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Constructing the search for a job in academia from the perspectives of self-regulated learning strategies and social cognitive career theory

Chuang Wang [a,*], Ya-yu Lo [b], Yaoying Xu [c], Yan Wang [d], Erik Porfeli [a]

[a] *Department of Educational Leadership, College of Education, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 9201 University City Blvd., Charlotte, NC 28223, USA*

[b] *Department of Special Education and Child Development, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA*

[c] *Department of Special Education and Disability Policy, Virginia Commonwealth University, USA*

[d] *Office of Strategic Planning and Research, Milwaukee Area Technical College, USA*

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Abstract

Four international doctoral graduates who found jobs in American academia wrote narratives about their job search process and were interviewed afterwards for this descriptive qualitative study. Retrospective narratives, responses to open-ended questions, and discussions in focus groups supported the integration of the self-regulated learning strategies into the social cognitive career theory to explain the learning aspect of the job search process. The strategies used by the participants during the job search process were identified with most categories of the self-regulated learning strategies in the literature, and the participants' self-oriented cultural perspectives and how these cultural perspectives interacted with perceptions about the job search process in the academic world of work were examined. The findings of this study contribute to the social cognitive career theory by introducing the job candidates' self-regulated learning procedure and could be resources for doctoral students who plan to make a successful transition from students to professors and/or researchers.
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Keywords: Self-regulated learning strategies; Social cognitive career theory; Job search; Autoethnography

* Corresponding author. Fax: +1 704 687 3493.
E-mail address: cwang15@uncc.edu (C. Wang).

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1. Introduction

Securing a faculty position in the academia is an immediate goal of many graduating or graduated doctoral students. While it can be exciting, the job search process is time consuming, demanding, stressful, and challenging. In order to identify essential determinants that lead to a successful job offer in higher education, the fields of psychology and sociology experienced a growth in research exploring the academic job search process in recent years. Collectively, these studies offered useful analyses and implications on two broad aspects of the job search process. First, researchers identified several contributing determinants that were likely to result in an on-campus interview invitation, including evidence of a good fit between the candidate's credentials and the requirements of the department (Demaray, Carlson, & Hodgson, 2003; Sheehan, McDevitt, & Ross, 1998), outstanding research and teaching experiences and agenda (Adams, 2002), and well established scholarly activities (Sheehan & Haselhorst, 1999). Second, researchers suggested that some important factors predicting a job offer included organized, inspiring, and timely delivery of research or teaching presentation during the colloquium (Demaray et al., 2003; Wilbur, 1995) and a well-perceived interpersonal performance throughout the on-campus interview process (Demaray et al., 2003; Mertz & McNeely, 1990). Despite the insights that these studies offered to academic job applicants, the current literature has limitations.

In order to advance our knowledge in bridging the theory and practice gap, we must explore and interpret the job search process from an expanded theoretical model. A few studies have employed a circumscribed theoretical model to systematically and empirically examine the job search process (Cotten, Price, Keeton, Burton, & Wittekind, 2001; Sheehan & Haselhorst, 1999). To our knowledge, however, no studies presented and examined the entire process to address the potential influences of cultural or social contexts on an applicant's job search process in higher education. Research has shown that cultural or social contexts (e.g., cultural values, personal identity) play critical roles in determining how candidates approach each aspect of the job search process to reach a career decision (Adams, Cahill, & Ackerlind, 2005; Gushue, 2006; Schaub & Tokar, 2005). According to career construction theory, individuals in today's turbulent society adapt themselves to the social and cultural environment through self-regulation and play an active role in making meaning out of their experience, creating their work lives, and building their careers (Savickas, 2005). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to describe the learning process of the candidates while securing positions in American academia from the perspectives of self-regulated learning strategies and social cognitive career theory within a particular cultural frame.

2. Theoretical foundation

Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory emphasizes one's competency in exercising self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reaction. According to Bandura (1986), self-observation refers to the deliberate attention to observe one's own behavior. Self-judgment is a comparison between one's performance relative to a standard or goal, whereas self-reaction is the evaluative response to self-judgment. Thus, following personal observations, people make a judgment of their progress toward their self-set goals and then alter their behaviors accordingly to attain these goals.

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) is based on social cognitive theory. SCCT posits that learning influences self-efficacy beliefs and a person's career expectations (see Fig. 1), which in turn influence career goals and choices. The model, therefore, suggests that self-efficacy and outcome expectations mediate the relationship between learning about the world of work and subsequent vocational choices and behaviors. SCCT does not, however, elaborate on the process of learning and mainly attributes individual differences in learning to personal-level factors like ability, culture and sex differences.

SCCT also suggests that human functioning must be understood within human contexts (Nauta & Epperson, 2003). The personal, behavioral, and environmental triadic reciprocal interaction system is employed within SCCT to suggest that self-oriented cognitions and genetic predispositions, the person's unique environment, and behavior interact to yield career decision making and generalized beliefs about the world of work. Moreover, all of the components of the system are engaged in a dynamic change process. For example, if the contextual conditions change (e.g., the requirements to obtain a job become more rigorous), then a person may change their self-oriented thoughts or behaviors to become more aligned with the changing contextual circumstances (e.g., plan to obtain more qualifications or change to a less demanding career aspiration). Our understanding of self-oriented thoughts or behaviors, and more specifically learning, can be enhanced by the self-regulated learning (SRL; Zimmerman, 2000) strategies, which is also an extension of social cognitive theory that has mainly been applied in the field of education.

Self-regulation refers to "self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals" (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 14). A self-regulated learner is one who displays personal initiative, perseverance, and adaptive skills in pursuing his or her self-set goals. As a job seeker learns how to seek and obtain a job, s/he will progress through four stages of development: (a) obser-

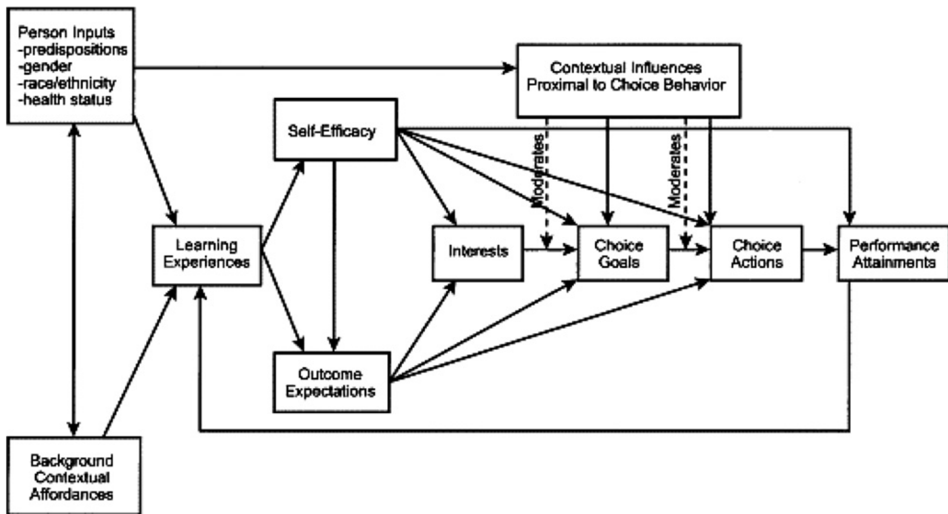

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Fig. 1. Social cognitive career theory. Reprinted from Lent, R.W., Brown, S.D. & Hackett, G. Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *45*, pp. 79–122.

vation of a behavioral model (e.g., a senior graduate who secured a job), (b) imitation of the model with proper feedback (e.g., try to follow the model's procedures and constantly ask for advice), (c) self-control of own performance by independently applying the strategies learned (e.g., adopt the strategies learned from the model to the new situation and develop his or her own strategies), and finally (d) exercising self-regulation by systematically adapting learning strategies to changing personal and contextual situations, e.g., change the strategies by reflecting upon his or her performance in each specific context (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). To become self-regulated, one must also exercise motivation, strategies, self-awareness of performance outcomes, and sensitivity to environmental and social settings. In the context of job search, doctoral graduates are self-motivated to make plans and choose strategies available in order to achieve the self-set goals of securing a particular job. Based on self-awareness of their performance to achieve the goals, the job seekers monitor their goals and strategies according to the dynamic environmental and social settings.

SRL strategies have been used in many fields (e.g., mathematics and reading) and shown to be effective in improving student learning at various educational levels (e.g., Fuchs et al., 2003; Heikkila & Lonka, 2006; Pape & Wang, 2003; Perry, Nordby, & Vandekamp, 2003; Wolters, 1998; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990). Recently, self-regulation was extended to teaching at higher education institutions. Kreber and colleagues (2005), for example, found that self-regulated instructors were more likely to seek peer consultations, solicit student feedback, attend workshops and conferences, read theoretical articles, and experiment with alternative approaches in teaching. Other studies had identified a positive correlation between participation in professional development activities and effective classroom teaching (see Protheroe, 2002; Yates, 2005). In a recent study with Native American adolescents, SRL skills were found to be significantly related to career success but these SRL skills were limited to goal-setting, monitoring academic performance, developing study skills, and library- and literature-research skills (Turner et al., 2006). Despite this extension of self-regulation theory, no research was located that applied this theoretical orientation to the job search process in academia or learning skills that are essential to career construction.

The job search is a part of graduate school students' learning process and is the immediate goal for most, if not all, students. The success of a job search may directly affect a graduate's success during the early career years and securing promotion and tenure. Therefore, it is important to explore the use of SRL strategies in job search process to maximize success. Additionally, given that SCCT and SRL are both derived from social cognitive theory and that they appear to complement one another, we employed SRL to further explore how learning influences the job search process and career construction in a way that has not garnered much attention in the empirical career literature (Schaub & Tokar, 2005). This study, therefore, aimed to employ SRL as a means to elaborate SCCT by further exploring the role of learning in career construction. Specifically, we employed narratives provided by four recent Asian graduates with doctoral degrees from educational fields about how they navigated the U.S. educational system as the data to explore the integration of SRL strategies into the SCCT during the job search process in academia. We examined how self-oriented cognitions about culture interacted with perceptions about the job search process in the academic world of work to arrive at career decisions. Our cases may also serve as vicarious experiences for doctoral students who plan to step into the field of higher education in the United States.

3. Method

The four participants of this study are also co-authors of this article. They were all international graduate students who earned bachelor's and/or master's degrees in their home countries and graduated from education doctoral programs in major U.S. research universities. Two participants graduated in 2003 and had one-year post-doctorate research/teaching experience, and the other two graduated in 2004. They all found faculty/research positions in American universities in 2004, and the job searches were not conducted with a formal theory of the job search process in mind (although in retrospect perhaps such a model would have been helpful). One participant was male, and the other three were females. Three participants originally came from mainland China and had job search and work experience in China. One participant originally came from Taiwan and had no job search or work experience in Taiwan. Three participants came to the United States in order to find a better future and the other one came to join her husband. Two participants had about 8 years of work experience in mainland China but felt that their career in China had reached to a bottleneck and therefore came to the United States to expand work opportunities. With regard to personality, they were all influenced by Confucius philosophy of being humble and deferential but they were also aware of the expectations of U.S. job-seekers to be assertive. Their cultural and personal background as well as previous job search experience in mainland China sometimes served as advantages whereas some other times served as disadvantages in the job search process for the faculty/research positions and making career decisions. The conflict between Eastern and Western cultures was embedded in the narratives.

A collective case study design (Stake, 2000) was used because we put four cases together in order to investigate how we constructed our career while seeking a job in American academia. This design "offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand the readers' experiences" (Merriam, 1988, p. 32). Reflexive autoethnographies were employed to document how we found our current positions, how we adapted ourselves to the dynamic social and cultural contexts, what lessons we had learned, what worked, and what did not work. Retrospective techniques have been found very effective in yielding trustworthy and reliable information in qualitative research (Berney & Blane, 1997; Brown & Schopflocher, 1998; Feldman-Barrett, 1997; Mason, 1997). Later on, we read each other's narration and developed some open-ended questions to include in a survey. Sample survey questions were included in Appendix A. We also set up a conference call to form a focus group and interviewed each other for clarification and further questions regarding cultural perspectives and detailed practices in the job search process. See Appendix B for the semi-structured interview questions. These narrations, responses to survey questions, and interviews served as major sources of data.

The constant comparative method was used for data analysis. This method involves an iterative process of constantly collecting data and comparing each piece of data with others through open coding, axial coding, and matrix development (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Peer debriefing and member checks were used to develop common categories and codes to organize the data in order to recognize links, relationships, and patterns and to make meaning out of the data. The emerged themes were finally linked to the SCCT and SRL strategies.

4. Results and discussion

The common themes emerged from our analyses of the data were compared to the SRL strategies defined by Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986) and the SCCT, specifically, the conceptual framework for understanding vocational interest formation, career choice, and academic/career performance as depicted in Fig. 1 (Lent et al., 1994). To facilitate understanding, we defined each category of SRL strategies that we used in the context of job search in the following sections as we report our findings. While most identified themes fell into existing SRL strategies defined by Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986), some were not applicable due to the unique context of our job search. For example, we combined the Rehearsing and Memorizing strategy with the Reviewing Records strategy into one category: Reviewing and Rehearsing. We also redefined the Environmental Structuring strategy as Mental Environment Structuring to reflect the psychological aspect involved in the job search process.

In the following paragraphs, we discuss how the strategies that we used during the job search process fell into each category of SRL strategies and how the learning process contributes to SCCT in relation to relevant literature. The conflict between our eastern and western cultural expectations is also presented.

4.1. Being self-regulated

The cross-case analyses of our own job search process indicated a common theme: being highly self-regulated. Although we used many strategies consistent with SRL throughout the job search process, we exhibited variability that appeared to hinge on our individual needs and unique situations. This is consistent with previous findings suggesting that mastering a variety of SRL strategies and appropriately applying them in dynamic social and physical settings is much more effective than mechanically applying particular strategies regardless of the context to attain goals (Pape & Wang, 2003). The strategies that we used were identified with the following categories of SRL strategies.

4.1.1. Goal-setting

This category of SRL strategies refers to setting personal goals or sub-goals for job search such as what kind of jobs to do and making a decision on which schools or positions to apply. SCCT hypothesizes that personal inputs such as personality traits and background contextual affordances influence occupationally relevant self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectancies. Self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectancies, in turn, affect vocational interests, occupational goals, choice actions, and performance attainments (Schaub & Tokar, 2005). Therefore, goal setting is the most important first step guiding all of us through the job search process because it reflects how we identify ourselves and how we view ourselves in our future career. While setting goals for our job search, we constructed our career potentials.

Before starting the job search, we carefully analyzed our own credentials including degrees held, areas of expertise, extent of teaching and research experiences, and affiliated universities for the doctorates to determine our job options. Based on our analyses, we felt efficacious because we believed that our credentials afforded us multiple job options. For example, each of us obtained graduate training across two areas of expertise (e.g., research methodology and Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language; applied behavior

analysis and special education; early childhood education/early childhood special education and multicultural education; higher education administration and service learning), which allowed us to find jobs in either or both areas. We had intensive and various levels of research and teaching experiences, which signaled to prospective employers that we held the promise to secure tenure and promotion in research focused universities (Adams, 2002). Being international scholars, we brought a culturally diverse and international perspective appealing to any institution that is committed to diversity. However, all of us were pressured by the constraint of our non-residency status, because such a status demanded that we secure a job within 1 year of graduation in order to legally stay in the United States. Although we focused our efforts on obtaining tenure track positions, our contextual constraints forced us to also devote substantial efforts to formulating alternative plans.

After self-evaluating our credentials and qualifications, each of us was able to more precisely determine our goals for the job search and identify positions to be included in our application process. Despite the slight differences in our goals, tenure-track assistant professor or research associate positions in higher education were the main target of our search. This process of career construction became one of the most important steps in guiding us through the job search process and helped us establish the foundation for our success in finding a job of our choice.

4.1.2. Seeking information

We define seeking information as one's effort to secure further information about (a) the positions or guidance for preparing the application packages, (b) background information about the faculty members of the programs one is applying including their research areas and courses taught, and (c) tips for interviews and content knowledge for job-talk. With the goals set, the next step was to seek out job opportunities. We tended to employ department bulletin boards or program listserves to locate opportunities. The job search websites we used included Academic360, Academic Keys, Chronicle of Higher Education, Higher Ed Jobs, Nation Job, and/or University Job Bank. To further ensure the quality of the programs we wanted to include in our application, we visited websites of universities with nationally recognized programs or researchers in our fields. This comprehensive process of seeking information provided us with a wide range of job options.

We also tended to seek out a great deal of information during the week before a scheduled campus visit. During this time period...

1. We revisited the university/program websites; studied the courses for undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs; and reviewed all of the faculty members' research interests and taught courses including syllabi if available. This was to make sure that we knew well enough the program we were to visit and were able to connect ourselves to the programs.
2. We carefully reviewed the interview agenda and made sure we knew what to expect during the interview.
3. We also contacted the committee chair to inquire questions associated with our visits such as the availability of technology for our presentation, the target audience, the number of handouts needed, etc. if information was not clearly provided.

4.1.3. Seeking social assistance

This strategy includes asking help from the social networks such as friends, advisors, family members, and colleagues throughout the job search process. We asked for help from advisors, other faculty members, and senior graduates. This help included seeking advice about who we wanted to become in our work life, discussing job opportunities, learning more about particular academic departments and universities, and securing letters of recommendation. Although most schools requested three recommendation letters, some of us decided to ask five people as their references. One of us asked professors from several disciplines in order to have at least one reference that was consistent with the discipline of the job opportunity. As job applicants, we tried to make this process as efficient as possible and to minimize intrusion into our advisors and references' lives. For example, we made a list of positions that we planned to apply for and asked the references to send letters together, instead of asking them for every application. Having additional people willing to submit a reference sometimes eased the stress of trying to get all the documents sent in by the deadline. Finally, two of us solicited input from alumni from our programs who successfully obtained positions at higher education institutions concerning the types of questions we might be asked.

4.1.4. Self-evaluation

This category of SRL strategies refers to the evaluation of one's credentials or performance, including the evaluation of one's qualifications after reading job descriptions, the preparation for interviews, and the performance of campus visit/on-site interviews. As mentioned in the goal-setting section, we all evaluated ourselves thoroughly before setting our goals. As part of our credentials, we all had several national conference presentations or publications during our graduate school years, which appears to be the most important criterion to determine who receives an invitation for an on-campus interview (Sheehan & Haselhorst, 1999). The fit between the candidate's credentials and the requirements of the department is a critical determining factor (Demaray et al., 2003; Sheehan et al., 1998). Sensing this, we questioned whether our qualifications met the requirements of the positions. Depending on the number of candidates scheduled for an on-campus interview and the timing of our visit, we tended to receive a response from the department chair (or the search committee chair) within 1 to 4 weeks after our campus visit. Rejections after an on-campus interview were disappointing. For example, one of us received an email from the search committee chair 2 weeks after the first campus visit and was informed that they found someone more qualified. The participant said, "I was very disappointed and could not sleep well for a few days." Moreover, the participant tended to view the rejection as a personal failure by suggesting that the dissertation was not finished at that time and, as a consequence, the on-campus research presentation (also known as a job-talk) was not comprehensive. Later the participant learned that such rejection was a part of the job search process that may have been due to many factors outside of the control of the candidate.

4.1.5. Organizing and transforming

This strategy includes drafting the cover letters, curriculum vitae, and presentation slides, as well as organizing questions to ask the interviewers or preparing responses to potential questions during phone and campus interviews. This was the strategy that we used most frequently throughout the job search process. Upon gathering information

on job openings from various resources, we took several steps to prepare our application packages. First, we updated our curriculum vitae (CV) to ensure that we showed great potential to engage in productive teaching, research, and service missions. One of us included the target job opening on the first page of her CV to make it more personal, "so the reviewers would immediately know I was interested in the specified job, not just scattering letters to hunt for any jobs." Although many universities did not require documents on research agendas or teaching interests (or a personal statement), most of us included them in our application package to support our CVs. One of us believed that this was an important "addendum" to the CV, and another expressed that the time in preparing this addendum was well spent because "it eventually served as a template for preparing other applications," and that "it showcased my qualifications."

Second, we carefully studied the job descriptions for which we were applying and marked down those job duties of which we had credentials. We addressed these job responsibilities and matched them with our credentials in our letters of interest (i.e., cover letter) as well as additional research agendas and teaching interests.

Third, we devoted substantial energy to craft a well-written cover letter. As one of us said, "the cover letter was the most important piece among all the piles of materials we put together." We structured our cover letter so that it clearly expressed the purpose of the letter (i.e., interest in the position) in the first sentence. All of our letters stayed within two pages to concisely address our qualifications and to match what the programs were looking for.

Most interviews began either through an email or a brief phone call by the search committee chair (sometimes a committee member or secretary) to determine if we were still on the market and interested in the position. This was typically followed by a phone interview with the entire search committee through a conference call, lasting 20–35 min. Although the types of questions the committee members asked were commonly shared, we agreed that having some preparation time allowed us to perform with more confidence. As we went through the phone interviews, we organized our thoughts according to the interview questions about research and teaching, and also asked the interviewer(s) about the reappointment/tenure process, collaborative work with the community, teaching load, junior faculty mentoring system, research/grant support for junior faculty, and courses they were looking to fill. Our aim as interviewees was to demonstrate that we were interested in learning more about the demands and opportunities associated with the job and to determine if and to what extent they were consistent with our skills, dispositions, interests, and aspirations.

We also organized and transformed information during the campus visit when the most influential interactions took place and we were able to show that we were approachable, friendly, knowledgeable, and collegial. We also handled well the questions raised during the campus visit. One of us expressed her use of this strategy,

> If for some reason I thought I did not handle a question very well at the moment, for the next question I would try to relate back to what I had just said. Or when I was asked to make comments or questions, I would restate what I had said before, but add more information when my thoughts came back.

Research demonstrates that the formal presentations during a campus visit are the most important determining factor for whether or not the job was offered to the applicant (Demaray et al., 2003; Wilbur, 1995) and we sensed the importance of this activity. All of

us were required to do a 30–60 min research or teaching presentation (or both). Each of us structured our presentation according to the time we were given, the audience, and whether it was a research or teaching presentation. Having been a student in the U.S. classroom for 5 or 6 years and presented in several national conferences, we understood the importance of interactions with the audience during the teaching or research presentations. Therefore, each of us strategically designed some activities to enhance the audience engagement. One of us was asked to teach a 30-min session of a quantitative research course. The participant challenged the audience to think by asking a series of in-depth questions and kept an appropriate pace to make sure everybody followed. The other one intentionally left some blanks on the course notes for the audience to complete in order to simulate active engagement in an actual classroom session. Still another purposefully started her presentation with a mixture of English and Chinese to capture the audience's attention and used group work to promote interactions with the audience. One was prepared to ask some specific technical questions appeared in the research reports by the college in order to initiate professional conversations.

4.1.6. Keeping records and monitoring

This category of SRL strategies refers to one's efforts to keep track of the positions applied as well as the application status, including taking notes during the interviews. As we went through this job search process, we kept all documents received in order to keep track of all the positions we applied for. We also wrote notes or journals of what we learned and marked down the questions we were asked during the phone interviews or campus visits so that we could review and practice them for future job opportunities. Moreover, we took brief notes while being interviewed so that we could address every question adequately.

4.1.7. Reviewing and rehearsing

This category of SRL strategies involves rereading one's presentation slides as well as practicing or rehearsing one's presentations and/or responses to potential interview questions. Although we were all very familiar with our own credentials, we all agreed that reviewing our own application packages was extremely helpful in that it familiarized ourselves with what the search committee would see and therefore could prepare ourselves for further elaboration. One of us drafted questions that committee members could pose during an interview and then rehearsed the answers many times in order to be more fluent if these questions were raised during the interview process.

4.1.8. Mental environment structuring

One may construct his or her psychological state (mental environment) through self-initiated efforts to keep calm and relaxed in a stressful situation throughout the job search process. Finding a job in American academia can be penetratingly stressful, challenging, and sometimes even unpleasant for many doctoral graduates (Sheehan & Haselhorst, 1999). The job search process may be even more stressful than the entire course of study in a doctoral program for some students because much of the candidate selection process is outside of our control and varies a great deal across search committees. Moreover, the job search process ends with a pass or fail outcome while success in graduate school is more incremental and transparent in nature. Therefore, monitoring our emotions and psychological well-being during the job search was also critical.

We found the waiting period to be the most stressful period of the job search process. Once the application packages were sent off, we tried to reduce this job-related stress by focusing on our dissertation work, searching for other positions, or sharing experiences with other students who were also looking for job positions. One of us said,

> I kept track of the dates when my application packages were sent and started to get nervous if I did not receive a response after one or two months. I kept checking my emails and voice mails hoping to hear something from the search committee members. Sometimes the atmosphere in my family became really tense when my spouse asked me about my progress. I got more stressful in this situation because it reminded me that our whole family's future relied on my success. Both my spouse and I gave up our jobs in China when I came to the U.S. to pursue a doctorate degree. Although it would not be difficult for us to find jobs in China, we would have to tell our friends and family members that we failed to find a job in America, which is considered disgraceful in China. Soon afterwards, my spouse figured out my mood, and we rarely talked about this in my family anymore in order to ease out some of my pressure.

The above narrative suggested that one's job search process could influence the quality of family life and marriage and bring dramatic changes to the job seeker's family. This is especially true for international graduates who only have 1 year to secure a job in order to legally stay in the United States.

When our applications unluckily did not make it through the first round of evaluation by the search committee, we received official letters from the search committee chair indicating rejection. Perhaps this was the first rejection we had to experience during the job search process. Although we all viewed rejection as an indication of the lack of our credentials (e.g., no K-12 teaching experience in the United States and English was not our native language) and our self-efficacy beliefs to secure similar positions were lowered to some extent, we also felt it hard to accept rejection based on our own cultural experience. When two of us graduated from a university in China over 15 years ago, we were both "given" jobs and did not go through the job search process. We had very limited opportunities to construct our career because we were assigned to our occupations on the basis of our tested talents and training and the demands of the labor market. Although we did not have a chance to construct our careers, we found meaning in our work by viewing it as meaningful service to our community and as a way of repaying the government for our education, which was free of charge. In China, we never worried about becoming unemployed. "Rejection was a new concept and it did create negative feelings toward myself and others." Nonetheless, we tended to further concentrate our efforts on work, family, and recreational pursuits (e.g., going to a movie so that we could stop thinking about our job application).

4.2. The conflict between two cultures and dual identity

Whether by chance or design we all met somebody from Asia (either a graduate student or a faculty member) during all of our campus visits. We tended to interpret these meetings as being by design and as sending a message that the program cared about us and appreciated diversity. We also felt that our ethnicity background and non-native speaker identity would not put us in a disadvantaged position. Being aware of the advantages and disadvantages as candidates from a non-mainstream culture, we were concerned about

our interpersonal skills, which also seem to be a determining factor for the job applicant (Demaray et al., 2003; Mertz & McNeely, 1990). We tried to show the committee that we were approachable, friendly, and collegial because we knew that the department anticipated a 30–35 years of commitment when it offered a tenure-track position to a candidate (Thomas, 2003). We wanted the committee members to know that we were not difficult to work with as international graduates. Therefore, our job search was driven more by adaptation to the American environment rather than by maturation of inner structures (Savickas, 2005).

Although we were aware of the American culture and had been exposed to this culture for at least 5 years, we still struggled between our Chinese culture and the American culture during the job search process. The typical situation when these two cultures collided was when we received multiple job offers. It turned out that only one of us negotiated with the department about salaries and benefits. One of us said that s/he knew that negotiation was possible particularly given that the participant received two offers within a week, but the participant's Chinese identity hindered negotiation because such a response could be interpreted as being greedy. Another one of us had a dramatic ending of her job search. She received three tenure-track offers but ended up not going anywhere! She stayed at the university where she just earned her Ph.D. and became a visiting professor. The reason was that one faculty member in her program was promoted to a senior administrator and the Chair asked her to consider staying as a visiting professor to teach the classes left by that faculty member. Her rationale to stay reflected her Chinese identity as well.

> It was MY school where I earned my master's and doctoral degrees, where I received all the financial, intellectual, and emotional supports. I was one of their proud children and products. I asked myself, 'How can you refuse your school when they need you? You can not betray these people because they are your family.' As a young child in China, I was taught to put others' interests above my own. Now after I had lived in this country [the United States] for 5 years and received education from the same school, I considered that school as my second home. At this home, I experienced happiness and sadness, excitement and frustration, laughs and tears. Sometimes we might complain about things at home, we might even fight each other like siblings, but it did not change how we feel about our home. That was how I felt when I had to make a choice between MY school and other equally wonderful schools.

4.3. The learning process of SCCT

Although we approached the job search study from different perspectives compared with previous research, some conclusions were common. Our cultural identity, learning and work experience, interest, and the social context all influenced our self-efficacy to secure positions in American academia and our decision making process (including choosing goals and accepting offers). We constantly adapted ourselves to the demanding environment in American academia. This provided evidence to support the dynamic nature of the SCCT (Lent et al., 1994) and the theory of career construction (Savickas, 2005). Furthermore, our data indicated that the career construction process is dynamic and also a learning process while job candidates keep adjusting their career choice, self-efficacy, outcome expectancy based upon the performance attainment and the social/cultural con-

text. We used SRL strategies such as self-evaluation, seeking information, seeking social assistance to help us learn how to set realistic goals. We also used SRL strategies such as organizing and transforming, keeping records and monitoring, reviewing and rehearsing, and mental environment structuring to help us learn to be well prepared in order to reach our career goals or performance attainment.

4.4. Limitations

Although this study provided the linkage between SCCT and SRL strategies, the study has limitations. First, we discussed the job search process and our use of SRL strategies from the perspectives of four international doctoral graduates. Although we shared many similarities throughout this process, our experiences were individual and case specific. Readers should be cautious in applying these strategies and adjust them appropriately in their own situations. Second, despite the fact that each of us successfully found a job we liked by using the SRL strategies, our analyses were retrospective and no data were available to demonstrate the essential role of each SRL strategy in each of the job search steps.

4.5. Significance and implications for future research

Our findings suggested that being self-regulated and consistently making adjustments of the plans were beneficial to reach our goals. More importantly, we showed that getting a job we wanted was not entirely in the hands of someone else. Instead, a job applicant may construct his or her career through adaptation to the environment and achieve the goal of finding a job successfully through the application of various SRL strategies. Future job applicants in American academia may choose to use some of these SRL strategies identified in our cases and apply them according to their particular situations. Moreover, by incorporating the cultural aspect of job search in our data analysis, we extend the SCCT application by attempting to address how issues of culture and social contexts may influence our career construction process including decision-making, career-related self-efficacy, the balance between self and society, and emotions.

This study contributed to research and practice devoted to career construction and the job search process in two ways. First, previous research suggests that SCCT has not emphasized the learning aspect of career exploration (Schaub & Tokar, 2005). The current study extends this area by exploring the utility of employing the SRL strategies to study how students learned about the world of work during the job search process. Second, this study enriches the literature devoted to those graduate students aspiring to enter academic settings by employing an autoethnography approach, which provides a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of how the process unfolds rather than the typical piecemeal suggestions offered in the existing literature.

To extend the existing literature, two areas are especially warranted for future research. First, research should continue to examine the role of SRL strategies in the job search process as well as to determine how each specific strategy contributes to successful job search outcomes. More studies are also needed with regard to the application of SRL strategies and SCCT in the job search process across different disciplines and fields. Second, a valid instrument to measure applicants' self-regulation is desirable. With this instrument, researchers may examine the attributive effects of self-regulation, along with other variables of interest (e.g., match between credentials and program expectations, interpersonal

skills), to the success of landing a job in American academe using statistical techniques to verify the SCCT model (Lent et al., 1994).

Appendix A

Sample survey questions

1. What were the three most important things you considered when you looked for job opportunities and read job postings?
2. What were the three most important things on your mind when you were on a campus visit for a job interview? Please justify each of the things you identified.
3. If you were to describe yourself in cultural terms, how would you describe yourself?
4. Given how you described yourself in cultural terms,
   (a) How did your culture influence your job search process (from the steps of goal-setting to accepting/rejecting an offer)?
   (b) How are you similar to and different from the culture in your current work environment?
5. Did any of the institutions you visited provide an opportunity for you to meet with another faculty/student with a similar cultural orientation to yours? If so, what impact did this person have on you in terms of your final decision to accept or reject an offer?
6. If you were rejected for a job, how did you interpret rejection? What did it mean to you to be rejected? How might your culture play a role in your interpretation of rejection?
7. Did you experience discrimination when you were searching for a job? If yes, please describe.
8. How would you describe the potential impacts of your cultural orientation on the search committee's decision on whether or not they would offer you a job?

Appendix B

Sample interview questions

1. Would you please compare the job search process in China/Taiwan with the same process in the United States? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the job search process in China and the United States?
   (a) What are the top three things you considered when finding a good job in China/Taiwan?
   (b) What are the top three things you considered when finding a good job in the United States?
2. How did your understanding of the job seeking process in China/Taiwan help or hinder you when you were looking for jobs in the United States? How did your understanding of the job seeking process in the United States help or hinder you when you were looking for jobs in the United States?
3. The U.S. system requires candidates to promote/sell themselves in the public while the Chinese system requires candidates to be humble and wait until others recognize their talents. How do you feel to be required by the U.S. system to be assertive while the culture requires you to be humble?

4. What pressures (e.g., immigration and legal status) did you face when you were graduating and looking for a job? What impact did this pressure have on your career choice and job search process? What family pressure or pressure from your friends did you face when you were graduating and looking for a job? What impact did this pressure have on your career choice and job search process?
5. In the job search process, to what extent did you think of your personal interest and to what extent did you think of the interest of your institution that you were leaving and the one you wished to join?
6. What did you do to construct the social environment during the interview and presentation? How did you interpret the environment when it happend?
7. Who helped you during the job search process? How did your culture and national identity influence whom you chose to ask for help from?
8. Did you have a Plan B if you could not find the kind of the job that reflected what you were doing in the United States?

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