

It's Just a Part of Life

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“It’s Just a Part of Life” focuses on career and personal challenges as two couples (Maria and Brad; Sara and Alejandro) deal with anticipated and unexpected disruptions in their lives. These couples experience events and opportunities including returns-to-work after laborforce gaps, job changes, geographical relocations, infertility, unplanned business trips and workloads, and sleep deprivation during early child rearing years. As they devise strategies for managing these stressful situations both individually and collectively, they adapt to and transform their new normals by enacting communication resilience processes. Throughout the case, there are episodes in which they, and the children (Eden and Lucy), perform the five processes: crafting normalcy; using, maintaining, and creating new networks; backgrounding negative feelings while foregrounding productive action; utilizing alternative logics; and anchoring identities. They enact resilience for themselves and others, for the present and the future, and by reflecting upon their pasts.

INTRODUCTION

Rather than being traits, characteristics, or personality factors, a communication perspective on *resilience* sees this process as “constituted in and through communicative processes that enhance people’s abilities to create new normalcies”

(Buzzanell, 2010, p. 9). In the *Communication Theory of Resilience (CTR)*, resilience is activated by *triggers*, or events and other disruptions, losses, deaths, transitions, and opportunities that might be mundane, such as going to a new restaurant in another part of town, or extraordinary and unusual, such as preparing for and coping with the aftermaths of hurricanes, wildland fires, tornadoes, extensive flooding, earthquakes, and mudslides (Buzzanell, 2018a, 2018b). To adapt to and/or transform the new normal that these disruptions seem to demand, people often engage in one or more resilience processes with other people. First, they may continue routines and rituals or create new ones along with language that indicates that they feel that they are experiencing some sense of normalcy (*crafting normalcy*). Second, they talk to and connect with others online and in face-to-face interactions (*using, maintaining, and creating new networks*). Third, they might feel upset, angry, betrayed, fearful, and/or devastated by something that happened yet they know that they need to pull themselves together and accomplish tasks that are necessary for them to survive and move beyond the disruption, such as locating water and food at a food pantry if family providers have lost their sources of income (*backgrounding negative feelings while foregrounding productive action*). Fourth, they may find silver linings, humor, and/or workaround or creative and improvisational procedures for handling the consequences of disruptions (*utilizing alternative logics*). Finally, they may make sense out of disruptions and their own parts in resilience processes by attending to salient identities, such as parent or friend, when everything else about life seems to be in disarray (*affirming identity anchors*).

Besides resilience, “It’s Just a Part of Life” also is a case about *work-life*, specifically *work-family, communication* that can develop patterns for sustainable “balance” or perform satisfactory career and paid labor activities as well as personal life interests such as home, family, friendships, volunteering, and leisure. Work-life communication incorporates many tensions and contradictions that show up in conflicts, opportunities, and desires for flexibility in organizational policies (Putnam et al., 2014) and as problematics for research studies (Kirby et al., 2003). Communication and interdisciplinary studies have examined work-life balance through a variety of terms like boundaries, gendered household tasks, and caregiving. What is important to note is that work-life balance and forms of caregiving (e.g., fatherhood, motherhood, aunting, and creation of families where there are no legal or biological connections) are different based on race, ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, type of jobs and industries, and other differences (Bochantin, 2016; Buzzanell & D’Enbeau, 2009; D’Enbeau et al., 2010; Ellingson & Sotirin, 2010; Garwood, 2022)

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