

## The 'why' and 'why not' of job search behaviour: Their relation to searching, unemployment experience, and well-being

MAARTEN VANSTEENKISTE<sup>1\*</sup>, WILLY LENS<sup>1</sup>,  
SIEGFRIED DE WITTE<sup>1</sup>, HANS DE WITTE<sup>1</sup> AND  
EDWARD L. DECI<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Leuven, Belgium*

<sup>2</sup>*University of Rochester, USA*

### *Abstract*

*Two studies (n = 273 and 254) used self-determination theory (SDT) to examine unemployed people's motivation both to search and not to search for a job. The self-regulation questionnaire format (Ryan & Connell, 1989) was used to assess participants' autonomous and controlled job-search motivation (the 'why' of job search) as well as their amotivation for searching. Additionally, both autonomous and controlled motivation for not searching (the 'why not' of job search) was assessed. Results provide validity for these five motivational constructs and indicate, in line with SDT, that the constructs predicted reports of search behaviour, affective experiences, and well-being. The addition of autonomous and controlled motivation for not searching contributed additional predictive power beyond the motivational constructs that focused only on searching. Copyright © 2004 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

Job loss and the ensuing period of unemployment can be highly stressful for people. The loss may be a blow to people's egos, even to their identities, and during periods of unemployment people may become agitated or depressed from the financial threat as well as the lack of structure and satisfaction their jobs provided. Over the past 25 years, researchers have documented various negative states linked to unemployment, including depressive symptoms (Winefield & Tiggemann, 1990; Winefield, Winefield, Tiggemann, & Goldney, 1991), anxiety (Donovan & Oddy, 1982), somatic symptoms (Kasl & Cobb, 1980), and lower self-esteem (Hartley, 1980). Unemployment has also been associated with poorer well-being (Banks & Jackson, 1982; De Witte, 1993; Feather, 1990; Vinokur, Caplan, & Williams, 1987), and even with higher rates of child abuse (Justice & Duncan, 1977) and suicide (Argyle, 1989).

Nonetheless, individuals do show variability in their reactions to unemployment (De Witte & Wets, 1996; Fryer, 1986; Warr, 1987; Warr & Jackson, 1984). Some people search for new jobs in effective ways while others search less effectively. Some stop searching because they can not cope with the

\*Correspondence to: Dr Maarten Vansteenkiste, Department of Psychology, University of Leuven, Tiensestraat 102, B-3000 Leuven, Belgium. E-mail: maarten.vansteenkiste@psy.kuleuven.ac.be

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situation while others stop because they decide to spend their time on other activities. As Fryer and Payne (1984) pointed out, although unemployment is debilitating for some people, it can have a liberating effect for others, freeing them from stressful work responsibilities and allowing them to devote their time to alternative activities they find important or interesting.

In this article, we attempt to (1) develop and validate a motivational job search questionnaire using motivational concepts derived from self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) and (2) predict unemployed individuals' reports of job-search behaviour, unemployment experiences, and well-being.

### AUTONOMY, CONTROL, AND AMOTIVATION

Central to SDT is the distinction between *autonomous* and *controlled* motivation. Autonomy involves acting with a full sense of volition and endorsement of an action. When autonomously motivated, the perceived locus of causality for action is internal (de Charms, 1968; Heider, 1958) and people experience the behaviour as a reflection of who they are. There are two bases for autonomous motivation: intrinsic motivation and fully internalized extrinsic motivation (see Deci & Ryan, 2000). When intrinsically motivated, people engage in an activity because they find it interesting and spontaneously enjoyable. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, involves doing an activity because it is instrumental to some consequence that is separable from the activity itself. According to SDT, the value and regulation of an extrinsically motivated behaviour can be internalized to varying degrees, and the more fully it is internalized the more it provides the basis for autonomous extrinsic motivation. When the regulation of a behaviour has been well internalized, people identify with its personal value for themselves and thus perform the behaviour volitionally because of its importance for their own lives and self-selected goals. This is referred to as *identified regulation*. An unemployed woman who applies for jobs with a sense that the work will provide some fulfilment or is important for being able to have a satisfying life for her family would be relatively autonomous in her actions.

Control, in contrast, involves engaging in an activity because people feel pressured or forced to do so by some external or internal force. When controlled, people comply either with the demands of others or with some partially internalized demands that are buttressed by threats of guilt or self-esteem contingencies. Complying with others' demands constitutes *external regulation* and complying with internal demands is referred to as *introjected regulation*. In either case, whether the demands are wholly external or have been introjected, individuals feel that they have no choice, that they have to do the behaviour. Controlled behaviours are characterized by an external perceived locus of causality (de Charms, 1968). A man who searches for jobs because his credit card bills have piled up or because he feels he has to bolster his self-worth can be considered to be controlled in his search behaviour.

In general, SDT proposes that autonomous motivation will lead to more adaptive functioning than controlled motivation, and several studies in various domains, such as education (e.g. Grolnick & Ryan, 1989), health care (e.g. Williams, Grow, Freedman, Ryan, & Deci, 1996), and sport (Brière, Vallerand, Blais, & Pelletier, 1995), have found autonomous (relative to controlled) motivation to be associated with greater persistence, more positive performance, and enhanced well-being (for overviews see Deci & Ryan, 2000; Vallerand, 1997).

The present research represents the first examination of autonomous versus controlled motivation in the domain of job search among unemployed adults. We predicted that higher levels of autonomous job-search motivation would relate positively to the intensity of people's continued search because having a job is personally important to these people and it provides the energy necessary to persist. However, being strongly controlled to search was not expected to relate to search intensity because people have a tendency to resist activities they feel forced to pursue.

Concerning the relations of motivation to experience and well-being, we expected, as found in other domains, that controlled job-search motivation would be associated with negative experiential and well-being outcomes. Indeed, because unemployed people who feel highly controlled are likely to experience searching as pressured and stressful, they were expected to report strongly negative experiences and poor well-being. As for autonomous job-search motivation, past studies have consistently shown it to be associated with positive experiences and well-being. Thus, on the one hand, being autonomous in one's search should be a facilitator of positive experience and well-being. However, this study is the first in which the goal for which people are autonomously motivated (i.e. finding a job) is repeatedly denied to them. Thus, being continually denied a goal that people are highly autonomously motivated to attain is likely to be a negative factor that should offset the benefit of the autonomous motivation on experience and well-being. Accordingly, we did not expect significant relations between autonomous job-search motivation and the indicators of positive experience and well-being.

Some unemployed individuals spend little effort searching for jobs and do so in a half-hearted way. Within SDT they are said to be 'amotivated' (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Amotivation, which means a lack of intention and motivation, stands in contrast to both autonomous and controlled motivation, both of which involve intention and motivation. Individuals tend to be amotivated for a behaviour if they believe the behaviour will not yield desired outcomes. When amotivated, people tend to feel helpless (Seligman, 1975). An unemployed woman who believes that searching for a job is futile is likely to display a high level of amotivation. In such cases, the perceived locus of causality is said to be impersonal (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Heider, 1958). We predicted that amotivation would be negatively related to job search intensity because people lack the motivation to persist. Further, as in past studies, we expected amotivation to be positively related to negative experiences and negatively related to well-being because amotivated people feel unable to affect their unemployment situation (e.g. Deci & Ryan, 2000).

### AUTONOMY AND CONTROL FOR NOT SEARCHING

Social mores point very strongly towards being employed, so it is typically assumed that if unemployed people are not searching for a job, they must be amotivated, feeling discouraged and lacking the psychological resources to search. Although we believe that many people who fail to persist at job searching are amotivated, it is possible that some are instead engaging in alternative activities rather than searching for a new job. Atkinson and Birch (1970) pointed out that when people's motivation for an alternative activity becomes greater than their motivation for a target activity, they switch to the alternative activity. Thus, unemployed people's motivation for alternative activities could direct their attention away from job search.

Considering alternative motivation as a reason for not performing a behaviour such as job search represents an extension of SDT because heretofore amotivation has been the primary explanation for not performing the target activity. However, because autonomous versus controlled motivation is central to SDT, we apply the distinction to not doing the target activity (i.e. not searching) just as we did to doing the activity (i.e. searching). That is, we propose that the motivation for not searching can be either autonomous or controlled. Thus, people can make an autonomous choice not to search in order to spend time doing something else they find more interesting or important. For example, a man might reflect on his life and consider living more simply, spending less money, and devoting more time to enjoying nature or pursuing hobbies. Alternatively a person may feel pressured or controlled to do something other than find a new job. For example, a woman might feel pressured by her husband to be

a housewife, or she might feel an internal obligation to care for her sick mother. Both autonomous and controlled motivation not to search are reasons, in addition to discouragement and amotivation, for why people might not persist at searching for a job. Autonomous versus controlled motivation not to search for a job are expected to relate differently to outcomes, just as autonomous versus controlled motivation to search were predicted to relate differently to outcomes.

In general, we expected autonomous motivation not to search to have positive experiential and mental health correlates, just as autonomous motivation does in other domains where it is not continually thwarted (e.g. Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993). In fact, we expected that autonomous (relative to controlled) motivation *not to search* would be strongly related to positive experiential and well-being outcomes, whereas we predicted that autonomous motivation *to search* would not be. The reasoning is that autonomous motivation to search consistently yielded failure which vitiates the positive effects of autonomous motivation, whereas autonomous motivation not to search maintained the valued outcome. Further, we expected that controlled motivation for not searching would relate to negative unemployment experiences and poor well-being, much as it does in other domains (Ryan et al., 1993).

Although Jahoda (1982, 1988) emphasized that unemployment is associated negatively with well-being, our more differentiated hypotheses are consistent with previous research which found that when unemployed individuals are involved in satisfying alternative activities during their unemployment, they tend to experience less negative affective consequences (e.g. Feather & Bond, 1983; Halford & Learner, 1984; Kilpatrick & Trew, 1985; Swinburne, 1981). Whereas these previous studies have tended to emphasize the quality of the alternative activities in predicting well-being, the present research focused on the types of motivation for not searching. Thus, we did not explicitly assess people's motivation for alternative activities, we simply assessed the degrees to which their motivation for not searching was autonomous and controlled.

## THE PRESENT STUDY

In the present research, two studies were conducted among unemployed adults who had been out of work for varying lengths of time averaging close to a year. The aim of the research was twofold. First, we constructed and validated a questionnaire assessing autonomy, control, and amotivation with respect to job search, and autonomous and controlled motivation for not searching. Second, we explored the relations between these variables and job search behaviour, unemployment experience, and well-being.

### STUDY 1

Ryan and Connell's (1989) approach was used to develop the Job Search Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ-JS). Because self-regulation questionnaires have been validated in several domains, such as health behaviour change (Williams et al., 1996), education (Ryan & Connell, 1989), and religious behaviour (Ryan et al., 1993), development of the new questionnaire followed the same format, making appropriate adjustments to the new domain of unemployment. The items generated for the SRQ-JS were completed by the 273 unemployed adults described in Study 1 who also completed various other questionnaires. Factor analysis was used to arrive at the final set of items and initial analyses were conducted to validate the scale. We then used the SRQ-JS to predict self-reports of job-search behaviour, unemployment experiences, and well-being.

## Method

### *Procedure*

Participants were recruited during meetings held by the Belgian welfare programme to help unemployed adults find employment. They were obliged to attend regularly to prove their willingness to be employed. Government employees offered the questionnaires to 350 people; 273 returned the packet; and 254 provided complete data so they constituted the final sample.

### *Participants*

Demographic information indicated that 61% of the 254 participants were women. Thirty-eight per cent were younger than 26 years old, 42% were between 26 and 40, and 19% were 41 or older. Forty-two per cent of the participants had been unemployed for less than 6 months, 41% had been unemployed for a period between 6 months and 2 years, and 17% had been unemployed for more than 2 years. Thirty-three per cent of the participants had dropped out of school before the end of ninth grade; 47% had completed some or all of high school; and 20% had completed some higher education. In terms of living conditions, 18% lived alone; 26% lived with parents; 21% lived only with a spouse or partner; 12% lived only with their children; and 22% lived with partner and children.

### *Measures*

Participants responded in Dutch to the questions which had been translated from English according to the guidelines of the International Test Commission (Hambleton, 1994). The following questionnaires were distributed.

*SRQ-JS* We began the questionnaire construction by interviewing five adults who had been unemployed for varying lengths of time in order to ascertain reasons why they were searching for jobs and why they were not searching as much as they might be. We generated 44 items that represented autonomous and controlled reasons for searching, amotivation for searching, and autonomous and controlled reasons for not searching, in line with the SDT construct definitions (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The questionnaire asked the questions, 'Why are you looking for a job?' and 'Why are you not looking for a job?' After the first question, there were items that represent autonomous and controlled reasons for searching and amotivation for searching, and after the second question, there were items representing autonomous and controlled reasons for not searching. Some autonomous reasons both to search and not to search reflected identified regulation and some reflected intrinsic motivation. Further, some controlled items reflected external regulation and some reflected introjection (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The reasons were rated on 5-point Likert scales ranging from 'do not agree at all' to 'completely agree'.

Principal component factor analysis (with promax rotation) was performed on the 44 items, and the criteria used for acceptable factors and items were: eigen values greater than 1.0; factor loadings greater than 0.40; and no cross loadings above 0.30. We found a seven-factor solution with factors corresponding directly to the SDT constructs. Specifically, two factors contained autonomous job-search motivation items, one reflecting intrinsic motivation (e.g. 'I'm searching because I find it fun to look around on the job market') and one reflecting identified regulation (e.g. 'because work is personally meaningful for me'); two factors contained controlled job-search motivation items, one for

external regulation (e.g. 'because I need the money') and one for introjected regulation (e.g. 'because it's my duty as an unemployed person to do so'); one factor contained only amotivation items (e.g. 'I'm not really looking because I do not feel competent to find employment'); one factor contained autonomous (identified and intrinsic) motivation not to search items (e.g. 'I'm not really searching for a job because I give priority to alternative activities such as pursuing hobbies'); and one contained controlled (external and introjected) motivation for not searching items (e.g. 'because others expect me to do an alternative activity or because I would feel like a bad person if I did not attend to other tasks').

For theoretical reasons, we combined items from the intrinsic and identified factors to form an autonomous-motivation-to-search subscale, and we combined items from the external and introjected factors to form a controlled-motivation-to-search subscale. The final five subscales, which contained a total of 29 items, were (a) autonomous job search (eight items;  $\alpha = 0.85$ ); (b) controlled job search (eight items;  $\alpha = 0.76$ ); (c) amotivation to search (four items;  $\alpha = 0.70$ ); (d) autonomous motivation not-to-search (five items;  $\alpha = 0.87$ ); and (e) controlled motivation not-to-search (four items;  $\alpha = 0.80$ ).<sup>1</sup>

*Demographics* Participants reported their length of unemployment, age, and gender. For length of unemployment they indicated one of eight ranges (0–3 months, 3–6 months, 6–9 months; 9–12 months; 12–24 months; 2–5 years; 5–10 years; and >10 years). When controlling for length of unemployment in the analyses we used a continuous variable from one to eight corresponding to the eight successive categories. For age, people indicated which of four ranges included their age: < 26 years; 26–40 years; 41–55 years; and >55 years.

*Financial Concerns* Seven items measured the degree to which respondents worried about their present financial situation. They responded to each item on a 5-point Likert scale indicating the extent to which they agreed with the items. The alpha was 0.91.

*Employment Commitment* Fourteen items assessed the degree to which people were committed to having a job. Participants used a 5-point Likert scale on this widely used questionnaire (e.g. Feather, 1990). Internal consistency for this scale was 0.84.

*Job Aspirations* Several theories, including SDT, have distinguished between jobs high on intrinsic aspects such as interest, variety, and participation, and jobs high on extrinsic aspects such as pay, benefits, and status. Participants reported the degree to which they aspire to jobs with these different characteristics, reporting on a 5-point Likert scale the importance of these job aspirations. A principal components factor analysis (varimax rotation) of responses resulted in two factors, a four-item intrinsic factor ( $\alpha = 0.75$ ) and a four-item extrinsic factor ( $\alpha = 0.72$ ).

*Expectation of Finding a Job* Four items, which had been used in previous unemployment studies (e.g. Feather & O'Brien, 1987; Lynd-Stevenson, 1999), assessed people's expectations about finding a job. Internal consistency of the scale was 0.75.

<sup>1</sup>To verify that it was empirically acceptable to combine identified and intrinsic motivation to search to form the concept of autonomous motivation and to combine external and introjected motivation to search to form the concept of controlled motivation, we reran the analyses of Study 1 using only one of both subscales of autonomous motivation to search (either intrinsic or identified motivation) and only one of both subscales of controlled motivation to search (either external or introjected motivation) instead of the combined subscales. The same pattern of significant results emerged, indicating that it was justified to combine the motivational subscales to form a composite of autonomous and controlled motivation to search.

*Job Search Optimism* Eight items (using a 5-point Likert scale) assessed the degree to which participants were optimistic versus pessimistic about finding a job in the near future (e.g. 'I am still optimistic that I will find a job in the near future.'). The scale has been used in several studies (e.g. De Witte & Wets, 1996). Internal consistency in the present sample was 0.80.

*Job Search Behaviour* Participants responded to 17 items about their job search activities over the preceding 3 months. Some items were taken from a job search scale (Blau, 1994) and some were added to include new job-search methods (e.g. use of the internet). Participants indicated how many times they had used each strategy by circling one of four options (never, once or twice, between three and six times, seven or more times). Internal consistency of the scale was 0.91.

*Negative Experience of Unemployment* Sixteen items concerning negative feelings during unemployment were taken from a scale developed by De Witte and Wets (1996). Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale. Items concerned with feeling worthless (e.g. 'I have lost my self-confidence'), feeling that life is meaningless (e.g. 'life has become meaningless for me'), and feeling socially isolated (e.g. 'I feel more lonely since I am unemployed') loaded on one factor with an alpha of 0.82.

*Positive Experience of Unemployment* This eight-item subscale, also taken from De Witte and Wets (1996), assesses positive feelings associated with being jobless (e.g. 'Since I am unemployed, I feel more relaxed') and with using the free time created by unemployment in satisfying ways (e.g. 'I meet more with friends and family since I am unemployed'). The alpha was 0.80.

*General Health Questionnaire (GHQ)* The first of the well-being variables was a widely used 12-item scale measuring general health and absence of symptoms (Goldberg, 1978). Participants answer questions about how they have been feeling over the past weeks using a 4-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating better health (e.g. 'Did you feel able to concentrate on your daily activities?'). The alpha was 0.82.

*Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS)* The other well-being measure was a five-item questionnaire (e.g. 'I am satisfied with my present life'; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), with 5-point Likert responses, which is considered the cognitive component of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984). Scale reliability and validity are well established. The alpha in this study was 0.71.

## Results and Brief Discussion

### *Construct Validation*

To begin construct validation, we examined correlations among the motivation subscales and predicted that the motivational concepts would form a simplex-like pattern (Guttman, 1954). That is concepts that are more closely related in terms of degree of autonomy (e.g. autonomous and controlled motivation to search) were expected to be more strongly correlated than concepts that are less close (e.g. autonomous motivation to search and amotivation). Correlations among the five SRQ-JS subscales are reported in Table 1 (lines 1–5). As expected, autonomous motivation to search related negatively to amotivation (which is highly non-autonomous), whereas autonomous motivation to search related positively to controlled motivation to search (which is moderately non-autonomous). *T*-testing indicated that the magnitude of these correlations was significantly different,  $t(263) = 7.55$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , suggesting that these correlations show the expected simplex-like pattern. Further, as

Table 1. Correlations among motivation variables and outcome variables for Study 1 and scale reliabilities (Diagonal) ( $n = 263$ )

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Autonomous motivation to search	0.85									
2. Controlled motivation to search	0.32**	0.76								
3. Amotivation	-0.27**	0.13*	0.70							
4. Autonomous motivation not to search	-0.32**	-0.25**	0.29**	0.87						
5. Controlled motivation not to search	-0.24**	0.08	0.44**	0.52**	0.80					
6. Job search intensity	0.31**	0.11	-0.08	-0.07	-0.03	0.91				
7. Negative unemployment experience	0.11	0.45**	0.41**	-0.05	0.25**	0.24**	0.82			
8. Positive unemployment experience	-0.35**	-0.23**	0.17**	0.48**	0.23**	-0.17**	-0.23**	0.80		
9. General health	-0.06	-0.23**	-0.18**	0.18**	-0.01	-0.24**	-0.55**	0.28**	0.82	
10. Life satisfaction	-0.16**	-0.29**	-0.02	0.36**	0.13*	-0.11	-0.43**	0.53**	0.42**	0.71

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .



Table 2. Correlations between the subscales of the SRQ-JS and related constructs of Study 1 ( $n = 271$ )

	Motivation to search			Motivation not to search	
	Autonomous	Controlled	Amotivation	Autonomous	Controlled
Financial concerns	0.02	0.37**	0.24*	-0.12	0.08
Job commitment	0.43**	0.48**	-0.02	-0.40**	-0.05
Intrinsic job aspirations	0.23**	0.11	-0.10	-0.03	-0.12
Extrinsic job aspirations	0.19*	0.33**	0.09	-0.18*	0.02
Expectation to find a job in the near future	0.24**	-0.08	-0.44**	-0.20**	-0.29**
Job search optimism	0.33**	0.10	-0.46**	-0.22**	-0.35**

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

expected, the relation between autonomous motivation not to search and amotivation was significantly weaker than the relation between autonomous motivation not to search and controlled motivation not to search,  $t(263) = 3.35$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Accordingly, there was a parallel in the simplex-like pattern among the motivation constructs when considering motivation to search as when considering motivation not to search. These relations provide initial evidence for the internal validity of the scale and for the comparability of the search and not search concepts.

Then, we correlated the motivation subscales with other constructs that were expected to relate differentially to the subscales. These were (1) financial concerns (predicted to relate to controlled job-search motivation), (2) employment commitment (predicted to relate positively to both autonomous and controlled motivation for job-search), (3) intrinsic job aspirations (predicted to relate positively to autonomous job-search motivation) and extrinsic job aspirations (predicted to relate positively to controlled job-search motivation), and (4) expecting to find a job soon and job search optimism (predicted to relate positively to autonomous job-search motivation and negatively to amotivation and motivation not to search).

Correlations between the motivation subscales and these constructs appear in Table 2. First, as predicted, having financial concerns was positively related to controlled job-search motivation. In addition, having financial concerns was positively related to amotivation. Although not predicted, this may result from the fact that people who are high in controlled motivation tend to become amotivated relatively easily when they fail to attain a goal. Thus, unemployed people controlled by financial concerns may have become amotivated in response to this failure to obtain a salary. Second, as predicted, employment commitment was positively related to both autonomous and controlled job-search motivation. It was negatively related to autonomous motivation not to search, suggesting that people committed to having a job were not autonomously motivated to do other things instead. Third, as expected, intrinsic job aspirations correlated positively with autonomous motivation for searching, and extrinsic job aspirations correlated positively with controlled motivation. Finally, as predicted, expecting to find a job soon and job search optimism related positively to autonomous job-search motivation and they related negatively to amotivation and to both types of motivation not to search. They were unrelated to controlled motivation.

### *Job Search Behaviour, Unemployment Experience, and Well-being*

Analyses were conducted to (1) examine the utility of autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and amotivation for job search as predictors of three sets of outcomes (*viz.* job search, experiences, and well-being) for the unemployed, and (2) determine whether autonomous and controlled motivation not to search would explain additional variance in the outcomes.

Correlations among the predictors and the outcome variables appear in Table 1 (lines 6–10). Only autonomous job search motivation was positively correlated with past job search behaviour. Negative unemployment experience was positively correlated with both types of controlled motivation and with amotivation, while positive experience of unemployment was negatively related to both autonomous and controlled motivation to search, but was positively related to the three motivational types that represent a lack of motivation to search. Further, autonomous motivation not to search was positively correlated with both general health and life satisfaction, while controlled motivation to search was negatively related to both well-being measures. Finally, autonomous motivation to search negatively predicted life satisfaction, while amotivation was negatively related to general health.

In order to determine the unique relationships between the predictors and outcomes, a series of multiple regressions was executed in which each outcome was regressed onto any demographic variables that had correlated with it and then onto the three job-search motivation variables (autonomy, control, and amotivation) to determine the variance accounted for by the job-search motivation variables. Finally, the two motivation-not-to-search variables (autonomy and control) were entered to ascertain whether they accounted for additional variance in each outcome. Education level related negatively to the negative unemployment feelings and job search intensity, while age and gender were not related to any outcome.

*Motivation for Searching* Although the three job search motivation scales explained a significant amount of variance in all outcomes (ranging between 0.07 and 0.36), the percentage of variance explained in people's life satisfaction and job search behaviour was rather low. The specific effects of each job search motivation variable are shown in Table 3.

Autonomous motivation for searching positively predicted self-reports of the intensity of job search behaviour during the previous 3 months. Amotivation did not contribute any independent variance to intensity of job search (although the relation was negative).

Concerning negative unemployment experiences, as expected, both controlled motivation and amotivation related strongly positively to it, and autonomous motivation was weakly related. Positive experience related negatively to both autonomous and controlled motivation but was unrelated to amotivation. People who were highly motivated to find a job did not feel positive as they failed to find one. As for the well-being variables, both general health and life satisfaction were negatively predicted by controlled motivation and amotivation and were unrelated to autonomous motivation.

Table 3. Regression analyses predicting outcomes from the motivation to search variables and the motivation not to search variables (Study 1,  $n = 254$ )

	Job search intensity	Negative experience	Positive experience	General health	Life satisfaction
<b>Motivation to search</b>					
Autonomous motivation	0.28**	0.14*	-0.15**	0.04	-0.08
Controlled motivation	0.05	0.29**	-0.11*	-0.15*	-0.21*
Amotivation	-0.06	0.40**	0.04	-0.21*	-0.11*
R-square	0.08**	0.36**	0.14**	0.07**	0.10**
<b>Motivation not to search</b>					
Autonomous motivation	-0.03	-0.14*	0.42**	0.23*	0.32**
Controlled motivation	0.02	0.14*	-0.01	-0.02	0.03
R-square change	0.01	0.02*	0.14**	0.04**	0.09**

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

*Motivation for Not Searching* As shown in Table 3, the motivation-not-to-search variables predicted significant variance beyond the variance explained by the three job search motivation variables for four of the five outcomes (except job search behaviour). More specifically, just as controlled motivation to search was a predictor of negative experiences during unemployment, controlled motivation not to search also predicted negative experiences. Thus, people high in controlled motivation not to search—for example, people who felt they should not work in order to engage in an alternative activity such as caring for children or relatives—reported more negative feelings such as worthlessness and meaninglessness. In contrast, autonomous motivation for not searching was negatively related to the unpleasant job-search experiences and was positively related to the pleasant experiences. In addition, autonomous motivation for not searching was positively related to both general health and life satisfaction. Thus, whereas autonomous motivation to search for work had not been positively related to well-being because the outcome the individuals were autonomously motivated to attain (*viz.* a job) was repeatedly denied to them, the positive relation between autonomous motivation not to search and well-being replicates the frequently obtained relationship in past studies.<sup>2,3</sup>

Overall, the results indicated that the SDT variables (*viz.* autonomy, control, and amotivation for job search) predicted a substantial amount of variance in the outcomes concerning job search behaviour, unemployment experience, and well-being. Autonomous and controlled motivation not to search significantly improved prediction for all of the outcomes except search behaviour.

Although many unemployed adults feel amotivated with respect to job search after repeated rejections, some of them actually appear to be motivated not to search either for autonomous reasons (e.g. they want to live a simpler, less-stressful life) or for controlled reasons (e.g. they feel pressured to do other activities). The motivation-not-to-search variables predicted additional variance in people's unemployment experiences and well-being. This helps to explain why losing one's job and being unemployed is not so traumatic for some people as it is for others. Indeed, being autonomous in not searching, presumably in order to do other things, explained significant variance in positive experiences and well-being.

## STUDY 2

Study 2 was designed to evaluate the reliability of the Study 1 findings. A confirmatory factor analysis on the SRQ-JS items was used to confirm the factor structure, and we used regression analyses to test the same hypotheses as in Study 1. In Study 2, however, we included an additional dependent variable, namely self-actualization. Specifically, whereas life satisfaction is a central indicator of hedonic well-being (e.g. Diener & Lucas, 1999), self-actualization is an important indicator of eudaimonic well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 1993). The hedonic view equates well-being with happiness, which we interpret as a relatively superficial state that is likely to be responsive to factors in the immediate situation such as being unemployed. The eudaimonic view, in contrast, equates well-being with being fully functioning, which we interpret as a deeper and more enduring sense of well-being that is not so likely to be affected by factors such as being unemployed. On the basis of this reasoning and SDT's expectation that the relation between autonomous motivation and well-being will be

<sup>2</sup>We repeated the regression analyses entering a block of all the demographic variables (rather than just the significant ones) before entering the motivation variables, and this did not change any of the results.

<sup>3</sup>It is appropriate to indicate that in some cases a motivation subscale significantly predicted an outcome in the regression analyses, while the raw zero-order correlation (See Table 1) was not significant. Although the significant beta-values indicate that the predictor and the outcome are related to a certain extent, these results should be interpreted with caution.

stronger when well-being is assessed by indicators of eudaimonia rather than hedonia (e.g. Nix, Ryan, Manly, & Deci, 1999), we expected autonomous job search motivation to positively predict self-actualization.

## **Method**

### *Procedure*

The questionnaire packet was distributed in the same way as in Study 1. Two hundred seventy-nine individuals received the packet, of whom 254 participants completed it. Missing data led to 227 participants being included in the final sample.

### *Participants*

Demographic information indicated that the second sample was similar to the first sample. Sixty-nine per cent of participants were female. Thirty-six per cent of the participants were younger than 26; 38% were between 26 and 40 years old; and 26% were 41 or older. Thirty-eight per cent of the participants had been unemployed for less than 6 months; 46% had been unemployed for a period between 6 months and 2 years; and 16% had been unemployed for more than 2 years. Twenty-two per cent of the participants had dropped out of school before the end of ninth grade; 54% had completed some or all of high school; and 24% had completed some higher education. In the sample, 22% of the participants lived alone; 23% lived with parents; 15% lived only with a spouse or partner; 10% lived only with their children; and 24% lived with partner and children.

### *Measures*

All variables included in Study 1 were also used in this study. The additional measure was the Self-Actualization Index, which is a widely used 15-item questionnaire with well-established reliability and validity (Jones & Crandall, 1986). Items concern efficient perception of reality, problem centredness, and engagement in meaningful interpersonal relationships (e.g. 'I do not accept my own weaknesses'). Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = disagree, 5 = agree).

## **Results**

### *Confirmatory Factor Analyses*

Two confirmatory factor analyses were performed using Structural Equation Modeling (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993) on the 29 items of the SRQ-JS. One included the seven factors that had emerged in the exploratory factor analysis of Study 1 and the other used the five conceptual factors that were used in the analyses of Study 1 (viz. combining intrinsic and identified job-search motivation, and combining external and introjected job-search motivation). The fit indices used were chi-square, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Comparative Fit Index (CFI). The seven-factor model provided a better fit than the five-factor model:  $X^2(356 df) = 598.7$  ( $p = 0.0$ ); the RMSEA = 0.05, and the CFI was 0.90. Although fit indices for the five-factor model were not as good ( $X^2(367 df) = 948.1$

( $p = 0.0$ ); RMSEA = 0.08; CFI = 0.81), primary analyses were conducted with the five subscales for theoretical reasons and for comparability with Study 1. The Cronbach alphas for all subscales ranged from 0.66 to 0.90. The correlations among the subscales together with the internal consistency of all measured variables are reported in Table 4 and were very similar to those in Study 1.

#### *Job Search Behaviour, Unemployment Experience, and Well-being*

Correlations among the outcome variables for Study 2 appear in Table 4. As in Study 1, autonomous job search motivation was the only positive correlate of job search behaviour and both types of controlled motivation as well as amotivation were positively related to negative unemployment experience. While autonomous motivation to search was negatively related to positive experience of unemployment, autonomous motivation not to search was positively related to it. Further, both controlled motivation to search and amotivation negatively predicted general health, life satisfaction, and self-actualization, whereas autonomous motivation to search was negatively related to life satisfaction and positively predicted self-actualization. Finally, autonomous motivation not to search was a positive predictor of life satisfaction and controlled motivation not to search negatively predicted self-actualization.

As in Study 1, we regressed each outcome variable onto the three motivation-to-search variables, controlling for demographic variables that had correlated with the outcome, and then onto the two motivation-not-to-search variables. Education correlated positively with job search intensity and self-actualization, and it correlated negatively with general health, and life satisfaction. Age was positively correlated with positive experience and self-actualization. These relations were controlled for in the analyses. Gender did not correlate with any outcome.

*Motivation for Searching* The percentages of variance in each of the outcome variables accounted for by the three job-search motivation variables ranged from 0.04 to 0.25 (See Table 5). Although these percentages of explained variance were all significant at  $p < 0.01$ , they were rather low in most of the outcomes, except for negative experience and self-actualization.

As shown in Table 5, after controlling for education level, autonomous motivation for searching positively predicted job-search intensity, as it did in Study 1. Also, as in the previous study, controlled motivation to search did not contribute independent variance to prediction of this outcome and amotivation was negatively (although non-significantly) related to job-search intensity, replicating Study 1 results.

With respect to the negative experiences of unemployment, both controlled motivation and amotivation positively predicted the negative feelings as they had in Study 1. Autonomous motivation did not relate to the negative experience variable, but being autonomously motivated to search and not finding a job was negatively related to a positive experience of unemployment.

Both general health and life satisfaction were negatively predicted by controlled motivation and amotivation and were unrelated to autonomous motivation, thus fully replicating the results of Study 1. However, whereas controlled motivation and amotivation were also negatively correlated with self-actualization, autonomous motivation was significantly positively related to self-actualization. Thus, although being autonomously motivated to find a job but not finding one leaves people with somatic symptoms and a sense of dissatisfaction with their current lives, being autonomously motivated was related to their more enduring eudaimonic sense of well-being and self-fulfillment.

*Motivation Not to Search* Table 5 shows that the motivation-not-to-search variables predicted significant independent variance in three of six outcome variables, namely negative and positive

Table 4. Correlations among motivation variables and outcome variables for Study 2 and scale reliabilities (diagonal) ( $n = 227$ )

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Autonomous motivation to search	0.84										
2. Controlled motivation to search	0.28**	0.77									
3. Amotivation	-0.12	0.24**	0.72								
4. Autonomous motivation not to search	-0.15*	0.05	0.36**	0.89							
5. Controlled motivation not to search	-0.06	0.16*	0.44**	0.39**	0.80						
6. Job search intensity	0.20**	0.09	-0.11	-0.05	0.03	0.82					
7. Negative unemployment experience	0.05	0.36**	0.34**	0.04	0.20*	0.16*	0.84				
8. Positive unemployment experience	-0.27**	0.01	0.13	0.33**	0.10	-0.13	-0.07	0.86			
9. General health	0.02	-0.20**	-0.14*	0.05	0.01	-0.14*	-0.52**	0.18**	0.85		
10. Life satisfaction	-0.13*	-0.28**	-0.14*	0.15*	0.05	-0.10	-0.39**	0.40**	0.40**	0.75	
11. Self-actualization	0.22**	-0.27**	-0.41**	-0.10	-0.26**	-0.13	-0.46**	-0.06	0.27**	0.22**	0.70

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Table 5. Regression analyses predicting outcomes from the motivation to search variables and the motivation not to search variables (Study 2,  $n = 227$ )

	Job search intensity	Negative experience	Positive experience	General health	Life satisfaction	Self-actualization
Motivation to search						
Autonomous motivation	0.18**	0.01	-0.19*	0.08	-0.05	0.23*
Controlled motivation	-0.01	0.29**	0.04	-0.19*	-0.26**	-0.19*
Amotivation	-0.13	0.27**	-0.02	-0.14*	-0.17*	-0.35**
R-square	0.05**	0.25**	0.07**	0.04**	0.06**	0.25**
Motivation not to search						
Autonomous motivation	-0.02	-0.18**	0.30***	0.10	0.16*	0.10
Controlled motivation	0.14*	0.16*	-0.02	0.04	0.06	-0.08
R-square change	0.01	0.04*	0.08**	0.01	0.03*	0.02

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

experience of unemployment and life satisfaction. Further, unlike Study 1, controlled motivation not to search was positively related to job search intensity. This finding was not expected, given the non-significant correlation, the significant (and low) beta should be interpreted with caution. Controlled motivation not to search also positively predicted negative unemployment feelings. In contrast, autonomous motivation not to search related negatively to negative feelings and related positively to positive experience and to life satisfaction. Although this set of results for autonomous and controlled motivation not to search was not exactly the same as in Study 1, the results were nonetheless quite consistent with, although weaker than, those from Study 1.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

There exists considerable variability in the way unemployed people experience their unemployment. Although studies (e.g. Jackson, Stafford, Banks, & Warr, 1983) have found that unemployment leads to poorer well-being, some authors (e.g. Fryer, 1986; Warr, 1987) have suggested that unemployment is not necessarily so detrimental if individuals fill their time with purposeful activities. In the present research we addressed this by examining whether the 'why' and 'why not' of job search, conceptualized with the SDT constructs of autonomous motivation and controlled motivation to search, amotivation, and autonomous and controlled motivation not to search, would predict self-reports of job-search, unemployment experiences, and well-being.

On the basis of SDT, we expected autonomous motivation to be associated with persistence though not with positive experiences and well-being. We expected controlled motivation and amotivation to be related to negative experiences and to poorer well-being. The results of the two studies provided substantial support for these predictions. In both studies, autonomous motivation to search was the only variable that related significantly to job search persistence. In general, it had few significant relations with the experiential and well-being variables that were consistent across the two studies, except that it related negatively to the positive experiences of being relaxed and enjoying free time.

In previous studies with children and adults, encompassing the domains of education (Black & Deci, 2000), religion (Ryan et al., 1993), and health care (Williams et al., 1996), autonomous motivation has consistently and reliably been related to a wide range of positive experiential and well-being outcomes. In contrast to these findings, the present research suggests that being highly autonomously motivated to find a job does not yield consistently positive outcomes in the face of continuous failure, although their persistence remained relatively high.

It is, however, important to note that autonomous motivation was positively related to self-actualization. Ryan and Deci (2001) distinguished between hedonic well-being, which means being happy and has been assessed with variables such as life satisfaction, and eudaimonic well-being, which means to be relatively fully functioning and has been assessed with variables such as self-actualization. Ryan and Deci suggested that autonomous motivation is particularly important for eudaimonic well-being (e.g. Nix et al., 1999). The present results are consistent with this in that, whereas failing to attain a goal for which people were autonomously motivated did not yield happiness or hedonic well-being, it was nonetheless positively related to eudaimonic well-being (i.e. self-actualization). It appears, then, that people who are able to maintain autonomous motivation in the face of persistent failures are the people who are likely to be relatively fully functioning as individuals even though they show signs of stress and unhappiness in this situation of persistent unemployment.

Concerning controlled motivation for job search, the results were very much as predicted. In both studies, this variable was consistently positively related to negative experiences and negatively related to positive experiences and well-being. Controlled job search motivation was not related to continuous engagement in job search, which further adds evidence to the literature that this type of motivation is not durable. These results replicate those found in several life domains confirming the utility of SDT's differentiation of autonomous and controlled types of motivation in predicting outcomes for people who have lost their jobs.

An important focus of the present research concerned the reasons why people do not search for a job—or at least why they search in a very limited way. Most motivation theories assume that not searching among the unemployed is a function of their having a low level of motivation, for example because they have low expectancies that their searching will lead to finding a job (Feather, 1990). According to SDT, amotivation explains why unemployed adults may not search for a job. The concept of amotivation suggests that people come to view an activity as futile because they believe it will not yield desired outcomes, so they either stop trying at all or behave in an alienated way. In the present studies, we found that amotivation was a positive predictor of negative unemployment experience and a negative predictor of well-being, suggesting that amotivated people did some searching in a disaffected way.

In this research, we extended SDT's consideration of the 'why not' of behaviour beyond just amotivation. We reasoned that people might be motivated not to search because they are motivated for some alternative, competing activities. If so, using the SDT perspective, this motivation might either be autonomous or controlled—that is, people might choose to engage in an alternative activity that is congruent with their own values and interests rather than taking on full-time employment, or they might feel pressured to do something other than have a job. Accordingly, we assessed autonomous and controlled motivation not to search. Results indicated that the more people do not search for a job because they feel pressured to do something else, the more they reported negative feelings, such as meaninglessness and worthlessness. If, however, their motivation not to search was autonomous, their experiences were more positive and less negative, and they showed greater hedonic well-being. These positive relationships make sense, because whereas people's autonomous motivation to search for a job consistently led to failure, their autonomous motivation not to look for a job was not continually thwarted. These results showing positive effects of autonomous motivation for pursuing alternative activities relate to the theoretical writings of Fryer (1986) and associates who emphasize the active coping capacity of the unemployed.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Some limitations of this research warrant discussion. Both studies relied on self-report data, so future studies with multiple methods would be useful. It will be important to have an objective measure of



job-search behaviour. Further, the data of these studies are cross-sectional and the analyses are correlational, so causal conclusions cannot be drawn. Future longitudinal research will be necessary to confirm the effects suggested by these studies. Research that follows people over the duration of their unemployment to ascertain how motivation, behaviour, experiences, and well-being change during this period would be especially interesting.

Unemployment researchers (e.g. De Witte & Hooge, 1997) have suggested that an adaptation process can occur among the unemployed in which their initially high motivation to search dissipates over time, and the critical issues become whether they are able to adopt alternative roles and to reorient their lives in order to maintain well-being. Studying such processes with respect to types of motivation to search and not to search could be illuminating.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the present research is especially interesting as it is the first time that the concepts of autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and amotivation have been used in a situation where people have consistently failed at an activity that is likely to be very important in their lives. We did not find the typically strong positive relations between autonomous motivation and the experiential and well-being variables, but instead found that it offset some of the negative experiences in the face of continued rejection.

Examination of reasons other than amotivation for why unemployed people might not search for a job represents an extension of SDT with respect to the 'why not' of behaviour. In particular, autonomous motivation not to search for a job yielded positive relations with experience and well-being variables much as autonomous motivation has shown such relations in other life domains, indicating, in line with Warr (1987), that some people are able to adjust to unemployment in a relatively healthy way.

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