1-1-2012

Effective Family Communication and Job Loss: Crafting the Narrative for Family Crisis

Lynn H. Turner
Marquette University, lynn.turner@marquette.edu

Chapter 12

Effective Family Communication and Job Loss: Crafting the Narrative for Family Crisis

Patrice M. Buzzanell and Lynn H. Turner

Job loss is typically described as a traumatic event in individuals' lives that requires social support, varied coping mechanisms, financial restructuring, and passage through stages of grief. Although job loss is considered stressful for individuals, the termination event and unemployment also strain families and affect family communication. In this chapter, we examine the ways that families shape narratives to craft and recraft meanings and relationships during this time of familial change. We discuss how job loss stories are stories on the margins (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004) and how families rework stories to bring them closer to the center of family life. In the process, they recraft their identity as a family and as individuals.

Headlines in the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* attest to the depth and breadth of job losses for white and blue collar workers in the United States and around the globe (Evans & Maher, 2009; Leroux & Jagger, 2009). The corporate story is fairly uniform: companies lay off workers to retain economic solvency. Layoffs arise in the context of rising energy prices, housing foreclosures, a home purchasing slump, and tightening consumer spending that affects retail and other sectors. Workers' stories, on the other hand, vary. Their narratives are cultural, moral, and personal, portraying the hopes and fears of generational, classed, and occupational cohorts and members.

Workers who perceive economic volatility and their own place in the overall economy as precarious continuously build in hedges against layoffs (Lucas, 2006). Other workers assume that they may be able to bounce back quickly in similar—if not better—jobs than they held before (Sonnenfeld, 2007), and still other workers spin a tale of betrayal, emotional labor, and identity loss who nevertheless aim toward reemployment. These latter workers resolve the loss of the old social and psychological contracts within socially constructed webs of

meritocracy, commitments, and career capital (Buzzanell & Turner, 2003; Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999) through new narratives.

This research claims these new narratives as its object of study. We examine familial stories of job loss because they offer a contested site in which familial and worker roles, identities, and discourses operate in concert with material conditions, such as economic insecurities and financial resources, to create sensemaking opportunities. We also examine the individual crafting of career and work identities that occur whenever someone looks for work and must account for employment changes (see Ibarra, 2003). In doing so, we address calls for more narrative research on family (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004; Langellier & Peterson, 2006; Turner & West, 2003) and on the meanings and meaningfulness of work (Cheney, Zorn, Planalp, & Lair, 2008). Because family members individually and collaboratively construct stories that they can tell themselves and others about their own identities and that of their individual and familial repositionings in periods of uncertainty, they offer spaces where much communicative effort to craft viable and acceptable identities, emotions, and strategies is undertaken. Following our analysis, we present recommendations for assisting individuals and families with job loss and, perhaps, other events that require narrative repositioning and behavioral changes. We believe that such research can not only contribute to the well-being and positive research undertaken in interpersonal and family communication (see Socha, 2008) but also to the ongoing exploration of resilience as a communicative construction on micro through macrolevels (see Buzzanell, 2010; Buzzanell, Shenoy, Lucas, & Remke, 2009).

Literature Review

To examine narrative craftings at individual and familial levels, we first describe how a discourse-centered lens differs from other approaches on job loss. We then present reviews of literature on narrative in interpersonal, familial, and organizational contexts.

Discourse-Centered Approach to Job Loss

Job loss is defined as a transitional process precipitated by the "trigger event" (event) of involuntary termination that occurs prior to

some period of unemployment (state) (Latack, Kinicki, & Prussia, 1995). Job loss often is described as a traumatic event in people's lives that necessitates social support, coping, financial restructuring, and passage through stages of grief (Birkel, 1998; Garrett-Peters, 2009; Latack et al., 1995; Leana & Feldman, 1992; London, 1998; Strandh, 2000; Voydanoff, 1983). Although individuals experience job loss, the termination event and unemployment also affects and strains their families, sometimes prompting increased violence among family members and others, propensities toward relationship dissolution, and hopelessness among children who wonder why their parents' hard work is unrewarded (Anderson, Umberson, & Elliott, 2004; Kalleberg, 2008; Liem & Liem, 1988; National Institute of Justice, 2007; Newman, 1998, 1993; Rifkin, 1995). However, we located no previous studies that focus on the discourse of family members who are in the midst of job loss.

In a discourse-centered approach to job loss, we examine the ways individuals (re)define the meanings of work and family, (re)construct their worlds intersubjectively, and struggle against and/or are complicit with dominant discourses that privilege work over family (see Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Cheney, Lair, Ritz, & Zorn, 2010; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001; Putnam & Boys, 2006). Although we cannot supply a moment-by-moment description of how family members' experiences with job loss influence their interactions, we can illuminate how they make sense of changes in their lives and position certain interests and identities as more important than others. We do so by examining their linguistic choices, reported changes in what they do and why, as well as the stories that they say provide insight into their decisions, emotions, and dealings with material hardship (e.g., Lucas & Buzzanell, in press; Marin, Bohanek, & Fivush, 2008). We examine how familial communication in difficult times is brought into sharp relief against the backdrop of ordinary family talk and interactions. These tensions depict a world in flux with possibilities for alternate work and family enactments in the future.

Despite extensive research on job loss, very little is known about how family members, particularly children, talk about their experiences with job loss and work-family interests. In fact, Finet (2001) reports that only indirect investigations of discourse exist in work-

family research as a whole. Although there has been a dramatic increase in work-family research over the past several years (see Kirby, Golden, Medved, Jorgenson, & Buzzanell, 2003), Finet's point remains valid especially when examining work-family processes from a familial lens. We locate our study squarely in the discourse of family unlike other research that is more firmly rooted in an organizational perspective. By exploring the tensions, opportunities, and ironies within family talk following job loss, we provide insight into members' sensemaking processes and offer advice about how to resolve some of the strains that threaten to disrupt relationships when a parent or partner loses his/her job. For instance, family themes are shaped by hard economic times and the stories of resilience, strategies for saving money, and recollections of shifted resource use patterns can help families and individual members cope (e.g., Marin et al., 2008).

Narrative

Narratives provide lenses into the content and ways of expressing or making sense of life events that individuals and collectivities, such as families and communities, construct. Some narrative research describes how people craft coherent life stories—often retrospectively—and how they integrate data into these narratives (Stone, 2004). The idea is that individuals and, by extension, their families seek to understand their underlying nature and use this information to develop meaning and identity (Ochs & Capps, 1996).

Still other research portrays how individuals work toward construction of unified stories that shift in different contexts, such as when an individuals seek to recraft, brand, and provide a 30-second elevator speech about who they are and how they can add value to a company for which they seek employment (Ehrenrich, 2005; Ibarra, 2003; Lair, Sullivan, & Cheney, 2005). Yet, narratives also function as ongoing constructions in which various interests and versions jockey for control. For our work, the issues may not only be what version family members tell at any given time but also what is family and how is family enacted and performed for others (see Langellier & Peterson, 1993). Of particular importance to us is who has authorial privilege in the family, how it tends to be enacted, and in what

situations authorial control takes place. In this view, the ongoing political nature of narrative may encourage the reproduction of and/or resistance to versions that mirror and/or disrupt particular familial, power, and social realities.

In this view, it is the crafting, telling, and performing of narrative that is of central concern. The content of the story is significant, but it is always subject to modification as new data are considered and negotiated among family members. We also focus on the process and content of storytelling. The performance of family storytelling is "an evolving expression of small group culture rather than a collection of stories" (Langellier & Peterson, 2004, p. 41). In job loss, older generations and family historians often have authorial privilege and rights to perform because they recall family traditions and strategies for enduring hard times. Members perform their positions in the familial social order and their generational and gendered interests (Buzzanell & Turner, 2003). They reconstitute family and, through the process of storytelling itself, transform who they are as individuals and as family members in particular circumstances (Stone, 2004). In particular contexts, different members may have authorial control (Ochs & Taylor, 1995).

In the work of constituting family and individual roles within the family, it is not simply the major stories that are important, but the ongoing, mundane events that are shaped into and shaped by family interactions. As Langellier and Peterson (2006) put it:

> equally formative of family culture is storytelling in the interrupted and intertwined conversations and habits of daily life—fragmentary, fleeting, and fluid, embedded among tasks and talk—while playing with children, doing housework and homework, reading the morning paper, preparing food, eating, and traveling to work and school. Family storytellers and listeners are multiple and dispersed, and stories may be contradictory and incoherent or simply bits of memory, speech, image. Such storytelling is so mundane that these stories may be invisible to family outsiders and even to family members themselves. (p. 110)

In job loss, changes in family patterns may be imperceptible to children (e.g., when mothers scale back on food purchases or use layaway). Changes may only be revealed when these children, now

adults, wonder how their families survived economic hardship such as layoffs during deindustrialization (Lucas & Buzzanell, in press). Their storytelling as well as the narrative content portray how such changes occur in ways consistent with family values or strategies but sometimes invisible to members.

Research Question

Despite the importance of family as "the first group," meaning that family-of-origin members usually constitute the first and longest lasting set of connections of a person's life (Socha, 1999, 2009), there has not been a great deal of scholarly effort devoted toward connections of economic hardship and family storytelling and stories. How members participate in and construct their family stories has implications for their identity constructions, sensemaking about life situations, adaptability to potentially destructive circumstances, and the integrity of family itself within any given society (see Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004; Ochs & Capps, 2001). We ask: How do family members craft job loss stories to display family values and strategies during times of crisis?

Method

Participants

Twenty-three members of seven families participated in our research (for an overview of families and their members, see Table 12.1). We describe our participants in three groupings: individual who lost their jobs (n = 7), partners of these individuals (n = 7), and children over the age of six living with their parents at the time of the job loss (n = 9).

Table 12.1: Participant Demographics Listed by Family and Individual (All Pseudonyms)

Background Information	Individual Who Lost Job	Partner	Child 1*	Child 2*
Family #1	Brad	Beth	Bets	Ben

	(Wife)	(Daughter)	(Son)
(3 months since termination)			

| Age at the time of the job loss: 39.98 yrs. | 39 yrs. | 15.5 yrs. | 12 yrs. |

Background Information	Individual Who Lost Job	Partner	Child 1*	Child 2*
Education:	Graduate Courses	Some College	High School	Middle School
Religion:	Protestant	Protestant	Protestant	Protestant
Previous Employment:	Plant Manager (14 years)	Unspecified Job	------	------
Current Employment:	Unspecified Job	Unspecified Job	-----	-----

Family #2 (5 months since termination)	Stan	Sher (Wife)	Susie (Daughter)	Young Daughter
Age at the time of the job loss:	42 yrs.	39 yrs.	9 yrs.	-----
Education:	B. A.	B. A.	-----	-----
Religion:	None Reported	Roman Catholic	-----	-----
Previous	Plant	-----	Grade	-----

Employment:	Engineer (11.5 years)		School	
Current Employment:	Part-time Job	Homemaker	-----	-----

Background Information	Individual Who Lost Job	Partner	Child 1*	Child 2*
Family #3 (3 months since termination)	Trevor	Tina (Wife)	Thom (Son)	Infant Daughter
Age at the time of the job loss:	39 yrs.	39 yrs.	16 yrs.	-----
Education:	Some College	Some College	Some High School	-----
Religion:	Lutheran	Roman Catholic	-----	-----
Previous Employment:	Senior Programmer/ Analyst (7 months)	Nurse	High School	-----
Current Employment:	Unspecified Job	Homemaker	-----	-----
Family #4 (8 months since termination)	Kevin	Kim (Wife)	Kurt (Son)	Kelly (Daughter)

	Individual Who Lost Job	Partner	Child 1*	Child 2*
Age at the time of the job loss:	42 yrs.	42 yrs.	10 yrs.	6.5 yrs.
Education:	Graduate Degree	Graduate Courses	-----	-----

Background Information	Individual Who Lost Job	Partner	Child 1*	Child 2*
Religion:	Christian	Evangelical (Born Again)	-----	-----
Previous Employment:	Architect Small Business (5 ½ years)	-----	Grade school. Scoliosis	Grade school.
Current Employment:	Unemployed	Homemaker	-----	-----

Family #5 (4 months since termination)	Donald	Donna (Wife)	Dave (Son)	-----
Age at the time of the job loss:	56 yrs.	53 yrs.	26 yrs.	-----
Education:	Some College	Some College	(not specified)	-----
Religion:	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic	-----	-----
Previous Employment:	Commissioned Officer - U.S. Army (25 years)	-----	-----	-----

| Current Employment: | 3 Part-Time Jobs | Bank Teller | Misc. Jobs |

Background Information	Individual Who Lost Job	Partner	Child 1*	Child 2*
Family #6 (8 months since termination)	Mark	Meg (Wife)	Max (Son)	Missy (Daughter)
Age at the time of the job loss:	33 yrs.	31 yrs.	7.5 yrs.	4 months
Education:	B. A.	B. A.	-----	-----
Religion:	Lutheran	Protestant	-----	-----
Previous Employment:	Managerial Representative Small Family Business (6 years)	----- Life Insurance Company	2nd grade; Attention Deficit Disorder	-----
Current Employment:	Small Business Owner-Sales	Homemaker	-----	-----
Family #7 (18 months since termination)	Rick	Rita (Wife)	Russ (Son)	-----
Age at the time of the job loss:	53 yrs.	51 yrs.	15 yrs.	-----
Education:	MBA	B. S.	High School	-----

	Individual Who Lost Job	Partner	Child 1*	Child 2*
Religion:	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic	-----
Background Information				
Previous Employment:	Managerial - Upper Administration in the Phone Company (25 years)	-----	High School	-----
Current Employment:	Partner in a smaller start-up company	Wife originally was a part-time volunteer coordinator at the parish offices, then she became a part-time employee	-----	-----

*A child must be at least 6 years of age at the time of the job loss to be interviewed for this research project.

In *Family #3*, the wife (Tina), quit her nursing job about seven months prior to our interview (or four months before her husband lost his job) because of the birth of their youngest child. In *Family #4*, there are two additional children, aged two years of age and under, who were not interviewed. The father in this family was the only individual in our data set who had lost his job prior to the current job loss. Rodney lost two jobs before the current termination. The small architectural firm for which he worked filed Chapter 11 bankruptcy. The individual who lost his job in *Family #5* knew about the termination prior to the event because of governmental mandatory age and length of service requirements at the time our data were collected. *Family # 6* has older children who were neither living at home nor in close proximity during the time of the job loss.

Individuals who lost their jobs (n = 7) were white, male, married, Christian, 44 years of age on the average at the time of the termination (with a range of 33–56 years), and had 2 children (range of 1–4 children of whom no more than two usually were eligible to participate in the research because of age constraints). Prior to the job loss, they were employed in the following jobs: plant manager, plant engineer, senior programmer and analyst, architect, U. S. Army officer, manager of a small family firm, and manager in a large public corporation. They had worked for these organizations for average for 13 years (range is 7 months to 25 years). Six individuals had never lost a job before, whereas one experienced two job losses prior to the current termination and unemployment. One knew about the termination ahead of time because of seniority rules in his work context. Their severance agreements varied from just health benefits to a half year's compensation plus health, life, medical, outplacement, and re-education benefits.

Their partners (n = 7) were white, female, married, Christian, 42 years of age on average at the time of the termination (range of 31–53 years). Four classified themselves as homemakers and the rest worked part- or full-time jobs such as volunteer coordinator or bank teller. Finally, the nine children whom we interviewed ranged in age from 6.5 to 26 years (average was 11 years). Three were male and six were female. With one exception, they were in elementary through high school at the time of the job loss.

Procedures

A series of advertisements requesting research volunteers were placed in a metropolitan newspaper. Our four research participation criteria were: one family wage earner must have lost his or her managerial/professional job within the past 18 months; no member of the family could know the researchers; the family must consist of two adults and at least one child aged 6 years or older; and all members had to complete interviews and surveys requesting family background and demographics. We developed these criteria to ensure that the job loss was recent enough to assume that participants would recall details accurately and that we would obtain adults' and children's versions for comparison and for details of interest to these

different generations. From two series of ads to which over 25 families responded to each, only seven families met all of our criteria. These families were promised and paid $50 for their participation in our project.

Trained interviewers scheduled appointments with participants at their homes. The authors trained these interviewers by reviewing interview protocols and providing feedback on their role playing of mock interviews and their gathering of demographic information. Interviewers switched the ordering of parents and children from one session to the next then ended with written questionnaires. Each family member was interviewed separately and in private. Respondents were provided with the researchers' phone numbers for follow-up questions about the project.

Interview protocols. Two versions of the interview protocol were developed based on whether the participant was an adult or a child. Primary questions asked participants about the job loss related to: (a) its effect on family communication, (b) changes in family dynamics and routines since the termination event, (c) accounts (of and reasons for the termination, and (d) metaphors for the job loss. Prior to our actual data collection, we pretested the children's version on three children ranging from seven to 11 years of age whose father had undergone a recent job loss. We utilized their data for pretest purposes only. For our data gathering, seven families produced 23 separate interviews (that averaged from one to 1.5 hours each) which were then transcribed verbatim (including nonfluencies and pauses) by a professional transcriptionist and double-checked by the interviewers and the researchers against the original audiotapes. At this time, all names were changed to pseudonyms. The transcripts totaled 117 pages of single-spaced text.

Analyses. Our analyses focused on the themes that surfaced consistently in family members' talk about their relationships, the effects of the job loss on individual family members, and on family communication as a whole. To analyze participants' discourse, we followed Rawlins's (1992) method of living with participants' voices and with interdisciplinary sources about work-family concerns, family communication, job loss, and related issues. To live with their voices and to develop themes true to participants' meanings and life experiences,

we read and reread transcripts numerous times until semantic patterns emerged through repetition of exact phrasing, recurrence of similar phrasing, and forcefulness of expression as well as other nonverbal communication (see Hoppe-Nagao & Ting-Toomey, 2002; Janesick, 1994; Owen, 1984). Consistent with family storytelling approaches, we looked at the processes, structure, and content of stories as well as how the respondents reported these shifted over time. In doing so, we formed individual family members' time lines of their emotions, account changes, material changes, revelations of what was happening and why, and day-to-day activities. We continued our individual readings and discussion until we reached agreement about the nature of the tensions as well as the character of the stories and storytelling that emerged at that point of time. We returned to our transcripts to look for evidence within and across interview transcripts to support and, perhaps, disconfirm, the patterns that were emerging in our results. We wanted to portray commonalities across families as well as the individual craftings of stories that made each of our families unique.

Results and Interpretation

We found three interrelated narrative threads that centered on how family members narrated their understandings of and strategies for managing job loss discursively and materially. First, we found that our families privileged the individual (father) who lost his job in ways that sometimes diminished others' discursive and material contributions to the family. Second, the maintenance and reworking of family rituals and mundane aspects of daily life enabled families to re-create their familial values and integrity, as well as individual identities or parts to play in family performance. Third, family communication work was most evident in metaphors and efforts toward the construction of appropriate images that underlay individuals and familial discourse. These metaphors and images operated as sense making and coping strategies for families.

Crafting Privilege: Discursive and Material Contributions to Family

First, the individuals who lost their jobs, namely the fathers in our study, had authorial control but required the performative support of

other family members to accomplish family. In this, the heterosexual, middle-class American family takes center stage as generational, male, and head of household roles overshadowed current contributions to discursive, financial, and family maintenance work. Throughout, the stories displayed *individuation-connection dialectics* (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) in the content, telling, and reordering of the timeline since job termination. Echoing prior research, family storytelling reproduced gendered hierarchies, generational power, and heterosexual partnerships privileging husband over wife (Ochs & Taylor, 1995).

For instance, Donald and his family (family #5; see Table 12.1) focused on Donald's daily experiences as their top priority. For most of his interview, Donald discussed his prior work experiences and salary; his current overqualification for jobs; his extensive job search and interviewing process; and his need to patch together part-time employment. His son, Dave, and his wife, Donna, talked primarily about Donald's emotions and activities rather than their own feelings. In contrast, Trevor's family (#3) did not engage in collaborative storytelling and a singular focus on his experiences. His family was undergoing a period of turmoil not only because of this first time that he had lost a job but also with a new baby, a wife who had just quit her job to stay home with the children, and ongoing volatility in his line of work. Trevor described his emotions—"shock," betrayal, "anger"—but stressed his need for collaborative emotion work and authoring with his wife: "When I was angry, my wife was, too." He became depressed but she was still angry: "I felt kinda like I had lost an ally so at this period I didn't feel too good." During this time (a joyless "vacation"), they fought until they got "it back in order."

To get "it back in order," Trevor wanted and needed emotional and narrative synchrony primarily with his wife. Until he could control and coordinate the job loss account and familial response, he said that he felt lost. His family worked emotionally and narratively to empathize with him and make him central in their communication as a family. His wife, Tina, regretted not being in synch with Trevor but noted that she had just given birth and quit her job. She maintained that Trevor did not change much during the job loss although she said that he stayed in his bathrobe until afternoon hours, yelled

more, and seemed upset. Her feelings were raw and conflicted because of her own situation as well as that of her family. Thom, their teenaged son, supported his father's head of household status by claiming that Tina's earnings were an addition to the main source of familial income (Trevor's pay from his contract jobs).

As their stories evolved over the course of the interviews, they exerted effort to privilege Trevor's situation and his desire to have everything "in order." In doing so, they maintained traditional hierarchical pairings: husband over wife, male over female, parent over child, family unit over individual desires. The individuation-connection dialectic surfaced repeatedly as members strove to address their own needs while also considering what they could do to help family members in need and the family as a whole.

If the family did not supply the support that the individual who lost his job needed, the father would look elsewhere. In the case of family #6, Meg did not fully support Mark's version of things but, over time, her job loss account and feelings merged with his. Meg said that she "tried to be positive about his ability to go out and find more work...but it was hard." She was "questioning why did you lose your job" but "then I started realizing how unfair they [previous employers] were." However, Meg was out of synch with Mark in one key area—namely, she was skeptical about Mark's new business venture and voiced her concerns repeatedly. Mark responded by saying that he talked to his father and other business associates because they expressed "a little more interest." He maintains strict public-private, work-family, male-female divisions. In sum, Mark and the other men who lost their jobs maintained authorial privilege over how family members developed job loss stories as well as the process of telling these stories. They described how they required the support and collaboration of family members and friends before they could effectively search for work. In this respect, family members' help in crafting a viable story and situating the father as central in the story seemed essential to the fathers' and families' adaptation to termination and unemployment.

Creating Family Resilience: Maintenance and the Reworking of Family Rituals and Mundane Aspects

Second, we found that family members exerted effort to (re-)create familial integrity and values as well as individual identities and roles. In this narrative thread, all the families described how they reworked or modified mundane family interaction patterns or routines as well as rituals. This discursive strategy coincided with material efforts to lower living costs but maintain the essence of family routines. In combination, the discursive and material efforts eased feelings of crisis and of stress. For instance, Kevin (family #4) discusses the time he has been able to spend with his family as a bright spot during his unemployment. He suggests he is able to participate in family rituals and activities more as a result of his unemployment.

Their comments in this narrative thread were marked by *predictability-spontaneity dialectics*. Predictability was found in the routine patterns of conversations, daily routines, weekly rituals or events; spontaneity occurred when family members were unsure of how and where such family patterns would take place. This spontaneity was both welcomed and nerve-racking, such as when family members were delighted that they could go on their scheduled vacation but some members expressed concern and stress-related reactions up to the time that the family members left their home. As Brad's daughter, Bets (age 16 years), put it, "I still went to Florida. I wasn't sure I could still go to Florida so that was nerve racking." As Bets noted, the adherence to past promises and routines offered a sense of comfort amidst understandable deviations from predictable patterns. Sometimes families needed to continue with planned events or rituals, such as vacations (or getting new clothes at the start of an academic year; see Lucas & Buzzanell, in press) to give them a sense of normalcy. In other cases, when the unfamiliar (e.g., not going to a nice restaurant for dinner) was couched within well-recognized routines (e.g., going out to dinner), family members considered events and family interactions to be "normal." The adherence to patterns in family communication, interactions, and events seemed to reduce the stress of job loss.

This effort to maintain a semblance of normalcy amidst chaos can be aligned with family resilience or ability to bounce back and reinte-

grate after the job termination and during the period of unemploy-
ment (see Buzzanell, 2010; Buzzanell et al., 2009). In the communica-
tive construction of resilience, our participants worked toward a
construction of a "new normalcy" in their communication, actions,
and rituals. Families reported doing a variety of things that were
atypical for them—eating food out of their freezer and only shopping
for perishables, cutting back on purchases, discussing relocations and
whether they could afford children's lessons, vacations, or family
entertainment evenings—but they maintained those interactions and
rituals that were most important to them. As Mark put it, things
"never skipped a beat" and Trevor noted that they all took things "in
stride." They still purchased clothing and took music lessons, but
they reported weighing the necessity of these expenditures, whereas
they would not have questioned them before the job loss. For the
most part, families said that they did more with less.

They also subscribed to the idea of family, particularly parents, as
protectors of the children. The children were informed about what the
parents thought they needed to know when their parents believed
they needed to know it. For instance, Thom (family #3) did not know
that the family was moving until right before their relocation. Rita
(family #7) said, "I would assure him [teenaged son, Russ] that we
were doing okay and we're not down in the food like yet and there
was no chance ... [of dire circumstances]." Despite Brad's (family #1)
irritation that his wife and daughter thought that he was still a
"bank" and that their spending patterns should not change, he did
not discuss finances with them. He apparently shielded them from his
concerns so well that they continued consumption expectations and
practices well past his termination. Brad's daughter, Bets (age 16
years), said that her father's job loss was a "bummer" because he
could no longer provide everything to which she felt entitled: "Be-
cause you couldn't do the things you used to be able to do. You
couldn't get all the things you need to."

In short, family members lessened feelings of stress by adhering
to the beliefs that things were pretty much the same as before the job
loss. These things that remained the same were the family rituals,
roles, and interactions, whereas the locations and details of their

normalcy stories may have changed drastically depending on family circumstances.

Reworking Family: Telling Metaphors and Family Images

Family members coped with job loss by making a concerted effort to construct an image that enabled them to reframe their experiences and their roles in the family. For family #6, Mark's linguistic choices portrayed his need and effort to control, refashion, diminish the negative and reassert the positive, and construct a unified family in synchronized stories, feelings, behaviors, and outlooks for the future. At different points in his interview, he commented: It wasn't like a death but it was like an illness," "It wasn't the end of the world but it was pretty serious," "my wife … she just thought it kind of rolled off my back," "No, it was the immediate shock and absolute bomb. But it didn't remain a bomb very long. There was a lot of anger. There were a lot of unanswered questions," and "so we never skipped a beat" and we're on "same side … united. …" Through his linguistic choices and imagery, Mark explains the devastating ("lot of anger") nature of his own and family's job loss crisis ("death" and "bomb") and his efforts to gain (he would have had responses to his "unanswered questions") and exert (his wife thought the loss "rolled off my back" because he tried to handle everything calmly so that the family "never skipped a beat") in the rhythm of their lives.

However, other family members tell different tales and use other imagery. Mark's son, Max, commented that he could no longer play with the son of his father's former employer ("Actually it is like a war," "Hatfields and McCoys") but his allegiances where with his father, his family. In that regard, he asserted repeatedly that they were a "normal family," they act "normal," and are a "regular family." Meg contributed to the image of a regular family in control and unified toward a common cause: maintaining the family. Meg stated that although the situation was "real devastating" at first, with it seeming as though "a weight [was] being lowered on us. It just put a tremendous strain on us at the time," her son was a "real trooper" and the entire episode may have been a "blessing in disguise."

In family #7, Rita said that the whole thing was "inconvenient … an annoyance." She continued this metaphor by elaborating: "It was

frustrating. ... It was inconvenient ... it's not a death. ... It was an annoyance. It wasn't a major loss. It was an annoyance that we had to work through." Her husband, Rick, maintained the trivializing or diminishing quality of Rita's remarks when he said that "It was like a speed bump." Kurt, a 10 year old in family #4, said, "it's pretty much normal." Overall, the seven family's metaphors captured the dialectic of stability and change. They verbally acknowledged the upending changes, challenges, and dire straits that the job loss imposed on them but their metaphors for their current lives displayed adaptation and reconstruction of a new normalcy. Their lives were not stable in a static sense but had reached a dynamic equilibrium through which they could anticipate routines and maintain their families.

For most families, the initial metaphors for the termination and immediate time period afterwards were imbued with disaster, disease, and traumatic images. Stan (Family #2) discussed feelings of uncertainty at first and likened his job loss to an illness, disease, cancer, bad joke, and ironic and cruel joke. Despite attempts to control life, his actions and emotional expressions promoted uncertainty. He could not seem to acknowledge his own feelings to his family so he described the effects of his job loss on his spouse rather than on himself. He did admit that he felt as though he was drifting, unat-tached, pressured to find some kind of work, bored, ostracized, and ashamed. Stan claimed that the job loss was not his fault and that he did nothing to deserve. Stan's "crushing" experience and moment of "trauma" occurred one week after termination when he signed up for unemployment and found himself in "a group of losers." Unlike the other fathers who lost their jobs, Stan seemed stuck because he did not, perhaps could not, construct a story that moved from anger and betrayal to some kind of resolution. Instead, his identity was shaken as he found his new comparison group to be "a group of losers."

Stan needed his family as primary sources of support, as well as his former co-workers, to help him realize that "it wasn't something I did" that resulted in the job loss. He was beginning to feel less "ostra-cized" with this self-confirmation at the end of his interview. In short, over time and with considerable family effort and control, the family images changed to those of regularity and normalcy in the ordinary conduct of their lives. These images and linguistic choices depicted a

new normalcy over which family members exerted control by actively crafting the rhythms and content of their lives (see Buzzanell, 2010; Buzzanell & Turner, 2003).

Discussion

Jorgenson and Bochner (2004) comment on the importance of stories when they state that "our identities hinge largely on the stories we tell about ourselves and the stories we hear and internalize that others tell about us" (p. 515). In the stories of job loss, family members' identities are shaped by their attempts to construct the overall image of a normal, regular family in which the father is still the head of household and the stories, routines, relationships, and emotions align with or are in synch with a coherent version. To craft stories in which every family member can find meaningful parts, identities, and interests is a significant accomplishment. Through synchronized communication, everyday routines and rituals, and linguistic choices, family members could construct and retain what was important about their family and maintain family itself.

Because the findings in our study are based on a relatively small and homogeneous group of families, our findings would be extended productively by replicating our study in different contexts and for larger groups of people. Moreover, for future studies, researchers might examine job loss or other periods of family trauma and chaos through diaries or other tools that can capture non-retrospective data to figure out how and when such synchronized craftings of stories begins to occur and how these stories emerge over time. In addition, it would be useful to find out the extent to which the content, structure, and process of crafting familial stories at the time of job loss were consistent across groups of people in the United States and abroad. In different family configurations of diverse race/ethnicities, class, nationalities, and sexual-social orientations, other storytelling patterns and power dynamics might emerge.

Best Practices

Based on our findings, we tentatively offer some suggestions for families in crisis and for counselors or friends trying to assist individual members and the families as a whole to bounce back and reinte-

grate. These recommendations include encouraging multiple story versions from individuals' vantage points so that a family story might incorporate not only the family's best interests but also some of the interests and needs of individual family members. Family members could write or tell their stories individually. These personal stories would legitimate their own feelings and versions before members engaged in collaborative storytelling of a family narrative. After an acceptable and coherent family narrative is crafted, the individual stories could be reintroduced to note both how the individuals' stories have now changed and whether there should be greater complexity and diversity to the family story. Second, families should be encouraged to consider what interaction patterns, family routines, and occasional rituals are of greatest importance to them and are most telling of who their family was and is becoming. If these interaction patterns include family dinners in which everyone voices some bright spot in their day, then that is what should continue. The issue is that each family member should have some voice in maintaining the family rituals about which they feel most strongly and positively. Maintaining the focus on positive routines would enhance the well-being (and reduce negativity during this family crisis). Finally, individuals' metaphors of the job loss or other experiences might begin with language choices expressing shock, uncertainty, surprise, and so on. Over time, individuals can be assisted in reframing these metaphors so that a coherent image of their family and where they fit within family performances can occur.

Conclusion

In closing, job loss is, by all accounts, a devastating experience not only for the individual who is unemployed but also for family members who rely on that income and feel as though their entire worlds are changing. Given the importance of the family for attachments, safety, and production of identities, any communicative attempts that can assist families in working through job loss or other potentially destructive situations should be encouraged. Our chapter begins the effort in that direction.

References

Anderson, K., Unverson, D., & Elliott, S. (2004). Violence and abuse in families. In A. Vangelisti (Ed.), *Handbook of family communication* (pp. 629–645). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Arthur, M.B., Inkson, K., & Pringle, J.K. (1999). *The new careers: Individual action and economic change.* London: Sage.

Baxter, L., & Montgomery, B. (1996). *Relating: Dialogues and dialectics.* New York: Guilford.

Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1967). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge.* New York: Anchor.

Birkel, J. (1998). *Career bounce-back: The Professionals In Transition*SM *guide to recovery and reemployment.* New York: AMACOM.

Buzzanell, P.M. (2010). Resilience: Talking, resisting, and imagining new normalcies into being. *Journal of Communication, 60,* 1–14.

Buzzanell, P.M., Shenoy, S., Remke, R., & Lucas, K. (2009). Intersubjectively creating resilience: Responding to and rebounding from potentially destructive organizational experiences. In P. Lutgen-Sandvik & B. Davenport Sypher (Eds.), *The destructive side of organizational communication* (pp. 530–576). New York: Routledge.

Cheney, G. Lair, D., Ritz, D., & Kendall, B. (2010). *Just a job? Communication, ethics & professional life.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Cheney, G., Zorn, T., Planalp, S., & Lair, D. (2008). Meaningful work and personal/social well-being: Organizational communication engages the meanings of work. *Communication Yearbook, 32,* 136–185.

Evans, K., & Maher, K. (2009, January 10). Yearly job loss worst since 1945. *Wall Street Journal.* Retrieved May 9, 2010, from http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123150742539367897.html

Finet, D. (2001). Sociopolitical environments and issues. In F.M. Jablin & L.L. Putnam (Eds.), *The new handbook of organizational communication: Advances in theory, research, and methods* (pp. 270–290). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Garrett-Peters, R. (2009). "If I don't have to work anymore, who am I?": Job loss and collaborative self-concept repair. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 38,* 547–583.

Hoppe-Nagao, A., & Ting-Toomey, S. (2002). Relational dialectics and management strategies in marital couples. *Southern Communication Journal, 67,* 142–159.

Ibarra, H. (2003). *Working identity: Unconventional strategies for reinventing your career.* Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Janesick, V.J. (1994). The dance of qualitative research design: Metaphor, methodolatry, and meaning. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 209–219). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Jorgenson, J., & Bochner, A. (2004). Imagining families through stories and rituals. In A. Vangelisti (Ed.), *Handbook of family communication* (pp. 513–540). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Kalleberg, A. (2008). The state of work (and workers) in America. *Work and Occupations, 35,* 243–261.

Kirby, E., Golden, A., Medved, C., Jorgenson, J., & Buzzanell, P.M. (2003). An organizational communication challenge to the discourse of work and family research: From problematics to empowerment. *Communication Yearbook, 27,* 1–44.

Lair, D., Sullivan, K., & Cheney, G. (2005). Marketization and the recasting of the professional self: The rhetoric and ethics of personal branding. *Management Communication Quarterly, 18,* 307–343.

Langellier, K.M., & Peterson, E.E. (1993). Family storytelling as a strategy of social control. In D. K. Mumby (Ed.), *Narrative and social control: Critical perspectives* (pp. 49–76). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Langellier, K.M., & Peterson, E.E. (2004). *Storytelling in daily life: Performing narrative.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Langellier, K.M., & Peterson, E.E. (2006). Family storytelling as communication practice In L. H. Turner & R. West (Eds.), *The family communication sourcebook* (pp. 109–128). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Latack, J.C., Kinicki, A.J., & Prussia, G.E. (1995). An integrative process model of coping with job loss. *Academy of Management Review, 20,* 311–342.

Leana, C.R., & Feldman, D.C. (1992). *Coping with job loss: How individuals, organizations, and communities respond to layoffs.* New York: Lexington.

Leroux, M., & Jagger, S. (2009, January 27). Job losses mount as downturn steepens. *New York Times Online.* Retrieved May 9, 2010, from http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/economics/article5594832.ece

Liem, R., & Liem, J.H. (1988). Psychological effects of unemployment on workers and their families. *Journal of Social Issues, 44*(4), 87–105.

Lin, X., & Leung, K. (2010). Differing effects of coping strategies on mental health during prolonged unemployment: A longitudinal analysis. *Human Relations, 63,* 637–665.

London, M. (1998). *Career barriers: How people experience, overcome, and avoid failure.* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Lucas, K. (2006). *No footsteps to follow: How blue-collar kids navigate postindustrial careers.* Unpublished dissertation, Purdue University, W. Lafayette, IN.

Lucas, K., & Buzzanell, P. M. (in press). It's the cheese: Collective memory of hard times during deindustrialization. In J. M. Cramer, C. P. Greene, & L. M. Walters (Eds.), *Food as communication: Communication as food.* New York: Peter Lang.

Marin, K., Bohanek, J., & Fivush, R. (2008). Positive effects of talking about the negative: Family narratives of negative experiences and preadolescents' perceived competence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 18,* 573–593.

National Institute of Justice. (2007). *Causes and consequences of intimate partner violence.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved May 9, 2010, from http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/topics/crime/intimate-partner-violence/causes.htm

Newman, K.S. (1988). *Falling from grace: The experience of downward mobility in the American middle class.* New York: Free Press.

Newman, K.S. (1993). *Declining fortunes: The withering of the American Dream.* New York: BasicBooks.

Ochs, E., & Capps, L. (1996). Narrating the self. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 25,* 19–43.

Ochs, E., & Capps, L. (2001). *Living narrative: Creating lives in everyday storytelling.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ochs, E., & Taylor, C. (1995). The 'father knows best' dynamic in dinnertime narratives. In K. Hall & M. Bucholtz (Eds.), *Gender ar-*

ticulated: *Language and the socially constructed self* (pp. 97–120). New York: Routledge.

Owen, W.F. (1984). Interpretive themes in relational communication. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 70,* 274–287.

Putnam, L.L., & Boys, S. (2006). Revisiting metaphors of organizational communication. In S. R. Clegg (Ed.), *Handbook of organization studies* (pp. 541–576). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Putnam, L.L., & Fairhurst, G.T. (2001). Discourse analysis in organizations: Issues and concerns. In F.M. Jablin & L.L. Putnam (Eds.), *The new handbook of organizational communication* (pp. 78–136). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rawlins, W.K. (1992). *Friendship matters: Communication, dialectics, and the life course.* New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Rifkin, J. (1995). *The end of work: The decline of the global labor force and the dawn of the post-market era.* New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.

Socha, T. (1999). Communication in family units: Studying the first "group." In L.R. Frey (Ed.), D.S. Gouran, & M.S. Poole (Assoc. Eds.), *The handbook of group communication theory and research* (pp. 475–492). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Socha, T. (2008, July). *Communication and the good life.* Keynote address to the NCA Institute for Faculty Development, held at Randolph-Macon College, Ashland, VA.

Socha, T. (2009). Family as agency of potential: Toward a positive ontology of applied family communication theory and research. In L. Frey & K. Cissna (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of applied communication research* (pp. 309–330). New York: Routledge.

Sonnenfeld, J. (2007). Firing back: How great leaders rebound after career disasters. *Harvard Business Review, 85*(1), 76–84.

Stone, E. (2004). *Black sheep and kissing cousins: How our family stories shape us.* Edison, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Voydanoff, P. (1983). Unemployment: Family strategies for adaptation. In C.R. Figley & H.I. McCubbin (Eds.), *Stress and the family. Volume II: Coping with catastrophe* (pp. 90–102). New York: Brunner/Mazel.