

Emotional Labor in Everyday Resilience: Class-based Experiences of Navigating Unemployment Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic in the U.S.

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During the COVID-19 global health crisis, institutions, policymakers, and academics alike have called for practicing resilience to overcome its ongoing disruptions. This paper contributes a comparative study of the job search experiences of working-class and upper-middle-class job seekers, particularly in relation to their resilience practices during the pandemic. Drawing from in-depth interviews with 12 working-class and 11 upper-middle-class job seekers in the U.S., we unpack challenges resulting from both the pandemic and unemployment and job seekers' novel practices of navigating these challenges in their everyday disrupted life. Job seekers' ongoing negotiation with their resources, situations, and surroundings gives practical meanings to building everyday resilience, which we conceptualize as an ongoing process of becoming resilient. While job seekers across classes experienced similar challenges, working-class job seekers took on additional emotional labor in their everyday resilience due to their limited experience in the digital job search space, competition with higher-degree holding job seekers applying for the same jobs, limited social support networks, and at times, isolation. By foregrounding the uneven distribution of emotional labor in realizing the promise of resilience along class lines, this work cautions against the romanticization of resilience and calls for a more critical understanding of resilience in CSCW.

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing** → **Empirical studies in collaborative and social computing**.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: everyday resilience, labor, invisible work, emotional labor, neoliberalism

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1 INTRODUCTION

The world saw a hit to the labor market due to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) pandemic, the most severe health crisis in a century. Amid the pandemic, unemployment rates rose, and the labor market slowed, shrinking the number of roles available to job seekers [67]. Governments

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mandated social distancing and stay-in-place orders during the pandemic, limiting job searches to solely online spaces. Job seekers experienced isolation, health concerns, and new challenges in the digital job search process, such as limited face-to-face communication and increased Internet and data usage. In the wake of this health crisis, institutions, policymakers, and academics alike have called for building and practicing resilience on individual, organizational, and societal levels (e.g., [45, 71, 74, 94]). This embrace of resilience often highlights a positive image of one's strength and ability in achieving favorable outcomes during hardships [76]. Under this rhetoric of resilience, one is expected to adapt to, cope with, and eventually bounce back from adversity and disruptions.

A growing number of Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) and Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) researchers and designers have explored how technologies can support individuals' and communities' resilience practices (e.g., [19, 62, 63, 82, 98]). Designing for resilience has gained popularity supporting resource-constrained communities' reliance on their existing assets to reduce and overcome vulnerabilities. However, existing critiques raise concerns about resilience being complicit in neoliberal approaches to how individuals and societies should be organized [40, 50].¹ In other words, the idea of resilience is seen as aligning with neoliberal governance that takes an individualistic approach and emphasizes individual adaptability and risk management [47]. Indeed this resilience/neoliberalism nexus cautions us of how the discourse of resilience risks shifting responsibilities of surviving through adversities to individuals and communities, especially those that have been historically marginalized and exploited [47, 50].

Our paper intends to unpack how job seekers practiced resilience during the COVID-19 health crisis with the sensitivities above in mind. In particular, our work looks into two research questions: **RQ1:** What challenges were faced by job seekers during the pandemic? **RQ2:** What resilience practices did job seekers adopt to respond to these challenges and navigate the disruptions brought about by unemployment and the pandemic? Prior research found demographic differences in digital technology use for employment along lines of socioeconomic status and raised new questions around social class and technology used for participating in the labor market [20]. Therefore, our work intended to compare and contrast the differences in job search challenges and resilience practices across classes to understand how job seekers in different social subject positions approached and realized the promise of resilience.

We draw from in-depth interviews with 12 working-class and 11 upper-middle-class job seekers.² We found that the lack of human connection through digital platforms and the precarious labor market during the pandemic (e.g., a limited number of jobs, highly competitive job market, closed businesses) were the main factors contributing to a challenging job search (RQ1). Despite these challenges, job seekers adopted varied practices to build resilience and navigate these disruptions, including working in unconventional roles outside the traditional labor market, receiving emotional support, and leveraging their local community and social media to search for work. While upper-middle-class job seekers discussed seeking social support through social media and online platforms, working-class individuals either relied on their close families and friends for support or absorbed their emotional struggles alone (RQ2).

The resilience practices identified in this work are situated in individuals' everyday navigation with the prolonged disruptions, which we refer to as *everyday resilience*. In our case, everyday

¹Neoliberalism is a political ideology associated with privatization, deregulation, and free trade that promotes the idea that people are responsible for their own social successes or economic failure. Harvey conceived neoliberalism as a project to maintain and restore class domination to different sectors of society, including divisions of labor, social relations, ways of living and thought [39].

²Following prior sociology literature [52], we use the term working class to refer to individuals with less than a four-year degree and having an annual income of \$40k or less. We use the term upper-middle class to refer to individuals with at least a four-year degree and an annual income of at least \$90k.

resilience entails individuals' mundane negotiation with the ever-shifting conditions of the disrupted labor market and the pandemic, which requires individuals to commit to emotional labor constantly. We recognize everyday resilience as an ongoing process of *becoming resilient*, and that mundane negotiations produce practical meanings to one's resilience. Yet, our results revealed that working-class individuals had to take on additional emotional labor and invisible work to realize the promise of resilience compared to those in the upper-middle class. In other words, the emotional labor in everyday resilience is disproportionately displaced to working-class individuals and yet remains invisible. In this way, we caution against the potential romanticization of resilience in CSCW. We argue that future CSCW design and research should foreground this oft-invisibilized emotional labor in practicing resilience in one's everyday social and economic life. Otherwise, the class inequalities that stem from neoliberal governance and the ongoing exploitation of the most disadvantaged will be (re)produced and intensified [5, 55, 59, 75].

Finally, we unpack design opportunities to support the potential alternatives and interventions identified in job seekers' existing everyday resilience, with a focus on the working class. We contribute ways to rethink how CSCW can provide for (1) supporting emotional needs in navigating disruptions and (2) fostering alternative ways of "work" that have emerged in individuals' resilience practices. In this way, we highlight the importance of supporting individuals' agency in negotiating with existing labor market conditions and controlling what work could look like. We believe this view of job seekers' resilience can make space for fostering existing alternative ways of making a living and modes of solidarity.

2 RELATED WORK

Scholarship in CSCW and neighboring fields has been increasingly investigating the role that technology plays (or does not play) in supporting low-income and working-class individuals and communities in their job search and workplace practices. Working-class job seekers who live from one paycheck to the next and face ongoing employment insecurity have been described as "the precariat" [86]. When compared to individuals with higher socioeconomic status, working-class individuals face challenges in maintaining life and stability and achieving social mobility due to ongoing institutional and systematic discrimination [80]. Seefeldt asserted that working-class individuals have been "abandoned by institutions that traditionally promoted inclusion and upward mobility" [80, p.4] and thus delegated to precarious subject positions. Past literature has also shown that technologies have often abandoned the working class because employment technologies are usually not designed to support their needs and interests [20, 25]. Responding and navigating such sociotechnical conditions that can be characterized as precarious and uncertain are often intertwined with a sense of resilience for the working-class individuals [90]. In the rest of the related work section, we first review the differences and similarities in the technology use and emotional experiences in job search among working-class and upper-middle-class job seekers before the pandemic and highlight how such differences have been amplified during the pandemic. Given the effects of such crises, we turn to the literature on resilience and individuals' everyday resilience practices in adapting to employment disruptions and crises. We situate this work into past CSCW investigations of employment, resilience, emotional and invisible work, and critiques of the political economy.

2.1 Stratified Design and Use of Digital Technologies in Employment

The Internet has become an essential tool for job seekers and was especially important amid the pandemic. However, it is crucial to recognize that the design and growing use of digital technologies in hiring and the job search over the last two decades (e.g., online job boards, social media recruitment, etc.) has reproduced stratification and inequality across classes [25, 59]. Literature

before the pandemic showed that digital employment tools were discriminatory against individuals with lower incomes and education, and minority groups [16]. Eubanks found that class-based institutional biases are rendered into the design of digital tools, further perpetuating and automating discrimination against working-class and minoritized individuals in today's labor market [26]. Algorithmic-enhanced employment websites such as Monster.com have been shown to rank applicants based on their educational level and alma mater [16]. This data-driven hiring approach limits less-educated groups from being considered for roles, preferencing higher-educated job seekers, those likely to have higher incomes, as stronger candidates.

In an in-depth set of semi-structured interviews with 11 low-resource job seekers in a Midwestern U.S. metropolitan area, Wheeler and Dillahunt uncovered the resulting strategies the job seekers used as a result of these inequalities [103]. Although useful in locating relevant jobs, Internet resources did not increase job seekers' chances of securing employment [103]. Low-resource job seekers who showed successful use of online resources were those who already had the resources to succeed in the job search or who were already skilled. Those who were unsuccessful in landing jobs using technology relied on their offline social networks [103]. Indeed, mobilizing our offline social networks plays a key role in finding employment [102]. A recent online survey of U.S. job seekers examining whether the use of job search strategies and online platforms correlated with demographic factors further illustrated such class-based stratification [20]. This study, conducted at the start of COVID-19, identified discrepancies in online platform use among factors such as income, gender, years of education, and race. Results suggested that higher-income job seekers were more likely to use different strategies and get callbacks than lower-income job seekers. This work offered no qualitative insights because it had methodological limitations, a gap we aim to fill in the current study.

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted employment, and individuals facing these circumstances are now in more onerous situations than before. Prior studies have shown the pandemic's stratified impact on the labor market and its disproportionate strike upon poor and working-class populations [6, 7]. In particular, the decrease in the employment rate of low-wage positions was more than twice that of the middle-wage positions in the year 2020 (-12.5% and -5.3%, respectively), while the employment of high-wage occupations witnessed a marginal increase [73]. If researchers identified sociotechnical challenges for working-class job seekers *before* the pandemic, then understanding whether these challenges have been magnified or changed altogether, and how job seekers have navigated them, could help to better inform the future of sociotechnical design and support. Further, understanding opportunities to provide employment and employment support at a time of limited face-to-face contact is crucial with the growing reliance on technology mediation in today's labor market. Our research aims to better address these gaps.

2.2 Social Support during Unemployment and Emotional Labor

Unemployment contributes to a "chain of adversity" [101]. This "chain" stems from the financial impact of unemployment leading to a loss of income, then feelings of depression including helplessness, hopelessness, and a loss of agency [101]. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted individuals' subjective well-being and drastically amplified the aforementioned emotional burdens associated with unemployment, among other precarious conditions [6, 104]. According to a recent Pew Research survey with 715 unemployed American adults, 56% of respondents reported experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety and depression since being unemployed during the pandemic. The majority of unemployed workers (70%) described a general feeling of being more stressed than usual [73]. Scholars have also shown that poor and working-class individuals in the U.S. face intense anxiety about basic needs such as health insurance and their financial stability with the decreasing levels of institutional and organizational protection during the pandemic [7].

Social and emotional support play a key role in alleviating such emotional distress resulting from job loss [34]. Scholars in CSCW and adjacent fields have long investigated digital technologies' and online communities' roles in facilitating social support seeking during various crises and life transitions including unemployment. These studies have shown varying benefits and limitations of platforms like Facebook and Reddit in affording social and emotional support after job loss. For example, Burke and Kraut's survey study suggests that communicating with strong ties (including family members and colleagues) on Facebook after job loss generally improves one's perceived social support [12]. This research also found that online communication with strong ties leads to reductions in stress and increased perceived social support after job loss. However, a more recent study by Moore and Lucas, conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, suggests that social support from strong ties offers little benefit to relieving one's emotional distress [68], contrasting with Burke and Kraut's earlier findings. Yet, according to Moore and Lucas, receiving social support from strong ties can facilitate one's coping practices during the pandemic [68].

Past research has also uncovered different methods and implications of seeking social support online across social classes. In comparison to higher classes, individuals with working-class backgrounds often experience emotional obstacles to disclosing their needs in social support and reaching out to connections for potential job opportunities [18]. Such emotional blocks in online disclosure can, in effect, lead to less perceived social support [104]. Garg's recent interview study with American Indian parents and teens similarly uncovered that low-socioeconomic-status (SES) parents often turn to pseudo-anonymized platforms like Reddit to vent their emotional stress resulting from job loss before the pandemic due to the fear of being judged by close ties [30]. Interestingly, with the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals have become more comfortable sharing their material needs with strong and weak ties online and seeking tangible employment support through newly formed online groups [30].

Importantly, managing the emotional toll of unemployment while preparing for employment requires job seekers to perform emotional labor. Hochschild defined emotional labor as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" [44, p.7]. To Hochschild, emotional labor is the act of "trying to change in degree or quality of an emotion or feeling" that commodifies one's emotions and orients them toward an employer's goals and profit generation [43, p.561]. In fact, "emotional capitalism" is a term coined by Illouz to denote how today's capitalist labor market is inherently emotional and to describe how the discourses of emotion and emotion management have penetrated aspects of economic relationships [48, p.5]. Besides commodity production and circulation, different stages of job search during the circulation of labor power (including preparing oneself to be job-ready, networking for job opportunities, preparing job applications, and going through hiring processes) also require individuals' emotional labor [28, 83]. In CSCW, scholars have similarly cautioned us of how one's emotional labor is often rendered invisible in today's digital work and in platform capitalism [5, 14, 60, 66]. As a form of invisible work, individuals' emotional labor is often not recognized as part of the formal work or job description and thus remains unacknowledged and under-credited [87, 89]. For example, Raval and Dourish's ethnographic study with ridesharing gig workers illustrates how the management of human bodies and emotions has been engineered and constructed into gig work algorithms and economic production [75]. Through an analytical lens of feminist political economy, these authors called attention to the critical role of emotional labor and other forms of immaterial labor in the constitution of economic life.

Building on this line of research and CSCW's long interest in invisible work, our work attends to job seekers' maintenance and management of emotions during their job search (*outside* the workplace and *before* the labor relation is established). Doing so allows us to make visible the emotional labor individuals commit to overcome the emotional toll of navigating the job search,

and to highlight how emotional labor is unequally distributed among social classes. We also bridge the concept of emotional labor with everyday resilience in CSCW and HCI, two concepts that were not previously discussed.

2.3 Conceptualizing Everyday Resilience in CSCW

Resilience refers to the capacity to adapt to disruptions to remain unchanged [99]. In social science, the definition of resilience often focuses on aspects of ecology, social structure, and disaster [61]. For example, Lorenz provides an overview of how the understanding of resilience has been developed in social science [56]. The author asserted that resilience is built around the adaptive, coping, and participative capacities of social systems and that these capacities are responsible for informed and strategic responses to disruptions for a (new) normal amid disruptions, which leads to learning as a part of resilience [56]. This social science perspective of resilience assumes that resilience is informed, systematic, and well-operationalized, which overlooks the mundane practices of everyday life and individuals' situated interactions with human/non-human actors and the ever-changing environment [54, 77]. In contrast to the social science perspective that focuses on "extraordinary" events, Lenette et al. stressed that resilience is situated in everydayness [54]. Everydayness here speaks to the lived experiences and mundane negotiations that are often spontaneous, situational, and improvisational [58]. Through the lens of *everyday resilience*, these scholars explored how refugee women with children built new lives and navigated emotional, financial, and social obstacles after settling in Australia. Understanding everyday resilience denaturalizes the dichotomous outcomes of being resilient versus non-resilient. It directs our attention to recognize resilience as an ongoing commitment in the navigation of everyday tensions and disruptions [54]. We refer to *everyday resilience* in our work and further explore this context in terms of how job seekers navigate the labor market amid the disruptions brought about by the pandemic and unemployment.

In CSCW and HCI, past research has explored ways for technologies and design to initiate, foster, and support resilience in varied contexts, mainly focusing on life disruptions such as war and disease (e.g., [63, 70, 82]). In the wake of COVID-19, several studies have investigated resilient practices undertaken by different individuals and communities in dealing with varied aspects of this ongoing crisis, such as technologies' roles in facilitating family resilience [30], the maintenance and repair of cultural infrastructure [2, 4], and older adults' resilient strategies in acquiring COVID-19 vaccination [3]. In this line of research, supporting the resilience situated in everydayness when disruption becomes ordinary has become a focus in CSCW [81, 98]. Through designing and supporting resilience, this scholarship focuses on how technologies can better amplify communities' situated assets in overcoming and adapting to disrupted situations. In particular, Vyas and Dillahunt investigated the everyday resilient practices of low-SES individuals [98]. This work stresses that everyday resilience is rooted in individuals' existing assets and relies on one's optimistic mindset. They found that community-based care and sharing are key for building resilience out of adversities [98]. Furthermore, through an infrastructural lens, Semaan's work conceived of "routine infrastructuring" as necessary work for "building everyday resilience with technology" [81]. Given the routine infrastructural breakdowns faced by people experiencing prolonged life disruptions and marginalization (e.g., veteran transitions and "coming out"), the invisible biases and logic embedded in normalized infrastructures are made visible [10]. Semaan suggested that such infrastructural breakdowns offer opportunities for individuals to appropriate existing infrastructures and build alternative bottom-up infrastructures [81]. As a result, this routine infrastructuring work can promote everyday resilience through supporting individual reflexivity and competence and interrogating the normalized structures and systems. In this work, we intend to extend the understanding of everyday resilience in CSCW to the context of unemployment and the pandemic as a moment of "infrastructural inversion" [88] and a "new normal" [64]. Our

work helps to address more specifically what is sociotechnical about everyday resilience, and how everyday resilience comes into being.

On the other hand, mainstream academia, media, and institutions embrace and promote resilience as a promising frame to combat crises and adversity. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in calls for building and practicing resiliency at different levels and sites across societies [45, 71, 74, 94]. Critics have argued that, given its emphasis on the individual over the social and institutional, resilience theory can be appropriated by the neoliberal labor market and policy agendas [9]. This is to say, the discourse of resilience risks rendering “bouncing back” from disruptions and crises as part of individual responsibilities [40, 50, 100]. In a way, resilience can be framed as the moral obligation of neoliberal subjects to hustle in the face of adversity and to overcome systemic problems such as job insecurity and unemployment, growing debt, and deteriorating social welfare [69]. Individuals have to proactively fulfill their responsibilities for self-development and self re-engineering to ensure their competence and merit in the labor market and in other aspects of society [54]. With this sensibility, our work builds on the critique of resilience to further its discourse in CSCW. We compare and contrast everyday resilience practices across social classes and make visible the oft-invisible emotional labor undertaken in practicing resiliency when prolonged disruptions have been perpetuated into everyday life. We caution against romanticizing resilience on the one hand and discuss how we should instead acknowledge and attend to the invisible labor required of less advantaged populations to practice everyday resiliency on the other.

3 METHODS

3.1 Participant Recruitment

Our recruitment pool consisted of 429 U.S. adult job seekers who were unemployed at least 3–6 months before the COVID-pandemic and who agreed to be contacted for an interview [20]. These job seekers were a subset of a population who completed a cross-panel survey about their job search experience during the pandemic. While the national survey focused on their use of specific technology during the pandemic, the purpose of our interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of their job search experience. Respondents provided their employment status, income, and use of social media for their job search process. We classified 173 respondents (40.3%) of the 429 as working class. These job seekers indicated their education level was less than a college degree *and* that their income was less than \$40k. We classified 104 (24.2%) of the 429 respondents as upper-middle class. These respondents indicated that their income level was \$90k or higher.

We contacted all 173 working-class respondents via email, and 30 (17.3%) participants responded. Of the 30 respondents, ten did not respond to follow-up emails, and eight did not show up for their scheduled interviews after multiple attempts, leading to a total of 12 working-class participants. We randomly sampled interviewees out of the group of 104 upper-middle-class respondents (i.e., those with an income of \$90k or higher) over six weeks, and we interviewed a total of 11 (10.6%) upper-middle-class participants.

The majority of working-class participants reported that their past work was in the service industry, one of the hardest-hit industries during the pandemic [27]. The majority of these job seekers were from smaller towns with a population of 60,000 people or less. In contrast to working-class participants, upper-middle-class participants previously worked in information technology and data analyst roles. In terms of educational attainment, seven of the 11 upper-middle-class job seekers reported earning a bachelor’s degree, two reported earning a professional degree, one reported earning an associate’s degree, and the last reported having some college education. Detailed demographic information can be found in Table 1.

ID	Pseudonym	Demographics*	Income (USD)	Last Job	Location
W1	Linda	White/50/W	less than \$10k	Groundskeeper	Montello, WI
W2	Jessica	White/35/W	less than \$10k	Pharmacy Tech	Hillsboro, SC
W3	Rebecca	Asian/35/W	less than \$10k	Bakery Worker	Jacksonville, FL
W4	Brian	White/60/M	less than \$10k	Landscaping Manager	Gurnee, IL
W5	Melissa	White/50/W	less than \$10k	Fast Food Chain General Manager	Forth Worth, TX
W6	Christopher	Black/47/M	\$10k-\$19,999	Construction Worker	Houston, TX
W7	Veronica	Black/36/W	\$10k-\$19,999	Retail Assistant	Sumter, SC
W8	Laura	Hispanic/35/W	\$10k-\$19,999	Restaurant Worker	Lake Havasu City, AZ
W9	Amanda	White/40/W	\$20k-\$29,999	Call Center Operator	Eugene, OR
W10	David	White/52/M	\$20k-\$29,999	Bank Computer Operator	Meriden, CT
W11	Susan	White/52/W	\$20k-\$29,999	Nanny	Warrenton, MO
W12	Christina	White/38/W	\$30k-\$39,999	Redemption Center Worker	Roxboro, NC
U1	Brandon	Black/35/M	\$90k-\$99,999	IT Manager	New York, NY
U2	Sean	White/33/M	\$90k-\$99,999	IT Manager	West Warwick, RI
U3	Shannon	White/46/W	\$90k-\$99,999	Manufacturing Customer Service	Athens, TN
U4	Jennifer	White/50/W	\$100k or more	Event Manager	Atlantic Highlands, NJ
U5	Lauren	Asian/38/W	\$100k or more	Healthcare Administration	Springboro, OH
U6	Holly	Asian/31/W	\$100k or more	Qualitative Analyst	River Edge, NJ
U7	Heather	White/59/W	\$100k or more	Aetna Accounting Analyst	Middleton, CT
U8	Michael	Black/35/M	\$100k or more	IT Manager	Airmont, NY
U9	Amy	White/52/W	\$100k or more	Attorney	Texarkana, AR
U10	Michelle	White/47/W	\$100k or more	Insurance Customer Service	Monroe, WA
U11	Jason	Black/36/M	\$100k or more	Manufacturing	NA

Table 1. Summary of participant information. Ethnicity: White (n=14, 61%), Black (n=5, 22%), Asian (n=3, 13%), Hispanic (n=1, 4%), racial and ethnic diversity was on par with that of the U.S.; Age: mean=43, sd=9; Gender: Women (n=16, 70%) were over-represented in our sample, Men (n=7, 30%)

*We organized participants' demographic information by ethnicity/age/gender.

3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

We conducted interviews from July to October 2020, about half a year into the pandemic when vaccinations were unavailable. We sought to understand how the pandemic disrupted job seekers' everyday lives and shifted their job search practices through semi-structured interviews. We also aimed to understand how they used digital employment tools and other technologies during the pandemic, and if applicable, successful job search strategies amid the pandemic. While our original plan was to leverage Zoom to conduct video interviews, we shifted to phone interviews, which allowed us to follow up with participants and remind them of the scheduled interview via voicemail. We compensated interview participants with their choice of a Target, Amazon or Walmart gift card worth \$15 USD for interviews lasting 30 minutes and \$30 USD for longer interviews. Interviews lasted on average 59 minutes. Our institutional review board approved our study.

3.3 Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed, and we used inductive thematic analysis and constant comparative analysis to analyze the interview data. Inductive thematic analysis allows the sorting of qualitative data into themes, which reveals salient insights while not fitting the analysis to a particular framework [78]. Constant comparative analysis allowed us to compare and contrast the similarities and differences of experiences between the two groups [8].

After interviewing, one author reviewed the transcripts for accuracy, and two authors familiarized themselves with the data by either listening to recorded interviews or reading the transcripts. One

author conducted the first round of open coding. In this round, all authors met weekly over two months to discuss the meanings of each code, identify patterns of meaning, and establish initial themes in the data. Salient codes from open coding focused on individuals who experienced an emotional toll during the pandemic and transition to unemployment (e.g., *experiencing frustration*, *feeling discouragement*, and *undergoing depression*). After that, the authors collaboratively conducted another round of focused coding to identify specific sociotechnical factors contributing to the identified emotional toll and individuals' practices to navigate these challenges. For example, salient codes from focused coding included *lacking personal connection in job search*, *limited support from social connections*, *getting support from family and friends*, *networking via social media*, and *reflecting on job search strategies*. Based on these codes, we generated themes that entailed resilient practices that job seekers adopted in response to the ongoing disruptions in their social and economic lives during the pandemic. Finally, we conducted a comparative analysis [8] to purposefully compare and contrast working-class and upper-middle-class job seekers' specific perspectives and practices in navigating the pandemic and unemployment. We specifically looked into which themes appeared in one class of job seekers but not in the other and how both classes of job seekers viewed shared challenges and resilient practices similarly and differently. To assist with this process, we also consolidated an analytical table to list themes identified during the coding process such as *using digital tools to re-skill*, *feeling discouragement*, and *seeking remote gig work* with the number of working-class and upper-middle-class participants who identified with that theme.

4 FINDINGS

In understanding job seekers' job search experiences, particularly concerning technology use during COVID-19, we found that our results aligned with prior work and that COVID-19 amplified existing findings. Naturally, the government's stay-at-home orders to help control the spread of COVID-19 significantly reduced face-to-face interactions and thus jobs requiring face-to-face interactions. These experiences were exacerbated by a competitive job market and as jobs diminished, unemployment rates rose. Job seekers experienced a lack of feedback from employers [103], job scams [97], weak social networks [36], and a competitive job market [13].

Yet, our research uncovered new challenges, which amplified prior challenges and revealed the highly emotional job-search experience during COVID-19. In the findings that follow, we discuss the factors that contributed to job seekers' challenges (RQ1) and how job seekers navigated these challenges (RQ2). We particularly attend to the similarities and differences in the sociotechnical resilience practices (i.e., the interactions among job seekers, their peers, and technology) between upper-middle-class and working-class job seekers (See Table 2 for summary).

4.1 Job Seekers' Challenges Amid the Crisis

Having to cope with the precarity of unemployment before the COVID-19 pandemic was already difficult, but the pandemic introduced a new layer of precarity related to social and health concerns. The coupling of these two major life transitions (unemployment and the pandemic) increased job seekers' emotional labor during the job search. The pandemic contributed to feelings of isolation, which extended into the digital job search. Participants reported the lack of human connection present in general during the pandemic. This was in addition to feelings of frustration, depression, and discouragement that resulted from their online job search. Amplifying the lack of human connection experienced online, job seekers received limited feedback from employers. The lack of communication and uncertainty was discouraging in an already competitive labor market. These factors were beyond all job seekers' control and they did not have the ability to change their situations. Job seekers were instead left to cope with what they were dealt.

4.1.1 Lack of Personal Connection during the Digital Job Search. The pandemic forced job seekers to conduct their job search predominantly online. Some job seekers spoke of their optimism about finding employment because technology allowed them to search for jobs amid stay-in-place orders and health concerns. However, both working- and upper-middle-class participants reported feeling frustrated, depressed, and discouraged by the fully digital job search. Thus, while some of our findings are not specific to COVID-19, the online job search effects were more pronounced amid the pandemic. Due to a lack of access to and less experience using digital employment tools, working-class job seekers faced additional challenges. They had to undertake additional emotional labor compared to upper-middle-class job seekers. While further investigation is needed, age and job type might have played a role in job seekers' comfort level and subsequent success in finding jobs online. For instance, older job seekers might have had less experience using technology than younger job seekers and thus required more support. It is also likely that job seekers in tech-related fields, like an analyst or IT manager, felt more comfortable with technology and were less likely to struggle with online job searches than job seekers in non-tech-related fields.

Most of our upper-middle-class (n=8) and working-class (n=7) job seeker participants expressed a lack of personal connection when job searching online during the pandemic. While artificial intelligence (AI) technologies were already embedded in the job-search process pre-pandemic, feelings of disconnectedness and detachment were further pronounced in our results and led to some job seekers feeling hopeless. Amy, a former attorney, expressed her frustrations about the lack of human interaction and AI-driven hiring practices during her job search:

[U]³ *It's time-consuming. Maybe it's just made this depressing. It frustrates me. It makes me feel like there's no human beings involved in the process. I used to get mad. I get irritated. I get frustrated. I don't want to do it anymore. I don't mind taking time to do anything. That's not it. It's just it's offensive to me. I just find it completely offensive. I guess that they needed to narrow people down. I don't know. But, there's got to be a better way. I don't know what it is.*

She further described how she believed digital tools contribute to AI-driven hiring practices, meaning employers were not taking the time to read her resume. She expressed the combination of “being stuck at home” as a result of COVID-19, and how the impersonal nature of employment sites made her feel hopeless, which she expressed never feeling before the pandemic. Past literature pointed out that the white-collar job-seeking process is a “chemistry game” and that hiring decisions are often based upon the emotional connection between job seekers and employers [83]. In this chemistry game, upper-middle-class job seekers undertake emotional labor to demonstrate their passions, establish personal connections with employers, and show the fit between themselves and the position. Such emotional labor has been masked as part of job seekers' responsibility that guarantees perceived control over job seeking [83]. Yet Amy's case indicates a shift in the nature of the chemistry game during the pandemic. In the prevailing situation of lacking personal connections in the job search, job seekers no longer had opportunities to connect. Thus, there were no outlets for even playing the chemistry game like before, which led to growing discouragement and frustration.

Working-class job seekers similarly expressed frustration brought about by completely shifting their job search online during the pandemic. For instance, Linda frequently searched for jobs in person pre-COVID-19, which allowed her direct communication with employers, but the pandemic took away the opportunity to search in person. She shared her feelings about the switch to the online job search:

³Hereinafter, we use [U] to denote upper-middle-class participants' quotes and [W] to denote working-class participants' quotes.

[W] A job search is frustrating to me because everything is online and it's not [in person]... Anything online shows absolutely no compassion whatsoever or personality. Whereas, if I was to come in, get an application from you, come back, give my application to you, you're familiar with a person's face. You can tell a lot by a person's voice or the way they hold themselves, or whatever the case may be.

The pandemic also made it difficult, if not impossible, for some to receive in-person technical support from employment centers and recruitment agencies. And as a result, a complete and unanticipated transition to online job seekers became even more challenging for working-class job seekers. For instance, Melissa told us that she had never applied for jobs online before the pandemic. Likewise, Susan described her struggles in filling out online job applications and paperwork with limited guidance.

Given that all upper-middle-class job seekers reported using online employment websites before COVID-19, working-class job seekers' adjustment to a fully digital job search came with more difficulties and friction. Besides learning how to apply for jobs online, working-class job seekers were also not accustomed to presenting themselves in an online format [33]. For instance, working-class job seekers had to learn how to present themselves in a way that employers deemed to be appropriate and professional (i.e., demonstrate their personality, character, job readiness, and work ethic) [59]. This learning demanded additional labor from working-class job seekers, which they could not avoid in order to participate in the labor market and make a living.

4.1.2 Lack of Employer Feedback and Support from Social Networks. During our interviews, both working-class and upper-middle-class job seekers expressed an emotional toll that stemmed from the lack of feedback/response from employers and social connections. Upper-middle-class participants reported reductions in their social networks during the pandemic, which led to their frustration about not being able to utilize connections during their job search. Both working- and upper-middle-class job seekers reported connecting to social networks as their primary search strategies pre-COVID-19. Similar to previous research reports of limited job search feedback [103] among working-class job seekers, all job seekers reported receiving little feedback from employers, which was confusing and frustrating amid an increasingly competitive job market. Sean, an upper-middle-class job seeker, tried to reconnect with past recruiters and expressed his lack of success:

[U] I would say some of the recruiters who used to contact me in the past, I have their numbers saved on my phone, and I try to call them up to see if they have any positions. Like I said, they don't usually respond. I don't know if they are not working or if they don't have any positions, but it has been worse during this time.

Sean's experience reaffirms the lack of employer–job seeker communication and suggests that previous connections that aided job seekers pre-COVID-19 were no longer reliable points of contact. Brandon, another upper-middle-class job seeker, similarly described how support from his social network decreased during the pandemic:

[U] I think the support before COVID was more, I had friends to support me more. I have colleagues, I have maybe school friends to support me, my past school friends to support me, but now I think they've reduced maybe because everyone is trying to just stay away from social distances [sic], so the only support I have now is just few friends.

Both Sean and Brandon's experiences highlight that job seekers' social networks were influential for social support pre-COVID-19. However, social distancing restrictions decreased their points of contact (i.e., online communication only, no in-person meetings) between connections, and this lack of communication resulted in reduced social support. The lack of communication was out of job seekers' control and harder to overcome.

Everyday Resilience Practices	Upper-Middle Class	Working Class
Networking	Professional social media platforms (i.e., LinkedIn), past recruiters	Personal social media platforms (i.e., Facebook)
Reflecting, Reskilling & Upskilling	Reflection on skills possessed and alternative job opportunities; Relying on both free tools (e.g., YouTube) and paid tools (e.g., LinkedIn Learning, Fairygodboss) for reskilling/upskilling	Limited proactive reflection and skill development; Reflection during our research interview on job search strategies and need for reskilling
Seeking Emotional Support	Family and friends provide words of encouragement, professional social media platforms (i.e., LinkedIn)	Family and friends provide words of encouragement, limited online emotional support
Finding Unconventional Work	Temporary work (e.g., U.S. Census Enumerator, COVID Vaccine Trial) with lower salary and skill requirement	Short-term gig work (e.g., proof reader, mover)

Table 2. Summary of differences and similarities in upper-middle- and working-class job seekers' everyday resilience practices

As mentioned, all job seekers reported limited responses after applying to online job openings. Jessica, a working-class job seeker, interviewed for a pharmacy technician role. She expressed how well she thought the interview went and her previous experience in the industry. When she did not get a response from the employer she felt confused: *“It’s kind of confusing as to know why I’m not being called back. Because they always seem pretty pleased with my answers.”* When asked about how the lack of feedback made her feel, she explicitly described feeling discouraged:

[W] *Some sort of feedback would be nice... I mean, it’s really discouraging, so it kind of discourages me for a while, and then I’ll get back up to doing it. I’m kind of a sensitive person, so ... but my mom tries to give me advice.*

The burnout Jessica experienced indicates how emotional the job search process was, and the burnout that she articulated was something we repeatedly heard from participants during our interviews. The information and power imbalances between employers and job seekers intensified and was rendered more visible when the labor market faced unprecedented challenges. Despite the ongoing discouragement, a sentiment of *“I’ll get back up to doing it”* was common among job seekers, especially among working-class individuals with limited existing support from social networks. Job seekers had limited options but became resilient subjects during these disruptions, which required them to overcome their emotional challenges and prepare to re-engage in the labor market.

4.2 Upper-Middle-Class Job Seekers’ Everyday Resilience Practices

Despite the emotional toll and varied restrictions brought about by the unemployment and the pandemic as described earlier, job seekers adopted new sociotechnical practices in their job search to build their resilience in the wake of a “new normal” [64]. This section discusses upper-middle-class job seekers’ everyday resilience practices in navigating the precarious labor market and managing emotional distress.

4.2.1 Networking with Professional Connections Online.

Upper-middle-class job seekers navigated the lack of personal connections on employment sites and employer responses after applying for

jobs online by reaching out to professional contacts. Ten of the 11 upper-middle-class job seekers reported networking with past co-workers, recruiters, and others, such as employees who worked in positions or companies of interest via LinkedIn. One job seeker described looking for phone numbers of past recruiters and reaching out via phone. Lauren, for instance, explained how she networked with a recruiter to try to interview for a public relations position:

[U] *I recall this particular recruiter and I really enjoy talking with him, but he was direct with me and said, "Hey, I just want ... With the beginning of this pandemic, and the quarantine, and the restriction, a lot of companies are freezing. They're freezing, or furloughing, they're not hiring right now, but we would like to keep you on our file, and if anything opens up, we'll contact you."*

Lauren's networking efforts successfully led her to a new connection and set her up for possible outreach about an open position in the future. Furthermore, making this connection allowed Lauren to follow up directly with another human rather than sending an online application in the highly competitive market job seekers reported.

4.2.2 Proactive Reskilling and Upskilling via Digital Tools. Most upper-middle-class participants (n=8) reported using digital tools to reskill to remain competitive in the job market or change career paths. These job seekers reported using digital tools such as YouTube, paid online classes, and employment platforms with informational coursework (e.g., LinkedIn Learning, Fairygodboss). We found that upper-middle-class job seekers were required to continue their education in previous positions and, as a result, were exposed to reskilling and upskilling. For example, Sean talked about his previous experience upskilling working in an information technology (IT) role:

[U] *They [the company] have a portal where they keep posting some things, and they also have a proper trainer. If I need some kind of technical training they'll arrange that for me, and we do have kind of a, I would say, a company requirement that we have to do some certifications every year.*

Sean's experience training for his IT position suggests that upper-middle-class job seekers might be aware of the need to reskill and participate in ongoing education to stay competitive in the job market. Higher-skilled jobs provide employees with resources to improve or gain new soft and hard skills, and we did not see this among the positions that working-class job seekers held. Meanwhile, it is essential to recognize that such imposed reskilling and upskilling in higher-skilled jobs illustrates the constant self-upgrading and re-engineering required for the shifting needs and goals of employers. And we see that this neoliberal demand to sustain oneself for the changing labor market has leaked into individuals' resilience-building during disruptions.

In another case, Amy addressed that she was reskilling so she could work for herself as a health coach and avoid future job market crashes:

[U] *I want to do two things. But, I want to work for myself again, which is what I was doing in the end, because I want to have control of my situation again. But, I'm still looking for a job because I want security as well.*

To set herself up for success, she started taking health coaching classes that cost \$30 each:

[U] *In that health class I'm taking, it's teaching about media and how to use ... I haven't got to that point yet, but I'm reeducating myself, and I have a doctorate already. I think that's what you got to do. I'm taking some other sites, like some of those little free classes. I signed up for one yesterday on marketing ... Because I want to do the side business on marketing on these platforms, like Facebook, and Pinterest, and things like that. I'm having to relearn everything.*

Here we see the tensions between regaining control over one's desired career and seizing basic financial security to navigate the situation. While Amy still was job searching to have job security, she decided to split her time between job searching and reskilling to prepare herself for the future. Thus, to Amy, responding to disruptions is a part of her everyday resilience. Responding entails negotiation between her disrupted reality and preparing for the imminent future, which might or might not return to the "pre-COVID-19 state."

4.2.3 Seeking Emotional Support through Social Media. Upper-middle-class job seekers reported seeking emotional support from family and friends. Emotional support from family and friends was mainly in the form of words of encouragement and positive affirmations (e.g., "Everything will be alright."). For example, one job seeker expressed how his spouse's words of encouragement were the sole reason he kept applying for jobs.

Our upper-middle-class job seekers also sought social and emotional support through social media and the job interview itself. For example, Amy described receiving emotional support on LinkedIn through identifying a sense of shared experience in people's posts:

[U] *LinkedIn is really nice. I don't know. I really like it. I feel like it's a good way to get information about other people struggling, making you feel like you're not insane. There's a lot of positive people, like Tony Robbins, on there.*

As a member of LinkedIn, Amy felt like she was part of a community and that other community members experienced the same struggles and situations as her. As a result, she did not feel alone in her job search.

In another case, Michelle expressed how she felt unmotivated in her job search before our research interview. Participating and critically thinking about her job search experiences in the interview study motivated her to stay active and hopeful. Emotional support was a form of encouragement for upper-middle-class job seekers, despite not finding successful employment or having a sense of connection in the online job search. Furthermore, the emotional support received via social media highlights an opportunity for technology to provide a space for support and extends past work suggesting that social media platforms can facilitate social support [31].

4.2.4 Finding Temporary and Unconventional Jobs with a Lower Salary. While the traditional job market slowed during the pandemic, job seekers started resorting to unconventional ways of earning a wage. Most of these unconventional jobs offered lower salaries and required fewer professional skills compared to participants' past jobs. A common sentiment shared by upper-middle-class job seekers who landed odd jobs was "it's not the highest pay, but better than nothing" (Lauren). For instance, Lauren received compensation from participating in COVID-19 vaccine trials, and Brandon was about to land an online transcription position on the platform CrowdSurf.

Two upper-middle-class job seekers worked for the government amid the pandemic as U.S. Census Enumerators. Working for the Census was unexpected for both participants because it was outside the industries they were searching for (nonprofit management and administration) and was the only job offer they received during COVID. Shannon was hesitant to apply for jobs but considered applying for the role because it was outdoors, where she could distance herself from others socially. She described how administrative positions in hospital offices meant there was a high risk of getting infected with COVID-19:

[U] *Sick people go anywhere, they could be anywhere but not specifically for that, going for the purpose of a flu, upper respiratory issues that very well could be COVID, and [my husband] agreed to that. He said, 'No, hold off on any office jobs for doctors or hospitals.' And so that's what I did, started back applying but the only thing I got offered was the census job.*

Shannon applied to this position via Indeed and was able to work for eight weeks as a U.S. Census Enumerator until she had collected data on all households in her area. Although the job was temporary, she had a source of income for two months. As this example suggests, how and when to be resilient in making a living is often unexpected and embodies negotiation with others (in Shannon's case, her husband and their perceived social situations). According to Jennifer, working as a Census Enumerator was also a potential pathway to working a higher-paid federal job:

[U] *But then I guess I had originally gone to an information session at the county Work Development Office. The woman there, when I came in and she saw my resume, she's like, "You've actually got experience and you've been working. You could be a supervisor, so you should apply for a supervisor job." Well, I didn't get a supervisor job. But she said to me, "You know, once you have worked for the Census, you're considered a federal employee. That might make it easier for you to get a federal job. So you should concentrate on USAjobs.gov, whatever it is, because this is the list of all the federal jobs that are open."*

Jennifer was happy when she was finally hired after months of searching but was also frustrated working for a menial wage compared to the six-figure salary she used to make as an event planner. This experience illustrates the tensions job seekers felt between working outside their desired industries to make a wage and an unwillingness to experience downward mobility in their careers. As past studies suggest, while such tensions are often brought about by the concerns about over-qualification and misaligned expectations on salary, they can often be misinterpreted as having "excessive pride" [83, p.136]. Navigating such frustrations can, in turn, lead to emotional labor that is perhaps unique to the experiences of upper-middle-class job seekers.

4.3 Working-Class Job Seekers' Everyday Resilience Practices

In this section, we identify our working-class participants' salient everyday resilience practices in navigating unemployment during the pandemic: (1) networking through personal social media platforms, (2) prompted reflection through interviews, (3) seeking emotional support, and (4) finding unconventional ways of making a living. While there was an overlap between these practices and the ones adopted by upper-middle-class participants, we highlight differences in the amount and quality of efforts and emotional labor undertaken.

4.3.1 Networking via Personal Social Media Platforms. Compared to upper-middle-class job seekers' wide use of professional social media platforms like LinkedIn to cope with job search challenges, we found working-class job seekers often turned to personal social media platforms for networking. Half of our working-class job seekers (n=6) reported networking on Facebook to overcome the impersonal experience of employment sites. In particular, five of the six used Facebook to connect with close ties (i.e., friends and family) to inform them they were actively seeking employment; two of the six used Facebook to network with potential employers. Working-class participants found Facebook to be beneficial in direct messaging and reading/broadcasting posts. Direct messaging on Facebook allowed participants to stay up-to-date on new jobs available and gain informational support during their job search. This communication platform was essential during the pandemic because job openings were limited and job seekers had to stay competitive in the job market. Susan, a working-class job seeker who previously worked as a nanny, shared how Facebook friends aided her in her job search and how she further utilized Facebook as a tool to foster communication between herself and potential employers:

[W] *Well, most [friends on Facebook] know that I'm looking for a job, so if they hear of something they'll either private message me or they'll send me a little note saying, "Hey this place here is hiring. Check it out and see what you think."*

Echoing past findings that Facebook allows for direct communication between job seekers and employers [59], Susan further utilized Facebook as a tool to foster communication between herself and potential employers: *“I’ve looked in different employment groups on social media. I have talked to prospective parents on social media about becoming a nanny.”*

However, after looking into nanny roles and communicating with parents, Susan desired a change to an industry that provided more work–life separation amid the pandemic. This desire for separation shows how boundaries between the professional and the personal in using Facebook, a personal social media platform, for job search are becoming more blurred [59]. Compared to upper-middle-class job seekers who often turned to professional social media platforms for networking, working-class participants were more likely to experience work–life tensions given that Facebook was the only platform for their networking and that traditional offline networking events were no longer available. Navigating tensions between the professional and personal required working-class job seekers’ extra effort in managing work–life boundaries and self-presentation online, which was especially emotionally draining [59].

4.3.2 Limited Proactive Reflection and Resources for Upskilling. Unlike upper-middle-class job seekers, working-class participants did not report reskilling via online tools or self-reflection. While most working-class participants did not see the need to upskill/reskill, some considered self-upgrading as a privilege during this uncertain time. In Jessica’s words, *“I’m unemployed with no money, and I’ve been fighting with the unemployment office for about since March, now. So, I mean, I don’t have the funds [to reskill].”* Another participant, David, admitted that self-upgrading was meaningful only when he landed a job and knew employers’ exact needs. Compared to upper-middle-class job seekers’ resilience practices, which entailed preparing for the future, working-class job seekers had to focus on addressing their pertinent and immediate needs.

However, Christopher expressed how the interview probed him to reflect on his job search strategies and more critically think about his approach to the job search:

[W] *The interview was helpful because it helped me reflect on myself and what I need to do. So it did kind of wake up a little bit of what I need to do or some different avenues that I could possibly take. So it definitely was helpful.*

Interview questions surrounding job seekers’ technological experiences, like staying relevant in a digital job market, their thoughts on technology, and how they utilized digital employment tools, provided opportunities for them to reflect and evaluate their job search strategies and skillset. Another working-class job seeker, Amanda, told us: *“So first it made me wonder if I should look at my skills and see if there’s anything I should like try to improve, especially if I wanted to get an office [job], like computer-related skills.”* Like Amanada, it was common for working-class job seekers to reflect on the skills they lacked versus their strengths.

4.3.3 Seeking Emotional Support Offline. Like upper-middle-class participants, working-class participants discussed the importance of seeking social and emotional support in coping with a disrupted social and economic life. Working-class participants mainly received emotional support from their family and friends through words of encouragement, empathy, and advice. For instance, as discussed in section 4.1.1, Linda voiced frustration toward the digital job market. She expressed the importance of emotional support when asked what kind of support she needed while job searching amid the pandemic. Her son was a supportive figure: *“I’ll fill out 20 applications and not one person, not one person will call me back. It’s very depressing. Very depressing. I’ll call my son ... he’s just like ‘Hang in there Mom.’”* One participant, Melissa, reported receiving emotional support via our research interview: *“Well, it makes me think that there are people out there that actually care about how people are struggling through it.”*

Unlike upper-middle-class job seekers and in contrast to earlier findings [30], *no* working-class participants reported seeking or receiving emotional support via online platforms. Instead, they felt more comfortable with traditional ways of communication, such as phone calls. When asked why, participants attributed it to barriers in learning and using new digital technologies to seek support, which upper-middle-class participants did not share. Some participants also perceived the emotional support they received online as impersonal and less direct. For example, when comparing the perceived social support between phone calls and online interactions, Christina found traditional voice-based communication preferable because of its ability to convey embodied emotions, whereas online interactions risked misinterpretation.

4.3.4 Finding Short-term Gigs through Connections and Communities. Working-class participants also reported finding unconventional work by pursuing short-term gig work during the pandemic. For example, Amanda stressed the value of sharing via word of mouth in securing a short-term gig as an editor amid the pandemic. She described that her family and friends needed help proofreading: “*Well, I’ve actually done just kind of like a side job. I did ... proofreading, a couple of proofreading jobs for a friend and a family member which I did get paid for.*”

In another case, Christopher similarly described finding short-term gigs through Craigslist:

[W]Since COVID, I’ve had more success with the one-day gigs. So pre-COVID, I was looking more towards my future and securing a longer term job. But since COVID I’ve had a much easier time just shooting day by day. Moving gigs. I’ve done a couple of auction gigs. And these are all gigs that are one-day gigs, but really well-paying gigs. \$250 a day type gigs. A lot of them are mostly moving gigs, just moving people. Spur of the moment, they need someone to unload these trucks type gigs.

In these cases, both Amanda and Christopher relied on their close connections and community to land these gigs. Amanda used her close ties within her community to secure work, while Christopher used Craigslist, a platform that allowed job seekers to find gigs within a local area. Also, both job seekers landed on-call service jobs (proofreader and mover) that were oriented towards community needs and demands. This finding further speaks to the opportunity to support working-class job seekers to land alternative community-based work outside the traditional labor market.

5 DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has reconfigured the ways people live, work, interact, and communicate. While our results identify challenges that were not unique to the labor market during the pandemic (i.e., a lack of personal connection and interaction during participants’ online job-seeking process [59] and employer feedback [21]; the growing competition and precarity of the labor market [25]; and concerns about infection and health conditions (RQ1)), the health crisis intensified these pre-existing conditions. Although all job seekers shared similar concerns, our results highlight how working-class individuals were more precarious in light of the health crisis than their upper-middle-class peers. We identified in Table 2 how both classes of job seekers employed sociotechnical practices to navigate these challenges in their day-to-day life (RQ2).

In the following sections, we first discuss how our work contributes to theorizing the notion of everyday resilience and making visible the emotional labor in building and practicing resilience. We reveal how CSCW can benefit from rethinking traditional production and advocating for employment alternatives while supporting individual resilience within the current labor market structure. This work concludes with design opportunities to better support and rethink job seekers’ everyday resilience, with a focus on the working-class contexts. Together, our work uncovers

CSCW research opportunities in the form of implications like inclusivity, individual agency, and community-based work models to be further understood in future research.

5.1 Attending to the Process of Everyday Resilience

Central to our work is everyday resilience, and particularly how this concept further theorizes CSCW's understanding of resilience. As mentioned, the social science view of resilience often orients toward the adaptive, coping, and participative capacities of social systems to orchestrate informed responses to external disturbances [56]. In contrast, the resilience practices observed in our work and some past CSCW studies (e.g., [64, 81, 98]) are integral to individuals' everydayness where the prolonged adversities and life disruptions have become part of daily life. Our work shows how COVID-19 and unemployment imposed varied challenges, which forced individuals to consider whether and how they would continue participating in the labor market, earn a wage as usual, and fulfill basic needs. Both upper-middle-class and working-class participants demonstrated initiative as reflexive agents capable of adapting to the uncertainties in a disruptive labor market. They turned to online tools for job applications, prepared for an even more competitive job market, and moved on with little feedback from employers. Aligning with Lenette et al.'s findings that focused on the ordinariness of resilience practiced by refugee women in Australia [54], we found that job seekers' resilience was situated in their daily life. And this embodies an entanglement of trying to return to the former "normal" state, muddling through the crisis, and reinventing oneself for a future career.

Our findings speak to the prior literature that attends to the processual nature of resilience [9, 54, 96]. Building on this literature, we further suggest that everyday resilience is a process of *becoming resilient*. This process speaks to individuals' improvisational adjustment to and negotiation with ever-shifting social environments and relationships. What resilience means is not self-evident—in this case, resilience is not a static or constant state. For example, recall that Amy had to navigate the trade-off between securing her basic financial needs and self-upgrading in preparation for the "previous normal"; Shannon adjusted her job search practices based on the needs of her loved ones and how they perceived the environment. For Amy and Shannon, both upper-middle-class job seekers, such negotiation happened over time. This negotiation gave practical meanings to resilience and led to everyday achievements, whether taking health classes for future businesses or making a living by taking on temporary jobs. Meanwhile, existing resources, often related to class backgrounds and values, determine job seekers' resilience practices. As shown in our findings, no working-class job seekers used new digital resources for the sake of reskilling and emotional support, nor did they see the immediate benefits of doing so. Rather, they turned to what was familiar (e.g., wanting to use the phone versus the Internet) and were limited by the resources that were not readily available (e.g., limited funding for reskilling).

Redirecting the understanding of resilience to a process of becoming resilient is of particular interest to CSCW, given the field's long history of investigating the practical meanings of mundane activities in everyday life. For example, Suchman's seminal work in the workplace context reminds us of how routine clerical work that is done is not determined by a prescribed standard workflow but by workers in the process of getting procedural tasks done [92]. While a standard workflow specifies an expected outcome, it does not consider practical contingencies or suggest how the workflow should be achieved. The standard workflow only has meaning in relation to the unfolding of Clerical workers' "unstructured" activities in each case they work on. Aligning our understanding and thinking with Suchman's, we argue that job seekers' ongoing practical actions of negotiating with the particulars of their disrupted situations and surroundings constitutes the meaning of resilience. This thinking of resilience joins past scholarship and questions the assumptions of what constitutes resilient/non-resilient responses to crises and external disruptions [54, 95]. For future

CSCW research and design, attending to the process of becoming resilient means redirecting our focus from the traits and outcomes of resilience to the process of how resilience comes into being in everyday negotiation. More specifically, (1) what resilience means when we design for resilience, and (2) how we can better support the day-to-day negotiation and judgment involved in becoming resilient.

5.2 Making Visible the Emotional Labor in Everyday Resilience

By bridging the concept of everyday resilience with the analytical lens of infrastructure, past CSCW literature considered building and practicing everyday resilience through technologies as ongoing infrastructuring [81]. Through this infrastructural analytical lens, we can make visible the backstage elements and labor embedded in the infrastructure through moments of “infrastructural inversion” [88]. Our findings uncover how the process of becoming resilient is permeated with precarity, vulnerability, and feelings of frustration. Everyday resilience is affective. The common sentiment of “I’ll get back up to doing it” required both upper-middle-class and working-class job seekers to undertake labor in emotion management and remain professional to continue participating in a precarious labor market. These affective demands additionally contributed to job seekers’ constant self-governance and self-engineering, besides navigating the growing intertwinement of their personal and professional lives. In addition, if the ongoing negotiation with one’s situations and surroundings constitutes everyday resilience, then we must recognize that emotional and invisible work is indispensable to such negotiation [89]. Among other CSCW scholars, Star, Suchman, and Bowker have demonstrated how the logic of rendering labor (in)visible is inherently political [10, 88, 89, 91]. In this light, future research and design should pay attention to the emotional labor individuals and communities undertake in maintaining an optimistic mindset, relying on existing resources, and facilitating community-based care—things shown to be the foundation of infrastructuring everyday resilience [98]. Otherwise, the systematic overlooking of emotional labor in everyday resilience could lead to a displacement of such labor and justify further exploitation.

To take this further, our results confirm past employment studies in HCI that job seekers from different classes had unequal access to information, resources, and social support to absorb and overcome the emotional challenges faced in their job search [20, 22, 57]. While it was common for upper-middle-class job seekers to rely on existing professional networks to share their feelings and seek both emotional and instrumental support through these networks, working-class job seekers did not report relying on their networks in this way. Our results suggest that some working-class job seekers relied on close family members, while many were left to deal with their frustration alone. Working-class job seekers were forced to switch to online job searching, which required additional labor in learning what online tools to use and how to use them appropriately. Additionally, recall that working-class individuals repeatedly expressed fear of getting infected at work and had to calculate and negotiate the trade-offs between returning to front-line positions with high health risks and not being able to afford basic material needs. Again, emotional labor required for these negotiations remains invisible in the resilience discourse. To this end, we interrogate past findings that working-class individuals tend to undertake surface-level emotional labor in their job search [83]. The “diligence game” played by working-class individuals (i.e., demonstrating high motivation and diligence, strong work ethic, and commitment to work in job-seeking [83]) is highly personal and emotional. In other words, the promise of resilience is unevenly distributed among different social groups and along class lines. The emotional labor for resilience was disproportionately displaced on working-class individuals.

Building on past CSCW and HCI scholars’ critiques of existing political economy and capitalist production [5, 49, 53, 75], we argue that future CSCW researchers and designers should carefully attend to the invisible work that individuals perform in their everyday economic life and resilience.

The more significant point here is that attention is needed to understand how the distribution of emotional labor could reproduce unequal class conditions on the macro level. Past literature has warned us that social vulnerability along the lines of class is closely tied to resilience building in response to disruptions [51] and that the most vulnerable and marginalized groups within society tend to suffer the most in crises and external disruptions [72, 93]. We therefore argue that overlooking the classed and structural logic of resilience risks romanticizing individuals' coping mechanisms, which in effect unevenly distributes the responsibilities of bouncing back from crisis among different social groups. Critiques have also cautioned how emphasizing individual responsibility in resilience, in a way, could feed into the logic of neoliberal approaches of governance while obscuring the ongoing reproduction of power hierarchy and the exploitation of working-class people [50, 65]. With the growing interest in designing for resilience in our field, we propose that future designers and technologists move toward designing to support individuals' agency in resilience, while attending to the opportunities to interrogate the broader historical and structural constructs [47]. For example, how can we reimagine the labor market and support alternative working methods while better supporting the negotiation and judgment activities embedded in job seekers' everyday resilience in the existing labor market? As discussed next, our investigation of individuals' resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic makes space to move beyond passive adaptation to identify potential opportunities for transformation [15].

5.3 CSCW Opportunities to Support Everyday Resilience and Foster Alternatives

For CSCW, supporting everyday resilience involves the questions of how system design can better support the negotiation embedded in the process of becoming resilient and how system design can shape and foster alternative structures that start to emerge in existing resilience practices.

5.3.1 Supporting Emotional Needs Amid Disruptions. While emotional support was critical to all job seekers' resilience practices during the pandemic, our results have shown differences in how upper-middle-class and working-class job seekers approached it. In other words, the need to find emotional support was indeed shared by job seekers across social classes. For both upper-middle-class and working-class job seekers, emotional support amid unemployment and the pandemic focused on recognizing shared emotions and experiences, receiving words of encouragement, and perceiving a sense of being cared for, aligning with past CSCW scholarship [20, 31]. However, we saw that some upper-middle-class individuals turned to online platforms like LinkedIn for social support, whereas working-class individuals often relied on close ties offline.

This salient gap in seeking emotional support showcases that individuals' practices and values of technology use and non-use are situated in the structural differences in their everyday lives, aligning with past CSCW work [1, 18]. From the social perspective, past findings have shown that the working-class contexts require individuals to be aware of the social hierarchy and their positions in the hierarchy, whereas the upper-middle-class contexts tend to promote "an assumption of equality with others" and individual-focused behaviors [90, p.614]. Working-class individuals might hence be less willing to seek support from social connections [18]. In addition, being unemployed can add a layer of stigma, which hinders working-class individuals from sharing their needs with others [41]. More recent research suggests that former professionals experiencing long-term employment face stigma in similar ways and find it difficult and distressful to reach out to their social networks for support [84]. From a design perspective, HCI researchers uncovered a notion of "us versus them" thinking that the design and use of online platforms unfold [20]. Working-class individuals do not turn to platforms like LinkedIn for social support because they do not identify a sense of inclusivity on these platforms [20]. Meanwhile, the perceived lack of nonverbal cues in technology-mediated communication and the technical challenges in learning new digital systems

also restrained working-class job seekers in the present study from seeking emotional support online.

While we might turn to prior literature suggesting the use of online spaces for marginalized job seekers to provide support [21], our findings, especially those from working-class job seekers, tell a different strategy. Working-class job seekers turned to close ties, like immediate family members or close friends, either in person or using the traditional phone call. This finding aligns with more recent literature uncovering adverse consequences among vulnerable communities seeking emotional support online to cope with the threat of unemployment and catching COVID-19 amid the pandemic [29]. Coping strategies of a Latinx population included accessing reliable information, cognitive strategies (e.g., normalizing, validation, perspective-taking/reframing, collectivist thinking, self-compassion, gratefulness [29]), spirituality, and social support. While our job seekers did not express the need for spirituality or cognitive strategies, they did seek social support and reliable information. They found comfort from emotional distress in their trusted loved ones and even felt connected to researchers during our research interviews. Building from prior CSCW literature, interventions like human libraries [46] could promote participation and experience sharing within local communities, as we saw in our research interviews. Such interventions can connect working-class job seekers with the relationships they have already trusted in and feel comfortable sharing feelings with, such as with close families, friends, or local community members. Future research could explore ways for working-class individuals to make visible their emotional concerns and, perhaps more important, challenge the discursive notion that their emotional labor is not legitimate or essential in their job search [83].

5.3.2 Fostering Emergent Alternative Ways of ‘Work’. As noted, one’s everyday resilience involves attempting to return to the old normal, adapting and muddling through the current disruptions, and, more important, responding creatively to reinvent oneself for the future. Therefore, besides better supporting the navigation of the existing labor market, understanding everyday resilience opens opportunities to identify alternatives and different politics around how work could look [15]. To this end, our work speaks to the ongoing CSCW debate: “What does the ‘work’ in Computer-Supported Cooperative Work mean?” [79]. Our findings shed light on the potential for systems to support the re-organization of power relations around “work” and departure from the labor relations entrenched in a capitalist logic.

As our findings indicate, besides attempting to re-participate in the traditional labor market, working-class job seekers have already started seeking alternative ways of making a living. For example, Amanda managed to get paid by proofreading for her friends and family; Christopher found informal moving gigs on Craigslist; several upper-middle-class job seekers also tried to get casual work through online platforms like Indeed and Crowdsurf. It is worth noting that the informal proofreading and moving gigs that Amanda and Christopher managed to undertake were not mediated through gig work platforms or established in the traditional capitalist labor relations. In fact, these informal work opportunities were located within the existing bonds of families, friends, and communities.

Peer-to-peer prototypes and systems like job co-ops [42] and time-banking systems [24, 85] have illustrated how CSCW systems could amplify and support what Amanda and Christopher informally attempted to achieve through resilience. Our empirical findings confirm the need for such systems to support community-based alternative work models. We see opportunities for systems like these to make visible people’s everyday needs (e.g., Christina was willing to work as a babysitter so that her kid could hang out with other kids) and turn these needs into potential work opportunities for community members with corresponding resources. Future research could look into how methods like participatory speculative design [11, 38] might be employed to launch

such initiatives with working-class individuals and varied community stakeholders. It is worth noting that we are not calling for new substitutions for gig work and sharing economy platforms that do not challenge the fundamental logic of exploitation embedded in capitalist production. A wealth of research has covered how the sharing economy contests the boundaries of waged labor [14, 32, 49], engineers one's embodied emotional performance and bodily presentation into economic production [75], and reinforces societal class structures [28, 35, 37]. Instead, we propose a mode of work that has already been practiced within communities and orients towards mutual support and cooperation.

Situating these efforts within local communities will also provide and develop sources of local social support while supporting collective knowledge and skill-building. As we have shown in the findings, the gap in the upskilling/reskilling narrative between working-class and upper-middle-class job seekers speaks to upper-middle-class job seekers' privileged resources compared to working-class individuals' and the neoliberal logic embedded in the demand for constant self-upgrading for employers' needs [17]. While dedicating time to upskill and reskill on the surface seems plausible, we argue that it can be a reactive and, in fact, a complicit response to the expanding automation in today's political economy. Building on past scholarship that advocates for individuals' and communities' agency over upskilling/reskilling [17], it is worth asking, *Who* has control over the discourse of reskilling and upskilling? And who benefits from workers' reskilling and upskilling?

To this end, design interventions could support the shift of upskilling and reskilling from avoiding being displaced by automation to actively supporting alternative work and community collective capacity building [46]. Future research and design could explore ways to assist individuals in developing and practicing tangible skills (that eventually benefit the collective activities and goals within the community) through the community-based alternative work model we discussed earlier. Work in CSCW and HCI has identified community-driven self-development and reciprocity as a key motivations for minoritized individuals participate in infrastructuring peer-to-peer sharing platforms [23, 85]. This way, we might begin resisting the neoliberal trope and redirecting reskilling/upskilling to foster and sustain an alternative mode of work that contributes to collective goods and mutual support.

6 LIMITATIONS

Our work has three limitations regarding sampling and recruitment. First, because we recruited using Qualtrics, those who responded had Internet access and some level of basic digital literacy to interact with the site. Thus, our results are biased toward those who had ongoing Internet access and were aware of Qualtrics. Second, we conducted our interviews between July and October 2020. During this time, qualified U.S. citizens might have received economic stimulus payments to support their Internet access and ongoing job search. Our results do not capture conditions job seekers might have faced while unemployed and without benefits. Finally, the majority of our participants were White women. In the U.S., while women are more likely to be unemployed than men, non-White people are more likely to be unemployed than white people [67]. Thus, our participant pool was not fully representative of those most likely to be unemployed.

In addition, future work can look into various types of support that did not arise from our work. For instance, follow-up studies can examine the role of local communities in job search and whether people received emotional support from social ties who might have attended the same faith or social organizations.

7 CONCLUSION

This work aimed to understand upper-middle-class and working-class job seekers' experiences with job searching and how they practiced everyday resilience during the COVID-19 health crisis. While

job seekers from upper-middle and working classes experienced similar challenges during the crisis, our results show that working-class job seekers undertook additional labor in building and practicing resilience in flux. This unequal distribution of invisibilized emotional labor in realizing the promise of resilience across classes adds nuance to the understanding of everyday resilience in CSCW. Future CSCW design and research should carefully examine the broader historical and structural constructs in which one's agency and resilience are located. Otherwise, the labor in realizing resilience could be displaced to the margins of society while continuing to reproduce and conceal exploitation.

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