

Handling the Stress of Looking for a Job in Law School: The Relationship between Intrinsic Motivation, Internal Attributions, Relations with Others, and Happiness

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A study was conducted to examine how law students cope with the stress of looking for a job. We argue that effective coping is exhibited by the capacity to keep stress in one domain of life from spreading to and contaminating other, unrelated areas of life. Certain situations may be undeniably stressful; however, individuals who can maintain positive feelings about their life as a whole despite this stress may cope well. We hypothesized that three social psychological variables might be associated with this phenomenon: motivation (intrinsic versus extrinsic), attributions (internal versus external), and relations with others. The results indicated that students with intrinsic motives for being a lawyer were happier with their lives in general than were students with extrinsic motives. Likewise, students who attributed the ability to find a job to internal attributes were happier than were those who did not. Relations with others did not relate to happiness. Implications of these findings for career counseling are presented.

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Stress seems to be an inevitable component of human experience. Numerous definitions of stress have been developed. For the purposes of this paper, Baum, Singer, and Baum's (1981) definition of stress as a "process in which environmental events or forces, called stressors, threaten an organism's existence and well-being" (p. 4) is adequate. Virtually everyone must at some point cope with both minor stressors like traffic jams or difficult roommates, and major stressors like bereavement or job loss. Consequently, research directed at determining how people manage to effectively deal with stress is of value.

The study described in this paper represents a modest attempt to examine this issue by studying how law students experience the stress of looking for a job. This study was conducted at the request of the Dean in charge of placement at a prestigious Chicago-area law school. He was concerned about the anxiety and unhappiness he was encountering among students looking for jobs. Although it had been relatively easy for law students to obtain jobs in the past, in recent years obtaining a job was becoming more difficult and stressful, due to the large increase in the law student population (Beck & Burns, 1979; Taylor, Watson, 1968). Not only are the stakes high, but for many students at prestigious schools this is the first time they have ever experienced the uncertainty, anxiety, and frustration that applying, interviewing, waiting, and being rejected involve. Lazarus and Folkman (1983) argue that the magnitude of the stress individuals experience depends in part on their appraisal of how much is at stake. They suggest that when the stakes are high, distress is high even if individuals believe they can ultimately succeed, because potential failure is so costly. Thus, these students' past history of success, the importance associated with finding a good position, and the bad job market all combine to make the job search process particularly stressful (Edmonds, 1976).

One possible indicator of effective coping in general, and for law students in particular, is the ability to keep stress in one area of life from spreading to and contaminating other unrelated areas of life. Certain situations, like looking for a job, may be undeniably stressful. However, if while suffering job stress individuals can obtain satisfaction from other domains in their lives, for example from their families and hobbies, then they should still be able to maintain positive feelings about their lives as a whole. If, however, this job stress spills over into other domains, then positive feelings about life as a whole will be even more difficult to maintain.

What factors influence whether people view job stress as an isolated aspect of their experience, or as something generalized across domains? Based on past research, we considered three social-psychological factors: in-

trinsic and extrinsic motives for becoming a lawyer, internal and external attributions for success or failure in job-seeking, and relations with others.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is an inner resource that can help individuals cope with stress. According to Deci (1975), "intrinsically motivated activities are ones for which there is no apparent reward except the activity itself . . ." (p. 23). Kruglanski (1978) suggests that individuals are intrinsically motivated when they engage in an activity because of its inherent qualities. It has been proposed that intrinsically motivated actions satisfy internal needs for competence and challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1978; Deci, 1975).

Students who chose a career in law primarily for extrinsic reasons (e.g., high pay, prestige, or the belief that it would be easier than medical school) should have an extremely difficult time when they do not obtain a job offer, because their primary reason for pursuing a legal career has been threatened. Conversely, students who chose law because of an intrinsic reason (e.g., an inherent interest in the field of law or a desire to help others via law) may cope better with setbacks because they can satisfy their personal motivations for pursuing a legal career in a variety of possible settings. For intrinsically motivated students, law is an end in and of itself; it is worth pursuing in spite of difficulties. However, for extrinsically motivated students, law is just one of several means to an end. Difficulties can cause these students to reevaluate their choice of law and chastise themselves for choosing a means that turned out to be a dead end.

Koch (1956, 1961) suggests that while performing an intrinsically motivated activity, individuals become fully absorbed in the activity and committed to it (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). More recently, Brickman (in preparation) argues that intrinsic motivation is a critical aspect of the commitment-building process. He suggests that part of the process of building a commitment is that intrinsic value is created and strengthened. Commitment is defined by Brickman (1977) as "whatever it is that makes a person stay with a course of action or a relationship when the going gets tough, when sacrifices are required, or when other courses of action or relationships seem more promising" (p. 3).

One might hypothesize that being committed to law would make being a lawyer a critical aspect of one's identity. Thus, difficulties in finding a job would be more stressful since these difficulties threaten one's identity. However, we would argue that commitment and intrinsic motivation reduce perceptions of stress and unhappiness because committed students can view the troublesome job search as an unpleasant but necessary stage in the process of becoming a lawyer. The value and meaning intrinsically motivated students find in the law can help them endure the hardships and accept its

¹Clearly, factors like financial status would affect an individual's ability to maintain overall life satisfaction despite job stress. This paper, however, focuses primarily on the social psychological factors that affect satisfaction and adjustment.

negative features. The stresses involved can be reinterpreted as worth enduring because the pursuit of law holds other rewards. For extrinsically motivated students, however, their potential failure at obtaining a prestigious or high-paying position is not balanced by other inherently positive elements, and consequently, the difficulties of the job search are perceived as arbitrary, unnecessary, and alienating. Therefore, we hypothesize that individuals committed to a law career will be more likely to perceive their lives in general as happy, despite the pressures of the job search, than those individuals who are not committed to a law career.

Internal and External Attributions

There is considerable evidence that people with low self-esteem and people who expect to perform poorly on a task are likely to attribute failure to personal rather than situational causes and to feel badly about their future prospects (see Janoff-Bulman & Brickman, 1982, for a review of this literature; also Weiner, Frieze, Kulka, Reed, Rest, & Rosenbaum, 1971). People with normal or high self-esteem and optimistic expectations for the future are more likely to deny responsibility for failures (cf., Zuckerman, 1979). It follows from this line of research that students who attribute their difficulties in finding a job to bad luck and circumstances will feel more happy than those who blame personal characteristics such as effort and ability (Weiner, 1982) because these situational causes do not imply that they will continue to fail in the future.

However, there is also research that indicates that people need to feel in control of their lives, that they feel better when they believe that they have such control, and are most likely to feel that they have such control when they take responsibility for both the positive and negative occurrences in their lives (Brickman, Rabinowitz, Karusa, Coates, Cohn, & Kidder, 1982; Wortman, 1976). For example, Bulman and Wortman (1977) found that among the spinal cord injured patients they interviewed, those who coped best were those who blamed themselves for the accident which caused this condition. They argue that by taking responsibility for the accident, patients also take responsibility for their recovery. This research suggests that students who attribute their difficulties in finding a job to personal characteristics may cope better than those who do not, because this internal attribution also places the ability to improve the situation within their own power. Students who make internal attributions may adjust better and be happier since they feel that they have the capacity to improve the situation in the future if they try.²

²They may also actually try harder because they believe their effort can make a difference. This increased effort may then actually improve their performance and consequently their chances of succeeding.

Relations with Others: Social Support and Social Comparison

Research indicates that in times of stress people want and need the support of others (Caplan, 1979; Cobb, 1976; Gore, 1978; Holahan & Moos, 1980; Silver and Wortman (1980) argue that perceived social support is a major predictor of good coping for victims of a variety of crises including physical disability, illness, bereavement, and rape. For example, Brown, Bhrolcha and Harris (1975) found that women who had experienced a major life crisis were more likely to develop a psychiatric disorder if they did not have an intimate, confiding relationship with a husband or boyfriend. As Dunkel-Schetter and Wortman (1982) note, being able to discuss one's fears openly and honestly with a sympathetic listener may be the first step toward understanding these fears and developing coping strategies to deal with them. By acting as a sounding board, significant others can help individuals interpret and manage their feelings. Therefore, one might hypothesize that students who talk to their significant others about their problems will be happier than those who do not.

However, talking about one's problems with others is not always helpful; it depends on whom one is talking to and their response. On the one hand, the individuals who can give the student the most informed advice and who can listen with the most understanding are fellow law students. There is evidence that peer support is perceived as beneficial by individuals coping with stress (Lieber, Plumb, Gerstanzang, & Holland, 1976; Schwartz, 1976; Thomas & Weiner, 1974). Unfortunately, such discussions inevitably involve social comparison, which can make it difficult for either participant to be totally honest with the other (a rival) and, therefore, little support is actually occur (see Brickman & Bulman, 1977, for a series of studies on this point). Unlike fellow law students, one's family and nonlaw friends provide support that is uncontaminated by the competition inherent in social comparison. Yet, because they understand what the student is going through less well, it may be difficult for them to empathize and give useful advice. Consequently, there are reasons why talking with others may be helpful to law students coping with the stress of looking for a job; reasons why it may not. For these reasons, no predictions were made about this variable. Information on the effects of talking with others on the ability to deal with job stress was of interest to us and the Dean because it seemed to be an area in which interventions could be developed if results were found.

In summary, we hypothesized that students who were intrinsically motivated, and students who attributed their job search status to internal causes would be able to keep their job stress from causing them to be unhappy about their life as a whole. We also thought that the ability to talk to others might be an important determinant of how these students felt

addition to these social psychological variables, some more obvious, objective factors are also likely to influence students' feelings about the job search process and thus, indirectly, their level of happiness. Students with a high class rank or publication experience are more likely to be offered a job. Knowledge of this should influence their perceptions of how difficult the job search process is.

METHOD

Subjects and Procedure

This study was conducted in late November, a time chosen because it was a critical period in the job search process. Students looking for a job typically interview in the fall and are contacted by December 15 by any firms that wish to offer them a job. Of course, some students already had accepted positions (e.g., from firms they worked for during the previous summer), but for most students this is a critical stage in the job search process. Juniors are searching for summer jobs, which are viewed as an important step towards obtaining full time jobs, while seniors are searching for permanent full time jobs.

The Dean of the law school contacted us in the late fall and requested that we conduct a survey on this topic. At that time we observed that to study how law students dealt with job stress, it was important to collect the data before the December 15 notification date. Due to this consideration, there was little time to develop and pretest measures. This disadvantage was balanced by our perception that this was a unique opportunity for investigating an interesting problem—job seeking in a tight market. Consequently we decided to proceed, but the survey is seen as preliminary and primarily of value in generating hypotheses and directing future research.

Subjects were juniors and seniors from a prestigious Chicago-area law school who agreed to complete the questionnaire. A table was set up in the law school commons that was staffed by law students for one day. Students who walked by were asked to fill out the questionnaire. The table was not labeled, so students were not aware of the focus of the questionnaire until they had agreed to participate. Only a handful of students who were late for class refused to participate. Every student who started the questionnaire completed it, although two students' questionnaires were discarded because they left a large number of questions unanswered. Eighty-five students comprised the sample.

Questionnaire

Subjects completed a two-page questionnaire that contained items designed to examine their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, commitment, their inter-

nal and external attributions, their ability to talk with others, and their job prospects. It was necessary to keep the questionnaire brief because we wanted students to have time to complete the questionnaire between classes. Most of the items were presented in a yes/no format for this reason. Basic demographic data such as sex, age, ethnic identification, and marital status were also collected, as well as information on class rank and publication experience. Finally, students were asked to describe the type of job they wanted and their most difficult job-related decision because these were of interest to the Dean.

Measures of motivation and commitment. Motivation and commitment were measured by subjects' responses to three questions. They were asked: (1) when they originally chose to become a lawyer; (2) what their current reasons were for being a lawyer; and (3) if their current reasons were strictly personal.

Students open-ended responses to the question "What are your reasons now for being a lawyer?" were coded into three categories: intrinsic motives, extrinsic motives, both intrinsic and extrinsic motives. Inter-rater reliability of two trained coders was .86. It was assumed that students who had personal reasons for being a lawyer had reasons that were intrinsic. This parallels the common definition of intrinsic motivation as "doing something for its own sake" (cf., Calder & Staw, 1975; Deci, 1975). Stating that one's reasons for choosing law are personal implies that these reasons would not hold for everyone and that everyone might not understand or agree with them. Extrinsic motives like money or prestige can be understood by everyone. Also, agreeing that one's motives are personal implies that they are one's own (intrinsic) reasons, not anyone else's.

Having chosen to become a lawyer early in one's life indicates sustained commitment to a law career that should be associated with greater intrinsic motivation (Brickman, in preparation). Students committed to a law career since high school should be further along in the commitment process and, therefore, have more intrinsic commitment to law. Furthermore, the longer committed group should contain fewer students whose motivation is extrinsic, because these students are likely to have dropped out over the years.

Measures of attributions. Attributions were measured by subjects' responses to two questions. The first asked them if they thought effort and ability (internal factors) were always extremely important determinants of getting a job. The second asked them if they thought luck and circumstances beyond their control (external factors) were always extremely important determinants of getting a job.

Measures of relations with others. Students were asked if they talked with fellow students about their job situation, if talking to them helped, and in what ways it helped. Similarly they were asked if they talked

with their family and nonlaw student friends about their job situation, if talking with them helped, and in what ways it helped. Responses to the two questions about why talking was helpful or unhelpful were coded into two categories: socio-emotional and task-instrumental. Inter-rater reliability between two trained coders was .87 for family and friends and .88 for fellow law students. Additional social comparison information was obtained by asking students which specific groups of fellow law students they spoke with: males, females, those of higher rank, those of lower rank, minority students, and students who wrote for a legal publication.

Students were also asked to describe the type of job they wanted, and their hardest job-related decision. Although we had no specific hypotheses regarding these variables, we wanted to know if any of these law-related decisions and circumstances affected their perceptions of how difficult their job search was or how happy they were overall.

Dependent measures. There were two primary dependent measures. To measure subjects' perceptions of the amount of stress they were experiencing, they were asked how rough looking for a job was on them right now. In other words, this was a measure of how difficult the job search process was for them. To measure their ability to maintain overall positive affect despite this stress they were asked how happy they were "in general." Ratings were made on 7 point Likert-type scales ranging from 0 for "not at all" to 6 for "extremely."

RESULTS

Description of Sample

Although the sample used in this study was not selected at random, the distribution of this sample on several demographic variables is comparable to that of the law school as a whole except that it had proportionately more juniors. Of the 85 students in the sample, 61% of the students were juniors, whereas 39% were seniors (there were 178 students in the senior class and 182 in the junior class). In our sample 65% of the students were male, whereas 28% were female (6 students did not answer this question). In the junior and senior classes as a whole, 31% of the students were female. The majority of the students in our sample were unmarried (74%). Nine percent of the students in our sample identified themselves as racial minority students. In the junior and senior classes, 15% of the students were members of a minority group.

According to their self-reports, the sample was skewed in favor of the top performing students. Sixty-five percent of the students reported being in the

top 25% of their class, 27% reported being in the 25-50% range, while only 8% reported being in the lower 50% of their class. Research that indicates that individuals overestimate their own abilities suggests that these ratings may be somewhat exaggerated (Codol, 1975; College Board, 1977; Myers, 1980). However, 45% of the students reported writing for a legal publication, a fact which is unlikely to be misrepresented. In the population, 34% of each class wrote for a publication. In sum, the sample examined in this study seems fairly comparable to the junior and senior classes at this law school as a whole, except perhaps for the class rank variable.

The results will be discussed in the following order. First descriptive information regarding students' expectations and concerns will be described as background information. Then the relationship between the independent variables (motivation, attributions, and relations with others) and students' perceptions of how difficult their situation is will be examined. Finally, the relationship between the independent variables and overall happiness will be described.

Students' Expectations and Concerns

Students had definite opinions about the type of law they hoped to practice. Thirty-four percent of the students planned on practicing corporate law, the most popular choice. Twenty-nine percent wanted to be involved with litigation, 9% with individual law, and 7% with governmental law (the rest were either undecided or gave an uncodable response). Seventy-one percent of the students expected to obtain the type of job they wanted now, while only 5% thought they would never obtain the type of job they wanted. Almost all of the students, therefore, were basically optimistic about their chances of obtaining a desirable job at some point in the future.

Students were asked to describe what was the most difficult decision they currently faced regarding their law career. Twenty percent were most concerned about where their job would be located. Sixteen percent found it hardest to decide what type of job to take. For example, one student responded, "whether to work for a large, prestigious firm or to go into a more public interest oriented position with the government—both are appealing for different reasons." Thirteen percent were most concerned about lifestyle or personal values. For example, one student's most difficult decision was, "resolving the conflict between my social consciousness and representing the wealthy." Similarly another wondered, "will I be able to avoid being lured by big money corporate law?" Another responded, "whether I will be able to totally fulfill myself both as a woman and as a lawyer—kids are very important to me . . ." Nine percent indicated it was deciding whether to continue with law school; as one student put it, "deciding if this is what I want to do—sometimes I feel the whole thing is a

big waste of time and money." Eight percent were concerned about the type of firm, for example, large or small, corporate or criminal. The remaining 33% felt they had no difficult decisions to make.

Predictors of Students' Perceptions of the Difficulty of the Job Search Process

As predicted, students with a high class rank perceived the job search process as significantly less difficult than did students who were performing less well, $t(77) = -3.17, p < .002$ ($M_s = 1.67$ and 3.22 respectively). Similarly, students with publications perceived the job search process as significantly less difficult than did students without publications, $t(80) = 3.49, p < .001$ ($M_s = 1.34$ and 2.91 respectively).

Younger students perceived the job search process as significantly more difficult than did older students, $t(58) = 3.17, p < .002$ ($M_s = 2.77$ and $.77$ respectively). There were no significant sex, marital status, or ethnic group differences in perceptions of job search difficulty.

Students with personal reasons for pursuing a law career perceived the job process as significantly less difficult than did students without personal reasons, $t(66) = -2.27, p < .03$ ($M_s = 1.69$ and 3.00 respectively). However, measures of motivation, attributions, or relations with others were not significantly associated with students' perceptions of how difficult it was to find a job.

Predictors of Students' Perceptions of their Overall Happiness

Student's responses to the two dependent measures were correlated, indicating that the more difficult the job search process, the less happy the student felt ($r = -.31, p < .002$). While this correlation is significant, ratings of how difficult it is to find a job accounted for less than 10% of the variance in self-reports of happiness.

As predicted, students with a high class rank were significantly happier than students who were performing less well, $t(76) = 2.00, p < .05$ ($M_s = 4.20$ and 3.44 respectively). Similarly, students with publications were significantly happier than students without publications, $t(79) = 2.53, p < .01$ ($M_s = 4.37$ and 3.49 respectively). There were no significant sex, age, or ethnic group differences in students' rating of their happiness.

Motivation and commitment. The measures of motivation and commitment were weakly related to each other (average $r = .20$). This is not surprising, because these were new measures devised to tap diverse aspects of the underlying concept.

Two of the three measures of intrinsic motivation were significantly associated with levels of happiness. Students who reported that their current reasons for pursuing a law career were "strictly personal" were significantly more happy than students who did not feel that their reasons were personal, $t(66) = 2.33, p < .02$ ($M_s = 4.35$ and 3.31 respectively). Furthermore, students who originally chose a law career very early in life, that is, before high school, were significantly happier than students who chose a law career later in life ($t(73) = 2.47, p < .02$ ($M_s = 5.00$ and 3.63 respectively). Whether or not students' motives were intrinsic or extrinsic did not significantly relate to happiness. However, older students were more likely to provide intrinsic explanations than were younger students, $\chi^2(1) = 7.94, p < .005$.

Interestingly, there was a significant relationship between students' type of motivation and their most difficult decision, $\chi^2(4) = 10.29, p < .05$. Extrinsically motivated students were more likely than intrinsically motivated students to indicate that their most difficult decision concerned whether or not to stay in law school. This supports our hypothesis that, under difficult circumstances, extrinsically motivated individuals may begin to question their pursuit of a particular line of action, since it is not providing them with the money, prestige, or other extrinsic rewards they desire.

Attributions. The measure of internal attributions and the measure of external attributions were negatively correlated ($r = -.13, n.s.$). As predicted by the control perspective, students who felt that effort and ability (internal attributions) are necessary to obtain a desired job were happier than students who did not make this internal attribution, $t(77) = 2.28, p < .02$ ($M_s = 4.21$ and 3.33 respectively). However, the external attribution item did not relate significantly to happiness.

Relations with others. Ninety-two percent of the students reported talking about their job situation to fellow students, and 88% reported talking to their family and friends. Given the skewness of these distributions, it is not surprising that neither of these measures related to happiness. Students were somewhat more variable in their assessments of whether talking helped. Of those who talked with others, 71% felt that talking with fellow students helped, whereas 64% felt that talking to family and friends helped. Finding talking helpful was not significantly related to happiness in either case.

Whether students' reasons for talking or not talking with others was socio-emotional or task-instrumental did not significantly relate to self-rated happiness. Students' responses to this question, however, provided some insight into the impact these social interactions had on students. As one student stated, talking to fellow students, "lets you know you are not alone in your frustration." Another said, "it's reassuring to know that

others are in the same position that you are." But these contacts were also found to have negative ramifications, as expected. One student stated, "it made me feel insecure," another said, "it gets depressing to talk to superstars and you feel bad when you talk with people who haven't gotten any call backs." Thus, social comparison with similar others had both positive and negative effects that may have cancelled each other out. This may explain why students who talked to other students who were similar to them in rank, publication experience, sex, or ethnic group were not significantly happier than students who talked with others who were dissimilar on these dimensions.

Talking to one's family and friends was helpful or unhelpful for somewhat different reasons than those given for peers. Some students had family members who were lawyers who could provide them with useful information. Many found it helpful to talk with their family and friends because they were removed from the legal environment. As one student said, "(it) helps to restore the proper perspective regarding the real 'importance' of the interviewing process in daily life." Another reported, "(it) helps in deciding what priorities I should set for a career." In contrast another student complained, "they don't know what I'm talking about." As one student seemed to sum it up, "(it helps) only as a psychological release—not much help as to sources of jobs."

Only one variable concerning relations with others was associated with feelings of happiness. Married students reported being happier than unmarried students, $t(80) = 2.52, p < .01$ ($M_s = 4.62$ and 3.59 respectively). Perhaps the support provided by a spouse during this stressful time or the loneliness of the job search process for single students was responsible for the effect.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide some tentative support for the initial hypotheses. Not surprisingly, students with high class rank and publications perceived the job search process as less difficult and were happier than other students. Because these factors are considered heavily by firms, these students' responses are understandable.

More importantly, students' motivation and attributions also affected their responses. Students whose reasons for being a lawyer were personal perceived the job search process as less difficult and were happier than students whose reasons were not personal. Students who chose law as a career early in life, that is before high school, were happier than students who chose a law career later in life. Admittedly these are somewhat indirect measures of intrinsic motivation and commitment. The more direct measure, students' open-ended reason for pursuing a law career, did not

relate significantly to perceptions of difficulty or happiness. This may have been due to the fact that 30% of the students either left the question blank or gave uncodable responses. In follow-up work, Brickman and associates have provided students with a list of the intrinsic and extrinsic motives frequently mentioned in this study that are rated on Likert-type scales for extent of agreement or disagreement (Brickman, in preparation). This kind of approach would seem more valuable.

The most commonly mentioned intrinsic motive in this study had to do with enjoying some integral aspect of the law such as the challenge of problem solving or advocacy. For example, one student stated, "I really enjoy the study of law. I like the advocacy role, the scholarship role, the counseling role." Another student replied, "to have the chance to have an impact on society, to do interesting and challenging work." The most commonly mentioned extrinsic motive was money. Surprisingly, while the majority of the comments about money concerned the desire to earn a good salary, 26% of the comments about money concerned the need to make enough money to pay back extensive school loans. As one student said, "I'm \$20,000 in debt for my tuition, so I don't have too much of a choice. I couldn't earn a much in any other field right now." In future research it might make sense to distinguish between positive and negative extrinsic motives to examine the differential effects they might have on satisfaction.

Younger students (those under age 26) felt it was more difficult looking for a job than did older students. This may be explained by the finding that older students were more likely to be intrinsically motivated (as measured by the open-ended question) than were younger students. After working for several years, the decision to go back to school is likely to be a difficult one which has probably been well thought out and is likely to cause some financial hardship, especially if one has a family. Consequently, it is not surprising that individuals who make this decision have strong intrinsic motives. As one older student stated, "I was achieving a relatively high level of success in another field but was not at all challenged in my work. I wanted a career that would offer more stimulation."

Students who felt that effort and ability were extremely important in getting the type of job they wanted were more likely to be happy than students who did not make this attribution. This finding supports those in the contraliterature which indicate that people adjust better when they make personal attributions, even for bad events (Bulman & Wortman, 1977). Individuals who feel in control can tell themselves that if they really try hard, they can achieve what they want. This feeling enhances their ability to remain happy even under difficult conditions.

Unfortunately, the measures of social relations that were used in this study were somewhat limited. Social relations were assessed only in terms of talking about the job situation rather than in terms of talking about other issues or providing positive affect, affirmation, and aid (cf., Kahn & Aronson, 1974).

tonucci, 1980). Several students reported that talking to friends and family was not helpful because these people could not really understand what they were going through. Past evidence suggests that in many cases people try to help troubled loved ones but that the things they do are ineffective and sometimes make things worse (see Abbey, Holland, & Wortman, 1980; Coates & Wortman, 1980; Dunkel-Schetter & Wortman, 1981; and Wortman & Dunkel-Schetter, 1979 for reviews of this literature). The social comparison which inevitably occurred through discussions with fellow students appeared to be a double-edged sword (cf., Brickman & Bulman, 1977). Sometimes individuals learned that they were doing better than others, sometimes they learned they were doing worse. For some, talking reduced anxiety, for others, it seemed to heighten it. These forces may balance each other out so that talking had no overall effect on perceptions of how difficult it is to find a job or on overall happiness. In future research, it would be interesting to use a wider range of social relations measures in order to gain greater insight into this aspect of job-seeking stress.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study, although preliminary, were predicted from previous research and theory in social psychology and would seem to have important implications for individuals who must deal with stress, especially that involved in finding a job. Attributions and motivation may not be easily altered, but to the extent that they are, there appear to be advantages in believing that outcomes are both personally controllable and inherently valuable.

After conducting this study we participated in a workshop at the law school designed to help students cope with the stress of looking for a job during which there was an interesting exchange between some first and third year law students. The first year students described only intrinsic motives for pursuing law, whereas the third year students seemed cynical and focused on earning enough to repay their loans and live well. However, at the end of the session, a few of the third year students expressed their appreciation to the first year students for reminding them of their original (intrinsic) reasons for being lawyers. In general, individuals and counselors who wish to help people deal with the stress of finding a job might want to encourage the elements of intrinsic motivation and internal attribution that already exist within the individual—provided that the individual still has some realistic prospect of obtaining the goal in question (cf., Janoff-Bulman & Brickman, 1982).

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