to thwarted life goals (e.g., not being able to retire as planned). Finally, participants reported that it was positive to make decisions (e.g., selecting a focus for one's job search) and embrace the notion of having a choice in any situation which helped to enhance one's sense of control in the face of uncertainty.

*Behaviours* included specific actions related to (a) job search, (b) finances (e.g., modifying spending), (c) starting a business (for certain individuals), and (d) reaching out for social support. Positive job search behaviours included networking, taking advantage of outplacement consulting and government programs, and using a structured, proactive job search. Avi stated, "If I had time between jobs...[I] treated it as I'm working to get work and find work...(treating) job search as a full-time activity." In contrast, negative well-being was associated with a lack of problem-focused coping vis-à-vis job search inactivity, procrastination, and limited networking (networking was harder for introverts). (This stance was often associated with avoidant-like coping.) Warren talked about guilt and job search inertia after four job losses:

Sometimes I just don't feel like doing it. I know I should be doing things, but I don't have the initiative to actually do things that I want to do. I'm just not up to it...you're not making good use of your time... And umm...yeah, sometimes it's hard to get up in the morning and it's easier to just sleep in... I'm not as productive as I normally would be. Such inactivity often stemmed from lack of confidence, feeling depressed, and lack of optimism. Problem-focused behavioural coping went beyond specific actions to include a more general orientation towards taking action/control, pushing through to face challenges, taking risks, and overcoming barriers. Approaching rather than avoiding problems was generally positive.

**Meaning-making processes.** This theme referred to sense-making processes aimed at understanding the circumstances of job loss as well as the overall impact on one's self and life. It included externally-oriented focused reflection (e.g., analyzing why job loss happened), as well as internally-focused introspection (e.g., understanding who I am now that I am unemployed)<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Meaning-making was also related to identity re-construction which will be discussed under identity/self-esteem.

(This category also includes the fact that *not* engaging in meaning-making was also important for well-being).

Triggers for meaning-making included (a) a sense of life disruption; (b) challenges with job search/re-employment; (c) threats to identity and self-esteem; (d) other people (e.g., comparing self to others, loneliness, feedback/questions from others); (e) events around the job loss itself (e.g., perceived unfairness); (f) lack of purpose/meaning; (g) negative thinking/emotions; and (h) practical considerations, such as financial concerns about supporting one's family.

The level of meaning-making did vary among participants. There was a subgroup who proactively valued the time and opportunity to reflect on life and to deepen their self-awareness – even with the challenging nature of the process. Alan talked about feeling more grounded, which he described as “I know where I am, where I want myself to be, what I want to contribute to.” He further felt that this stance helped to keep him centered in the face of change, “... The wind could blow and the world could change...I actually don't really care.”

However, others did not as actively engage in meaning-making. This response included two subgroups of those who consciously avoided meaning-making despite struggling with it, and those who were less inclined to search for meaning. Avoiding the process (e.g., distracting oneself with lots of activity) was hard to sustain since it fuelled negative emotions like anxiety and guilt. The second subgroup of those less inclined to search for meaning was associated with factors such as (a) positive attitudes (especially a focus on looking forward not backward), (b) emphasis on problem-focused coping and acceptance, (c) a focus on other people and things rather than job loss, (d) wanting to leave the job/quickly getting a new job, (e) lack of perceived financial strain, (f) good self-esteem, (g) emotional regulation, (h) optimism, (i) gratitude, (j) focus on choice/decision making, and (k) previous experience with doing layoffs as a manager.

Meaning-making was, at times, characterized by a language pattern of serial questioning where participants asked themselves a series of questions in a rapid-fire fashion. Heather stated:

So now it's like, okay I thought this was where I was going, but 'Now what?;' 'Who am I?;' 'What do I want?;' ... 'Who am I really?;' ... 'What do I really want?;' 'What am I going to be really good at?;'” and 'What am I going to be happy at?'

Asking the big questions of life and processing this life event was generally hard for participants as they struggled with these cognitively challenging and emotionally distressing questions.

Questions were generally organized according to three different timeframes: (a) the past (e.g., Why did this happen?; Why me?; What could I have done differently?); (b) the present (e.g., Who am I?; What should I do right now?); and (c) the future (e.g., What's next?; Will I get a job?). The impact on meaning-making on well-being was mixed. Whether meaning-making was deemed positive or negative often depended on the processes and outcomes of meaning-making.

The *process* of meaning-making, in the short-term, was generally difficult due to a sense of uncertainty, a lack of control, and negative emotions such as worry and anger. Repetitive cycles of looking back at past events without closure were particularly hard. Lucy stated:

When I lost my job, I had to re-examine my life purpose and my self-worth. I had many questions and doubts, such as, 'Why was I laid off?'; 'Was my performance not good?' I remember feeling like being thrown off a big ship and had to swim in the ocean by myself. .... 'Why was I picked?' ... 'If I stayed at the other job, would I have got laid off?'

Self-awareness and strong self-esteem were assets during the tough process of meaning-making since they helped participants stay grounded, understand their reactions, and recraft their goals and sense of self as they moved forward.

Ultimately, well-being often depended on the *outcomes* of such reflection, such as finding a sense of renewed purpose. Todd stated:

And I mean one of the things, I guess really since the layoffs, that I've... always asked 'Why are we here?'; 'Why do we exist?' ...And for me, I've come to the conclusion that we exist to help others...So I do things to help others. ... a way to achieve immortality.

Positive well-being was also associated with making peace with the past, modifying goals, expectations, and assumptions, and/or being able to find satisfactory answers to one's questions. Karen stated, "Umm, as tough as it is to do self-reflection, if you come away from it with what you had hoped to do, then you've succeeded." Acceptance was also important, and included being able to accept the uncertainty and incompleteness associated with unanswered questions.

**Attitudes and expectancies.** This subtheme referred to the impact of one's mindset and future outlook on well-being, and included (a) optimism/hope, (b) positive/negative thinking, and (c) perspective-taking. *Optimism/hope* reflected participant verbatim use of these terms, which also included the negative counterparts of pessimism and hopelessness (e.g., feeling discouraged regarding employment prospects). Lori wrote about her changed worldview, "I've noticed that I am much more pessimistic about the future and very security conscious now. I don't want to buy

a bigger house in case I experience job loss again.” Conversely, optimistic expectations that things would go well in life (especially re-employment) were associated with positive coping in the face of the uncertainty of job loss. Optimism was often described as trait-like, with some participants like Heather citing the value of an optimistic disposition. She wrote:

The number of full-time employment and contract positions over the next few years brought various changes in well-being like a roller coaster. However, (because) of my optimistic demeanor and having been through the job search, it was not a scary thing. ...It is a bit scary not knowing what would be next and how long you would be out. But my optimistic side gave me the courage and strength to decide to leave (bad jobs) and believe something else would come along.

*Positive thinking* encompassed a conscious cognitive effort to think positively in the face of negativity which, in turn, was helpful for well-being. Examples of this stance included emphasizing the benefits of job loss (e.g., having more free time), an attitude of deciding to making the best of job loss, and the use of motivational positive self-talk (e.g., being competent despite job loss). Alan exemplified positive self-talk, with numerous references to “It’s okay.” He stated:

‘It’s okay’, you know, it’s just a blip. It will come back. It might not be the way that it used to be, but it will be different and ‘It’s okay’. I think I’ve learned this ... I reminded my daughter to say thanks when she gets into challenges (to)... say things like ‘It’s okay, remember your own experience in the past.’

Such self-talk was helpful given the initial rejection of job loss and a lack of job search feedback. Negative thinking, conversely, was associated with poorer well-being. It included things such as a sense of being stuck, self-blame, and personalizing job loss despite intellectually knowing that one was not at fault given the mass layoffs. Negative thinking often occurred both before and after the job loss, which included concern about the future. Olivia stated, “And I think in my mind, I was kind of playing out scenarios—the worst case scenarios... ‘What if when I finish up that last contract and, you know, I didn’t have a job?’ ... ‘And how long can I survive?’ ”

*Perspective-taking* was beneficial for well-being and it included consciously reframing job loss in a positive manner, which often occurred after the initial shock of job loss wore off. Tim stated, “I always like doing new things, so this is an opportunity that I hadn’t planned on.” whereas Avi said that “[I] treated the time that I had as a gift ... Use it, don’t lose it.” It was

particularly helpful to reframe the life event of job loss within the broader context of one's life, which was often experienced as gratitude. Warren stated, "I can always look at the big picture and, you know, I got lots of great stuff. I have a wonderful wife, a great relationship, great kids." It was also helpful to compare job loss to worse life events (e.g., death of a loved one), as well as the greater suffering of others (e.g., person who lost their job and went bankrupt). Mike stated, "Well, I don't think I wrote it in there, but about six and a half years ago I lost my wife to cancer... Yeah, so I mean, losing a job compared to that... (losing your wife) "

Overall, participants reported that positive attitudes and expectancies enhanced their well-being via three key processes: (a) reducing negative emotions and enhancing positive emotions (e.g., less worry, more gratitude); (b) helping to preserve self-esteem, motivation and mental health in face of job loss; and (c) promoting positive interpersonal interaction (e.g., others prefer to be around positive rather than negative people). Despite the benefits of positivity, it was important that a positive attitude be genuine and not forced. Notably, mixed well-being was associated with attempting to act or think positively in a manner that was experienced as highly incongruent.

**Behavioural processes.** This sub-theme referred to general behaviours (e.g., going for a run), as opposed to other behaviours that were mentioned under the subtheme of problem-focused coping (e.g., sending out résumés). Specific dimensions included (a) *routine, structure, and activity*; (b) *self-care*; and (c) *behaving authentically*. The impact of these behaviours on well-being often depended on the motive for the behaviour. For instance, using activity as a distraction often had mixed effects which included distracting oneself from negative emotions and thoughts (e.g., worry and rumination) in the short-term. However, it became negative over the long-term when it was used to ignore problems, procrastinate, and mask low self-esteem.

*Routine, structure, and activity* helped fill the time and structure void created by job loss, which included notions such as keeping busy and having something to get up for in the morning. This approach also positively influenced well-being by providing positive emotions, a distraction to the events of job loss, and a sense of purpose, goals, and accomplishment. Pam talked about the value of routine (which also included job search). She stated:

For the most part, I tried to keep things moving forward. Drop the kids at school, go to French class, work on applications in the afternoon, pick up the kids, make dinner, work

on more applications in the evening. This gave me goals and companionship. If I was doing my best, I wouldn't punish myself. My spirits were reasonably good for this time. Key positive activities included socializing, hobbies, taking courses/learning, volunteering, getting out of the house, engaging in spiritual practice, and taking on domestic projects. Staying occupied was important, given the long hours typically worked in the technology sector. Karen stated:

I've always wanted this free time, you have it. And you don't know what to do with it... The first few days I did everything, you know, you have that rainy day list. I cleaned the house, I stored stuff, I put stuff away, I went to a bookstore for an afternoon because I never had time to do that.

Activities with goals and deadlines (e.g., getting a black belt in judo) fostered momentum and provided a sense of purpose, growth, and accomplishment. Tim talked about the positive value of leisure-oriented goals and projects, "I've got to get things done for those goals...And when I [feel] accomplishment, it's a little bit of a success...So that perks me back up."

Participant-reported *self-care* behaviours included exercising, taking a vacation, relaxation/breathing, and generally doing things that make one's self feel good (e.g., watching TV, cooking, spending time with family and friends). Such activities also improved both physical and mental health by dampening stress. They also helped individuals recover from the effects of working long hours prior to job loss. Todd remarked, "I know how to take care of myself better... I've learned through all the ups and downs what I need to do to keep myself healthy and the benefits of doing it." *Behaving in an authentic manner*, which participants defined as acting in a genuine manner, was also important for well-being. The reverse stance of inauthenticity led to negative emotions and a sense of dissonance. However, it should be noted that the discomfort of inauthenticity did inspire some participants to change their behaviour for the positive.

**Emotional Processes.** Emotions were central to the experience of well-being. Processes specifically referred to how (a) *positive and negative affect*, as well as (b) *emotion management strategies* impacted well-being following job loss. *Positive and negative affect* often co-occurred, and varied by what one participant referred to as the stages of job loss, as illustrated by Alan's written narrative. He wrote:

Looking back from the day I lost my job, I have gone through... the following stages:

1. A sense of relief – after a long period of uncertainty
2. A sense of excitement – well motivated to find a new career in a different field
3. A sense of disappointment after not able to established myself in any domain that I thought I was interested in, in a significant way
4. A sense of fear, doubt, anxiety and hopelessness
5. A sense of clarity after facing the reality of what needs to be done in pursuing my perceived interest, and the depth of my passion in those interests
6. A sense of anxiety and curiosity when [I] first joined the government as a temporary employee
7. A sense of achievement and euphoria in receiving positive feedback and encouragement unexpectedly in the new working environment (in government)
8. Different stages of “ups and downs” during the period working in government and in the different positions, yet that is probably normal in any working environment

*Negative affect* was particularly common in the study. It included emotions such as fear, worry, sadness, guilt, numbness/shock, and shame/embarrassment/humiliation. Such emotions negatively impacted well-being via (a) demotivation (e.g., decreased job search, diminished activity, life functioning); (b) negative thinking/rumination (e.g., replaying an unfair dismissal); (c) social withdrawal/masking one’s feelings (e.g., avoiding friends); (d) physical health symptoms (e.g., headaches); and (e) negative health behaviours (e.g., not exercising, increased drinking). *Positive affect* included emotions such as love, joy, relief, pride, and calmness. These emotions were associated with positive impacts such as increased motivation, energy, social interaction, engagement, and patience. Humour was also important. Karen talked about how co-workers would make light of the threat of layoffs by singing a once popular song. She stated:

We all had a box under our desk [for our belongings in case we were laid off]. We all knew that our number could be up at any one point in time...And what kept us going, as much as it sounds negative, [was] for us to start singing ‘*Another One Bites the Dust*’—...That was the humour, ... it was [acknowledging] the elephant in the room.

*Managing emotions*, as reported by participants, included two dimensions: active versus passive emotional coping responses, as well as suppressing versus acknowledging emotions. These approaches naturally overlapped. For instance, suppressing negative emotions included both active strategies (e.g., keeping busy, focusing on others) as well as more passive approaches such as shutting down (e.g., doing fewer things in general, withdrawing from others). Avi talked about avoiding negative emotions, “I try to skip those stages where you get angry and so on because it’s not doing anything...It’s just draining you.”

Acknowledging emotions also involved both active and passive strategies. For instance, Boris used an active, logic-based approach to cope with job loss concerns. He stated, “Ninety-five percent [of things] are not important to worry about....And five percent you can’t do anything about them anyways, so why worry....Very simple.” In contrast, passive emotional acknowledgement included simply noticing and experiencing emotions as is without attempting to control the emotions per se. Examples of this stance included riding out emotions, noticing the emotional highs and lows, surrendering to the emotional experience, and letting go. Karen stated, “I think you should be allowed to feel the emotion... Experience it and let go.”

The impact of these emotion regulation strategies on participant well-being is difficult to generalize since the efficacy of these approaches depended on the person, circumstances, and timeframes considered. For instance, active attempts to generate positive emotions (e.g., spending time with others, using positive rather than negative language) were beneficial in the short-term, as long as they did not create long-term issues with avoidance of underlying negative emotions – hence, approach versus avoidance once again. Interestingly, active emotional regulation also included the previously mentioned strategies of problem-focused coping, meaning-making, and adjusting behaviours, attitudes, and expectancies in the wake of job loss. Lastly, emotional stability was generally positive for well-being. Descriptions included being even-tempered and not experiencing too many emotional swings/extremes of emotions. That said, participants who experienced fewer emotional swings may not have always reported as much growth as those who worked through a wider gamut of emotions.

### **Protective and Sensitizing Factors**

This theme identifies factors that tended to (a) protectively inoculate and/or mitigate the effects of job loss of well-being or (b) sensitize participants in ways which made them more vulnerable to this life event. Specific subthemes included: (a) *identity and self-esteem*, (b) *impact of past adversity*, and (c) *personal resources and characteristics* (e.g., financial means, persistence).

**Identity and self-esteem.** This subtheme was a central factor impacting well-being following job loss. Participants generally reported a diminished sense of identity and self-esteem due to a sense of rejection as a result of getting laid off, a perceived lack of accomplishment, and the challenging nature of job search (e.g., rejection, lack of feedback). Pam wrote:

I had always identified very strongly with my job and it was embarrassing to admit to others that I didn't have one. Even though, a lot of people we knew were actually in the same boat. [...] My brain knew that this wasn't about me, but inside I felt worthless (no one wanted me) and lonely (I missed my friends from work). Getting almost nowhere with hundreds of applications did nothing to improve my self-esteem.

This sense of diminishment often had negative effects on both job search effort and re-employment which, in turn, further diminished one's sense of self. Sharon stated, "When you can't find a job, it erodes your confidence. That makes it hard to find another job. You can't project confidence, and I felt brittle." A diminished sense of identity and self-esteem also led to (a) ruminative meaning-making (e.g., Why was I chosen over other co-workers?); (b) negative affect (e.g., shame, embarrassment); (c) negative thinking (e.g., self-blame and a sense of worthlessness); (d) diminished mental health (e.g., depression); and (e) social withdrawal.

The degree of impact of self-esteem and identity was influenced by high work involvement, sources of identity and self-esteem outside of work, life roles, identification with social discourses regarding the role of work, and one's pre-existing level self-esteem.

High work involvement prior to job loss was generally negative due to the amount of time, energy, and self-investment in one's work (especially, identity and self-esteem). Other reasons included a heightened sense of loss, a lack of work-life balance, anger towards one's employer, and not building one's skills/network due to overinvestment in work. Paul stated:

You know, part of my problem I think is that I got way too wrapped up in my job... In terms of networking, for instance, I didn't even know the people that I worked with ... 'But did I eat lunch in the cafeteria?'—never, always at my desk .... Maybe I should have, instead of putting in all those extra hours that I didn't get paid for. Maybe I should have been volunteering somewhere or coaching somewhere or just having another facet to my life so that I wasn't so unidimensional.

Paul also showed how life roles (i.e., being the family breadwinner) and societal discourses (i.e., society defines one by their job), could further compromise one's sense of identity. He stated:

One of the worst things recently was when my five year old had a school assignment to draw pictures (of)... what jobs daddy and mommy do. ... So, he's like, okay what should I put for you daddy? I said, well—I sort of explained it to him, I don't have a job right now. Can I get you to draw me as something I'd like to be? He's five right, so he's

puzzled and I said, ‘Mommy really likes firemen, can you draw me as a fireman?’ and my wife says, ‘Don’t draw him as a fireman, that’s not what he does...He’s a numbers guy; he’s kind of a financial guy.’ ... But it really is like ‘What do you do?’, right.

Finally, a pre-existing lower level of self-esteem (e.g., negative experiences growing up in one’s family) served to make participants more vulnerable to the effects of job loss.

Conversely, protective effects were noted with those who had strong, pre-existing identity and self-esteem from non-work sources which led to learning (e.g., taking courses), accomplishment (e.g., doing projects), and contribution (e.g., volunteering). Warren stated:

I’m a bit uncertain about my identity because my identity will be whatever I’m doing next.. Umm...but identity is made up of a lot of different things. I mean, I’m—you know, my identity is that I’m a runner and I talk about that. I’m very involved in all the charity stuff so that’s a big part of my identity... Umm, my family is a big part of my identity and that hasn’t changed....

Strong self-esteem was reported as being particularly valuable in helping participants maintain or improve their well-being in the face of job loss, as with Avi whose sense of self-esteem remained intact despite six layoffs. He stated: “And I always had a belief in myself... And, as a result, I believed I could continue what I loved to do.” Self-esteem was a particularly positive asset when job searching, as Mike reported: “Umm, well, certainly, when I left the company the job market wasn’t very good...But, again, as I mentioned earlier, I’m confident in my abilities and confident that I would find something.” Positive self-esteem and identity was often described using words such as self-acceptance, seeing self-esteem as a choice, not being defined by work, a sense of belief and trust in one’s self, and self-love.

Some participants reported that losing one’s job sometimes led to better self-esteem in the long-run, as with Lucy who reported a net gain in self-esteem despite initial declines. Participants also reported increased confidence in the case of multiple job losses via gains such as (a) coping self-efficacy due to overcoming adversity, (b) exposure to new experiences, and (c) increased personal assertiveness. Finally, some participants reported a more balanced sense of self-esteem due to the humbling effects of job loss (e.g., no longer seeing one’s self as superior to others).

**Impact of past adversity.** This subtheme related to the influence of past life challenges on well-being (i.e., both negative and positive), including (a) *participants' experiences with their own past adversity*, as well as (b) *participants' perceptions of how others coped with adversity*.

*Participants' experiences with their own past adversity* often negatively impacted one's capacity to respond to current challenges via a wearing down of financial, social support, mental health, and coping resources. Todd discussed the accumulated stress of multiple negative life events, "I know all the stuff was piling up and I remember one day I was talking to a colleague at work... 'I'm going to crack soon'. I knew I was—I was hitting my breaking point." Multiple job losses were often tough, due on-going life disruption. For some, a history of life adversity also led to a more cynical and pessimistic outlook.

The positives of past adversity centered on a sense of growth and improved resilience, both of which were then leveraged to overcome current challenges. Heather felt that overcoming past adversity in her family-of-origin helped her cope with job loss. She stated:

The funny thing is I see life as roller-coasters and merry-go-rounds... I grew up on a roller-coaster. My family has a lot of, you know, problems... So, I think I'm used to the roller-coaster... And so I can manage it... Umm, when I look at my husband, he grew up on a merry-go-round —... Predictable and calm. And so, ... we're different.

Upon reflection, past adversity was sometimes seen as having an inoculation/mitigation effect against future adversity. Job loss itself was sometimes a catalyst for future growth. Olivia stated:

It may sound odd that leaving GlobeCo actually forced me to grow in areas that I would not have if I had stayed in GlobeCo. I have gained confidence in my ability to survive in the "outside" world. I have learned how to network, to look for jobs and have the confidence that my experience would serve me well.

Sometimes multiple job losses were seen as having a desensitizing effect on later job losses (e.g. knowing what to expect, how to cope).

Other specific positives of past adversity include (a) increased wisdom and learning (e.g., increased knowledge, maturity, life lessons); (b) re-examining one's values (e.g., increased focus on relationships and improved work life balance); (c) personal and professional development (e.g., increased self-awareness, new experiences, and development of new skills); (d) feeling mentally and emotionally stronger; (e) increased adaptability; (f) having improved coping skills/coping self-efficacy; and (g) increased self-confidence in general.

These benefits were often both unexpected and retrospectively perceived. Learning from past adversity and being able to apply lessons was often critical to realizing the benefits of adversity. Karen stated: “I think I’ve learned a lot [that] I’d like to learn and I’ve learned from some of my mistakes...There’s still some I need to learn.” Finally, adversity was sometimes life-defining. Todd talked about overcoming burnout, including feeling suicidal. He stated:

But I am what I am now because of that experience...So it's part of me. ... So it's like everything else that I've been through, was it fun—no...But I grew from it and it made me who I am. ... It's made me stronger...I mean you can't go through this stuff and look inside of yourself that whole introspection type thing without making you stronger. ...

And you are going to be better able to deal with the things that happen outside of you. Overall, as Todd’s example suggests, the impact of past adversity is best summarized as having mixed results.

Finally, *participants’ perceptions of how others coped with adversity* had a generally positive impact on well-being. Participants reported positive motivational impacts both from observation (e.g., being inspired by those who fight hard and take action when faced with challenge) as well as learning from those who shared their experiences and offered advice. Key individuals mentioned here included close family and friends, teachers/mentors, colleagues who lost their jobs, and inspirational speakers and writers. Todd cited the impact of the latter:

I did a lot of reading...I think that helped build me up. Again reading about people who had been in down situations but built themselves back up so “Ok, it is possible to do that one”...Again (it made me) feel stronger, it's like this is not my fault... I can move on. ... And how they had brought themselves back up and well I can do that too.

Other motivational effects included being inspired to take action and keep going, helping to pull one out of a cycle of negative thoughts, and others being a catalyst for growth. Observing others who did not cope as well with adversity also benefitted participants who decided to take a different coping response (e.g., managing stress differently). In both positive and negative inspirational scenarios, social contact with others who had lost their jobs was particularly helpful (e.g., getting hints about what to do or not do). Once through their adversity, many participants often turned to helping others who had lost their jobs which was done in the spirit of paying it forward and giving back.

**Personal resources and characteristics.** This subtheme referred to self-defined assets and personal qualities which participants' reported as both positively and negatively impacting their well-being and included (a) financial well-being, (b) spirituality, and (c) personal attributes. This subtheme is more briefly discussed due to space issues, with some factors having less complex and/or pervasive impacts on well-being in comparison to other thematic categories.

*Financial well-being*, in this study, consisted of one's financial resources and approach to financial management which were significant given the generally negative impact on one's financial situation. Access to a satisfactory severance package, income from spouse/partner, and accumulated savings were important mitigating factors, as was participants' approach to financial management – both before and after job loss. Positive financial management included having a proactive mindset regarding goals and plans, as well as financial prudence. Those who had saved/invested well and were mindful of their expenses/spending, experienced less financial stress in the wake of job loss and felt less pressure to find a job. Mike stated: "And...I didn't have to find something today because I could still put food on the table and pay bills." In particular, past savings for kids' education and being mortgage-free reduced job loss stress.

Conversely, negative financial well-being was associated with having savings tied up in technology sector stocks which became devalued, high debt, and a high cost lifestyle (e.g., expensive houses, cars, and vacations), with one participant losing her house. Perceptions of financial stress were also important. Some participants reported more stress and worry than others, despite having equal or greater financial resources. Money concerns also indirectly impacted well-being by decreasing one's ability to partake in positive well-being activities (e.g., going out with friends, going on a holiday). Finally, financial adversity due to job loss sometimes led to positive benefits later on (e.g., saving more, decreasing one's expenses). Eric stated: "I think from a financial perspective, I cleaned up my act quite a bit because I was in pretty bad shape... You know, I was just spending too much. Pretty much everything invested in GlobeCo."

*Spirituality*, which was endorsed by a smaller subset of participants, generally referred to verbatim mentions of spirituality and religion. Spirituality was generally a positive influence for well-being for those participants who strongly endorsed it. For Dawn, spirituality was a strong asset during job loss and other life events. She stated:

I have certainly surrendered many times in my life to saying, ‘Okay God, what in the world is next?’ ... It certainly has not been an easy ride but I will say this that the more I followed and prayed ... (the more) God answered (my) prayer.

Spirituality was also seen as a (a) source of direction (e.g., being guided by God, asking God for direction); (b) strength (e.g., empowerment); (c) positive emotions (e.g., joy, gratitude); (d) purpose (e.g., meaning in life); and (e) source of values (e.g., religious teachings).

Finally, for others, spirituality had neutral or more limited impacts on well-being. Some saw spirituality through a lens of religion which diminished over time (e.g., becoming atheist or agnostic). Sometimes adversity diminished the role of religion. Mike talked of the impact of watching his spouse die with cancer. He stated, “I’m born French-Canadian Roman Catholic. Umm, let’s just say I have my doubts—Based on the suffering I’ve seen. [...] Other than that I’m a very spiritual person.” As with this example, some participants distinguished between religion and spirituality, with the latter also including non-deity sources (e.g., connection with nature, feeling in harmony with others).

*Personal attributes* included a variety of characteristics which were self-defined: (a) use of one’s strengths, (b) skills in analyzing/adapting to one’s environment, (c) degree of introversion/extraversion, (d) persistence/determination, and (e) courage.

Being unemployed often negatively impacted the ability to use one’s strengths, whereas strengths utilization was also an important determinant of reemployment satisfaction (e.g., involuntary underemployment was negative). Secondly, skills in analyzing and adapting to one’s environment were also critical. In the pre-job loss phase, being able to read one’s environment allowed participants both to better anticipate and prepare for job loss as well as to navigate internal politics in a downsizing environment. Post-job loss, this skill helped participants to better target their re-employment efforts (e.g., leaving the technology sector for more stable employment). Thirdly, one’s self-labelled degree of introversion/extraversion was such that introverts found networking challenging and extraverts missed the social aspects of work.

Finally, the attributes of both persistence/determination and courage helped sustain participants through the tough job search process, as well enabled risk-taking (e.g., leaving a bad job, starting one’s own business.) Alan provided a strong example of many preceding attributes as he talked about the value of “perseverance” which stemmed from his belief that “one can achieve anything with enough effort and time.” He stated the he felt that it provided him with the

“courage and stamina to keep pursuing activities that were difficult and not my nature [as an introvert] but necessary, like keep making ‘cold calls’ every day to find opportunity.”

### **Discussion**

The impact of job loss on well-being was related to a rich wealth of individual factors that coalesced into two key themes: (a) *coping responses and processes* and (b) *protective and sensitizing factors*.

#### **Coping Responses and Processes**

Coping strongly influenced well-being (Kleinke, 2007; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). This finding aligns with the emphasis on stress and coping models in the job loss research (Gowan, 2014) and well as Jahoda’s (1982) seminal latent deprivation model of job loss which relates negative well-being to deficiencies related to lack of time structure, activity, social contact, status/identity, and purpose. Interestingly, participant explanations for reasons for such effects often went beyond the negative assumptions behind such models to also include both approach as well as avoidance motives. Participants were motivated to move towards certain conditions, not just away from job loss difficulties (e.g., pursuing hobbies for pleasure rather than just to fill time).

*Problem-focused coping*, for instance, went beyond the benefits of obtaining satisfactory re-employment (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Synard & Gazzola, 2016b). Quite significantly, this orientation was beneficial even *before* finding a new job due to the motivational effects of future goals and achievement (Sheldon, 2013). Findings also concur with the strong linkages between problem-focused coping and well-being following job loss (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Seršić & Šavor, 2012; Wanberg, 2012; Zikic & Richardson, 2007), which enhanced one’s sense of purpose, self-esteem, and control in the wake of involuntary job loss (Jahoda, 1982; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005, Warr, 1987). Results also highlight the importance of environmental mastery (Ryff, 1989) and psychological flexibility (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010) for well-being.

However, it should be noted that job search was generally perceived as a difficult process that negatively impacted well-being (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Participants’ descriptions referred to as the “emotional ups and downs” of job search (Synard & Gazzola, 2016b, p. 13). This vacillating “roller coaster” emotional experience (Amundson & Borgen, 1987, p. 99) also co-existed with positive aspects such as taking control. Furthermore, job search avoidance also created stress, anxiety, and negative emotions as predicted by both procrastination (Pychl, 2013)

and anxiety research (Antony & Rowa, 2005). It is thus important to view problem-focused coping as a complex process rather than a simplistic prescription for action.

Similarly, *behavioural processes* extended beyond addressing the deficiencies cited in Jahoda's (1989) model (i.e., lack of activity, time structure, purpose, and social contact). Leisure and social activities were intrinsically valued and pursued before job loss (e.g., passion for cooking, enjoying time with family). They promoted well-being via positive emotionality (Fredrickson, 2001) as well as striving towards goals, accomplishments, and growth, all of which have been linked with eudaimonic well-being (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Sheldon, 2013). These effects were generally positive as long as the motive was not pure avoidance.

*Emotional processes* similarly have included approach patterns which reflect the motivational impact of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001), such as the emotionally energizing effect of participants' involvement in leisure activities. In contrast, the job loss and coping literatures have emphasized emotional avoidance via emotion-focused coping, which is often conceptualized as a strategy to avoid negative emotions by 'distancing' one's self from the stressor (Kleinke, 2007; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Solove, Fisher, & Kraiger, 2015). However, a closer look at distancing questionnaire items suggests that there might be other factors rather than avoidance motives (e.g., "Tell myself that there are more important things in life than having a good job"; Solove et al., 2015, p. 535), which concurs with participant reports of gratitude/perspective-taking. Positive emotions also motivated social interaction which, in turn, led to positive effects vis-à-vis self-esteem and social support (Synard & Gazzola, 2016b).

Context is a key to understanding such processes. For instance, it could be argued that watching TV to distance one's self from job search stressors might be more helpful at the end rather than the start of one's day, if the net effect is job search procrastination rather than feeling relaxed. Thus, it is critical for individuals to know when and how to flexibly apply one or more coping strategies (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010; Kleinke, 2007). This study identified a preponderance of negative emotions following job loss (Synard & Gazzola, 2016a). When individuals were able to transform negative emotions (e.g., by experiencing rather than avoiding them), the result was catalytic at times (Wong, 2011). Finally, other positive effects stemmed from emotional stability (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Synard & Gazzola, 2016a) and the ability to manage emotions via emotional intelligence (Salovey, Mayer, Caruso, & Yoo, 2009).

*Attitudes and expectancies* also had positive approach effects, including the motivational impact of positive cognitive re-appraisals (e.g., reframing job loss as an opportunity/challenge; seeing the positives of extra time), which are consistent with research in job loss (Amundson & Borgen, 1987; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Zikic & Richardson, 2007), hardiness (Maddi, 2002); gratitude (Emmons & Shelton, 2005) and post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Positive notions such as optimism/hope and positive self-talk helped to sustain coping efforts, to maintain job search motivation over time, and to mitigate negative emotions and diminished self-esteem (Synard & Gazzola, 2016b). Optimism and hope were particularly impactful, as predicted by positive psychology and coping research (i.e., Carver, Scheier, Miller, & Fulford, 2005; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, respectively). Conversely, negative well-being was associated with negative self-talk/self-blame (Blustein et al., 2013), rumination (Park, 2010), and discouragement/pessimism (Jones, 1989) which were exasperated by a stance of avoidance.

*Meaning-making* demonstrated more complex effects with regards to avoidance and approach processes. While most participants searched for meaning, the extent of meaning-making and its subsequent impact on well-being did differ by individual and circumstances. Consistent with findings in the literature, perceived resolution in a search for meaning (e.g., acceptance, closure, new meanings made) was more positive for well-being than continued attempts to search for meaning without some form of resolution (Davis & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2009; Davis, Wortman, Lehman, & Silver, 2000; Park, 2010). Recurring cycles of serial questioning also fit with rumination, which has been associated with negative well-being (Park, 2010). Our findings suggest the need to go beyond understanding whether searching for meaning has positive or negative impacts on well-being. It is also important to examine the issue of “why” an extensive search for meaning is employed or not (Davis et al., 2000; Park, 2010).

Searching for meaning was generally positive for a subset of individuals who valued the process (e.g., opportunity for self-awareness), while not searching for meaning depended on whether participants felt the need to (with pervasive avoidance being associated with negative well-being). Experiencing positive well-being, despite not searching for meaning nor consciously avoiding, often overlapped with other factors such as positive attitudes and expectancies (e.g., looking forward instead of backwards), being oriented towards problem-focused coping (especially acceptance), and having a strong base of self-esteem. Circumstantial factors (e.g., minimal feelings of loss, less financial stress, quicker satisfactory re-employment) were also

important. Individual variations also raised questions regarding the role of one's disposition in meaning-making tendencies (e.g., Are some individuals more meaning-seeking and existential by nature?) and past life experiences (e.g., Does past meaning-making provide individuals with tools such as self-awareness to better handle future challenges such as better solidifying one's identity?).

In terms of other meaning-making processes, findings also highlight the often neglected role of emotional processes in meaning-making (Martela & Steger, 2016) as well as the integration of both internal and external factors (Blustein et al., 2013; Synard & Gazzola, 2016b) which fits with constructivism (Polkinghorne, 2005). The study also shows the sometimes catalytic value of negative well-being in meaning-making, with negative emotionality being particularly important (King & Hicks, 2009; Wong, 2011). The job loss context itself is also likely quite relevant since it offers both an impetus for meaning-making (e.g., disruption of daily routines), as well as ample opportunity (e.g., having extra time), as Zikic and Richardson (2007) revealed.

Finally, findings related to a serial questioning pattern of meaning-making warrant further study. The literature provides some early, tentative support for these findings. Questions were prominently featured in both Blustein et al.'s (2013) description of 'unemployment story' (i.e., "How did I lose my job?" and "Why am I unemployed?," p. 259) as well as Park's (2010) comprehensive review of meaning and life events literature (e.g. "Why me?"; "What does my life mean now?"; p. 260). Thirdly, Angus's (2012) narrative processes coding system for emotional focus therapy (EFT) strongly features questions as she discusses (a) autobiographical narrative sequences (e.g., "What happened to me?"; p. 4); (b) internal narrative processes (e.g., "What am I feeling?"; p. 4); and (c) reflexive narrative processes (e.g., "What does this mean to me?"; p. 4). She also mentions that recursive questioning very much parallels the idea of serial questioning.

### **Protective and Sensitizing Factors**

Findings showed that some individual factors had the potential to be either a protective asset or sensitizing factor in the face of job loss. Interestingly, these factors sometimes varied within the individual over time, thus further illustrating the complexity of well-being.

*Identity and self-esteem* was a key factor that permeated across other individual factors like meaning-making. The importance of identity concurs with job loss literature regarding the

pivotal effects of work-role centrality (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005), work as source of status and social positioning (Jahoda, 1982; Warr, 1987), and this study's findings regarding an espoused male breadwinner role (Synard & Gazzola, 2016b). Findings also fit eudaimonic identity theory which includes work as a form of self-realization and self-expression (Waterman & Schwartz, 2013). The role of *self-esteem* aligns with McKee-Ryan et al.'s (2005) results regarding the importance of positive core-evaluations (which included both self-esteem and self-efficacy). Conversely, core negative evaluations have been associated with decreased job search activity (Seršić, & Šavor, 2012), increased job loss duration (Wanberg, 2012), and the diminished use of problem-focused coping (Solove et al., 2015). This study also highlighted the potentially vicious cycle of not job searching due to low self-esteem, and further declines in self-esteem due to being unemployed and lacking accomplishment from work (Synard & Gazzola, 2016a, 2016b).

This study extends the literature by helping to specify *how* diminished identity and self-esteem impacts well-being via the role of negative emotions, the intertwined, bi-directional nature of self-esteem and identity, as well as identifying both protective and paradoxical effects. Diminished identity and self-esteem often led to negative emotions (e.g., shame, embarrassment) which sometimes led to withdrawal from job search, leisure, and social situations which, in turn, could deprive one of positive emotions and social support (Synard & Gazzola, 2016b). Diminished identity often directly lowered one's self-esteem which further led to withdrawal on a number of life fronts, thus further diminishing one's identity and creating a vicious circle. Finally, there were positive exceptions to strongly diminished identity and self-esteem which included protective factors such as having a diverse, flexible identity beyond work via hobbies or social roles, and a strong base level of self-esteem. Paradoxically, diminished identity and self-esteem was sometimes reported as being positive in the long-run due to increased self-esteem as a result of coping with job loss and becoming more humble (Tangney, 2009).

*Drawing from experiences with past adversity* highlights the positive benefits of struggling with life's challenges (Wong, 2011). As post-traumatic growth predicts, most participants reported at least some growth in the form of increased strength, improved relationships (Synard & Gazzola, 2016b), perceptions of new possibilities, and a greater appreciation for life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). However, the degree and nature of growth varied, with some participants reporting life-changing shifts in well-being (e.g., changing one's worldview) while other changes were less cataclysmic (e.g., focusing a bit more on family).

Such findings concur with critiques of post-traumatic growth, which some contend might sometimes be better classified as benefit-finding as they stress the need for a higher threshold for pure post-traumatic growth (Davis & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2009; Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014). Quite significantly, the net experience of growth ranged from job loss being seen as a positive transformative event over the long-run to being perceived as a generally negative event despite some positive benefits. Study findings also suggest that more attention needs to be paid to the *process* of growth, which includes the degree to which benefits were a function of ‘struggling’ through adversity. Such a stance would imply undergoing a significant period of negative well-being, thus suggesting the need for further conceptual refinement (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014). Regardless of label, this paper builds from Davis and Nolen-Hoeksema’s (2009) earthquake metaphor as it argues that true post-traumatic growth refers to “seismic”-like (p. 644) shifts in one’s life which requires significant re-building of one’s self/life, in contrast to milder forms of growth (akin to slight tremors with limited damage) which do not require re-building.

Drawing from experiences with past adversity also naturally relates to resilience, with both past adversity and resilience often impacting future resilience. Furthermore, resilience has been linked with other factors identified by this study, which include problem solving, an optimistic/positive outlook on life, and positive self-esteem (Masten & Reed, 2005) as well the inter-related process of resilience, meaning-making, and positive emotions (Park, 2010; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004; Wong, 2011). This study particularly highlights the role of proactive learning and reflection, with positive outcomes being associated with the stance of looking back on past challenges in the spirit of moving forward. Conversely, negative well-being was linked with ruminative re-examination of both past and current adversity which is akin to ‘searching in circles.’ Findings also show the value of observing how others cope with adversity, which fits with vicarious resilience (Hernandez, Gangsei, & Engstrom, 2007) and learning (Bandura, 1977).

Finally, there is a need to determine when past adversity becomes protective versus sensitizing. Seery, Holman, and Silver’s (2010) longitudinal research revealed better well-being for those who had experienced some lifetime adversity, in contrast to limited or no adversity scenarios. Adversity was deemed positive until a certain point, when the hypothesized effects of stress accumulation and resource depletion became significant (as was seen in this study). Participants classified multiple job losses as both protective or sensitizing, which concurs with longitudinal job loss research suggests that both time interval and the quality of re-employment

between losses influences well-being outcomes (Booker & Sacker, 2012; Lucas, 2007; Luhmann & Eid, 2009).

*Personal resources and characteristics* center on the logical importance of financial well-being vis-à-vis resource deprivation and perceived stress (e.g., McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Warr, 1997). This study also recognizes the mitigating effects of factors such as income from one's spouse and severance (Synard & Gazzola, 2016b), and identifies positive benefits such as increased financial prudence and less materialism. In contrast to post-traumatic growth research, spirituality was not a major factor for most study participants (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). This effect was also seen in Waters and Strauss' (2016) study of post-traumatic growth following job loss, with the authors suggesting that job loss differs from other events like death of a loved one where the nature of the loss is more irreplaceable. However, for some participants, spirituality served as a positive source of support, empowerment, optimism, hope, positive emotions, and life meaning in the face of job loss (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005).

Finally, most of the personal characteristics mentioned have been previously cited in the research, including the importance of being able to apply one's strengths (Seligman, 2011; Warr's (1987), courage (Pury & Lopez, 2009), and persistence/determination, which aligns with positive psychology's notion of grit (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). Skills in analyzing and adapting to one's environment concur with both environmental mastery (Ryff, 1989) and the espoused role of mastery and control in resilience (Seery et al., 2010).

### **Limitations**

The transferability of study findings is naturally bound by the context of job loss. Job loss itself is further contextualized by the specific dimensions of the case study (e.g., regional job market, study time frame, nature of the technology industry, and participant demographics), many of which have been shown to differentially impact post-job loss well-being (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Given the rapidly-changing technology sector, participants could arguably be predisposed to adaptability. Other limitations include using a retrospective study which captures participants' perspectives on well-being at a single point in time, which differs from the ideal of a prospective, longitudinal study (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Potential memory recall effects were mitigated by using written narratives and providing the interview guide in advance, with constructivism further suggesting that participants will naturally recall what is most meaningful to them (Polkinghorne, 2005). This study identifies potential

rather than definitive process factors (which ideally collects data at multiple points in time). Finally, the potential impact of trait versus state-based personality factors has not been assessed.

### **Implications for Research and Practice**

Further research directions include: (a) conducting prospective, longitudinal study of how well-being changes over time with job loss and the associated processes; (b) quantitatively testing findings with a larger, broader sample; and, (c) doing a more in-depth exploration of key findings related to coping, meaning-making, emotions, and resilience. Moving to the broader well-being context, future research could also explore other major life events (Lucas, 2007).

In terms of applications to practice, displaced workers and their support networks can look to these findings to help to focus their efforts regarding well-being and they can also be a potential source of ideas to improve well-being (e.g., developing positive daily routines). However, it is not suggested that the negative effects of job loss can be magically erased via simplistic self-help behaviours. Counsellors could also highlight and reinforce client factors which are strengths in adapting to job loss (e.g., problem-focused coping). This approach does not have to be formal and can include an experiential stance of mindful attunement and reinforcement of a client's strengths within the moment of the session. When exploring a client's history of trauma and past adversity, it would also be helpful to pay attention to past coping and resilience. Finally, a helping stance of positivity must always be preceded by the groundwork of empathy and a solid therapeutic relationship. The value of positivity notwithstanding, the challenges of job loss are both real and significant. Counsellors should stay attuned to the process of change and realize that positive aspects of job loss may only unfold over time.

In conclusion, the experience of well-being following job loss in this contextualized case study was impacted by a variety of individual-oriented coping, protective and sensitizing processes. These factors should not be simplistically interpreted as either good or bad. The net impact varied according to the person and their specific circumstances at a single point in time. Instead, these findings represent a repertoire of potential approaches which can help shift the well-being pendulum from negative to positive in the face of job loss and other life challenges.

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Table 1

*Internal Factors Impacting Well-being Following Job Loss*

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**Key Themes and Subthemes**

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**1.0 Coping Responses and Processes**1.1 *Problem-Focused Coping*

Cognitive: acceptance, environmental scanning, goals/planning, decision-making/choice

Behavioural: job search, finances, starting a business, and reaching out for social support

1.2 *Meaning-Making Processes*

Triggers of meaning-making

Individual variations in meaning-making

Serial questioning

1.3 *Attitudes and Expectancies*

Optimism/hope

Positive/negative thinking

Perspective-taking

1.4 *Behavioural Processes*

Routine, structure, and activity

Self-care

Behaving authentically

1.5 *Emotional Processes*

Positive and negative affect

Emotion management strategies

**2.0 Protective and Sensitizing Processes**2.1 *Identity and Self-Esteem*

Diminished identity and self-esteem

Protective and paradoxical effects

2.2. *Impact of Past Adversity*

Participants' experiences with their own past adversity

Participants' perceptions of how others coped with adversity

2.3 *Personal Resources and Characteristics*

Financial well-being

Spirituality

Personal attributes

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

Overall, the experience of well-being following job loss was found to be rich, complex, and personalized. It also included a number of external and internal factors. This conclusion integrates study insights, as it specifically discusses: (a) a summary of key findings; (b) implications for further theory, research, and practice; (c) limitations; and (d) contributions to knowledge.

### Summary of Key Findings

Using a positive psychology lens, this qualitative-focused case study explored the experience of well-being following job loss with a sample of 20 technology sector workers from Ottawa, Canada who have experienced involuntary job loss from 2000-2006. This study specifically blended both positive psychology and job loss perspectives as it address the following overarching research question: *What is the subjective experience of well-being following job loss?* More specifically, following the life event of job loss:

- (a) *How do individuals describe their self-perceived sense of well-being?*
- (b) *What do individuals describe as being the key factors, conditions, and critical events (i.e., potential process factors) which have impacted their self-perceived well-being?*

Findings were reported via three articles whose inductively-derived findings will now be summarized, along with a brief summary of the contextualized nature of the case.

**Article One.** The first article focused on participant descriptions of well-being following job loss, as it addressed the following research question: *“Following the life event(s) of job loss, how do participants describe their self-perceived sense of well-being?”*

Mixed well-being was the dominant theme, with all participants reporting both positive and negative experiences. Well-being following job loss was further shown to be both rich and multifaceted, and it was comprised of multiple conceptualizations of well-being. There was no singular, all-inclusive construct which represented the ‘Holy Grail’ of well-being. Multiple variations in the types of well-being descriptions and notions were reported. Quite significantly, this variation occurred not only amongst participants but also within individuals themselves. These findings point to the personalized nature of well-being, as opposed to ‘one-size-fits-all’ notions of well-being.

Six major well-being themes emerged: (a) life evaluation, (b) transitory experiencing, (c) growth and grounding, (d) environmental mastery/stability, (e) mental ill-being/ill-health, and (f)

motivational mindsets/conditions. Within these major themes, the subthemes of life domain well-being and emotional well-being were strong commonalities of the overall experience of well-being amongst this sample. In general, these themes represent multiple notions of well-being which included integrated notions of hedonia and eudaimonia, the absence of psychopathology/mental illness, and the emergent notion of centered and steadfast (e.g., a steady state-like form of well-being). Findings were also congruent with specific constructs/theories in positive psychology including subjective well-being (Diener et al., 1999), psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989), self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and the PERMA theory of flourishing (Seligman, 2011).

Finally, the experience of well-being was shown to be non-dualistic. Well-being was both subjective and objective which includes both personalized as well as common notions of well-being. In addition, the experience of well-being went beyond “outcomes” (i.e., the “what” of well-being) to also include the “process” of well-being (i.e., the “how” of well-being).

**Article Two.** The second article identified participants’ self-reported external factors which help to explain the relationship between job loss and well-being, as it addressed the following research question: “*What do individuals describe as being the key factors, conditions, and critical events (i.e., potential process factors) which have impacted their self-perceived well-being following job loss?*” (The third article also reported on these inductively-derived factors, as it focused on discussing internal factors which reside within the individual). Three groups of inductive external factors were reported: (a) *systemic*, (b) *interpersonal* and (c) *chance factors*.

*Systemic factors* were specifically comprised of (a) the broader business environment (i.e., the economy, financial markets, and the nature of the technology industry); (b) the context/actions of terminating employers (i.e., work environment prior to job loss, employer integrity and HR processes, and employer-paid outplacement services); (c) the job replacement context (i.e., broader job market/specific job requirements, job search and hiring processes, unemployment duration, multiple job losses, and re-employment outcomes); and (d) government policy and programs (i.e., government intervention philosophy, programs, awareness, and access).

*Interpersonal factors* included: (a) social support and (b) the intrinsic value of relationships. Social support in the face of job loss identified both (a) sources of social support (e.g., spouse/partner, friends, family), as well as the resulting impact on well-being vis-à-vis

providing (b) positivity in the face of job loss, (c) practical support, (d) a relational stance of supportiveness, and (e) the implications of reduced social contact. The intrinsic value of relationships discussed the impact of others on well-being, including the importance of relationships as being a source of both positivity and demands. Finally, the theme of chance detailed the impacts of perceptions of luck and serendipity, as well as the historical event of “September, 11, 2001” on participants’ experiences of well-being.

**Article Three.** The third article identified participants’ self-reported internal factors which help to explain the relationship between job loss and well-being, as it addressed the following research question: “*What do individuals describe as being the key factors, conditions, and critical events (i.e., potential process factors) which have impacted their self-perceived well-being following job loss?*” Inductive analysis identified two major categories of internal factors: (a) *coping responses and processes*, and (b) *protective and sensitizing factors*.

*Coping responses and processes* consisted of (a) problem-focused coping (i.e., cognitive and behavioural); (b) meaning-making (i.e., processes and outcomes of meaning-making); (c) attitudes and expectancies (i.e., optimism/hope, positive/negative thinking, perspective-taking); (d) behavioral processes (i.e., routine/structure/activity, self-care, behaving authentically); and (e) emotional processes (i.e., positive/negative affect and emotion management strategies). Problem-focused coping was an especially rich category which included the cognitive components of acceptance/realism, environmental scanning/analysis, goals/planning/focus, and decision-making choice. The behavioural aspects of problem-focused coping were job search, financial management, entrepreneurship, and reaching out for social support.

*Protective and sensitizing factors* included identity and self-esteem, the impact of past adversity, and individual resources and characteristics (i.e., use of one’s strengths, skills in analyzing/adapting to one’s environment, introversion/extraversion, persistence/determination, and courage). Figure 1 below provides an integrated visual summary of all three articles.

### The Experience of Well-Being Following Job Loss

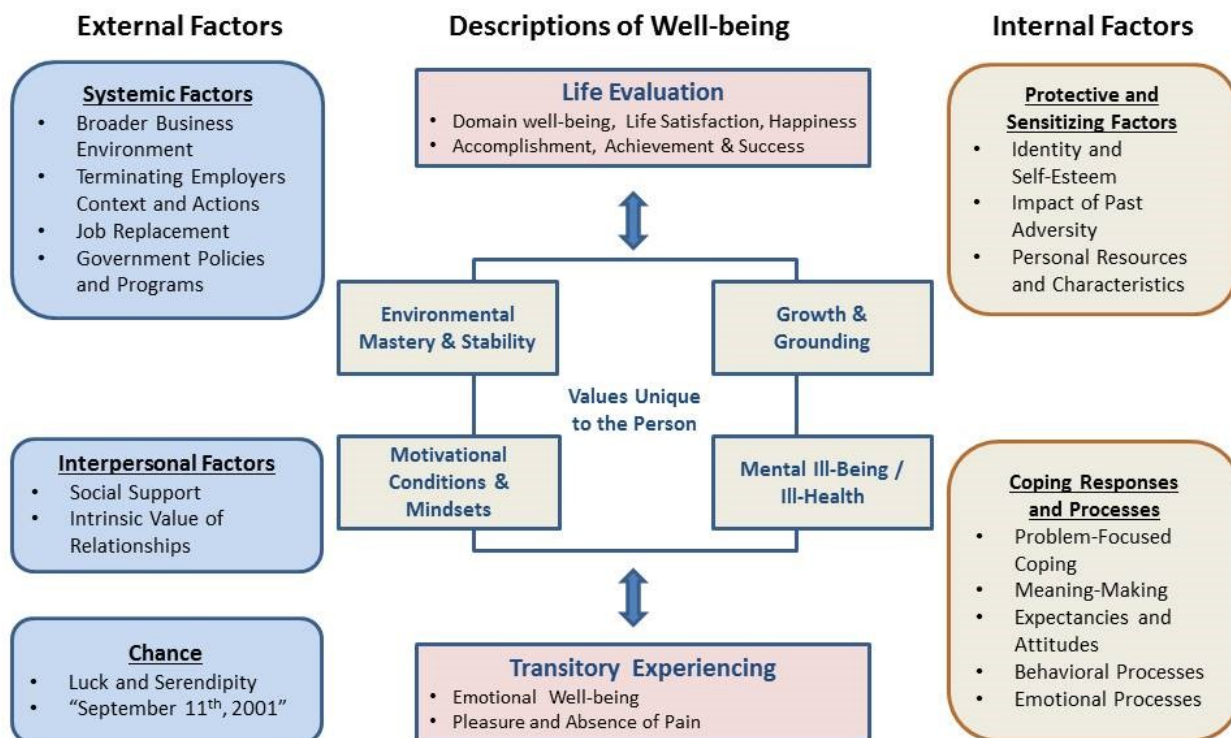


Figure 1. Thematic representation of the experience of well-being following job loss.

In general, the integrated findings from all three articles illustrate the richness and complexity of well-being following job loss. Multiple notions of well-being emerged, all of which exist in unique combinations within each participant. Similarly, both positive and negative aspects of well-being were identified and support the case for mixed well-being.

**Case Summary.** The experience of well-being following job loss was shown to be quite rich for these 20 Ottawa-area technology workers. On the contextual level, study findings were strongly related to the nature of the technology sector which included positives such as enjoying meaningful, challenging work when employed and negatives such as intensive change and rapid ‘boom and bust’ cycles of employment (Caputo & Wallace, 2007; Geier, 2015). The time context also mattered due to a 2000 dotcom collapse which included a collapse of financial makers, a massive industry shakeout, and even bankruptcies (Geier, 2015). Finally, the geographic context of Ottawa as Canada’s capital was also important due to having alternative large public sector employers which led to positives such as economic stability/diversification, as well as labour market obstacles such as bilingualism (Bagnall, 2015; Caputo & Wallace, 2007).

### **Implications for Further Theory, Research, and Practice**

This section explores the implications for further theory, research, and practice for both well-being in general, as well as for job loss specifically.

**Well-being theory.** Well-being theory, as study findings show, is both rich and complex. Moving forward, a focus on the integration and synthesis of existing conceptualizations of well-being and openness to new notions of well-being would strongly enhance theory development. This stance goes counter to the oft-described current culture of divisiveness, polarity, and entrenchment regarding competing theories and constructs of well-being (e.g., Kashdan et al., 2008; Waterman, 2013c). The integration of both hedonia and eudaimonia would provide an important starting point, which would ideally include a focus on determining how these various processes of well-being both interact and potentially differ. As Biswas-Diener et al. (2009) suggest, these two traditions of well-being research will continue to inform our overall understanding of well-being and its important nuances. Positive psychology could also be enhanced by integrating both positive and negative well-being to better inform theory. This approach should ideally consider well-being in the context of adversity as well as psychopathology, as opposed to an exclusive focus on idealistic states like flourishing.

Notwithstanding the elusiveness of the “Holy Grail” of well-being, theory development would also be advanced via a more grounded focus on developing common guiding theoretical principles. This approach would be similar to common factors work in psychotherapy research (e.g., Duncan, Miller, Wampold, & Hubble, 2010; Lambert & Ogles, 2004; Norcross & Goldfried, 2005). In the case of therapy, common factors research negates the superiority of any one theory in relation to favourable outcomes (i.e., the dodo bird effect) as it relates the process of therapeutic change to high-order factors such as the therapeutic relationship.

Based on this study and existing research, some potential candidates for higher factors include: (a) life evaluation (Diener et al., 1999); (b) emotions (Diener et al., 1999; Fredrickson, 2001); (c) coping/adaptation/past adversity (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Luthar, 2006); (d) growth (Huta & Waterman, 2014); (e) self-realization (Waterman, 2013a); (f) meaning (Steger, 2012); (g) future orientation via optimism and hope (Carver et al., 2005; Snyder, Rand, & Sigmon, 2005); and (h) one’s personalized life philosophy/values (Tiberus, 2013). Contextual factors are also equally important. Potential candidates for higher-order factors here include relationships (Maisel & Gable, 2009), social support (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), environmental

challenges/stability (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Maddi, 2002), and the influences of cultural/social discourse (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008).

Theory should also reflect the dynamic nature of well-being by adopting a process as well as an outcome lens. The experience of well-being includes one's way of being as well as outcomes of well-being. An example of this approach would be to explore more precisely how well-being in various life domains and emotional experience get incorporated into broader judgments of whether one's life is satisfying and meaningful. Based on study findings, it would also be valuable to explore individual-oriented processes (e.g., coping, meaning-making, attitude and expectancy formulation, behaviours, emotion regulation, and identity and self-esteem), as well as external processes (e.g., relational/social support, environmental, and cultural processes). In the case of negative events, it would be interesting to explore the role of acceptance versus change, as the serenity prayer suggests (Reinhold Niebuhr, n.d.).

Given findings that well-being is subjectively-objective, well-being theory could be further enhanced by developing topologies of well-being like those seen in the job loss research. This approach would group individuals based on unifying commonalities in the experience of well-being (e.g., those who experience steady versus fluctuating well-being). This approach would be conceptually similar to marketing practice where customers are grouped in segments based on varying needs/preferences as opposed to assuming that all customers are alike (Sommers & Barnes, 2007). Similarly, this study shows that "one-size-does-not-fit-all" in the case of well-being. For instance, are there groups of individuals that naturally adopt a hedonic orientation versus those that embrace more of a eudaimonic orientation? Is meaning-making typically a reactive process for the hedonic group (e.g., activated in the face of threats to meaning) versus eudaimonia (e.g., more proactive, constant assessments of life meaning)? The role of values would be particularly important to explore, as philosophical well-being theory suggests (Tiberus, 2013). Such typologies could help to better inform both intervention and the translation of positive psychology into everyday life, vis-à-vis more customized approaches to well-being.

**Job loss theory.** Study findings generally concur with job loss theories related to deprivation (e.g., Jahoda, 1982) as well as the importance of stress, appraisal and coping as being critical predictors of well-being (Gowan, 2014). Existing theories/models could be enhanced by considering the contribution of positive processes of well-being (e.g., positive emotions,

approach motives), as well as the role of external (e.g., process of termination) and relational factors (Blustein, 2011; Blustein et al., 2013). Positivity is particularly important. Existing theory takes an almost exclusive focus on the negative aspects of job loss, with more limited consideration for the role of positive protective factors, outcomes and processes in determining well-being outcomes and mitigating the often negative effects of job loss (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Given that differential responses to job loss have been noted, there is a strong need to further explain how various factors interact to produce varied responses (Gowan, 2014; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). This perspective includes studying positive exceptions to negative well-being following job loss.

Theory would ideally also be more process-oriented, which could include factors such as a better understanding of dynamic processes like coping flexibility and the ongoing adaptation of job search strategies (Gowan, 2014). Psychological processes related to meaning-making, emotional regulation, identity and self-esteem, and past adversity are important to consider, as well as contextual and relational factors (Blustein et al., 2013; Gowan, 2014; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). For instance, what role do others play in helping displaced workers find meaning, regulate emotions, and maintain a positive identity in the face of job loss? In general, job loss theory would benefit from shifting from a purely economic perspective (e.g., speed of re-employment) to consider the impact of the psychological dimensions (Gowan, 2014; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Finally, the role of grief itself should be incorporated into models (Harris & Isenor, 2010). A sense of loss typically occurs even in the best case scenario of re-establishing one's career, being happy with the new job, and establishing new co-worker friendships.

**Well-being research.** Well-being research, especially in positive psychology, would benefit from more qualitative and mixed methods research (Delle Fave & Bassi, 2009; Delle Fave et al., 2011), particularly given the relative newness of the field and the need to go beyond variable-centric correlational research (Kashdan & Steger, 2011). There is a strong need for more discovery-oriented research, particularly with respect to processes of well-being (Luthar, 2006). This approach also helps us to understanding everyday notions of well-being, as well as the broader experience of well-being (Delle Fave & Bassi, 2009; Delle Fave et al., 2011). Even within a purely post-positivistic lens, there is a need to ensure that existing a priori theories and commonly accepted constructs are appropriately operationalized (Kashan et al., 2008). It would be valuable to further investigate the various notions, factors, and potential processes of well-

being which emerged from this study. Specifically, investigation could include quantitative research with broader samples, exploring the impact of other life events on well-being, and exploring hypothesized processes using experimental research.

In terms of specific research designs, prospective, longitudinal research would be ideal in order to see how well-being changes with time and key life events (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014). Understanding how well-being changes on the within-person level would be particularly valuable (Kashdan & Steger, 2011) and could seed the development of bottom-up process theories. For instance, a prospective longitudinal diary design could request participants to freely write about their well-being at designed times (e.g., every weekend) as well as during self-defined critical moments and/or times of inspiration. The latter approach would be helpful in capturing critical events or turning points in well-being which could identify naturalistic well-being processes. Experience sampling methodology, which instructs participants to reflect on their well-being when electronically prompted, could also be adapted to gather qualitative data (Hektner, Schmidt, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; Killingsworth, & Gilbert, 2010). Unstructured written narratives, as seen in the context of this study, can provide rich insight that might not otherwise emerge using a highly structured approach. Participants reported that they derived meaning from completing the written narratives (Niderhoffer & Pennebaker, 2005). They appreciated the chance to reflect back on job loss, to connect it with other major life events, and see how their perspective on the event changed with time. Similarly, ‘questerviews’ would also be helpful to further explore theoretical constructs and to explore how participants respond to and interpret self-report instruments (Adamson et al., 2004). Finally, naturalistic secondary data (e.g., autobiographies and counselling transcripts) can be used to provide new insights about well-being and to further explore processes such as serial meaning-making.

**Job loss research.** Many of the proposed research directions for well-being research also apply to job loss research. Examples include the need for longitudinal prospective designs, more process research, and greater use of qualitative and mixed methods (Gowan, 2014; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Focusing on understanding differential responses to job loss, via typology research, would be particularly valuable. As described under the implications for job loss theory, researching the positives as well as the negatives of well-being and contextual factors would also be important to further our understanding of the holistic experience of job loss (Blustein et al., 2013; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). For instance, operationalization of distancing should be refined

to distinguish between approach motives (e.g., pursuing leisure activities because they bring me joy) versus an avoidance orientation (e.g., procrastination during job search). As previously mentioned, job loss research would benefit from a philosophical shift to focus on well-being rather than re-employment being the only and ultimate outcome measure.

**Well-being practice.** Most fundamentally, this study shows the value of attending to an individual's personalized notions of well-being whether conducting a therapy session or designing a self-help intervention. This assertion aligns with Fordyce's (1977, 1983) classic happiness intervention studies that showed the strongest positive effects were obtained when participants were educated about happiness and could freely choose interventions from a proposed list. In a therapeutic context, collaborative goal setting would be particularly valuable instead of presuming what well-being looks like for the client (Hackney & Cormier, 2005). It would also be important to attune to clients' past experiences with adversity and to take note of their habitual coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Seery et al., 2010). Well-being practice could also benefit from interventions such as expressive writing (Niderhoffer & Pennebaker, 2005) and psychoeducation (e.g., resilience, environmental mastery/adaptation, emotional regulation, and coping strategies). Interventions targeted at improving one's relationships (Maisel & Gable, 2009), enhancing social support (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and improving psychological flexibility would also be helpful (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010).

**Job loss practice.** Interventions for displaced workers could include psychoeducation on the experience of job loss which normalizes the impact of this major life event. For instance, it would be important to understand the tenuous nature of job search, which acts as a source of emotional ups and downs as well as being critical for re-employment (Borgen & Amundson, 1987). Coaching individuals on how to engage with their support network and to communicate their needs to others during this stressful time would be helpful. Finding positive sources to counteract the deprivations associated with job loss is also important when helping displaced workers to find other sources of meaning, identity, self-esteem, time structure, and contact with others (outside of an employment context). When warranted, these approaches could be complimented by grief processing (Brewington et al., 2004; Harris & Isenor, 2010). In general, counsellors would ideally attend to processing the story of job loss rather than adopting a purely solution-focused orientation (Blustein et al., 2013). Openness to the positives of job loss should be gently explored, with attention to timing and an overriding stance of empathy before

positivity. Noticing client strengths and past resilience is also critical. Finally, it is important to remember that personal and career counselling are naturally integrated (Blustein, 2008).

On a more systemic level, it would be valuable to educate employers, human resource professionals, and managers about the nature of job loss as well as to encourage more well-being friendly practices and policies (e.g., empathic dismissals, provision of outplacement services, providing feedback/closure for job applicants). Finally, policy makers need to consider the critical importance of well-being along with the traditional focus on re-employment. This perspective is especially relevant, since negative well-being during unemployment can sometimes impede re-employment (Paul & Moser, 2009), such as finding it hard to look for a job when depressed. Overall, it would be helpful to develop and test a number of interventions for displaced workers which include qualitative feedback about what is or is not helpful and how the impact of such interventions vary by individual.

### **Limitations**

Study transferability is impacted by (a) the context of job loss (versus other life events like divorce); (b) situational factors (e.g., the industry, geographic area, job market, study timeframe); and (c) participant demographics, which generally represent a Westernized sample of well-educated, white collar workers with medium-high socioeconomic status. Of particular importance is the exclusion of blue collar workers who typically fare worse with job loss (Paul & Moser, 2009). This sample may also be eudaimonically-predisposed given workers' high education levels (Ryff, 2013) and their attraction to working in a growth-oriented industry. Given the rapidly-changing technology sector, it is possible that participants could also be predisposed to adaptability.

Methodological limitations include the use of a retrospective study design which captures participants' perspectives on well-being at a single point in time. Ideally, this research would compare participants' well-being both before and after job loss using a prospective, longitudinal study (Gowan, 2014; Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Using written narratives and providing the interview guide in advance did aid both recall and reflection, while the lens of constructivism suggests the most meaningful events will be remembered (Polkinghorne, 2005). This study identifies potential rather than definitive process factors, since process data is ideally collected at different points in time. Another limitation is a lack of anonymity when completing questionnaires which may have created a self-presentation bias.

Finally, the potential impact of trait versus state-based personality factors has not been assessed (Stones, Worobetz, & Brink, 2011).

### **Contributions to Knowledge**

Positive psychology is a relatively new field which is rich in both theory and theoretical debate, yet gaps remain regarding the exact nature of well-being (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Jayawickreme et al., 2012; Seligman, 2011). This study used an inductive approach to explore the experience of well-being by providing a bottom-up view of well-being from the experiences of everyday people which was then compared to a priori notions. Exploring the specific case of well-being following job loss also provided the important perspective of considering negative as well as positive aspects of well-being.

This study advanced knowledge by showing that the experience of well-being following job loss is both rich and personalized, which includes subjectively-objective nature of well-being. It specifically validated common constructs of well-being, while showing that there are a variety of notions which are uniquely valued in different combinations by individuals. It also introduces a new notion of well-being – centered and steadfast – which refers to a steady-state well-being which is characterized by well-being stability, emotional stability, and being grounded in oneself. Findings further showed that the predominant theoretical conceptualizations of both hedonia and eudaimonia are potentially integrated, rather than separate (Kashdan et al., 2009). Furthermore, these experiences overlap (e.g., life satisfaction can sometimes implicitly refer to life meaning). The study findings also make the case for the integration of both negative and positive aspects of well-being, which includes the absence of psychopathology as well as mixed well-being. As seen with resilience and post-traumatic growth phenomena, negative experiences can sometimes be pathways to improved well-being (Wong, 2011). Finally, the experience of well-being is seen as a dynamic rather than a static concept. The dynamic nature of well-being includes both (a) the outcomes of well-being (e.g., the “what” of well-being such as happiness) as well as (b) the processes of well-being (e.g., the “how” of well-being such as being self-congruent). The role of domain well-being and emotional well-being also emerged as dominant themes, with the life domain of relationships being especially important.

Within the job loss field, the negative impact of job loss on well-being is known while the positive aspects have been understudied (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). This study advances our knowledge by identifying the potential positives of well-being (e.g., improved relationships,

personal growth, enhanced resilience) which vary by person, and are often retroactively-perceived with the benefit of time. Findings show that positives do exist along with the negatives, mixed well-being is the norm, and the overall experience of well-being tends to vary by individual. This study is generally congruent with existing job loss theories and models (Gowan, 2014), and introduces the notion of positive, approach-based processes.

This research also enhances our understanding of the explanatory factors which impact well-being following job loss by identifying a complex array of both external and internal themes. On the external side, the impact of the actions of employers who dismiss workers, the non-responsiveness of employers who hire displaced workers, and the value of relationships as a source of positivity/demands (rather than purely instrumental support) stand out as key subthemes. In terms of internal themes, this study shows that coping is a complicated process which includes overlapping cognitive, behavioural, emotional, and meaning-making processes. In particular, this research identifies a unique narrative pattern of meaning-making called serial questioning where individuals ask themselves a series of existential questions. The study also challenges the notion of emotion-focused coping as distancing oneself from the stressor and further introduces the possibility that distancing could instead be measuring positive constructs such as gratitude. Findings also highlight the role of protective and sensitizing effects such as self-esteem and past adversity, whose effects may differ by person.

Finally, this research provides practical suggestions to improve the well-being of displaced workers which can be used in both self-help and therapeutic contexts. Such applications would be ideally guided by key intervention principles such as personalization, attention to the practical challenges of job loss, and a stance of empathic-oriented positivity. In sum, well-being following job loss is a rich experience containing both positive and negative experiences which vary according to person and are further constructed by one's broader external context.

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**Appendix A**  
Certificate of Ethics Approval

File Number: 09-12-08

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 11/05/2012



**Université d'Ottawa** **University of Ottawa**  
 Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

**Ethics Approval Notice**  
**Social Science and Humanities REB**

**Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)**

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Nicola	Gazzola	Education / Education	Supervisor
Jacqueline	Synard	Education / Education	Student Researcher

**File Number:** 09-12-08

**Type of Project:** PhD Thesis

**Title:** The Experience of Well-Being Following High-Tech Job Loss: A Case Study

<b>Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)</b>	<b>Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)</b>	<b>Approval Type</b>
11/05/2012	11/04/2013	Ia

**(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)**

**Special Conditions / Comments:**

N/A

File Number: 09-12-08

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 11/05/2012



**Université d'Ottawa**  
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

**University of Ottawa**  
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the application for ethical approval for the above named research project as of the Ethics Approval Date indicated for the period above and subject to the conditions listed the section above entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the study the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove subjects from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the study (e.g. change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment documentation, should be submitted to this office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at:  
<http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms.html>

Please submit an annual status report to the Protocol Officer four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to either close the file or request a renewal of ethics approval. This document can be found at:  
<http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms.html>

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5387 or by e-mail at: [ethics@uOttawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uOttawa.ca).

**Signature:**

Riana Marcotte  
Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research  
For Barbara Graves, Chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities REB

File Number: 09-12-08B

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 11/05/2012



**Université d'Ottawa** **University of Ottawa**  
 Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

**Ethics Approval Notice**  
**Social Science and Humanities REB**

**Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)**

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Nicola	Gazzola	Education / Education	Supervisor
Jacqueline	Synard	Education / Education	Student Researcher

**File Number:** 09-12-08B**Type of Project:** Secondary use of data**Title:** The Experience of Well-Being Following High-Tech Job Loss: A Case Study

<b>Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)</b>	<b>Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)</b>	<b>Approval Type</b>
11/05/2012	11/04/2013	Ia

**(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)****Special Conditions / Comments:**

N/A

File Number: 09-12-08B

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 11/05/2012



**Université d'Ottawa**  
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

**University of Ottawa**  
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the application for ethical approval for the above named research project as of the Ethics Approval Date indicated for the period above and subject to the conditions listed the section above entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the study the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove subjects from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the study (e.g. change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment documentation, should be submitted to this office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at:  
<http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms.html>

Please submit an annual status report to the Protocol Officer four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to either close the file or request a renewal of ethics approval. This document can be found at:  
<http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms.html>

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5387 or by e-mail at: [ethics@uOttawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uOttawa.ca).

**Signature:**

Riana Marcotte  
Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research  
For Barbara Graves, Chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities REB

2

550, rue Cumberland      550 Cumberland Street  
Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6N5 Canada      Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada  
(613) 562-5387 • Téléc./Fax (613) 562-5338  
<http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/index.html>  
<http://www.recherche.uottawa.ca/deontologie/index.html>

**Appendix B**

Study Recruitment and Promotional Materials



**E-Mail Text Recruiting General Technology Sector Participants**

Subject: Seeking Participants for University Research Study on High-Tech Job Loss

The Ottawa, Ontario high tech sector has been highly impacted by job loss over the years. This study is interested in looking at the long-term impact of job loss on the well-being of people who lost their job in the local high tech sector (one or more times) from 2000-2006.

To introduce myself, I am Jacqui Synard, a 3<sup>rd</sup> year University of Ottawa counselling Ph.D. student. I am currently recruiting participants who would be interested in sharing their experiences with job loss.

This study would provide you (or an acquaintance of yours) with the opportunity to reflect on your experience with job loss and its long term impact on one's life and well-being. Sharing these experiences, whether negative and/or positive, will help us identify how others friends, family, employers, etc. can best support people through job loss. Study participation will also contribute to academic research regarding well-being. (See attached poster).

Eligible participants will be compensated for their time and may withdraw participation at any point (see attached poster). Please contact me for more information at xxxx or yyyy. You may feel free to forward this e-mail on to others who might be interested.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,

Jacqui Synard, Ph.D. Candidate  
Educational Counselling, University of Ottawa

**E-Mail Text to Outplacement Consultants**

Subject: Seeking Participants for Research Study on Job Loss (University of Ottawa)

Please see the attached poster regarding a University of Ottawa job loss research study which is currently recruiting participants who may be interested in sharing their experience with job loss. Participants will also be given the opportunity to provide input on what is helpful or not in supporting people during job loss. Eligible participants will have experienced one or more job losses while working in the Ottawa, Ontario region high-tech sector from 2000-2006. Participants will be compensated for their time and may withdraw participation at any point.

Please see attached flyer or contact Jacqui Synard, University of Ottawa, Ph.D. Candidate for more information (xxxx).

Your support in forwarding the below e-mail message and attached poster to *current or former clients* is greatly appreciated!

Regards,  
YYY

encl. Study poster and draft e-mail text to general participants

**Letter to Outplacement Consulting Firms**

Date, 2012 (U of O Letterhead)

Managing Partner, Ottawa Office  
XZY Outplacement Consulting Firm  
Street Address Ottawa, ON, Postal Code

Re: University of Ottawa Ph.D. Research Study on Job Loss and Well-being

Dear XXXXX:

Job loss is often a major life event which impacts one's well-being. Have you ever wondered why some people seem to bounce back from job loss while others seem to struggle? This University of Ottawa research study explores the experience of well-being following job loss in the Ottawa, Ontario area high-tech sector from 2000-2006.

I am kindly requesting your support in promoting this study to clients who experienced one or more high-tech job losses during the 2000-2006 period. To introduce myself, I am Jacqui Synard, a 3<sup>rd</sup> year Ph.D. student in Educational Counselling at the University of Ottawa.

The objective of this study is to explore the experience of job loss and how it impacts one's well-being. Your firm could contribute to this study through two simple steps: (1) permitting the placement of posters in your offices, and (2) the distribution of promotional materials to you outplacement consultants who could e-mail or mention this study to *current or former clients*.

I recognize that both your firm and your outplacement consultants are busy. In appreciation for your support (should you choose to participate), I would offer to do a presentation on the results of this study to your local office when they become available.

Eligible client participants who meet screening criteria and choose to participate will be compensated for their time (see enclosed flyer). Participation would consist of a written exercise, completing some questionnaires, and a face-to-face interview.

Thank you very much for considering this request. Please feel free to phone or e-mail me should you have any questions (yyyy). Otherwise, I will follow-up with you in two weeks to determine whether your firm would kindly offer to help promote this research to your clients. In any case, thank you for your time.

Regards,

Jacqui Synard, Ph.D. Candidate  
University of Ottawa

**E-Mail Text to Learn to Bounce Participants**

Subject: Seeking Participants for University Research Study on High-Tech Job Loss

Dear *Learn to Bounce* Participant,

This e-mail is being forwarded to you by Anita Caputo, co-author of *Learn to Bounce*, the book where your story of job loss was profiled. The people featured in this book are being asked to consider participating in a follow-up study at the University of Ottawa which I am conducting. To introduce myself, I am Jacqui Synard, a 3<sup>rd</sup> year counselling Ph.D. student. The purpose of the study is to learn more about the experience of well-being following job loss.

This study would provide you with the opportunity to reflect on your experiences with job loss and its long term impact on your life and well-being. By sharing your experiences, you can help identify how others such as friends, family, and employers can best support people through job loss. You will also contribute to academic research regarding well-being. (See attached poster).

It should be noted that, unlike in the book, participants will not be identified by name and participants' identities will be masked in the final research report. Eligible participants will be compensated for their time and may withdraw participation at any point. Please feel free to contact me for more information at xxxx or yyyy.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,

Jacqui Synard, Ph.D. Candidate  
Educational Counselling, University of Ottawa

**Appendix C**  
Participant Screening Form

### ***Participant Screening Form***

[This information will be captured over the phone and recorded by the primary researcher.]

*Thank you for your interest in participating in this study of the experience of well-being following job loss. As mentioned in the poster, data will be collected from selected participants in two parts. [Note: Read exact information on study requirements from the consent form.]*

*Are you still interested in participating in the study? [If yes, proceed. If no, thank them for their time and interest.] The next step is to screen all participants to see if they are eligible to participate in the study, as mentioned in the poster. If you are not eligible, your information will be retained for the purposes of reporting statistics on the total number of participants who did not participate and the reasons that participants were not included. Only totals and percentages will be reported (i.e., no information will be reported on an individual basis). Furthermore, your all information given, including your contact information, will be kept both private and secure. Do you have any questions regarding this? Do you give your consent to proceed to answering the screening questions and providing contact information about yourself now? [If yes, proceed. If no, thank them for their time and interest.]*

**Date/Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Name and Contact Info:**

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Given Names: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, Province, Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Tel: \_\_\_\_\_ OK to Leave Messages: (Y/N) Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

e-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Screening Questions:**

1. Did you work in the Ottawa, ON area technology sector (i.e., telecommunications, information technology, or software/hardware development) from 2000-06? (Y/N)
2. Did you experience one or more job losses while being permanently employed in this sector? Or, in other words, were you either laid off or fired from your job which resulted in having your employment relationship with a company formally terminated? (Y/N)
3. Would you say this job loss was involuntary – either completely or partially? (Y/N)
4. How many job losses have you had since 2000, in high tech or otherwise, being permanently employed? (Single, Multiple: \_\_\_\_\_)
5. Are you currently employed? (Y/N) If so, do you consider yourself, underemployed? Why? (Y/N): \_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you speak English and do you feel comfortable that you to communicate as required in a research study? (Y/N)
7. Based on information provided in the study's information poster/e-mails, are you generally interested in participating in the study and proceeding to the next step of participant recruitment (i.e., reviewing the consent form and deciding whether to participate)? (Y/N)

- 7b. As a person who was profiled in Learn to Bounce, would you be interested in allowing the use of your story, taped interview, transcript or author’s notes? (Y/N)
- 8. Are there any factors which may impact your ability to participate in a research study such as major life stressors) which could create added risks to your physical or emotional well-being as a result of participating in the study? (Y/N)

[Screening Out: Screen out any participant who answers “No” to any of questions 1,2,3, or 6 or “Yes” to any of questions 7 & 8. Thank the participant for their interest and explain that they are not eligible for this particular study and provide them with the option of providing their contact details for inclusion in future studies which may be conducted by this researcher. Inform them that their information will not be given to any other researcher or third party.

Screening In: If participant is eligible, (1) thank them for their interest; (2) send them a copy of the consent form for consideration, with the invitation to freely ask questions as required and reminder that participation is total voluntary; and (3) indicate that participants will be selected on a first-come, first-served basis. Participants, whom agree to participate, will be asked to complete the consent form and mail it back to the researcher. Participants can elect to either: (a) mailed a consent form with a postage-paid envelope, or (b) be e-mailed a PDF of the consent form and mail it back at their own cost.]

Notes:

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**Appendix D**  
Consent Forms



Université d'Ottawa  
Faculté d'éducation  
University of Ottawa  
Faculty of Education

## INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**Study Topic:** The Experience of Well-being Following High-Tech Job Loss

**Researcher:** Ms. Jacqueline Synard, Ph.D. Candidate

**Supervised by:** Dr. Nicola Gazzola, Ph.D., Associate Professor

**Funded by:**

Government of Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Doctoral Fellowship

This consent form (a copy of which has been given to you) is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, feel free to consult further with Jacqui Synard, at 562-5800, ext. 4132. Please take the time to read this carefully.

### Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of the study is to explore the experience of well-being following job loss. This research will provide information on how one's well-being is impacted by job loss.

### Invitation to Participate:

You are invited to participate in this research study which is being conducted by Jacqueline Synard as a part of her Ph.D. program.

### Participation:

Your consent includes participation in these activities, as required, (Total Time: ~ 2.0-3.0 hours):

- (1) Part 1: Doing an at-home writing exercise where you write freely (without worrying about spelling or grammar) for at least 15 minutes about your experience of well-being after losing a job(es), and completing a short demographic questionnaire providing some basic information about yourself (e.g., age, gender etc.);
- (2) Part 2: Attending a 1-1.5 hour in-person interview where you discuss the experience of job loss and well-being, plus completing 6 short well-being questionnaires; and
- (3) Being available by phone to address any short, follow-up questions which may arise during data analysis, as well as reviewing your interview transcript and/or published work on your story (if desired).

Participants will be asked to complete Part 1 (i.e., the written narratives and demographic questionnaire) at home, at their convenience. At this time, you may also (optionally), include a copy of your résumé if you feel that would be helpful. The interviews for Part 2 will be conducted in person at the University of Ottawa or another quiet, private location (or by phone if out of town). Questionnaires may be completed at the interview or at home and returned by mail within a week. [Note: Participants whose stories were included in the book *Learn to Bounce*, also consent to allowing their original *Learn to Bounce* tape-recorded interview, transcript, authors' interview notes, and published story to be used for this study].

**Procedures:**

Interviews will be conducted by the researcher and taped (either audiotaped or videotaped-based on your preference). Transcription, coding, and analysis will be conducted and overseen by the researcher, with possible assistance from the researcher's supervisor, a volunteer research team and/or a paid research assistant(s).

The results of this research will be summarized in a publically-accessible doctoral dissertation and may also be presented at research conferences or published in scholarly journals, mainstream media, and other vehicles. In all matters regarding the communication of results, steps will be taken to protect your anonymity. Once completed, the results of the investigation will be made available to you upon request.

**Risks:**

Your participation in this study means you could disclose very personal and/or sensitive information which could trigger an emotional response or create stress. All participants will thus be provided with a list of counselling and community resources which may be accessed if required.

Every effort will be made to minimize these risks which include: (1) the right to refuse to answer any questions and/or to immediately stop discussing any topic which makes you uncomfortable; and (2) the right to withdraw your participation (and data) at any time without prejudice. Throughout the study, you will also be provided with any new and relevant information on risks or other factors which may impact your decision to participate.

**Benefits:**

Your participation in this study allows you to reflect on the experience of losing your job and how it impacted your well-being. Participation also provides you with the opportunity to reflect on future life and career goals. By sharing your experiences, you can contribute to improving how employers, governments, and counsellors (as well as friends and family) support people during times of job loss via published research. You also contribute to academic research about well-being. Finally, you can contribute to helping universities better train counsellors.

**Compensation for Your Participation:**

As a small thank-you for your participation, you will be compensated with a \$40 gift certificate to a bookstore or coffee shop (i.e., \$20 for each part) plus any applicable parking costs. You will receive this compensation for any part of the study that you have participated in, even if you choose to withdraw from the study.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity:**

Any information that you share will be kept strictly confidential to members of the research team which consists of the primary researcher, her supervisor, and any other graduate student/professor, and/or paid research assistant who is a part of the research team. I understand that the information will only be used for the purpose of collecting, analyzing, and reporting on well-being during job loss.

Confidentiality will be protected by: (1) conducting all interviews in a private area; (2) training research team members on confidentiality; and, (3) ensuring that all data is locked up and secured when not being used by a member of the research team. Hard copies of data will be locked in filing cabinets at the Community Counselling Service which are housed in the Faculty of Education in a secured room. A back-up copy of all data will also be kept in the primary researcher's supervisor's (i.e., Dr. Nicola Gazzola) University of Ottawa office. All electronic data is stored in (a) password-secured files on password-secured computers and/or (b) memory sticks/DVD disks in a secure filing cabinet. It is acknowledged that the complete security of e-mail system cannot be guaranteed. Any documents sent to you via e-mail (e.g., copies of your interview transcript) from the researcher will be sent via a password protected files.

Moreover, all information will be treated as private and confidential even after identifying features have been removed. Tapes and transcripts will be labelled and coded to remove any identifying information and kept in a

locked filing cabinet in the primary researcher's (Jacqueline Synard's) office, as well as her supervisor's (Dr. Nicola Gazzola) University of Ottawa office. The code keys will be stored in a reference file separate from the data set. All of the tapes will be kept for ten years.

Anonymity cannot be completely guaranteed since there is a small risk that someone could recognize the specific circumstances of your life situation when it is written up in a published research report. Steps taken to protect your anonymity include changing your name and masking specific identifying details in the final report and any other form of research dissemination. You will also be given the opportunity to read and review information about your story to maximize protection of your identity before research findings are published in a public thesis dissertation report. You acknowledge that your anonymity may be compromised should you choose to tell others about your participation in this project.

**Conservation of Data:**

The data collected via tape recordings, transcripts, and research notes will be kept in a secure manner for ten years after which it will be destroyed. Hard copies of data, along with electronic back-ups on CD/memory stick, will be stored in locked filing cabinets in the University of Ottawa Community Counselling Services in the Faculty of Education. Original electronic data will be stored in password-secured files on the researcher's secured computer.

**Voluntary Participation:**

You are under no obligation to participate. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. You will not be asked to refund any compensation that you have received for completing any part of the study. If you choose to withdraw, you will be given the option of withdrawing your data or having it remain a part of the study. It is acknowledged that it would be practically difficult (if not impossible) to withdraw your data once results are published or otherwise disseminated.

**Acceptance:**

Your signature on this form indicates you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in this research and agree to participate in this research. In no way does this waive your legal rights and it also doesn't release anyone involved with the research from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from

the study at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

I, (*participant's name*), agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Ms. Jacqueline Synard of the Faculty of Education, Educational Counselling Department of the University of Ottawa. If interviewed, I would prefer: audiotaping, videotaping (please circle).

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact the researcher or her supervisor. If you have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa as indicated (Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5. Tel.: (613) 562-5387 e-mail: [ethics@uottawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uottawa.ca)).

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact Details:**

Faculty of Education, Educational Counselling  
University of Ottawa  
145 Jean-Jacques Lussier Private, Ottawa



uOttawa

Université d'Ottawa  
Faculté d'éducation  
University of Ottawa  
Faculty of Education

### CONSENTEMENT ÉCLAIRÉ DE PARTICIPER À UNE ÉTUDE

**Sujet de l'étude :** Étude de cas de l'expérience du mieux-être suite à la perte d'un emploi dans le secteur de la haute technologie

**Rechercheuse :** Mme Jacqueline Synard, candidate au doctorat

**Supervisée par :** M. Nicola Gazzola, Ph.D., professeur agrégé

**Financée par :** Le programme de bourses de doctorat du Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du gouvernement du Canada.

Ce formulaire de consentement (dont vous avez reçu un exemplaire) ne représente qu'une partie du processus de consentement éclairé. Il devrait vous donner une idée de base de l'étude et de ce que votre participation implique. Si vous désirez de plus amples détails sur un élément dont il est fait mention dans ce document ou sur des renseignements qui n'y figurent pas, n'hésitez pas à communiquer avec Jacqui Synard au 613-562-5800, poste 4132. Veuillez prendre le temps de lire attentivement ce document.

#### But de l'étude :

Le but de l'étude est d'explorer l'expérience du mieux-être suite à une perte d'emploi. Cette recherche donnera des renseignements sur la façon dont le mieux-être d'une personne est touché par la perte d'un emploi.

#### Invitation à participer :

Vous êtes invité à participer à cette étude de recherche qui sera menée par Jacqueline Synard, dans le cadre de son programme de doctorat.

#### Participation :

Votre consentement comprend votre participation dans ces activités, au besoin

(Temps total : ~ 2,0-3,0 heures) :

- (1) Partie 1: Effectuer à la maison, un exercice de rédaction qui consiste à écrire librement (sans vous soucier de l'orthographe ou de la grammaire) pendant au moins 15 minutes concernant votre expérience de mieux-être suite à la perte de votre emploi et remplir un bref questionnaire démographique donnant certains renseignements de base à votre sujet (par ex., âge, sexe, etc.);
- (2) Partie 2 : Prendre part en personne à une entrevue d'une durée de 1-1,5 heure où vous discuterez de votre expérience concernant la perte de votre emploi et le mieux-être et remplir également 6 brefs questionnaires sur le mieux-être; et
- (3) Être disponible afin de répondre, par téléphone, à toute question de suivi qui pourrait survenir, de même que pour revoir la transcription de votre entrevue ainsi que le texte relatant votre expérience qui sera publié (si vous le désirez).

On demandera à tous les participants de compléter la Partie 1 ci-dessus (c.-à-d. la rédaction et questionnaire démographique) à la maison, à leur convenance. Vous aurez, à ce moment-là, l'option de joindre votre curriculum au questionnaire démographique, si vous estimez que cela pourrait s'avérer utile. Les entrevues (Partie 2) se dérouleront en personne dans les locaux de l'Université d'Ottawa ou dans un autre local tranquille et privé (ou par téléphone, si vous demeurez à l'extérieur de la ville).

Vous pourrez remplir les questionnaires au moment de l'entrevue ou à la maison, et les renvoyer par la poste en deçà d'une semaine. [Nota : Les participants dont les expériences font partie du livre *Learn to Bounce* consentent également à ce que l'entrevue originale enregistrée pour le livre, la transcription, les notes des auteurs durant l'entrevue ainsi que le texte publié soient utilisés dans le cadre de cette étude].

Les entrevues seront menées par la chercheure et enregistrées (sous forme audio ou vidéo selon votre préférence). La transcription, le codage et l'analyse seront effectués et surveillés par la chercheure qui pourrait recevoir l'aide de son superviseur, d'une équipe de recherche bénévole et/ou d'adjoints rémunérés.

Les résultats de la recherche seront résumés dans une thèse de doctorat disponible au public et pourraient également être présentés dans des conférences de recherche, publiés dans des revues savantes, dans les principaux médias, et d'autres véhicules. Dans toutes les questions ayant trait à la communication des résultats, des mesures seront prises afin de protéger votre anonymat. Les résultats seront mis à votre disposition, sur demande une fois l'étude terminée.

**Risques :**

Votre participation dans cette étude signifie que vous pourriez divulguer des renseignements très personnels et/ou sensibles pouvant entraîner une réaction émotionnelle ou créer un stress. Tous les participants se verront remettre une liste des ressources en counselling ou communautaires auxquelles ils peuvent faire appel, si nécessaire.

Tous les efforts seront faits pour minimiser ces risques, y compris : (1) le droit de refuser de répondre à toute question et/ou de cesser immédiatement de discuter de tout sujet qui vous rend inconfortable; et (2) le droit de retirer votre participation (et vos données) en tout temps, sans préjudice. Tout au long de l'étude, on vous fera part de tout renseignement nouveau et pertinent sur les risques ou d'autres facteurs qui pourraient influencer sur votre décision de participer.

**Bénéfices :**

Votre participation dans cette étude permettra de vous pencher sur l'expérience de la perte de votre emploi et de ses effets sur votre mieux-être. Vous pourrez également profiter de l'occasion pour réfléchir à vos futurs objectifs de vie et de carrière. En partageant vos expériences, vous pouvez contribuer à améliorer la façon dont les employeurs, les gouvernements, et les conseillers (ainsi que les amis et la famille) soutiennent les personnes dans des situations de pertes d'emploi via la publication de la recherche. Vous pouvez également contribuer à la recherche académique sur le mieux-être et comment nous aidons les personnes à rebondir face aux difficultés de la vie. Enfin, vous pouvez contribuer à aider les universités à améliorer la formation des conseillers.

**Compensation pour votre participation :**

En guise de petit remerciement pour votre participation, on vous remettra un certificat-cadeau d'une valeur de 40 \$, dans une librairie ou café et l'on vous remboursera vos frais de stationnement, s'il y a lieu. Les participants qui choisissent de se retirer recevront néanmoins la compensation.

**Confidentialité et anonymat :**

Tous les renseignements que vous partagerez seront considérés comme strictement confidentiels aux membres de l'équipe de recherche qui comprend la chercheuse principale, son superviseur, et tout autre étudiant diplômé/professeur et/ou tout adjoint de recherche rémunéré qui fait partie de l'équipe de recherche. Vous comprenez que les renseignements ne seront utilisés que dans le but de recueillir, d'analyser et de faire rapport sur le mieux-être durant la perte d'un emploi

La confidentialité sera protégée en : (1) menant toutes les entrevues dans un local privé; (2) en assurant que tous les membres de l'équipe de recherche aient reçu une formation sur la confidentialité; et (3) en s'assurant que toutes les données se retrouvent sous clé et en sécurité lorsqu'elles ne sont pas utilisées par un membre de l'équipe de recherche. Les copies tangibles des données seront conservées sous clé dans des classeurs du Service de counselling communautaire de la Faculté d'éducation, dans un local sécurisé. Une copie de sauvegarde de toutes les données sera également conservée dans le bureau du superviseur de la chercheuse (c.-à-d. M. Nicola Gazzola) à l'Université d'Ottawa. Toutes les données électroniques seront conservées dans des fichiers protégés par mot de passe dans des ordinateurs protégés par mot de passe et/ou sur des cartes mémoires Memory Stick/disques DVD dans un classeur sécurisé. On reconnaît que l'on ne peut garantir la sécurité intégrale du système de courrier électronique. Tout document que vous fera parvenir la

chercheure par courriel (par ex. copies de la transcription de votre entrevue ou le texte concernant votre expérience), sera acheminé dans des fichiers protégés par mot de passe.

De plus, tous les renseignements seront considérés privés et secrets même après que les éléments d'identification aient été enlevés. Les enregistrements et les transcriptions seront étiquetés et codés afin d'enlever tout renseignement d'identification et seront conservés dans un classeur sous clé dans le bureau de la chercheure principale (Jacqueline Synard), ainsi que dans le bureau de son superviseur (M. Nicola Gazzola) à l'Université d'Ottawa. Les clés de codage seront conservées dans un dossier de référence distinct, à l'écart de l'ensemble des données. Tous les enregistrements seront conservés pour une période de dix ans.

L'anonymat ne peut être assuré complètement puisqu'il y a toujours un risque minime qu'une personne puisse reconnaître les circonstances précises de votre situation lorsqu'elle sera décrite dans un rapport de recherché publié. Les mesures prises pour protéger votre anonymat comprennent entre autres, changer votre nom et cacher certains détails pertinents d'identification (par ex. le titre de votre poste) dans le rapport final et tout autre moyen de diffusion de la recherche. Vous aurez également la possibilité de lire et de réviser les renseignements concernant votre expérience afin de maximiser la protection de votre identité avant que les conclusions de l'étude ne soient publiées dans rapport de thèse accessible au public. Vous êtes conscient que votre anonymat pourrait être compromis si vous décidez de faire part à d'autres personnes de votre participation dans ce projet.

**Conservation des données :**

Les données recueillies au moyen d'enregistrements, de transcriptions, de notes de session/recherche seront conservées de façon sécurisée pendant une période de dix ans, après quoi, elles seront détruites. Les copies tangibles des données ainsi que les sauvegardes électroniques sur CD/cartes mémoires seront conservées dans des classeurs sous clé au Service de counselling communautaire de la Faculté de l'éducation de l'Université d'Ottawa. Les données électroniques originales seront conservées dans des fichiers protégés par mot de passe dans l'ordinateur sécurisé de la chercheure.

**Participation volontaire :**

Vous n'êtes sous aucune obligation de participer. Si vous choisissez de participer, vous pouvez vous retirer de l'étude à n'importe quel moment et/ou refuser de répondre à n'importe quelle question, sans subir de conséquences négatives. On ne vous demandera pas de rembourser toute

compensation que vous avez pu recevoir pour participer dans cette étude. Si vous choisissez de vous retirer, vous aurez l'option de retirer vos données ou de les laisser faire partie de l'étude. On reconnaît qu'il serait à toute fin pratique difficile (voire impossible) de retirer vos données, une fois que les résultats ont été publiés ou divulgués autrement.

**Acceptation :**

Votre signature du formulaire indique que vous avez compris à votre satisfaction les renseignements concernant votre participation dans cette étude et que vous acceptez d'y participer. Cela ne constitue en aucun cas une renonciation de vos droits légaux pas plus qu'il ne permet aux personnes menant l'étude de se soustraire de leurs obligations légales et professionnelles. Vous êtes libre de vous retirer de cette étude à n'importe quel moment. N'hésitez pas à demander des éclaircissements ou des renseignements complémentaires tout au long de l'étude.

Je, (*nom du participant*), accepte de participer dans l'étude ci-dessus menée par Mme Jacqueline Synard de la Faculté d'éducation, Département du counselling éducationnel de l'Université d'Ottawa. En ce qui concerne l'entrevue, je préfère un enregistrement : audio, vidéo (veuillez encercler).

Si vous avez des questions concernant l'étude, vous pouvez communiquer avec la chercheuse ou son superviseur. Si vous avez des questions concernant la déontologie de cette étude, vous pouvez communiquer avec le responsable de la déontologie en recherche, à l'Université d'Ottawa, comme suit (Pavillon Tabaret, 550, rue Cumberland, Bureau 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5. Tél. : (613) 562-5387 courriel : [ethics@uottawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uottawa.ca)).

Il y a deux exemplaires du formulaire de consentement, dont une copie pour vos dossiers.

Nom du participant (en lettres moulées) : \_\_\_\_\_

Signature du participant : \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Nom de la chercheuse (en lettres moulées) : \_\_\_\_\_

Signature de la chercheuse : \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

**Pour communiquer avec les personnes-ressources :**

Faculté d'éducation, Counselling éducationnel  
Université d'Ottawa  
145, rue Jean-Jacques Lussier, Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5

**Appendix E**  
Case Study Data Sources

Table 1

*List of Case Study Data Sources*

Phase 1 Data Collection	Phase 2 Data Collection
Written Narratives Demographic Questionnaires Participant Résumés	Interviews Well-being Questionnaires <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS, 4 items)</li> <li>2. Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS, 5 items)</li> <li>3. Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS, 20 items)</li> <li>4. Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MIL-Q, 10 items)</li> <li>5. Brief Resilience Scale (BRS, 6 items)</li> <li>6. Patient Health Questionnaire (PHS-4, 4 items)</li> </ol>

**Appendix F**

Phase 1 Data Collection Protocol

## **Well-being Following Job Loss – Written Narrative and Demographic Questionnaire Protocol & Guide – Version #5**

**Title:** Well-being Following Job Loss – Interview Protocol & Guide

**Developer:** Jacqueline Synard, Ph.D. Candidate

**Date:** August 13th, 2012

**Type of Instrument:** Semi-structured written narrative plus a demographic questionnaire.

**Length:** Written Narrative: 25-45 minutes; Demographic Questionnaire: 5-15 minutes.

Total time: 30-60 minutes

**Location:** To be completed by the participant at the participant's home. Materials will be mailed or e-mailed as appropriate.

**Research Question:** What is the subjective experience well-being following job loss?

**Data to be Analyzed:** Written narratives and questionnaires will provide context for the selection of participants for interviews and the broader case. Written narratives of those selected for interviews will be coded and analyzed in detail, with handwritten information re-typed (if required). Participants may also optionally provide their résumés.

### **Written Narrative and Questionnaire Administration Preparation**

1. Discuss the project with interested participants by phone prior to obtaining informed consent. Use this interaction and subsequent phone and e-mail interactions with participants to build rapport and comfort with researcher prior to the interview.
2. Participants will be asked to begin reflecting on their experience of losing their jobs while they await their instructions on how to complete their narratives.
3. Narratives are to be completed at home and will be securely returned to the researcher via mail, or a secure prepaid courier as appropriate. Participants will be encouraged to contact the researcher by e-mail or phone should they have any questions.

### **Written Narratives and Questionnaires Approach**

This study requires establishing a safe, open and non-judgmental environment which puts the participant at ease to share his/her experiences of job loss. The participants and primary researcher will have interacted previously during recruitment.

Written narratives will be completed first (~ 25-45 minutes), followed by the demographic questionnaire (~ 5-15 minutes). Participants may complete both narratives and questionnaire right away in one sitting. Participants will be given the option of typing or hand-writing the narratives. Hand-written narratives will be transcribed by the research team and sent to the participations for clarification and verification as required.

Participants will be given verbal instructions over the phone. They will be thanked for contributions, assured of confidentiality, and provided with instructions for the narratives and questionnaires (Creswell, 2007). The primary researcher will make herself available by e-mail or phone to answer questions during instrument completion.

**Narrative and Demographic Questionnaire Verbal Introduction** (To be spoken informally)

Thank you again for participating in this part of the study which includes a short writing exercise. Your input, time, and hard work are appreciated. As we discussed, everything is confidential, and you will have the opportunity to review any parts of your story that are selected for write-up before the research is published. You can, of course, choose to withdraw your participation at any time. Any questions?

For the writing exercise, you are asked to write freely about the experience of losing your job and its impact on your well-being. The goal is simply to understand your unique, personal experience with losing your job and your own personal understanding of well-being. Should writing raise anything that is distressing for you, please let me know and we can refer you to resources as required.

Feel free to write about whatever comes to your mind and be as open and honest as you can. This is not a test of your writing ability so no need to worry about your grammar, spelling, or writing style. Just write about whatever you think or feel in the moment. You may write or type. Should you feel stuck, there will be some suggestions about things to write about. Take as long as you like to write or think – no pressure. Feel free to ask any questions or take a break if required.

Once you are done the writing exercise, you may take a break, and then proceed directly to completing the demographic questionnaire which collects some basic information. Any questions?

**Appendix G**

Written Narrative Exercise

### Job Loss and Well-being Writing Exercise

#### Reflection Instructions

Before you begin to write, I would encourage you to take some time to think back to your experience(s) with losing a job (or jobs). Specifically, you will be asked to write about two items: (a) How you would describe the experience of losing your job(s)?, and (b) Looking back, how did losing your job(s) impact your personal sense of well-being and why? You can consider high-tech job loss(s) from 2000-2006 as well as any other subsequent job losses. Think about the events, moments, and people that stand out for you as you look back. There are no right or wrong answers and the goal is to simply understand your unique, personal experience.

Next, reflect on how job loss has impacted your sense of well-being and why. Feel free to write about any aspect of your well-being – however you define it, whether negative or positive. You may choose to write about your overall well-being and/or about well-being in different parts of your life. You may write about the present moment or about how your well-being changed at different time points during this experience (e.g., when you first heard the news versus a few months or a year later). These things are all suggestions. It is not necessary to comment on all of these points. If you feel stuck, feel free to select a sentence or two from the list below to help get you thinking. (You do not have to write about these, but can choose to take parts if that helps).

Some Sentences to Get You Thinking:

- “If a friend asked me, I would say losing my job felt like...”
- “What most surprised me about losing my job is...”
- “I noticed the following changes in my well-being ....”
- “The part(s) of my life most impacted by losing my job include....”
- “The hardest thing has been..., the best thing has been...”
- “The moments, people, events, or things that stand out for me include...”
- “The things that have helped me the most include..., the things that have hindered me ...”
- “My biggest life lesson from losing my job is.... ”

#### Writing Instructions

Once you have reflected, I would like to invite you to write freely as you complete the following two sentences: (1) “*I would describe the experience of losing my job(s)....*” and (2) “*Looking back, I would describe my personal sense of well-being since losing my job(s)...*”. You may begin to write now, with whatever comes to mind. There is no need to worry about spelling, grammar, or writing style. It would be ideal if you could write for at least 15 minutes. You may take longer if you need to and there is no word limit. When done, please e-mail me at [jsynard@uottawa.ca](mailto:jsynard@uottawa.ca) and I will give you more information on the next steps. Thank you!

**Appendix H**  
Demographic Questionnaire

### ***Participant Demographic Information***

*Please be assured that that your information will be kept confidential/secure and only viewed by the researcher and her supervisor. Your anonymity will also be protected.*

#### **Participant Name and Contact Info**

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Given Names: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 City, Province, Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Home Tel: \_\_\_\_\_ OK to Leave Messages (Y/N) Cell: \_\_\_\_\_  
 e-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Basic Demographic Information**

Age/Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Country of Origin/Ethnic Identity (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Number/Age of Children: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Education: (list all degrees/ diplomas): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Current Employer (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_ Salary (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Industry: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Job Loss History**

Number of Lifetime Job Loss Events: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Most Recent Event: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Lifetime Job Loss Events (beginning with most recent). Use extra paper if you want to add more events. You may also, optionally, choose to attach a copy of your résumé, if that is easier.

##### **Event 1:**

Employer: \_\_\_\_\_ Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Industry: \_\_\_\_\_ Salary (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date of Layoff: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Next Career Step: (e.g. obtained a permanent job, contract work, returned to school, caregiving for relatives, retired, continued job searching, stopped looking etc.) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Duration of Unemployment: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

##### **Event 2:**

Employer: \_\_\_\_\_ Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Industry: \_\_\_\_\_ Salary (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date of Layoff: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Next Career Step: (e.g. obtained a permanent job, contract work, returned to school, caregiving for relatives, retired, continued job searching, stopped looking etc.) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Duration of Unemployment: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Event 3:

Employer: \_\_\_\_\_ Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Industry: \_\_\_\_\_ Salary (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Layoff: \_\_\_\_\_

Next Career Step: (e.g. obtained a permanent job, contract work, returned to school, caregiving for relatives, retired, continued job searching, stopped looking etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

Duration of Unemployment: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Event 4:

Employer: \_\_\_\_\_ Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Industry: \_\_\_\_\_ Salary (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Layoff: \_\_\_\_\_

Next Career Step: (e.g. obtained a permanent job, contract work, returned to school, caregiving for relatives, retired, continued job searching, stopped looking etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

Duration of Unemployment: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Event 5:

Employer: \_\_\_\_\_ Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Industry: \_\_\_\_\_ Salary (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Layoff: \_\_\_\_\_

Next Career Step: (e.g. obtained a permanent job, contract work, returned to school, caregiving for relatives, retired, continued job searching, stopped looking etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

Duration of Unemployment: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Event 6:

Employer: \_\_\_\_\_ Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Industry: \_\_\_\_\_ Salary (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Layoff: \_\_\_\_\_

Next Career Step: (e.g. obtained a permanent job, contract work, returned to school, caregiving for relatives, retired, continued job searching, stopped looking etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

Duration of Unemployment: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please feel free to use additional paper if there are more job losses that you would like to record. Be assured that that your information will be kept confidential and secure and your privacy and anonymity protected (as indicated in the study's consent form).*

Thank you for your participation!

**Appendix I**

Interview and Well-being Questionnaires Protocol

## Well-being Following Job Loss – Interview and Well-being Questionnaires Protocol

**Developer:** Jacqueline Synard, Ph.D. Candidate

**Date & Version:** August 31, 2012

**Length:** Interview: 60-90 minutes, Well-being Questionnaires: 15-30 minutes.  
Total Time: ~ 1.5 to 2 hours

**Location:** Interviews conducted in Faculty of Education's Community Counselling Clinic, or another private location such as a participants' home or workplace. Questionnaires may be completed following the end of the interview or at home within a week of the interview.

**Research Question:** What is the subjective experience well-being following job loss?

**Data to be Analyzed:** Interviews which will be transcribed and coded. Questionnaires which will be used as context for individual participants well-being accounts.

### Interview Preparation

1. Provide a copy of the interview guide to the client one week in advance of the interview. (The interview guide will contain the main questions, not the possible probe questions, to avoid overwhelming or confusing participants). Providing the protocol in advance will allow him/her to reflect upon and recall his/her experiences given the long time frame being assessed.
2. Secure a quiet, bright and private room without interruptions with two comfortable chairs. Provide and offer water for the client. Although interview is targeted to be ideally completed in 60-90 minutes, the room should be booked for two and half hours in case the client expands on topic and/or distressing issues arise.
3. Bring and test digital audio tape recorder, including extra batteries for the session. Test video-equipment if videotaping. Bring pen and paper for note-taking.
4. For any out-of-town participants who might have moved out of the Ottawa region, a recorded telephone interview may be conducted for those who consent to recording.

### Interview Approach

The semi-structured interview will be 60-90 minutes. It will address pre-defined topics as well as be open to exploring new directions. The participant and interviewer will have previously interacted by both phone and e-mail during recruitment and completion of written narratives. This interview requires establishing a safe, open and non-judgmental environment which puts the participant at ease to share his/her experiences of job loss. This process begins with greeting the client and making small talk before settling into the interview to establish rapport. Client is thanked for contributions to date, assured of confidentiality, and provided with instructions for the interview (Creswell, 2007). Key approaches include an attitude of empathic curiosity, open body posture, and encouraging the client to tell his/her story via active listening, use of open-ended questions, and gentle probing as required.

**Interview Verbal Introduction** (To be spoken more informally)

Thank you again for participating in our study. We really appreciate all of your time and hard work. The research team and I will start reviewing all of this information following today's interview which will be taped and transcribed. As we discussed, everything is confidential, and you will have the opportunity to review what is written about your experiences. You can, of course, choose to withdraw your participation at any time. Any questions?

Today, our interview will focus on two things: (1) your experience of job loss, and (2) how this impacted you, your life, and your sense of well-being. The information in this interview will be used to help us identify guidelines which determine how employers, governments, counsellors, and friends/family can best support people during times of job loss.

This interview is for research purposes not therapy. However, as discussed before, if anything distressing comes up during this interview, we can refer you to resources that can help you with either career and/or personal aspects of job loss. Again, feel free to stop me at any point if you feel uncomfortable, have any questions, or need a break. Sound good? Our discussion will generally address the questions that you received in advance. We will, however, go with the flow of the discussion. I thus may ask new questions as they naturally occur during our discussion. Likewise, you should not feel constrained by the guide. Feel free to interject any comments, ideas or questions as they appear to you. Simply answer questions to the best of your knowledge, providing as much detail as possible. You should not feel pressured to answer a certain way – there are no correct responses. We are most interested in your story. We are looking forward to your open, honest sharing about what it was like to lose your job and how your sense of well-being has changed (if at all), whether positive or negative. Any further questions? OK, shall we start?

**Well-being Questionnaire Verbal Introduction** (To be spoken more informally)

Once you we have finished the interview, you may proceed directly to completing the questionnaires after taking a short break. Or alternatively, you may also choose to complete the questionnaires anytime within the next week and mail them back. Please answer the questionnaires to the best of your knowledge. You may feel free to ask me any questions or write any comments if you feel that would be helpful. Any questions?

**Appendix J**

Semi-structured Interview Guide

## Interview Questions for Participants

*Note: For these questions, you may refer to one or more job losses depending on what is most relevant to you.*

### Introduction

- Review consent form and discuss on-going informed consent (e.g. free to quit )
- Semi-structured, ask questions, go with the flow, jump in
- In case of distress: stop, let me know, and can provide resources
- What am I looking for? – Nothing. Simply your experience, qualitative no research hypothesis so won't mess up my study. Just how it was for you personally.
- For these questions, you may refer to one or more job losses depending on what is most relevant to you.

### 1.0 Debriefing on Experience of Written Narrative

1.1 Before we get started with the interview questions I sent you, I am wondering what it was like for you to reflect losing your job(s), as you were doing the writing exercise or demographic questionnaires?

- 1.1.1 Is there anything in the writing exercise that you would like to elaborate upon?
- 1.1.2 Are there any additional thoughts or comments that you would like to share?

### 2.0 Experience of Job Loss

2.1 If someone really close to you and/or someone you really trusted asked you, “*What was it really like to lose your job?*”, what would you say?

- 2.1.1 How do you think your perspective now compares to how you might have described the experience about 5-10 years ago? [*Or at the time of your Learn to Bounce interview*]
- 2.1.2 Since the time you lost your job, are there any other major life and career events that you feel might be important to share, if, and only if, you are comfortable? (If so, please feel free to elaborate on those things you feel comfortable sharing.)

2.2 As you look back on losing your job many years later, what things stand out for you (e.g. memories, critical moments etc.?) Why?

- 2.2.1. What, if anything, surprised you?

2.3 Next, think back to how losing your job has changed things. I will now ask you three specific questions:

- 2.3.1. How has this experience, if any, changed your life?
- 2.3.2 How (if any) has this experience changed you, as a person?
- 2.3.3 How (if any) did it change those around you?

### 6.3 Experience of Well-Being Following Job Loss

3.1 How would you describe your sense of well-being in the time since you've lost your job?

- 3.1.1 What was it like for you the moment you got the news? Was it a surprise?
- 3.1.2 What was it like for you in the first weeks or months?
- 3.1.3 What was it like for you 5-10 years later?
- 3.1.4 How does this compare to your sense of well-being *before* losing your job?

3.2 What have been the best moments for your well-being? Worst moments? Why do you say that?

- 3.2.1 Think of the time or time(s) that your well-being has been at its *best* since losing your job. What moments or things come to mind when you think of this time? Why?
- 3.2.2 Think of the time or time(s) that your well-being has been at its *worst* since losing your job. What moments or things come to mind when you think of this time? Why?
- 3.2.3 What turning points, if any, come to mind as you think about times when your well-being went from negative to positive, or vice-versa.

3.3 How do you personally define "well-being"?

- 3.3.1 How do you think your personal definition of well-being compares to that of others'?

3.4 In what areas of your life (if any) has your sense of well-being most changed (for better or for worst)? Why do you say that?

- 3.4.1 Career/work?
- 3.4.2 Your sense of identity and self-esteem?
- 3.4.3 Health (physical and mental)
- 3.4.4 Your relationships (partner, friends, family, community etc.)
- 3.4.5 Financially?
- 3.4.6 Leisure/play?
- 3.4.7 How (if any) have changes in well-being in one area of your life, impacted the other areas?

### 4.0 Critical Factors Impacting Your Sense of Well-being Following Job Loss

4.1 How did you cope with losing your job? What was helpful? What was less helpful?

- 4.1.1 What did you do, think, and/or feel that positively contributed to your well-being?
- 4.1.2 What did you do, think, and/or feel that negatively contributed to your well-being?
- 4.1.3 As you watched others experience job loss, what did you learn from them about helpful and non-helpful ways of coping with losing your job?

4.2 What people (if any), have had the biggest impact on your well-being since job loss – either positively or negatively?

- 4.2.1 Who was your biggest source of social support?
- 4.2.2 What did they do or say to positively contributed your well-being?
- 4.2.3 What did they do or say that negatively contributed to your well-being?

4.3 Can you think if any other external things or factors (i.e., such as the job market, treatment by your employer etc.), had a significant impact on your well-being following job loss? Why do you say that?

## **5.0 Wrap-Up Questions**

5.1 If someone really close to you lost their job and asked for advice, what would you say to them?

5.2 What should others do to help those who have lost their jobs? (e.g. families/spouses/partners, friends, employers, and governments, friends and family)

- 5.2.1 family/spouses/partners
- 5.2.2 friends
- 5.2.3 employers
- 5.2.4 governments

5.3 What was it like for you to participate in this study?

5.4 Are there any questions that you feel I could have asked but didn't?

5.5 Do you have final comments or questions?

## **6.0 Questionnaires**

6.3 What was it like for you to fill out the questionnaires?

6.3 Do you have any comments to add based on filling out the questionnaires?

6.3. The questionnaires covered a number of concepts of well-being, specifically happiness, life satisfaction, emotions, meaning, resilience, and sense of anxiety/depression. Of these areas, which ones fit with your own experience of well-being following job loss? Why?

- 6.3.1. Which ones don't resonate with you? Why?

**Appendix K**

Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS)

### Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS)

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By Sonja Lyubomirsky, Ph.D.

For each of the following statements and/or questions, please circle the point on the scale that you feel is most appropriate in describing you.

1. In general, I consider myself:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not a very happy person						a very happy person

2. Compared to most of my peers, I consider myself:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
less happy						more happy

3. Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life regardless of what is going on, getting the most out of everything. To what extent does this characterization describe you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						a great deal

4. Some people are generally not very happy. Although they are not depressed, they never seem as happy as they might be. To what extent does this characterization describe you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						a great deal

Note: Item #4 is reverse coded.

**Appendix L**

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)

### **The Satisfaction with Life Scale**

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By Ed Diener, Ph.D.

DIRECTIONS: Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the 1-7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number in the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Slightly Disagree
- 4 = Neither Agree or Disagree
- 5 = Slightly Agree
- 6 = Agree
- 7 = Strongly Agree

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I am satisfied with life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffen, 1985

**Appendix M**

Meaning-in-Life Questionnaire (MIL-Q)

## MLQ

Please take a moment to think about what makes your life and existence feel important and significant to you. Please respond to the following statements as truthfully and accurately as you can, and also please remember that these are very subjective questions and that there are no right or wrong answers. Please answer according to the scale below:

Absolutely Untrue	Mostly Untrue	Somewhat Untrue	Can't Say True or False	Somewhat True	Mostly True	Absolutely True
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I understand my life's meaning.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ I am looking for something that makes my life feel meaningful.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ I am always looking to find my life's purpose.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ My life has a clear sense of purpose.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ I have discovered a satisfying life purpose.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ I am always searching for something that makes my life feel significant.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ My life has no clear purpose.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ I am searching for meaning in my life.

MLQ syntax to create Presence and Search subscales:

Presence = 1, 4, 5, 6, & 9-reverse-coded

Search = 2, 3, 7, 8, & 10

Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006

**Appendix N**

Patient Health Questionnaire-4 (PHQ-4)

<b>PHQ-4</b>				
<b>Over the <u>last 2 weeks</u>, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?</b> <i>(Use "✓" to indicate your answer)</i>	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1. Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge	0	1	2	3
2. Not being able to stop or control worrying	0	1	2	3
3. Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	1	2	3
4. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	0	1	2	3

*(For office coding: Total Score T \_\_\_ = \_\_\_ + \_\_\_ + \_\_\_)*

Kroenke, Spitzer, William, & Lowe, 2009

### **Statement of Contribution of Co-Authors**

Each of the three manuscripts included in this dissertation represent original work co-authored by Ms. Jacqueline Synard, Ph.D. Candidate and her research supervisor, Dr. Nicola Gazzola. Ms. Synard is the first author on all three papers, given her role in conceptualizing the study, conducting the literature review, recruiting and selecting participants, collecting all data/ conducting research interviews, leading the analysis and interpretation of data, and writing the articles/dissertation. Dr. Gazzola is the second author based on his research mentoring of Ms. Synard and his very active role in supervising this project. His specific contributions included input on study design, guiding key decisions regarding study modifications as they were required, reviewing sample data, auditing of coding data structures, and providing extensive content and editorial advice during manuscript preparation. This spilt of contributions between the first and second author was the same for all three manuscripts.