

Self-Enhancement in a Job Search Context

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of self-enhancement in a job search context. Based on previous theoretical and empirical research on positive illusions and core self-evaluations (Judge & Bono, 2001; Taylor & Brown, 1988), we examined the relationships among core self-evaluations, self-enhancement, perceived job alternatives, and job search behaviors. Participants in two different studies were students attending a career fair at a university in the southwestern United States to look for a job. Results showed that self-enhancement is positively related to preparatory job search and mediates the relationship between core self-evaluations and perceived job alternatives. The implications of this study are discussed.

Keywords: self-enhancement, core self-evaluations, perceived job alternatives, preparatory job search, active job search

Self-Enhancement in a Job Search Context

Extensive empirical evidence suggests that overly positive self-evaluations are characteristic of normal human thought (Taylor & Brown, 1988). The name given to these unrealistically positive self-evaluations is *self-enhancement* (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Although these overly positive self-evaluations are unrealistic when compared with more objective standards, evidence shows that self-enhancement is common (John & Robins, 1994; Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995).

For example, self-enhancement in performance self-evaluations is well established. There are at least three ways in which performance self-evaluations are overly positive. First, individuals tend to evaluate their performance higher than supervisors or peers evaluate them. This phenomenon has been found across different occupations and organizational layers (Farh & Dobbins, 1989; Harris & Schaubroeck, 1988; Thornton, 1980; Yu & Murphy, 1993). Second, compared with other employees from the same organization in similar jobs at the same salary grade, individuals tend to evaluate their own job performance as well above average (top 25% or above) (Meyer, 1980). Third, when evaluating their contribution in groups, individual team members, on average, tend to overestimate their performance (John & Robins, 1994; Saavedra & Kwun, 1993). Although self-evaluations are not always extremely positive, they usually produce overly optimistic performance self-ratings (Weisband & Atwater, 1999).

Self-enhancement is also well established in selection. First, self-enhancement has been studied in the literature regarding the relationship between personality tests and socially desirable responses (see Dilchert, Ones, Viswesvaran, & Deller, 2006; Ellingson, Sackett, & Connelly, 2007). Researchers have noted that response distortion (e.g.,

portraying oneself as a desirable job applicant) occurs in contexts in which respondents are instructed to fake responses (Dilchert et al., 2006). Ellingson et al. (2007) examined response distortion in personality in both selection and developmental contexts and found a limited degree of response distortion in selection. These findings suggest that although self-enhancement may be a factor in score distortion, selection outcomes do not seem seriously affected. Second, self-enhancement has also been examined in relation to impression management in interviews (Cianni & Horan, 1990; Higgins & Judge, 2004; Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Note that self-enhancement differs from impression management because self-enhancement relates to self-evaluations that are typically unrealistically positive; impression management relates to one's attempt to enhance others' evaluations of oneself (Higgins & Judge, 2004). Research has shown that self-promotion tactics, in which applicants describes themselves with positive statements, are used during actual job interviews (Stevenson & Kristof, 1995). However, researchers disagree about the outcome of using these tactics. Stevenson and Kristof (1995) found that these tactics were positively related to interviewer's evaluations and interview outcomes. However, Higgins and Judge (2004) did not find such a relationship.

Despite considerable research on self-enhancement in both selection and performance self-evaluation, the impact of self-enhancement within a job search context has received little attention. Theoretically, self-enhancement should be helpful during a job search because looking for a job presents a situation that can be stressful because of the uncertainty and potential rejection involved (Barber, Daly, Giannantonio, & Phillips, 1994; Brasher & Chen, 1999; Winefield, Winefield, Tiggemann, & Goldney, 1991). In

addition, examining the effect of self-enhancement may help recruiters understand if self-enhancement really matters in a job search and has the potential to predict selection outcomes.

The theory of positive illusion maintains that overly positive illusions of oneself will be especially relevant in situations (such as a job search) in which one experiences negative feedback or feels threatened (Taylor & Brown, 1988; Barber et al., 1994). As such, it makes sense that self-enhancement would help job applicants persevere during the search process in which they face the stress of interviews, of waiting for calls from potential employers, and of rejection. Furthermore, self-enhancement is particularly pertinent to a job search because applicants have to believe they are the best candidate (or one of the best candidates) for a given job compared with those with similar qualifications. Nevertheless, the relationship between self-enhancement and job search behavior remains largely unexplored. Lerner and Somers (1992) are an exception. They examined the relationship between self-enhancement and the job search intentions of laid-off employees. However, their findings were mixed, and the measure of self-enhancement was confounded with other self-evaluative measures. Therefore, the question of whether self-enhancement affects job search behaviors remains unanswered.

In examining self-enhancement, it also is important to draw from the research conducted on core self-evaluations and their relationship to job search (Wanberg, Glomb, Song, & Sorenson, 2005). Core self-evaluations are important in examining job search because previous research has found that this dispositional trait relates to job search intensity (Wanberg et al., 2005). Core self-evaluations are defined as a broad dispositional trait that involves four specific traits: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy,

locus of control, and emotional stability (Judge & Bono, 2001). The similarities and differences between core self-evaluations and self-enhancement are clear. Core self-evaluations and self-enhancement are both about positive self-concept. However, core self-evaluations differ from self-enhancement in two important ways. First, core self-evaluations are defined as a dispositional trait, whereas self-evaluations are situational self-perceptions (Judge & Bono, 2001; Taylor et al., 2003a). Second, core self-evaluations are defined as positive self-concept, whereas self-enhancement is essentially comparative (with relevant peers), and in many cases it represents an illusion (Judge & Bono, 2001; Taylor & Brown 1988). Although the importance of core self-evaluations has been discussed in previous studies, research is silent on the role of both core self-evaluations and self-enhancement in understanding job search behaviors. In integrating these two streams of research, we also examined perceived job alternatives because perceived employment opportunities drive job search behaviors (Bretz, Boudreau, & Judge, 1994).

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of self-enhancement in a job search context by examining the relationships among core self-evaluations, self-enhancement, perceived job alternatives, and job search behaviors. This study has theoretical importance because we will be able to test predictions based on the theory of positive illusions in a context that has not been researched before (i.e., job search). This study also has practical importance because results may be instrumental in helping us understand the role of self-enhancement in a job search as well as in a selection context.

Theoretical Model

Briefly, our model is drawn mainly from the core self-evaluations and positive illusion literature (Judge & Bono, 2001; Taylor & Brown, 1988). We predict that self-enhancement has direct effects on perceived job alternatives, preparative job search, and active job search. We also predict that self-enhancement mediates the relationship between core self-evaluations and job search behaviors as well as the relationship between core self-evaluations and perceived job alternatives (see Figure 1). In testing these hypotheses, we control for financial need because it is a main antecedent of job search behaviors (Blau, 1994).

In particular, we expect relationships among core self-evaluations, self-enhancement, and perceived job alternatives. Although core self-evaluations differ from self-enhancement, both are about individuals' positive self-concepts. The theory of positive illusions states that self-enhancement is a self-evaluation associated with self-esteem, self-efficacy, and low neuroticism (all specific traits related to core self-evaluations) in comparison with relevant peers (Taylor & Brown, 1988; Taylor et al., 2003a; Taylor et al., 2003b). Responses to social comparisons mostly depend on a person's self-concept (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). It follows that those who have high positive self-concept will more likely believe they are better than relevant peers than those who have negative self-concepts.

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between core self-evaluations and self-enhancement.

Similarly, those high in core self-evaluations will be more likely to perceive better job alternatives. Individuals with positive self-concepts should be in a better position to

perceive new job opportunities (Boswell, Bordreu, & Dunford, 2004). These individuals are in a positive mindset to see opportunities instead of problems whereas other people, with lower positive self-concept, may just see the problems. People with a positive mindset are also more likely to believe that they can overcome problems. Furthermore, we contend that self-enhancement will mediate the relationship between core self-evaluations and job alternatives. Positive core self-evaluations will lead to more positive self-perceptions in comparison with relevant peers which will ultimately affect perceived job alternatives.

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between core self-evaluations and perceived job alternatives.

Hypothesis 3: Self-enhancement mediates the relationship between core self-evaluations and perceived job alternatives.

Drawing from the theory of positive illusions (Taylor & Brown, 1988) and from research on job search, we expect that self-enhancement and job search should be related. Searching for a job can be a taxing process because of the uncertainty involved and the potential for rejection. Job search, then, requires perseverance on the part of the applicant. To that end, researchers have pointed out that self-enhancement appears to “foster motivation, persistence at tasks, and ultimately, more effective performance” (Taylor & Brown, 1988, p. 199). Because of this, we think that high self-enhancers will be better equipped than low self-enhancers to persevere through the job search process.

In particular, we expect that self-enhancement will be related positively to both preparatory and active job search behaviors. Preparatory job search behaviors are those related to the effort exerted in gathering information related to the job search. Active job

search behaviors are related to the commitment to looking for a job (Blau, 1993, 1994). Those who believe that they are better than the average person in a diverse array of dimensions will tend to have more positive attitudes toward themselves than those who believe they are below average (Taylor & Brown, 1988, 1994). This suggests that people who self-enhance believe they are well positioned for success relative to their peers and will have the confidence to persevere through the job search process, even in challenging situations. Therefore, we believe that those who self-enhance will be more likely to gather information related to job opportunities, such as key people to contact and/or ways to improve their résumés. All of these activities are related to preparatory job search.

The theory of positive illusions also suggests that self-enhancement is associated with criteria that may lead to active job search behavior, including the ability to form and sustain relationships and the ability to set goals and progress toward them (Taylor, Lerner, Sherman, Sage, & McDowell, 2003a). Those high in self-enhancement are likely to show high commitment to an active job search, such as setting goals to contact certain organizations and/or sending out résumés. The main reason behind these relationships is that while looking for a job, applicants need to muster the motivation, resources, and cognitions to keep looking for a job and achieve their goals (Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995). Job applicants must continue to be motivated to look for a job regardless of whether they control events (i.e., sending out résumés) or events are outside of their control (i.e., judgments of applicants made by recruiters) (Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995). These challenges require motivation and perseverance, both of which are characteristic of self-enhancement (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Therefore, based on the theory of positive illusions, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 4: Self-enhancement is positively related to preparatory job search behavior (H4a) and active job search behavior (H4b).

In turn, following the same rationale as above, we expect self-enhancement to mediate the relationships between core self-evaluations and both preparatory and active job search. Positive self-concepts will translate into better self-evaluations in comparison with relevant peers and ultimately will lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Those with positive self-concepts who are searching for jobs will try harder in situations where the probabilities for success are uncertain, which impacts preparatory and active job search behaviors (Taylor & Brown, 1988).

Hypothesis 5: Self-enhancement mediates the relationship between core self-evaluations and both preparatory job search (H5a) and active job search (H5b).

Method

The hypotheses were tested in two different studies. Both Study 1 and Study 2 were carried out in a career fair with participants who were actually searching for jobs. A major difference between Studies 1 and 2 is that Study 1 was conducted at two different points in time, whereas Study 2 was cross-sectional.

Study 1

Procedure and Sample

Participants were students at a large southwestern university who were attending a career fair to search for jobs. Data were collected at two different times to avoid common method variance (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). In exchange for participating in the study, participants had the chance to win two gift certificates (one gift certificate at Time 1 and another at Time 2) worth \$100 each at the university bookstore. At Time 1,

324 applicants answered an Internet-based survey while they were at the fair. The career services center set up 20 computer terminals near the entrance to the fair so that students could answer this survey. At this time, they answered questions regarding self-enhancement, perceived job alternatives, financial need, and demographics. At Time 2, one week after the career fair, applicants who participated in Time 1 were sent an e-mail invitation to answer a second Internet-based survey. This time, participants answered questions regarding core self-evaluations, preparatory job search, and active job search behaviors. Ninety of the original 324 job seekers answered the second survey, representing a 28% response rate. To test the hypotheses, we excluded those job seekers who did not answer the second survey.

Given the attrition of the sample from Time 1 to Time 2, we examined whether responses differed significantly in terms of self-enhancement scores and demographics. Table 1 shows the results of this analysis. No significant differences appeared between those answering the survey at Time 1 and Time 2 in terms of age, race/ethnic background, and grade-point average. However, females were more likely than males to answer the second survey (Time 2). Also, those who responded at Time 2 had higher self-enhancement scores than those who only responded at Time 1. We compared the scores of self-enhancement for females versus males at Time 1, $d = -.23$, and the scores of self-enhancement for females and males that answered the survey at Time 2, $d = -.43$. We computed the d scores using the formulas from Arthur, Bennett, and Huffcutt (2001). The d values indicated that women scored almost a quarter of a standard deviation below men for Time 1 and close to half of a standard deviation below men for Time 2. We also compared the scores of self-enhancement for Hispanics and non-Hispanics at Time 1, $d =$

-.44 and Time 2, $d = -1.68$. The d -values indicated that Hispanics scored almost half of a standard deviation below non-Hispanics at Time 1 and more than one and half standard deviations below non-Hispanics at Time 2.

Of the participants answering both surveys (i.e., Time 1 and 2), the majority were Hispanic (77.8%), followed by Asian American (10%), Caucasian (7.8%), American Indian (1.1%), African American (1.1%), and Other (2.2%). The study was conducted in a large southwestern university in the United States, and the demographic characteristics of this sample are representative of the population in the city where the university is located. A total of 64.4% were female. The mean age was 25 years. Almost 80% of the participants in the study had work experience.

Measures

Core self-evaluations. We measured core self-evaluations with a 12-item scale taken from Judge, Erez, Bono, and Thoresen (2003). A sample item is “When I try, I generally succeed.” Anchors were in a Likert-type format from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Reliability for the scale was $\alpha = .84$.

Self-enhancement. Participants in the study answered the “How I See Myself Questionnaire” (Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995), which has good psychometric properties (see Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995; Taylor, Lerner, Sherman, Sage, & McDowell, 2003b; Taylor et al., 2003a). The measure is composed of 21 positive qualities and skills (e.g., leadership ability, understanding of others) and 21 negative characteristics (e.g., jealous, nervous, manipulative). For each of the qualities and skills, participants rated themselves in comparison with the average college student of their same age and gender at their university. The response format was a Likert-type scale (1 = much less than average, 4 =

average, 7 = much more than average). Scores below 4 represent self-deprecation relative to peers, and scores higher than 4 represent self-enhancement. The negative traits were reverse scored. The Cronbach alpha was $\alpha = .86$.

Perceived job alternatives. We measured perceived job alternatives with three items (Boswell et al., 2004; Bretz et al., 1994; Griffeth & Hom, 1988). A sample item is “Give your best estimate of your present alternative employment opportunities.” This was answered in a Likert-type scale from 1 (no alternatives) to 3 (many alternatives).

Reliability for the scale was $\alpha = .64$.

Preparatory and active job search. We used Blau’s (1993) measure of active and preparatory job search, which includes items such as “Sent out résumés to potential employers” and “Read a book or article about getting a job or changing jobs.”

Participants responded to 12 items in a Likert-type format. Response options ranged from never (0 times) to very frequently (at least 10 times). The Cronbach alpha for preparatory job search was $\alpha = .74$, and $\alpha = .84$ for active job search.

Control variable. We also measured financial need with two items taken from Blau (1994) because financial need is positively related to both preparatory and active job search behaviors (Blau, 1994). A sample item is “It is difficult to afford much more than the basics on my current salary.” Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Reliability for the scale was $\alpha = .76$.

Results

Correlations, means, standard deviations, and reliabilities are shown in Table 2. Significant positive correlations were found between self-enhancement and preparatory job search ($r = .43, p < .001$), active job search ($r = .35, p < .001$), core self-evaluations (r

= .54, $p < .01$), and perceived job alternatives ($r = .38, p < .01$). No significant relationship was found between core self-evaluations and job search behaviors. However, there was a positive correlation between core self-evaluations and perceived job alternatives ($r = .31, p < .01$). An important point is that 98% of the participants who answered the survey at Time 2 had mean self-enhancement scores higher than 4, showing that they considered themselves better than their average peer.

We ran a path analysis to test the hypotheses of our model. The fit for the proposed model was good, $\chi^2 = 8.16, df = 4, p > .05, CFI = .97, SRMR = .06$. Figure 2 shows the standardized path coefficients. Although not hypothesized, we included a path from preparatory to active job search because previous research had already established this relationship (Blau, 1994). We also included a path from perceived job alternatives to job search behaviors because prior research has shown a positive relationship between search and perceived alternatives (Boswell et al., 2004). However, it is noteworthy that Bretz, et al. (1994) did not find support for a positive relationship between search and perceived alternatives. As shown in Figure 2, core self-evaluations were positively related to self-enhancement ($\gamma = .54, p < .05$), supporting Hypothesis 1. Self-enhancement and perceived job alternatives ($\beta = .30, p < .05$) were also positively related, supporting Hypothesis 2. Self-enhancement was also positively related to preparatory job search ($\beta = .40, p < .05$), supporting Hypothesis 4a. However, self-enhancement was not related to active job search when holding preparatory job search constant ($\beta = .05, p < ns$). Therefore, Hypothesis 4b was not supported.

Hypothesis 3 stated that self-enhancement mediates the relationship between core self-evaluations and perceived job alternatives. To test for mediation, we followed Baron

and Kenny's (1986) four-step method. First, the independent variable must be related to the dependent variable (Step 1). Second, the independent variable must be related to the mediator (Step 2). Third, the mediator must be related to the dependent variable while controlling for the independent variable (Step 3). Finally, a previously significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables must be reduced in the presence of the mediator (Step 4).

In order to test the first step of Baron and Kenny's method, we ran a path analysis eliminating self-enhancement from the model and including a direct path from core self-evaluations to perceived job alternatives. Results (available from the first author) indicate that core self-evaluations positively predict perceived job alternatives ($\gamma = .31, p < .05$). Step 2 also holds because we found support for the relationship between core self-evaluations and self-enhancement. Step 3 also holds as Hypothesis 2 was supported. Finally, in the presence of the mediator, core self-evaluations were not related to perceived job alternatives ($\gamma = .15, p < ns$). The Sobel (1982) test for indirect effects shows that the indirect effect was significant, $z = 2.31, p < .05$. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

In Hypothesis 5, we expected that self-enhancement would mediate the relationship between core self-evaluations and preparatory job search (H5a) and active job search (H5b). To test Step 1 of Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure, we ran a path analysis eliminating self-enhancement and including a path directly from core self-evaluations to preparatory and active job search. Results (available from the first author) indicate that the path from core self-evaluation to preparatory job search was $\gamma = .00, p < ns$, and the path to active job search was $\gamma = -.10, p < ns$. Therefore, Hypotheses 5a and

5b were not supported.

Discussion

The proposed model fits the data very well. Core self-evaluations are positively related to self-enhancement. Self-enhancement in turn relates to perceived job alternatives and preparatory job search. However, self-enhancement was not related to active job search. We also found that self-enhancement mediates the relationship between core self-evaluations and perceived job alternatives. However, it does not mediate the relationship between core self-evaluations and either preparatory or active job search. One major limitation of this study was the small sample size. For this reason, we collected additional data for the purpose of ruling out power as an alternative explanation of our results.

Study 2

Procedure, Sample, and Measures

As in Study 1, participants were students at a large southwestern university attending a career fair in search of a job. Participants were invited to answer a one-time survey on the Internet. We set up 10 computer terminals near the entrance of the fair so that students could answer this survey. Participants answered the exact same questions as in Study 1. In exchange for participating in the study, participants had the chance to win one of six gift certificates worth \$50 each to be redeemed at the university bookstore. A total of 227 applicants looking for jobs participated in an Internet-based survey while they were at the fair.

The majority of the participants were Hispanic (77.9%), followed by Caucasian (7.4%), Asian American (6.6%), other (5%), African American (2.7%), and American

Indian (.4%). A total of 57.4% were male. The mean age was 22 years. Almost 69% of the participants in the study had work experience.

Results

Table 3 shows the correlations, means, and standard deviations. As the correlation table shows, there was a significant relationship between self-enhancement and preparatory job search ($r = .25, p < .01$), active job search ($r = .24, p < .01$), core self-evaluations ($r = .51, p < .01$), and perceived job alternatives ($r = .38, p < .01$). Core self-evaluations correlated positively to preparatory job search ($r = .16, p < .05$) as well as to active job search ($r = .17, p < .01$). Also, preparatory and active job search ($r = .82, p < .01$) were strongly correlated. For this reason, before testing the model, we examined the discriminant validity of these two constructs by following the methodology of Anderson and Gerbing (1988). We ran a two-factor confirmatory factor analysis in which we constrained the estimated correlation parameter between preparatory and active job search to 1.0. Then we ran the same analysis, but at this point the model was unconstrained. A significantly lower chi-square value for the unconstrained model indicated that the constructs differed from each other (results available from the first author), which indicates that preparatory job search differs significantly from active job search.

As in Study 1, the model was tested with a path analysis (see Figure 3). The fit of the proposed model was good: $\chi^2 = 4.74, df = 4, p = ns, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .03$. As expected, core self-evaluations were positively related to self-enhancement, $\beta = .52, p < .05$), supporting Hypothesis 1. Also, self-enhancement related positively to perceived job alternatives, $\beta = .34, p < .05$, supporting Hypothesis 2. In addition, self-enhancement

related positively to preparatory job search, $\beta = .22, p < .05$, supporting Hypothesis 4a. However, self-enhancement was not related to active job search, $\beta = .04, p = ns$. Therefore, Hypothesis 4b was not supported.

To test Hypothesis 3, we followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) method. In order to test Step 1 of Baron and Kenny's method, we ran a path analysis eliminating self-enhancement and including a direct path from core self-evaluations to perceived job alternatives. Results (available from the first author) indicate that core self-evaluations related positively to perceived job alternatives, $\gamma = .25, p < .05$, fulfilling Step 1. Core self-evaluations related positively to self-enhancement, $\beta = .52, p < .01$, fulfilling Step 2. Also, self-enhancement was related to perceived job alternatives as supported by Hypothesis 3, fulfilling Step 3. Finally, core self-evaluations were no longer significant in predicting perceived job alternatives after self-enhancement was included in the equation, $\gamma = .07, p < ns$. The Sobel test for indirect effects shows that the indirect effect was significant, $z = 4.24, p < .05$. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

We also followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) method to test Hypothesis 5. To test Step 1, we eliminated self-enhancement from the analysis. However, core self-evaluations were not related to job search behaviors. So, Hypotheses 5a and 5b were not supported.

Discussion

As predicted, core self-evaluations were significantly related to self-enhancement; in turn, self-enhancement was significantly related to preparatory job search and perceived job alternatives. Self-enhancement was also a mediator between core self-evaluations and perceived job alternatives. However, the relationship between self-

enhancement and active job search was not supported, and self-enhancement was not a mediator between core self-evaluations and preparatory or active job search behaviors.

A limitation of this study was the high correlation between preparatory and active job search. However, the confirmatory factor analysis indicated that these two constructs differed. Another limitation was that the study was conducted at only one point in time, which causes mono-method variance. Yet, the results of Study 1 collected at two points in time lead to identical results as those found in this study, which indicates that mono-method variance is not a major threat in this study. In addition, the replication of our findings indicates that our results are robust.

Discussion

Across two studies, we supported predictions based on the theory of positive illusions (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Results show that those who self-enhance are more likely to invest more effort in preparatory job search compared with those who self-enhance less. Also, self-enhancement mediates the relationship between core self-evaluations and perceived job alternatives. In terms of fit, the proposed model was very good. These results contribute to the job search literature because they indicate that it is not only important to perceive ourselves as being good enough when looking for a job, but also that it is important how we perceive ourselves relative to others similar to ourselves. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to demonstrate this finding.

Interestingly, self-enhancement was not related to active job search. Our findings suggest that self-enhancement is only relevant at the preparatory stage. A possible explanation for this result is that we collected data at a moment in which applicants are

mostly focused on preparatory-type behaviors. The active-type behaviors most likely occur after the career fair. Another unexpected finding is that core self-evaluations do not predict preparatory or active job search. They only have an effect on perceived job alternatives through self-enhancement. Future research may examine the conditions under which core self-evaluations predict these outcomes.

This paper has several strengths. First, participants in the study were all applicants looking for jobs at a career fair. This increases the generalizability of the study, because all of the participants were engaged in a job search process. Second, our results were replicated across two different studies, thus providing evidence of the robustness of the findings. Third, we found effects above and beyond important predictors that have been associated with job search in previous research.

A main limitation of the study is the fact that there may be sampling bias in the study. Because career fairs can be intimidating, applicants who attended the career fair may have been those who were more self-assured and higher in self-enhancement than those who did not attend. In theory, however, having a somewhat homogenous group of people in the sample would reduce the variance in the data and make it more difficult to find effects. As such, our data may possibly underestimate the effects of self-enhancement on active and preparatory job search. A second limitation of this study is the attrition that occurred in Study 1 from Time 1 data collection to Time 2. Participants who answered both surveys had relatively higher self-enhancement scores. Therefore, it is possible that their tendency to self-enhance led them to inflate their reported job search activity. Another important limitation of both Studies 1 and 2 is that of common method variance. We acknowledge that some of the variance may be a function of collecting

some of our data at the same time in Study 1 and all the data at one time in Study 2. However, the fact that we collected data at two different times in Study 1 helps to lessen common method variance problems. A final limitation of the study is that we were unable to conduct a longitudinal investigation to collect follow-up data after the career fair. If that had been possible, we could have answered more complex questions about the relationship between self-enhancement and job outcomes (e.g., the number of interviews or job offers).

The evidence in this study indicates that when the job search context is focused on individual actions (i.e., job seekers' behaviors), those who self-enhance may be better prepared and perceive more job opportunities than those who do not self-enhance. From an applicant's viewpoint, these findings imply that self-enhancement is instrumental in the job search process, at least at the beginning of the process. From a recruiter's point of view, these findings suggest that self-enhancers will be better prepared to answer screening questions, typical of the first stages in the recruitment process, given that they spend more time in preparatory job search activities. Future research should examine how self-enhancement may affect later stages of an applicant's job search process, such as when he or she interacts with recruiters and interviewers.

Our findings also have practical importance because they shed new light on the role of self-enhancement in a job search context. Anecdotal evidence from job search advice columnists at the three major job search websites in the United States (careerbuilder.com, Yahoo! hotjobs.com, and monster.com) unanimously recommend that in order to be successful, job seekers need to show interest, do research on companies, make as many contacts as possible, and follow up after interviews

(careerbuilder.com, 2007; Levchuck, 2007; Martin, 2007). These actions are representative of active and preparatory job search behaviors. Consistent with the theory of positive illusion (Taylor & Brown, 1988), our data imply that high self-enhancers exhibit more preparatory job search behaviors than low self-enhancers. Because these overly positive self-evaluations are associated with proactive job search behavior, they may ultimately open doors that lead to job search success.

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Table 1

Comparison of participants answering at Time 1 and Time 2 versus those answering only at Time 1 for Study 1

Variables	Participants who answered survey at Time 1 and Time 2	Participants who answered survey at Time 1 only	Test
Self-Enhancement	4.92	4.76	$t = 2.36, p < .05$
Gender	Female = 64.4% Male = 35.6% $d = -.43^a$	Female = 55% Male = 45% $d = -.23$	$\chi^2(1) = 4.34, p < .05$
Age	24.90	24.29	$t = .35, p = ns$
Race/Ethnic Background	Hispanic = 77.8% Non-Hispanic = 22.2% $d = -1.68^b$	Hispanic = 73.9% Non-Hispanic = 23.1% $d = -.44$	$\chi^2(1) = .09, p = ns$
GPA	3.20	3.56	$t = -.53, p = ns$
N	90	324	

Note. ^a = Compares the score of self-enhancement for females versus males. ^b = Compares the score of self-enhancement for Hispanics versus non-Hispanics.

Table 2

Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Study 1

	Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Self-Enhancement	4.92	0.53	.86					
2. Preparatory Job Search	2.92	0.76	.43**	.74				
3. Active Job Search	2.58	0.91	.35**	.71**	.84			
4. Core Self-Evaluations	4.39	0.72	.54**	.09	-.01	.84		
5. Financial Need	2.94	1.37	.18 [†]	.18 [†]	.14	.18 [†]	.76	
6. Perceived Job Alternatives	3.01	0.69	.38**	.21*	.18 [†]	.31**	.13	.64

Note. $N = 90$. [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Racial/Ethnic Background: 1 = Hispanic, 0 = Others. Reliabilities are included on the diagonal.

Table 3

Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Study 2

	Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Self-Enhancement	4.88	.53	.86					
2. Preparatory Job Search	2.51	.74	.25**	.79				
3. Active Job Search	2.28	.78	.24**	.82**	.83			
4. Core Self-Evaluations	4.58	.63	.51**	.16*	.17**	.78		
5. Financial Need	2.71	1.33	.06	.08	.06	.09	.77	
6. Perceived Job Alternatives	3.18	.64	.38**	.18**	.15*	.25**	.15*	.71

Note. $N = 227$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Reliabilities are included on the diagonal.

Figure 1. Theoretical model

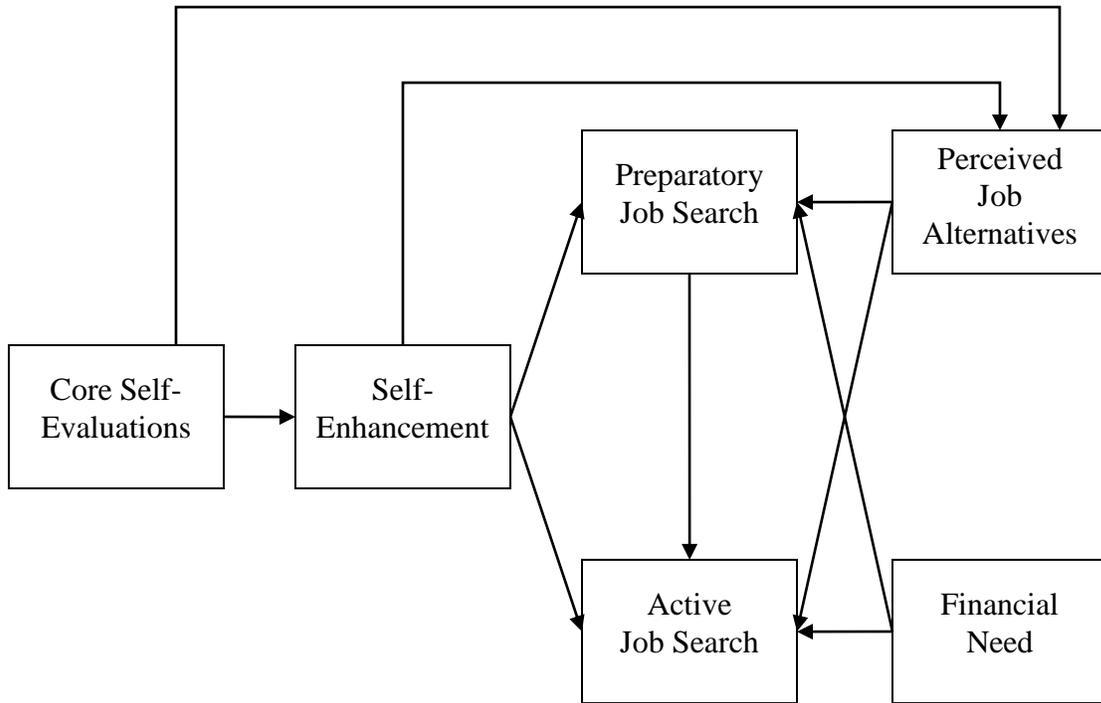
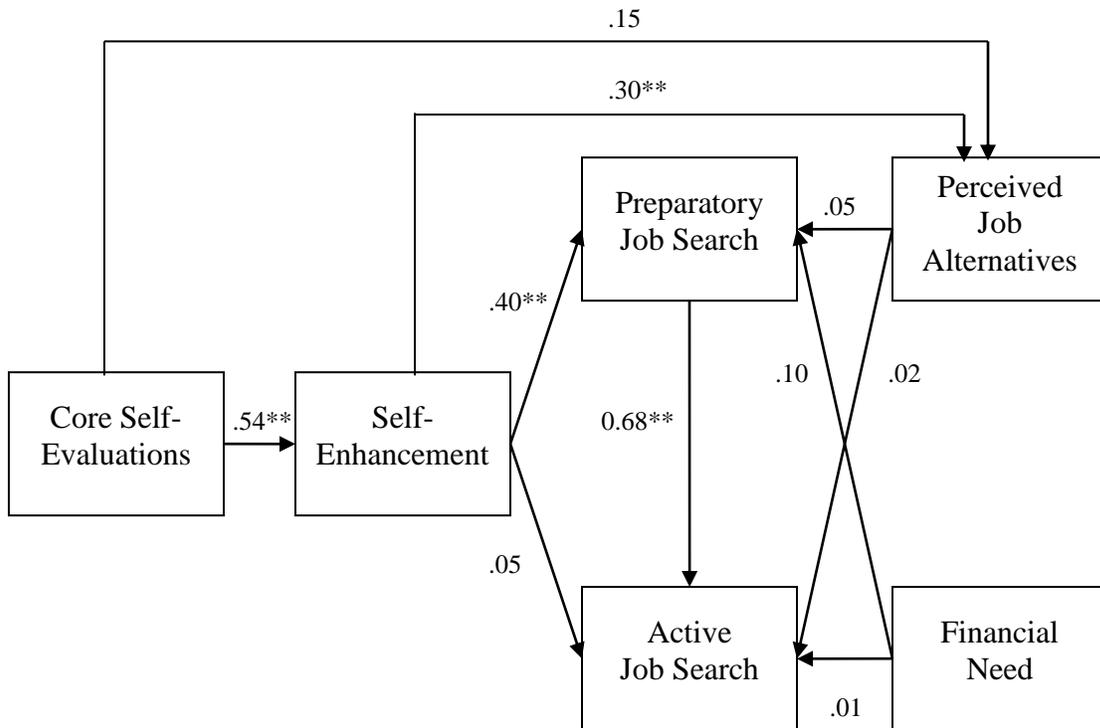
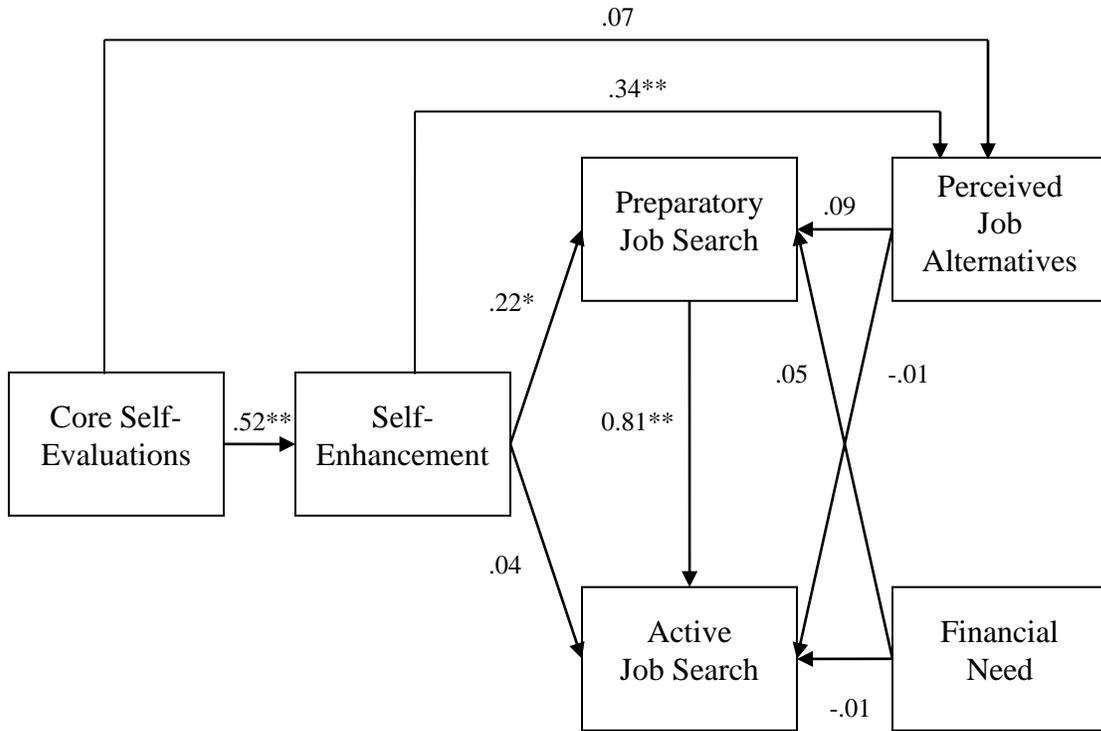


Figure 2. Results for Study 1



Note. $N = 90$. The coefficients are standardized. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Figure 3. Results for Study 2



Note. $N = 227$. The coefficients are standardized. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.