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Job Seeking Among Retirees Seeking Bridge Employment

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Abstract

Using a sample of recent retirees, the study described here sought to test the general propositions of the [Wanberg, Watt, and Rumsey \(1996\)](#) model by (a) including specific variables that are likely to be relevant to older adults seeking work after retirement (bridge employment) and (b) integrating more recent variable groups (e.g., situational constraints) suggested by recent research (e.g., [Wanberg, Kanfer, & Rotundo \(1999\)](#) and [Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz \(2001\)](#)). Generally, the results support the efficacy of the Wanberg et al. model to predict job seeking among this group. Biographical variables such as older worker job search constraints, self-evaluations (e.g., job seeking self-efficacy), and motive/social variables (e.g., social support)

were related to job seeking. Some of these, however, were not in the expected direction. Similarities and differences between “regular” job seeking and bridge employment job seeking are discussed.

Several trends have increased the current and projected prevalence of continued employment after one has officially retired (i.e., bridge employment; [Feldman, 1994](#); [Kim & Feldman, 1998](#)). One important trend in bridge employment is the substantial increase expected in the number of older adults in the United States (AARP, 1999) from its current level of approximately 34.4 million adults over the age of 65 years (13% of the population) to 70 million (20% of the population) by 2030. Although many of these older adults are choosing to retire from their full-time jobs before the age of 65 ([Feldman, 1994](#); [Quinn, Burkhauser, & Meyers, 1990](#)), many continue in some level of paid employment after they retire ([Ekerdt, DiViney, & Kosloski, 1996](#); [Hayward, Hardy, & Liu, 1994](#); [Ruhm, 1989](#)). In 1998, 3.7 million (11%) adults over the age of 65 were either working or seeking work (AARP, 1999). A recent study of adults between the ages of 36 and 54 years reported that 55% intended to continue working part time and 32% intended to continue working full time after they retire ([Roper Starch Worldwide, 1999](#)). In 1995, the Census Bureau estimated that a full 85% of those over the age of 50 years were willing to work in temporary and/or part-time positions ([Census Bureau, 1995](#)). Given these statistics, it is clear that retirement does not necessarily imply a complete withdrawal from workforce participation ([Henretta, 1994](#); [O’Rand, 1996](#)). Many older adults either continue to work or express a desire to do so.

Although bridge employment often carries the connotation of “slowing down” between career employment and full-time retirement (which is sometimes the case), it does not necessarily involve less demanding/challenging work. Bridge employment includes both part-time and full-time work that may or may not be similar to the work performed prior to retirement and can serve several important functions for individuals, organizations, and society ([Weckerle & Schultz, 1999](#)). At the individual level, bridge employment allows older workers to match their desired and actual levels of workforce participation. Research has linked such a match to increased psychological well-being ([Herzog, House, & Morgan, 1991](#)). It can also allow older workers to pursue different types of jobs or provide a gradual transition from full-time work to full-time retirement, thereby facilitating adaptation and adjustment to full-time retirement ([Feldman, 1994](#)). For organizations, bridge employment can allow them to retain the valuable skills and organizational intelligence of their older workers at a reduced cost ([Quadagno & Hardy, 1996](#); [Talaga & Beehr, 1989](#)) and provide a pool of highly skilled workers in a time when such workers are in increasingly short supply ([Committee for Economic Development, 1999](#); [Hansson, DeKoekoek, Neece, & Patterson, 1997](#); [Warr, 1994](#)). At the societal level, bridge employment serves an economic function by providing older adults with an important source of income and, in some cases, medical and other types of insurance, which reduces poverty as well as reliance on social security and other public and/or private retirement funding sources ([Committee for Economic Development, 1999](#)).

Despite the prevalence and importance of bridge employment, little empirical research has addressed the issues of seeking and obtaining bridge employment. Indeed, within the retirement literature, much of the research has focused on identifying the preretirement predictors of bridge employment ([Gustman & Steinmeier, 1984](#); [Weckerle & Schultz, 1999](#)), the role of bridge employment in the decision to retire ([Kim & Feldman, 1998](#)), and the relation of bridge employment to well being during retirement ([Dorfman & Rubenstein, 1993](#)). Outside of the retirement literature, in the areas of economics and industrial psychology, researchers studying job loss and unemployment have developed several models of job seeking and reemployment (i.e., [McFadyen & Thomas, 1997](#); [Schwab, Rynes, & Aldag, 1987](#); [Wanberg, Kanfer, & Rotundo, 1999](#)). However, none of these has been applied to older adults seeking bridge employment, despite calls for such research ([Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001](#); [Wanberg, Watt, & Rumsey, 1996](#)). The lack of understanding of the job seeking and reemployment process among older adults is highlighted by the results of one recent study that reported that 61% of firms had difficulty finding older job candidates ([Committee for Economic Development, 1999](#)).

Although not developed specifically to explain bridge employment, models of job seeking do provide a useful heuristic framework for examining job seeking in bridge employment jobs. Perhaps the most general model of job seeking and reemployment was that presented and empirically tested by [Wanberg et al. \(1996\)](#). In this model, a collection of individual difference and situational variables were hypothesized to influence job seeking behavior, which, in turn, was hypothesized to influence reemployment. Among the individual difference variables included in an initial test of the model were job seeking self-efficacy, work commitment, conscientiousness, and unemployment negativity. Among the situational variables were social support and economic hardship. These variables will be described below.

In two longitudinal tests of this model ([Wanberg et al., 1999](#); [Wanberg et al., 1996](#)), support was found for many of the hypothesized relationships. Interestingly, in a post-hoc analysis in one of those studies ([Wanberg et al., 1996](#)), the researchers also found an interaction between age and job seeking such that participants over the age of 40 who reported higher job seeking frequency were less likely to be employed than their younger counterparts. The results for this initial model not only support the possibility that age matters when studying job seeking and reemployment, but also suggest that the [Wanberg et al. \(1996\)](#) model may be different for older adults seeking bridge employment than for younger workers. Accordingly, the study described here sought to test the general propositions of the Wanberg et al. model by (a) including specific variables that are likely to be relevant to older adults seeking bridge employment and (b) integrating more recent variable groups (e.g., situational constraints) suggested by more recent research (e.g., [Wanberg et al. \(1999\)](#) and [Kanfer et al. \(2001\)](#)). We structured our hypotheses along the lines of [Kanfer et al. \(2001\)](#) by using the variable groupings suggested there.

Biographical Variables

The first category of variables suggested by [Kanfer et al. \(2001\)](#) is biographical variables that have been linked to job seeking. These include demographic variables such as age and gender, as well as life history variables such as job search constraints (e.g., inadequate transportation or finances; [Kanfer et al., 2001](#)). Research has shown that older workers and females tend to engage in less job seeking ([Kanfer et al., 2001](#)) than their younger and male counterparts. [Taylor and Shore \(1995\)](#) also found that age predicts retirement. This is consistent with evidence from [Ekerdt and DeViney's \(1993\)](#) article suggesting that work becomes less satisfying as individuals age and particularly as they approach retirement. This association holds even among a sample of early retirees whereby [Davis \(2003\)](#) found that age was negatively associated with bridge employment controlling for other factors such as health, gender, and organizational tenure. Those who retire at younger ages are more likely to gain satisfaction from bridge employment and be more interested in work to maintain, *albeit*, a reduced connection to their work identity and to generate income to fund a longer period of retirement. Thus, we expect a negative association between age and job seeking activities for retirees.

For gender, however, we expect that retired women will demonstrate a different level of job seeking than that found among traditional job seekers. Although traditional female job seekers tend to exhibit fewer job seeking behaviors, female retirees have more discontinuous work histories and lower levels of accumulated wages and pension benefits. Given that women in the United States can be expected to live, on average, 5-1/2 years longer than men (["Life Expectancy," 2003](#)), one can argue they need greater retirement funds (on average) to support the same standard of living. Therefore, female retirees have a greater need for employment post retirement ([Beehr, 1986](#); [Talaga & Beehr, 1995](#)) and this is probably true even controlling for income. For these reasons, the first two hypotheses stated:

- *Hypothesis 1:* Among retirees, age will have a negative relationship with job seeking.
- *Hypothesis 2:* Among retirees, women will engage in more job seeking than men.

Retirement differs somewhat from other forms of nonemployment in that retirees may have purposefully planned financial resources from pensions, private savings, and investments that they intend to use during the length of their retirement. Thus, those with higher incomes are also likely to have planned for retirement. Individuals who have planned for retirement have been found to be more satisfied with it (e.g., [Maddox, 1966](#); [Pollman & Johnson, 1979](#)) and, therefore, might be less likely to engage in bridge employment. Second, income is also associated with other characteristics such as education and job demands that may negatively affect interest in bridge employment ([Brown, Fukunaga, Umemoto, & Wicker, 1996](#)). Thus, we expect that those with higher household incomes would be less likely to seek bridge employment.

- *Hypothesis 3:* Among retirees, income will have a negative relationship with job seeking.

The length of time since retirement may also be an important predictor of job seeking activity. Within the job search literature, job search intensity has been found to change over time. For example, [Barber, Daly, Giannantonio, and Phillips \(1994\)](#) found that college and vocational technical school graduates varied the intensity of their job search depending on the time since graduation. Other research suggests that job search intensity decreases with length of unemployment ([Kulik, 2000](#); [Warr & Jackson, 1984](#)). However, among retirees, the effects of time since retirement are likely to be different considering that, unlike unemployment, most retirements are voluntary (e.g., [Parnes & Less, 1985](#)) and, thus, at least initially, finding work is not desirable. Retirees, particularly males, often experience a “honeymoon” period just after retirement ([Atchley, 1976](#); [Ekerdt, Bosse, & Levkoff, 1985](#); [Richardson & Kilty, 1995](#)). However, this period is then followed by one of disillusionment or discontent with retirement. Given this, we would expect that as the retirement period lengthens, voluntary retirees become less satisfied with retirement, more interested in reemployment and will increase job seeking activity over time. In addition, a longer time since retirement may provide these individuals with more time to update their skills, prepare for a career shift ([Feldman, 1994](#)), and formulate a job seeking plan.

- *Hypothesis 4:* Among retirees, length of time retired will have a positive relationship with job seeking.

In addition to these demographic variables, [Kanfer et al. \(2001\)](#) also included job search constraints among their biographical category. Job search constraints consist of factors such as inadequate transportation or inadequate finances to engage in job seeking activities that are likely to impact job seeking and reemployment. [Wanberg et al. \(1999\)](#) identified seven such factors that they collectively measured and referred to as job search constraints. These constraints were shown to be negatively related to job seeking behaviors ([Wanberg et al., 1996, 1999](#)). Older adults seeking bridge employment face many of the same constraints experienced by younger workers. In addition, older job seekers may experience some constraints more strongly. One example is poor health. Poor health may limit the timing of one's job search and the types of jobs one might seek ([Allan, 1990](#)). Further, despite population-level evidence that suggests an overall improvement in the health and ability of older adults to work ([Crimmins, Reynolds, & Saito, 1999](#)), poor health often contributes to the decision to retire ([Mutchler, Burr, Massagli, & Pienta, 1999](#)). Poor health may also prevent some individuals from desiring and, therefore, seeking reentry into the workforce ([Henretta, Chan, & O'Rand, 1992](#)). For these traditional job search constraints, the following hypothesis was made:

- *Hypothesis 5:* Among retirees, traditional job search constraints will have a negative relationship with job seeking.

Older job seekers may also experience additional constraints including stereotypes regarding older workers ([Perry, Kulik, & Bourhis, 1996](#)) and economic disincentives to work ([Herz & Rones, 1989](#)). With regard to older worker stereotypes, although the relationship between age-related stereotypes and employment decisions may depend on several contextual factors ([Finkelstein, Burke, & Raju, 1995](#); [Hassell & Perrewe, 1995](#); [Warr, 1994](#)),

the preponderance of evidence suggests that older workers do face negative stereotypes that may limit their participation in the workforce ([Committee for Economic Development, 1999](#)). Given this, it is also reasonable to suspect that older adults who perceive they have been negatively stereotyped will become discouraged in their job search ([Kulik & Rowland, 1989](#); [Rife & Kilty, 1989](#)) and, as a result, will engage in less job seeking.

With regard to economic disincentives for work, the economic disincentives of the earnings limit provision of the social security system and some types of pension plans have often been studied (i.e., [Fields & Mitchell, 1984](#); [Herz & Rones, 1989](#); [Kotlikoff & Wise, 1989](#)). There is a consensus among researchers that current social security system and pension plan features tend to discourage full-time labor force participation among older adults. As a result, older adults seeking bridge employment are more likely to seek part-time employment. The perception that part-time work, especially in positions at a level of status similar to one's preretirement job, is unavailable can serve as a constraint on older adults seeking bridge employment.

In this study, these perceptions of discrimination, economic disincentives, and availability of part-time work are collectively referred to as "older worker job search constraints" and were hypothesized to relate to job seeking as follows:

- *Hypothesis 6:* Among retirees, older worker job search constraints will have a negative relationship with job seeking.

Self-Evaluations

A second category of variables identified by [Kanfer et al. \(2001\)](#) addressed job seekers' self-evaluations of their ability to conduct a successful job search. Generally, research supports the notion that those individuals who perceive themselves as more competent at job seeking (i.e., job seeking self-efficacy) report higher job seeking and are also more likely to become reemployed ([Kanfer et al., 2001](#); [Moynihan, Roehling, LePine, & Boswell, 2003](#)). However, [Moynihan et al. \(2003\)](#) suggested this may be more true for preparatory search behaviors than active search behaviors. With regard to employment, for instance, in a sample of graduating college students, [Ellis and Taylor \(1983\)](#) found that job search specific self-efficacy was positively correlated with the number of job offers received by participants. Some evidence for this relationship in an older sample was provided by [Rife and Kilty \(1989\)](#) who found that those participants who had abandoned their job search reported lower job search self-efficacy than those who were still searching. Based on this literature, the following relationship was hypothesized:

- *Hypothesis 7:* Among retirees, job search self-efficacy will have a positive relationship with job seeking.

Motive and Social Variables

A third category of variables identified by [Kanfer et al. \(2001\)](#) addressed job seekers' motives for obtaining employment and support they receive from their environment. Two "motivations" for job seeking that are prominent in the literature include commitment to paid work and unemployment negativity. Research on the job seeking of unemployed adults has generally supported that there is a positive relationship between both of these and job seeking ([Blau, 1994](#); [Taris, Heesink, & Feij, 1995](#); [Wanberg et al., 1999](#); [Wanberg et al., 1996](#)). The first, commitment to paid work, reflects a general orientation toward work rather than a specific job or organization ([Blood, 1969](#)). Individuals with a high degree of work commitment see work as an important and fundamentally good activity. The literature on retirement decision making suggests the positive relationship between such a work ethic and job seeking would be expected for older adults seeking bridge employment ([Adams & Beehr, 1998](#); [Adams, 1999](#)).

Unemployment negativity has been defined as “how negative, depressed, and upset an individual is about being unemployed” ([Wanberg et al., 1996](#), p. 77). However, unemployment negativity is less relevant for older adults seeking bridge employment than it is for younger workers seeking regular employment. Retirement is a normative event and the status of being retired does not carry the same negative stigma as being unemployed. Thus, rather than looking at unemployment negativity, we examine retirement negativity, or how negative, depressed, and upset an individual is about being retired. Involuntary retirements are likely to be viewed negatively because individuals feel “forced out” and may not have psychologically prepared for the retirement phase. However, as pointed out earlier, even among voluntary retirements it has been shown that individuals often experience retirement negativity ([Ekerdt, Bosse, & Levkoff, 1985](#); [Richardson & Kilty, 1995](#)). Thus, to the extent that some retirees experience the retirement role negatively, we would expect that (as with unemployment negativity) this will motivate job seeking activities aimed at bridge employment ([Adams & Beehr, 1998](#)). Therefore, in this study, retirement negativity rather than unemployment negativity was assessed.

The specific hypotheses for these motives were as follows:

- *Hypothesis 8:* Among retirees, work ethic will have a positive relationship with job seeking.
- *Hypothesis 9:* Among retirees, retirement negativity will have a positive relationship with job seeking.

The most prominent social variable among the motives and social variables category is job seeking social support ([Kanfer et al., 2001](#); [Wanberg et al., 1999](#)). Although there are several types of social support ([Cohen & Wills, 1985](#), [King, Mattimore, King, & Adams, 1995](#)), most definitions of social support include two main components: emotional support (i.e., encouragement, reassurance of worth, etc.) and instrumental support (i.e., information and tangible assistance). Both of these, when specifically directed at job seeking, are important coping resources during the job search process ([Leana & Feldman, 1995](#)). Some empirical evidence for linking social support to job seeking in older adults is provided by [Mallinckrodt and Fretz \(1988\)](#), who studied workers over the age of 40 years. Based on this literature, the following hypothesis was offered:

- *Hypothesis 10:* Among retirees, job seeking social support will have a positive relationship with job seeking.

Job Seeking

In the [Wanberg et al. \(1996\)](#) model, job seeking is seen as a unidimensional construct composed of items intended to measure both the job seeking sources used and the intensity of the job search. Others have suggested that there may be a difference between this traditional operationalization of job seeking and assertive job seeking ([Blau, 1994](#); [Schmit, Amel, & Ryan, 1993](#)). Given this, and in light of the suggestion that older adults may have difficulty becoming reemployed because they engage in less assertive job seeking behaviors ([Wanberg et al., 1996](#)), both the traditional measure of job seeking and a measure of assertive job seeking were included as outcomes in this study.

Summary

In summary, the current and projected prevalence of bridge employment, as well as its potential importance at the individual, organizational, and societal levels, suggests a need for a better understanding of job seeking among retired workers. A model of job seeking developed on working age adults suggests that job seeking is influenced by a collection of biographical variables, self-evaluations, motives and social variables. Unfortunately, this model was neither developed nor empirically tested within the context of bridge employment. Although the general model is expected to hold, and many of the same variables are likely to influence the job seeking of older adults seeking bridge employment, there are also some potential differences that must be considered. The

literature on older workers and retirees suggests that among these differences are retirement negativity and constraints that are somewhat more unique to those seeking bridge employment.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Questionnaires were sent to 599 retirees who were all listed as having retired within a 24-month time period (ending in July 2001) from a large state-sponsored university system located in a midwestern state. Of those that were sent, 331 provided usable data (a 55% response rate). From this larger sample, we selected a subsample of those retirees who were not currently employed (employed retirees would be expected to have different job seeking attitudes and behaviors). This subsample included 118 men and 81 women that ranged in age from 55 to 78 ($M= 62.28$, $SD= 4.53$). Most were married (75%) and well educated (69% had completed four or more years of college). On average they had been retired for 12.63 months ($SD= 6.24$, range = 2–24). Regarding their occupations prior to retirement, 37% had been in teaching related positions, 24% in managerial/administrative positions, 11% in technical positions, 11% in clerical positions, 5% in skilled trades, 4% in housekeeping/janitorial positions, 8% in other (e.g., health/human service related) positions.

An 8-page self-report questionnaire was used to collect the data for this study. It contained standard items to measure demographic information (e.g., age, household income, time since retirement) and the items needed to measure the individual difference, situational, and job seeking variables. Following procedures outlined by [Dillman \(2000\)](#) and [Fowler \(1988\)](#), participants were contacted three times. First, all participants were sent a cover letter and questionnaire via first-class mail explaining the purpose of the study and assuring them confidentiality. Approximately 10 days later, they were mailed a reminder letter. Approximately ten days after that, those who still had not responded were sent another copy of the questionnaire and a final appeal to complete it. All items were rated on a Likert type scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *a very great deal* unless otherwise noted. It should also be noted that 6 months after this initial survey was conducted, a follow-up questionnaire asking about employment status was sent. Unfortunately, fewer than 20 of the participants who were seeking work had become employed. As a result, in this study, we examine only the cross-sectional data.

Biographical Variables

Age was measured by asking the participants to write on a blank line their age in years at the time of their last birthday. Gender was measured by asking the participants to indicate their gender by circling either male or female (later coded 0 = *male*, 1 = *female*). Education was measured on a scale from 1 = *grade school* to 8 = *graduate or professional degree*. Income was measured using a single item which asked, "What is your annual household income?" that was followed by a scale ranging from 1 = *\$0 to \$10,000* to 10 = *\$90,001 or more*. Length of time since retirement was measured by an item that asked participants to write on a line how long (in months) they had been retired.

Traditional job search constraints were measured using the six items developed by [Wanberg et al. \(1999\)](#). These items were preceded by a common stem that read, "How much have each of the following interfered with your ability to look for a job?" This stem is followed by items such as "my physical health," "not having adequate transportation," "not having enough money to search for a job (e.g., for clothes, phone calls, mailings, etc.)," and "child care, spouse care, or other family responsibilities."

In addition to this measure, four items based on the works of [Allan \(1990\)](#) and [Rife and Kilty \(1989\)](#) were used to create an index of older worker job search constraints. The first two are intended to measure perceived disincentives ("There are too few part-time jobs" and "I would lose my social security or pension if I took a job"). The second two focus on perceived age stereotyping ("Most companies do not want to hire someone my age" and "Older workers have a hard time finding work because of negative stereotypes people have about us"). To

provide some evidence that these two measures were indeed tapping two distinct types of constraints, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted on all 10 items. Using principal components extraction and varimax rotation, two components with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted. These two components accounted for 59% of the variance in the solution and an examination of the rotated component matrix indicated that the items corresponding to traditional constraints had their highest loadings on one component (ranging from .57 to .73, cross loadings ranging from .06 to .33), and the items corresponding to the older worker constraints had their highest loading on the other (ranging from .57 to .93, cross loadings ranging from .16 to .27; additional details available from the first author upon request).

Self-Evaluations

Job seeking self-efficacy was measured using seven items from [Van Ryn and Vinokur \(1991\)](#) as adapted by [Wanberg et al. \(1996\)](#). These items focus on perceptions of competence at job seeking. These items have a common stem that read “How confident are you about being able to do the following things successfully?” This was followed by items such as “complete a good application and resume” and “contact and persuade a potential employer to consider you for a job.”

Motives and Social Variables

Work ethic was measured with four items from [Blood's \(1969\)](#) Pro-Protestant Ethic Scale, which differs from other measures of work commitment in that it reflects a general orientation toward work rather than a job or organization. The four items on this measure included: “Hard work makes one a better person,” “Wasting time is as bad as wasting money,” “A good indication of a person's worth is how well they do their job,” and “If all other things are equal, it is better to have a job with a lot of responsibility than one with little responsibility.”

Retirement negativity was measured using four items adapted from [Anson, Antonovsky, Sagy, and Adler's \(1989\)](#) Gains and Losses in Retirement Scale. This scale was originally developed to measure older workers' perceptions of what it would be like if they were to retire (i.e., If I were to retire, I would be bored). Adapting the items calls for rephrasing the initial clause in each item to refer to the respondent's current situation. The four items that were used included: “Since I have retired, I have been bored,” “Since I have retired, I have become more socially isolated,” “Since I have retired, I miss the companionship provided by my friends at work,” and “Since I have retired, I miss the structure provided by my work schedule.”

Job seeking social support was measured with five items along the lines of those developed by [Vinokur and Caplan \(1987\)](#). Both emotional support (i.e., encouragement, reassurance of worth, etc.) and instrumental support (i.e., information and tangible assistance) for job seeking were captured by seven items preceded by a common stem that read, “To what extent can you rely on people you know such as friends, family members, etc. to provide you with the following?” This was followed by the items, “encouragement surrounding your job search efforts,” “comments that raise your self-confidence about your job search,” “someone to listen to you when you need to talk about your job search,” “someone who would loan you money to help you conduct your job search,” and “useful information about your job search.”

Job Seeking

Job seeking was measured with items adapted from [Blau's \(1994\)](#) measures of job seeking. Factor analytic evidence on the dimensionality of this measure has shown that it taps two types of job seeking. Its development relied partially on [Becker's \(1980\)](#) Assertiveness Job-Hunting Survey. The first dimension reflects traditional job seeking and the second reflects more active or “assertive” job seeking behaviors. Six items from each dimension were used. Sample items from the traditional job seeking dimension include “read the help wanted/classified jobs in a newspaper, journal or newsletter” and “contacted an employment agency or state employment service.” Sample items from the assertive job seeking dimension include “asked friends if they knew of a job

opening I might be interested in” and “listed yourself as a job applicant in a newspaper, journal or newsletter.” One item from the traditional job seeking dimension (referring to the use of current employer resources) seemed inappropriate for this sample. This item was replaced with an item that referred to searching the Internet for job opportunities. All items were preceded by a common stem asking how often the respondents had done each since they had retired.

Because some studies have not replicated the two-dimensional structure reported in the original source (i.e., [Boudreau, Boswell, Judge, & Bretz, 2001](#)), an exploratory factor analysis was conducted in this study to investigate the dimensionality of the measure. Using principal components extraction and varimax rotation, one component with an eigenvalue greater than 1 was extracted. This component accounted for 57% of the variance. The item loadings on this single component ranged from .60 to .87 (additional details available from the first author upon request). Based on these results, and consistent with some past uses of this measure ([Bretz, Boudreau, & Judge, 1994](#)), responses to all 12 items were used in a single measure of job seeking. This measure was created by counting the number of job seeking activities in which participants had engaged. Thus, its possible range was from 0 to 12.

Analyses

Using a count measure as the outcome variable has the advantage of allowing all participants who were unemployed to be used in the analyses and is consistent with this study's aim of examining job seeking among retirees. However, because some of the sample may not have engaged in any job seeking (i.e., are fully retired), this variable is not normally distributed but more nearly approximates a Poisson distribution (i.e., intentionally including more 0s or highly positively skewed). As a result, rather than using ordinary least-squares-based correlation and regression, Poisson-based incident rate ratios and regression using maximum likelihood estimation (more commonly found in the epidemiological and econometric literature) were used to test the hypotheses ([Cameron & Trivedi, 1998](#); [Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003](#); [Long, 1997](#)). Incident rate ratios (IRR) reflect the increase/decrease in the rate of job seeking activities expected with a one-unit change in the predictor (analogous to a correlation coefficient for bivariate relationships). IRR values greater than 1 indicate a higher rate and values less than 1 indicate lower rate. When multiple predictors are used (Poisson regression) these incident rate ratios are analogous to regression weights. Overall fit of the Poisson regression model was evaluated via the likelihood ratio chi-square, and as rough estimate of explanatory power, the pseudo R^2 is also reported. Tests of the IRRs were made via the Wald test.

Results

Our initial analysis revealed that missing data never accounted for more than 9% of the data for any one variable (9% of the data were missing for job seeking social support). In an effort to retain sample size and based on the suggestions by [Roth \(1994\)](#) and [Tabachnick and Fidell \(2001\)](#), mean substitution of missing values was used for the predictors only. Following this, descriptive statistics for all variables measured in this study were calculated (see [Table 1](#)). Included are means, standard deviations, observed ranges, possible ranges, and coefficient alpha reliability estimates. As can be seen, the observed ranges were equal to or approached the possible ranges for all variables. All of the coefficient alphas were over the .70 level that is recommended for research ([Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994](#)), suggesting that the multi-item measures displayed adequate internal consistency.

Table 1.

Means, Standard Deviations, Ranges, Coefficient Alphas, Incident Rate Ratios and Intercorrelations Among Variables (n = 199)

| Variable | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | Possible range | Observed range | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
|--------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------------|----------------|-------|--------|-------|------|-------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|-----|
| 1. Age | 62.28 | 4.53 | – | 5–78 | – | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Gender | .41 | .49 | 0–1 | 0–1 | -.11 | – | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Income | 6.46 | 2.71 | 1–10 | 1–10 | .28** | -.25** | – | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Time retired (months) | 12.63 | 6.23 | 2–24 | 2–24 | .05 | .14 | -.09 | – | | | | | | | |
| 5. Traditional constraints | 1.50 | .73 | 1–5 | 1–5 | .12 | .02 | -.04 | .04 | .80 | | | | | | |
| 6. Older worker constraints | 2.03 | 1.04 | 1–5 | 1–5 | .18* | .11 | -.10 | .11 | .51** | .82 | | | | | |
| 7. Job seeking self-efficacy | 3.93 | .81 | 1–5 | 1–5 | .15* | .05 | .25** | -.01 | -.05 | -.06 | .93 | | | | |
| 8. Work ethic | 2.76 | 1.01 | 1–5 | 1–5 | .19** | -.13 | .11 | .04 | .09 | .12 | .01 | .78 | | | |
| 9. Retirement negativity | 1.84 | .80 | 1–5 | 1–5 | .04 | .02 | .00 | .06 | .14 | .16* | -.06 | .24** | .78 | | |
| 10. Job seeking social support | 2.78 | 1.20 | 1–5 | 1–5 | .07 | .18** | -.02 | -.02 | .08 | .16* | .29** | -.10 | .08 | .92 | |
| 11. Job seeking | 4.16 | 4.34 | 0–12 | 0–12 | .99 | 1.37** | .96** | 1.00 | 1.06 | 1.34** | 1.11** | .97 | 1.50** | 1.33** | .94 |

- *Note.* Items in the main diagonal are alphas. The relationships with job seeking (row 11) are incident rate ratios, the other relationships are correlations.

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

Incident Rate Ratios and Intercorrelations

Incident rate ratios and intercorrelations among all variables are presented in [Table 1](#). As can be seen there, although three of the biographical variables, gender (IRR = 1.37, $p < .01$), income (IRR = .96, $p < .01$), and older worker job search constraints (IRR = 1.35, $p < .01$) were related to job seeking, three others (age, time retired and traditional constraints) were not. As expected, women (Hypothesis 2) engaged in more job seeking than men, and those with higher incomes (Hypothesis 3) engaged in less job seeking than those with lower incomes. Contrary to our expectations, however, those who reported higher older worker job search constraints (Hypothesis 6) engaged in more job seeking. The self-evaluation variable, job seeking self-efficacy (Hypothesis 7), was related to job seeking (IRR = 1.11, $p < .05$) as expected. For the motive and social variables, retirement negativity (Hypothesis 9) was positively related to job seeking (IRR = 1.50, $p < .01$) as was job seeking social support (Hypothesis 10; IRR = 1.34, $p < .01$).

Multivariate Regression

As a summary analysis and to test the notion that the variables that are somewhat unique to retirees can add to the prediction of bridge employment job seeking along with traditional job seeking predictors, the Poisson regression procedure was used (see [Table 2](#)). Overall, the model with all predictors fit the data better than a null model (pseudo $R^2 = .20$, likelihood ratio chi square (10) = 307.17, $p < .01$). For the biographical variables, an examination of IRRs in the regression showed that age (IRR = .98, $p < .01$) and traditional job search constraints (IRR = .77, $p < .01$) were negatively related to job seeking. Older worker job search constraints (1.41, $p < .01$) were also related to job seeking. However, the relationship was positive rather than negative. Gender, income, and length of time retired were not related to job seeking. The self-evaluation variable, job seeking self-efficacy, was not related to job seeking. All three motive and social variables were related to job seeking. Retirement negativity (IRR = 1.55, $p < .01$) and job seeking social support (IRR = 1.27, $p < .01$) were positively related to job seeking as expected. Contrary to our expectations though, work ethic (IRR = .88, $p < .01$) was negatively related to job seeking.

Table 2.

Poisson Regression of Job Seeking on Predictor Variables (n = 199)

| Predictor | IRR |
|----------------------------|----------|
| Biographical variables | |
| Age | .98** |
| Gender | 1.04 |
| Income | .99 |
| Time retired | .99 |
| Traditional constraints | .77** |
| Older worker constraints | 1.41** |
| Self evaluation variable | |
| Job seeking self-efficacy | 1.06 |
| Motive/Social variables | |
| Work ethic | .88** |
| Retirement negativity | 1.55** |
| Job seeking social support | 1.27** |
| Pseudo R^2 | .20 |
| χ^2 | 307.17** |

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

Discussion

The purpose of this reported here was to test the general propositions of the [Wanberg et al. \(1996\)](#) model by (a) including specific variables that are likely to be relevant to older adults seeking bridge employment and (b) integrating more recent variable groups (e.g., situational constraints) suggested by more recent research (e.g., [Wanberg et al., 1999](#); [Kanfer et al., 2001](#)). This was seen as important to both testing the generalizability of the model and contributing to our understanding of job seeking for bridge employment jobs. Generally, the results support the efficacy of the Wanberg et al. model. Wanberg et al. examined 10 predictors, which together accounted for 26% of the variance in job seeking. Three of those 10 were significantly related to job seeking. In this study, 10 variables were examined, which produced a pseudo R^2 of .20 (an analogous measure of the explanatory ability of the correlates), and six of these were significantly related to job seeking. Similar to Wanberg et al., job seeking social support was a significant correlate of job seeking. Unlike the Wanberg et al. study, this study found retirement negativity to be related to job seeking. We thus demonstrated that some predictors of job seeking are similar across traditional and bridge employment, although others are different. It is also encouraging that those variables considered somewhat unique to bridge employment were related to job seeking beyond the traditional predictors when tested simultaneously with them. Interestingly, however, the results for specific variables were not always as expected. In the section that immediately follows, the similarities and differences across specific variables are discussed, as are the strengths and limitations of the study and suggestions for research.

Biographical Variables

The bivariate analyses of the biographical variables found that gender, income, and older worker job search constraints were related to job seeking. In the regression analysis, age, traditional job search constraints, and older worker job search constraints were significant correlates of job seeking. These differences between the bivariate and regression results are not entirely surprising in light of the similarly mixed results found in the past ([Kanfer et al., 2001](#)). The specific pattern of results (significant bivariate correlations and nonsignificant regression weights) for at least some of these variables (i.e., gender and income) are consistent with the [Kanfer et al. \(2001\)](#) assertion that demographic variables act as proxies for other predictors, which would seem to motivate job seeking. Although using biographical variables in this manner is appropriate, it is important for researchers to be mindful of the different reasons these variables might be related to job seeking across different populations. For example, with regard to gender, women may engage in less job seeking than men in samples of high school graduates because they are more likely to attend college, whereas retirement age women may engage in greater job seeking because they face lower retirement income as the result of more discontinuous work histories and the accrual of fewer pension benefits than men (e.g., [Talaga & Beehr, 1995](#)). In a retired sample, the higher level of job seeking reported by women would be found in bivariate analyses. However, the extent to which that higher level of job seeking is due to income differences could only be understood by controlling for income. As we found here, there were no differences between genders once we accounted for income differences. These inconsistencies between bivariate and multivariate effects reinforce the need for future research that uncovers the underlying reasons for the relationships between biographical variables and job seeking.

The nonsignificant findings for length of time since retirement generally suggest that job seeking does not change over the time that one has been retired. There may be a couple of possible explanations for this finding. First, the range on this variable is restricted with a minimum of 2 months and a maximum of 24 months. It is possible that the effect is attenuated due to a restricted range. Alternatively, we believe that most of the retirements represented in this sample were voluntary in nature (due to the nature of the employer and

knowledge that no early retirement packages were offered as incentive for retirement). Given this, retirees in the time frame we are examining are likely to be experiencing a “honeymoon” effect; job search is prompted only later in the retirement phase as retirees become disenchanted with retirement. The 24 month time frame may not be sufficient to capture job search behavior that would result at the end of the “honeymoon.” We also point out that for involuntary retirees, we would expect the relationship to be very similar to that found among typical unemployed workers. That is, as the job search lengthens and proves unfruitful, older workers may become discouraged and reduce their job seeking activities. In addition, the longer the period of retirement, the more psychological distance is created between retirees and their previous jobs and work identity. This too should reduce their desire to engage in bridge employment. Thus, future research may wish to examine the nonlinear effects of reason for retirement and length of time on job seeking using a sample that covers a wider range of retirement length.

Contrary to what was hypothesized, in the bivariate results, traditional job seeking constraints had no relationship with job seeking and the older worker specific constraints were not positively related to job seeking but, instead, showed a negative relationship with job seeking. In the regression, however, the results for traditional job seeking constraints were negative as expected. The difference between the two analyses is likely due to the relationships traditional constraints have with other variables. Once these relationships are included in the analysis, the expected negative relationship is obtained. The positive relationship (both bivariate and multivariate) between what was conceptualized as older worker constraints and job seeking is more interesting. It may be the result of item wording and content. The items comprising the older worker constraint measure (too few part-time jobs, negative attitudes toward older workers, etc.) do not place direct constraints on job seeking. The logic for them was that they might discourage job seeking. However, because of their more external focus, it is possible to overcome these constraints through increased job seeking. That is, retirees may attempt to overcome the relative unavailability of part-time jobs by engaging in more job seeking in order to find work. It may also be the case that as the older adults engaged in more job seeking they encountered more constraints or a heightened awareness of them. For instance, applying unsuccessfully for a job may lead to increased perceptions of discrimination.

Self-Evaluation

One notable difference between the results reported here and those reported in some studies on “regular” job seeking is that job seeker self-evaluations of their job seeking competence (job seeking self-efficacy), although related to job seeking in the bivariate analysis, were not related to job seeking in the regression analysis. Reasoning from both the literature on “regular” job seeking ([Kanfer et al., 2001](#)) and that on bridge employment, we expected that job seeking self-efficacy would be related to job seeking. The discrepancy between the results reported here and those suggested by the literature may be a result of the differences between older workers in general and retirees seeking bridge employment in terms of the reasons why these two groups seek jobs and the types of jobs they seek ([Loi & Shultz, 2002](#)). Older workers seeking to become reemployed full-time in their field are likely to be more interested in higher level jobs that allow them to reestablish their former status and continue progressing in their careers. Such higher level jobs are at least perceived as being more difficult to obtain and would, therefore, require a considerable amount of job seeking self-efficacy (i.e., more confidence in one's ability to make a favorable impression). Retirees seeking bridge employment have already left their career jobs ([Feldman, 1994](#)) and may not be seeking such higher level positions but rather simpler jobs that allow them to supplement their income, pursue new interests, or to have the chance to stay productive and engaged without placing significant demands on their time and energy (which might be invested in the pursuit of leisure activities). Obtaining these types of jobs may be perceived as easier than higher level jobs and, as a result, require less job seeking self-efficacy. Given this, and the fact that job seeking self-efficacy was relatively high among our participants ($M= 3.93$, $SD= .81$ on a scale from 1–5), it may be

less important for this particular sample of retirees seeking bridge employment than might be found in a less educated and lower income sample or for those seeking traditional employment. In addition, some research has suggested that the relationship of job seeking self-efficacy with job seeking may depend on whether the measure of job seeking focuses on preparatory or active job seeking ([Moynihan et al., 2003](#)). Clearly, additional research examining differences in the types of jobs sought by different groups of job seekers and using alternative measures of job seeking is needed.

Motives and Social Variables

Recognizing the importance of motivation in the job seeking process as suggested by [Kanfer et al. \(2001\)](#), two motive-related variables that would seem particularly relevant to retirees seeking bridge employment (i.e., work ethic and retirement negativity) were included with mixed results. For work ethic, no relationship was found in the bivariate analysis; however, it was negatively related to job seeking in the regression analysis. This difference highlights the importance of simultaneously considering the multiple variables that likely influence job seeking. The somewhat counterintuitive finding from the regression analysis may have been because the measure of work ethic used was a general attachment to work rather than a collection of measures reflecting commitment to various work roles (i.e., commitment to one's career, organization, job, etc.). There is some evidence for differential effects of career, organizational, and job commitment on retirement decisions ([Adams, 1999](#)), which might carry over into seeking employment after retirement ([Feldman, 1994](#)). A more fine-grained approach would be to use multiple measures of role attachment that include both the work role and nonwork role. It would also be interesting to examine how work ethic influences older adults' attitudes toward retirement and the idea of working during retirement. One might speculate that people with greater work ethic are more prepared for retirement and, to some extent, feel it is their "just reward" for the years of work commitment.

The results for retirement negativity (bivariate and regression) and job seeking social support (regression) were as expected. Those who experience retirement more negatively engaged in more job seeking. Similar to other types of job seekers, those who reported having greater job seeking social support also reported higher amounts of job seeking. These findings are consistent with research regarding regular employment seeking ([Vinokur & Caplan, 1987](#)).

Strengths and Limitations

Some of the main strengths of this study stem from the sample that was used. First, included in the sample were recent retirees from a wide range of jobs and job types, which enhances the generalizability of the results. It is, at the same time, a common employer. As such, all of the participants had very similar pension plans and other retirement benefits, thus producing very similar incentives for retirement. As a result of these similarities, many potential confounds that could have affected the results were controlled (e.g., voluntary vs. involuntary retirement). However, a single setting, although allowing greater control over potential confounds, sacrifices generalizability of the sample. Although our sample does cross occupational and education lines, because of its university setting, the sample of retirees studied in this paper may, on average, be more educated, retired at later ages, and have more opportunities to work after age 65 than a sample of "typical" retirees. Hence, generalizability of our findings to other samples should be tested.

A key limitation of this study stems from its cross-sectional design. For instance, although we were able to measure job seeking, a full test of the [Wanberg et al. \(1996\)](#) model would have required a longitudinal design that allowed for the assessment of reemployment. The desired outcome of job seeking is, after all, actually finding work. Unfortunately, a follow-up study to collect employment information yielded an insufficient number of responses to test the entire model. A second way that the cross-sectional design limits the study is because it precludes the examination of those who had sought employment at one time but have now given up. It seems possible that perceptions of some variables, such as job seeking and work-related self-efficacy, would

have changed for those who engaged in job seeking and were unsuccessful. A third way in which the cross-sectional design limits this study is by precluding inferences of causality.

Despite these limitations, however, we believe that establishing the direction of covariation among the variables does add value to this literature. First, the issue of the direction of causality is more of a problem for some variables than for others. For example, the demographic variables (e.g., age, gender) can be viewed as causal rather than caused by job seeking. Similarly for others (e.g., length of time retired, job search constraints, work ethic, retirement negativity), there is no plausible explanation for why job seeking would cause these variables rather than be a cause. In those cases where the issue of reverse causality is most plausible (e.g., perceptions that there are too few jobs and/or stereotyping, job seeking social support, self-efficacy), we can defer to previous longitudinal research that has established the direction of causality between other key variables of interest (such as [Wanberg et al., 1999](#); [Wanberg et al., 1996](#)). There is little reason to believe that our study respondents are different than younger workers in this respect (e.g., that for older workers self-efficacy is an outcome of job seeking rather than a cause but the reverse is found for younger workers). Where previous research does not address the issue of causality (e.g., whether perceptions of the number of jobs for, and/or stereotyping of, older workers is affected by job seeking behaviors rather than the reverse), the results we describe suggests relationships where establishing causality could be of interest in future research. Lastly, whenever data are collected from a single source, common method bias is a concern. However, respondents in this study clearly distinguished between the various scales used to measure key variables. In addition, common method bias is unlikely to be present when relationships estimated are between demographic and nondemographic variables such as those included in our model ([Crampton & Wagner, 1994](#)). Finally, we can think of no reason (e.g., social desirability response) why common method bias would be particularly likely in our study ([Spector & Brannick, 1995](#)). Thus, we do not believe common method bias is a concern.

Implications

This study provides a first step to understanding job seeking behaviors of older workers by verifying the usefulness of an existing job search model, the [Wanberg et al. \(1996\)](#) general model of job seeking, for this specific population of adults. This suggests that the same process underlying job seeking for regular employment also underlies job seeking for bridge employment. The study also found some examples of specific variables that may be unique to this population (i.e., older worker job search constraints). However, we note that our Pseudo R^2 of 20% is consistent with the explained variance found by [Wanberg et al. \(1996\)](#) and [Wanberg et al. \(1999\)](#). This suggests a need for additional theoretical and empirical work that can improve explained variance and, hence, our understanding of job search behavior for all populations of job seekers. A meta-analysis of the literature by [Kanfer et al. \(2001\)](#) offers suggestions such as examining the different types of job search behaviors separately (e.g., preparatory job search vs. active job search), including contextual factors such as the voluntary versus involuntary nature of unemployment (or, in our case, retirement), using finer measures of job seekers' personality traits, knowledge, and skills, as well as examining the influence of job seekers' motives or employment goals for job search behaviors. They also suggest some interactions between antecedent variables that may explain job search behavior differences.

In addition to the suggestions for future research already given, research focusing on additional variables unique to this population is warranted. One example here might be to examine how involvement in nonwork activities such as community service and volunteer work influence job seeking. It is possible that retirees who have a high degree of commitment to work as a productive activity could replace work with other activities, thereby lessening the motivational effect of this variable. Future research may wish to identify characteristics of jobs and organizations that would be attractive to potential bridge employment job seeking. Although many suggestions have been made ([Albrecht, 2001](#); [Doverspike, 2000](#)), few have been empirically tested. Such research could be

used to inform recruiting and job redesign efforts and improve organizational performance in the recruitment of older workers.

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