

● Predicting self-esteem during unemployment: the effect of gender, financial deprivation, alternate roles, and social support

Lea E. Waters
Kathleen A. Moore

Two hundred and one unemployed men and women participated in a cross-sectional study that assessed self-esteem, financial deprivation, number of alternate roles, and use of social support. Financial deprivation, alternate roles, and social support each had a main effect on self-esteem. In addition, these variables interacted with gender to affect self-esteem. Specifically, financial deprivation had a greater negative association with self-esteem in men as compared with women. In contrast, alternate roles and social support had a stronger positive relationship to self-esteem in women than in men. The incorporation of these findings into intervention programs for unemployed persons is discussed.

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The negative impact of unemployment on psychological health has a long research history. Arguably one of the most damaging, and certainly one of the most commonly reported, of all the psychological consequences of unemployment is a loss of self-esteem (Sheeran & Abraham, 1994; Waters, 2000; Winefield, Tiggemann, & Winefield, 1992). Among others, Amundson and Borgen (1987) and Amundson (1994) have characterized unemployment as an experience that leads to self-doubt and an internal struggle with confidence. The aim of the current study was to examine the contribution of three major factors (financial status, alternate roles, and social support) to the self-esteem of people who were unemployed. This study also examined the important question of whether gender had a differentiated effect on the relationship between these three factors and self-esteem.

Rosenberg (1965) defined self-esteem as "the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself or herself: it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval towards oneself" (p. 5). Most studies concerned with the effect of unemployment on self-esteem have assessed self-esteem as a global construct, often using Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Inventory (e.g., Patton & Noller, 1984; Shamir, 1986; Winefield, Tiggemann, & Winefield, 1992). Cross-

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Lea E. Waters and Kathleen A. Moore, Deakin University, Melbourne campus, Australia. Lea E. Waters is now at The University of Melbourne. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Lea E. Waters, Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Commerce, The University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria 3101, Australia (e-mail: l.waters@unimelb.edu.au).

sectional and longitudinal research using a global measure of self-esteem has repeatedly demonstrated that unemployed people display lower levels of self-esteem than do employed people (Feather & O'Brien, 1986; Gurney, 1980; Patton & Noller, 1990; Perfetti & Bingham, 1983; Shams & Jackson, 1994).

However, there is still more to be learned about the relationship between unemployment and self-esteem, and researchers have recently turned attention to factors that influence this relationship. Along this line, many authors have suggested that gender may be an important factor. Yet, the relative infancy of studies concerned with gender-based differences during unemployment means that there is still considerable debate about whether gender does influence psychological reaction to unemployment (Kulik, 2001; Muller, 1995). Although there is some evidence to show that gender does not influence the relationship between unemployment and psychological reaction (e.g., Heubeck, Taush, & Mayer, 1995; Leana & Feldman, 1991), the bulk of evidence suggests that gender is an important factor in psychological reaction to unemployment. More particularly, the results often show that during unemployment, men report poorer psychological health than do women (Najam, Ashraf, Naareen, Bashir, & Khan, 1996). For example, Shamir (1985) found that unemployed men experienced lower morale and higher anxiety than did unemployed women. Similarly, Muller, Hicks, and Winocur (1993) found that unemployed men had lower vigor (i.e., energy), higher distress, higher tension, and higher fatigue than did unemployed women. In a longitudinal test of the way gender interacted with employment status, Lahelmo (1992) found that employed men who had lost their job reacted more negatively to unemployment (as shown through a greater change in General Health Questionnaire score) than did working women who became unemployed. The aforementioned research findings suggest that there is a gender effect in psychological reactions to unemployment.

Muller (1995) and Fielden and Davidson (1999) have argued that this gender effect has not been adequately considered in the design of many labor market programs, which typically follow a traditional male model of work. (*Author's Note.* In Australia, labor market programs include job search programs as well as work-based training and job creation schemes.) Muller (1995) also argued that future policy responses need to be broadened to meet the needs of unemployed women as well as unemployed men. However, before implementing such strategies, research is needed to examine the factors that interact with gender to influence psychological reaction. The current study considers three such factors: financial deprivation, alternate roles, and social support.

An early popular explanation for why women respond more favorably to unemployment than do men was that they were less financially deprived than men during unemployment (Komarovsky, 1940). This argument was based on the notion that women were not the breadwinners and worked only for "hobby spending" or "pin money" (Kauffman & Feters, 1980; Rosenfeld & Spenner, 1988). Such an explanation is outdated given the rise in the number of women entering full-time employment, single career women, dual-breadwinner relationships, and single parent families (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2001; Lewis, 1992; Whitehouse, 1990). Research into the career aspirations and work attitudes of women has shown that women are no longer marginal employees (Rosenfeld & Spenner, 1988; Sverko &

Super, 1995). It is, expected, therefore, that both genders will experience financial deprivation during unemployment. However, despite these gender-shifts in labor market participation and career aspirations, research shows that men, on average, still earn higher wages than women do (ABS, 2001; Whitehouse, 1990). As such, the explanation that men respond less favorably to unemployment than women do because they are relatively more financially deprived may still apply. It is, therefore, predicted that financial deprivation will be a factor that interacts with gender to affect self-esteem during unemployment.

STUDY HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1: *The negative relationship between financial deprivation and self-esteem will be stronger in men than in women.*

Loss of role identity has been shown to be a major contributor to lowered self-esteem during unemployment (Bolton & Oatley, 1987). Hence, one factor that may reduce the impact of unemployment on self-esteem is the availability of alternate non-employment-related roles (Dilnot & Kell, 1988; Fielden & Davidson, 1999). Jahoda (1982) and Warr and Parry (1982) argued that roles such as spouse, parent, and community worker can be used as psychological compensations for the loss of one's role as employee. Although the use of alternate roles may help to protect the identity of both men and women, social attitudes and patterns have allowed women to develop a greater range of non-employment-related roles (Alvesson, 1998; Ely, 1995; Levine, 1997; Rosenfeld & Spenner, 1988). Underlid's (1996) results provided support for the idea that the alternate role hypothesis is more relevant to women. In Underlid's study, unemployed women were more likely than were unemployed men to turn to the domestic role as a way to remain active during unemployment. It must be stated clearly at this point that we are not suggesting that roles such as parent and spouse should be more important to women than to men nor that the role of employee should be more important to men than to women. Rather, we propose that in the temporary absence of one's role of employee, it may be more socially acceptable for women than it is for men to turn toward these roles for a sense of purpose and esteem. Given this notion, it is suggested that alternate roles will have a greater influence on the self-esteem of women than on that of men during unemployment.

Hypothesis 2: *The positive relationship between alternate roles and self-esteem will be stronger in women than in men.*

Social support is a third factor that has been shown to positively relate to self-esteem during unemployment (Broomhall & Winefield, 1990; Jackson, 1988; Liem & Liem, 1988; Viinamaki, Koskela, Niskanen, Arnkill, & Tikkaken, 1993). Quick, Nelson, Matuszek, Whittington, and Quick (1996) defined social support as "the provision of positive psychological, emotional, and material resources to a person through interpersonal relationships" (p. 269). Jones (1991) argued that social support helps to promote a sense of self-worth because it makes people feel valued despite their lack of paid work. Gist and Mitchell (1992) and Latack, Kinicki, and Prussia (1995) reasoned that people with strong social support are likely to appraise unem-

ployment as less stressful than will those with limited or weak support and are able, therefore, to maintain a sense of control and confidence. To date, research has not considered the interaction of social support with gender when trying to explain why the self-esteem of unemployed men may be lower than that of unemployed women. We suggest that, although social support may be a resource that positively influences self-esteem for both men and women, it will have a greater influence on the self-esteem of women. Certainly, past research in unemployment has found that women are typically more willing than are men to use or mobilize their social support networks as a protective factor during unemployment (Leana & Feldman, 1991; Mallinckrodt & Fretz, 1988; Phelps & Mason, 1991). Hence, it is possible that one reason women may not experience the same degree of loss in self-esteem during unemployment as men do is because they are more likely to protect themselves with support from other people.

Hypothesis 3: The impact of social support on self-esteem will have a stronger association with self-esteem in women as compared with men.

In summary, although financial deprivation, alternate roles, and social support are three factors that have been associated with self-esteem in past research, we suggest that the impact of these factors on self-esteem may be differentiated by gender. An examination of the interaction between these factors and gender on self-esteem will provide a better understanding of the way men and women react to unemployment and will help to inform future policy responses so that they meet gender-specific needs. Although the interaction between gender and financial deprivation (Shamir, 1985) and gender and alternate roles (Underlid, 1996) has been tested to a limited degree, the interaction between gender and social support has not been systematically investigated in the empirical research. Moreover, the research to date has not conducted an analysis that considers the interaction of gender with financial deprivation, alternate roles, and social support *within* the same data set. Such an analysis would be beneficial, because it would allow an evaluation of the relative strength of each interaction in explaining gender reactions to unemployment.

METHOD

Participants

Participants in this study were 201 unemployed people (women = 100, men = 101). The mode for the duration of unemployment was 3 months. Participants were recruited through the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES), a national government service that provided referrals to jobs and/or individually tailored case management for job seekers through network offices throughout Australia.

Staff at the CES used their database to restrict the current sample to participants who had been unemployed for at least 6 weeks in order to overcome possible short-term confoundings: either extreme distress or apathy upon initially experiencing unemployment (Kulik, 2001; Patton & Noller, 1990; Rowley & Feather, 1987; Shamir, 1986). The current study also screened out unemployed youth (ABS classifies un-

employed youth as people under the age of 22) in order to focus on an adult sample. The age restriction was imposed because numerous authors have found that youth and adults react differently to unemployment (Broomhall & Winefield, 1990; Rowley & Feather, 1987; Warr & Jackson, 1985). The database was also used to target people from the same regional area (the southern area of Melbourne, Victoria) in the hope of avoiding any geographical influences, which, in broad terms, might be related to types of occupations and socioeconomic status. Once people meeting these exclusionary criteria were targeted, a random sample of 250 female clients and 250 male clients was generated from the rest of the database.

Two hundred and one people participated in the study (201/500). The 40% response rate is similar to that obtained with other samples of those who are unemployed in studies by Leana and Feldman (1990, 1995) and Wanberg, Watt, and Rumsey (1996). Those in the final sample had a mean age of 32.41 ($SD = 10.18$ years). Educational level was quite high in this sample (63% were tertiary educated, i.e., they held college degrees and tertiary apprenticeships/technical and further education), and the majority of participants (60%) had held white-collar positions when they had been employed.

METHODS

Independent Variables

Demographics. Respondents were asked to record their age, gender, marital status, occupational status, and educational level.

Financial deprivation. Appraisal of financial deprivation was assessed using two items developed by Waters and Moore (2001). Item 1 states, "I feel that I cannot provide for the material necessities of life" and is answered along a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Item 2 states, "I do not have enough money to participate in meaningful leisure activities" and is answered along a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. These items were designed to test whether spending was curtailed for essential items (Item 1) and nonessential items (Item 2; e.g., social activities). A higher score indicated greater financial deprivation.

Alternate roles. Participants were provided with a list of 14 possible roles (parent, spouse, lover, carer, student, child, in-law, relative, friend, neighbor, churchgoer, volunteer, hobbyist, and sportsperson) and were asked to check off each role that they fulfilled. The roles that were checked were then totaled so that a higher score indicated a greater number of roles. This procedure followed that of Shamir (1986).

Use of social support. The Deakin Coping Scale (Moore, Greenglass, & Burrows, in press) was used to assess the degree to which men and women used social support during unemployment. A 9-item scale assessed the degree to which people asked for advice and support from others. Example of items are "Talked to someone about how I was feeling" and "Asked someone I respected for advice." Answers are recorded along a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 = *never* to 5 = *always*. A higher score reflected a greater use of social support (scores ranged

from 9 to 45). Moore et al. reported strong internal reliability for this scale ($\alpha = .88$). In the current study, internal reliability was also strong ($\alpha = .86$).

Dependent Variable

The Global Self-Worth subscale from Messer and Harter's (1986) Adult Self-Perception Profile (ASPP) was used to assess self-esteem. This subscale is based on Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Inventory but was adapted by Messer and Harter for an adult population. It consists of six items that relate to general feelings about self-worth, such as "I am happy being the way I am." Items are answered on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *not true for me* to 4 = *really true for me*. Higher scores reflect a more positive self-esteem (range 6 to 24). Messer and Harter reported internal reliability at $\alpha = .92$. In the present study, α was .78.

Open-Ended Question

The final page of the questionnaire invited participants to make comments about their experiences with unemployment. Thirty-eight percent of participants used this section to make comment. A selection of comments made by participants is incorporated into the Discussion section of this article.

Procedure

Following identification of the sampling frame, staff at the CES distributed a brief, clearly stated summary of the purpose of the study and an invitation to participate in the study to 500 people. Recipients interested in participating in the study were asked to collect a questionnaire from the local CES office. The method of recruiting unemployed people through the CES allowed us to achieve a reasonably equal gender distribution, to screen out unemployed youth, to screen out newly unemployed people, and to recruit people from the same regional area, therefore controlling for a number of confounding variables. However, it must be recognized that by approaching only unemployed people who were officially registered with the CES, the generalizability of the current sample to unregistered jobless people may be somewhat limited. For example, it may be that jobless people who are not officially registered as unemployed (hidden unemployed) are less financially needy than people who are officially registered. It is also possible that people who do not register themselves as officially unemployed are less concerned about their jobless state and about finding work than people who are registered. However, given these factors, it is unlikely that these hidden unemployed would have participated in the current study even if different recruitment methods were used (e.g., newspaper advertising).

Respondents completed all questionnaires on their own time and returned them to us in a postage-paid return-addressed envelope. Participants received a \$10 payment and a letter of appreciation after they returned the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Gender Differences and Tests of Relationships

Given that the study was concerned with gender comparisons, preliminary analysis was required to determine whether men and women differed on factors other than

the independent and dependent variables. Chi-square analyses were used to examine the associations between gender and educational level, $\chi^2(1) = 7.86, p < .05$; marital status, $\chi^2(1) = .11, p > .05$; and occupational status, $\chi^2(1) = 3.76, p > .05$ (see Table 1). An independent *t* test revealed that men were significantly older than the women, $t(196) = 3.48, p < .05$. These results suggest that age (men are older than women) and educational level (more women held college degrees or tertiary apprenticeships than did men) need to be considered as covariates.

A multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was used to compare men and women on their levels of self-esteem, financial deprivation, number of alternate roles, and use of social support. Age and educational status were entered as covariates. Pillai's criterion revealed an overall significant difference between men and women on the dependent variables, $F(4, 158) = 19.95, p < .001$. Univariate tests revealed that unemployed women reported significantly higher levels of self-esteem, $F(1, 161) = 4.46, p < .05$; greater financial deprivation, $F(1, 161) = 8.26, p < .01$; and a higher number of alternate roles, $F(1, 161) = 41.61, p < .001$. Neither of the covariates revealed a significant effect: age, $F(4, 158) = 1.41, p > .05$; educational level, $F(4, 158) = 2.18, p > .05$.

The interrelationships between gender (male = 0, female = 1), self-esteem, financial deprivation, alternate roles, use of social support, and several demographic characteristics (educational level, marital status, occupational status, and age) were examined using Spearman's correlation (see Table 1). A positive relationship was found between gender (being female) and self-esteem, financial deprivation, number of alternate roles, and use of social support. Self-esteem was positively related to the number of alternate roles and use of social support, whereas it was negatively related to financial deprivation.

Tests of the Hypotheses

Multiple regression analyses were used to test the hypotheses of this study. The predictor variables were gender, financial deprivation, number of alternate roles, and use of social support. The dependent variable was self-esteem. Two-way interaction terms among these predictor variables were also entered into the regression (see Table 2). Given the nonsignificance of age and educational level in the MANCOVA, these covariates were not included in the regression analysis.

Examination of the assumptions indicated that the interaction terms in the models were multicollinear, as would be expected by the communality of gender. Multicollinearity was controlled for by using a center score approach whereby the data were transformed, that is centered, into deviation scores with means equal to zero (Aiken & West, 1991; Jaccard, Turrissi, & Wan, 1990). After these linear transformations, examination of the variance inflation factor scores and tolerance scores showed acceptable changes in collinearity, and the models were rerun using the centered scores.

Fifty percent of the variance in self-esteem was explained by the factors in the regression, $F(7, 165) = 23.713, p < .001$. As shown in Table 2, self-esteem was nega-

TABLE 2
Variables Predicting Self-Esteem

Variable	B	β	t	Sig.
Main effects				
(Constant)	15.54		12.32	.000
Gender	0.32	.05	0.75	.455
Financial deprivation	-0.91	-.46	-7.18	.000
Number of alternate roles	0.30	.31	4.67	.000
Use of social support	6.78	.14	2.35	.020
Two-way interactions				
Gender $\times$ Financial Deprivation	1.15	.29	5.05	.000
Gender $\times$ Number of Alternate Roles	0.12	.17	3.01	.003
Gender $\times$ Use of Social Support	0.14	.13	2.15	.033

Note. $N = 178$. $R = .70$. $R^2 = .50$. Adjusted $R^2 = .47$.

tively predicted by financial deprivation, and it was positively predicted by the number of alternate roles adopted and social support. There were significant two-way interactions between gender and financial deprivation, gender and number of alternate roles, and gender and social support. These results indicate that in addition to the main effects of financial deprivation, the number of alternate roles, and social support on self-esteem, the effect of these variables is also conditional upon gender.

The two-way interactions were probed following procedures recommended by Cohen and Cohen (1983). Median splits were used to divide the respective samples into those high and those low on financial deprivation, the number of alternate roles, and the use of social support. The interaction terms were then plotted. Figure 1 illustrates the effect of gender on the relationship between financial deprivation and self-esteem. The figure suggests that although having a high level of financial deprivation is associated with low self-esteem in both genders, it has a stronger impact on self-esteem for those in the sample of men. Post hoc probing of the slopes portrayed in Figure 1 confirmed the negative regression of financial deprivation on self-esteem for both genders. Moreover, the magnitude of the slope was stronger for men ($B = -1.19$) than it was for women ($B = -.271$). Chow's F test showed that the difference between the two subgroups was statistically significant, $F(1, 199) = 21.96$, $p < .001$. These results provide support for Hypothesis 1.

Figure 2 illustrates the interaction between gender and number of alternate roles and self-esteem. This figure shows that women who had a high number of alternate roles also reported higher levels of self-esteem as compared with women classified as low in use of social support. This trend was not as marked in the sample of men, for which higher use of alternate roles was not as strongly associated with higher levels of self-esteem. The regression slopes revealed that a high number of alternate roles had a greater effect on the self-esteem of women ($B = 6.77$) than it did on that of men ($B = 3.82$). Chow's F test showed that the difference between the two subgroups was statistically significant, $F(1, 176) = 5.17$, $p < .001$. These results provide support for Hypothesis 2.

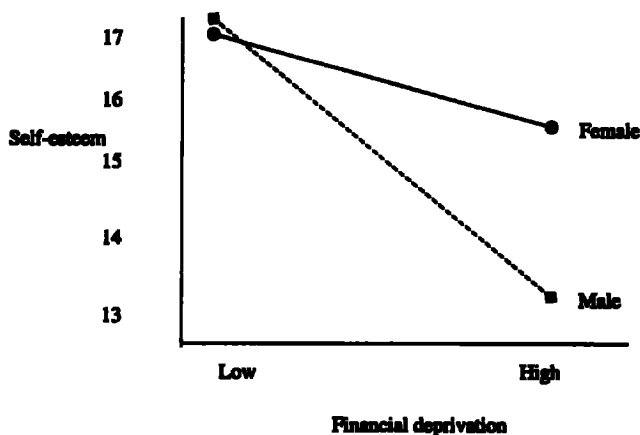


FIGURE 1

Interactive Effects of Gender and Financial Deprivation on Self-Esteem

Figure 3 illustrates the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between use of social support and self-esteem. The figure suggests that a higher use of social support is positively related to self-esteem in both genders. However, the relationship between social support and self-esteem was stronger in the sample of women. Although the self-esteem of men did not change dramatically between high and low use of social support, moving from low to high use of social support for women had a marked effect on self-esteem. Post hoc probing of the slopes confirmed the posi-

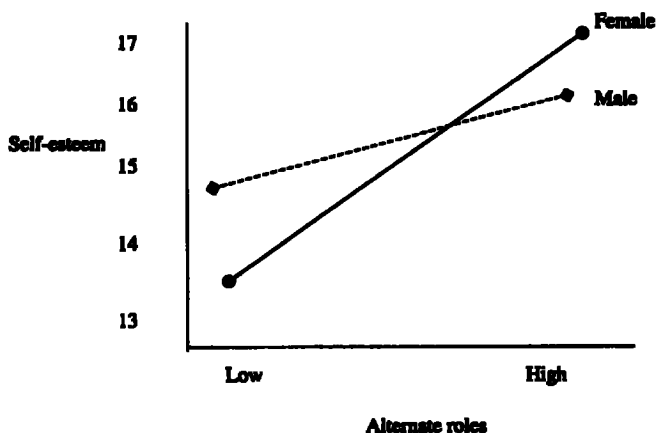


FIGURE 2

Interactive Effects of Gender and Alternate Roles on Self-Esteem

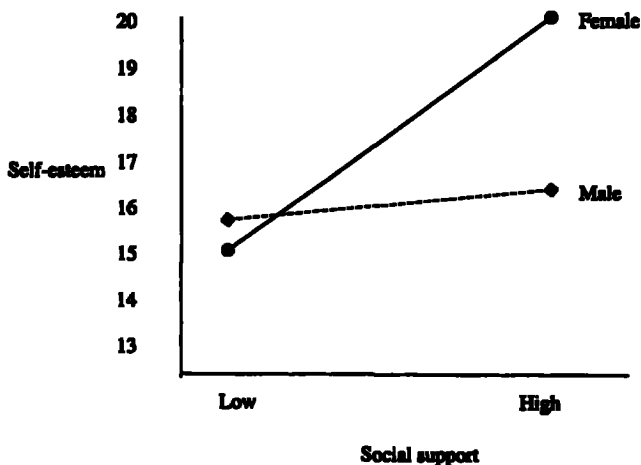


FIGURE 3

Interactive Effects of Gender and Social Support on Self-Esteem

tive regression of social support on self-esteem for women ($B = 5.86$) and men ($B = 5.74$). Chow's F test showed that the difference between the two subgroups was statistically significant, $F(1, 199) = 5.78, p < .001$. These results provide support for Hypothesis 3.

DISCUSSION

The current study examined the contribution of three major factors (financial status, alternate roles, and social support) to the self-esteem of people who were unemployed. This study also examined whether gender exerted an impact on the relationship between these three factors and self-esteem. The interaction of gender with financial deprivation, number of alternate roles, and social support contributed to the variance explained in self-esteem over and above the unique contribution of these three variables.

Financial deprivation was a significant negative contributor to self-esteem during unemployment. Frese (1987) argued that financial deprivation during unemployment leads to psychological ill health because it fosters perceptions of general helplessness and a loss of freedom in the market place. Fryer (1995), in his agency theory, also highlighted the role that having sufficient income plays in contributing to psychological well-being and identity. According to agency theory, money provides people with a means to control their lives and engage in spending and activities that provide them with experiences, roles, and social interactions, all of which are necessary for developing and maintaining identity and self-esteem. However, neither Frese nor Fryer considered whether financial deprivation had a greater impact on the self-esteem of men as compared with its impact on women during unemployment.

Results of the current study suggest that gender needs to be considered when examining the impact of financial deprivation on self-esteem. Although the level of reported financial deprivation was higher for women than for men, it did not have as much of an impact on women's self-esteem as it did on that of men. It may be that the impact of wage loss on self-esteem during unemployment does not necessarily have as much to do with the amount of money lost *per se* but more to do with what money symbolizes to men as compared with women. It seems that for a man, whose identity may still largely be conceived as that of the breadwinner (Kulik, 2001), a loss in wage prevents him from fulfilling his primary role obligations, and this can be devastating to his self-esteem. This was reflected in a comment made by a 43-year-old man:

I feel terrible about not bringing home a wage. My wife works but if I don't find a job soon we are going to have to take the kids out of their school. I really feel that this is my responsibility and that I am letting my whole family down. I am desperate to get another job.

Hypothesis 2 stated that the positive relationship between number of alternate roles and self-esteem would be stronger in women than in men. The regression analysis supported this hypothesis because a high number of alternate roles had a stronger effect on the self-esteem of women than it did on men. On average, unemployed women engaged in 12.68 roles out of a possible 14. This figure is exceptionally high, especially when compared with unemployed men who engaged in only 7.33 roles. It seems that men are less likely than women to have alternate roles through which to fill their time and protect their self-esteem. A 36-year-old man commented,

I am bored most of the time. I have started doing the grocery shopping but I feel like all the women at the supermarket look at me and know that I am unemployed. It's shameful for a man to be without work.

Turning to a domestic role did not help to bolster this male participant's self-esteem.

These results hint at an interesting proposal about the changing relationship between gender identity and employment; namely, that although the relationship has changed quite markedly for women, it remains largely unchanged for men. Although female identities have expanded to include employment alongside nurturing and community roles, male identities have not expanded to the same degree. Instead, the male identity seems to be very heavily, and somewhat singularly, based in the employee role. Although this difference in the breadth and dimensionality of identity is not particularly evident in situations in which both genders are involved in paid work (Kulik, 2001), its effect on self-esteem becomes apparent when individuals are unemployed. It seems that during periods without work, men may not be likely to expand their identity by engaging in alternate roles, and even when they do, it does not boost self-esteem to the same degree that it does for women.

However, before claiming that the current results support this proposal, there are a number of methodological factors that must be considered. For example, the list of alternate roles taken from Shamir (1986) is reasonably gender-neutral, and it may be that if the list had included more gender-specific roles (e.g., fisherman and handy-

man), different results may have been found. In particular, we may have seen that men are, indeed, likely to use alternate roles as a mechanism to boost or maintain a positive self-esteem. One must also consider that the age, educational level, and occupational status of those in this sample might mean that the participants still hold traditional stereotypes of the roles that are suitable for men and women, and these stereotypes might have influenced the current results.

Social support was predicted to be a third factor that may interact with gender when explaining self-esteem. Previous researchers have suggested that social support is an important resource during unemployment because it assists unemployed people in maintaining a positive view of themselves (Jackson, 1988; Pearlin, Meaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan, 1981). This was found in our study in which social support had a main effect on self-esteem. However, our results also suggest that the general conclusion that social support boosts self-esteem during unemployment may need to be altered according to the gender of the unemployed individual.

Although there was a marked difference in self-esteem between women who reported a low use of social support and women who reported a high use of social support, the self-esteem of men did not change dramatically between high and low use of social support. The qualitative data also highlighted gender differences. A 29-year-old woman commented,

I have found that my girlfriends and family have been really helpful to me during this time. I have almost been too busy to get upset about not having a job and everyone has been so positive that I haven't let things get to me.

This is in stark contrast to a 29-year-old male participant, who stated,

I am embarrassed to ask my wife for help. I should be the one supporting her.

Another male participant (37 years old) stated,

My mates are all at work during the day and then busy with their "lives" on the weekends. I feel like a loser when I am with them and I don't see anyone much these days.

These findings contradict those of Malen and Stroh (1998), who suggested that social support during unemployment was similarly important to men and women who were in management positions. Yet, with the exception of Malen and Stroh and the current study, gender differences in the importance of social support during unemployment have not been considered in the unemployment literature. For this reason, we turn to evidence outside of the unemployment field to consider whether there are gender differences in the role of social support for psychological health in samples of those who are employed. Lindorff (2000), in a sample of employed managers, found that social support was beneficial for female managers but harmful for male managers. Ashton and Fuehrer (1993) together with Ben and Zeidner (1996), Pretorius (1996), and Kohlmann, Weidner, Dotzauer, and Burns (1997) have argued that social support may not be as beneficial for men as it is for women (indeed, in

some cases it may be harmful for men) because it reduces masculine competence by demonstrating that the man cannot act independently.

Feminist writers have shown that the female identity is tied closely to relationships and intimacy, whereas male identity is reflected more in external achievement, individuation, and autonomy (Porter & Stone, 1995; Tannen, 1991). If this is the case, then it may help to explain why supportive relationships were more strongly associated with self-esteem for unemployed female participants of this study as compared with the unemployed men. Given the implications for the use of social support by men and women during unemployment, further research is required to replicate the current results and consider why social support may play a different role for men than it does for women during unemployment.

It is interesting that the MANCOVA revealed that use of social support was not different between women and men. Male participants were obviously accessing their support networks even though support was not contributing to their self-esteem. To explain this finding, more information is needed regarding the type of social support the men were using. The current measure of social support (Moore et al., in press) was global in its orientation; however, authors such as Cohen and Wills (1985) and Greenglass (1993) have argued that social support comes in three different, but interrelated, forms: informational, instrumental, and emotional. It may be that unemployed men were using the more functional aspects of their support networks (informational or instrumental support) rather than asking for emotional support. Given this, although social support was extensively used by men, it may not have been the type of support that contributed directly to positive feelings about self. This explanation is only speculative, and further research is needed to examine whether men and women access different types of support from their social networks during unemployment.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the current study suggest that unemployment interventions need to be tailored according to the different reactions of men and women. In relation to unemployed men, the findings suggest that assistance programs need to extend beyond typical skill-based vocational training programs to include elements of personal development training (Muller, 1995). In particular, interventions are needed in the form of career counseling that helps men to understand the relationship between their own identity and the broader labor market. Career counselors might help unemployed men to adopt a more holistic definition of career so that it is more than just paid employment. Following the suggestions made by Warr and Jackson (1987) and Amundson (1994), career counselors might help men to use their experience with unemployment as a time to engage in "identity negotiation" (Amundson, 1994, p. 98) to redefine themselves independently of their job. An assisted process of self-examination that helps unemployed men to view life in a broader sense and to include non-work-related achievements and capacities in their identity might help them to cope more constructively with unemployment.

Despite the potential benefits of this type of personal development program, counselors need to be aware that such programs are likely to be quite challenging for male participants. This type of program requires participants to discuss emotional issues and confront basic notions of identity. This is a difficult task in itself but may be even more difficult when considering that unemployed men have already experienced considerable perceived harm to their masculine identity (Muller, Winocur, Hicks, & Delahaye, 1994). Nevertheless, the difficulties associated with this type of approach should not be a deterrent to career counselors, who should consider incorporating elements of personal development into future programs.

Practitioners and counselors working with unemployed people should also be mindful of the results in relation to the harmful effect of financial deprivation. Financial deprivation was harmful to self-esteem in both men and women in our study. Services are needed that help unemployed people to strengthen both short-term budgeting skills and long-term financial planning skills. Such interventions may help to improve self-esteem as well as increase a sense of agency. The results of our study show that unemployed men might benefit from such programs to a greater degree than women.

Interventions that help unemployed people to identify and invest energy into alternate roles may also be beneficial. Services that place unemployed people into volunteer organizations, local leisure clubs, or vocational training courses might help them to find purpose in roles such as community worker, sportsperson, and student. Such roles may serve as short-term alternatives to maintain self-esteem while people are searching for work.

Social service organizations may also set up peer-support groups for unemployed people. Not only will such groups help to boost self-esteem but the networks derived through peer-support groups may also help participants to find new employment (Jones, 1991). However, the results of the current study show that these types of interventions (through the provision of social support) may be more helpful for women than for men.

LIMITATIONS AND FINAL CONCLUSION

The findings of the current study must be interpreted with consideration of the limitations regarding the research. As already mentioned, there may be issues of selection bias and response bias because individuals in the sample were accessed through the government CES database. It may be that this study only attracted financially needy people who had to register for government assistance. Perhaps a sample of unemployed people who were not in financial difficulty may have produced different results. Alternatively, if the gender differences are supported in future samples of unemployed men and women who are financially secure, it would help to strengthen the argument that gender differences in this area are not so much related to the actual amount of money lost during unemployment but more related to differences in what money symbolizes for the identity of men and women.

Another concern of this study is its cross-sectional design and limitation of causality. Future research should consider the use of a longitudinal design that could examine whether the self-esteem undergoes different changes for men than for women as they move from employment to unemployment or different changes for men than for women as unemployment duration continues. Research could also examine whether women are able to maintain the protection of their self-esteem through social support and alternate roles or whether these protective factors lose their impact over time. If there are gender differences over time, then the aforementioned implications for gender-specific unemployment interventions are even more important.

Finally, the fact that the measures were all derived from self-reports could well have created common-method variance, which may have artificially increased the relationships between study variables. This problem is not uncommon for research investigating psychological reactions to unemployment, given that self-report strategies are the most practical way to assess subjective cognition and affective states.

In summation, the existence of gender differences in psychological reactions to unemployment, although not surprising, is by no means trivial, and the current results indicate that the negative psychological impact of unemployment may be reduced somewhat differently for men and women. The economic predictions that unemployment rates will remain high over the next decade (Dawkins, 1996; Layard, Nickell, & Jackman, 1994; Lerner, 1994) suggest that it is important for researchers, practitioners, and policy makers to have a detailed understanding of the role of gender in the psychological reaction to unemployment.

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