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### Searching for a job

*Problem- and emotion-focused coping*

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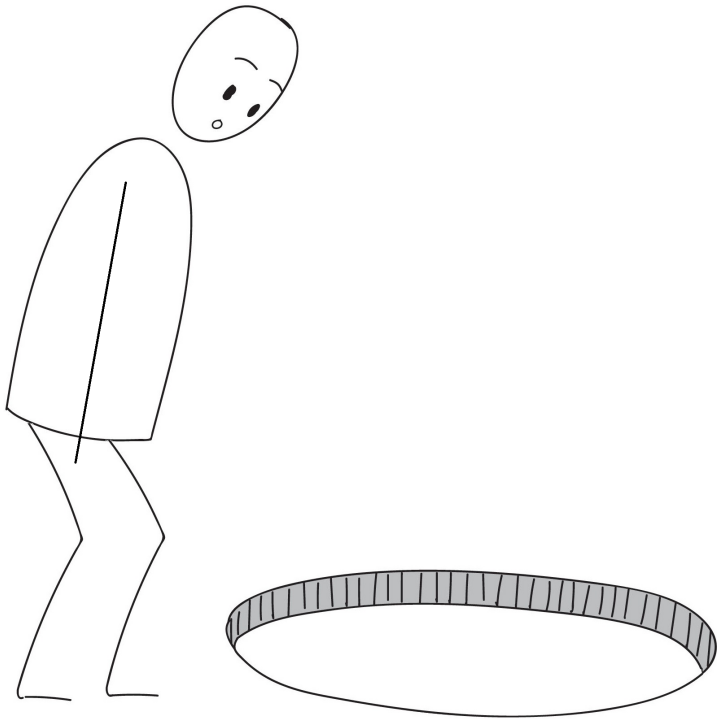
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# Chapter 6

## General Discussion



## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Job search has become an inseparable part of people's working lives. In our increasingly flexible job market people need to search for a job in many stages of their career: while making a school-to-work transition, after losing a job due to downsizing or temporary contracts, or when changing between jobs. When people are unable to timely secure a job, they risk unemployment. Unemployment is associated with severe consequences for individuals' mental and physical wellbeing (e.g., Korpi, 2001; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009; Strully, 2009), which intensify over time (Paul & Moser, 2009). In addition to individual consequences, unemployment can be damaging to the well-being of the families of unemployed individuals (McKee-Ryan & Maitoza, 2018; Ström, 2003), and costly to society as a whole (Stenberg & Westerlund, 2008). It is therefore of paramount importance for individuals themselves, for their families, and for society that job seekers find a suitable job within a reasonable period of time.

Spending time and effort on searching for a job increases the chances of finding a job (Kanfer et al., 2001), but only modestly. The first aim of this dissertation was therefore to examine *how* job seekers can search for a job to increase the likelihood of (re)employment, and to uncover which factors facilitate such a way of searching. In this dissertation, I showed that in addition to just searching harder the quality with which job seekers search is important for the likelihood of finding a job. I broadened existing approaches to studying job search behavior by identifying job search systematicity as an important indicator of job search quality.

However, as illustrated in this dissertation, job search is a difficult process full of obstacles and insecurities. The affective consequences of the negative experiences associated with job search can hinder the process of finding a job (Côté et al., 2006; Song et al., 2009; Turban et al., 2013; Van Hooft et al., 2004). To be able to help job seekers increase their chances of finding a job and circumvent the negative consequences of unemployment, as a second aim this dissertation uncovered how job seekers can deal with negative job

search experiences to reduce negative affect and foster positive affect. Specifically, I introduced self-compassion to the job search literature as a functional coping strategy to mitigate the negative affective consequences of job search.

The above two aims were articulated in the following research questions: How can job seekers effectively search for a job? Which factors facilitate such way of searching? What negative job search events do job seekers encounter while searching for a job, and how do job seekers respond to these events? How can they adaptively cope with the negative experiences they encounter during job search? In what follows I will answer these questions based on the findings of this dissertation, discuss contributions and implications of this work, and suggest future research.

## **Overview of Findings**

### **Systematic Job Search as Predictor of Job Search Success**

In the first empirical chapter (Chapter 2), I set out to uncover a way of searching that increases the chance of obtaining a job and factors that predict this way of searching. In addition to the time job seekers spend on job search (i.e., job search intensity), extant theory has suggested that other dimensions of job search behavior may also be important in predicting employment outcomes (Kanfer et al., 2001; Stumpf et al., 1983; Van Hooft et al., 2013). Building on this theorizing I identified systematic versus non-systematic job search as an important dimension of job search behavior. A highly systematic way of searching indicates an adaptable and persistent approach towards job seeking. For example, job seekers can be adaptable by trying new ways of searching, asking for feedback to improve search behavior, and adjusting their search strategy based on what they learn during job search. Job seekers can be persistent in their search by building in routines and by continuing searching even when it was tedious or when they were afraid things would not work. At the other end of the spectrum low systematicity reflects less adaptable and persistent behavior, characterized by distraction, the use of a random

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hit-or-miss job search approach, and less deliberate thoughts on how to improve.

In Chapter 2, I described a field study among 217 higher educated new labor market entrants who were actively searching for a job, and explored whether systematic job search is predictive of the likelihood of finding a job (beyond mere job search intensity). I used a five-wave correlational design, in which I surveyed job seekers every four days over the course of three weeks, and I assessed employment status in follow-up measurements two and five months later. The results showed that job search systematicity was positively related to job search success, controlling for job search intensity. So, job seekers who searched for a job in a more systematic way had a higher chance of getting a job than job seekers who searched in a less systematic way (i.e., for each unit increase in systematic search, the odds of getting a job were 2.51 times higher).

Subsequently, I examined the development of systematic job search over time and the antecedents of systematic job search. Supporting a learning based perspective on job search change (Barber et al., 1994), I found that over the 20-day study period job seekers searched in an increasingly systematic way, suggesting that job seekers became more adaptable and persistent, and thus learned more effective search methods. Furthermore, based on recent models and research on job search (Liu, Wang, et al., 2014; Song et al., 2009; Wanberg et al., 2010) I examined how job search clarity, financial need, employment commitment, and different types of affect relate to systematic job search. As predicted, the study showed that goal clarity, employment commitment, and activating affect were positively associated with job search systematicity. Financial need and deactivating affect were not related to job search systematicity.

The knowledge of what way of searching increases the likelihood of finding a job may help job seekers to shape their search strategy to become more effective. Nonetheless, they still need to put time and effort in their job search, which most likely leads to encountering negative job search experiences. To be able to better

understand what makes job search such a negative experience, I examined negative job search experiences as well as job seekers' affective and behavioral responses in more detail.

### **Negative Job Search Experiences and their Consequences**

To investigate what negative job search events job seekers encounter while searching for a job, and how they respond to these events, I asked 192 job seekers to describe their worst job search experience, what happened, what they felt, and how they acted. I conducted qualitative analyses of these anecdotes about negative job search experiences, using a grounded theory method.

As described in Chapter 5, I arrived at a classification of negative job search events which aligns with the conceptualization of job search as a multiphase process. Most of the negative job search events described by the job seekers could be categorized into one of four job search phases: (1) Forethought and exploration, (2) Preparatory job search behavior, (3) Active job search behavior, and (4) Selection result: Rejections. There were three general themes that emerged across the job search stages: (1) job seekers' insecurity of finding a job (e.g., fueled by competition, or dissatisfaction with one's resume), (2) a poor job search flow (e.g., dissatisfaction with progress, feeling stuck, procrastination), and (3) indifference of hiring organizations (e.g., ignoring requests for feedback, breaching agreements).

I subsequently categorized job seekers' responses into discrete emotions (using the circumplex model; Yik, Russell, & Steiger, 2011), emotion regulation strategies, and behaviors. Most of respondents' emotional responses to negative job search events (47%) belonged to the high activation spectrum (e.g., they felt offended, self-doubt/shame, despaired, insecure/stuck, angry, hurt, frustrated, startled, nervous, self-blame, and self-conscious), followed by responses low in activation (40%; e.g., disappointed, sad, discouraged, and resigned). When looking at the emotions separately, disappointment was the most frequently described

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emotional response to negative job search events (34% of all respondents), followed by sadness (17%). To deal with the negative emotions, job seekers appeared to engage in emotion regulation strategies such as emotional suppression, cognitive reappraisal, seeking social support, seeking distraction, and taking time off of job search. Regularly occurring behavioral responses to negative job search events reflected two general themes: (1) social desirability, and (2) performance. Most job seekers tended to respond with constructive and polite behaviors rather than expressing their displeasure with the situation. Job seekers mentioned several times that negative job search events made them underperform, which is a negative experience in itself. Some job seekers invested to improve their performance by asking for feedback and reflecting on improvements, others started ruminating their flaws.

While job seekers responded with a mix of emotions to the particular negative job search events, there were trends visible in the pattern of responses. Certain emotions were associated more with certain events than other events, and certain events elicited certain emotions more than other emotions. For example, job seekers reported feeling discouraged mostly after not being able to find a fitting vacancy, while they reported feeling disappointed mostly after being rejected to a highly anticipated job, and felt mostly insecure after an unpleasant interaction during an interview. Another trend that was visible in the data was that in general throughout all job search phases job seekers experienced mostly activating emotions, with the exception of the selection result phase. After rejections job seekers mostly experienced negative deactivating emotions (i.e., disappointment, sadness, and discouragement).

In general, these findings illustrate the notion that the negative events associated with job search have a substantive negative impact on job seekers' feelings and behavior. Moreover, these findings reveal a lack of adaptive coping responses to these events.

### **Self-Compassion as Emotion-Focused Coping**

A relevant question then is how job seekers can cope adaptively with the negative experiences they encounter during job search? In Chapter 3 and 4 I introduced and examined the effectiveness of self-compassion as an emotion-focused coping strategy for job seekers in dealing with their negative job search experiences to reduce negative affect and foster positive affect. Extending previous research indicating that self-compassion benefits individuals in dealing with unpleasant personal events like receiving negative feedback (Breines & Chen, 2012; Leary et al., 2007; Neff et al., 2005), my findings show that the effects of self-compassion apply to job seekers as well.

Specifically, in Chapter 3 I described two studies in which I tested the benefits of trait self-compassion among active job seekers. First, I examined whether being self-compassioned helps job seekers to better cope emotionally with the difficulties they encounter during job search in a cross-sectional field study (Study 3.1;  $N = 99$ ). I measured job seekers' trait self-compassion, the extent to which they experienced job search difficulties, and how they felt. Results of Study 3.1 indicated that trait self-compassion related positively to (de-)activating positive affect and negatively to (de-)activating negative affect. Furthermore, the negative relationship between difficulties during job search and different types of positive affect (i.e., activating and deactivating) was attenuated for job seekers with more self-compassion. So extending previous research (Breines & Chen, 2012; Leary et al., 2007; Neff et al., 2005), self-compassioned job seekers felt more positive and less negative overall during active job search and more likely maintained positive regardless of job search difficulties, while less self-compassioned job seekers felt less positive as difficulties increased.

I extended these findings in a subsequent study in two ways. First, because job search is a dynamic process (e.g., Song et al., 2009; Sun et al., 2013; Wanberg et al., 2005, 2010; Wanberg, Zhu, et al., 2012) in which job seekers' affective responses fluctuate (Song et al.,



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2009; Wanberg et al., 2010), I examined how the relationships between job search experiences and affect function within individuals over time. Therefore, in Study 3.2 ( $N = 227$ ) I used a multi-wave design to examine the moderating role of self-compassion on the within-person dynamics regarding negative job search experiences and subsequent affect. Second, I applied a broader conceptualization of negative job search experiences by examining perceived lack of progress, rather than specific job search difficulties. This is a more comprehensive evaluation of the process than perceived difficulties because someone who experiences job search difficulties can still perceive progress. Over a period of 20 days, every 4 days I assessed perceived progress among job seekers as well as how they felt, and I related this to their trait self-compassion measured in the baseline survey.

Results of Study 3.2 were in line with Study 3.1 and showed that self-compassioned job seekers reported less negative affect and more positive affect than less self-compassioned job seekers during job search episodes in which they perceived low or no job search progress. Furthermore, self-compassion was found to function as an adaptive mindset that attenuates the positive relationship of perceived lack of job search progress with different types (i.e., activating and deactivating) of negative affect. Again, self-compassioned job seekers were overall more positive and less negative. Self-compassioned job seekers stayed less negative even when they perceived low progress. The combined Study 3.1 and 3.2 findings suggest that trait self-compassion can be beneficial for job seekers' well-being in difficult times during the job search process.

In Chapter 4 I followed up on the correlational studies in Chapter 3 by testing the causal effects of self-compassion on job seekers' affect during their job search. Although self-compassion is considered to be a general tendency, in line with previous research I show that it can also be induced/trained (e.g., Breines & Chen, 2012; Leary et al., 2007; Shapira & Mongrain, 2010; J. W. Zhang & Chen, 2016). Specifically, I developed an online self-compassion

intervention composed of writing exercises that facilitated taking a self-compassioned perspective towards job search difficulties. Using a between-individual field experiment among 180 active job seekers with an intervention and control condition I found that the self-compassion intervention increased job seekers' state self-compassion in comparison to the control writing exercise in which participants reflected freely on their negative job search experiences.

Subsequently, based on theorizing and prior research (Gilbert & Procter, 2006; Neff, 2003b, 2003a; Neff et al., 2007), I examined the process through which state self-compassion influences affect. Results show that state self-compassion related to job seekers' affective responses to job search. Specifically, job seekers' negative deactivating affect (e.g., sadness) was lower and their positive deactivating affect (e.g., calmness) was higher immediately after the self-compassion writing exercise than after reflecting freely (i.e., the control condition). I therefore tentatively conclude that deactivating affect is somewhat more affected by the self-compassion intervention than activating affect. The effects on job seekers' affect were mediated by reduced self-criticism. Differences between conditions were no longer apparent in the follow-up measurement one week later. In both conditions job seekers felt better: they reported more deactivating positive affect and less deactivating negative affect in the follow-up measurement in comparison to the baseline measure. Thus, job seekers in the self-compassion condition felt better sooner (i.e., immediately after the intervention), while job seekers in the control condition caught up feeling equally well one week later.

The findings from the three studies presented in Chapter 3 and 4 suggest that self-compassion is a coping strategy that effectively helps job seekers cope with the negative experiences they may encounter during their search for a job. They may benefit from practicing to reflect on their experiences with self-compassion, since reflecting freely on negative job search experiences seemed to have a less positive effect on job seekers.

### **Contributions and Implications**

#### **Broadening Approaches to Studying Job Search Behavior**

In my quest to find a way of searching that increases job seekers' likelihood of finding a job, I contribute to the literature by broadening the construct space of job search behavior. Even though the relevance of other dimensions of job search in addition to intensity is recognized by job search scholars (e.g., Kanfer et al., 2001; Koen et al., 2010; Saks, 2005; Van Hooft & Noordzij, 2009; Wanberg et al., 2002), relatively few empirical research has been done to specify these additional dimensions and their possible role in the job search process. By introducing job search systematicity as an indicator of job search quality and showing that it is predictive of the likelihood of finding a job I extend current theorizing on beneficial job search behaviors and how to measure those.

Moreover the results inform theory as to what factors predict job search quality. Specifically, goal clarity, employment commitment, and activating affect positively predicted job search systematicity, whereas financial need and deactivating affect were unrelated. First, goal clarity refers to the extent to which job seekers have clear job-search objectives, for example regarding the type of job they want (Wanberg et al., 2002). Job search goals are important to direct individuals' attention and mobilize and sustain effort towards job search behavior. My findings support self-regulatory theory that states that any self-regulated process starts with a goal (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1982), by showing that clear goals encourage systematic self-regulatory job search behavior. Empirical evidence has shown that job search clarity is positively related to job search intensity and job search success (Côté et al., 2006; Wanberg et al., 2002; Zikic & Saks, 2009). My findings add to this research by showing that job search clarity also positively relates to job search quality.

Second, employment commitment positively predicted job search systematicity, while financial need did not. Employment commitment refers to how intrinsically important work is to an

individual (Kanfer et al., 2001) and financial need in this sample referred to the extent to which job seekers would have financial difficulties if they would not find a job in the upcoming months. These concepts are both indicators of the valence of finding a job, but whereas employment commitment reflects intrinsic motives for finding a job, financial need reflects more extrinsic motives. The findings are in line with the incentive performance literature in which various meta-analyses (e.g., Cerasoli et al., 2014; Jenkins et al., 1998) indicate that intrinsic motivation explains more unique variance in the quality of performance, whereas incentives are better predictors of the quantity of performance. Considering systematic job search as an indicator of job search quality, I similarly found that the intrinsic motivation of employment commitment rather than the extrinsic motivation of financial need relates to the quality of job search. These findings contrast with antecedents of job search intensity, which is positively predicted by both employment commitment and financial need (Kanfer et al., 2001).

Finally, positive and negative *activating* affect were both positively related to systematic job search behavior, likely because they both help mobilizing energy to engage in goal pursuit (Carver, 2001). Positive activating and negative activating affect may also facilitate systematic job search in their own unique way. For example, positive activating affect has been associated with increased breadth of attention (Rowe et al., 2007), which may facilitate the adaptive nature of systematic search that allows job seekers to meet expectations of demanding parties on the job market. In contrast, negative activating affect is associated with cognitive focus and narrowed scope of attention (for a review see Derryberry & Tucker, 1994), which may facilitate goal shielding and goal maintenance processes needed for systematic search, keeping alternative goals at bay. These findings add to the job search literature by indicating that both positive and negative affect can be beneficial to the quality of job search behavior as long as these are activating rather than deactivating affects.

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The findings in the present dissertation indicate that research and practice dealing with (re)employment process should shift their attention from job search quantity to job search quality. Specifically, this knowledge may benefit job seekers and employment and career counsellors in providing direction on how job seekers may spend their time most efficiently to optimize employment outcomes. For example, job seekers should be encouraged to be attentive to the way they are searching, try new ways (e.g., search on different platforms, use informal and formal sources, network), actively seek opportunities to learn about job search (e.g., ask for feedback) and use what they learn to improve the way they search. In addition, job seekers should be encouraged to build in routines to help them persevering during difficult times.

### **Negative Job Search Events and the Responses they Elicit**

My in-depth analysis of job seekers' experiences contributes to job search literature by providing an extensive overview of the plethora of negative job search events that job seekers encounter throughout the job search process, which may lead to a mix of negative emotional responses. Previous research mostly measured negative job search experiences in general terms with generic items about job search difficulties, or lack of job search progress (for exceptions see Ali et al., 2016; Wanberg, Basbug, et al., 2012). In-depth knowledge about the kind of events job seekers are confronted with during job search and their responses associated with these events provides a new opportunity to investigate the causes and outcomes of certain kinds of negative job search experiences. For example, the results show that some negative job search events are mostly associated with activating emotions, while others mostly elicit deactivating emotions. Since activating and deactivating emotions relate differently to subsequent job search behavior, these findings can focus future research to better understand the job search process.

Practically, this knowledge may also help to create more opportunities to mitigate the emotional damage of job search. For

example, hiring parties should be aware that negative job search events may in part be reduced if they take more responsibility for proper communication at various stages of the recruitment and selection procedure. Moreover, it may help employment counselors to identify the types of support that job seekers need during their job search. The findings indicate that job seekers typically lack functional emotional coping strategies to deal with negative job search events and subsequent emotions, such as suppression of emotions and avoiding future job search activities. Many job seekers experience negative self-critical emotions (e.g., self-blame, rumination), rather than self-kindness and acceptance. This supports the urgency of training self-compassion to job seekers.

### **Self-Compassion**

My examination of self-compassion during the job search process contributes to both the job search and the self-compassion literature. Most importantly, the results of this dissertation support the notion that self-compassion is an adaptive emotion-focused coping strategy for job seekers to deal with negative job search experiences. Chapter 3 provides compelling evidence in two studies that job seekers who are more self-compassioned are less negatively impacted by negative job search experiences than job seekers who are less self-compassioned. Moreover, my findings in Chapter 4 imply that a self-compassion intervention can effectively increase job seekers' ability to respond to negative job search events with more self-compassion, and that this beneficially impacts job seekers' affective responses to these events. By offering an evidenced-based adaptive emotion-focused coping strategy during job search I break with traditional intervention approaches. These predominantly offer support in the form of problem-focused coping, focusing on improving job search skills and or motivation (Liu, Huang, et al., 2014), rather than coping with the emotional consequences of the setbacks that accompany job search. Even when dealing with setbacks is integrated in interventions, the focus is still problem-

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focused. For example, the well-known JOBS training (Caplan et al., 1989) includes ‘inoculation against setbacks’, intended to improve job seekers’ general mental health. Specifically, job seekers learn to anticipate setbacks (e.g., not hearing back), then plan alternatives or preventive courses of action aimed to overcome such barriers and setbacks (e.g., making follow-up calls). Another way to deal with failures and negative experiences that is suggested is to enhancing learning from failure and awareness of alternative strategies (Noordzij et al., 2013). Even though these tactics may be helpful to stay activated, they do not explicitly address job seekers’ emotional experiences. Self-compassion is different as it is an adaptive emotion-focused coping strategy, rather than a problem-focused coping strategy. Moreover, unlike most emotion regulation strategies that aim to modify either the antecedents that cause emotions or the responses elicited by emotions (e.g., cognitive reappraisal, emotional suppression; Gross & John, 2003), self-compassion involves mindful acceptance of the emotions that are present (Neff, 2003a). The results indicate that self-compassion reduces negative affect and fosters positive affect. Practically, these findings imply that encouraging job seekers to reflect on negative job search events helps them to deal with negative job search experiences.

The results contribute to the self-compassion literature by increasing our understanding of how self-compassion makes individuals feel better. More specifically, I identified self-criticism as mediator of the relation between self-compassion and affect. Hereby I add weight to the notion that self-compassion may help to reduce self-criticism and that interventions could be tailored to specific sensitive groups (e.g., those who suffer more from self-criticism; Shapira & Mongrain, 2010). In addition, previous self-compassion intervention studies have looked at various outcomes, such as depressive symptoms and happiness (Shapira & Mongrain, 2010), general negative affect (Leary et al., 2007), improvement motivation (Breines & Chen, 2012), and psychopathological outcomes in clinical setting such as trauma recovery (Zeller et al., 2015) or chronic self-

loathing (Krawitz, 2012), but did not include all four types of affect as outcome variables. This study therefore contributes to self-compassion research by generating insight into the impact of self-compassion interventions on affect of different activation levels, that is, by showing differential effects for different types of affect. It also contributes to the understanding of the effects of a modest self-compassion intervention over time. The results show that taking a self-compassioned mindset to reflect on negative job search experiences can speed-up emotional recovery, such that people who reflect freely seem to need more time to reach similar emotional balance. To have a lasting effect on people's general sense of happiness or dejection, self-compassion likely needs some time to be learned and routinized (Shapira & Mongrain, 2010). These results emphasize the importance of taking time into account when researching the dynamics of emotion regulation through self-compassion by having multiple follow-up measurements.

### **Distinguishing Activating and Deactivating Affect**

Throughout all studies in this dissertation affect was an important predictor and outcome of job search behavior. In line with contemporary literature (Yik et al., 2011), I classified job seekers' affect in terms of valence (i.e., positive and negative) and activation level (i.e., activating and deactivating) to examine whether different kinds of affect predicted job search behavior differently, and whether job search experiences led to different kinds of affect. The cumulative results show that activation level is an important distinction to make when investigating the predictors and outcomes of the job search process. The findings described in Chapter 2 indicate that activating and deactivating affect predicted job search behavior differently. Activating affect related positively to systematic job search, while deactivating affect did not. These results can be explained from a functional perspective on affect, presuming that the elevated arousal levels of activating affect mobilize energy for goal pursuit, while deactivating affect helps to preserve energy and to come to terms with



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the situation (Carver, 2001, 2004; Streubel & Kunzmann, 2011; Taylor, 1991). The results described in Chapter 3 were relatively comparable for activating and deactivating affect. The direction of the relationships was the same across the activation levels and the size of the relationships differed only slightly. For example, my findings show that self-compassion has similar main and moderating effects across types of affect with similar valence regardless of activation level. While these main effects of trait self-compassion were replicated in Study 4, the results regarding state self-compassion did differentiate activating and deactivating affect. Job seekers who reflected with self-compassion on their negative job search experiences generally felt less deactivating negative affect (e.g., sad) and more deactivating positive affect (e.g., calm), but felt equally positive and negative activating affect (e.g., cheerful and frustrated, respectively) as job seekers who had reflected freely. I might therefore tentatively conclude that deactivating affect was more effected by the self-compassion intervention than activating affect. Finally, in Chapter 5 activation level was associated with different phases of the job search process. Generally, most negative job search events were followed by negative activating affect (e.g., frustration, despair), with the exception of rejection, which was followed mostly by negative deactivating affect (e.g., disappointment, sadness).

### **Limitations and Future Research**

To put the findings in perspective it is important to be aware of the limitations of this work. I made a first step in providing empirical evidence for the importance of job search quality for job search success. I measured job search success as employment status several months after job search behavior was assessed. Job search systematicity related to finding a job sooner. However, a shorter job search duration may also be achieved by lowering the expectations of what kind of job one agrees to have and just accepting *any* job. While having a low quality job may seem better than having no job,

this is not necessarily the case. For example, the negative consequences for employees working below their full working capacity (i.e., underemployment) are comparable to unemployment in terms of lower well-being, lower life satisfaction, and more physical and psychological strain (e.g., Feldman, 1996; Kinicki, Prussia, & McKee-Ryan, 2000; McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). Moreover, the negative consequences of a mismatch between someone's preferences and needs, and the characteristics and demands of a job or organization (e.g., low job satisfaction, burnout) can lead to turnover (Kristof, 1996; Van Vianen, 2000). To test whether systematic job search leads to sustainable employment, future research should also examine its relation with employment quality, for example by measuring job satisfaction, need-supplies fit, and turnover intentions in the new job (cf. Koen et al., 2010).

I identified job search systematicity as an indicator of job search quality, but this does not provide a complete picture of what job search quality entails. Future research should further attempt to identify and conceptualize (indicators of) job search quality. For example, Turban et al. (2009) examined the role of meta-cognitive activities in the job search. They referred to meta-cognitive activities as “self-regulatory activities that involve setting goals, developing plans, and monitoring and analyzing progress toward goal accomplishment” (p. 555), and showed that these activities positively predicted job search outcomes (e.g., the number of resumés submitted and job interview invitations). Similar activities are delineated in the different phases of the job search process quality cycle, a cyclical self-regulatory model of job search process quality described by Van Hooft et al. (2013; i.e. goal establishment, planning of goal pursuit, goal stiving, reflection). These views have in common that they place self-regulatory processes at the heart of job search quality. This could be the starting point of future empirical research in elaborating how effective self-regulation strategies can be incorporated in the job search process. In addition, future research could examine interactions between different behavioral dimensions

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of job search. For example, different job search strategies (e.g., focused, exploratory; Crossley & Highhouse, 2005) may interact with job search systematicity in predicting employment success. For example, Koen et al. (2010) showed that exploratory job search strategy is associated with higher number of job offers, but not with higher reemployment quality and that a focused strategy is associated with higher reemployment quality but not with number of job offers. Theoretically one can search exploratory or focused with lower or higher quality. Perhaps high systematic exploratory job search may relate to reemployment quality, whereas low systematic focused job search may not. Looking at job search behavior on different dimensions and combining those perspectives will help to get a better understanding of what kind of behavior is effective.

The results regarding job search systematicity are correlational in nature. Two important questions that remain to be answered concern causality and how to improve job search systematicity. My research showed that on average job search systematicity increased over time. Future research could investigate whether individuals differ in this increase, and what factors explain these different change patterns. For example, job seekers with a learning goal orientation (Elliot & McGregor, 2001) have been found to be more successful in obtaining employment (Noordzij et al., 2013; Van Hooft & Noordzij, 2009). Future research could examine whether this effect can be explained by job search systematicity, such that those with a learning goal orientation have a steeper learning curve toward searching systematically. Another factor that may explain individual differences in improving job search behavior may be how autonomously motivated job seekers are to find a job. Previous research suggests that job seekers learned the most when they experienced autonomy in their reemployment process, which was directly associated with autonomous job search motivation and indirectly associated with high-quality job search (Koen et al., 2016). Future research could attempt to develop interventions that either directly increase job seekers' systematicity, or indirectly by focusing

on potential antecedents such as learning goal orientation or experienced autonomy, and in turn test the effect of learned systematicity on employment success. A field experiment would allow to test my theorizing on job search systematicity with more rigor and make a causal claim more justified to put theory in practice (Aguinis & Edwards, 2014), where it may truly be of help to job seekers.

The findings described in Chapter 5 support the notion that negative job search experiences take different forms and elicit different responses. These findings are based on qualitative analyses of the data. Given that different negative job search events have different consequences, future research should develop a questionnaire for job search difficulties, possibly with different phases, to quantitatively test the qualitative findings.

Lastly, regarding the effects of self-compassion, self-compassion can be expected to indirectly positively impact job search behavior because self-compassion makes job seekers feel better (Chapter 3 and 4) and positive emotions are associated with job search success (Côté et al., 2006; Turban et al., 2013, 2009). However, this expectation has not been tested in this dissertation. Future research should test these expectations and examine the direct effects of self-compassion on job search behavior and job search success. The research in this dissertation was the first step to testing the effectiveness of a self-compassion intervention for job seekers. Although I showed that the intervention impacted job seekers' affective responses beneficially, we need additional data to test whether the improved affective responses can be replicated and translate to better job search behaviors and outcomes. Future research could therefore include more outcome measures that could tap into job search behavior (e.g., job search strategies, Crossley & Stanton, 2005), job search systematicity (Chapter 2 in this dissertation), and job search success (e.g., interview invitations, job offers, employment quality).

### **Concluding Remarks**

Altogether, the studies presented in this dissertation advance understanding of how job seekers can effectively search for a job and how they can deal with the setbacks they encounter during their job search. I showed that searching systematically by being persistent and adaptable increases the likelihood of finding a job. By introducing systematic job search as indicator of job search quality I open the door for future research to empirically test the relation between job search quality and employment success, and I inform job seekers and reemployment counselors on how individuals can search effectively. I further provided a detailed look into the negative job search events that job seekers encounter and how they respond to these events. These findings suggest that although hiring organizations cannot take away the pain of a rejection, they can prevent further negative spinoffs by treating their applicants with transparency, honesty, and respect. Lastly, I showed that reflecting on negative job search experiences with self-compassion (by being kind and mindfully accepting, and being aware that failure is part of human nature) beneficially impacts how job seekers feel about the experienced job search difficulties. Introducing self-compassion to the job search literature as an adaptive emotion-focused coping strategy extends traditional intervention approaches that predominantly offer support in the form of problem-focused coping. My findings inform job seekers and reemployment counselors how to deal with negative job search experiences to reduce negative emotions and foster positive emotions. Even though the process of finding a job can be very tough and unpleasant, job seekers can get better at it by seeking feedback, adapting their strategy based on what they learn, by persevering and by having self-compassion when dealing with setbacks.