WHEN 'BOUNCING BACK' IS HARMFUL: EXPLORING THE DARK SIDE OF INDIVIDUAL RESILIENCE

ABSTRACT

Prior research has mostly considered individual resilience as a positive capacity enabling a person to handle adversity and maintain or regain their well-being. However, the potential pitfalls one may encounter while building individual resilience have been relatively less studied. Based on an exploratory empirical study of early career academics, we show how they build resilience through two types of practices: bright and dark. While bright practices increase *latent capacities* – capacities that are in place before they can be used – dark practices do not contribute to them and can be damaging for the people who engage in them. In examining the dark side of individual resilience, we reveal the potentially dysfunctional coping practices that enable resilience, but which may be destructive, cause suffering and make resilience less likely in the future. We argue that building individual resilience is a complex and variable process, which needs to be continually renewed and readjusted in the face of ongoing personal, organizational and environmental challenges.

Key words: individual resilience, dark resilience, latent resilience, academic well being

INTRODUCTION

The focus in research on the positive side of resilience is apparent. Resilience is usually presented as positive, dynamic and related to individual agency (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2022; Powley, 2009; Shin et al., 2012; Windle, 2011). Individual resilience refers to positive adaptation in the face of hardship, the ability to maintain one's mental health despite experiencing significant distress and to overcome one or more shocks and regain a degree of balance (Herrman et al., 2011; Kossek & Perrigino, 2016; Luthar et al., 2000; Ollier-Malaterre, 2010). The positive side is so significant that a whole stream of resilience research has been labelled as the 'heroic understandings of resilience' and sees resilience as bouncing back 'heroically' in reaction to adverse events (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2022) or considers resilient individuals such as entrepreneurs as having a quasi-heroic quality (Elias et al., 2022).

Yet, as Williams et al. (2017: 758) point out, 'although resilience clearly plays a positive role in organizing in the face of adversity, there are likely "downsides" to resilience in certain scenarios, which to date are virtually unexplored'. This constitutes a call to extend our understanding of resilience and to consider its dark side or the 'cost of resilience' (Williams at al., 2017): the potential 'long-term maladaptive outcomes of drawing on certain psychological capacities and/or adopting certain coping strategies (such as repressive coping) despite the initial advantages they offer for building resilience' (Ahmed et al., 2022: 25). Moving in this direction, some studies do, for example, underline the importance of negative emotions in building resilience (e.g. Barton & Kahn, 2019; Williams et al., 2017). Mahdiani and Ungar (2021) distinguish between functional and less functional resilience with regard to contexts, degrees of risk and types of resilience. However, more research is needed to examine the dark side of individual resilience (Mahdiani & Ungar, 2021).

In response, we develop in this paper a deeper study of resilience, acknowledging its dark side. We draw on research that describes resilience as a dynamic *process* of adaptation rather than as a fixed stable personality trait (Windle, 2011) or as a mere capacity (Kossek & Perrigino, 2016). We therefore formulate our research questions as follows: *How does an individual build resilience in coping with adversity? What are the potential downsides of individual resilience building?*

As resilience has earned a place in the ongoing debate about academic well-being (Gray et al., 2018; Siltaloppi et al., 2019), we decided to study resilience among early career academics. In particular, we investigated how PhD students build resilience in the face of difficulties encountered during their PhD journey. We combined various data sources including semi-structured formal interviews, participant observation and numerous informal conversations to shed light on the ongoing and various ways in which PhD students built their resilience in the face of adversity.

Our study offers the following contributions. First and most important, we emphasize the dark nature of some coping practices which, while they do help to build resilience, do so at a very high cost to the individual including negative somatic impact, isolation or negative emotions. We extend the understanding of resilience by empirically identifying the use of coping practices that may be either bright or dark, challenging the purely positive accounts of resilience found in the literature.

Second, we propose a broader definition of resilience as a capacity-building process which needs to be continually renewed and readjusted in the face of ongoing personal, organizational and environmental challenges. To build resilience, individuals employ two types of coping practices – bright and dark – and draw on social, organizational and personal resources. We refer to personal resources that are in place before they can be used as *latent resilience*. We argue that bright practices reinforce

and build latent resilience. On the contrary, dark practices do not contribute to latent resilience building and thus make resilience less likely in the future.

Third, we argue that resilience incorporates both latent and manufactured elements that are in constant interaction. By highlighting the processual nature of resilience, we also emphasize its two important features: continuity and variability. We contend that resilience can be achieved through a wide spectrum of practices ranging from bright to dark.

In the following section, we discuss the opportunity to delve into an unresearched area of resilience, its dark side. We also review the literature on static versus processual views of resilience. Next, we present our research setting and methodology. In the findings section, we identify the bright and dark coping practices of early career academics and develop a model using interacting causal loop diagrams, which shows that building individual resilience is a relational, interactive, variable and ongoing process.

EXPLORING THE DARK SIDE OF RESILIENCE

Many studies on resilience consider it to be a positive capacity or outcome (Guillén, 2021; Luthar et al., 2000; van den Berg et al., 2021). Such outcomes may be perceived as the end-point of resilience, reflecting the 'maintenance of normal development or functioning (mental or physical health), or better than expected development or functioning, given exposure to the adversity under question' (Windle, 2011). The notion of resilience sometimes refers to the maintenance of a positive attitude and the capacity to adapt under adversity and particularly the ability of individuals to resist changes that threaten their self-actualization (Siltaloppi et al., 2019). Resilience involves ‘struggling well’ (Barton & Kahn, 2019), i.e. facing adversity with eyes wide open and working

through it rather than avoiding difficulties, and has been described as 'the force that drives a person to grow through adversity and disruptions' (Richardson, 2002: 308). Resilient people have three characteristics: they accept the harsh realities they face, find meaning in difficult times and have the ability to improvise (Coutu, 2002). These studies view resilience as a positive process, whereby individuals or organizations reestablish their equilibrium by building coping strategies that attempt to mobilize present resources and immaterial resources accumulated in the past.

While the positive side of resilience seems self-evident, some studies have highlighted the potential negative aspects of it. For example, Williams et al. (2017) point out the role of negative emotions in improving the process of making sense of the causes that led to a disturbance. Individuals who do not respond to these 'sensemaking triggers' may fail to readjust and therefore will not regain their equilibrium.

Regarding the group level, Barton and Kahn (2019: 1426) highlight the complicated role of emotions in building group resilience, stating that 'rushing towards positivity may even inhibit psychological integration'. Thus, while positive emotions can improve resilience, the authors suggest that resilience theorizing should recognize the importance of turning towards rather than away from negative emotions (Barton & Kahn, 2019). This is interesting for two reasons. First, they integrate the role of negativity into the concept of resilience. Second, they highlight the role of negativity in the processual nature of resilience: by grappling with anxiety, for example, a group can build resilience. The role of negativity is acknowledged, but the outcome is necessarily positive.

Some scholars have suggested exploring the dark side of resilience without adopting such a critical stance, acknowledging that this area of future research 'came as a bit of a surprise' (Williams et al., 2017: 756). At the individual level, high resilience

can be associated with narcissism and self-enhancement, which raises the question of self-awareness. In the case of entrepreneurship, self-enhancement might help entrepreneurs cope with adversity, but when combined with narcissism and negative perceptions from others it might also limit their ability to draw on social support that could aid in coping (Ahmed et al., 2022). At the group level, CEO studies show that a combination of CEO narcissism and poor corporate governance practices generally erodes an organization's resilience to shocks (Buyl et al., 2019), but a distinction can be made at the individual level between 'grandiose narcissism', positively related to resilience, and 'vulnerable narcissism', negatively related to it (Sękowski et al., 2021). Constant resilience can undermine resilient capability and lead to negative health consequences in the long run (Hill et al., 2016) and an excessive degree of individual resilience may bring a dysfunctional dimension to positive adaptation, resulting in a darker picture of resilience (Mahdiani & Ungar, 2021). What can be labeled the 'dark side' of resilience is thus associated with the *cost of resilience functioning*, which 'may – under some conditions – create the basis for a subsequent major disruption' and which 'influences escalation of commitment to failing courses of action, delayed decisions to terminate poorly performing endeavors, and inability to readjust and change course' (Williams et al., 2017: 757). These costs include overly positive self-conceptions, which can obstruct 'learning to fail intelligently' (Cannon & Edmondson, 2005) from past experiences with adversity. The dark side of resilience reveals that a certain lack of awareness can result in a high cost of functioning for the resilient individual.

RESILIENCE AS 'LATENT' CAPACITIES AND PROCESS

Resilience is mostly considered as a capacity, an important 'resource reservoir' (Shin et al., 2012) that helps individuals manage the instability and difficulties they

experience. While some research focuses on the role of ‘systems’ (families, services, groups, and communities) in helping people cope with adversity, and considers organizational design as an asset in developing the resilience of employees (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011), resilience at work is also studied as a personal resource that the organizational context may encourage or discourage (Meneghel et al., 2016).

This *latent* capacity for resilience, which is in place before it needs to be used, is central in resilience research. The influence of an individual's life trajectory on their resilience appeared as an area of research with the first studies on individual resilience (Murphy & Moriarty, 1976). Some studies consider the various sources of resilience to be personal factors (including personality traits, internal locus of control, optimism), biological factors, and environmental–systemic factors, as well as the interaction between these factors (Herrman et al., 2011). Resilient individuals have the time, energy, and resources to bounce back and return to a state of equilibrium (Youssef & Luthans, 2007).

Regarding the group level, Moenkemeyer et al. (2012) show that project members’ potential to positively adjust after a setback, such as the failure of an innovation project, is fundamental. Shin et al. (2012) also see resilience as ‘a resource derived from employees' own psychological makeup that may enable them to commit to the implementation of organizational change’ and they identify the protective effects of resilience on individuals’ reactions to change in a work setting. Employees with more psychological resilience are likely to respond more favorably to change and experience more positive emotions than other employees. Resilience shapes employees' attitudinal and behavioral reactions to change (Shin et al., 2012). From an individual perspective, resilience can also be seen as a key component of an individual’s career identity, the latter being a potentially actionable asset in career management. A resilient career

identity involves ‘perceiving oneself as someone who overcomes career difficulties successfully and follows a positive developmental trajectory despite obstacles’ (Vough & Caza, 2017). Resilience is a specific component of identity that can influence potential career-related behavioral outcomes: individuals that see themselves as resilient will have the cognitive and emotional resources to put additional effort into their career while individuals who lack resilience may be burnt out after a career failure (Vough & Caza, 2017). This corroborates the studies stating that the capacity for resilience also helps the individual recognize the potential destructive impact that difficulties can have and hence the need to bounce back (Youssef & Luthans, 2007).

Scholars also conceptualize resilience as a *process*. For example, Windle (2011), who conducted a multidisciplinary systematic review and concept analysis combined with empirical insights, defines resilience as 'the process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress or trauma (…) Assets and resources within the individual, their life and environment facilitate this capacity for adaptation and "bouncing back" in the face of adversity.' (p.12).

Resilience refers to a dynamic positive process of adaptation in the face of adversity, and the focus of resilience research has progressively ‘turned away from identifying key factors associated with resilience, to the understanding of mechanisms by which they might operate’ (Windle, 2011: 5). According to Youssef and Luthans (2007: 778), 'resilience allows not only reactive recovery but also proactive learning and growth through tackling challenges.’ Importantly, the focus of resilience also ‘goes beyond just the additive sum of one’s assets and risk factors’. Resilience is rooted in the need for flexibility, adaptation, and even improvisation in situations characterized by change and uncertainty, where individuals have to build their assets, risk-

management strategies, and, ‘most importantly, facilitating cognitive, emotional, and behavioral adaptational processes’ (Youssef & Luthans, 2007: 794).

The context in which these resilience capacities are mobilized is also key. For resilience to come into play, there must be an event perceived by the individual as a challenge that will mobilize them. For example, a crisis ‘tests resilience, thereby revealing capabilities that are not well known or clearly understood’ (Lee et al., 2020: 1043). Powley (2009: 1299) conceptualizes various social mechanisms related to resilience activation such as the alteration of relational structures or a temporal holding space where organizational members readjust ‘psychologically, emotionally, and relationally’. Studies in the organizational context ‘predominantly treat resilience as a factor that influences a setback’s impact on individuals, thereby neglecting this setback’s potential influence on resilience’ (Moenkemeyer et al., 2012). Thus, resilience is both rooted in a capacity and the ability to use this capacity, which is mobilized on the go and in the context. The study of resilience can help us to understand ‘why similar misfortunes may lead to significantly different outcomes’ (Siltaloppi et al., 2019).

Several of the key papers we reviewed have called for research into the very promising dark resilience perspective, calling into question the positive assumptions that underpin current resilience scholarship and challenging our conventional understanding of the concept. We seek to do so by combining the latent and processual perspectives, while acknowledging the contemporary comprehension of the concept. Opportunities for advances in resilience research therefore lie in exploring its dark side and the link between the capabilities and processes which, together, constitute resilience (Williams et al., 2017).

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

To investigate individual resilience, we chose to study early career academics, specifically PhD students. Many studies have documented how the PhD journey is riddled with individual and structural difficulties, with dire consequences on students' well-being and mental health (e.g. Edwards et al 2021; Levecque et al. 2017). These difficulties encountered by doctoral students can be categorized in three types: (i) academic difficulties that encompass the work practices inherent in obtaining a doctorate, ranging from feelings of incompetence while writing the dissertation (Pyhältö & Keskinen, 2012) to managing the relationship with the supervisor (Cohen & Baruch, 2021); (ii) well-being and social life difficulties that pertain to how doctoral students deal with stress, high workloads and role conflict (Levecque et al., 2017); and (iii) resource difficulties as doctoral students try to access the financial and informational resources needed for success (Sverdlik et al., 2018).

We conducted an empirical investigation of how PhD students develop and combine their coping strategies to deal with the challenges of the PhD journey. To explore the concept of resilience through PhD students' personal trajectories, we conducted 31 semi-structured interviews between December 2021 and August 2022 at a French business school. Interviews were conducted either in English or in French, some of them online via Google Meet or Zoom, and lasted an hour on average. Of the 31 respondents (20 female and 11 male), 18 were PhD students at the time of the interview and 13 were alumni (having defended their thesis no later than 2014). Most of them (21) started their PhD between the ages of 25 and 29. The variety of profiles can also be seen in the amount of professional experience they had before entering the PhD program: 52% had less than five years, 35% between 5 and 10 years, and 13% more than ten years. Twenty-one of them are French, the others are from different American,

Asian and European countries. When quoting from the participants, we assigned them North American pseudonyms.

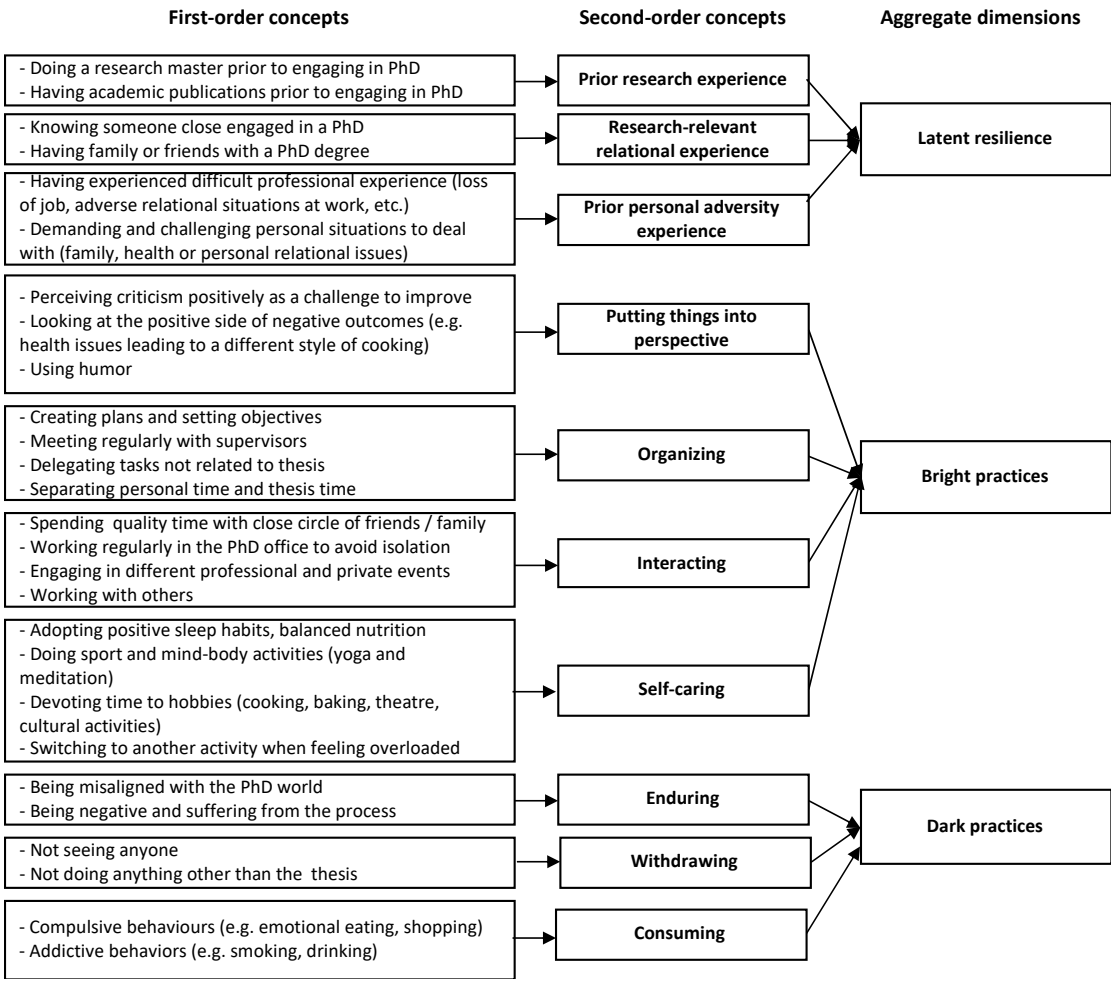
The interviewers were either PhD students themselves or graduates of the program, which likely fostered complicity with the interviewee given their common experience of the PhD journey. This facilitated candid speech and limited the interviewee's fear of being judged on difficult or awkward periods. We were aware that the peer effect would also lead the interviewers to experience emotions since the study is conducted from an emic perspective and can easily lead to self-related issues (Murchison, 2010). This empathy was necessary, but needed to be collectively regulated (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014).

Numerous informal conversations between the authors and the PhD students and/or alumni also made a major contribution to our study. These informal conversations occurred spontaneously at different kinds of events, such as seminars, workshops or informal social events and allowed us to establish a bond of trust with the interviewees. They also helped to contextualize the data collected during the interviews by providing the authors with an insider's perception of the PhD program culture. One of the authors is a PhD supervisor, which provided another perspective through her interactions with and observations of PhD students and informal exchanges with other supervisors.

We analyzed our data using the three-step process advocated by Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013). In our first-order analysis we mainly used the interviews to generate concepts, although other data sources such as direct participation and observation as well as informal conversations were very useful as well. For each interview, a pair of authors interpreted and coded the concepts independently in the first step. The consensual coding was done through a cyclical analytical process during

regular meetings of all authors held once a month for six months. The first-order concepts were then grouped into second-order themes which were finally grouped into aggregate dimensions in the third step (see Figure 1 for the data structure). For example, we coded 'perceiving criticism positively as a challenge to improve', 'looking at the positive sides of negative outcomes (e.g. health issues leading to a different style of cooking)', and 'using humour' as first-order concepts, which we then grouped into a second-order theme ‘putting things into perspective’. Next, we grouped this theme together with other second-order themes ‘interacting’, ‘organizing’, and ‘self-caring’ into the aggregate dimension ‘bright side of resilience.’

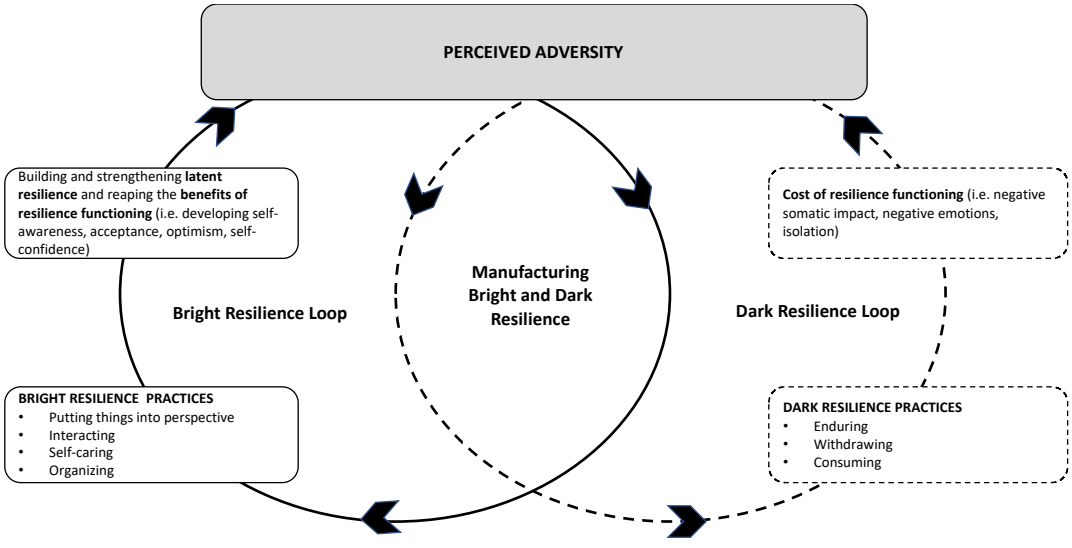
Figure 1. Short data structure.



FINDINGS

We have structured our findings as follows. First, we will discuss how the perceived adversity of PhD students depends on a variety of factors such as constraints and resources, including prior latent resilience as a personal resource. Second, we will depict the bright resilience loop based on bright resilience practices that help to reinforce and build latent resilience. Next, we will explain when and why the resilience manufacturing process can be dark. For this, we describe the dark resilience loop (see Figure 2) that may help to handle adversity, but at a high cost of functioning, i.e., it may be harmful and cause suffering without contributing to latent resilience building. Finally, we will discuss the relational and interactive nature of these loops.

Figure 2. Manufacturing bright and dark resilience



PERCEIVED ADVERSITY – SITUATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND PRIOR LATENT RESILIENCE

Most of the difficulties perceived by the PhD students we interviewed correspond to those identified in the literature and described above in the research

context and methodology section. These difficulties are coded as ‘academic difficulties’ (figuring out the new world of academia with its codes and expectations, especially regarding publishing), ‘role conflict difficulties’ (reconciling their role as a PhD student with their place in the wider social space), and ‘resource difficulties’ (obtaining the necessary financial or administrative resources).

These difficulties may be exacerbated by personal constraints (e.g. illness, loss of a family member), organizational constraints (e.g. having two PhD supervisors with contradictory opinions), or environmental constraints (e.g. Covid-19 pandemic or French bureaucratic regulations). However, resources in the form of organizational and social support can mitigate difficult moments experienced by PhD students. Organizational support refers to the psychological and material resources provided by PhD students' professional network: supervisor(s), PhD program, academic community, or peers. This support helps reduce their academic, role-conflict, or resource difficulties. As for social support, a network of family and friends helps PhD students cope with stress.

Finally, according to our data, PhD students who have already developed latent resilience or personal resources perceive adversity to a lesser degree. We define PhD students’ latent resilience as a capacity forged by personal and past experiences: prior research experience, research-relevant relational experience, and prior personal adversity experience.

Prior research experience, such as having completed a research master’s degree or having published academic articles before starting the PhD, contributes to lowering the stress level triggered by the anxiety of academic reading and writing, uncertainty in the academic publishing process or academic pressure in general. These respondents

have already developed their strategies to cope with this kind of adversity, which therefore reduces their academic, role-conflict or resource difficulties.

Research-relevant relational experience also contributes to lessening stress. As Mia explains:

> *I am very lucky since my family knows both the doctoral journey and academia. My grandfather did two PhDs (in Economics and Management) and my mother has a PhD in Management. They supported me from the very beginning and encouraged me to go further. My family knows the ups-and-downs and the pitfalls of a doctoral journey, and I am very grateful for that.*

Prior personal adversity experience, such as having experienced difficult professional situations (job loss, adverse relationships at work, etc.) or having dealt with demanding and challenging personal situations (family, health or personal relational issues, etc.), increases individual resilience and helps to mobilize coping capacities while lessening the perceived adversity. For instance, Kai had developed the ability to deal with pressure and adversity at work through his rich yet difficult experience:

> *My eight years of professional experience had cooled me down a bit. The relationships were really commercial and consisted of the commodification of the human body. Human relations at work were contract-oriented. One day, people are on first-name terms with you and will tell you 'you're my best friend in the world'. Then, the next day, if you have a problem, they forget about you.*

In particular, it helped him to overcome the legitimacy crisis that most PhD students face while teaching. Kai mentions that '*it is easier to talk about things that you have lived through. In an ethics course, I talked about violence at work. It's a thing I've experienced so it's much easier to talk about it. It's not a hollow word, you see'*.

To deal with perceived adversity and depending on their support, constraints and latent resilience, PhD students will employ bright resilience practices, leading to a bright resilience loop, dark resilience practices, leading to a dark resilience loop, or a combination of both. Both loops and their relationship are explained below.

BRIGHT RESILIENCE LOOP: INCREASING LATENT RESILIENCE

Bright resilience practices constitute a *bright* side of manufacturing resilience as they allow PhD students to overcome difficulties while maintaining or even improving their physical and mental health and ultimately their latent resilience. We will first explain what bright resilience practices consist of and then discuss the reinforcing bright resilience loop.

Bright Resilience Practices

Our data reveal four bright resilience practices: putting things into perspective, organizing, interacting, and self-caring.

Putting things into perspective refers to PhD students' ability to reexamine the situation and keep a positive attitude, generally seeing the glass half full rather than half empty. This includes their ability to look at the positive outcomes of difficult situations. For example, Daphne developed food allergies that she attributed to stress during her thesis work. But instead of suffering, she looked at new ways of eating: *'Actually this inspired me to get into nutrition, learn to eat healthy and pay attention to what I consume. I think I started to be more health conscious after that. That also was a good life lesson on its own' (Daphne)*. This practice allows students to see their PhD within the bigger picture, keeping them grounded: *'I said to myself, well if the PhD is not progressing well, it doesn't matter; life is short, I may die tomorrow. I hope not, but at*

some point, you have to remember the essential' (Jason). Covid-related problems – lockdowns, remote online classes, family losses – were common themes in our interviews. Referring to Covid-related challenges, Dora said: *'I even joke with my husband that I am doing my PhD to relax' (Dora)*. Humor is an important coping practice to deal with situations that are beyond one's control. Putting things into perspective is the mental framing of a difficult event to reduce its negative impact. Through this process PhD students built bright resilience little by little. For Daphne, this process was represented by the song 'September' by Earth, Wind and Fire: '*… never was a cloudy day. Ba-du-da, ba-du-da, ba-du-da, ba-du …'*. Listening to this song reminded her to see things from a positive perspective. This practice also allowed the PhD students to see their journey with optimism, helping them to alleviate their perception of adversity.

Organizing refers to creating schedules, setting objectives, delegating tasks not related to thesis work, and taking time off. *'I wasn't necessarily making more progress working long hours, so what I have learnt is to set reasonable goals. Basically, my goal is to work three hours to be fully focused and fully productive' (Riley)*. This practice requires self-discipline to reap its benefits: *'I still have schedules to organize myself for my week, but it requires real personal rigor. I may have moments when I say to myself "here I want to do this" so I do it, but I still have fixed schedules' (Yara)*. The PhD students acknowledge the importance of taking time off and resting as a crucial part of their organizing practices: *'I am also planning my breaks in advance. I know that I'm going to slow down because it's really important not to always be chained to your desk, otherwise you're no longer productive' (Tyson)*. Organizing practices are self-tailored to each PhD student's needs, allowing them to advance in their PhD journey by building bright resilience.

Interacting refers to engaging with a PhD student community, participating in events, working at the school office to avoid isolation, and spending quality time with family and friends. This practice goes beyond trivial interactions. PhD students talk about meaningful connections where they can share their struggles: *'It's about real human encounters, that's important… It's important to have someone you can really confide in, share what you feel, your doubts, your questions, and who will understand because the doctoral experiences will resonate with him.* ' *(Kai)*. Some PhD students have created *'working groups'* to review their work, share ideas, and provide support. This practice helps them to *'take the pressure off'* as it allows them to *'explain what I'm going through' (Abigail)* and avoid isolation. Social interactions are a powerful resource in building bright resilience as they provide encouragement and support the PhD student going through adversity: *'I made friends and that's what encouraged me the most to go all the way. That allowed me to keep my spirits up a bit, hang in there and ultimately complete my dissertation' (Carly).*

Self-caring refers to taking care of oneself and knowing one's limitations. This includes having good healthy habits, doing sport and mindfulness activities, communicating about difficulties, and looking for help. *'I learned to listen to my intuition, to take more time for me and to take care of myself, because that's the biggest asset I have' (Riley).* Having a healthy diet, getting enough sleep, and physical activity were common practices of our participants. *'Tennis is what centered me. As soon as I had no more energy and I couldn't think anymore, I would go and play tennis for two hours' (Alice)*. Some PhD students turned to professional help to deal with difficulties. Psychotherapy may be part of a coping strategy while building resilience: *'I also saw a therapist for two years at the end of the doctorate, because it was emotionally complicated. It was very scary; you're starting to get fed up. On the one hand you are*

stagnating and at the same time you feel guilty for being stagnant' (Kai). Reaching out for help builds positive resilience as it diminishes tensions and alleviates the perception of adversity. Self-caring acts are very important in the process of building bright resilience: *'I listen to my body and that's something that is extremely important' (Stella)*. Sometimes the importance of self-caring acts is overlooked; however, putting one's wellbeing first is an important component in the process of building bright resilience.

The bright resilience loop (see Figure 2) shows how PhD students respond to perceived stress by employing a combination of bright practices, which is associated with the reinforcement of latent resilience. Thus, this interacting causal loop shows how latent resilience is constantly renewed and reshaped over time and may help to deal with stress in a better way. PhD students who experience this virtuous loop develop self-awareness, acceptance (acquiescence to the reality of their situation, without protesting or trying to change it), optimism, and self-confidence linked to academic recognition and the feeling of belonging to a research community.

DARK RESILIENCE LOOP: HIGH COST OF RESILIENCE FUNCTIONING

Our findings show that PhD students developed maladaptive practices leading to negative outcomes even though they build resilience. The dark resilience loop (see Figure 2) reveals the dark side of manufacturing resilience, portraying the practices that generate negative emotions and isolation, cause negative somatic impacts, and ultimately exact a high cost of resilience functioning. These practices do not contribute to latent resilience building and might even negatively impact the student's physical and

mental health. We will first explain what dark resilience practices are and then discuss the costs of resilience functioning.

Dark Resilience Practices

Our data reveal three practices of this kind: enduring, withdrawing and consuming.

Enduring refers to soldiering on, being determined to get through difficulties. It is associated with long suffering. In a way, this is the opposite of the 'putting into perspective' practice. For example, instead of perceiving criticism positively as an opportunity to improve, PhD students who want to endure may enter a silent suffering mode where they remain very negative about any criticism, sometimes about the whole PhD journey. They might have the impression that this whole PhD universe does not accept them and is not aligned with who they actually are*: 'It didn't work on either side, that is to say that this world didn't accept me, and that's how I lived it. And I didn't necessarily accept this world, because it's rigid' (Carly)*. They might also suffer considerably when they are unable to see how a PhD journey can be associated with any positive feelings: *'When I think of my PhD, I cannot associate the PhD with joy. They are not compatible' (Layla).* However, notwithstanding all these negative feelings regarding their PhD, they continued the journey until the end.

Withdrawing refers to the practice of disconnecting both emotionally and physically from others. Withdrawing is associated with feelings of isolation and a sense of not belonging professionally speaking: *'This world did not embrace me… throughout the PhD, I did not fit in because I didn't correspond to the PhD student model' (Carly).* Some feel estranged due to their background or scientific approaches: '*I had the impression that as soon as I said I came from a sociology background or that I was*

interested in ethnography, professors looked at me as if I was a bit of a Martian. This was painful in fact' *(Alice)*.

This disconnection may also occur on the personal side. Some PhD students start to isolate themselves more and more from friends and family and sometimes even lose touch with them completely. They might have the impression that only by withdrawing will they have enough time to concentrate on their thesis: *'Friendships also suffered, particularly in the final year of my thesis, I was so stressed that I neglected a lot of friends. I was mentally not capable of juggling my writing and seeing my friends.' (Ariana)* Withdrawing tends to negatively affect the PhD students' relationships with their families. Many respondents indeed report having brought tensions home:

> *What was problematic for my companion was the high stress levels that made me impatient about a lot of things at home. I lost patience a lot [...] I started working very late at night, on weekends, sometimes on public holidays. One evening, my kids went on strike; they didn't want to eat until I was there. So… clearly, uh, it weighed on them (Jane).*

Some of them felt that others could not really understand their situation:

> *I also had the impression of being alienated from my mother because it was difficult for me to explain to her what I was actually doing. I had the impression that the gap between her and me was widening and that it was more and more difficult for me to explain to her what academic life is really about. (Ariana).*

In a similar vein, Carly reports that her withdrawing was because of a lack of understanding: *'I knew I was going to annoy them (friends and family) with my thesis more than have a good time with them, so I preferred to stay home and cut the ties. I locked myself in' (Carly).*

PhD students withdrawing at some point in their PhD journey is very common in our findings and always goes along with quite a lot of suffering because they do not see how they can handle the situation differently. It is often associated with a marked sense of guilt: '*I still try to do my best to be the best father possible, but I don't feel like I am. Because I'm not there enough. When I get angry, it's at them, it's dramatic' (Owen).*

Consuming refers to the emergence of compulsive or even addictive behaviors as coping mechanisms to handle adversity during the PhD journey. It can manifest in dietary behaviors such as emotional eating, as in the case of Tyson who *'tended to take refuge in sweet food'.* This tendency to turn to food for emotional comfort is typically directed toward a specific type of food: comfort food that helps to ease stress. *'The last months before my thesis submission I was chewing a lot of gum and drinking a lot of Coca-Cola, which I have never done again afterwards… completely crazy when I think back about this now' (Ariana).*

Some participants report compulsive shopping behaviors, which developed during their PhD studies: *'I developed an even more intense addiction to buying clothes. For instance, I am currently obsessed with buying sleeping clothes' (Opal).* To deal with negative emotions, some respondents say they started smoking during their PhD studies (e.g. Layla) or report excessive tobacco use: *'I used to smoke during the PhD. I quit three years ago, but I recall smoking a lot of cigarettes at that time' (Kai).* Alcohol consumption is also used as means to reduce stress: *'What soothes me is dining and having drinks with my friends. I do not want to end up an alcoholic by the end of the year, but it is a bit difficult' (Opal).*

Cost of resilience functioning

Figure 2 shows how PhD students employ a combination of practices that constitute the dark side of resilience – practices which help them respond to adversity, but which are associated with health problems, negative emotions, isolation and suffering. Dark practices may emerge in reaction to highly perceived adversity but also due to lower latent resilience capacities. A case in point is that of Carly, who throughout her thesis perceived the academic world as a hostile place, even developing a stress ulcer because of anxiety related to the PhD. In her previous professional and personal experiences, Carly did not have the opportunity to build latent resilience to help her handle the academic experience. Lacking latent resilience capacities, she developed a biased and rather negative view of herself. She mostly employed dark practices to cope: enduring, withdrawing and consuming, which did not help to build latent capacities. Despite engaging in some bright self-caring practices (e.g., consulting a psychologist, a coach, sports activities) and significant support from her supervisor, the PhD was the moment of greatest adversity for Carly. It concluded with a feeling of regret for having engaged in the doctoral experience: '*If I had to do it again, would I do it again? I'm not sure, but I'm leaning more towards no*'.

Although dark practices help to face adversity, they do so at a high cost. We identified the following costs of resilience functioning: negative somatic impact, negative emotions leading to a loss of confidence, students questioning their career path, and isolation. As isolation and the associated sense of not belonging have already been described as a direct consequence of the withdrawing practice, we explain negative somatic impact and negative emotions below.

Negative somatic impact associated with high perception of adversity was developed over time by some PhD students (i.e., sleeping problems, psychological damage, and health or somatization issues). Deterioration of sleep quality was

frequently mentioned: '*All in all, I don't think I was getting the right amount of sleep. Most of the time not at all because of the work we have to do, you know. I wish I had managed my sleep time better though*' *(Daphne).* In the same vein, Layla reports*:* '*Sometimes I find myself emailing at 2 o'clock in the morning. So, since September …. I think I slept like 5 hours, 4 hours per night. I work a lot, even during the weekends, so I'm like cracking. Now I can feel my body is saying no, I cannot take it anymore*'. Numerous temporary effects on physical health were reported by many: headaches and eczema for Opal, general weakness and '*jamming a vertebra'* for Jane, muscle tension, sense of pressure and stiffness for Stella, allergy issues for Daphne. But some also experienced more harmful and long-term impacts on their health (e.g. ulcer and cancer). In addition to these various effects on the body, participants reported difficulties at the psychological level. There were mentions of distress or depression: '*I find [the PhD experience] extremely violent, in terms of depression at times*' (Opal).

Negative emotions such as sadness, frustration, rejection or anxiety are often experienced by PhD students who are trapped in the dark resilience loop, i.e., they mostly resort to dark practices. This dark resilience is echoed in the interest that some respondents take in art associated with negative emotions. For instance, Opal draws a parallel between his doctoral journey and a song by Renaud Flusin called 'Sad & Slow', which is slow and melancholic. Another example is that of Jason, who associates his thesis with the book *The Story of a Life* by Aharon Appelfeld, which relates the story of a young Holocaust survivor and his years of wandering after escaping from the labor camp in which he was held. Some associate the PhD with utterly negative feelings: '*It was painful emotions, almost all along*' (Kai), while others report profound tiredness, anxiety, and obsession: *'I felt this kind of exhaustion, you see, as if you were completely*

emptied from the inside. [...] I cried during the writing process.' (Jane); '*I felt emotionally or let's say mentally very much more anxious' (Jack*).

These negative emotions weaken respondents' self-esteem. Rejections from journals or conferences generate weariness and a loss of confidence: *'After seeing rejections, rejections, rejections, well, I said to myself, I'm never going to get there' (Abigail)*. In addition to creating difficulties for post-PhD recruitment, the difficulties encountered in publishing are described as '*devaluing*' *(Avery)*.

The negative emotions experienced by PhD students may lead them to question their career path. This starts with the recognition of difficulties or lack of interest in academic writing or research in general. Some respondents claimed '*I don't really enjoy reading a hundred articles a month' (Carly)*. Others even report feeling out of place: '*As soon as we started talking about the theoretical corpus, I had the impression of being in orbit*' *(Alice).* The various milestones (publications, conference presentations) throughout the PhD journey were therefore experienced as a burden and factors of significant stress. Doubting the very merits of the work they were doing, students began to question their own value, which caused great frustration. Such doubts sometimes led to an acute sense of pointlessness: *'There really are times when we feel that what we are doing is of no use and a pretty crazy waste of time and energy' (Samantha)*. For PhD students, this senselessness often coincides with a feeling of remoteness, in the sense that 'the outside world' will neither be impacted by nor interested in the work they do: *'There are mornings, I wake up and I say to myself what I am doing sucks, nobody will be interested' (Owen)*.

Once in the PhD program, a preference for the reality of the business world (in terms of time, sociability, and deliverables) may also emerge. Some PhD students lament the lack of tangible deliverables or teamwork that they are accustomed to from

previous experiences. A return to the corporate world is envisioned: *'I envy some of my friends a lot, not necessarily their jobs, but I tell myself that they are lucky to have a proper rhythm. At least they have tasks to do. At the start of the year, I wanted to go back to the corporate world' (Opal).* For knowledge diffusion, some prefer to publish in non-academic media, which may lead to rejection of an academic career: '*I am aware that our papers will be little read, so I like to use The Conversation as a medium where we get a little more feedback through popularization. Who takes the time outside the academic sphere to read management papers?' (Tyson).*

To illustrate the dark resilience loop, some respondents strongly associate their PhD journey with works of art representing the dark sides of humanity. For example, Avery chose Honoré de Balzac's *Lost Illusions* to symbolize her disenchantment: '*I had pictured myself as a fulfilled woman after the PhD, who has a job that she loves, who is a researcher, who publishes and lives in another country, who has stability and is recognized in her field. It's been two years since the defense and it's not the case*'. Layla refers to the *Guernica* painting in which Pablo Picasso expressed his outrage against war. Stella associates her PhD studies with *Purgatory*, a painting by Hieronymus Bosch.

RESILIENCE MANUFACTURING

Our findings (summarized in Figure 2) demonstrate that PhD students may develop bright or dark resilience practices at different moments to cope with the adversity of a demanding PhD program. For example, at the beginning of her thesis, Abigail worked hard at night in order to combine her teaching activities with the development of her thesis. She ended up feeling isolated because she was out of step with her family. Later on, she reorganized her daily activities to strike a healthier

balance between her life as a PhD student and her personal life. For example, she adjusted her work schedule to that of her family and did batch cooking to be less stressed during the week and eat healthily.

In some cases, bright and dark practices might be developed simultaneously. In order to cope with the stress of the thesis, Layla started to smoke, drink coffee excessively, sometimes drink alcohol alone, and developed bad sleeping habits. At the same time, she imposed on herself a very tough sports routine. Layla alternated between bright and dark practices: *'It was very hard for me to find a balance'.*

PhD students may experience bright and/or dark resilience loops, confirming that resilience, while preserving central positive aspects, may also be characterized by negativity.

Our data show that resilience practices constitute a continuum going from one extreme, where some people embrace only bright practices, to the other extreme where some people mostly adopt dark practices. While we have a few examples of PhD students representing each extreme, most respondents employ a combination of bright and dark practices, depending on the challenges they face and at different times. The doctoral journey is often described by many PhD students as an emotional rollercoaster since they experience both positive and negative emotions. Every time PhD students face adversity, there is a continuing process of resilience manufacturing, either bright, dark or a combination of both depending on the ups and downs of their PhD journey and their personal, organizational and environmental challenges.

To illustrate how resilience is built over time, we look at Daphne's PhD journey. At the start of the PhD, she was interacting with her PhD fellows a lot, was keeping things in perspective, and organizing. At one point, she needed to travel regularly to her country of origin for personal reasons. This situation *'was quite stressful'.* Even

though she did not plan for this, she found a way to manage it, but *'having extra personal challenges added on top made it [the PhD] more difficult'*. She was enduring a lot during this period. All the constant traveling had *'an impact'* on her health and she developed a food allergy. However, as mentioned earlier, she was looking for new ways of eating and took this as an opportunity to eat healthily, thus demonstrating the 'putting things into perspective' practice. At the time of our conversation, she had a secure position in academia and had capitalized on this struggle, saying *'this inspired me to get into nutrition'.* Daphne thus experienced both bright and dark resilience loops during her PhD. She found ways of coping and had family members that supported her, but her health deteriorated. However, she developed positive self-awareness and acceptance, as she mentioned *'[it] was a good life lesson on its own'*.

DISCUSSION

By focusing explicitly on the dark side of resilience as well as looking at the fuller picture of resilience as both a capacity and a process to build this capacity to handle adversity, our study differs from the existing literature and participates in the conversation about the negative aspects of resilience. In particular, our findings lead to the following theoretical contributions.

Resilience definition

We extend our understanding of resilience by identifying its different features, summarized in Table 1. We define *resilience as a capacity-building process, which needs to be continually renewed and readjusted in the face of personal, organizational or environmental challenges with the help of various resources (social and*

organizational support as well as latent resilience, i.e., personal resources) and through the use of coping practices that may be bright or dark.

Table 1. Resilience constituents

Resilience features		Characteristics
Presence of adversity	Individual	Personal challenges (e.g., illness, loss of a family member)
	Organizational	Organizational challenges (e.g., difficulties with the supervisor)
	Environmental	Environmental challenges occurring independently of personal and organizational circumstances (e.g., Covid-19 pandemic or state administrative issues).
Resources to 'bounce back' in the face of adversity	Social	Social resources to handle adversity (e.g., support from family and friends).
	Organizational	Organizational resources to handle adversity. For example, the organization may offer human resources support (assign a mentor, provide training, introduce career development methods, set up a support ecosystem, etc.).
	Latent resilience (personal resources)	Capacities that are in place before experiencing the adversity, which are rooted in prior experience, relevant relational experience, and prior personal adversity experience. Can be built up over time through the use of bright practices.
Coping practices	Bright	Employing coping practices that recharge rather than deplete the individual's resilience capacities. These coping practices may include putting things into perspective, organizing, interacting, and self-caring. They contribute to building latent resilience and developing self-awareness, acceptance, optimism, and self-confidence.
	Dark	Employing coping practices that may help to handle adversity, but the cost of resilience functioning is high. They may be harmful and cause suffering (e.g. negative somatic impact, negative emotions or isolation). These coping strategies may include enduring, withdrawing, and consuming. They do not contribute to building latent resilience.
Continuity and variability		Resilience is a process of using coping practices to handle adversity. It needs to be continually renewed and readjusted in the face of ongoing personal, organizational and environmental challenges. The individual experience of resilience varies over time. An individual may employ bright practices at one moment, dark practices at another, or a combination of both.

Resilience as a possible dysfunction

By exploring the dark side of resilience, we respond to the call by Williams et al. (2017) to look into potential dysfunctional coping practices which, although they help to build

resilience, may be harmful and cause suffering. First, we question the purely positive accounts of resilience found in the literature and explore the mechanisms of 'dark practices' along with 'bright practices'. The capacity to recover rapidly from difficulties (Williams et al., 2017) may involve positive adaptation and behaviors (Herrman et al., 2011; Luthar et al., 2000), but also coping practices and behaviors which are negative and which can be damaging for the people who engage in them. Enduring, withdrawing, and consuming behaviors may lead to sabotaging one's life, and people engage in them at the expense of their physical and mental health. These high cost practices constitute dark resilience. It is also important to highlight that dark practices do not contribute to latent resilience building.

Ironically, if acquired in certain ways, resistance to adversity may lead to serious liabilities such as negative somatic impact, isolation, or negative emotions that are associated with a loss of confidence. This brings us to our argument that resilience can be de-correlated from positive outcomes, which contributes to earlier research on the importance of negative emotions on resilience. We propose an approach that tackles the dark side directly: integrating negativity into the concept itself, not just through negative emotions (Williams et al., 2017). Ultimately, and in contrast to existing research, our study also leads to a 'moderate' position that recognizes the dark side of resilience without making it a purely negative concept.

Latent resilience as pre-existing personal resource

Our re-conceptualization of resilience distinguishes between its processual and latent components. We distinguish between latent resilience – already in place before adversity occurs – and manufactured resilience, which is constructed continuously in response to adversity. We define *latent resilience as the capacity to draw resources from different personal and professional past experiences and to mobilize them in a*

given context. Latent resilience is the 'resource reservoir' (Shin et al., 2012) that helps individuals handle adversity.

We argue that bright practices may reinforce latent resilience. Thus, we reconcile different research streams that see resilience either as a personal trait (e.g. Herrman et al., 2011) or as a process (e.g. Westphal & Bonanno, 2007). We argue that the concept of resilience is rooted in both *a capacity and the ability to use this capacity, which is mobilized in action and in context*.

Endogenizing variability in resilience research

While resilience research tends to treat resilience as a stable trait (Windle, 2011) that helps people preserve stability and continuity while experiencing external instability, we *endogenize* resilience by specifying the internal factors that trigger its variability. In his initial definition of ecological resilience, Holling (1973, p. 1) contrasted stability and resilience. Resilience was a broad ability to persist (Holling, 1973) and consisted in maintaining stability despite external perturbations. This distinction between stability and resilience was important to understand that resilience involves the efficient execution of routines both at the individual and organizational levels (Hepfer & Lawrence, 2022).

We argue that resilience is a variable and continuous process. In this, our findings are in line with Windle (2011): we state that the individual experience of resilience varies over time. At a given point in time, an individual may use only bright practices, while at another time only dark or a combination of both. Previous research referred to degrees of resilience, i.e. one's ability to mitigate exposure to risk and enhance functioning can range from suboptimal or naïve to functional and realistic (Mahdiani

& Ungar, 2021). We contend that resilience can be achieved through a wide spectrum of practices from bright to dark.

LIMITATIONS AND AVENUES FOR RESEARCH

Although we collected a significant amount of data and benefited from our direct participation and observation, this study may be somewhat limited due to the particularities of this specific PhD program. Although we believe that our results are generalizable to other PhD programs, it would be interesting to conduct other studies of early career academics to investigate the process of resilience building as well as its bright and dark sides. Investigating all these individual dimensions in organizational settings other than academia would also be interesting.

In challenging organizational contexts, resilience is often seen as a positive resource. However, our paper has shown the potential negative impact of manufacturing resilience for individuals within organizations. Although we have not explored these specific issues, further studies on dark resilience should examine not just the downsides for the individual, but also the detrimental effects that this process may have on the entire organization. Additional research could help refine the themes that we have developed in this paper in relation to the dynamic nature of resilience and its dark side at the organizational level. Future research should investigate the characteristics of *resilience as a liability* in contrast to *resilience as an asset*.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

We believe that our study on the darker side of individual resilience provides important insights for managers, given the potential harmful consequences for individuals. Specifically, our findings lead to the following managerial implications. First, the

development of individual resilience through organizational initiatives: as stress perception and the corresponding coping strategies are associated with factors such as organizational and environmental constraints as well as resources such as organizational and social support, we believe organizations could play a part in helping individuals build resilience, for example through training programs aimed at the adoption of bright resilience practices. Second, in the area of human resources and hiring, we believe the ability to detect latent resilience in a candidate could be beneficial to HR practitioners during the selection process. Indeed, experiences that help build latent resilience – such as having dealt with uncertainty or adversity in prior work positions – could be a signal that a given candidate may handle rapidly changing work settings better. Finally, we consider that an individual or organization's awareness of dark resilience should lead to better coping strategies, and we believe that both organizational and individual reflexivity could be very beneficial in this regard. Through the adoption of reflexive practices (Hibbert & Cunliffe 2015, Cunliffe 2018), stress triggers and the corresponding resilience manufacturing could be more easily identified and then countered in the case of dark resilience. As a matter of fact, in the case of our PhD students, it was through knowing themselves and being aware of what they were experiencing at a certain moment in time that some of our informants were able to fend off the dark side of resilience.

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