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MAINTAINING THE JOB SEARCH GOAL AGAINST OBSTACLES: A

WITHIN- AND BETWEEN-PERSON STUDY

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Abstract

To determine how individuals maintain their focal goal(s) over time in the face of obstacles and distractions, the current study theorized goal maintenance as a dynamic, self-regulated process and examined this process in the context of the job search. Specifically, I distinguished between two types of obstacles to the job search – emotional obstacles and attentional obstacles – and examined the within-person relationships among these obstacles with job search intensity, as well as three between-person factors that facilitate or hinder the goal maintenance process. These factors are emotion regulation self-efficacy, performance-avoid goal orientation, and perceived job search norms. This study found that at the within-person level, attentional obstacles significantly reduced the number of hours job seekers reported searching for jobs. At the between-person level, higher emotion regulation self-efficacy and perceived job search norms buffered the negative effects of emotion and attentional obstacles, respectively, on hours spent searching; however, performance-avoid goal orientation exacerbated the negative effect of attentional obstacles on hours. These findings are discussed in terms of their theoretical and practical implications.

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Introduction

To various extents unemployment is a global phenomenon, affecting job seekers, especially labor market new entrants, all over the world (CIA World Factbook, 2014). To illustrate, the United States counted approximately 13 million new entrants to the job market in 2014 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Comparative to the United States, the estimated numbers of new labor market entrants in 2014 were over 12 million for India (World Bank, 2014), and 15 million for China (Long, 2015). Their quest for employment is critical, as the success (or lack thereof) of labor market new entrants' job search influences not only their immediate employability (Barber, 1998) but also their long-term career trajectories (Yang & Gysbers, 2007).

Labor market new entrants are shown to be especially unfamiliar with the unstructured nature of searching the job market (Turban, Stevens, & Lee, 2009). In addition, they are likely competing with others who are more experienced and who may even be applying for the same entry-level positions for which the new entrants are qualified (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). Such high levels of ambiguity and competition could overwhelm these job seekers and have a detrimental effect on their effective search. Maladjustment in this process could lead them to procrastinate extensively, target their search effort toward any job in a haphazard way, settle for positions in which they do not fit, or even disengage from the job search altogether (Crossley & Highhouse, 2002). In July 2014, the U.S. unemployment rate hit a five-year low. However, this was mainly because millions in the labor force withdrew from the job market and discontinued their

job search (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Consequently, there is a strong and urgent need to optimize the job search process to facilitate the job seeking effort of new labor market entrants.

Recent research has conceptualized a high-quality job search process as a "highly self-regulated job search process" (Van Hooft, Wanberg, & Van Hoye, 2013, p. 9). This is because, to obtain employment, individuals need to continually focus their attention on the job search goal, a distal goal the path toward which involves persistence over a considerable period of time. However, one's pursuit of the employment goal is often interrupted by various obstacles (Wanberg, Kanfer, & Rotundo, 1999), including constraints such as physical and emotional exhaustion and competing demands and temptations such as temporary work and family obligations. Such obstacles job seekers face on a daily basis could impede job search success by lowering the frequency and intensity with which people engage in job search (Liu, Huang, Wang, 2014; Wanberg, Zhu, & Van Hooft, 2010), which has been directly linked to employment outcomes (Kanfer et al., 2001; Liu, Wang, Liao, & Shi, 2014). Accordingly, Van Hooft et al. (2013) suggest that maintaining job search goals by sustaining resilience against negative emotionality and distractions is essential to a high-quality job search process. However this goal maintenance process remains unexplored, limiting our understanding about how seekers overcome obstacles during the course of their job search, as well as the personal and environmental characteristics that might facilitate or hinder job search goal maintenance.

Specifically, extent literature on job search suffers from the following limitations. First, little is known about the types of obstacles faced by new labor market entrants, nor

do we understand differential effects various types of obstacles might have on their job search intensity. As Wanberg and colleagues (2010) pointed out, preliminary findings regarding the effect of job search obstacles were largely inclusive and a taxonomy of factors that act to impede job search is still lacking (Wanberg et al., 1999; Wanberg, Hough, & Song, 2002). Second, a theoretical framework is yet to be developed that explains how job seekers protect their job search goals against various obstacles. Moreover, personal and environmental factors that could facilitate/impede job seekers' effort to maintain their employment goal have not been integrated into theories of job search quality. Third, most extant research assesses job search obstacles at one point in time (Wanberg et al., 1999; Wanberg et al., 2002). This approach ignores the dynamic nature of the job search process, as job seekers' cognitions and behaviors are adjusted in response to external environment and internal states which are also time-varying (Liu et al., 2014; Sun, Song, & Lim, 2013). As pointed out by Van Hooft et al. (2013), job seekers' *reoccurring* obstacles and *repeated* attempts to refocus on job search play an important role in this dynamic process, and thus should be captured by appropriate research design.

Aiming to investigate the dynamic goal maintenance process during job search, the current study contributes to the literature on self-regulation and job search in several important ways. First, it answers the call to study job search quality by examining how job seekers overcome obstacles over time (Van Hooft et al., 2013). Drawing on the goal maintenance literature (Achtziger, Gollwitzer, & Sheeran, 2008; Shah & Kruglanski, 2008), I theorize the process in which individuals maintain their job search goal and identify between-person factors that facilitate/hinder resilience during such goal

maintenance. Second, I posit that job seekers deal with two distinct types of obstacles: *emotional obstacles* and *attentional* obstacles. To my knowledge, this represents the first attempt to categorize job search obstacles, which could benefit both theory development and job search counseling and intervention. Third, I posit and demonstrate the moderating effects of three between-person variables (i.e., emotion regulation efficacy, performance-avoid goal orientation, and perceived job search norms) as influences of the within-person goal maintenance process. Fourth, the study focuses on graduating college students whose unemployment is especially problematic. Using repeated semi-weekly assessments across two samples, the current study better captures the dynamic nature of the goal maintenance process in job search than previous cross-sectional or lab-based research.

Self-Regulation and High Quality Job Search

In a recent review, Van Hooft and colleagues (2013) argued that more attention should be given to job search *quality*, in addition to the examination of job search *intensity*. According to their seminal work, a high quality job search is a highly self-regulated job search. This is because to achieve the employment goal individuals must not behave haphazardly, but instead concentrate their effort toward a clear objective (i.e., obtaining a job). In the broader literature, self-regulation refers to one's regulation of emotions and behavior during goal pursuit and his or her reactions to successes and failures along the way (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004). It involves self-control of attention, thoughts, affect, and behavior deliberately or automatically (Karoly, 1993). The self-regulation framework is especially appropriate to guide the study of job search because of the autonomous, self-directed nature of the job search, which requires personal control to

maintain goal-related activities and avoid distractions (Kruglanski et al., 2002). In addition, self-regulation is particularly needed when working toward distal goals that are not immediately realizable (Sansone & Thoman, 2006). Acquiring employment through job searching is considered a distal goal, as it is often characterized by immediate effort and delayed (if any) success. Furthermore, self-regulation is needed while working toward goals that are not necessarily pleasurable or exciting, such as finishing mundane work tasks, learning difficult materials, and dieting. Similarly, job search is usually not considered enjoyable, and is instead typically characterized by repeated rejections and heightened pressure to establish financial security (Wanberg et al., 1999).

Scholars have suggested that self-regulation is influenced by individual difference factors like personality, self-evaluations, and motives (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001; Karoly, 1993). Various aspects of job search-specific self-regulation, key to a high quality job search (Van Hooft et al., 2013), are influenced by individual difference factors ranging from stable personal attributes (e.g., conscientiousness, proactive personality, positive affectivity; Brown et al. 2006; Côté, Saks, & Zikic, 2006), to situation-specific personal attributes (e.g., job search self-efficacy; Dahling, Melloy, & Thompson, 2013), to the situation itself in which one is embedded (e.g., economic hardship, social support; Kanfer et al., 2001). Despite these findings, no prior research has provided an integrated framework to examine the role of these individual difference factors in protecting job search goals in the face of various obstacles. I seek to understand the influence of emotion regulation efficacy (a personal attribute), job search goal orientation (a situation-specific personal attribute), and perceptions of job search norms (a situational factor), variables that may hold the key to successful goal maintenance during job search. As

stated by Van Hooft et al. (2013, p. 16), "because obstacles, setbacks, and difficulties are abundant during job search, and likely distract job seekers from their goal pursuit, a high-quality job search process must encompass self-regulatory techniques that help initiating and maintaining the planned job search activities despite temptations, obstacles, and setbacks." To explain such obstacle resistance process during job search, I first draw on the goal maintenance literature, based on which the role of various individual difference factors are extrapolated.

<p style="text-align:center">Goal Maintenance for a High Quality Job Search</p>

Prior research argues for the importance of *goal maintenance* to self-control and sustained performance (Achtziger et al., 2008; Dreisbach & Wenke, 2011). Goal maintenance can be conceptualized as a self-regulatory technique by which one keeps focal goals accessible and active (Van Hooft et al., 2013). Goal maintenance is achieved by both supporting current goals and by shielding them via suppressing attractive alternatives and distractions over time (Shah & Kruglanski, 2008).

Several areas of research have examined strategies for self-regulated goal maintenance, including social psychology with implementation intentions (Achtziger et al., 2008), automatic inhibition of alternative goals (Shah, Friedman, & Kruglanski, 2002), and counteractive self-control (Trope & Fishbach, 2000), and developmental psychology with attention in delay of gratification (Peake, Hebl, & Mischel, 2002). Consistent with the general self-regulation literature, which suggests that both emotional control and cognitive control underlie the behavioral manifestation of self-regulation (e.g., Karoly, 1993), the above-mentioned literature also explains goal maintenance in terms of active self-regulation of emotion and cognition.

Specifically, emotional control, concerns self-regulatory-specific strategies to handle disruptive emotions (Wanberg et al., 1999). People need to manage negative, and sustain positive, emotions to focus attention and not get discouraged or sidetracked. Achtziger et al. (2008) maintain that people need to regulate their "inner psychological states" because negative states are destructive to persistence and goal attainment. In two successive studies, the authors showed that negative inner states could lead to disruptive thoughts that "derail ongoing goal striving" (p. 387). Negative inner states reduce performance efficiency by clouding judgment to adapt strategies when experiencing harmful emotions (e.g. sadness) and related disruptive thoughts (e.g. cravings; Herman & Polivy, 2004). People experiencing strong negative emotions use fewer goal pursuit strategies and have more trouble managing their effort (Williams, Vickers, & Rodrigues, 2002). On the other hand, positive emotions are just as important to self-regulation and goal maintenance (Aspinwall, 1998; Tice, Baumeister, Shmueli, & Muraven, 2007), suggesting that sustaining them over the course of goal pursuit is critical for maintaining intensity over time (Louro, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2007). Hence, emotional control is needed to regulate one's emotional reactions and experiences to prevent the manifestation of negative inner states, modulate their influence, and promote positivity. Accordingly, an employee recently passed up for a promotion should control experienced negative emotions in reaction to the situation. If not, individuals' focus on the means to obtain the promotion goal, namely good performance, may deteriorate, thus potentially diminishing the chances of promotion in the future. Instead, the employee would be better served by channeling positive emotions into productive behaviors that are constructive for performance and career advancement.

Related yet distinctive to emotional control is cognitive control, referring to self-regulatory strategies to keep attention on the focal goal, thus sustaining intended behavior against various obstacles (von Suchodoletz & Achtziger, 2011). Unfocused attention and unintended behaviors could result in cognitive challenges that can cause a failure to initiate action and derailment from goal pursuit (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006). Failure to initiate action could stem from cognitively draining situational demands that reduce the level of focal goal activation (Einstein & MacDaniel, 1996). Both Shah et al. (2005) and Achtziger et al. (2008) argue that people must make focal goals more cognitively accessible to focus attention. It is in this way that people can keep their focal goal in the forefront of their mind and more adequately avoid procrastination and dismiss intrusive thoughts when temptations come. For example, when an employee who is constantly thinking about an upcoming project deadline (i.e., high goal accessibility) is invited to go out with coworkers after work, s/he will be more likely to think of whether accepting the invitation affects finishing up the project rather than saying yes right away.

Previous job search research also suggests that the success of both emotional control and cognitive control are influenced by individual differences. Situational differences, like the perception of those around you, can affect the extent to which job seekers can execute emotional control and active search behaviors (Van Hooft et al., 2013). So too can dispositional factors affect the strength of, commitment to, and level of control over employment goals. For example, in a self-regulatory process model of job search developed by Wanberg, Zhu, Kanfer, and Zhang (2012), trait motivational differences between job seekers are directly responsible for different effectiveness in maintaining job search intensity. Specifically, job seekers who are unable to control their

motivation and emotion exhibit lower job search intensity over time and a significant

deterioration of their mental health, and resort to self-defeating cognitions and negative

emotions that reinforce their desire to disengage from goal pursuit.

Job Search Obstacles

Job search is associated with many types of obstacles that can impede one's

progress, prolong the resource drain, and even deter people from continuing. In prior

research, the effects of job search obstacles on job search intensity have ranged from

significant (Brooks & Buckner, 1996) to inconclusive (Wanberg et al., 1999). This

discrepancy could be attributed to the inconsistent ways job search obstacles have been

operationalized. Notably in some studies, job search obstacles are considered to be

"outside" the person, such as family, social, or school obligations, leisure activities, or

temporary work (Brooks & Buckner, 1996). These tend to be events or commitments that

can distract the seeker because they require time, attention, and resources that would

otherwise be spent on the job search. For example, a study by Van Hooft, Born, Taris,

and van der Flier (2005) shows that job seekers with more family responsibilities had

lower job search intentions and performed less search behaviors than individuals with

less family responsibilities. Moreover, Wanberg et al. (2010) show that some of the most

cited "external" reasons for not working on the job search on a given day were "wanted

to do other things" (15%) and "other" (27.2%; e.g. "errands; p. 800). In other studies, the

focus is on obstacles "inside" the person. Such obstacles are related to internal feelings

that hinder and/or demotivate a job seeker from searching. These typically manifest as

exhaustion and burnout brought on by lack of progress (Song, Uy, Zhang, & Shi, 2009),

negative affect (Crossley & Stanton, 2005), and even illness (Brooks & Bruckner, 1996).

Job seekers may become ill from stress and anxiety over financial insecurity and the open-ended nature of unemployment, or they may experience feelings of frustration, anger, or shame. For example, both Allan (1990) and Brooks and Buckner (1996) suggest that people were likely to postpone their job search due to illness. In the study by Wanberg et al. (2010), the most cited "internal" reasons given for not job searching were "did not feel well" (18.4%), "needed a break" (13.6%), and "discouraged" (9.5%).

In their work with implementation intentions, Achtziger et al. (2008) discuss the possibility of this same distinction between obstacles. They empirically studied the positive effects of implementation intentions that specify weaknesses inside the person (i.e. negative inner states), but discuss the benefits of specifying the challenges arising outside the person as well. It appears that there are in fact two distinct types of job search obstacles: emotional obstacles and attentional obstacles, both of which could detract the individual from the job search. Specific to new labor market entrants, obstacles are likely to manifest in both forms. College students' time is often constrained by classes, projects, exams, and social commitments. Simultaneously, they are also likely to be unsure about how to approach the job search (Turban, Stevens, & Lee, 2009), unaware of their priorities and needs for success and security beyond school (Boswell, Zimmerman, & Swider, 2012), and feel tired and frustrated during the lengthy pursuit of employment (Feldman, 2003). These two types of obstacles are likely to impair job seekers' ability to fully engage in job search. Thus, I propose:

Hypothesis 1a: Emotional obstacles are negatively related to job search intensity.

Hypothesis 1b: Attentional obstacles are negatively related to job search intensity.

Individual and Contextual Factors Influencing Goal Maintenance

During Job Search

Emotion Regulation Efficacy

The ability to recognize, control, and use one's emotions is essential when engaging in tasks in general (Kanfer & Heggestad, 1997) and the job search in particular (Wanberg et al., 1999). Salovey and Mayer (1990) define emotion regulation as "the ability to [manage] emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (p. 10), while Gross (1998) further specifies the process as determining how "…individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions" (p. 275). The job search can be an arduous process that takes an emotional toll on both new and veteran labor market entrants (Vinokur & Caplan, 1987), and the ability to regulate emotions enables people to more rapidly recover from psychological distress. Thus, job seekers with high self-efficacy for regulating their emotions may feel they can better manage their emotions over the course of their search to overcome emotional obstacles.

Research shows that individuals' ability to maintain a focal goal in light of alternative goals and obstacles is affected by their current mood (Achtziger et al., 2008). The job search is an emotional process consisting of many ups and downs in experienced affect that influence the time spent actively searching (Barber, Daly, Giannantonio, & Phillips 1994). People who experience negative emotional states, like dejection, are significantly less likely to persist on tasks and perform worse overall than others who are not experiencing such states (Shah, 2002). In a daily study of job search affect by Wanberg et al. (2010), individuals who reported lower progress on one day tended to

report lower positive and higher negative affect the next day. These individuals, subsequently, were more likely to disengage from the job search.

There are two important ways in which emotion regulation could be beneficial to maintain job search goals. First, emotion regulation could help job seekers to recognize and counteract the negative emotions they experience from rejection, stigma, or pressure. The job search requires representing oneself in the best way, and any employer silence or rejection could be taken personally as a reflection of low competence (Melloy & Liu, 2014). Job seekers, like anyone else in an evaluative situation, are likely to be especially emotionally sensitive to criticism and pressure. Meta-analyses among workers show that stressful events and pressure can lead to emotional exhaustion (Lee & Ashforth, 1996), which can lead to somatic symptoms that can, over time, erode one's ability and desire to search for jobs (Salovey, Rothman, Detweiler, & Steward, 2000). A better control over one's emotions can serve to temper negative emotional reactions. In fact, people are less impinged by emotionally demanding situations and more engaged in tasks when they are better able to regulate their emotions (Bechtoldt, Rohrmann, De Pater, & Beersma, 2011). Job seekers with high emotion regulation could offset negative emotions (i.e. emotional obstacles) because they are better able to recognize and regulate these emotions within themselves before they can have a detrimental impact.

Second, emotion regulation could serve to channel positive emotions toward the job search, which sustains job search effort despite obstacles. By increasing positive affect associated with the job search, job seekers with high regulatory ability could better maintain search intensity by up-regulating productive emotions to direct themselves toward constructive (e.g., goal setting, self encouragement) rather than destructive

activities (e.g., withdrawal, self discouragement; Law, Wong, & Song, 2004). Job seekers who report lower state positive affect one day tend to report less frequent search behaviors the following day if they are unable to detach from negativity (Wanberg et al., 2010). Higher emotion regulation can potentially mitigate this negative emotional state and enhance the optimism regarding job search, which could help job seekers to maintain goal-directed behavioral intensity. Accordingly, I hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2: Participants' self-reported Emotion Regulation Efficacy will moderate the relationship between emotional obstacles and job search intensity, such that the negative relationship will be weaker (vs. stronger) for those with higher (vs. lower) Emotion Regulation Efficacy.

Performance-Avoid Goal Orientation

Goal orientation refers to individual differences in goal preferences in achievement situations (Dweck, 1986). In domains ranging from education to psychology, one's goal orientation can predict a variety of important criteria, including self-efficacy, commitment, knowledge acquisition, and job performance (e.g., Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Porter, 2005). Views of goal achievement are situation-specific (Button, Mathieu, & Zajac, 1996), and these situations can affect the behavior patterns of people engaged in self-regulation. Situational characteristics as simple as task framing (Stevens & Gist, 1997) can shape people's interpretations of challenging tasks and affect their subsequent problem-solving and decision-making abilities (Higgins, 1998). Individuals dynamically adjust their behavior in response to the situation to be consistent with the way in which they view their goals.

Job searching represents a high-stake situation and there is a high risk of failure, especially when job opportunities are limited and the job market is saturated and competitive. These circumstances affect how people view their goals, and their risky nature could incline some people toward *performance-avoid goal orientations* (PAGO; Elliot & Church, 1997). Those with a higher PAGO seek success as a means to avoid failure and unfavorable judgments of competence (Vandewalle, 1997). Research shows that higher levels of PAGO are associated with reduced self-regulatory ability and decreased motivation and persistence (Creed, Buys, Tilbury, & Crawford, 2013; Creed, Fallon, & Hood, 2009).

Building on findings from both Shah et al. (2005) and Achtziger et al. (2008), I posit that PAGO could hinder cognitive control, thus negatively affecting goal maintenance. Lower expectations of performance outcomes, as a result of high PAGO (Creed et al., 2013), could reduce the subsequent use of cognitive strategies, metacognition, and conscious effort management (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). The use of cognitive strategies is important for developing goal-striving action plans to sustain effort in light of setbacks and obstacles. For example, Pintrich's (2000) longitudinal study found that students who felt they needed to show their competence and avoid demonstrating failure (i.e., high levels of PAGO) abandoned their cognitive strategies (i.e., active cognitive engagement) and instead adopted self-handicapping strategies (i.e., forethoughts to reduce effort if performance requirements are not met). Subsequently, these students reduced their effort to study for future exams and as a result performed more poorly over time compared with those who have lower levels of PAGO.

During the course of the job search, seekers with higher levels of PAGO are motivated by a fear of performing their search poorly and not obtaining successful outcomes. Consequently, they will find it more difficult to control goal engagement cognitions over time. Compared to others with lower levels of PAGO, these job seekers are likely to be unable to effectively pursue employment and disengage from the search when it becomes difficult and emotionally taxing or when job search competes for limited resources with other activities. As such, I posit:

Hypothesis 3: Performance-avoid goal orientation (PAGO) will moderate the relationship between attentional obstacles and job search intensity, such that the negative relationship will be stronger (vs. weaker) for job seekers who have higher (vs. lower) levels of PAGO.

Perceived Job Search Norms

In this study, I use perceived job search norms to refer to individuals' perceptions of job search behaviors performed by peer job seekers. It is a type of subjective norm that constitutes job seekers' beliefs about their environment, resulting from their interactions with peer job seekers (Ostroff, Kinicki, & Muhammad, 2012). Prior job search studies have shown that behavioral intentions and actual behaviors are increased under conditions of strong subjective norms (Van Hooft, Born, Taris, & van der Flier, 2004; van Ryn & Vinokur, 1992). Just as subjective job search norms can initiate and increase action, I posit that perceived job search behavioral norms can facilitate the maintenance of job search goals by *sustaining* action over time against obstacles.

People use perceptions of peer norms as a standard with which to compare their own behaviors (Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius, 2007). Higher,

stronger perceptions of others performing job search behaviors can serve as reminders of the focal goal and motivate individuals to increase their own search behaviors. If peers are searching for jobs intensively and obtain important leads, the job seeker is likely to avoid thoughts and distractions that might otherwise decrease his or her intensity and develop the contingency plan to spend more time on the job search when temptations come. In fact, job search counseling programs laud the importance of normative behaviors and show that observing peer job seekers' search behaviors can increase motivation and confidence to overcome job search obstacles and temptations (Rutter & Jones, 2007). When observing classmates or roommates frequently attending job fairs, the focal job seeker is likely to do the same despite that he/she feels discouraged or upset.

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) suggests that individuals observe the expressed attitudes, emotions, and behaviors of others and base their actions on the observed (or implied) consequences of others' actions. Indeed, evidence confirms that new market entrants are made aware of the current job market characteristics and benchmark behaviors needed for success based on the emotional projections and behavioral outcomes of their peers and important figures in their life. In a study by Thompson, Nitzarim, Her, and Dahling (2013), the ability of young adults to recognize others' emotions following experiences with unemployment significantly affected and redirected their job search motivations. When figures important to the participants experienced unemployment and appeared unfocused, unmotivated, and/or pessimistic about their job search, the participants took notice and subsequently reported more despair and distraction from their focal goals. Conversely, if job search norms are perceived to be stronger, and others are viewed as actively engaging in the job market

and making progress, the focal seeker will likely model such effective behaviors even when faced with repeated rejections. Just as weak behavioral norms can convey negative emotions and leads susceptible to distraction, stronger norms could provide instrumental support/advice to job seekers to help them to overcome obstacles.

Obstacles and distractions can also strongly impede the cognitive recognition of appropriate action initiation (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006). Putting in the time to effectively pursue goals can be impeded by a reluctance to act or by the failure to notice when a good opportunity to perform has arrived because of competing demands. Perceptions of strong job search norms provide the force necessary to guide behavior in light of these obstacles. Strong norms (e.g., a workplace behavior norm) suggests to the perceiver the relative priority of competing goals, providing an overriding referent standard for action regulation under uncertainty (Zohar, 2000). For example, van Damn and Menting (2012) found that subjective job search norms significantly influenced the extent to which people engaged in job search behaviors intensely. Here, job seekers who believed that those close to them considered employment important and had high expectations that the seeker would search for jobs were more likely to consider the job search goal a priority.

It is for these reasons I propose that perceived job search norms can help job seekers form clear cognitive maps to help them navigate the job search process. Thus, job seekers perceiving strong job search norms should not be easily distracted or demotivated by negative emotionality or distractions.

Hypothesis 4a: Perceived job search norms will moderate the relationship between emotional obstacles and job search intensity, such that the negative relationship will be weaker (vs. stronger) when the job search norms are more (vs. less) positive.

Hypothesis 4b: Perceived job search norms will moderate the relationship between attentional obstacles and job search intensity, such that the negative relationship will be weaker (vs. stronger) when the job search norms are more (vs. less) positive.

Figure 1 depicts the hypothesized model.
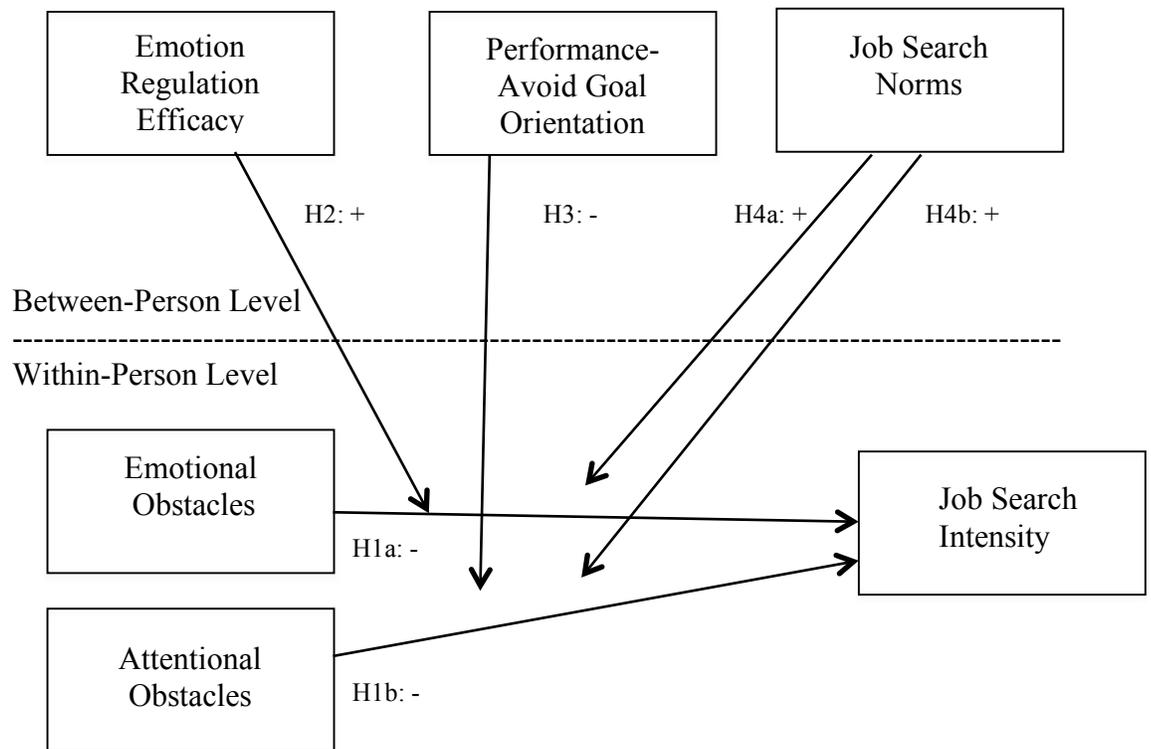
Figure 1. The hypothesized model.

<center>**Pilot Study**</center>

I used two studies to generate evidence regarding the goal maintenance process during job search. The pilot study assessed the dimensionality of the adapted job search obstacles scale using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The main study further evaluated the reliability and construct validity of the scale and tested the hypotheses.

Methods

Data collection procedure and sample. Pilot data was collected to explore the dimensionality of the adapted job search obstacles scale. Senior college students actively searching for jobs were recruited from four universities in China. The study was advertised to students on the website of the universities' career centers. The announcement invited senior students who were actively searching for jobs to participate in the study. Each qualified individual was informed that all of his or her information would be held strictly confidential, and that s/he would be given a free career interest test and counseling as a token of appreciation. Participants held majors in a wide variety of areas, such as psychology, journalism, bioengineering, human resource management, and economics.

To measure the dynamic job search obstacles, participants were interviewed a maximum of 12 times via semi-weekly telephone surveys over the course of six weeks from October to December. The university career centers suggested tracking the student job seekers for six weeks. This is because most student job seekers are active from late October to early December, so it is easier to observe job search behaviors during this period. This is consistent with previous research that calls for examining the job search within smaller intervals to understand more nuanced behaviors (Blau, 1993; Saks &

Ashforth, 2000). Participants were surveyed two times per week because the job search process is often lengthy, and significant events occur at a low base rate. Therefore, measuring job search behaviors more frequently is unnecessary (Liu et al., 2014), while less frequent assessment could result in increased retrieval bias. Trained research assistants telephoned participants between 6:00pm and 9:00pm each Wednesday and Sunday to assess their job search experiences over the previous half week. Both the initial and semi-weekly telephone surveys were conducted in Chinese, and the English-language measures were converted into Chinese using the translation-back translation procedure (Brislin, 1970). During the interviews, research assistants gathered information regarding participants' job search obstacles.

In total, 85 senior college students were recruited for the pilot data collection. Forty-three of the 85 (50.58%) participants were female. Participants' average age was 24.04 years ($SD = 2.61$), and their average GPA was 3.35 ($SD = .43$). On average participants completed 5.40 within-person observations (total $N = 457$). According to information provided by the university career centers, the students sampled were representative of the student population.

Results

Preliminary analysis with the pilot sample. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to evaluate the factor structure of the job search obstacles scale. Specifically, EFA was conducted on the pilot sample using MPlus 6.1 (Muthén & Muthén, 2010).

Eight items from Wanberg, Zhu, and Van Hooft (2008) were adapted to assess individuals' obstacles to the job search. Individuals were asked to respond on a 5-point

Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) with their level of

agreement to having faced obstacles to the job search in the past half week. Maximum

likelihood factor analysis was performed on the pilot sample of the data ($N = 457$), using

direct oblimin rotation. The correlation between emotional obstacles ($M = 2.57$, $SD = .74$)

and attentional obstacles ($M = 3.16$, $SD = .72$) is significant, albeit small in magnitude (r

$= .15$, $p < .01$). The results of the EFA suggest a two-factor solution, with emotion and

attention factors explaining 52% of the total variance. The first factor, emotional

obstacles, is composed of four items that indicate tiredness and related negative emotions

associated with job search. The second emergent factor, attentional obstacles, is

composed of four items that indicate daily non-job-search events and other commitments

and desires. Results of the exploratory factor analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
*Results of the exploratory factor analysis of the job search obstacles scale in the pilot
study*

	Factor	
Item	Emotion	Attention
I felt discouraged and upset	**.81**	-.10
I don't know what to do	**.65**	-.08
I feel exhausted and need rest	**.45**	.31
I am not feeling well	**.50**	.29
I have classes to attend and homework/papers to do	.12	**.40**
I want to do something else	-.04	**.52**
I have social activities to participate	-.09	**.51**
Other obligations (i.e., errands)	.05	**.65**
Eigenvalue	2.69	1.48
Percentage of variance explained by both factors	52.09	

Note. $N = 457$. Extraction method: maximum likelihood; rotation method: direct oblimin
with Kaiser normalization. Boldfaced loadings indicate on which factor the item mainly
loads.

Main Study

Methods

Data collection procedure and sample. The data collection for the main study followed the same semi-weekly data collection procedure as the pilot study. Additionally, between-person variables were also measured two weeks prior to the semi-weekly telephone interviews. Specifically, participants completed an online questionnaire of demographic information, their GPA, and measures of emotion regulation efficacy, performance-avoid goal orientation, and perceived job search norms. This questionnaire was administered during the second week of October, which the university career centers suggested was the time when most Chinese college seniors start to look for jobs and companies begin recruiting on campus. During the telephone interviews, research assistants gathered information regarding participants' job search obstacles and job search intensity.

For the main sample, a total of 151 senior college students from four universities in China were recruited to participate (no overlap between the pilot sample and the main sample). Eighty-two of the 151 (58.9%) participants were female. Participants' average age was 23.39 years ($SD = 1.90$), and their average GPA was 3.0 ($SD = .51$). On average participants completed 8.60 within-person observations (total $N = 1,294$).

Measures

Emotion regulation efficacy. Four items from Wong and Law's (2002) emotional intelligence scale were used to assess emotion regulation efficacy. Participants were asked to respond to the four items on 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (*strongly*

disagree) to 7 *(strongly agree)*. A sample item read, *"I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions."* For this scale, Cronbach's alpha was .91.

Performance-avoid goal orientation. Two items from Elliot and McGregor's (2001) goal orientation scale were adapted and used to assess performance-avoid goal orientation. The directions and language were changed to reference the job search. Participants were asked to respond on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 *(strongly disagree)* to 7 *(strongly agree)*. The items were, *"I just want to avoid doing poorly in this job search,"* and, *"My goal during job search is to avoid performing poorly."* For this scale, Cronbach's alpha is .77.

Perceived job search norms. Five items from Wanberg, Hough, and Song (2002) were used to assess how often individuals believe their peers to be actively performing job search behaviors. Individuals were asked to respond on scales ranging from 0 *(never)* to 5 *(very often)* about the frequency in which their peers engage in job search behaviors. Sample items were *"Looked at help wanted/classified ads in the newspaper or in a newsletter,"* and *"Telephoned or visited a possible employer."* For this scale, Cronbach's alpha is .70.

Job search obstacles. Eight items from Wanberg et al. (2010) were adapted to assess job search obstacles. Individuals were asked to respond on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 *(strongly disagree)* to 5 *(strongly agree)* with their level of agreement to having faced obstacles to the job search in the past half week. A sample item for emotional obstacles was, *"I felt discouraged or upset."* A sample item for attentional obstacles was, *"I have classes to attend and/or homework to do."* Emotion items and attention items, respectively, were averaged to obtain scores for each participant.

Cronbach's alphas for the emotion and attention subscales across 12 measurement occasions were .71 (range = .63-.79, *SD* = .05) and .71 (range = .64-.79, *SD* = .04), respectively. The ICC(1) for emotional obstacles was .39, and the ICC(1) for attentional obstacles was .43, suggesting substantial variation at both the within-person level and the between-person level.

Job search intensity. Participants were asked to indicate the number of hours per day during the previous half-week they spent looking for new jobs and performing job search activities per day (e.g., sending out resumes, making cold calls, and browsing want-ads). Past research has shown that hours spent on the job search correlated highly (*r* = .56 - .68) with multiple-item scales of job search intensity (Wanberg, Glomb, Song, & Sorensen, 2005), and using number of hours to assess job search intensity is consistent with existing research on the job search (Blau, 1993; Wanberg, Kanfer, & Banas, 2000; Wanberg, Zhu, Kanfer, & Zhang, 2012). ICC(1) for job search intensity is .49.

Control variables. The variable gender could be related to job search behaviors (Wanberg et al., 2005), thus it was used as a control in the analysis. Previous research on job search also recognized that the day of the week during which participants were assessed for job search behaviors, as well as the order in which behaviors were reported over the course of the search, could also impact job search intensity (Liu et al., 2014). These will be controlled for as well because participants' behaviors recorded on one day may be higher or lower than those reported on another depending on the opportunities they had to search for jobs and the nature of the targeted job's business hours.

Analytical Strategy

The data in this study are organized into a hierarchical structure in which multiple

observations are nested within each person over time. To partition the variance at

between- and within-person levels and analyze this type of nested data, multilevel

modeling techniques have been developed (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Additionally, a

newly adapted and translated scale (i.e., job search obstacles) is used. Therefore,

confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to demonstrate and replicate the

expected factor structure determined by the EFA in the pilot study. The main sample was

used to conduct the CFA and tests of the hypotheses. Both the factor analysis and the

tests of the hypotheses were performed using MPlus 6.1 (Muthén & Muthén, 2010).

Further, I am interested in determining the moderating effects of between-person

variables on a within-person relationship. According to Hofmann and Gavin (1998),

when dealing with cross-level moderation, group mean centering is necessary. All within-

person predictors (i.e., obstacles) in the main sample were centered by individual means

(i.e., group means) to warrant the accurate interpretation of the statistical estimates in

multilevel modeling (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

To confirm the factor structure obtained through EFA, a confirmatory factor

analysis (CFA) was conducted on the main sample of data ($N = 1,240$). The results of the

CFA are reported in Table 2. The results of the CFA indicate acceptable fit of the

proposed two-factor solution ($\chi^2(15) = 112.70$, $p < .01$; CFI = .96, SRMR = .03). All

items loaded significantly onto their corresponding factor ($ps < .01$). This model also fit

to the data significantly better than a one-factor model ($\chi^2(16) = 187.34$, $p < .01$; CFI =

.92, SRMR = .05; Δ χ^2(1) = 74.64, p < .01), in which the emotion factor and the attention

factor are combined.

Table 2
*Results of the confirmatory factor analysis of the job search obstacles scale in the main
study*

	Factor	
Item	Emotion	Attention
I felt discouraged and upset	.45**	
I don't know what to do	.46**	
I feel exhausted and need rest	.77**	
I am not feeling well	.48**	
I have classes to attend and homework/papers to do		.57**
I want to do something else		.66**
I have social activities to participate		.43**
Others (i.e., errands)		.51**
N	1240	
χ^2 (15)	112.70**	
Comparative fit index (CFI)	.96	
Standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR)	.03	

Note. N = 1,259. Factor loadings are standardized. **p < .01.

The means, standard deviations, and between-person correlations among the

variables are presented in a Table 3. Within-person correlations are also presented.

Participants engaged in job search activities for an average of 2.08 hours (*SD* = 1.13) per

day. At the within-person level, emotional obstacles were not significantly related to job

search intensity (r = -.03, p > .05), but attentional obstacles were significantly related to

job search intensity (r = -.01, p < .01

Table 3

Descriptive statistics and correlations for between- and within-person variables

	Variable	M	Within-Person SD	Between-Person SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1.	Age	23.39		1.90	-								
2.	Gender	.41		.49	.02	-							
3.	Report day	.50	.25	.00	-.02	.00	-	-	-.00	-.01			
4.	Job Search Intensity (Hours)	2.08	1.15	1.13	-.05	-.16**	-.03	-	-.04	-.24*			
5.	Emotional Obstacles	2.57	.60	.48	.00	.02	-.01	-.03	(.71)	.11**			
6.	Attentional Obstacles	3.01	.59	.52	-.00	-.05	-.01	-.18**	.07*	(.71)			
7.	Emotion Regulation	4.67		1.30	.28	-.06	-.01	.01	-.14*	-.00	(.90)		
8.	Performance-Avoid Goal Orientation	3.53		1.54	-.53*	.12	.01	-.13**	.06*	-.00	-.03	(.77)	
9.	Perceived Job Search Norms	2.76		.72	-.23*	.07*	.01	-.07*	.11**	-.03	-.05	.22*	(.70)

Note. Correlations below the diagonal represent between-person correlations ($N = 152$). Numbers in parentheses are alpha reliability coefficients. To calculate the between-person correlations, the within-person variables (i.e., report day, order, job search intensity, emotional obstacles, attentional obstacles) were averaged across days. Dummy coded variables: Gender: 0 = female, 1 = male; Report day: 0 = Sunday, 1 = Wednesday.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Within-person main effects. The within-person multilevel model parameter estimates of emotional and attentional obstacles in predicting job search intensity are presented in Table 4. Hypotheses 1a and 1b state that emotional and attentional obstacles, respectively, will be negatively related to job search intensity. The mean value of the random slope for the relationship between emotional obstacles and job search intensity was not significant ($\gamma_{01} = .09$, $p > .05$). The mean value of the random slope for the relationship between attentional obstacles and job search intensity, however, was significant ($\gamma_{02} = -.15$, $p < .05$). These results supported Hypothesis 1b, but not 1a.

Table 4
Within-person main effect models

	Job Search Intensity		
Variable	Coefficient	*SE*	95% CI
Random intercept (β_0)			
M (γ_{00})	2.38**	.15	[2.09, 2.68]
Variance (τ_0)	1.29**	.22	[.85, 1.74]
Random slope for emotion (β_1)			
M (γ_{01})	.09	.08	[-.06, .24]
Variance (τ_1)	.21*	.09	[.04, .38]
Random slope for attention (β_2)			
M (γ_{02})	-.15*	.07	[-.29, -.01]
Variance (τ_2)	.14*	.06	[.02, .26]
Fixed slope for report day (β_3)	-.14*	.07	[-.27, -.004]
Fixed slope for order (β_4)	-.05**	.02	[-.09, -.01]

Note. $N = 1,229$. Level 1 equation: Job search intensity $= \beta_0 + \beta_1$(emotion) $+ \beta_2$(attention) $+ \beta_3$(report day) $+ \beta_4$(order). Level 2 equations: $\beta_0 = \gamma_{00}$; $\beta_1 = \gamma_{10}$; $\beta_2 = \gamma_{20}$. Report day: 0 = Sunday, 1 = Wednesday. Order ranges 1-12, representing each time point.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

The variances of the random slopes of the relationships between both emotional and attentional obstacles with job search intensity were significant ($\tau_1 = .21$, $p < .05$; and $\tau_2 = .14$, $p < .05$, respectively). Therefore, there is considerable variation in the within-person slopes that is likely attributable to between-person predictors. Next, the effects of between-person predictors on the within-person slopes were tested.

Testing cross-level moderations of emotion regulation efficacy, performance-avoid goal orientation, and job search norms. The results of the cross-level moderation model are presented in Table 5. Hypothesis 2 states that emotion regulation efficacy will moderate the relationship between emotional obstacles and job search intensity. After controlling for covariates, emotion regulation efficacy significantly moderated the relationship between emotional obstacles and job search intensity (γ_{12} = .12, p < .05). Emotion regulation efficacy thereby weakened and even reversed the negative effect of emotional obstacles on job search intensity. The interaction is illustrated in Figure 2. Simple slopes tests revealed a significant slope when emotion regulation efficacy was high (+1 *SD*; ω = .27, p < .05), but a non-significant slope when emotion regulation efficacy was low (-1 *SD*; ω = -.02, p > .05). As emotional obstacles increased, people exhibited a slight decline in their job search intensity if they reported lower levels of emotion regulation efficacy. However, people confronted with more emotional obstacles showed significant increase in hours spent searching if they reported high emotion regulation efficacy. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported, albeit in an unexpected way.

Table 5
Cross-level moderation models

Variable	Job Search Intensity		
	Coefficient	*SE*	95% CI
Random intercept (β_0)			
Intercept (γ_{00})	2.99*	.64	[.1.74, 4.24]
Gender (γ_{01})	-.49**	.18	[-.85, -.13]
Emotion Regulation Efficacy (γ_{02})	.025	.08	[-.14, .19]
Performance-Avoid G.O. (γ_{03})	-.10	.06	[-.23, .02]
Perceived Job Search Norms (γ_{04})	-.06	.12	[-.30, .18]
Residual Variance Within	1.13**	.12	[.89, 1.34]
Residual Variance Between	1.19**	.20	[.79, 1.59]
Random slope for emotion (β_1)			
Intercept (γ_{10})	-.58**	.42	[-1.41, .24]
Gender (γ_{11})	-.10	.15	[-.39, .19]
Emotion Regulation Efficacy (γ_{12})	.12*	.06	[.01, .23]
Perceived Job Search Norms (γ_{13})	.06	.10	[-.15, .26]
Residual Variance (σ^2_1)	.21*	.09	[.04, .39]
Random slope for attention (β_2)			
Intercept (γ_{20})	-.38	.30	[-.97, .20]
Gender (γ_{21})	-.06	.14	[-.34, .22]
Performance-Avoid G.O. (γ_{22})	-.09**	.03	[-.16, -.03]
Perceived Job Search Norms (γ_{23})	.21*	.11	[.001, .42]
Residual Variance (σ^2_2)	.08	.05	[-.02, .18]
Fixed slope for report day (β_3)	-.13	.07	[-.27, .004]
Fixed slope for order (β_4)	-.05*	.12	[-.09, -.01]

Note. $N = 1,229$. Level 1 equation: Job search intensity = $\beta_0 + \beta_1$(emotion) + β_2(attention) + β_3(report day) + β_4(order). Level 2 equations: $\beta_0 = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}$(gender) + γ_{02}(emotion regulation) + γ_{03}(performance-avoid) + γ_{04}(job search norms); $\beta_1 = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11}$(gender) + γ_{12}(emotion regulation) + γ_{13}(job search norms); $\beta_2 = \gamma_{20} + \gamma_{21}$(gender) + γ_{22}(performance-avoid) + γ_{23}(job search norms). Gender: 0 = female, 1 = male. Report day: 0 = Sunday, 1 = Wednesday. Order ranges 1-12, representing each time point. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.
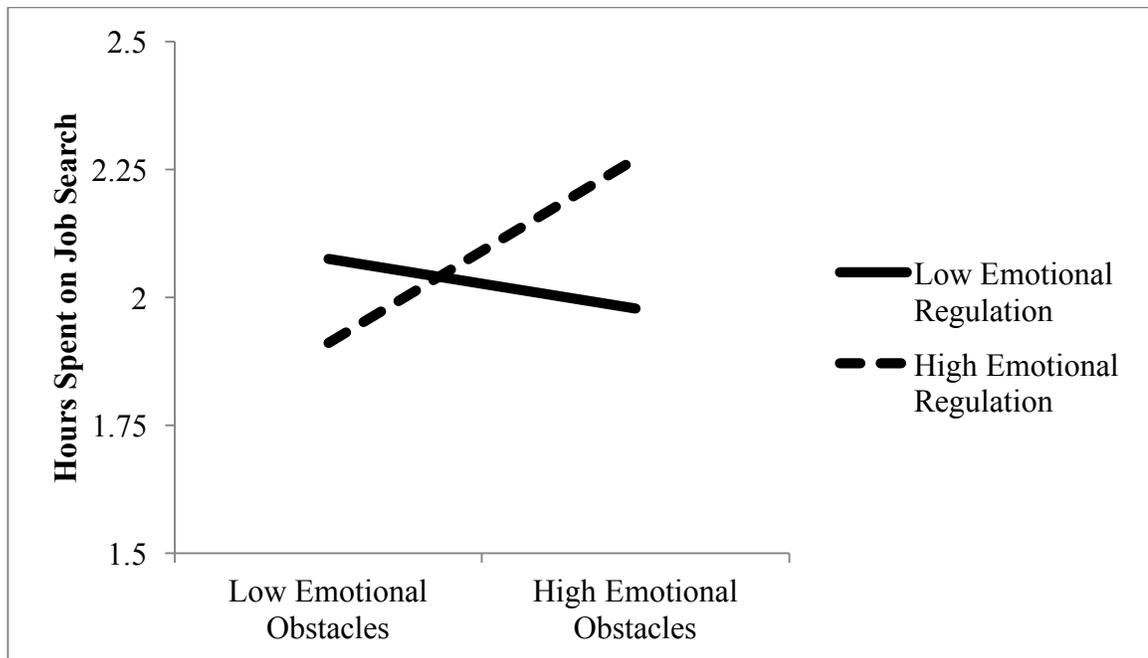
Figure 2. Emotion regulation as a moderator of the relationship between emotional obstacles and job search intensity.

Hypothesis 3 states that performance-avoid goal orientation (PAGO) will moderate the relationship between attentional obstacles and job search intensity. Results indicated that PAGO did significantly moderate the relationship between attentional obstacles and job search intensity (γ_{23} = -.09, p < .01). The interaction is illustrated in Figure 3. Simple slopes tests revealed a significant slope when PAGO was high (+1 *SD*; ω = -.29, p < .01), but the slope was not significant for low levels of PAGO (-1 *SD*; ω = -.03, p > .05). PAGO exacerbated the negative relationship between attentional obstacles and job search intensity, such that distractions during job search lead to fewer hours spent searching for jobs, especially for those who reported high levels of PAGO. These results support Hypothesis 3.
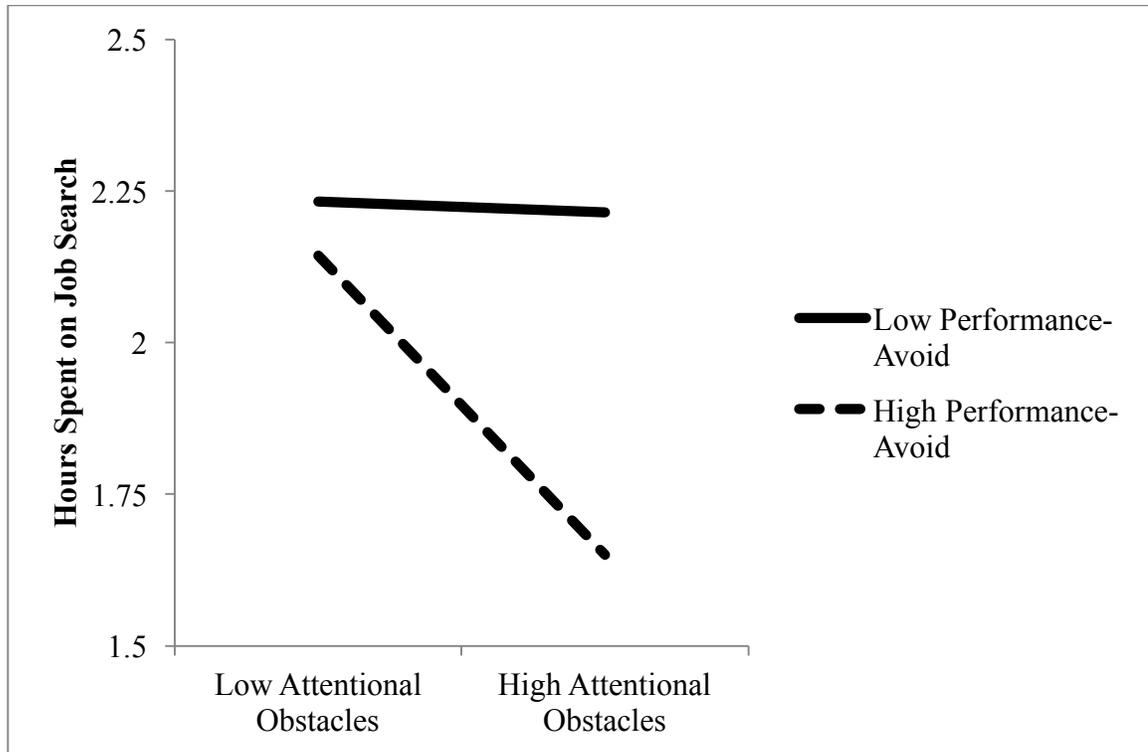
Figure 3. Performance-avoid goal orientation as a moderator of the relationship between attentional obstacles and job search intensity.

Last, Hypotheses 4a and 4b state that job search norms will moderate the relationships between emotion and attentional obstacles and job search intensity, respectively. Job search norms did not significantly moderate the relationship between emotional obstacles and job search intensity (γ_{14} = -.06, p > .05). However, job search norms did significantly moderate the relationship between attentional obstacles and job search intensity (γ_{24} = .21, p < .05). The interaction is illustrated in Figure 4. Simple slopes tests revealed that when perceived job search norms were high, the slope was not significant (+1 *SD*; ω = -.02, p > .05); however the slope was significant when perceived job search norms were low (+1 *SD*; ω = -.32, p < .05). In this case, perceptions of job search norms affected the relationship between attentional obstacles and job search intensity, such that job seekers confronted with attentional obstacles reported a steep

decline in job search intensity when they perceived lower levels of (i.e., weaker) job

search norms.
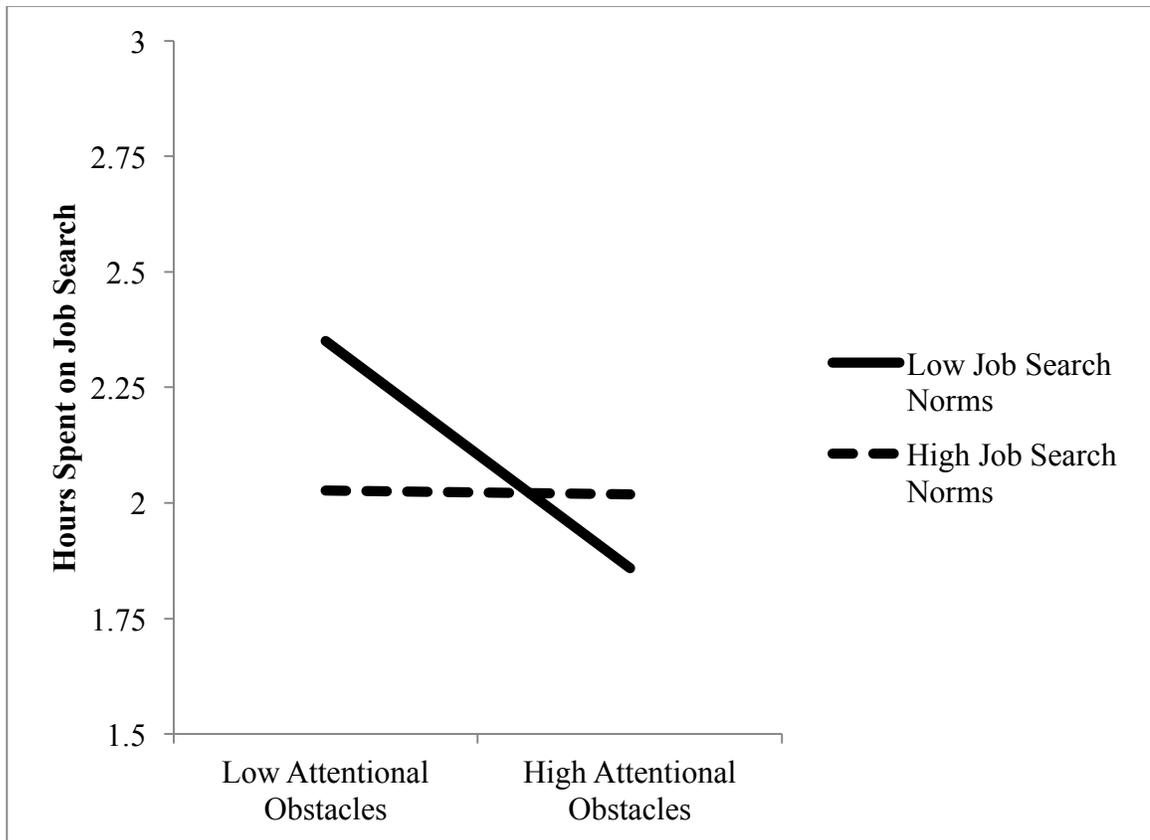
Figure 4. Perceived job search norms as a moderator of the relationship between

attentional obstacles and job search intensity.

The final model is presented in Figure 5.
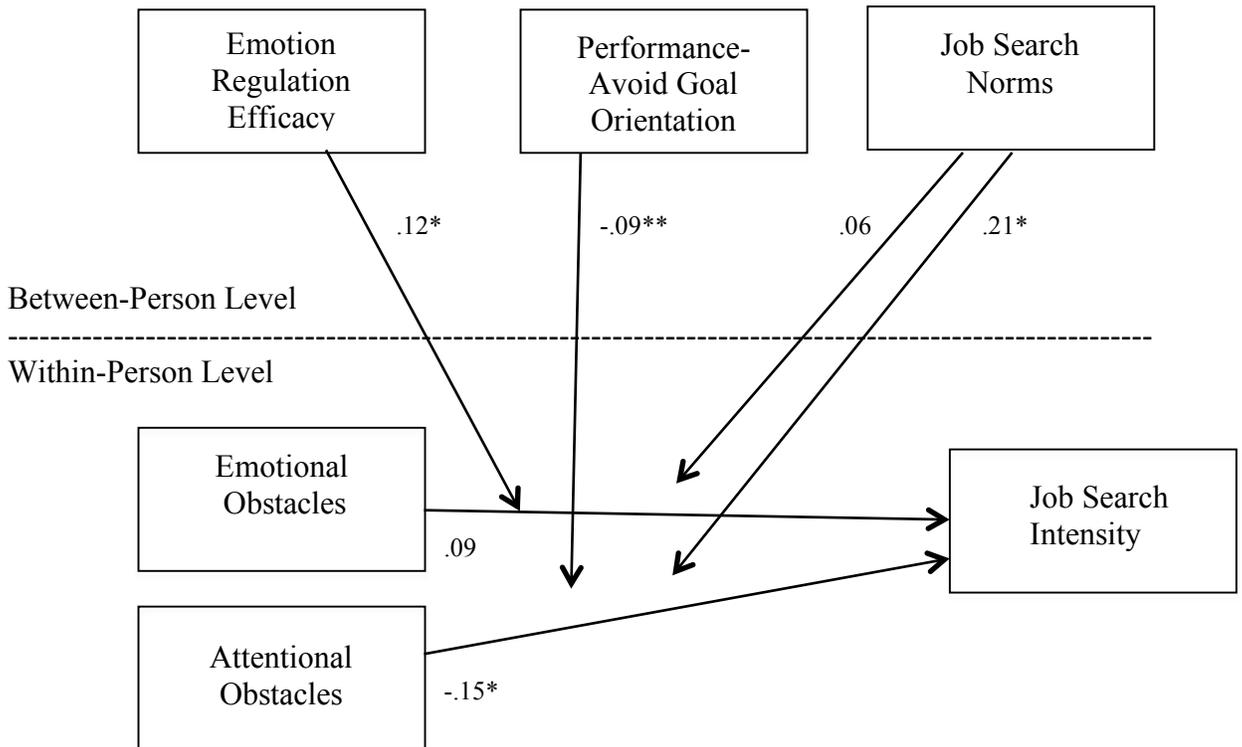
Figure 5. The final model with coefficient estimates. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Supplemental Analyses. I performed several supplemental analyses to rule out

any alternative explanations for the current findings. The results from these analyses can

be seen in Appendix C. First, I tested an alternative proposition that job search obstacles

and job search intensity could have a dynamic relationship that changes over the course

of the job search. To do this, I tested reporting order as a moderator of the relationships

of both emotional and attentional obstacles with job search intensity. Reporting order was

neither a significant moderator of the relationship between emotional obstacles and job

search intensity ($\gamma = .03$, $p > .05$) nor a significant moderator of the relationship between

attentional obstacles and job search intensity ($\gamma = -.01$, $p > .05$).

Second, I tested a reverse causality model in which intensity reported during one half-week could influence the emotional obstacles and attentional obstacles faced subsequently. I therefore tested the lagged prediction that intensity reported at time T would predict obstacles reported at time T+1. Results showed that hours reported at time T did not significantly predict emotional obstacles at T+1 ($\gamma = .01$, $p > .05$); however, hours spent at time T did significantly predict attentional obstacles at T+1 ($\gamma = -.05$, $p < .01$).

Finally, I tested an autocorrelation model in which emotion and attentional obstacles reported at one time could influence the amount of emotion and attentional obstacles, respectively, at a later time. I tested the lagged prediction that emotional obstacles reported at time T would significantly predict emotional obstacles reported at time T+1, as well as the similar prediction that attentional obstacles reported at time T would significantly predict attentional obstacles reported at time T+1. Neither emotional obstacles ($\gamma = .10$, $p > .05$) nor attentional obstacles ($\gamma = .02$, $p > .05$) predicted themselves at time T+1.

Discussion

Goal maintenance is an especially important concept that seeks to explain how individuals maintain their focal goal(s) by shielding them from outside influences or alternative choices. Studying goal maintenance thereby advances our understanding of goals and goal striving behavior, while also advancing our understanding of self-regulation during the job search. Results from both the pilot and main study analyses show that obstacles to the job search are more nuanced than previously thought; they can be distinguished and categorized as either emotion or attentional. At the within-person

level of analysis, attentional obstacles to the job search significantly detract from the time people spend actively engaged in job seeking behaviors over the course of the job search. At the between-person level of analysis, I show that emotion regulation efficacy, performance-avoid goal orientation, and perceived job search norms are significant moderators that could help or hurt job seekers' ability to maintain their goals in light of obstacles. These results support goal shielding and maintenance as integral characteristics of a high quality job search, but ones that are contingent upon several dispositional and situational factors (van Hooft et al., 2013).

I had hypothesized that emotional obstacles would negatively affect job search intensity. This was not the case, as emotional obstacles did not affect job search intensity over time at the within-person level. It is possible that the emotional obstacles reported at each measurement occasion were not strong enough to diminish intensity overall, especially in light of the personal importance of the focal goal. Prior research suggests that people experiencing certain types of negative emotionality (e.g., frustration) do not necessarily exhibit deficits in motivation to exert effort and perform (Brinkmann & Gendolla, 2008). Negative feelings can signal an insufficient rate of progress that motivates one to increase intensity to meet their desired performance criteria. In these instances, people experiencing negative emotional states may exhibit more behavioral intensity to correct their rate of progress (Shah, 2002; Quick, Quick, Nelson, & Hurrell Jr, 1997). Perhaps there are types of emotional obstacles that, while they may exert a negative influence on other aspects of the job search, help to mobilize some job seekers to search for employment opportunities more intensely.

Interestingly, a positive simple slope was observed from emotional obstacles to hours spent searching when emotion regulation efficacy was high. Though unexpected, this effect is not surprising. Research shows that emotions can be used to actually invigorate and facilitate self-regulation (Aspinwall, 1998). People with high emotion regulation can use their experiences to generate feelings that help them to persist longer on tasks to achieve positive outcomes (Martin & Davies, 1998), as well as to process information and feedback more creatively and efficiently to solve problems and make better decisions (Isen, 2000). For instance, someone who is faced with ambiguity or confusion, but who is highly able to emotionally regulate, may use such obstacles as reasons to put in more hours to figure out how to properly search later.

Counter to my prediction, perceived job search norms did not moderate the relationship between emotional obstacles and job search intensity. Several theories of emotion posit that emotions serve the adaptive purpose of motivating individuals toward goals in response to anticipated goal outcomes (e.g., Lazarus, 1999). Although perceptions of job search norms indicate to the job seeker that their peers are actively searching, the outcomes of their behaviors are likely not always apparent. It could be difficult for the seeker to make accurate inferences about the ultimate success or failure of others' search behaviors, and the ambiguity may neither exacerbate nor buffer the effects of emotional obstacles on their intensity. Additionally, obstacles like "not knowing what to do" could perhaps lead people to search for jobs haphazardly without necessarily diminishing the frequency with which they behave. In this case, experiencing emotional obstacles while observing strong job search norms might increase intensity

despite confusion, but decrease effectiveness. Research on the job search would benefit

from examining emotional obstacles in light of other job search quality outcomes.

Supplemental analyses attempted to rule out alternative directions of causality.

The results of these analyses reveal that a model of auto-correlation does not better

explain the observed relationships among the data, and thus lend support to the claim that

job search obstacles are independent of themselves across each measurement occasion

over time. Yet, although intensity at Time T did not significantly predict emotional

obstacles at Time T+1, a relationship was unexpectedly observed whereby intensity at

Time T significantly reduced attentional obstacles at Time T+1. Though unanticipated,

this relationship may be an artifact of the short time intervals between each measurement

occasion. People who put in hours searching at Time T may, at Time T+1, not rate certain

events or commitments as being "distracting" because they feel better about their search

if they put in more hours over the previous half-week. Job seekers may experience a

change in how they view attentional obstacles when they report them at Time T+1.

Theoretical Implications

The current study offers three important implications to theories in applied

psychology. First, results of factor analyses using two different samples support the

proposition that emotional and attentional obstacles represent two distinct constructs.

Convergent evidence from two samples supports the creation of a taxonomy of job search

obstacles that not only indicates that these obstacles are more nuanced than previously

assumed, but incorporates them as related components to self-regulation as their impact is

also regulated by individual difference factors facilitating and hindering the regulation of

emotional and cognitive control. Both self-regulation and job search literatures propose

that obstacles are detrimental and are likely problematic to goal pursuit (Latham &
Locke, 1991; Van Hooft et al., 2012). However, there is a lack of theorizing in regards to
just how obstacles affect the goal pursuit process. As Van Hooft et al. (2012) state,
"Because obstacles, setbacks, and difficulties are abundant during job search, and likely
distract seekers from their goal pursuit, a high-quality job search process must encompass
self-regulatory techniques that help initiating and maintaining the planned job search
activities despite temptations, obstacles, and setbacks" (p. 16). The present findings
extend existing theory by enhancing our understanding of obstacles to job search
specifically, as well as self-regulation and goal maintenance broadly. The effects of
emotion and attentional obstacles are not limited to the job search; they could be applied
to other contexts in which self-regulation is beneficial, like weight control, substance
abuse, and learning (Liu et al., 2014). Here they may exert differential effects (or even
the same), but they operate in different ways and can be moderated by different factors.

Second, job search quality is considered as the extent to which individuals
maintain their goals in light of obstacles that could detract from goal pursuit, while
simultaneously considering the interpersonal factors that facilitate self-regulation and
allow one to maximize his or her intensity. Previous research has both examined the roles
of affect and cognition in self-regulation (e.g., Ilies & Judge, 2005) and proposed that
goal maintenance is a highly self-regulated process that includes the regulation of
behaviors, cognitions, and emotions (van Hooft et al., 2013). This process is thought to
be essential for a high quality job search, but until now researchers have not integrated a
rationale for how self-regulation occurs during goal maintenance. The current study
integrates the two by expanding what we know about self-regulation during the job

search to include and underscore the importance of emotional and cognitive self-control to goal maintenance over time.

Third, analyzing goal maintenance at both within- and between-person levels revealed that people use emotion control and cognitive control over time, but they differ in their ability to do so. Like other aspects of self-regulation, the effects of both types of obstacles are influenced by dispositional (e.g. emotion regulation efficacy), situational (e.g. job search norms), and/or situation-specific dispositional (e.g. performance-avoid goal orientation) factors. Although tangential experimental research on goal maintenance strategies exists, little else has attempted to determine the personal and environmental factors that can affect goal maintenance. The current study integrates recommendations to continue to incorporate the study of individual differences to the job search (Lopez-Kidwell et al., 2012), and shows that individuals who were better able to regulate their emotions and remain cognitively engaged in the process were better able to maintain and even increase goal pursuit (i.e. job search) intensity. Thus, it is important to continue to examine individual differences in goal maintenance that could influence the dynamic process that defines job search quality. Subsequent research on the job search specifically, as well as goal maintenance and self-regulation generally, could greatly benefit from determining what other between-person factors might influence the degree to which goals are maintained over time.

Practical Implications

The results of this study imply several ways in which to help aid job seekers obtain employment. First, the results show that job seekers reporting higher emotion regulation efficacy spent more hours searching for jobs. Most prior research with new

market entrants has focused solely on cognitive processes involved in the job search, while only a limited number of studies have considered the role of feeling states (Boswell et al., 2012). It turns out that emotion regulation plays a very important role in helping new market entrants to maintain their goals because these individuals actually deal with specific types of obstacles that include emotions and other feeling states. Emotion-control trainings (e.g. reframing negative emotions, emphasizing personal control) can have positive impacts on self-regulation to reduce anxiety and increase self-efficacy (Bell & Kozlowski, 2008). In fact, a recent study by Hodzic, Ripoll, Lira, and Zenasni (2015) shows that emotional competency training interventions can significantly increase job seekers' entrepreneurial self-efficacy, perceived employability, and successful reemployment outcomes. Counselors and job coaches should be sure to emphasize emotion regulation throughout the job search and train their charges to reduce the frequency of negative reactions and to sustain and channel positive emotions toward productive ends.

People with a performance-avoid goal orientation feel compelled to perform to avoid doing poorly and demonstrating incompetence to others. As distractions present themselves and job seekers determine they are not going to be able to put in the time to be successful, they may reduce the amount of hours they search to avoid negative outcomes altogether. This is particularly problematic because they are not putting forth the time required to be successful in the future. Studies like one conducted by Beck and Schmidt (2013) show that time pressure leads people to adopt performance-avoid goal orientations. In struggling economies job market entrants face the challenging task of competing with peers and existing job seekers for a finite number of open employment

positions. There is often intense time pressure to obtain employment to pay bills, debts, and support oneself and any dependents. Thus, job seekers are especially likely to adopt a performance-avoid goal orientation. One way to help job seekers get them out of this mindset is to coach job them to reframe their perception of the job search away from a performance-oriented perspective. Job seekers could see more success once they are not worried about how others are viewing them and are not focused on attaining employment simply to show capability.

Finally, job seekers should be made aware and take notice of the search behaviors of their peers and others on the job market. The current results suggest that their perceptions of others' job search intensity can affect how one fends off distractions as they present themselves over time. Curiously, job seekers with low distractions and low job search norms reported the highest hours spent searching. It is possible that although these seekers might be searching more frequently, they also might be searching more haphazardly. By contrast, people reporting high norms may be in contexts that provide them insight to the most beneficial and efficient ways to search. It would be helpful to have job seekers identify job search role models and surround themselves with others who are finding success. Higher, more positive perceptions of job search norms (i.e. seeing people intensely and successfully job searching) can focus and motivate job seekers to be able to recognize distractions and avoid letting them obstruct their goals.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Though this study addresses several theoretical gaps and methodological concerns with previous goal-setting research, its findings should be considered in light of some limitations. For instance, the collected responses are self-reported by the job seekers

themselves. However, the longitudinal nature of the current study should mitigate common-method bias through the collection of data several times over the course of the job search. By introducing a temporal separation of measurement, participants are allowed to forget responses previously given and "make prior responses less salient, available, or relevant" (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003, p. 888). Moreover, consistent with recent research examining the job search over time the three between-person factors (emotion regulation efficacy, performance-avoid goal orientation, perceived job search norms) are group-mean centered to remove between-person variance from the constructs, including any individual response biases (Sun et al., 2013). Future research could attempt to further reduce common-method bias by using more objective measures, such as for self-reported emotion regulation efficacy (Joseph, Jin, Newman, & Boyle, 2015). Moreover, I also attempt to capture an objective situational factor (norms) but only with a subjective measure of perceived job search norms. Although the present operationalization is consistent with other research focused on norms (Ajzen, 1991), future research should attempt to use more objective measures of situational individual differences as well (Lopez-Kidwell, Grosser, Dineen, & Borgatti, 2012).

I operationalized job search intensity using a single item measure of hours spent searching for jobs. As mentioned above, using a single item measure of intensity is consistent with job search research across multiple disciplines, including psychology (Wanberg et al., 2012) and economics (Caliendo, Cobb-Clark, & Uhlendorff, 2014). Further, job search intensity conceptualized as the reported frequency of job searching has been meta-analytically shown to positively predict important job search employment outcomes (Liu et al., 2014). Future research should examine the impact of job search

obstacles beyond their effects on hours, and may study job search stress, job search emotions, and specific types of job search behaviors (e.g., preparatory, active, networking, etc.) as outcomes of the within-subject variations in job search obstacles. It is possible that emotion and attentional obstacles may have differential relationships with these outcome variables as well.

The design of the study limits the ability to make causal inferences regarding the relationship between obstacles and job search behaviors. Obstacles and distractions were unable to be experimentally manipulated, and so causality cannot be confirmed. However, job search obstacles and behaviors were measured over time, and I tested several alternative, time-lagged measurement models to determine the exact directionality of the focal relationships. These alternative models were not statistically significant and thus narrow the range of other possible explanations for the observed relationships. Additionally, observing the job search process in a naturalistic environment increases the external validity and generalizability of my findings over and above previous studies examining goal maintenance and self-regulation. Future studies should attempt to manipulate obstacles to replicate the self-regulatory process of goal shielding and confirm causality.

Last, the participants of this study are graduating college students from China, and the context of the job search and job market may be different in China than in the United States or Europe. It is possible that job seekers may feel different pressures to find a job in the East than they do in the West. For example, new market entrants might have fewer distractions to keep them from searching for jobs, unlike older job seekers who may have more family or concurrent work-role responsibilities. Other recent job search research has

examined job seekers within the Chinese context as well (Guan et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2014; Song, Wanberg, Niu, & Xie, 2006), and it is considered generalizable to U. S. culture (Boswell et al., 2012). Still, it is important for future research to replicate these findings in other countries and job markets to fully determine the extent to which these relationships and interpersonal effects hold true. Recruiting job seekers who are older and more experienced could help further capture the spectrum of obstacles all seekers face.

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Data Transparency

In the interest of transparency, the variables reported in this manuscript were collected as a part of a larger data collection. Findings from the data collection have been reported in one prior manuscript. A table displaying the variables used in both studies is provided in Appendix A. Manuscript 1 (M1; published) focuses on variables 4-9, while manuscript 2 (M2; current) focuses on variables 10-14. Variables 1-3 were/are used as control variables in both the published and current study.

Data Transparency Table

Variables in the Complete Dataset	M1 (STATUS=published)	M2 (STATUS=current)
1. Gender (Control variable)	X	X
2. Order (Control variable)	X	X
3. Day of Week (Control variable)	X	X
4. Perceived Job Search Progress	X	
5. Job Search Behavior Self-Efficacy	X	
6. Employment Self-Efficacy	X	
7. Internal Attribution	X	
8. Job Search Behavior	X	
9. Number of Job Offers	X	
10. Job Search Obstacles		X
11. Hours Spent on Job Search		X
12. Emotion Regulation		X
13. Performance-Avoid G. O.		X
14. Job Search Norms		X

Measures Used in the Current Study

Job Search Intensity

On average, how many hours did you spend on the job search each day over the past half-

week?

Job Search Obstacles

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements, from 1 (*strongly*

disagree) to 5 (*strongly agree*), regarding what might have kept you away from engaging

in job search activities:

Emotional obstacles

1. I felt discouraged and upset.
2. I don't know what to do.
3. I feel exhausted and need rest.
4. I am not feeling well.

Attentional Obstacles

5. I have classes to attend and homework/papers to do.
6. I want to do something else.
7. I have social activities to participate.
8. Others (i.e., errands).

Emotion Regulation Efficacy

Indicate your agreement or disagreement with each item by providing the appropriate

number from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

1. I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally.
2. I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions.
3. I can always calm down quickly when I am very angry.
4. I have good control of my own emotions.

Performance-Avoid Goal Orientation

Please rate how well each item below describes the thoughts you had during your job search, from 1 (*not at all true of me*) to 7 (*very true of me*):

1. I just want to avoid doing poorly in this job search.
2. My goal during job search is to avoid performing poorly.

Perceived Job Search Norms

Please indicate how often your peers have performed the following behaviors, from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often/always*):

1. Looked at help wanted/classified ads in the newspaper or in a newsletter.
2. Talked to their friends or relatives to get their ideas about possible job leads.
3. Talked to faculty and staff in the university about possible job leads.
4. Consulted a private employment agency or search firm.
5. Telephoned or visited a possible employer.

Supplemental Analyses

Within-person main effect model
Order of reporting as a moderator of the obstacles-intensity relationships

	Job Search Intensity		
Variable	Coefficient	*SE*	95% CI
Intercept (γ_0)	2.41**	.15	[2.12, 2.70]
Report day (γ_1)	-.15*	.07	[-.29, -.02]
Order (γ_2)	-.05**	.02	[-.09, -.02]
Emotional Obstacles (γ_3)	.10	.08	[-.07, .26]
Attentional Obstacles (γ_4)	-.18*	.08	[-.34, -.02]
Emotional Obstacles x Order (γ_5)	.03	.03	[-.03, .08]
Attentional Obstacles x Order (γ_6)	-.01	.03	[-.06, .04]

Note. $N = 1{,}229$. Report day: 0 = Sunday, 1 = Wednesday. Order ranges 1-12, representing each time point. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Within-person main effect model
Intensity at time T predicting emotional obstacles at time T+1

	Emotional Obstacles (Time t+1)		
Variable	Coefficient	*SE*	95% CI
Intercept (γ_0)	2.64**	.06	[2.53, 2.76]
Report day (γ_1)	.02	.04	[-.05, .09]
Order (γ_2)	-.02*	.01	[-.04, -.001]
Hours (Time T) (γ_3)	.01	.02	[-.03, .05]

Note. $N = 1{,}229$. Report day: 0 = Sunday, 1 = Wednesday. Order ranges 1-12, representing each time point. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Within-person main effect model
Intensity at time T predicting attentional obstacles at time T+1

	Attentional Obstacles (Time T+1)		
Variable	Coefficient	*SE*	95% CI
Intercept (γ_0)	3.00**	.06	[2.89, 3.12]
Report day (γ_1)	-.003	.04	[-.09, .08]
Order (γ_2)	-.002	.01	[-.02, .02]
Hours (Time T) (γ_3)	-.05**	.02	[-.08, -.01]

Note. $N = 1{,}229$. Report day: 0 = Sunday, 1 = Wednesday. Order ranges 1-12, representing each time point. ** $p < .01$.

Within-person main effect model
Emotional and attentional obstacles at time T predicting corresponding obstacles at time T+1

Variable	Emotional Obstacles (Time T+1)			Attentional Obstacles (Time T+1)		
	Coefficient	SE	95% CI	Coefficient	SE	95% CI
Intercept (γ_0)	2.63**	.06	[2.51, 2.75]	2.99**	.06	[2.87, 3.11]
Report day (γ_1)	.03	.04	[-.04, -.11]	.002	.04	[-.08, .09]
Order (γ_2)	-.02*	.009	[-.04, -.001]	-.001	.01	[-.04, -.001]
Emotional Obstacles (Time T) (γ_3)	.10	.05	[-.004, .20]			[-.07, .26]
Attentional Obstacles (Time T) (γ_4)				.02	.06	[-.01, .15]

Note. $N = 1{,}229$. Report day: 0 = Sunday, 1 = Wednesday. Order ranges 1-12, representing each time point. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.