

# Journal of Applied Psychology

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Online First Publication, May 17, 2021. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/apl0000915>

### CITATION

DeOrtentiis, P. S., Van Iddekinge, C. H., & Wanberg, C. R. (2021, May 17). Different Starting Lines, Different Finish Times: The Role of Social Class in the Job Search Process. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/apl0000915>

# Different Starting Lines, Different Finish Times: The Role of Social Class in the Job Search Process

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Although social class is an important construct throughout the social sciences, it has received only minimal attention in the industrial–organizational psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource management literatures. As a result, little is known regarding the potential role of social class in the work and career context. The present study examines the role of social class during the job search process. We integrate self-regulation and social class perspectives to hypothesize ways social class may influence job search antecedents, behaviors, and outcomes. Analysis of longitudinal data from new job entrants ( $N = 516$ ) indicated that job seekers from lower social classes possess lower job search self-efficacy, lower perceived social support, and higher perceived financial hardship compared with those from higher social classes. Further, results suggest that through the mechanism of lower self-efficacy, lower social class job seekers display lower job search intensity. Finally, one indicator of social class—parental income—was positively related to job acceptance rate, a hazard outcome that reflected whether and how quickly participants accepted a job. In contrast, subjective social class was negatively related to job acceptance rate. Overall, the present findings suggest that social class plays a multifaceted role in the job search process and, thus, warrants more attention within this and other areas of organizational research.

*Keywords:* social class, socioeconomic status, self-regulation, job search, employment

Social class is the manifestation of individuals' relative position within a societal hierarchy and represents both substantive and perceived differences among individuals. These differences reflect individuals' access to tangible and intangible resources (e.g., Diemer & Ali, 2009), as well as perceptions of their position in society and privileges associated with that position (Adler et al., 2000; Kraus et al., 2009). The general notion of social class differences is that individuals belonging to a higher social class hold advantages over individuals of a lower social class regarding cultural, social, and economic resources (Diemer et al., 2013). This is particularly concerning given that disparities between high and low social class groups are steadily increasing. In 2007, the top 1% of wealth holders represented 45.5% of the world's overall wealth. Ten years later, the gap increased such that 50.1% of global wealth belongs to 1% of the world's population (Shorrocks et al., 2017). Within the U.S., disparities between lower-, middle-, and upper-income families have also grown. Between 2007 and 2016, the median wealth of lower- and middle-income families decreased by 42% and 33%, respectively, whereas the median wealth of upper-income families increased by 10% (Kochhar & Cilluffo, 2017).

As differences in social class increase, it becomes even more important to understand the role of social class on individuals and society. Prior research has shown that individuals of a lower social

class demonstrate lower academic achievement than those of a higher social class (Sirin, 2005). In addition, belonging to a lower social class has been associated with greater mental health issues (Artazcoz et al., 2004) and higher mortality rates (Mackenbach et al., 2003). Social class also has been found to covary with certain personality traits, including higher levels of hostility and lower self-esteem among individuals of lower social class (Ranchor et al., 1996).

Although research in other disciplines has demonstrated the impact of social class on these and other areas of life, social class has received surprisingly little attention in the industrial–organizational psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource management literatures. Only very recently have researchers begun to consider roles social class may play in the workplace. This work suggests that social class may have implications for job attitudes (Loignon- & Woehr, 2018), leadership behavior (Martin et al., 2016), decision-making (Kish-Gephart & Campbell, 2015), and social engagement (Côté, 2011). Furthermore, researchers have proposed that job seekers who belong to a lower social class may be disadvantaged when searching for employment (Leana et al., 2012). For example, Elliott (1999) found that individuals with higher levels of poverty were more likely to use informal job search methods (i.e., finding work through neighbors) than individuals with lower levels of poverty. Additionally, some employers prefer candidates from very elite universities, a factor that can also be associated with social class (Rivera, 2011). More recently, Rivera and Tilcsik (2016) found that applicants whose resumes included higher social class signals received more callbacks than applicants with lower social class signals.

These initial findings suggest a strong need for more research examining the relevance of social class to the attitudes, motivations, and behaviors necessary to search for and find employment.

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In this study, we draw upon theoretical perspectives of social class (Bourdieu, 1987) and self-regulation (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Kanfer & Bufton, 2018) to propose three mechanisms (job search self-efficacy, social support, and financial hardship) through which social class may affect a central self-regulatory dimension involved in the job search process, job search intensity (i.e., the time and energy spent on the job search), as well as whether and how quickly people accept jobs (i.e., job acceptance and job search duration). We examine these relationships in a longitudinal study of new college graduates.

Our study provides important insights into the effects of social class on the job search process and employment outcomes. At the most basic level, we attempt to substantiate the link between social class and employment outcomes. For example, given that our study focuses on new college graduates, we extend previous findings by examining whether social class exerts a role in employment outcomes from the very start of one's career. Furthermore, our longitudinal design allows triangulation of the results of the few other studies that have examined social class in the job search context. These studies have used other methods, namely resume audit and interview methodology, to link social class and employment outcomes (Rivera, 2011; Rivera & Tilcsik, 2016). Triangulation—the study of a phenomenon using multiple methodologies—increases both the internal and external validity of the conclusions one can draw about the phenomenon (Scandura & Williams, 2000).

At a more advanced level, we extend theoretical understandings of the relationships between social class and employment outcomes by producing critical insight into the intermediate mechanisms involved within the job search process. Specifically, we examine job search self-efficacy, social support, and financial hardship as means through which social class may affect job search intensity and ultimately employment outcomes. This deeper and richer insight into mechanisms is critical as we need to know *how* and *why* social class affects employment outcomes. This is especially true if, in addition to the possibility that some decision-makers may be biased against applicants of lower social class, the job search process itself is influenced by individuals' social class.

Finally, our work contributes to the broader job search literature. The dominant theoretical framework in this domain has been job search as an autonomous, self-regulated, goal-directed process (Kanfer & Bufton, 2018). We provide a valuable and previously unavailable understanding of mechanisms (e.g., low self-efficacy) relevant to the intensity of goal striving during job search for individuals of lower social class. Our examination informs frameworks within the job search literature that have begun to delineate external factors and obstacles that affect individuals' ability to pursue employment (e.g., Melloy et al., 2018). Such research is critical to understand the flow of human capital into organizations. Without it, it is difficult to comprehend if individuals' success in finding employment is based on their capacity to perform the jobs they seek or is limited based on socioeconomic factors unrelated to potential job performance.

We begin by providing an overview of social class and job search as a self-regulatory process. We then integrate these perspectives to develop hypotheses concerning the effects of social class on job search antecedents, job search intensity, and employment outcomes.

## Theoretical Basis

### Conceptualizations and Effects of Social Class

*Social class* represents someone's place within the social hierarchy of society. Researchers have conceptualized social class in two main ways. First, some research has measured social class in terms of individuals' access to intangible and tangible resources relative to other individuals (Diemer & Ali, 2009). Using this approach, social class differences are often represented by income, education, and/or occupational status (Adler & Snibbe, 2003; Goodman et al., 2001; Grossmann & Varnum, 2011). For minors and young adults, parental indicators of social class are often used (Diemer et al., 2013). Bourdieu (1987) elaborated on these differences and proposed that social class differentiates individuals regarding three forms of capital: cultural capital (e.g., skills and knowledge, mannerisms, and behavioral scripts), social capital (e.g., relationships with others), and economic capital (e.g., income and wealth). Social class determines individuals' access to these forms of capital such that individuals of a higher social class have greater access than individuals of a lower social class. Additionally, individuals tend to be surrounded by others who possess similar resources and are isolated from those who possess different quality or quantity of resources (Wilson, 1987). This can compound the effects of individuals' social class, giving individuals of higher social classes greater advantages while making it difficult for those of lower social classes to overcome potential disadvantages. This is critical because access (or lack thereof) to these various resources influences the demands and opportunities individuals experience throughout their lives (Kohn, 1977).

Second, other research has conceptualized social class in terms of individuals' perceptions of their place in the social hierarchy. For instance, some researchers have examined how social class influences individuals' sense of identity, such as whether individuals consider themselves as belonging to lower-, middle-, or upper-class groups (Smith, 2010; Stephens et al., 2012). These social class-based identities influence individuals' attitudes and goals, which, in turn, affect how they interpret and interact with their environment (Markus & Wurf, 1987). Another common subjective conceptualization of social class involves individuals' comparative rankings of their status within a social hierarchy (Kraus et al., 2009). Importantly, individuals desire to maintain alignment with the social class they identify as their own (Liu, Soleck, et al., 2004). Because of this, some individuals may behave more in line with their self-identified social class than with the social class reflected by their actual resources (e.g., income, social connections).

In sum, social class reflects many different aspects of individuals' place within their society. Although social class encompasses socioeconomic status, social class is a broader concept that encompasses both individuals' objective access to different resources and their perceptions of access to those resources. Further, social class represents their beliefs regarding their status in society and the (dis)advantages they may have in relation to others. An important finding is that social class can affect key aspects of self-regulation, such as individuals' initiation of, and persistence in, goal-directed behavior. For example, social class is positively related to graduate students' goals of pursuing faculty positions at top research universities (Ostrove et al., 2011). Specifically, students of higher social classes experienced less financial strain during graduate school,

which, in turn, related to a higher sense of belonging and, ultimately, a stronger desire to attain top academic positions. Additional research suggests that individuals of higher social class are better able to access and complete a college education as they tend to possess a greater support system to handle the emotional and financial strain of higher education (Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Sewell & Shah, 1968). Finally, children raised in families of higher social class have greater self-efficacy and aspirations for higher-status occupations (e.g., professor, architect) compared with children from families of lower social class (Bandura et al., 2001).

### Job Search as a Self-Regulatory Process

The dominant theoretical framework used within the job search domain has been that of job search as a self-regulatory, goal-directed process (Kanfer & Bufton, 2018). *Job search* is “a purposive, volitional pattern of action that begins with the identification and commitment to pursuing an employment goal” (Kanfer et al., 2001, p. 838). The goal of finding employment is a broad undertaking that requires job seekers to take various actions, often in the absence of external guidance and clear milestones job seekers can use to assess their progress (Wanberg, Zhu, et al., 2012). To succeed, job seekers need to set objectives, identify the means to accomplish those objectives, analyze their progress, and make appropriate adjustments (Saks & Ashforth, 2000). Job seekers must also solicit, interpret, and act on feedback from their environment (Lopez-Kidwell et al., 2013) and maintain momentum after discouraging rejections (Wanberg et al., 2010). Throughout this process, a variety of factors may contribute to a job seeker’s ability to initiate and maintain their striving toward finding employment.

Researchers have distinguished between three dimensions of job search as a self-regulated process: direction, intensity, and persistence (Kanfer et al., 2001). Job search *direction* refers to the types and effectiveness of behaviors in which job seekers engage, such as goal establishment, goal clarity, planning of search activities, prioritizing, and feedback seeking (van Hooft et al., 2013). Job search *intensity* refers to the amount of time and effort individuals spend on job search. Job search *persistence* refers to the extent to which individuals sustain or modify their job search behavior over time.

Although each of these dimensions is worthy of research attention in relation to social class, our study focused on job search intensity. Individuals must initiate job search activities and devote effort to those activities to find employment. Indeed, job seekers who exhibit higher job search intensity tend to receive more offers and obtain employment more quickly compared with job seekers who exhibit lower intensity (Kanfer et al., 2001). Individual levels of job search intensity are also highly correlated across time (Wanberg et al., 2005). Meta-analytic findings suggest that the key antecedents of job search intensity include job seeker personality (e.g., extroversion and conscientiousness), self-evaluation (e.g., self-efficacy), motives (e.g., financial hardship and employment commitment), and social environment (e.g., social support). Although several biographical antecedents have been studied in relation to job search intensity (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, and education; Kanfer et al., 2001), social class has not been examined as a focal variable in the job search literature.

### Integration of Perspectives and Hypotheses

We integrate self-regulation perspectives (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Kanfer & Bufton, 2018) with theoretical perspectives of social class (Bourdieu, 1987) to propose three mechanisms through which social class may affect job search intensity and employment outcomes. Among the possible mediators we could choose to explain the potential relationship between social class and employment outcomes, we focus on three variables—self-efficacy, social support, and financial hardship—for two central reasons. First, these potential mediators align with the types of resources social class is thought to affect. As discussed, Bourdieu (1987) proposed that social class differentiates individuals regarding cultural capital (e.g., skills and knowledge, mannerisms, and behavioral scripts), social capital (e.g., relationships with others), and economic capital (e.g., income and wealth). Self-efficacy, social support, and financial hardship can be viewed as types of cultural, social, and economic capital, respectively, that social class may affect. Second, of the antecedents of job search intensity Kanfer et al. (2001) identified, these potential mediators were among the strongest correlates. Although a few key personality dispositions such as extroversion and conscientiousness are also associated with higher search intensity, the potential mediators we chose are more malleable and relevant for potential intervention than are personality variables. In the following sections, we explicate this proposition further and hypothesize how social class is relevant to individuals’ access to these resource-based constructs.

### Social Class → Antecedents of Job Search

*Job search self-efficacy* represents job seekers’ confidence in their ability to engage in the job search process and to successfully find a good job (Saks et al., 2015). Self-efficacy is formed by individuals’ own experiences, as well as by observing the experiences of others (Bandura, 1982). Social class may influence job search self-efficacy in two ways. First, social class affects individuals’ opportunities to engage in confidence-building activities (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). For example, individuals of lower social class may be exposed to fewer opportunities for community or social activities that help foster their self-esteem and confidence. Second, social class may affect individuals’ perspectives of employment and the workplace (Gecas, 1989; Kraus et al., 2012). Job seekers of lower social class, for instance, may be exposed to fewer positive social models, such as witnessing others successfully find and maintain employment. This should result in job seekers of lower social class perceiving more disadvantages for themselves and, in turn, possessing less confidence in finding employment compared with their counterparts of higher social class.

Although not studied in the job search context, previous research suggests that individuals of a lower social class may have lower self-efficacy in other areas of life. For example, past research has found a positive relationship between social class and self-efficacy in the academic context (e.g., MacPhee et al., 2013; Wiederkehr et al., 2015), as well as in health-related areas (Anderson et al., 2006; Siahpush et al., 2006). Overall, we expect that higher social class will promote job search self-efficacy.

*Hypothesis 1:* Social class is positively related to job search self-efficacy.

*Perceived social support* represents job seekers' perceptions of assistance provided by those in a job seeker's social network, including friends, family, and mentors (Malecki & Demaray, 2006). This aid represents a form of social capital that can take a variety of forms, including emotional, instrumental, or informational assistance (Tardy, 1985). Research in other areas suggests that social class is related to higher levels of social support. For example, Wang and Eccles (2012) found a positive relationship between social class and education-related social support, which, in turn, impacted educational outcomes such as school engagement, attendance, and views of the value of learning. Malecki and Demaray (2006) found a similar positive relationship between social class and social support, as well as evidence of social support mediating the effect of social class on academic performance. Turner and Noh (1983) found that social support had a stronger relationship with psychological stress for individuals from upper and middle social classes than for those from lower social classes.

When individuals of higher social class are looking for employment, they can rely on (and in turn, perceive) the support of family and friends who are more likely to possess high levels of cultural, economic, and social capital (e.g., Oakley & Rajan, 1991). For instance, job seekers of higher social class may receive tangible support, including access to resources such as technology (e.g., computers, Internet access), transportation, and money to purchase business attire. They also may receive intangible support regarding job search strategies, such as feedback on resumes and advice on how to interview. In contrast, individuals of lower social class tend to be socially isolated (Wilson, 1996). As such, they may be surrounded by individuals with less experience or training regarding how to successfully seek employment. Further, the social support job seekers of low social class do possess may be of limited value because their family and friends tend to belong to a similarly low social class. Overall, we expect that higher social class will relate to higher degrees of perceived social support.

*Hypothesis 2:* Social class is positively related to perceived social support. (Wanberg, 2012)

*Perceived financial hardship* represents job seekers' perceptions of financial difficulty (e.g., Wanberg, 2012). Social class is related to individuals' "reservoir" of economic capital, which, in turn, affects perceptions of financial strain (Gallie et al., 2003; Rankin & Quane, 2000). First, job seekers of lower social class possess less economic capital (e.g., personal savings) compared with job seekers of higher social class. Due to this, job seekers of a lower social class may experience greater stress as they are more reliant on employment for their financial well-being. Second, individuals of lower social class also tend to have more debt compared with individuals of higher social class (Drentea & Lavrakas, 2000). This greater need to pay off debt may add to the stress job seekers of lower social class experience. Thus, job seekers of lower social class will perceive greater financial difficulties before and during the job search process compared with job seekers of high social class.

*Hypothesis 3:* Social class is negatively related to perceived financial hardship.

## Social Class → Job Search Antecedents → Job Search Intensity

Hypotheses 1–3 posited that social class will be related to self-efficacy, perceived social support, and perceived financial hardship. These three mechanisms, in turn, are central catalysts of self-regulatory behavior during job search, particularly in relation to the time and effort individuals can allocate toward their job searches (Kanfer et al., 2001).

First, job seekers who are more confident in their job search skills and ability to find a job (e.g., higher job search self-efficacy) are more likely to engage in job search behaviors (e.g., higher job search intensity) than those who are less confident. For example, Liu et al. (2014) found that graduating college students with higher job search self-efficacy reported engaging in job search behaviors more frequently than those with lower self-efficacy. From a more general self-regulatory perspective, substantial research has shown that self-efficacy enhances performance across a variety of contexts (Bandura, 1982). Conversely, when individuals judge themselves critically or do not have confidence in a domain, an activity may become aversive and individuals are less likely to engage in the activity (Bandura, 1986).

Next, social-focused antecedents (e.g., perceived social support) influence individuals' ability to persist in the job search process by reducing the pressure and strain job seekers' experience. Specifically, perceiving social support encourages job seekers to maintain behaviors necessary to finding employment, even when faced with difficulties such as lack of job openings that fit their interests and skills, the inability to pursue certain jobs for personal reasons, or failure to receive interview or job offers. For example, Šverko et al. (2008) found greater social support related to higher job search intensity, and McArdle et al. (2007) found social support related to job search intensity via its effect on job seekers' overall employability. From a more general self-regulatory perspective, social support is a multifaceted resource that can potentially help individuals translate goals into action via additional avenues including available modeling, normative comparison, praise, and feedback (Bandura, 1986).

Finally, job seekers who perceive themselves as more in need of employment (e.g., higher perceived financial hardship) should engage more intensely in relevant job search activities to increase their chance of finding employment. Wanberg et al. (1999) found that individuals experiencing higher levels of financial difficulties during their job search displayed greater job search intensity. More broadly, self-regulation perspectives suggest that motives increase goal directed behavior. People with stronger motives will be more likely to expend greater effort in goal-relevant activities because the value and centrality of those activities become more important in comparison to others (Bandura, 1986).

In sum, we expect social class to be related to self-efficacy, perceived social support, and perceived financial hardship. Moreover, these factors have been shown to be related to goal pursuit during job search. Recognizing that social class may also have a direct relationship with initiation of, and persistence in, goal-directed behavior (Ostrove et al., 2011), we advance the following partial mediation hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 4a:* Job search self-efficacy partially mediates the positive effect of social class on job search intensity.

*Hypothesis 4b:* Perceived social support partially mediates the positive effect of social class on job search intensity.

*Hypothesis 4c:* Perceived financial hardship partially mediates the negative effect of social class on job search intensity.

To this point, we have proposed that higher social class has both positive (i.e., via job search self-efficacy and social support) and negative (i.e., via financial hardship) indirect relationships with job search intensity. In addition to these indirect effects, we propose that higher social class will have a direct and positive relationship with intensity of job search behaviors. Social class represents not only the position of job seekers in a society but also all the advantages and disadvantages inherent to it. Thus, their social class may determine the degree to which job seekers are capable of effectively engaging in the job search process. Specifically, job seekers from a higher social class both possess and perceive advantages in seeking employment in comparison to their counterparts from lower social classes who seek employment from a disadvantageous position. As such, we posit that social class affects the time and intensity individuals devote to their job search in three important ways.

First, compared with job seekers of higher social class, job seekers of lower social class may experience more conflicting demands during the job search process (Roberts & Li, 2017). For instance, job seekers of a lower social class may need to hold a temporary or part-time job while searching for a full-time position due to lower economic capital (e.g., lack of personal savings) or less social capital (e.g., support from family or friends). This, in turn, may reduce the time and energy job seekers of low social class can devote to the actions necessary for a productive job search. Second, the limited economic and social resources available to lower social class may limit their ability to pursue job search activities in lieu of other responsibilities. For example, Brooks and Buckner (1996) found that a lack of affordable childcare negatively impacted the ability of lower-income women to seek employment. Third, differences in cultural capital may negatively influence lower social class job seekers' understanding of different types of job search activities and how to engage in those activities. For instance, job seekers of lower social class may be less aware of, or less adept in using, employment-seeking resources such as online job boards and social network websites. Thus, we posit that belonging to a lower social class will inhibit the ability of such job seekers to effectively perform the self-regulating behaviors necessary for finding employment.

*Hypothesis 5:* Higher social class directly and positively relates to job search intensity.

### Social Class → Employment Outcome

Finally, we propose that higher social class will also be directly and positively related to the ultimate success (or failure) of individuals' search for employment. For example, social class may be related to lower-quality work experiences prior to job search, narrowing available job opportunities. Further, individuals of lower social class will often find themselves geographically and socially isolated. For example, job seekers of lower social class may lack the economic capital necessary to fund a job relocation. Or perhaps job seekers of lower social class have

others (e.g., family) that rely on them (e.g., Schene, 1990). If so, these job seekers may find it difficult to consider job opportunities that would require them to move away from the people they support. Additionally, social class may affect the types of jobs that can be pursued as realistic job opportunities. Specifically, job seekers of lower social class may consider a smaller range of jobs as attainable and, thus, apply to fewer jobs compared with their counterparts of higher social class. The nature of job seekers' social relationships also may affect the likelihood of finding employment. Particularly, job seekers of higher social class may possess a greater number of occupationally focused relationships, which, in turn, may allow them to experience less difficulty in finding jobs compared with job seekers of lower social class who lack such networks (Barbulescu, 2015). Thus, in addition to social class's influence on crucial job search antecedents and behaviors, we posit that social class will directly influence job seekers' employment outcome, reflected within this study by whether people accepted a job and how quickly they did so (i.e., job acceptance rate).

*Hypothesis 6:* Higher social class is directly and positively related to job seekers' job acceptance rate (i.e., higher likelihood of job acceptance and shorter job search duration).

## Method

### Sample

Participants were undergraduate students at a large Southeastern university who we recruited through the university career center and registrar's office (Florida State University IRB Protocol Number IRB00000446 for study entitled "Dissertation"). To participate, students were required to (a) have a graduation date within the upcoming academic year and (b) be currently seeking full-time employment for after they graduate. We surveyed participants four times, and 647 participants completed one or more of the surveys (participants were entered into raffles for a \$50 gift card for each survey completed). Each survey included one attention check item, and we excluded 54 participants who failed 50% or more of the items. Four participants were removed due to missing data regarding graduation semester. Additionally, we excluded 73 participants who reported ending their job search prior to our measurement of the job search antecedents (i.e., Time 2). This resulted in a final sample size of 516 participants. The sample was 69.9% White, 19% Hispanic/Latino, 4.2% multiracial, 4.2% Black, and 2.8% Asian. Regarding gender, 77.3% participants identified as female and 22.7% as male. The age of participants ranged from 20 to 46 years old ( $M = 22.4$ ,  $SD = 2.9$ ).

### Procedure

We contacted participants every three months between November 2015 and July 2016. A total of 516, 316, 205, and 186, respectively, job seekers participated in each of the four data collections. We measured the variables over time to increase the validity of causal inferences and to help control for common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). For example, we measured social class at Time 1, and we measured job search self-efficacy, perceived social support, and perceived financial hardship at Time 2. We assessed

job search behavior and employment outcomes at all four times. We used the job search intensity assessment at Time 2 to test our hypotheses to ensure job search intensity was assessed after antecedents were measured and while individuals were actively searching for employment.

## Measure

### Social Class

Consistent with prior social class research, we operationalized social class with assessments of “objective material resources” as well as “corresponding subjective perceptions of rank vis-à-vis others” (Côté, 2011, p. 47). Parental income and education were used to assess objective resources (Diemer et al., 2013) available to this sample of student job seekers up to and including their time in college. *Parental income* was measured via two items used in previous research (e.g., Adams & Rau, 2004): “On average, what was your first parent’s annual income while you lived at home?” and “On average, what was your second parent’s annual income while you lived at home?” These items were scored on a scale of 1 = \$0 to \$10,000 to 17 = \$140,001 or more. The scores for each parent’s income added together to form a total score for parental income ( $M = 12.17$ ,  $SD = 5.58$ ). *Parental education* consisted of two items from Diemer et al. (2013). The first item measured the educational attainment of one of the participants’ parents: “What is the highest grade or year of school completed for your first parent,” which is rated on a scale from 1 = *did not complete high school* to 7 = *law degree, medical degree, or doctorate*. Participants were then asked to rate the educational attainment of their other parent. As with parental income, we summed scores for parental education to create a total score ( $M = 6.99$ ,  $SD = 2.18$ ).

We used five items from a measure developed by Kluegel et al. (1977) to measure perceptions of social class. Respondents were asked to select which class best describes their parents’ occupations, income level, way of life, influence, and overall background. Participants rated the items using a scale based on the Social Class Worldview Model (Liu, Soleck, et al., 2004) whereby 1 = *lower class*, 2 = *lower middle class*, 3 = *middle class*, 4 = *upper middle class*, and 5 = *upper class* ( $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = .68$ ,  $\alpha = .90$ ).

### Job Search Self-Efficacy

We used a 10-item scale developed by Saks et al. (2015) to measure job search self-efficacy. The measure was scored on a scale that ranged from 1 = *not at all confident* to 7 = *extremely confident* ( $M = 4.76$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ). Sample items include: “Prepare resumes that will get you job interviews” and “Search for and find good job opportunities.”

### Perceived Social Support

We used Adams and Rau’s (2004) five-item measure of social support. The measure asks participants to rate the extent to which they rely on individuals they know (e.g., family, friends) for encouragement, assistance, and feedback during the job search process on a scale that ranged from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *to a very great extent* ( $M = 5.22$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ,  $\alpha = .87$ ). Sample items include: “Encouragement surrounding your job search efforts” and

“Someone who would loan you money to help you conduct your job search.”

### Perceived Financial Hardship

We measured perceived financial hardship via a three-item scale developed by Vinokur and colleagues (Vinokur & Caplan, 1987; Vinokur & Schul, 2002). Items were scored on a scale that ranged from 1 = *very unlikely* to 7 = *extremely likely* ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ,  $\alpha = .78$ ). A sample item is: “How likely would not having another job in the next two months create actual hardships for you and your family, such as inadequate housing, food, or medical attention?”

### Job Search Intensity

We measured job search intensity using a modified version of Blau’s (1993) job search behavior scale. Consistent with other recent work using this scale, we revised the measure to capture more contemporary job search behaviors (Wanberg et al., 2020). For example, we changed “Listed yourself as a job applicant in a newspaper, journal, or professional association” to “Listed yourself as a job candidate in a newspaper, internet job board, or professional association.” Further, we developed two additional items to better represent the domain of job search behaviors: “Updated social media information (e.g., LinkedIn)” and “Participated in job search preparation activity (e.g., resume workshop, mock interview).” The result was a 14-item measure, asking individuals about their search activities in the last 2 months, on a scale that ranged from 1 = *never* to 5 = *very frequently* ( $M = 2.55$ ,  $SD = .79$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ).

### Job Acceptance Rate

Job acceptance rate was assessed with two measures: job acceptance and job search duration. Job acceptance was measured by the item “Have you accepted a full-time job for after you graduate?” During the study period, 18.9% of participants reported accepting a position and 81.1% reporting not accepting a position. Job search duration was measured by the items “When did you start looking for a full-time job for after you graduate?” and “When did you accept your job offer?” For participants who found employment, job search duration reflected the number of months between when they started looking for a job and when they found employment. Participants who did not report finding a job by the end of the study were right-censored, meaning their full job search duration was not observed (Therneau & Grambsch, 2000). For these individuals, job search duration represented the number of months from when they started searching to when the fourth survey was submitted ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = 3.27$ ).

### Control Variables

We controlled for the potential influence of four variables. First, we controlled for participants’ *graduation semester* (1 = *Fall*, 2 = *Spring*, and 3 = *Summer*), which we thought could affect substantive variables such as job search intensity ( $M = 1.90$ ,  $SD = .57$ ). Second, we controlled for *proactive personality*, which prior research has suggested is related to job search behaviors (e.g., Brown et al., 2006). Further, proactive personality is often considered to be a compound trait that reflects other personality

traits such as conscientiousness and extraversion (e.g., Fuller & Marler, 2009). Proactive personality was measured using the 10-item Proactive Personality Scale (Seibert et al., 1999). Sample items include: “I am constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve my life” and “I can spot a good opportunity long before others can.” Items were scored on a Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*;  $M = 5.40$ ,  $SD = .78$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ ). Third, we controlled for participants’ self-reported grade point average (GPA) ( $M = 3.36$ ,  $SD = .39$ ) as academic performance may relate to job search behaviors and employment outcomes (e.g., Turban et al., 2013). Finally, we controlled for participants’ gender (1 = *male*, 0 = *female*) as past research has also shown a relationship between gender and the outcomes we examine (e.g., van Hooff et al., 2005).

### Analyses

We used two main analytic approaches to test our hypotheses. First, Hypotheses 1–5 were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) in Mplus 8.0 (Muthen & Muthen, 2017). We used the factorial algorithm approach (Williams & O’Boyle, 2008) to create parcels for measures that included more than five items. The items with the highest standardized factor loadings were used as “anchors” for each parcel. The items with the next highest standardized factor loadings were then assigned to the parcels in inverse order. This resulted in three item parcels for job search self-efficacy, three item parcels for proactive personality, and four item parcels for job search intensity.

We used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test the fit of the measurement model, which included (a) two items for objective social class, (b) five items for subjective social class, (c) a higher order social class latent variable (indicated by the objective and subjective social class variables), (d) three item parcels for job search self-efficacy, (e) three items for financial hardship, (f) five items for social support, (g) four parcels for job search intensity, and (h) three item parcels for proactive personality. The model provided a good fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 588.64$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $df = 318$ ; CFI = .94; TLI = .94; RMSEA = .04; SRMR = .05), and all factor loadings were statistically significant. Therefore, we used these latent variables and indicators in the structural model, as well as graduation semester, proactive personality, GPA, and gender as control variables. We utilized full information maximum likelihood (FIML) to estimate the missing data based on the data that were present (Newman, 2014). FIML computes a likelihood function based on the variables that are present for a specific case. This function provides a conditional estimate for missing scores within each case.

Second, we tested the effects of social class on employment outcome using survival analysis (i.e., Cox regression model) in SAS 9.4 (Therneau & Grambsch, 2000). Survival analysis—named after its common use in studying patient mortality—is recommended when an outcome (a) may or may not happen for everyone and (b) may happen more quickly for some individuals than for others (Singer & Willett, 1991, p. 268). We used survival analysis to predict whether participants found a job (i.e., job acceptance) and how quickly they did so (i.e., job search duration; see Hoffman, 1991; Song et al., 2006; Wanberg, Zhu, et al., 2012) for similar applications of survival analysis). Survival analysis also is well suited to handle right censoring of the data. In our study, 81.1% of the sample did not accept a job during the study period and, thus, we do not know how long their job search lasted. Survival analysis is

specifically designed to analyze data of this type. The survival model included objective and subjective social class as independent variables and job search intensity, graduation semester, proactive personality, GPA, and gender as control variables. The dependent variable, job acceptance rate, was a hazard outcome that reflected whether participants accepted a job during the study period, and if so, how quickly they accepted a job.

To account for missing data, we utilized multiple imputations via PROC MI in SAS 9.4. Specifically, we imputed scores for variables missing at random. In doing so, we imputed 500 unique data sets. Each data set included all reported scores by the 516 participants, as well as imputed scores for any missing data. Next, we conducted survival analyses for each of the 500 data sets and used PROC MIANALYSIS to calculate the model results and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for the estimates (Yuan, 2011).

## Results

### Social Class and Job Search Behavior

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for the study variables. The structural model we used to test our hypotheses provided a good fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 5238.85$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $df = 318$ ; CFI = .94; TLI = .93; RMSEA = .04; SRMR = .07). Table 2 presents coefficients for all paths in the model, and Figure 1 displays the standardized path coefficients ( $\beta$ ) related to our hypotheses.

Hypotheses 1–3 predicted that social class would relate to demonstrated antecedents of job search. In support of these hypotheses, social class was positively related to job search self-efficacy ( $\beta = .20$ ,  $p = .04$ ) and perceived social support ( $\beta = .28$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and was negatively related to perceived financial hardship ( $\beta = -.50$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These results suggest that job seekers of a higher social class possess higher job search self-efficacy, higher perceived social support, and lower perceived financial hardship compared with job seekers of a lower social class.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that the effects of social class on job search intensity would be partially mediated through (a) job search self-efficacy, (b) perceived social support, and (c) perceived financial hardship. Hypothesis 5 predicted a positive, direct relationship between social class and job search intensity. We used bootstrapping to test the direct and indirect effects of social class on job search intensity (Preacher et al., 2010, 2016). Table 3 reports the 95% CIs for indirect effects. In support of Hypothesis 4a, results revealed a significant indirect effect of social class on job search intensity through job search self-efficacy such that the 95% CI [.002–.151] did not include zero. In contrast, the indirect effects through perceived social support (95% CI [–.094–.004]) and perceived financial hardship (95% CI [–.185–.066]) were nonsignificant, which fails to support Hypotheses 4b and 4c. In addition, results indicated a positive, direct relationship between social class and job search intensity ( $\beta = .28$ ,  $p < .01$ ), providing support for Hypothesis 5.

### Social Class and Employment Outcome

Hypothesis 6 predicted a positive relationship between social class and job acceptance rate. Table 4 provides the results of the survival analysis testing this hypothesis. Parental income had a significant, positive relationship with job acceptance rate

**Table 1**  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Parental income	379	12.17	5.58	—												
2. Parental education	462	6.99	2.18	.42**	—											
3. Subjective social class	492	3.12	.68	.57**	.40**	(.90)										
4. Job search self-efficacy	302	4.76	1.03	.09	.01	.17**	(.87)									
5. Perceived social support	304	5.22	1.24	.12	.10	.25**	.35**	(.87)								
6. Perceived financial hardship	303	3.89	1.58	-.26**	-.36**	-.40**	.01	-.21**	(.78)							
7. Job search intensity	297	2.55	.79	.20**	.04	.23**	.36**	.11*	-.02	(.88)						
8. Job acceptance	455	.19	.39	.05	-.05	-.04	.04	-.04	.07	.11	—					
9. Job search duration	343	4.08	3.27	-.00	-.02	.12*	.11	.10	.01	.17*	-.16**	—				
10. Graduation semester	516	1.90	.57	.05	.01	.08	-.04	.00	.06	-.14*	-.10*	.01	—			
11. Proactive personality	231	5.40	.78	-.07	-.14*	.00	.30**	-.03	.05	.10	.01	-.02	.04	(.89)		
12. Grade point average	209	3.36	.39	-.02	-.04	.02	-.05	-.01	-.02	-.12	.08	.05	-.01	-.01	—	
13. Gender	220	.23	.42	.13	-.07	-.06	.09	-.06	.04	.01	.01	-.04	.05	.07	-.13	—
14. Job offers	455	1.67	1.14	.06	.00	.06	.15**	-.03	.03	.20**	.35**	.03	-.03	.08	.12	.02

*Note.* Job acceptance was scored as 1 = accepted a full-time job, 0 = did not accept a full-time job. Job search duration is right-censored for individuals who did not accept a job by the end of the study period. For these individuals, job search duration is the number of months from when individuals started searching to when the fourth survey was submitted. Graduation semester was scored as Fall = 1, Spring = 2, Summer = 3. Gender was scored as 1 = male, 0 = female. Coefficient alphas for multi-item variables are listed in the diagonal.

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

(hazard ratio = 1.06,  $p = .02$ ) such that a single unit increase in parental income related to a 6% increase in the likelihood of accepting a full-time position within the study period. In contrast, parental education was unrelated to job acceptance rate (hazard ratio = .97,  $p = .57$ ). Finally, contrary to our

expectations, subjective social class was *negatively* related to job acceptance rate (hazard ratio = .65,  $p = .02$ ). For each unit increase in subjective social class, the likelihood of accepting a full-time position decreased by 35%. This suggests that job seekers who perceive they belong to a higher social class were *less likely* to accept a position compared with job seekers who perceive they belong to a lower social class. Overall, these results provide mixed support for Hypothesis 6.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 2**  
Path Coefficients for Structural Model

Variable	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
DV: Job search self-efficacy				
Social class	.38	.20	.10	.04
Graduation semester	-.14	-.08	.08	.30
Proactive personality	.42	.34	.09	<.01
Grade point average	-.14	-.05	.09	.54
Gender	.16	.07	.08	.38
DV: Perceived social support				
Social class	.64	.28	.08	<.01
Graduation semester	-.06	-.03	.08	.74
Proactive personality	.11	.07	.08	.40
Grade point average	.04	.01	.09	.88
Gender	-.02	-.01	.09	.94
DV: Perceived financial hardship				
Social class	-.98	-.50	.07	<.01
Graduation semester	.27	.15	.07	.02
Proactive personality	.12	.09	.08	.24
Grade point average	-.08	-.03	.08	.70
Gender	-.03	-.01	.09	.89
DV: Job search intensity				
Social class	.44	.28	.09	<.01
Job search self-efficacy	.31	.37	.08	<.01
Perceived social support	-.05	-.08	.06	.19
Perceived financial hardship	.11	.14	.10	.18
Graduation semester	-.27	-.18	.07	.01
Proactive personality	.00	.00	.09	.99
Grade point average	-.25	-.12	.08	.13
Gender	-.05	-.02	.09	.80

*Note.*  $N = 516$ . DV = dependent variable;  $b$  = unstandardized path coefficient;  $\beta$  = standardized path coefficient;  $SE$  = standard error for standardized path coefficient.

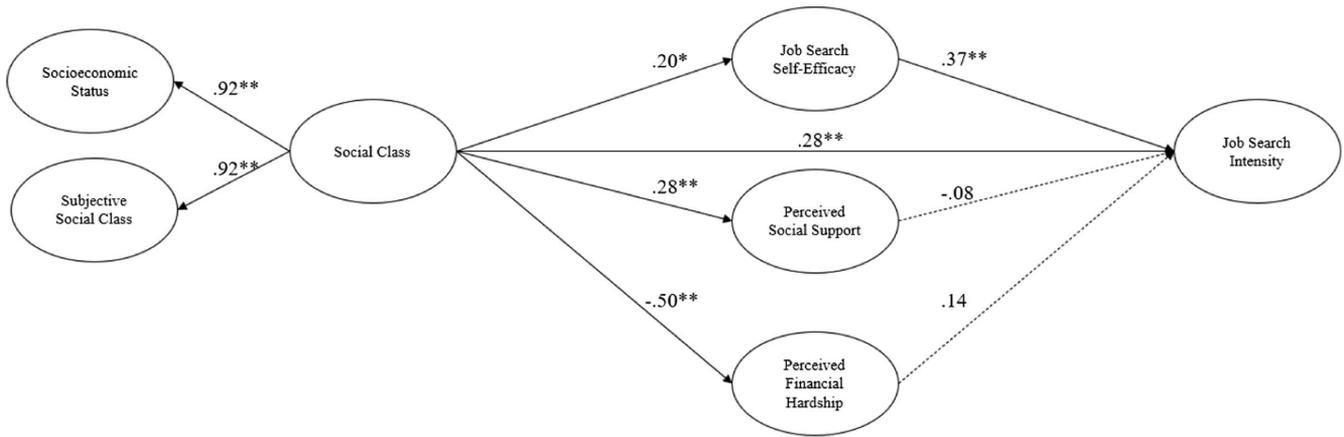
## Post Hoc Analyses

In addition to our main analyses, we conducted two post hoc analyses using the number of job offers participants received as an outcome. *Job offers* was measured with the item "How many job offers have you received?" The mean score of responses was 1.67 ( $SD = 1.14$ ).

First, we utilized SEM to examine if social class and job search intensity (modeled as latent variables) related to job offers, controlling for job search self-efficacy, perceived financial hardship, perceived social support, graduation semester, proactive personality, GPA, and gender. This model displayed good fit ( $CFI = .94$ ,  $TLI = .93$ ,  $RMSEA = .04$ ,  $SRMR = .05$ ) and indicated that job

<sup>1</sup> We also conducted two sets of supplemental analyses as suggested by an anonymous reviewer. First, we examined the two components of the job acceptance rate outcome—job acceptance (a dichotomous variable) and job search duration (a continuous, right censored variable)—as separate outcomes. The results for job acceptance indicated a significant relationship with parental income ( $p = .03$ ) but not with parental education ( $p = .29$ ) or subjective social status ( $p = .09$ ). The results for job search duration indicated a significant relationship with subjective social status ( $p = .02$ ) but not with parental income ( $p = .27$ ) or parental education ( $p = .37$ ). Second, we reran the survival analyses using a composite measure of the individual social class measures to more closely mimic the latent variable approach used to test Hypotheses 1–5. Specifically, we averaged the standardized scores for parental income, parental education, and subjective social class to create an overall score. Results revealed that this aggregate measure of social class was not a significant predictor of job acceptance rate ( $p = .74$ ).

**Figure 1**  
Structural Model with Standardized Path Coefficients



*Note.* For simplicity, we excluded paths involving the control variables. Significant paths are indicated with a solid line. Nonsignificant paths are indicated with a dashed line.  
\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

search intensity was significantly related to job offers, such that individuals with higher job search intensity received more offers ( $b = .20, p = .02$ ). Although social class did not significantly relate to job offers ( $b = .00, p = .98$ ), it had a small, indirect effect on job offers through job search intensity ( $b = .06, 95\% \text{ CI } [.01-.13]$ ). Additionally, GPA was significantly related to job offers, such that participants with higher grades received more job offers ( $b = .21, p < .01$ ).

Second, we conducted a survival analysis to examine whether job offers was related to job acceptance rate, controlling for parental income, parental education, subjective social status, job search intensity, graduation semester, proactive personality, GPA, and gender. Results indicated that job offers were significantly related to job acceptance rate (hazard ratio = 1.36,  $p < .01$ ). Specifically,

for each additional job offer received, the likelihood of accepting a full-time position increased by 36%. Further, all the previous findings from our main analyses remained unchanged when job offers were added to the model (i.e., parental income and subjective social status remained significant predictors of job acceptance rate). Full results for the post hoc analyses can be found at [https://osf.io/ha653/?view\\_only=80e84fc06abd4de9bd241702cec2df27](https://osf.io/ha653/?view_only=80e84fc06abd4de9bd241702cec2df27).<sup>2</sup>

**Discussion**

Despite its widespread effects on people’s lives, little is known about the role of social class in work and career experiences. The present study took a step to address this gap by considering whether and how social class affects job seekers’ ability to obtain employment. We integrate theoretical perspectives of social class with a self-regulation and, in doing so, provide previously unavailable rationale and data concerning the effects of social class on key antecedents, behaviors, and outcomes related to job search.

**Implications for Theory and Practice**

There are several important theoretical implications of our study. First, we theorized that cultural, social, and economic forms of

**Table 3**  
Direct and Indirect Effects of Social Class on Job Search Intensity

Variable	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	95% CI of indirect effects	
				Lower bound	Upper bound
Direct effect	.44*	.28*	.09	.057	.429
Indirect effect through					
Job search self-efficacy	.12*	.07*	.04	.002	.151
Perceived social support	-.03	-.02	.02	-.094	.004
Perceived financial hardship	-.11	-.07	.06	-.185	.066
Total effect	.42**	.27**	.06	.131	.359

*Note.*  $N = 516$ . Confidence intervals represent the results from bootstrapping 100 iterations. *b* = unstandardized path coefficient;  $\beta$  = standardized path coefficient; *SE* = standard error for standardized path coefficient.  
\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

<sup>2</sup> We also conducted two sets of robustness checks of the main results in Tables 2–4. First, we examined these models without the control variables and found very similar results. The only substantive difference was that the indirect effect of social class on job search intensity through perceived social support was significant without controls. Second, we examined the models with the inclusion of individuals who failed all the attention checks. The overall pattern of results was very similar to the main results we report. The main differences were that social class no longer was significantly related to job search self-efficacy when including all participants regardless of attention checks, whereas the indirect effect of social class on job search intensity through perceived financial hardship became significant. In addition, subjective social status was no longer a significant predictor of job acceptance rate. Output files for these results are posted at [https://osf.io/ha653/?view\\_only=80e84fc06abd4de9bd241702cec2df27](https://osf.io/ha653/?view_only=80e84fc06abd4de9bd241702cec2df27).

**Table 4**

*Unstandardized Estimates, Hazard Ratios, and 95% Confidence Intervals for the Effect of Social Class on Job Acceptance Rate*

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	Hazard ratio	95% CI of <i>b</i>	
				Lower bound	Upper bound
Social class predictors					
Parental income	.06*	.03	1.06	.01	.11
Parental education	-.03	.06	.97	-.15	.08
Subjective social class	-.43*	.20	.65	-.82	-.04
Controls					
Job search intensity	.18	.15	1.20	-.11	.46
Graduation semester	-.27	.19	.78	-.64	.11
Proactive personality	.11	.15	1.12	-.18	.40
Grade point average	.27	.33	1.33	-.37	.91
Gender	-.04	.27	.98	-.57	.50

*Note.*  $N = 516$ .  $b$  = unstandardized path coefficient;  $SE$  = standard error for unstandardized path coefficient. A hazard ratio of over 1.0 indicates a positive relationship with job acceptance rate, and a hazard ratio of less than 1.0 indicates a negative relationship with job acceptance rate.

\*  $p < .05$ .

capital inherent in social class (Bourdieu, 1987) serve as a foundation that influences key antecedents of job search behavior and outcomes. Our data provide support for these ideas in that job seekers of higher social class appear to experience advantages with respect to having higher job search self-efficacy and perceived social support and lower perceived financial hardship. These results suggest that factors experienced by individuals throughout their lives (i.e., their social class)—and long before any job search is initiated—can influence the ability to find employment.

Second, we provide critical insights into the consequences traditional job search antecedents may have with the broader job search process. Specifically, our study provides evidence that social class not only relates to important antecedents of job searching but also to the intensity with which individuals strive toward their goal of employment. We posited that social class influences the types of activities utilized by job seekers, such that individuals of a higher social class can expend greater time and energy on job search activities than those of a lower social class. Drawing from social class theory, we suggest that this occurs via different mechanisms, such as awareness of (i.e., through cultural capital) and/or access to different types of job search activities (i.e., through social or economic capital). Further, our results indicate that job search self-efficacy is the specific mechanism by which social class affects job search intensity. This suggests that one reason why job seekers of lower social class tend to have more difficulty finding employment compared with job seekers of higher social class is because individuals of lower social class have less confidence in their ability to engage in the behaviors necessary for an effective job search. It is also noteworthy that two common antecedents (i.e., perceived social support and perceived financial hardship) were not significant

predictors of job search behavior when accounting for social class. This suggests that social class may be as or more important than these more established job search antecedents.

Third, we found that the relationship between social class and job acceptance rate maybe somewhat more complex than hypothesized. Interestingly, whereas objective social class (i.e., parental income) was positively related to job acceptance rate, there was a significant, negative relationship between subjective social class and job acceptance rate. Perhaps perceiving oneself to be of higher social class reduces such job seekers' motivation to find employment. For example, job seekers of higher social class may feel less financial pressure to initiate the job search process due to their perceived superior economic resources. However, when job seekers of higher social class begin the job search process, they may be capable of drawing on additional resources that those from lower social classes cannot access. Additionally, job seekers from higher social classes—perhaps through their greater reserve of financial and social capital—may be able to turn down less desirable job offers and hold out for better positions. Conversely, job seekers from lower social classes may have to accept the first offer they receive to ameliorate stress and other negative effects of being unemployed.

Our study also has important practical implications for job seekers and organizations. The results show that despite similarities in educational attainment (e.g., all participants in this study were graduating from college), first-time job seekers possess different advantages and disadvantages based on their social class. For example, our study finds that job seekers of lower social class have lower job search self-efficacy, which, in turn, negatively affects their job search behaviors. It is helpful for vocational counselors to be aware of this finding and to attend to confidence building for individuals of lower social class when warranted. Also, because individuals tend to be surrounded by others who possess similar resources (Wilson, 1987), individuals of lower social class may benefit from additional mentoring from career advising offices.

Our results suggest that job seekers from families of higher social class are more likely to find employment compared with those from lower social classes for reasons that are not necessarily related to their qualifications (e.g., being raised in higher-income family). This suggests that organizations can expand their applicant pools by identifying and assisting job candidates from lower social classes. For example, organizations can utilize hiring methods that may not disproportionately burden job seekers of lower social class, such as phone or online interviews. Furthermore, given that minority job seekers are more likely to belong to a lower social class (Karlsen & Nazroo, 2002), social class might also contribute to race/ethnicity-based adverse impact in selection decisions. Thus, organizations may address the potential influence of social class when designing recruitment and selection procedures, as well as training recruiters, hiring managers, and other employees who implement the procedures.

### Limitations and Future Directions

As is common in job search research, many of the constructs in our study required us to rely on self-reports. Although we took steps to reduce the potential influence of method variance (e.g., by separating the measures by time, by using objective measures whenever possible), the use of self-reports could have contributed

to some of the findings. For example, individuals' social class may influence evaluations of their job search such that job seekers from a lower (higher) social class may be overly critical (optimistic) of their job seeking behaviors. We hope future research can replicate and extend these initial findings using different designs and measures.

Further, our study focused on first-time job seekers. Past research has indicated that relationships among job search antecedents (e.g., personality, education, gender), behaviors, and outcomes can vary based on if individuals are first-time job seekers, job seekers searching for re-employment, or job seekers looking to switch jobs (Kanfer et al., 2001). Future research is needed to examine the consistency of social class's role across different types of job seekers. For instance, perhaps social class plays a more crucial role in determining how individuals' careers begin (e.g., when, where, and if they find employment) but becomes less important as individuals gain experience and connections that benefit subsequent job searches. Further, the effects of social class may depend on the level of employment job seekers pursue. For example, for higher-level positions (e.g., upper management), social class may be important because of its relationship with social capital, whereas for entry-level positions, its relationship with self-efficacy appears to be an important factor.

This study examined two aspects of self-regulation critical to job search success: goal striving (i.e., job search intensity) and goal attainment (i.e., job acceptance rate). However, social class may be related to other aspects of self-regulation, such as goal selection, planning, and reflection (van Hooft et al., 2013). A particularly important aspect of self-regulation involves the ability to persist in behavior over time. Given that job search is a demanding process, replete with challenges and rejections (Wanberg, Basbug, et al., 2012), it would be intriguing for future work to examine whether social class is related to persistence in the job search. Self-regulation is a dynamic, reciprocal process, and future studies could also examine how social class affects self-evaluations, attributions, and self-reactions over time (Zimmerman, 2000).

Additionally, the quality of job seekers' materials (e.g., resumes, cover letters) and actions (e.g., interview etiquette) are important to employment success, as are many other self-regulatory components of job search that contribute to job search quality, such as preparation and planning (van Hooft et al., 2013). Given that social class can affect access to resources such as career services (e.g., Brown & Lent, 2016), social class may be related to the quality of one's job search materials and actions. For instance, past research has found a relationship between social class and speech mannerisms (Bernstein, 1962; Besnier, 1990). Given the importance of communication in interviews—as well as other factors such as greetings, eye contact, and professional dress (Stewart et al., 2008)—belonging to a lower social class may place those applicants at a disadvantage. Further, these disadvantages may be magnified if hiring managers are biased (intentionally or not) against individuals from lower or different social classes than themselves. Thus, future research should focus on identifying and understanding the mechanisms by which social class may affect different stages of the employment process.

It is also important for practitioners and researchers to understand the role of social class in the job search behaviors of currently employed individuals. For example, research needs to determine if social class affects whether and how employed individuals seek

alternative employment or if individuals who belong to a lower social class may constantly search for jobs that could provide better compensation and benefits.

Our post hoc analyses also suggested some interesting relationships that could be explored further in future research. First, although social class had a small, indirect effect on job offers, it did not directly relate to this outcome. Thus, while social class appears to serve a critical role in the ultimate success of individuals' job searching (i.e., job acceptance rate), its relationship with an important indicator of job search progress (i.e., job offers) may be more complex. Perhaps job offers are influenced by more visible characteristics of candidates than by social class. For example, we found that individuals with higher GPAs received more offers. Furthermore, our job offers data accounted for the number of job offers received but not for the quality of offers in terms of factors such as starting salary and other benefits. Taken together, future research is needed to examine how and why social class affects success at the various stages of the job search process.

Additionally, results from our robustness checks revealed some small, but potentially important, differences from our main analyses. First, when control variables were excluded from the SEM, an indirect relationship between social class and job search intensity emerged through perceived social support. This provides an example of the importance of selecting control variables relevant to the study context and comparing results with and without controls (e.g., Spector & Brannick, 2011). Second, when we included all participants regardless of attention checks, the relationship between social class and job search self-efficacy was no longer significant, whereas the indirect relationship between social class and job search intensity through perceived financial hardship became significant. This highlights how the inclusion or exclusion of careless or inattentive respondents can affect study findings and conclusions (e.g., Meade & Craig, 2012).

Finally, although we focused on the role social class plays in finding employment, social class also may affect subsequent outcomes. For example, given our results on job search self-efficacy, and because individuals with lower social class have been shown to have lower self-efficacy in other arenas of life (e.g., MacPhee et al., 2013; Wiederkehr et al., 2015), job seekers of higher social class may be more confident about, or knowledgeable of, their value as employees. Thus, compared with job seekers of lower social class, job seekers of higher social class might be more likely to expect higher salaries and then engage in behaviors to acquire their desired salary (e.g., making counteroffers). Additionally, researchers should examine whether individuals' social class affects posthire outcomes and, if so, by which mechanisms. For example, job seekers of higher social class may be able to wait for better fitting jobs, whereas job seekers of lower social class must accept the first position available (e.g., to alleviate financial hardship). If so, perhaps job seekers of lower social class are more apt to take less ideal jobs, which, in turn, may lead to the negative outcomes due to poor fit (i.e., lower performance and higher turnover; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Further, research has shown that individuals can improve their self-efficacy (e.g., Eden & Aviram, 1993; Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Thus, it may be possible to mitigate some of the detriments of belonging to a lower social class by helping job seekers increase their confidence via training or providing them with the job search tools.

## Conclusion

Our study addresses the critical but unaddressed question of whether social class affects an individual's ability to seek and find employment. In doing so, we extend the job search literature by integrating perspectives of social class into a self-regulatory framework. Our results suggest that social class affects key job search antecedents and behaviors and, ultimately, can affect job seekers' ability to find employment. This is particularly concerning because job seekers of lower social class appear to be at a disadvantage compared with their counterparts of higher social class. We hope future research will build upon these initial findings to examine whether and how social class affects other aspects of job search, as well as other parts of the employment process.

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Received April 23, 2019

Revision received January 14, 2021

Accepted March 6, 2021 ■