



# Understanding unemployed people's job search behaviour, unemployment experience and well-being: A comparison of expectancy-value theory and self-determination theory

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Previous unemployment research has directly tested hypotheses derived from expectancy-value theory (EVT; Feather, 1982, 1990), but no comparative analysis has been executed with another motivational framework. In one large study with 446 unemployed people, separate analyses provided good evidence for predictions derived from both EVT and self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). Comparative analyses indicated that the type of people's job search motivation, as conceptualized through the notions of autonomous versus controlled motivation within SDT, is an important predictor of people's unemployment experience and well-being, beyond people's strength of motivation assessed within EVT through expectancies of finding a job and employment value. The importance of simultaneously testing two theoretical frameworks is discussed.

Dozens of studies conducted over the past two decades have mapped out the negative consequences of being unemployed (for reviews see Feather, 1990; Warr, 1987; Winefield, 1995). These studies revealed that unemployed people display lower self-esteem (e.g. Winefield, Winefield, Tiggeman, & Goldney, 1991) and lower well-being (e.g. Warr, Jackson, & Banks, 1988), and that unemployment is even associated with higher rates of child abuse (Justice & Duncan, 1977) and suicide (Argyle, 1989). Several theories out of the organizational/industrial area, such as Jahoda's latent deprivation model (Jahoda, 1982) and Warr's vitamin model (Warr, 1987), have contributed in important ways to the understanding of these findings. However, as suggested by Jahoda (1988), most of these studies are rather descriptive in nature in the sense that they are not guided by a formal theory; so they are less clear about the more general psychological processes that might explain these results.

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Simultaneously, a number of more general psychological theories have been applied to the unemployment domain, such as expectancy-value theory (EVT; e.g. Feather, 1990), self-efficacy theory (e.g. Kanfer & Hulin, 1985), learned helplessness theory (e.g. Rodriguez, 1997) and attribution theory (e.g. Prussia, Kinicki, & Bracker, 1993), among others. These more general frameworks might provide good insight into the psychological factors and processes that explain the extent to which people suffer from unemployment, and how much effort they expend in looking for a job. In line with the suggestion by Feather (Feather, 1990, 1992a, 1992b; Feather & O'Brien, 1986) that theorists should attempt to apply mid-range theories to the unemployment domain, we explored the usefulness of two well-established motivational frameworks, namely self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2002) and EVT (Feather, 1990, 1992a; Vroom, 1964) in explaining unemployed people's job search behaviour, unemployment experience, and psychological well-being. Thus, because the field of unemployment psychology might benefit from a formal theory-driven understanding of unemployed people's motivational, emotional and behavioural reactions towards their unemployment situation, we decided to apply EVT and SDT to this rather than to another domain. Furthermore, the application of those two motivational theories to the unemployment domain should also help to broaden their ecological validity.

One large cross-sectional study among a group of unemployed people was conducted, and the predictions of both theories were tested in separate analyses. However, because both frameworks conceptualize people's motivation in different ways, we also executed analyses in which predictors of both theories were entered simultaneously, providing us with the unique opportunity to compare both theories on an empirical level. We believe that such an empirical comparison of different frameworks is important because it might help to shed light on the different phenomena that can be explained by both frameworks, and contributes to a further conceptual clarification and integration of motivational constructs based on empirical evidence. In the following sections, the most important concepts of both frameworks are outlined.

### ***Expectancy-value theory***

EVT is a cognitive-motivational theory that relates an individual's level or strength of motivation to strive for a certain goal to the (product of) expectations to attain the desired goal and the incentive value or valence of that particular goal (e.g. finding a job). Different researchers have developed slightly different expectancy-value models (Feather, 1982, 1990; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992), but the present formulation of the model is based upon the work of Feather and his colleagues, because they applied the theory to the unemployment domain in previous research (e.g. Feather & O'Brien, 1987).

#### *Expectancy*

Two different types of expectancies are involved in the concept of expectations as used within EVT (Feather, 1992b): efficacy-expectations, which are defined as 'the conviction that one can successfully execute the required behaviour to produce the outcomes', and outcome expectancies, which refer to 'a person's estimate that a given behaviour will lead to certain outcomes' (Bandura, 1977, p. 193). For example, an unemployed person could have a strong expectation that he or she would perform well on a job interview, thereby meeting the main requirement for successful performance (e.g. by addressing the questions asked in the interview), and the unemployed person might also hold the

expectation that succeeding at the interview would yield positive consequences, such as being engaged for the job. EVT predicts that an unemployed person with a high expectation of finding employment will search more intensively for a job when compared with an unemployed person with a lower expectation.

Unemployed people with higher expectations of finding a job might also be more positive in other ways, such as in their psychological well-being. Their optimism might generalize to other areas of their lives, especially when this optimism is based on their assessment of jobs in the current labour market and on their own positive assessment of their skills and abilities relating to preferred employment and their motivation to find a job. Thus, we predicted that higher expectations would also be associated with more positive psychological well-being.

Several previous studies have explored these hypotheses. At the cross-sectional level, job search intensity was found to be positively correlated with the previously outlined expectancy constructs (e.g. Baik, Hosseini, & Priesmeyer, 1989; Feather & Davenport, 1981). However, in one study, Feather and O'Brien (1987) found it to be unrelated to one's confidence in finding a job or control-optimism (see Feather, 1990, for a discussion of this finding). In their meta-analytical review, Kanfer, Wanberg, and Kantrowitz (2001) found that self-efficacy positively predicted the number of received job offers and the probability of obtaining employment, and negatively predicted unemployment duration. Finally, several studies showed that providing self-efficacy training to unemployed people was associated with an increased likelihood of re-employment and a reduction in depressive symptoms (e.g. Vinokur & Schul, 1997).

### Value

Together with expectancies, a person's needs and values are considered to be determinants of motivated action through their effects on valences within EVT (Feather, 1992a, 1992b). Needs and values are assumed to affect a person's definition of a situation, so that some objects, activities, and potential outcomes are perceived as having positive valence (they become attractive), while others have a negative valence (they become aversive). EVT predicts that the intensity of job search will be positively related to how much finding a job is valued, i.e. has positive valence. Feather and O'Brien (1987) found evidence from two separate samples that supported this prediction. The meta-analysis by Kanfer *et al.* (2001) also showed that employment value or commitment predicted both job search intensity and success in finding a job.

Although EVT has primarily been applied to behavioural variables such as choice (Feather, 1995; Feather, Norman, & Worsley, 1998), performance, and persistence (e.g. Feather, 1982, 1988), it can also be applied to the analysis of psychological well-being and affective states (Feather, 1992b). Because needs and values are assumed to be linked to the affective system, the fulfilment or frustration of motivational tendencies that are associated with important needs and values will generate positive and negative affects, respectively, and ultimately affect psychological well-being (Feather, 1992b). EVT predicts that the more an unemployed person values employment, perceiving it to be an important and attractive goal, the more they will experience negative affect and reduced psychological well-being because an important value is not fulfilled. Studies have shown that unemployed people who strongly value employment feel more depressed about being unemployed (Feather & Davenport, 1981), experience their use of time as less structured and purposeful (Feather & Bond, 1983), and report higher levels of psychological distress (Stafford, Jackson, & Banks, 1980).

### **Self-determination theory**

As stated above, within EVT people's motivation to choose and strive for a particular goal is primarily conceptualized in terms of the intensity or strength of motivation to attain that goal. SDT also recognizes the importance of the level or strength of the motivation to pursue a particular goal, but it further differentiates between qualitatively different kinds of motivation or reasons for action, arguing that different types of motivation will lead to very different outcomes, independently of the strength of the motivation (Ryan & Connell, 1989; Sheldon, Joiner, & Williams, 2003; Williams, Saizow, Ross, & Deci, 1997). Thus, according to SDT, unemployed people might display very strong job search motivation, but the reason for their high motivation might vary considerably. Some unemployed people might perceive employment as an opportunity to develop their skills, and searching for a job is for them an autonomous and personal choice. Others might feel pressured and controlled in their search for a job, because, for example, they are afraid of being perceived by others as a free-rider on social welfare, because they suffer from financial problems, or because they are pushed to search for a job by their parents or spouse. To differentiate between those qualitatively different types of motivation, SDT distinguished between *autonomous* and *controlled* behaviours (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

#### *Autonomous and controlled behaviour*

Autonomous behaviours are regulated by the process of choice and volition, which is reflected in people experiencing a full endorsement of, or sense of willingness to, engage in a behaviour. The perceived locus of causality of autonomous action is internal (deCharms, 1968). Ryan and Deci (2000) distinguish two types of autonomous motivation: intrinsic and identified. The prototype of autonomous motivation is intrinsic motivation, which is illustrated by people engaging in an activity simply because it is interesting and enjoyable on its own. For instance, an unemployed person might like to explore the labour market because the discovery of new job opportunities is experienced as inherently satisfying.

In contrast, identified motivation is considered to be an autonomous type of extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation pertains to doing an activity in order to attain some separable outcome, and thus contrasts with intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Although identified motivation is instrumental or extrinsic in nature, it is considered to be autonomous because the reason for, and the regulation of, the behaviour has been internalized. As a consequence, the action is accepted or owned as personally important. As is the case for intrinsically motivated behaviour, the locus of causality is therefore internal. For instance, unemployed people who have identified with the personal value of job searching might search for a job because they perceive work as an opportunity to grow as people, enabling them to use and develop their competencies.

Controlled behaviours, in contrast, are regulated by the process of compliance and are reflected in people's feeling that they have no other choice than to engage in the activity. Within controlled behaviours, externally regulated behaviours are distinguished from introjected behaviours. When externally regulated, people's behaviour is controlled by demands, threatening punishments, or proffered rewards from an external agent. With introjected regulation, people's behaviour is controlled by intrapsychic rewards and punishment such as self-aggrandizement, feelings of guilt or shame or self-derogation. Both forms of behavioural regulation are extrinsically

motivated because people engage in the activity to meet either external demands and expectations or internal pressures. The regulation of the behaviour is not internalized (i.e. external regulation) or only poorly internalized (i.e. introjected regulation), and people act with a sense of pressure. Therefore, controlled behaviours are characterized by an external perceived locus of causality (deCharms, 1968). For example, unemployed people would display controlled motivation when they search for a job because they do not want to be perceived by others as a lazy person, or when they are primarily motivated to seek welfare payments that are available only when there is evidence of a job search.

Several studies in various domains such as education (e.g. Grolnick & Ryan, 1987; Vallerand & Bissonnette, 1992), health care (e.g. Williams, Rodin, Ryan, Grolnick, & Deci, 1998), sports (Sarrazin, Vallerand, Guillet, Pelletier, & Cury, 2002) and many others (see Deci & Ryan, 2000; Vallerand, 1997 for an overview) have documented that the advantages of autonomous motivation (i.e. intrinsic motivation or well-internalized extrinsic motivation) relative to controlled motivation (i.e. poorly internalized extrinsic motivation) are manifold, including more behavioural effectiveness, greater volitional persistence, and enhanced subjective well-being. Such findings justify SDT's differentiation between qualitatively different types of motivation (Sheldon & Elliot, 1998).

### **Present study**

The purpose of the present study of job search behaviour and well-being was twofold: (a) we tested hypotheses that were derived from two separate theoretical frameworks (i.e. EVT and SDT), and (b) we simultaneously tested both theories, which offered us the unique opportunity to compare both motivational theories on an empirical level. To our knowledge, no previous study has explicitly undertaken such an empirical comparison. Five different outcome measures were assessed in the present study. We included a measure of unemployed people's past job search behaviour and two widely used well-being measures: the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) and the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) (Goldberg, 1978). In addition, we also assessed the negative experience of unemployment in terms of unemployed people's feelings of meaninglessness and worthlessness as well as their feelings of social isolation (De Witte, 1993). These two outcomes were assumed to reflect two more specific reactions to unemployment.

## **Hypotheses**

### **Expectancy-value theory**

#### *Hypothesis 1a*

On the basis of previous research and EVT, we expected that employment value – that is, the value attached to finding or having a job – would negatively predict psychological well-being among unemployed people, and that it would positively predict the negative experience of unemployment, because being denied an important valued goal (i.e. employment) should be associated with strong negative reactions. However, employment value should positively predict job search behaviour.

*Hypothesis 1b*

We hypothesized that expectancy would be a positive predictor of psychological well-being and a negative predictor of people's negative unemployment experiences, because higher confidence about finding a job might reflect more positive attitudes towards self and towards the current state of the labour market in regard to its provision of employment opportunities, and might also reflect a successful record of finding jobs on previous occasions. Such attitudes may be realistic or unrealistic but they should affect confidence levels. We also predicted, in line with EVT, that expectancy would be positively related to job search behaviour.

*Hypothesis 1c*

Finally, EVT predicts that expectancy and employment value combine in a multiplicative way to generate job search motivation over and above the impact of both main predictors alone (e.g. Feather & O'Brien, 1987). Having high expectations of finding a job was also expected to offset some of the predicted negative effects of employment value on psychological well-being.

**Self-determination theory***Hypothesis 2a*

On the basis of SDT and previous SDT research in other domains, we predicted that autonomous motivation would be positively related to job search because people are more likely to persist at activities they feel free to pursue. Although previous SDT research has consistently reported that autonomous motivation positively predicts well-being in other domains (e.g. Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993), we did not expect to find such a positive relation in the present study because autonomously motivated unemployed people are constantly denied an important outcome (i.e. employment) in their lives, which was not the case in previous SDT studies.

*Hypothesis 2b*

We did not expect controlled motivation to predict job search behaviour because people are more likely to give up a behaviour they are forced to engage in (Sarrazin *et al.*, 2002; Vallerand, Guay, & Fortier, 1997). Controlled motivation was expected to be a positive predictor of negative feelings associated with being jobless (i.e. feeling worthless and socially isolated) and a negative predictor of life satisfaction and psychological well-being. This is because unemployed people with high controlled motivation who are searching for a job are likely to experience their job search as stressful and pressuring, thereby undermining their psychological well-being (Vansteenkiste, Lens, Dewitte, De Witte, & Deci, 2004).

**Comparative prediction***Hypothesis 3*

We finally tested one more hypothesis that compared both theories at an empirical level. Because EVT primarily addresses the relevance of people's total strength of motivation to achieve a certain outcome as a determinant of their persistence behaviour and well-being, we explored whether additionally considering qualitatively different forms or types of

motivation (autonomous versus controlled) for people's job search behaviour would be associated with an increase in explained variance. We expected that it would, given SDT's emphasis on the quality of people's motivation to attain a particular goal in addition to their strength of motivation. Such a finding would illustrate that motivational theories in general might not only conceptualize *how much* a person is motivated for a specific action, but also the *quality or type of motivation* that is involved in engagement in the activity.

## Method

### *Participants and procedure*

The questionnaire package was distributed individually or during a collective information session by government employees who regularly meet unemployed people as part of a social welfare programme. The data were collected in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, in two different waves: the data of the first wave were collected during the spring of 2001, while the data of the second wave were gathered in the summer and autumn of 2001. At the time of the data collection (2001), 6.4% of the population was unemployed ([www.steunpuntwav.be](http://www.steunpuntwav.be)). Six hundred and nine participants received a questionnaire that was completed by 527 participants (return rate 86.5%). Missing data led to 481 participants being included in most of the analyses.

### *Measures*

#### *Demographics*

Participants completed a questionnaire concerning their length of unemployment, age, and gender. For length of unemployment they indicated which of eight ranges included their unemployment duration (0–3 months, 3–6 months, 6–9 months, 9–12 months, 12–24 months, 2–5 years, 5–10 years, and > 10 years). For age, people indicated which of four ranges included their age (< 26 years, 26–40 years, 41–55 years, and > 55 years).

#### *Self-regulation questionnaire – job searching (SRQ-JS)*

The development and the initial validation of this questionnaire has been described elsewhere (Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2004). Unemployed people were asked, 'Why are you looking for a job?'. They indicated on a 5-point Likert scale their degree of agreement with the presented reasons. In line with SDT, we measured two types of autonomous job search motivation (eight items;  $\alpha = .85$ ), namely both intrinsic job search motivation (e.g. 'I am looking for a job because I find it enjoyable to explore the job market opportunities') and identified job search motivation (e.g. 'I am looking for a job because I want to use and develop my skills on a future job'). The questionnaire also assessed two types of controlled motivation (eight items;  $\alpha = .75$ ), namely both external job search motivation (e.g. 'I am looking for a job because having a job will allow me to buy some things I always wanted to buy') and introjected job search motivation (e.g. 'I am looking for a job because I would feel guilty if I were not').

#### *Employment value*

Fourteen items assessed the degree to which people valued having a job. Participants used a 5-point Likert-type scale on this widely used questionnaire (e.g. 'People need to work in order to be part of society' or 'I find it personally important to find a job');

Feather, 1990, 1992a, 1992b; Stafford *et al.*, 1980). Internal consistency for this scale was .81.

#### *Expectation of finding a job*

Three items were used to assess people's expectations about finding a job ('I am optimistic about finding a job in the near future'; 'I don't expect to find a job in the near future' [reverse scored]; 'I have been rejected so many times during application interviews that I don't expect to find a job any longer' [reverse scored]). Internal consistency was .60.

#### *Job search behaviour*

Participants responded to eight items about their job search activities over the preceding 3 months. Some items were taken from a job search scale (Blau, 1994) and some items were added to include new job search methods (e.g. use of the Internet). Participants indicated how many times they had used the various strategies by circling one of four options (never, once or twice, between 3 times and 6 times, 7 or more times; e.g. 'In the past 3 months I have had an application interview with an employer'). Internal consistency of the scale was .82.

#### *Negative experience of unemployment*

Sixteen items concerning negative feelings resulting from being unemployed were selected from a scale that measures the experience of unemployment (e.g. De Witte, 1992). Each item was answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*). Factor analysis with pro-max rotation, allowing extracted factors to be intercorrelated, revealed two easily interpretable subscales, one tapping participant's feelings of worthlessness and meaninglessness (e.g. 'I don't feel I'm a worthy person since I'm unemployed') and one reflecting people's experiences of social isolation (e.g. 'I feel more alone since I'm unemployed'). Cronbach's alpha for the subscales were .90 and .80.

#### *General Health Questionnaire*

This widely used 12-item scale measures general health and the absence of minor psychiatric symptoms (Goldberg, 1978). Participants answered questions about how they have been feeling over the past weeks in comparison with how they usually feel, using a 4-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating better health. The internal consistency for the scale was .85.

#### *Satisfaction With Life Scale*

This 5-item questionnaire (Diener *et al.*, 1985) with 5-point Likert responses is considered to measure the cognitive component of subjective well-being (e.g. 'I'm satisfied with my current life'; Diener, 1984). This scale is widely used and its reliability and validity have been confirmed. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  in this study was .72.

## Results

### Preliminary analysis

#### Descriptive information

Demographic information indicated the following: 61% of the sample were female; 38% were younger than 26 years old, 42% were between 26 and 40 years old, and 19% were older than 41 years old; 42% had been unemployed for <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; 11% of the unemployed people had very low levels of education (primary education), 22% had low levels of education (Grade 9), 47% were moderately educated (Grade 12), and 20% had participated in higher education; 18% lived alone, 12% lived together with their children, 21% lived together with a partner, 22% lived together with partner and children, and 26% lived together with his or her parents.

#### Correlations

Table 1 presents the correlations between the predictor variables from SDT and EVT and the outcome variables. The results show that autonomous motivation and controlled motivation were positively correlated with employment value and with each other. Autonomous motivation was positively related to the expectancy of finding a job, and controlled motivation was negatively related to expectancy. Thus, unemployed people with higher levels of both autonomous and controlled motivation reported higher employment value, but only those with higher autonomous motivation reported more confidence about finding a job. Those with higher levels of controlled motivation reported less confidence.

**Table 1.** Pearson correlations among the independent and dependent variables

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
1. Autonomous motivation								
2. Controlled motivation	.23**							
3. Job expectancy	.21**	-.10*						
4. Employment value	.44**	.42**	.01					
5. Job search intensity	.25**	.07	-.09*	.28***				
6. Feeling worthless	.09	.41***	-.34***	.51***	.23***			
7. Social isolation	.04	.33***	-.29***	.40***	.13**	.68***		
8. Life satisfaction	-.15**	-.28***	.05	-.32***	-.17**	-.40***	-.33***	
9. General health	-.03	-.23***	.15**	-.27***	-.10*	-.53***	-.43***	.38***

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Job search intensity was positively related to both feeling worthless and social isolation, and negatively related to both life satisfaction and general health. Feeling worthless was positively correlated with social isolation. Both were negatively correlated with life satisfaction and with general health, which were themselves positively intercorrelated.

Job search intensity was positively correlated with autonomous motivation and employment value, indicating that unemployed people who are autonomously motivated to search for a job and unemployed people who place higher value on gaining employment are more active job seekers. Feeling worthless and social isolation

were positively correlated with controlled motivation and with employment value, but both variables were negatively correlated with job expectancy. Life satisfaction was negatively predicted by autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and employment value. General health was negatively correlated with controlled motivation and employment value, but it was positively correlated with job expectancy. Thus, the more the unemployed participants valued having a job and the more they felt controlled in their job search, the more they reported feeling worthless and socially isolated, and the lower was their life satisfaction and psychological well-being, whereas those with higher autonomous motivation were somewhat less satisfied with their present lives. Also, those unemployed participants with higher job expectancies reported feeling less worthless and less socially isolated and they reported better general mental health (higher psychological well-being).

### **Primary analyses**

We conducted three sets of multiple regression analyses to test our hypotheses. In the first set of regressions, we tested the predictions based on EVT. We then examined the predictive power of the SDT variables. In the third analysis we explored whether autonomous and controlled motivation predicted any additional outcome variance in people's job search behaviour and reported emotional experiences beyond that predicted by EVT. In all of these regressions, we controlled for background variables that were significantly correlated with the outcome variables. Gender, age, and length of unemployment time were unrelated to any of the outcome or criterion measures. Educational level correlated negatively with life satisfaction but was unrelated to all other outcome variables.

### *EVT analyses*

To test the predictions derived from EVT (Hypotheses 1a–c), we entered employment value, expectancy of finding a job, and their interaction into a regression analysis. The interaction term was constructed by multiplying employment value and expectancy after centring each variable about its respective mean. As shown in Table 2 (column 1), job search intensity was positively predicted by employment value. However, it was negatively, but weakly ( $\beta = -.09$ ) related to expectancy of finding a job and was unrelated with the product of expectancy and employment value.

Employment value was a positive predictor of both measures of negative unemployment experience (i.e. feeling worthless and social isolation), and a negative predictor of life satisfaction and general mental health. An opposite pattern of results was obtained for expectancy. Being confident of finding a job in the near future negatively predicted feelings of both worthlessness/meaninglessness and feeling socially isolated during one's unemployment period. Expectancy of finding a job positively predicted general mental health but was unrelated to life satisfaction. The Expectancy  $\times$  Value product did not contribute significantly to the prediction of job search intensity, negative unemployment experience, or psychological well-being beyond the main effect(s). The amount of outcome variance explained by the EVT variables varied between .09 and .38.

*SDT analyses*

The second goal was to test whether controlled motivation would be associated with a more maladaptive pattern of behavioural and emotional reactions among unemployed people when compared with autonomous motivation (Hypotheses 2a and b). These results are presented in Table 2 (column 2). As predicted, autonomous, but not controlled, motivation positively predicted job search intensity. Furthermore, controlled motivation was a positive predictor of the two indicators of negative unemployment experience, and a negative predictor of the two psychological well-being measures (i.e. life satisfaction and general mental health). Autonomous motivation did not predict general mental health, feelings of social isolation, and feeling worthless, but there was a small negative association with life satisfaction. The two SDT variables explained between .05 and .17 of the outcome variance.

*EV theory, autonomous and controlled motivation*

To test whether adding autonomous and controlled motivation to the regression equation increased the amount of variance explained for the outcome variables, we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis that added autonomous and controlled motivation at the second step after having introduced the EVT variables at the first step (Hypothesis 3). As predicted, adding autonomous motivation and controlled motivation led to a significant increase in explained variance for all five outcome variables (see Table 2, column 3 for each variable), with increases in  $R^2$  between .02 and .04,  $p < .01$ .

The results also show that employment value and autonomous motivation continued to be positive predictors of job search intensity in this expanded analysis, whereas expectancy remained a negative predictor. The two indicators of negative experience of being unemployed were again positively predicted by employment value and controlled motivation in the expanded analysis. Similarly, both indicators of well-being continued to be negatively predicted by employment value and controlled motivation, after adding autonomous motivation and controlled motivation to the regression equation.

The relationship between expectancy of finding a job, employment value, and controlled motivation and the four affective measures (worthlessness, social isolation, life satisfaction, general mental health) were not affected by the introduction of the two SDT variables. In contrast, the pattern of results for autonomous motivation was somewhat different in the expanded analysis compared with the separate analysis. While autonomous motivation was unrelated to reported feelings of worthlessness and feelings of social isolation in the initial regression analysis, it was negatively related to both variables in the expanded analysis. In addition, while autonomous motivation was unrelated to general mental health in the initial analysis, it positively predicted general mental health in the expanded analysis. Finally, while autonomous motivation negatively predicted life satisfaction in the initial analysis, it was no longer related to it in the expanded analysis.

**Discussion**

The rapid increase in the unemployment rate in Europe since the beginning of the new millennium (Noll, 2002) should contribute to an enhanced interest in unemployment research from policy makers and the general public. In that respect, theory-driven research that helps to identify crucial predictors of unemployed people's job search

**Table 2.** Standardized  $\beta$ -coefficients from separate multiple regression analyses, and comparative hierarchical regression analyses

	Feeling worthless and meaningless															
	Job search intensity				Feeling socially isolated				Life satisfaction				General mental health			
	EVT	SDT	EVT + SDT	EVT	SDT	EVT + SDT	EVT	SDT	EVT + SDT	EVT	SDT	EVT + SDT	EVT	SDT	EVT + SDT	
EVT																
Expectancy (E)	-.09*		-.14*	-.35**		-.31**	-.29**		-.25**		.06	.04		.15**		.12**
Employment value (V)	.28**		.23**	.50**		.46**	.40**		.38**		-.32**	-.26**		-.27**		-.25**
E × V	.02		.00	.04		.05	.02		.03		.08	.07		.04		.05
SDT																
Autonomous motivation		.24**		.19**		-.01	-.11*		-.12*		-.09*	.01		.03		.10*
Controlled motivation		.02		-.09		.41**	.19**		.33**		.16**	-.17**		-.23**		-.13**
R <sup>2</sup>	.09**	.06**	.12**	.38**	.17**	.42**	.24**	.11**	.27**	.12**	.09**	.14**	.10**	.05**	.12**	.12**
R <sup>2</sup> change			.03**		.04**			.03**		.02**			.02**			.02**

Note: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

EVT (Expectancy-Value Theory); SDT (Self-Determination Theory)

behaviour and well-being is needed. Therefore, the main purpose of the present study was to investigate hypotheses derived from two motivational approaches, namely SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and EVT (Feather, 1982, 1990). In addition to testing hypotheses from each approach, we also executed a comparative analysis in order to investigate which variables are important in predicting unemployment effects. Before comparing the results relating to the two approaches, we first discuss the findings for each theory separately.

### **Expectancy-value theory**

As predicted, the value unemployed people attach to having a job was a positive predictor of past job search behaviour. Although we used a more specific measure of job finding expectancy, as encouraged by Feather (1990), job search behaviour was negatively related to expectancy and unrelated to the product of expectancy by employment value in the separate EVT analysis. Expectancy continued to be a negative predictor of job search in the expanded analysis. Feather and O'Brien (1987) also found negative correlations between frequency of job-seeking and their measure of control-optimism, but these correlations were not statistically significant. The expectancy measure used in the current research, which reflected unemployed people's optimism about finding a job, was similar although somewhat less general than the one used by Feather and O'Brien. These authors explained their null finding by suggesting that additional extrapersonal forces (e.g. financial worries) and/or intrapsychic demands (e.g. avoiding feelings of guilt or shame) might pressure individuals with low job-finding expectancies to search for a job. The present analyses did not confirm such a hypothetical interpretation. The pressuring forces were measured in the present study through the concept of controlled motivation, but no positive relation between expectation and job seeking was found after controlling for those pressuring forces.

There might be other reasons for the failure to find a positive relation between job searching and expectancy. Some unemployed people who are confident about finding a job might (temporarily) give priority to alternative activities in their lives (e.g. taking care of the household, one's family, hobbies etc.) before looking for a new job (Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2004). Second, people's high expectations might be due to the fact that there are plenty of jobs available on the job market; and therefore one does not have to engage in a frequent search for them. Third, unemployed people with high expectations of finding a job might be so confident about finding a job that they do not see any reason to start their job search. Confident people might believe that they have the necessary skills and competencies that will get them a job when they begin their search, whereas people with low confidence of finding a job might believe that they lack some of the required skills and competencies and therefore search harder. However, being overly confident or optimistic might also be a cost in the sense that unemployed people who are overly confident might find a job less quickly because they have unrealistic expectations that are not met in the labour market. Future research might test these hypotheses about conditions that might affect relations between job search activity and expectancy of finding a job in order to better understand the reason for the findings obtained in the present study.

In regard to the affective outcomes, it was found, in line with EVT, that unemployed people who ascribe a high value to employment experience their unemployment situation as more meaningless and feel more socially isolated. Employment value also negatively predicted both people's general mental health or psychological well-being

(as found in other studies; Jackson, Stafford, Banks, & Warr, 1983) and life satisfaction. These results are consistent with the assumption (Feather, 1990, 1992b) that when an important value is not fulfilled in people's lives, they may suffer negative effects in regard to unhappiness, dissatisfaction, anger, and other affective and health-related outcomes.

The present results also indicated, in line with previous research (e.g. Vinokur & Schul, 1997), that the more confident unemployed people were of finding a job in the near future, the less they experienced their lives as meaningless and empty, the less they felt abandoned and socially isolated, and the higher were their reported mental health scores. Finally, in contrast to our predictions, but in line with previous studies (e.g. Lynd-Stevenson, 1999), we obtained no evidence for the predicted interaction effect of employment value and expectancies. Thus, it appears that being confident in finding a job might not help to offset the negative effects on psychological well-being when unemployed people place high value on being employed.

### **Self-determination theory**

In contrast to EVT, SDT researchers claim that although individuals might be highly motivated to achieve a particular outcome (i.e. finding a job), it is important to consider the qualitative differences in the nature of their motivation to strive for a particular goal, in addition to its strength. These qualitative differences are reflected in the distinction between autonomous and controlled motivation. While individuals with high autonomous job search motivation stand at the origin of their job search behaviour, people with controlled motivation are rather the pawn of demands external to themselves.

On the basis of SDT, we expected that autonomous motivation would positively predict job search behaviour. By contrast, job search would be unrelated to controlled motivation because the volitional strength behind people's activities is more likely to fade away in the face of obstacles and failures when people are pushed into action (Vallerand *et al.*, 1997). The results confirmed this reasoning. Further, as predicted, we found that being forced to search for a job led to stronger experiences of meaninglessness and social isolation, and negatively predicted general health and life satisfaction, presumably because controlled job search motivation is more likely to be accompanied by stressful and pressuring experiences.

While autonomous motivation has consistently been found to positively predict people's psychological well-being in domains other than unemployment (e.g. Blais, Sabourin, Boucher, & Vallerand, 1990; Ryan *et al.*, 1993), such a positive relationship was not obtained in the present sample. The well-being and experiential measures were mostly unrelated to autonomous motivation presumably because unemployed people are continually denied an important outcome in their lives that they personally value (i.e. having a job). In contrast, people with high autonomous motivation in other domains that have been studied were given the opportunity to express their interests and values (i.e. their autonomous motivation), which presumably contributed to their well-being (Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2004).

### **Comparing EVT and SDT**

Because both EVT and SDT conceptualize people's motivation to strive for a particular goal differently, another goal of this research was to compare the two theoretical frameworks on empirical grounds. Because SDT claims that people's motivation to strive

for a particular goal is not only a function of its strength, but also of the quality of motivation (Sheldon & Elliot, 1998), we expected and found that adding autonomous and controlled motivation in addition to the EVT variables led to a significant increase in explained variance. Controlled motivation in particular appeared to be an important additional negative predictor of people's well-being, and a positive predictor of negative unemployment experiences. Autonomous motivation was also found to negatively predict feelings of social isolation and worthlessness in the expanded analysis, and it positively predicted past job search behaviour.

Thus, it seems important to take into consideration differences in the types of motivation as described by SDT in addition to people's *level* of motivation as described by EVT, in order to obtain a more complete understanding of people's unemployment experiences. Although highly valuing employment was associated with decreased psychological well-being, and being confident of finding a job positively predicted adjustment to unemployment, unemployed people who engaged in their job search to meet internal or external pressures also suffered more from their unemployment situation. In contrast, in the expanded multiple regression analyses that controlled for other variables, the  $\beta$  coefficients implied that unemployed people who were searching in a more autonomous manner, either because they experienced inherent enjoyment in their job search or because they perceived it as a personally important activity, tended to experience their unemployment situation less negatively when feelings of social isolation and worthlessness were considered.

### **Limitations and future research**

Some limitations of this research warrant discussion. Because the findings of the present study rely on self-report data, future studies with multiple methods would be useful. Note that the amount of explained job search variance by both theories was quite low. Therefore, it would be particularly important to use an actual measure of the amount of job search behaviour to explore whether a larger amount of variance can be accounted for by both theories.

Further, the data of the present study are cross-sectional and the analyses are correlational, so conclusions cannot be made regarding causal relations between variables. In this respect, future longitudinal research will be important to determine which are the strongest motivational predictors of people's future effective job finding.

Finally, future research might examine the impact of both EVT and SDT in predicting other outcomes than those assessed in the current research. In that respect, it might be the case that EVT can better predict people's effective future job finding and the future job choices of unemployed people than SDT. In contrast, SDT might better account for the amount of experienced job satisfaction on the new job. The latter is important in the light of a longitudinal study by Winefield *et al.* (1991), who showed that becoming employed is not associated with an increase in well-being if people are unsatisfactorily employed (see also O'Brien & Feather, 1990).

### **Conclusions**

The primary aim of this research was to empirically test predictions derived from two different motivational frameworks. Separate analyses indicated that we obtained good evidence for both EVT and SDT. The direct comparison of the two motivational

frameworks provided useful insight into the conceptual divergence between both theories. The results indicate that it would be instructive not only to consider the strength of unemployed people's job search motivation *per se*, as suggested by EVT, but also to take into account the basis for their high motivation (autonomous versus controlled) as proposed by SDT.

To conclude, we would encourage researchers to execute studies in which predictions from different theoretical frameworks are tested in other domains than unemployment, such as, for instance, education (Anderman *et al.*, 2001; Black & Deci, 2000; Feather, 1988). In executing such comparative analyses, it might be instructive and interesting to look for outcomes that are differentially predicted by both theories, because such findings provide the best insights into the phenomena that can be illuminated by both frameworks, and they indirectly indicate the limitations and advantages of each theoretical approach. These comparative studies might help to clarify some conceptual fuzziness in the motivation literature (e.g. Murphy & Alexander, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000) on the basis of empirical grounds.

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