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Motivating Job Search Among Discouraged Workers

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Individuals who feel that events in their lives are controlled by fate, luck, chance, or other forces tend to become discouraged more easily than those who feel that events are a result of their own efforts, abilities, or attributes. That unemployed blacks tend to be more like the former than the latter implies that solving the problems of hard-core unemployment requires two different approaches. Discouraged workers of each type, who have ceased their search for jobs during periods of high unemployment (national, regional, local), must be counseled in different ways if they are to be motivated to search for employment.

Many psychological differences among ethnic groups have been reported. It might be hypothesized that when these differences occur, their impact may be felt and observed in the economy. If so, the psychological differences may affect economic policy decisions or the effectiveness of actions taken to solve economic problems.

This research is an attempt to document, by means of economic data, the existence and policy impact of one such psychological difference—the locus of control attribute—and its effect on the economic behavior of the black unemployed population.

It is hypothesized that locus of control differences between blacks and whites as groups can be documented by using economic data gathered from employed, unemployed, and discouraged workers. Discouraged workers are those who have ceased to search for jobs.

Locus of Control and Learned Helplessness

An overwhelming body of research exists that relates the internal-external locus of control attribute in individuals to learned helplessness (Cohen *et al.*, 1976; Hiroto, 1974).

Rotter (1966) developed a definition of the internal-external locus-of-control concept from social learning theory. The locus of control concept describes the degree to which an individual believes that outcomes are contingent upon his or her own behavior. Specifically, internal control refers to individuals who believe that outcomes result from their own

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behavior, capacities, or attributes. External control refers to individuals who believe that outcomes are not under their personal control, but rather are under the control of powerful others, luck, chance, fate, etc. (Joe, 1971). Depending on past experience, a person will have developed a consistent attitude toward either an internal or external locus of control as a source of reinforcement (Lefcourt, 1966).

Learned helplessness has been posited by Seligman (1975), who maintains that the basic cause of helplessness is lack of control over events. When outcomes are not affected by one's attempts to control them, helplessness is learned (Hiroto and Seligman, 1975). This is especially true in situations where there is long-term exposure to uncontrollable outcomes, and increased effort to affect the outcomes is fruitless (Roth and Bootzin, 1974).

When an individual with an external locus of control is placed in a situation of helplessness over a prolonged period of time, learned helplessness is very likely to occur.

Psychological Measurement

Most of the psychologically based studies of locus of control and learned helplessness have used the Rotter Internal-External Locus of Control Scale or some similar psychometric instrument to measure locus of control. The Rotter scale is composed of 23 scored items and six filler items which consist of pairs of statements. One statement is attractive to internals and the other is attractive to externals. Subjects are asked to choose the statement (a or b) with which they agree most strongly. One point is given for each external statement selected. Scores can range from 0 (most internal) to 23 (most external). Rotter (1966) reports test-retest reliability coefficients ranging from .49 to .83 on the basis of various samples and elapsed times ranging from one to two months. He also reports a Kuder-Richardson internal consistency coefficient of .70 for a sample of 400 college students. There is a good deal of evidence to support the convergent validity of the scale with similar measures (Joe, 1971; Lefcourt, 1966, 1976; Rotter, 1966), and its discriminant validity when compared to measures of other constructs (Feather, 1967; Hjelle, 1971; Lefcourt, 1976; Rotter, 1966).

Racial Differences in Locus of Control and Learned Helplessness

Most studies indicate that the black population is more externally oriented than the white population (Battle and Rotter, 1963; Lefcourt and Ladwig, 1965, 1966). In addition, Scott and Phelan (1969) found that unemployed blacks were significantly more external than unemployed whites. In an attempt to understand the underlying causes of these racial differences, Gurin *et al.* (1969) factor-analyzed the responses of 1,695 black students on a locus-of-control questionnaire. They uncovered five factors which they named as follows:

1. Control Ideology referred to the amount of control one believes most people in society possess.
2. Personal Control referred to the amount of control a person believes he possesses.
3. System Modifiability measured the degree to which an individual believes racial discrimination, war, and world affairs can be modified.
4. Race Ideology dealt with the amount of control felt to be possessed by blacks as an ethnic group.
5. Individual/System Blame described the attributing of blame either to oneself or to the social system.

These factors point directly to the existence of a situation of long-term helplessness for many black individuals. The blacks in the sample of Gurin *et al.* reported their beliefs that most individual members of society possess little control, that they personally possess little control, that racial discrimination could be modified only slightly, that blacks as a group possess little control, and that the system was to be blamed for their plight.

It is not necessary to establish a causal relationship between locus of control and learned

helplessness, only their mutual existence. Whether one causes the other is not so important as the fact that they seem to exist together. It could even be argued that the two concepts are mutually supportive.

While there are many psychological studies which document the existence of external locus of control and learned helplessness in the black population, there is little documentation in the economic literature.

Hard-Core Unemployment and Discouragement

Perhaps one of the most helpless situations which many blacks currently face is that of long-term, hard-core unemployment which may lead to discouragement (dropping out of the labor force). This is the economic situation selected for study. A labor force participation model is used in an attempt to document the locus of control attribute. Specifically, a self-reported health variable is utilized.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are tested:

I. A self-reported health limitation is significant in the labor force participation decision, i.e., the decision to seek work.

II. A higher percentage of black males will report health limitations than white males.

III. Black males will react less negatively to having a self-reported health limitation during a year of high unemployment than in a year of relatively low unemployment. In other words, even though blacks continue to report health limitations during a period of high unemployment, health limitations are not reported as often as a reason for not being in the labor force. Also, the number of blacks reporting a health limitation will decline.

The third hypothesis is not an obvious one. During periods of high employment, externally oriented individuals may attempt to justify their own unemployment by attributing their plight to an external cause—health limitations. However, during periods of high unemployment, externals may feel less need to justify being out of the labor force (not looking for employment) because others around them are not employed. In other words, for externals, high unemployment may substitute for a health limitation as the perceived external cause of unemployment. Thus, a self-reported health limitation may be one indication of locus of control.

Concerning hypothesis II, a self-reported health limitation also indicates actual disabilities. There are significant differences in the percentages of white and black males with a health limitation because blacks have a much higher incidence of serious illnesses, such as cardiovascular disease, and are more heavily concentrated in manual labor occupations where disabling accidents are more likely to occur (*Statistical Abstracts*, 1979).

A Labor Force Participation Model

A labor force participation model is used to test the hypotheses. Most research on labor force participation suggests that economic factors, as well as demographic factors, influence the labor force participation decisions of both white and black males (Bowen and Finegan, 1969; Parsons, 1982). The economic factors included in the model are the wage rate, earned or asset income other than wage or salary income, transfer income such as welfare payments, the Social Security replacement ratio (the ratio of potential Social Security benefits to the market wage), the local area unemployment rate, and the market for unskilled labor. The Social Security replacement ratio measures the incentive effects of Social Security disability benefits on labor force participation. Demographic factors included are the education level, urban residence, region, marital status, age, age squared, and health limitation.

LFP = F(ED, SSBW, SMSA, SOUTH, MAR, AGE, AGESQ, XOTHERY, NOTHERY, WAGE, HEALTH, U, UNSKSUPL) (see variable definitions, Table 1).

TABLE 1
Definitions of Variables

LFP	1 = the prime-age male is in the labor force at the time of interview 0 = otherwise
ED	
ELEM	1 = eight to 11 years of education 0 = otherwise
HIGHSC	1 = 12 years of education 0 = otherwise
COLDROP	1 = 13 through 15 years of education 0 = otherwise
COLLEGE	1 = 16 years of education 0 = otherwise
SSBW	Ratio of potential monthly Social Security benefits to the monthly market wage rate.
SMSA	1 = resides in a standard metropolitan statistical area 0 = otherwise
SOUTH ¹	1 = resides in the South 0 = otherwise
MAR	1 = married living with spouse 0 = otherwise
AGE	Continuous variable (range age 25 to 54 years)
AGE SQ	Age variable squared
XOTHERY ²	Summation of the total labor income of his wife, income received from relatives, income received from rent, interest, and dividends and taxable income of others
NOTHERY ²	Actual income equal to the summation of wife's transfer income other than ADC and AFDC payments and welfare payments, other welfare payments of head and wife, Social Security payments of head and wife, total transfer income of others in household, Workmen's Compensation, and miscellaneous transfer
WAGE	The actual reported wage, or the calculated wage, or the imputed wage
HEALTH	1 = health limitation that restricts the person from the type of work that he may do or the amount of work that he may do 0 = otherwise
U	The local area unemployment rate
UNSKSUPL	1 = a surplus of unskilled workers in local area exists 0 = otherwise

¹The South includes the following states: Alabama; Arkansas; Delaware; Washington, D.C.; Florida; Georgia; Kentucky; Louisiana; Maryland; Mississippi; North Carolina; Oklahoma; South Carolina; Tennessee; Texas; Virginia; and West Virginia.

²Income variables are for the past year.

The health limitation variable in this model is a self-reported measure of health. It is a binary variable which takes on the value of one if the health limitation restricts the person from the type or amount of work that he may do and takes on a value of zero otherwise. Since the health limitation variable is a self-reported measure of health, an individual may vary his response with changing environmental conditions.

The dependent variable in the model, labor force participation, is also defined as a zero-one binary variable. Therefore, estimates obtained from using ordinary least squares are inefficient, since the residuals are heteroscedastic. To correct for the clustering of error terms that occurs in the case of a binary dependent variable, logit techniques are utilized in the determination of white and black male labor force participation.

In a logit formulation, P_i represents the probability that an individual will make a certain choice, given knowledge of X_i (the independent variable). The logit function is written as follows:

$$P_i = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-(a + BX)}}$$

The equation is often reexpressed as:

$$\log \frac{P_i}{1 - P_i} = a + bX_i$$

The logit, which is the expression on the left-hand side of the above equation, is the log of the odds.

Data Base

The data base that is used is the *Panel Study of Income Dynamics*, collected by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. This panel study contains microdata collected in interviews with heads of households from 1968 to the present. Panel survey data contain observations on the same individuals recorded at different points in time. A disproportionate sample of families with incomes in 1966 equal to or below twice the federal poverty line at that time was selected to be included in the panel sample. Newly formed families containing 1968 panel family members have been added to the original base each year. In the sample, 49.2 percent of black families had incomes below \$5,000, whereas 24.5 percent of white families had incomes below \$5,000. The logit analysis focuses on the determination of labor force participation for the years 1968, 1971, 1975, and 1978. In 1975, unemployment was significantly higher than the other years in the study.

This study focuses on the participation of black and white males between the ages of 25-54, a subset of the panel survey sample. Males in this age category have traditionally participated in the labor force, earn a significant portion of the total income of the civilian labor force, and have a relatively high productivity level. Hence, the absence of males aged 25 to 54 presents a serious problem to economic and social policy makers.

Results and Discussion

A chi-square test of the logit equations for both white and black males indicates that the independent variables are significant ($p < .05$) in explaining the variance in labor force participation. The results support the hypotheses (see Table 2). Hypothesis I predicted that a self-reported health limitation is significant in the decision to seek work. The health limitation variable is statistically significant ($p < .05$) in all four years. The relationship is negative. Therefore, a male who has a self-reported health limitation that restricts him either from the type or the amount of work that he may do is much less likely to be in the labor force than a male without a limitation.

TABLE 2
Results of Logit Analysis
White Males

Variables	1968	1971	1975	1978
MARRIED	.0669 (.0873)	.2986 (.5131)	-1.1027 (-1.8091)	.8010 (1.7382)
AGE	.0146 (.0800)	.4190 (2.333)*	.2465 (1.5278)	.7010 (3.9636)**
AGESQ	.2749 E-05 (.0012)	-.0049 (-2.174)*	-.3615 E-02 (-1.7583)	-.9305 E-02 (-4.0218)**
XOTHERY	-.3022 E-04 (-.6260)	-.1167E-03 (-2.670)*	.2714 E-04 (.7797)	-.7436 E-05 (-.2912)
NOTHERY	-.1077 E-02 (-7.653)**	-.8481 E-03 (-6.858)**	-.5655 E-03 (-7.7010)**	-.1897 E-04 (-1.1792)
HEALTH	-6.1120 (-7.086)**	-2.2386 (-7.351)**	-3.9386 (-6.0125)**	-3.5960 (-10.216)**
WAGE	-.1147 E-02 (-1.455)	.3156 E-03 (.2941)	.4457 E-02 (5.4903)**	.1565 E-03 (.2798)
ELEM	.1859 (.3135)	.1885 (.4107)	-1.2371 (-1.5067)	.3806 (.5928)
HIGHSC	.0303 (.0578)	.5928 (1.353)	-1.4065 (-1.7677)	-.3608 (-.5792)
COLDROP	-.2109 (-.3587)	-.0948 (-.1802)	-1.7466 (-.0120)*	-1.0055 (-.4512)
COLLEGE	.1040 (.1529)	.5449 (.7231)	-1.9873 (-2.2498)*	.4181 (.5049)
ADVAND	-.0149 (-.0201)	-.4275 (-.7557)	-3.5880 (-4.0722)**	.3981 (.4458)
SSBW	.7142 E-02 (.6077)	.0026 (.1687)	-.1997 E-02 (-.4217)	-.3847 E-02 (-.4774)
SMSA	-.0588 (-.1525)	.1415 (.4646)	-.3123 (-.89301)	-.7286 (2.0540)*
U	-.5457 E-02 (-.0628)	.0660 (.0834)	-.1025 (-1.8919)	-.0711 (-1.0115)
SOUTH	-.2906 (-.7784)	-.6139 (-1.974)*	-0.0829 (-.2402)	-.7207 (-2.2741)
UNSKSUPL		-.3932 (-1.036)	-.0779 (-1.835)	.0248 (.0787)
CONSTANT	3.3847 (.9190)	-4.1322 (-.0104)	2.1739 (.6547)	-7.0822 (-2.0162)*
OBSERVATIONS	1233	1288	1640	1888
CHI SQUARE	87.20	155.93	225.53	187.85

*Critical t = 1.96 (.05 level of significance).

**Critical t = 2.57 (.01 level of significance).
(t ratio in parentheses)

Variables	<i>Black Males</i>			
	1968	1971	1975	1978
MARRIED	-.2197 (-.1732)	-.9171 (-.6058)	-1.0514 (-1.2692)	-.2741 (-.4390)
AGE	.6032 E-02 (.0167)	.5116 (1.4337)	.4326 (2.2788)*	.4489 (2.6108)**
AGESQ	-.1723 E-03 (-.0380)	-.0069 (-1.6476)	-.5425 E-02 (-2.3493)*	-.5864 E-02 (-2.6786)**
XOTHERY	-.2230 E-05 (-.0128)	-.1114 E-03 (-.6651)	-.3368 E-04 (.7787)	.4124 E-04 (1.2579)
NOTHERY	-.3769 E-03 (.9944)	.4441 E-03 (1.4458)	-.5655 E-03 (-6.1785)**	-.3074 E04 (-.5420)
HEALTH	-7.4615 (-3.0710)**	-8.9112 (-2.2708)*	-3.1134 (-4.7459)**	-3.4789 (-9.5048)**
WAGE	-.2458 E02 (-1.2850)	.3063 E-02 (.4774)	.8230 E-02 (4.6200)**	.2125 E-02 (2.034)*
ELEM	-.4484 E-02 (-.0063)	-.9582 (-1.2919)	.7738 (1.8555)	.1106 (.2355)
HIGHSC	-.0389 (-.0460)	.4002 (.2563)	.3563 (.7376)	.2189 (.4171)
COLDROP	.1214 (.0809)	.1872 (.0696)	1.1440 (1.7572)	.0043 (.0066)
COLLEGE	.0688 (.0213)	.1849 (.0044)	3.8229 (.6473)	-.6308 (-.6260)
ADVAND	-.0223 (-1.7361)	1.7848 (.3005)	-1.1368 (-1.0098)	-.4662 (-.3689)
SSBW	.5133 E-02 (.1811)	.0277 (.5034)	.0417 (1.9614)*	.0185 (1.3820)
SMSA	.3508 (.3999)	-.6802 (-.8950)	-.6075 (-1.5504)	-.4257 (-1.1282)
U	.0581 (.2456)	.1326 (.6996)	.0561 (.7435)	-.0499 (-.5924)
SOUTH	-.3229 (-.4468)	-.8167 (-.9446)	-.3295 (-.8681)	.3603 (1.0144)
UNSKSUPL		-.4845 (-.5947)	.3894 (.8882)	.2067 (.6405)
CONSTANT	3.9398 (.5192)	-.2981 (-.0290)	-10.449 (-2.1573)*	-6.8435 (-1.7947)
OBSERVATIONS	508	506	639	842
CHI SQUARE	60.37	103.96	112.32	178.79

*Critical t = 1.96 (.05 level of significance).
 **Critical t = 2.57 (.01 level of significance).
 (t ratio in parentheses)

Hypothesis II predicted that a greater percentage of black males would report health limitations than white males. As expected, a relatively greater percentage of black males report themselves as having a health limitation and, hence, not being able to seek employment (see Table 3). The black male proportion is larger than the white male proportion in all four years. This result was expected due to the higher incidence of serious illnesses among blacks, to the greater number of blacks concentrated in manual labor occupations, and to the more external orientation of the black population. The differences in black and white health limitation means also become more significant over time.

TABLE 3
Health Limitation Variable Means
(Percentage with self-reported health limitation)

	1968	1971 ¹	1975	1978
White males	.0349	.1165	.0165	.0583
Black males	.0472	.1423	.0391	.0843
Differences	-.0123	-.0258*	-.0226**	-.0260**
Total observations	1741	1794	2279	2730

¹The 1971 health limitation variable was not coded in such a way as to make it directly comparable to the other years.

*Difference significant at $p < .10$.

**Difference significant at $p < .05$.

Finally, hypothesis III predicted black males would react less negatively to having self-reported limitations during a period of high unemployment than in a period of relatively low unemployment. The health limitation logit coefficient is less negative for blacks in 1975, a year of relatively high unemployment, than in other years. This is not true for the white health limitation logit coefficient (see Table 2). Also, Table 3 shows that the health limitation proportions were dramatically smaller in the 1975 recession, a year of relatively high unemployment. There are two possible explanations for this behavior. An externally oriented person may feel less need to justify not seeking employment while others around him also are not employed. Hence, he may not report himself as having a health limitation. Whereas, when others around him are employed, the need for a different justification may be greater, the justification being a health limitation. Another possible explanation for this behavior is an added-worker effect. The primary wage earner may become unemployed forcing a male with a reported health limitation to seek employment. However, most cross-sectional studies do not tend to support the added-worker effect (Mincer, 1965).

Implications and Conclusions

These findings imply that the motivation of job search behavior is a problem of two dimensions—the individual and the economy. Figure 1 illustrates the four possible states that the job search problem may assume when the two types of individuals are found in the two types of economic situations. Individuals may be either internals or externals. The economy may be one of high employment or high unemployment. The individual variable is in the realm of the psychologist, the employment variable is in the realm of the economist, but solutions are derived from the integration of both disciplines.

FIGURE 1
Motivating Job Search

<i>Internal</i>			
I N D I	Self-management skills should be provided.	4	1 A problem does not exist.
V I D U A L	An intense system of counseling, support, encouragement, and incentives is necessary.	3	2 Counseling is required to place the external in a job.
<i>External</i>			
High Unemployment			High Employment
		<i>ECONOMY</i>	

Quadrant 1 shows the internal individual in a situation of high employment. There is no problem. The internal believes his own efforts will lead him to employment and it is only a matter of time before his search brings him into contact with a suitable job.

Quadrant 2 finds the external in a high employment economy. Jobs are available but the external is not a self-starter. While the individual's personal needs may motivate him to visit the employment agency where both jobs and "safety net" benefits are available, the counselor must take the initiative to find a suitable job and place the individual in it.

Quadrant 3 is the worst possible combination with which to deal. This is the situation in which the learned helplessness of the external presents a formidable challenge which can only be overcome by an intense system of counseling, support, encouragement, and incentives. Several different approaches have been used to combat learned helplessness. Dweck (1975) was successful in training children to overcome learned helplessness by teaching them to attribute failure to lack of effort. Similarly, Eisenberger *et al.* (1976) and Brickman *et al.* (1976) taught learned industriousness and learned competence. Both groups were able to increase the performance success of their subjects by using basic behavioral modification techniques, e.g., rewarding industriousness and competence.

There is some evidence that job counselors may be able to increase job search efforts in a number of ways. Helping applicants to understand their own strengths, weaknesses, and qualifications, as well as the requirements of various jobs, apparently led to increased and more efficient effort by reducing career indecision and anxiety while focusing attention on jobs which were more likely to be offered (Fry, 1975; Krivatsy and Magoon, 1976; McGowan, 1977; and Mendoner and Siess, 1976).

Maola and Kane (1976) found a computer-based occupational information system to be more effective than counselors in teaching occupational information to disadvantaged students seeking jobs.

Discussion groups have also proven to be effective in teaching individuals to seek, and how to seek, employment (Hollandsworth *et al.* 1977). A related concept, the job-finding club, was used successfully by Azrin *et al.* (1975) to share leads, use a "buddy" system, and lend mutual support in job seeking.

Some form of self-analysis combined with identification of jobs which "fit" the person seems to be inherent in all these approaches. Bowser *et al.* (1974) used self-analysis, identification of industries where abilities might apply, the development of a realistic job objective, resumé preparation, role-playing telephone interviews, a mailing list, and following through on applications to increase the effectiveness of job search. Eighty-three percent of those who completed the program secured employment while the typical rate had been, and continued to be, 7 percent. Unfortunately, data concerning locus of control were not available and participants were self-selected so that it is impossible to tell whether the system worked better or worse for internals than for externals.

In quadrant 4 the internal must seek a job in the difficult situation of high unemployment. Very few jobs are available but the internal is self-motivated to seek employment. A system which provides the information and skills needed to allow the internal to proceed is the only need on the psychological side of the problem. A more pressing need, as in quadrant 3, is the creation of jobs.

At the macroeconomic or system level, the efforts of counselors, trainers, and others may be greatly enhanced in quadrants 3 and 4 by programs designed to create jobs where none exist. Only through the effective integration of both psychological knowledge and economic policy can the job search process be optimized for the learned helpless, external, hard-core unemployed, and discouraged. A significant improvement in the black employment problem may be achieved by integrating intense psychological counseling with job training, assistance in job search, and job creation.

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