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How Job Insecurity Affects Political Attitudes: Identity Threat Plays a Role

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This study tests the assumption that job insecurity threatens people's work-related identities and thereby affects their political attitudes. Work-related identity threat in times of job insecurity is proposed to happen in two ways: people will fear to lose an important part of their identity (their identity as employed people), and they can also be afraid to gain a negative identity (their feared future self of becoming unemployed). Both identity threats are proposed to lead to more antiegalitarian attitudes and more political leaning to the right. A four-wave study among 969 employed British employees delivers support for some of the assumptions. In line with the expectations, results of time-stable structural equation modeling show that job insecurity indeed threatens the identity as an employed person, which leads to an increase in antiegalitarian attitudes over time. Different than expected, identity threat in the form of a heightened identification with the unemployed was not found. Also, people who identified more as unemployed people actually reported fewer antiegalitarian attitudes and shifted their political standing more to the left.

INTRODUCTION

Job insecurity is regarded as a root cause of a great number of negative individual and organizational outcomes, such as low well-being (e.g., De Witte, Pienaar, & De Cuyper, 2016), reduced job performance or high turnover intention (see Gilboa, Shirom, Fried, & Cooper, 2008; Sverke, Låstad, Hellgren,

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Richter, & Näswall, 2019). Outside work, job insecurity is often given as a reason for the recent rise in political populism by political commentators and analysts (e.g., Kirkpatrick, 2015; Mughan, Bean, & McAllister, 2003; Mutz, 2018). In short, job insecurity not only has effects for individuals and organizations, but it is also assumed to have political consequences.

Interestingly, while job insecurity research is steadily growing, work psychologists rarely seem to be concerned with those wider, potential political consequences of job insecurity. This is short-sighted, as work forms an important part of people's life, and job insecurity already has shown to impact on people's wider private context, outside work (e.g., marital quality, Mauno & Kinnunen, 1999; children's work beliefs, Barling, Dupre & Hepburn, 1998). Looking at political outcomes seems particularly pressing, as people's political attitudes and voting intentions outside work will ultimately set the macro-political, legislative and societal conditions that form the context for organizations and work. In this paper, we provide a theoretical model backed up by empirical evidence that suggests how job insecurity and individual political positions can be linked.

This study draws on the social identity approach (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Haslam, 2004; Petriglieri, 2011; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) to argue that job insecurity can be understood as a particular type of identity threat. It thereby integrates this literature with job insecurity research (e.g., Shoss, 2017; De Witte et al., 2016). Furthermore, the study borrows from work on conservatism as a motivated social cognition (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski & Sulloway, 2003; Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009; Thórisdóttir & Jost, 2011) to illustrate the link between work-related identity threat and political conservativism.

Work forms an important aspect of people's identity, most broadly defined as a person's answer to the question "who are you" (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Selenko et al., 2018). Aspects of work, such as a person's occupation, organizational membership or job position can provide an answer to that question. Job insecurity, which can be understood as "a subjective perception reflecting uncertainty about the future employment" (Sverke, De Witte, Näswall, & Hellgren, 2010, p. 175), will pose a threat in two ways: Not only will it signal a potential loss of many of those desired work-related aspects of a person's identity, but it will also threaten by making an undesirable future identity group salient. Job insecure people are aware of a so-called "feared future self" (Markus & Nurius, 1986) of becoming an unemployed person. These two identity threats will not only affect well-being and work behavior, but they will also have consequences for wider political attitudes, particularly people's stance towards others in society in general (Jost et al., 2003).

There are a number of theoretical and practical contributions of this study. This study is the first to our knowledge that provides a theoretically sound

explanation as well as longitudinal evidence for the relationship between perceptions of job insecurity and the political attitudes of employees. We thereby broaden the outlook of work-psychological and job insecurity research and offer a new way of understanding work as an integral part of people's lives. Second, by introducing and testing work-related identity threat as an explanatory mechanism, a novel theoretical bridge is suggested between job insecurity and its outcomes. This broadens the theoretical frameworks available in the area of job insecurity research, which so far has not explored identity threat as a mediating mechanism (De Witte et al., 2016). It also contributes to organizational identity research, which has looked at identity primarily in the context of relatively positive work-related events, such as career transitions, job change or retirement (e.g., Miscenko & Day, 2016) and has not investigated threats in the form of potentially becoming unemployed. Third, our study's findings will also be of practical interest to political analysts and policy makers. The two outcome variables we investigate, antiegalitarian attitudes and self-declared political standing, are predictors of voting preferences (Cornelis & Van Hiel, 2015). Our study aims to understand how an important work-related characteristic, job insecurity, could play a predictive role. It thereby offers a novel and more nuanced, individual level understanding to what is often a "hunch" by political commentators or the wider public.

Job Insecurity as a Work-Related Identity Threat

If work is a central part of a person's identity, then a threat to the work situation is going to affect identity. Before identity threat can be defined, it is important to clarify the understanding of identity that is being used in this research. According to the social identity approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1987), the identity of a person is informed by multiple social identity categories a person considers themselves to be a member of. These social category memberships allow an answer to the question "who one is" (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). In relation to work, identity can, for example, be informed by the own organization ("I am working for company X"), the own job role ("I am a manager"), the own occupation ("I am a doctor") and most generally the own employment status ("I am employed"). All of these category memberships will inform a person's work-related identity; their understanding of themselves in relation to work. Social category memberships are important as they provide self-referential information about a person's standing in relation to others, as well as normative guidelines for behavior and attitudes (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Identity threat arises when people cannot be certain about their membership to a positively distinct social group anymore (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005). In the context of organizations, Petriglieri (2011) defines identity threat

as occurring when people perceive a "potential harm to the … enactment of an identity" (Petriglieri, 2011, p. 644). Job insecurity signals an identity threat in two ways. Job insecurity is commonly defined as "…an overall concern about the continued existence of the job in the future" (e.g., De Witte, 1999, p. 156; Rosenblatt & Ruvio, 1996; Sverke, Hellgren & Näswall, 2002). In the same breath it is also often understood as the apprehension of unemployment, and as the perceived probability of becoming unemployed in the future (Shoss, 2017; De Witte, 1999). The threat to work-related identities by job insecurity hence stems from (1) the implied harm to the enactment of a valued identity and (2) the fear of becoming a member of an undesired social category, the group of unemployed people. These are two subtly different kinds of threats; and while the first resonates with the literature on identity threat in organizations (Petriglieri, 2011), the second has received less attention to our knowledge.

In relation to the first type of threat, a person who is very job insecure cannot be certain anymore whether they will remain a part of their organization, keep their job-role, profess their occupation, and most generally, whether they can remain employed. Put more abstractly, their position in these groups is undermined, or under threat. According to Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (1999) this constitutes a so-called "acceptance identity threat", as job insecure people are uncertain about their future acceptance to their organization, their professional group or more generally the group of working people.

As to the second type of threat, job insecurity also entails the fear that one might become one of the unemployed, which constitutes a stigmatized group (Furnham, 1983). Becoming unemployed is what some researchers call a *feared future self* (cf. Markus & Nurius, 1986; Strauss, Griffin, & Parker, 2012). A feared future self describes the person who one does not want to become in relation to work and it can be triggered by events that are relevant to the individual's future, such as job insecurity (Neale & Griffin, 2006). Depending on the context, different hoped-for or feared future selves can be triggered. For example, a job insecure worker might have the feared future self of being unemployed; a heavy drinker might have the feared future self of being an alcoholic; a person working towards a PhD might have the feared future self of becoming a drop-out and being regarded a failure. In Branscombe and colleagues' (1999) terms this could be understood as a kind of "categorization threat": the imposition of an inappropriate group membership against one's will. Job insecure people might feel they are already counted as "one of the unemployed."

In sum, we propose that threat not only occurs when there is potential harm to the value, meaning, or enactment of a *desirable* identity, but it also implies a potential gain of an *undesirable* identity. We thereby expand

existing definitions of the identity threat concept in the work-context (Petriglieri, 2011). Job insecurity will be threatening to a person's work-related identity in two ways: existing valued identities will be under threat of being lost and future unwanted identities will become a threatening possibility.

Work-Related Identity Threat Manifests in a Changed Identification with the Working Population and Unemployed People

The perceived threat of job insecurity to work-related identities in the future is likely to trigger cognitive as well as affective heuristics, which will inform how a person perceives themselves now (e.g., Warr, Bindl, Parker, & Inceoglu, 2014).

Experimental research on mental heuristics shows that people's imaginations of events in the future influence how they judge the same events in the present (Carroll, 1978). For example, people who are asked to imagine the likelihood of contracting a certain disease in the future, already rated their present health status as lower. The authors explain this phenomenon in terms of the availability heuristic: imagined future scenarios become mentally more available and the resulting ease of retrieval serves as a piece of information in itself for the likelihood of the event (Gregory, Cialdini, & Carpenter 1982; Sherman, Cialdini, Schwartzman, & Reynolds, 1985). Transferred to the situation of job insecurity this means that people who anticipate potential future unemployment and job loss, would have that scenario more readily available in their mind and already see themselves to be a little less belonging to the working people and a little more belonging to the unemployed people at present.

Perceived identifications can also be influenced by the affective processes associated with identity threat. Job insecurity has been found to lead to feelings of anxiety, anger, and distrust (Reisel, Probst, Chia, Maloles III, & König, 2010; Sverke et al., 2002), which are emotions also associated with identity threat (Branscombe et al., 1999; Voci, 2006). Similar to the cognitions about the future, these negative emotions also serve a mental informative purpose themselves, according to the affect-as-information hypothesis (Clore, Gasper, & Gavin, 2001). In this particular case, feeling anxious, angry, and distrusting, contradicts the positive affective pattern that accompanies strong in-group membership (Tajfel, 1982), which will inform judgements people make about their current belongingness to groups. Negative emotions lead people to less positive judgements about themselves, in the form of feeling less belonging to the in-group (here: the working people), and more belonging to an unwanted out-group (here: the unemployed people).

In sum, we propose that it is through these cognitive and affective shifts in self-perception that identity threat in the form of job insecurity will manifest in a lowered identification with the group of working people and a heightened identification with unemployed people. There is already some empirical evidence available for this assumption: In a study with job insecure British workers Selenko, Mäkikangas, and Stride (2017) found that those who reported to be more job insecure also identified less as members of the working population. There is no study to our knowledge that explicitly investigated the relationship between vocational threats and self-perceptions in relation to unemployed people. However, studies among unemployed people show that they do experience identity threats and loss of self-worth, as their situation is not in line with their ideal self (Giuntoli, Hughes, Karban, & South, 2015; Wehrle, Klehe, Kira, & Zikic, 2018). It is likely that the threat of unemployment, will stir that unwanted feared future self.

This leads to our first hypothesis:

> People who are more job insecure will feel threatened in their work-related identity, as expressed in a lowered identification with the working population (Hypothesis 1a) and a heightened identification with the unemployed people (Hypothesis 1b) over time.

Consequences of Work-Related Identity Threat for Political Attitudes

Threats to valued, positively esteemed social identities can undermine people's fundamental understanding of themselves. This is not only unpleasant, but also its cognitive and affective by-processes are likely to have ripple on effects on behavior, attitudes, and even well-being (Haslam, Jetten, Cruwys, Dingle, & Haslam, 2018).

There is extensive research in social and political psychology that argues that situations of uncertainty and threat, and emotions like fear and anxiety can be connected with an increased tendency to adopt more conservative political attitudes (Jost et al., 2009; Thorisdottir & Jost, 2011). Meta-analytical evidence across 88 samples and 12 different countries, for example, shows that fear of threat and loss, which we regard as inherent in the experience of job insecurity, is linked to a rise in conservative attitudes (Jost et al., 2003).

Conceptually, the link between threat perceptions and political attitudes has been explained in different ways. From a social identity perspective, Branscombe et al. (1999) suggest that following identity threat, people would be inclined to derogate people who do not belong to their group, in an attempt to maximize the distance between themselves and the feared others.

In experimental studies, this tactic leads people to act more competitively towards the outgroup, and favor less egalitarian outcomes, which is regarded as a hallmark of political conservativism (Jost et al., 2003; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). In the context of job insecurity, these "feared others" would consist of all those people who are not in a job at the moment; for example, unemployed people or people who are out of the labor force. Accordingly, job insecure people who feel threatened in their work-related identity would be less supportive of egalitarian treatment of these groups; in order to increase the distance between themselves and these other groups.

Political conservativism can, therefore, be understood as a motivated social cognition, as it serves particular social psychological motives (Jost et al., 2003, 2009). Thorisdottir and Jost (2011) argue that the fear and anxiety that accompany identity threat would reduce the capacity for cognitive information-processing. People under threat would think more narrowly and pay selective and focused attention on threatening stimuli. This would then rather lead to mental rigidity, which has been argued to lead to more political conservativism (Jost et al., 2003).

In the case of work-related identity threat caused by job insecurity, we expect similar mechanisms to be at work. This would be true to both kinds of threats—the implied harm to the membership to the working population and the fear of becoming a member of the undesired social group of unemployed people. There is some evidence that threats to valued group-memberships at work motivate people to derogate others (Petriglieri, 2011). There are also studies that show that the threat associated with job insecurity leads to narrowed information processing (and consequently less creativity and innovation; Van Hootegem, Niesen, & De Witte, 2019). We would hence expect people who are more threatened in their work-related identity to engage in more narrowed information processing. According to meta-analytical evidence (Jost et al., 2003) this would be expressed in more antiegalitarian attitudes and a shift of political standing more to the right. Indeed, political scientists have found that a perceived status threat predicted US electorates' dislike of group equality and a tendency to vote conservative in the 2016 presidential elections (see Mutz, 2018). Expressed in a hypothesis this results in:

> *Hypothesis 2*. The greater the threat to work-related identity, the more antiegalitarian attitudes people will have and the more they will politically self-identify to the right, over time.

Note that work-related identity threat will be operationalized in two ways in this study: in the form of a lowered identification with the working population and a heightened identification with the unemployed people. Taken together, this leads us to predict an indirect effect of job insecurity via

threatened identity on political outcome variables. Stated more formally, we propose:

> *Hypothesis 3*: The effect of job insecurity on antiegalitarian attitudes and political standing will be mediated by a threat to work-related identity.

It is important to note that while this is the first study to investigate the effect of job insecurity on political outcomes via social identity processes in a quantitative and longitudinal manner, there have been others before which looked at political behavior in relation to perceived job insecurity (De Weerdt & De Witte, 2005; De Witte & Meuleman, 2007; Stynen & De Witte, 2011). De Witte and Meuleman (2007) and Stynen and De Witte (2011), for example, both found an indirect relationship between perceived job insecurity and extreme right-wing voting.

Explanations for this relationship are unclear—while Stynen and De Witte (2011) found status anxiety as a mediating mechanism, De Witte and Meuleman (2007) found no significant effect of status anxiety but rather identified collective relative deprivation (the feeling that the own group is less well off) as intervening mechanism. Both studies are limited in that they only offer cross-sectional evidence, but they do suggest that a comparison process with others plays a role. The social identity approach adopted in this study specifies the comparison element, by postulating that job insecurity will lead people to feel threatened in comparison to other members of the working population. In the social identity framework, status anxiety and comparison processes are elements of identity threat and derogation of others functions as strategy to regain status as well as a coping mechanism upon fear. Figure 1 summarizes the hypotheses of this study in a theoretical model.

METHOD

Participants

To investigate the hypotheses a longitudinal survey study was carried out. A survey company was tasked with the recruitment of the study sample, the study itself was hosted by the authors of this paper. Participants had to be over 18 years of age and currently employed and living in the UK to be eligible for the study. People who matched these criteria received an invite to participate in the study. Study participation was fully anonymous, voluntarily and rewarded in bonus-points (which can be exchanged against money), as well as the participation in raffle. British workers in various professions were surveyed on their working conditions, their identification (with the working population and with the unemployed) as well as their work behavior and

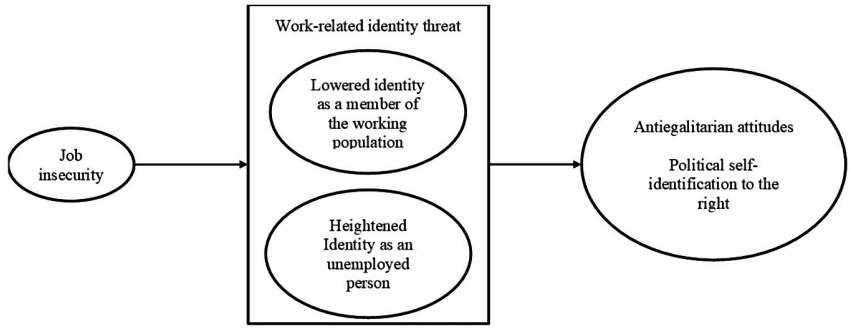

FIGURE 1. Conceptual model of the relationship between job insecurity, work-related identity threat and political outcomes. *Note*. Identity threat is expressed in the negative path between job insecurity and the identity as an employed person as well as in the positive path between job insecurity and the identity as an unemployed person.

political attitudes over four waves, with four months between them. Previous studies that used a longitudinal survey technique to measure the identity consequences of job insecurity suggested a four-month time interval to be sufficient enough to allow for enough variability in social identity (Selenko et al., 2017). In June 2016, a total of 1,001 employed people took part in the survey. For the present analysis only the data of those who remained employed over the duration of the study were used, reducing the original study sample to n_{T1} = 969. This number subsequently dropped to 615 (October 2016), 506 (February 2017) and 470 (June 2017).

The majority of these respondents (55.2%) were male, on average 44.08 years old (*SD* = 11.29), most (71.3%) were in a relationship and did not have any children living with them (68.5%). As for their education, only 16 (1.7%) had not finished any education, 20.2 percent had finished 11 years of schooling (GCSEs, usually at the age of 16), 19.4 percent also held a high school diploma (requirement for a place at university), 19.6 percent finished a technical or professional education, 24.1 percent held a bachelor's degree, and 13.5 percent held a postgraduate degree. For further analysis this variable was dummy coded; having a postgraduate degree served as the comparison category. Respondents worked in various professions, 15.5 per cent could be classified as blue collar workers (i.e. crafts or related trades worker, plant or machine operator or assembler, skilled agricultural worker), 84.2 per cent were white collar workers (i.e. legislators, professionals, technicians, clerks or service workers) according to standard classifications (Eurofound, 2010). Most worked in a permanent position (79.9%) where they worked on average 35.00 hours per week (*SD* = 10.85).

To check whether there was a systematic drop out of respondents, three logistic regression analyses were carried out predicting participation at Time 2 (T2), Time 3 (T3) and Time 4 (T4) by all demographic, work-related and variables of interest in the previous waves. We found that men (B = −0.42, SEB = 0.16, p = .010) and more job insecure people at Time 1 (T1) (B = 24, SEB = 0.08, p = .002; χ^2 (17) = 47.01, p < .001) were more likely to participate also at Time 2. This suggests that people who were more affected by job insecurity were also more attracted towards participating in this study. Variables at T2 and T3 did not predict subsequent participation at T3; χ^2 (17) = 18.10, p =.382 or T4; χ^2 (17) = 23.99, p =.119.

Measures

Job insecurity was measured with a four-item scale by Vander Elst, De Witte, and De Cuyper (2014). Respondents had to indicate on a 5-point scale how strongly they agreed or disagreed with statements like "Chances are I will soon lose my job." The reliability of the scale ranged between $\alpha = 0.86$ and $\alpha = 0.90$ across all four measurement waves.

Work-related identity threat in this study was operationalized as a lowered social identification with the working population and a heightened social identification with unemployed people.

Social identification with the working population was assessed with an adapted scale by Selenko et al. (2017) which builds on the Doosje, Ellemers, and Spears' (1995) social identity scale. The original scale consists of four general statements such as "I see myself as [member of Group X]" or "I am pleased to be a [member of Group X]." The scale can be easily adapted for an organizational setting, and has been widely used for that purpose (Haslam, 2004). For the present study, "Group X" was replaced with "working population." Respondents had to indicate on a 7-point response coding how strongly they disagreed or agreed with the so-created statements, for example "I see myself as a part of the working population." The scale's reliability was good, ranging between $\alpha = 0.89$ and $\alpha = 0.90$ across the measurement waves.

To measure the *social identification with the unemployed* respondents had to disagree/agree on a 7-point measurement scale to the following three items: "I identify with unemployed people," "I am like people who are unemployed," and "I feel solidarity with people who are unemployed." The first two items were derived from Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk's (1999) social self-categorization scale, which originally reads "I identify with [Group X]" and "I am like [other members of Group X]." The last item was taken from Haslam, O'Brien, Jetten, Vormedal, and Penna's (2005) two-item scale to measure identification with family and friends. In this case, the part of the item that read "my family and friends" was replaced with "people who

are unemployed." The combination of these items allowed us to tap into identification with a group that people were not objectively part of yet, but potentially very close to. This scale was very reliable, with Cronbach's alphas ranging between $\alpha = 0.88$ and $\alpha = 0.90$ across the four waves.

Attitudes towards group equality was measured with the antiegalitarianism subscale of the SDO7 scale by Ho et al. (2015). Items originally read: "Group equality should not be our primary goal" and "It is unjust to try to make groups equal." We slightly modified these items by adding "in our society" at the end of each of them, to provide more context. Respondents had to rate how negatively (1) or positively (5) they regarded the following two statements on a 5-point Likert scale; "Group equality should not be our primary goal in our society," and "It is unjust to try to make groups equal in our society" (Cronbach's alpha between $\alpha = 0.65$ and $\alpha = 0.75$). Higher values indicated more antiegalitarian attitudes.

In addition, people had to indicate their *political standing* on a 10-point scale, ranging from left wing (1) to right wing (10).

Control Variables. Since we did not have any theoretical presumption about possible demographic factors or personal characteristics influencing the proposed relationships, we adopted a statistical approach. If a specific characteristic of our sample would correlate with two different types of variables of our theoretical model (for example, with job insecurity and one of the mediating variables, or with job insecurity and one of the dependent variables, or with one of the mediating variables and one of the dependent variables), this might suggest a confounding influence on these relationships, which might distort the relationships of interest (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). Table 1 shows the correlations of all variables of interest in this study with the demographic characteristics of our sample. It appears that age is the only characteristic that meets these criteria. People who were older reported more identification with the working population and more antiegalitarian attitudes. This suggests that the relationship between the identification with the working population and political attitudes could look different for people of different ages. Age was subsequently taken up as control variable. It was modelled to have an effect on identification with the working population and antiegalitarianism at each time point.

Statistical Analysis

To test the hypotheses, a cross-lagged structural equation modeling (SEM) technique was employed, using MPlus v7.4 and a maximum likelihood estimation, following the recommendations by Cole and Maxwell (2003) and Little, Preacher, Selig, and Card (2007) for the analysis of longitudinal data.

TABLE 1
Pearson Correlations of Demographic Variables with Job Insecurity, Identification, Performance and Political Attitudes Over Time

	M	*SD*	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33
1. Age	44.08	11.30	.06	.00	−.04	−.01	.07*	.09*	.10*	.12**	.07*	.04	.09*	.07	.10**	.13**	.17**	.12**	.13**	.07	.03	.04
2. Gender	0.45	0.50	.01	.00	.02	.00	.13**	.08*	.14**	.10*	−.13**	−.08	−.17**	−.18**	−.07*	−.03	.01	−.06	−.04	.03	.00	−.04
3. Relation	0.72	0.45	−.02	.04	−.02	−.05	.10**	.08*	.12**	.14**	−.05	−.07	−.06	−.11*	.05	.00	.03	.08	.00	−.02	−.03	−.01
4. Children	0.52	0.86	−.06	−.03	−.05	−.09*	.04	.04	.11*	.06	−.02	.02	.02	−.04	.06	−.03	−.06	.02	−.06	.03	.05	−.07
5. EDU0	0.02	0.13	−.01	.02	−.02	.01	.01	.04	−.02	.04	−.05	−.04	−.06	−.08	.04	.04	.04	−.01	.04	.03	.05	.08
6. EDU1	0.20	0.40	.00	.01	−.03	−.01	.01	.02	.02	.04	.00	−.02	.00	.03	.05	.03	.04	.06	.09**	.08	.00	.03
7. EDU2	0.20	0.40	−.03	−.02	−.04	−.04	.02	.04	.06	.02	.00	.02	−.03	−.03	.01	.00	.05	.00	−.02	−.04	.04	.03
8. EDU3	0.20	0.40	.00	−.05	.02	−.02	−.01	−.07	−.04	−.07	−.04	−.06	−.03	−.05	.07*	.09*	.11*	.06	.02	.02	−.01	−.02
9. EDU4	0.24	0.43	−.03	−.03	−.02	−.03	.00	.03	.01	.00	.03	.00	.02	.00	−.08**	−.09*	−.17**	−.12*	−.09**	−.08*	−.05	−.03
10. EDU5	0.14	0.34	.07*	.10*	.10*	.12*	−.01	−.05	−.05	−.02	.03	.08	.07	.08	−.06*	−.05	−.02	.01	.00	.01	.02	−.02
11. Occup.	0.84	0.36	−.02	.04	.06	.04	.06	.04	.10*	.05	−.03	−.07	−.09*	−.11*	−.05	−.05	−.06	.00	−.01	.01	.04	.01
12. Contract	0.83	0.37	−.04	.00	−.03	−.03	.12**	.11*	.09*	.09	−.02	−.01	−.06	−.02	.07*	.02	.07	.07	.07*	.07	.11*	.08
13. Hrs	35.00	11.17	.00	.04	.02	−.02	.03	.06	−.02	.04	−.02	−.04	−.02	.04	.05	.04	.04	.07	.03	.00	.08	.11*
14. Jobi T1	2.33	1.00	–	.69**	.64**	.65**	−.12**	−.12**	−.14**	−.10*	.17**	.18**	.14**	.09	.04	.01	.06	.08	−.03	.02	.00	.04
15. Jobi. T2	2.38	0.93		–	.72**	.72**	−.08*	−.17**	−.19**	−.13**	.18**	.21**	.15**	.09	.05	−.04	.10*	.06	−.05	.01	.07	.10*
16. Jobi. T3	2.37	0.94			–	.72**	−.07	−.16**	−.17**	−.16**	.22**	.21**	.20**	.11*	.06	−.04	.03	.05	−.03	.02	.01	.04
17. Jobi. T4	2.40	0.94				–	−.06	−.09	−.16**	−.14**	.16**	.17**	.16**	.07	.07	.07	.06	.05	.02	.07	.07	.10*
18. SI.WT1	5.58	1.11					–	.64**	.63**	.56**	−.02	.00	.05	.01	−.06*	−.10*	−.07	−.09	.04	−.05	−.02	.01
19. SI.WT2	5.52	1.13						–	.74**	.70**	.01	.00	.06	.06	−.12**	−.09*	−.15**	−.05	.02	−.05	.01	−.01
20. SI.WT3	5.61	1.14							–	.73**	.02	.02	.03	−.01	−.07	−.11*	−.09*	−.03	.02	−.02	−.02	−.02
21. SI.WT4	5.56	1.18								–	−.01	−.03	−.01	.02	−.04	−.04	−.10*	.01	.02	−.02	.00	.05
22. SI un. T1	3.43	1.47									–	.69**	.64**	.68**	−.14**	−.26**	−.20**	−.07	−.23**	−.24**	−.26**	−.19**
23. SI un. T2	3.50	1.46										–	.70**	.72**	−.12**	−.21**	−.18**	−.10*	−.25**	−.21**	−.28**	−.21**
24. SI un. T3	3.45	1.53											–	.72**	−.08	−.16**	−.18**	−.10	−.23**	−.21**	−.23**	−.15**

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)

	M	*SD*	*14*	*15*	*16*	*17*	*18*	*19*	*20*	*21*	*22*	*23*	*24*	*25*	*26*	*27*	*28*	*29*	*30*	*31*	*32*	*33*
25. SI un.T4	3.35	1.54												–	−.11*	−.24**	−.19**	−.11*	−.25**	−.23**	−.27**	−.19**
26. Antiegal. T1	2.75	0.89													–	.38**	.37**	.30**	.28**	.28**	.22**	.22**
27. Antiegal. T2	2.76	0.90														–	.43**	.35**	.24**	.23**	.23**	.23**
28. Antiegal. T3	2.81	0.87															–	.23**	.25**	.20**	.25**	.22**
29. Antiegal. T4	2.75	0.94																–	.30**	.31**	.25**	.25**
30. Political T1	5.12	1.94																	–	.74**	.75**	.73**
31. Political T2	5.25	1.90																		–	.79**	.75**
32. Political T3	5.26	1.85																			–	.77**
33. Political T4	5.30	1.96																				–

Note. Gender (1 = female), relationship status (1 = in a relationship, 0 = not in a relationship), EDU stands for highest education completed, coded in 1 = yes, 0 = no, ranging from EDU0 (no education completed), EDU1 (highest education GCSEs), EDU2 (highest education A-level), EDU3 (highest education technical or professional degree), EDU4 (highest education first degree), EDU5 (highest education postgraduate degree); occupation (1 = white collar, 0 = blue collar), contract type (1 = permanent contract, 0 = temporary contract), Job in. "Job insecurity", SIW. "Social identification as a member of the working population", SI un "Social identification with the unemployed", Antiegal. "Antiegalitarian attitudes", Political "political orientation" (1 = leftwing, 10 = rightwing).
**$p < .05$; *$p < .01$.

This was done in a series of different phases. In the first phase, the overall fit of the measurement model and its time-stability was established. The reason for this is to ensure that any changes in latent constructs over time represent "true" changes in constructs (rather than changes in the understanding of survey items). In the measurement model, all items measuring job insecurity, social identification with the working population, social identification with the unemployed, and antiegalitarian attitudes at all four waves were included and modelled to load on their respective factors. This resulted in a 16-factor solution, with four factors at each time point. Items were modelled to load on their presumed latent factors within each specific time point, all factors were freed to correlate with each other. In addition, all item residuals were modelled to correlate with the residuals of equivalent items in the subsequent or previous time point. This model was tested against a number of alternative versions, such as a one-factor model or a model that merged the two identification factors into one.

After establishing a satisfactorily fitting measurement model, its invariance over time needed to be established. This was done by testing the initial model (the configural invariance model) against a series of more restricted ones: a metric invariance model (where item-factor loadings fixed equal across T1 to T4); a scalar model (where loadings and intercepts were fixed equal across T1 to T4), a strict invariance model (where loadings, intercepts and item residual variances were fixed equal across T1 to T4). In order to ensure that the meanings of the measure do not change between the time points, and prove time invariance, at least scalar invariance needs to achieved.

In the second phase of the analysis, the best fitting model of the measurement invariance test was then extended to form the structural model, to test the hypotheses. Specifically, the control variable age was added and so was the manifest variable political preference at each time point. Age was modelled to influence the identification with the working population and antiegalitarian attitudes at each time point. The following structural paths were added: autoregressive (time-stability) paths from all latent factors upon themselves at the next wave, cross-lagged paths from job insecurity to social identification (as a member of the working population and as an unemployed person) at the later time point, cross-lagged paths from social identification to antiegalitarianism and political preference at the subsequent time point. All latent factors were allowed to correlate with each other at Time 1 but at no other time point. The so constructed model then served as a baseline model to be compared against subsequently more restricted models to test the robustness of the proposed relationships: first, autoregressive paths from T1 to T2 were fixed to be equal to the autoregressive paths between T2 and T3 and T3 and T4. Next, the "a" paths of the mediation model, from job insecurity to the social identification variables were fixed equal over time. Finally the "b" paths

from social identification to political outcome variables were fixed to be the same over time. The most time-restricted model was then used to conclude about the hypothesized relationships.

RESULTS

Looking at the Pearson correlations between the variables of interest (Table 1), already reveals interesting findings: people who were more job insecure in our sample, also reported less identification with the working population and more identification with unemployed people, both cross sectionally and over time. Identification with unemployed people was related to less antiegalitarianism and a political self-identification more to the left. Repeated measures ANOVAs were carried out (controlling for age) to test for differences between the means of job insecurity, the two social identification measures and antiegalitarianism over time. It turned out that no variable changes significantly over time.

Establishing Measurement and Time Invariance

First of all, the overall fit of the model and temporal measurement invariance of the hypothesized 4-factor measurement model for job insecurity, social identification with the working population, future self as being unemployed, and antiegalitarianism was established. The "4-factors at each wave measurement model," fitted the data satisfactorily ($\chi^2 = 2130.509$, df = 1076, $p < .01$, CFI = 0.957, TLI = 0.947, RMSEA = 0.032, SRMR = 0.047) according to commonly employed fit criteria (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Marsh, Hau, & Wen, 2004; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). This four-factor model also fit significantly better than a competing three factor model that merged the two identity measures into one ($\Delta\chi^2 = 3456.53$, Δdf = 54, $p < .01$, CFI = 0.817, TLI = 0.785, RMSEA = 0.064, SRMR = 0.128) and a one-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 9084.45$, Δdf = 114, $p < .01$, CFI = 0.558, TLI = 0.541, RMSEA = 0.093, SRMR = 0.181).

Next, the time invariance of the measurement model was tested by fixing the factor loadings of items to factors invariant between the time points. As it turned out, one item of the job insecurity scale violated the invariance assumption of metric invariance. According to Widaman, Ferrer, and Conger (2010) this pattern of invariance is quite common, and not serious as long as other items loading on these factors are time-stable (which was the case here). Widaman et al. (2010) suggest that in those cases two models should be developed—one which frees the invariant parameters and allows for partial invariance, one that does not, and inspect whether the theoretical prediction differs. This approach was also adopted here. All results reported refer to the partial invariance model. The metric partial invariance model differed

nonsignificantly from the configural model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 27.31$, $\Delta df = 24$, $p = .290$). The model presuming scalar invariance (intercepts fixed equal) differed but in a non-meaningful way from the metric partial invariance model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 46.97$, $\Delta df = 27$, $p = .010$), as the model fit indices (TLI, SRMR) were identical to the configural model (CFI decreased by 0.001 and RMSEA increased by 0.001). Differences in model fit indices cannot be tested, however, Cheung and Rensvold (2002) could show that any change of CFI smaller or equal to 0.01 does not warrant to reject invariance. We, therefore, accept the scalar invariance model as the starting point for the construction of our structural model.

Testing the Theoretical Model

To test our hypotheses we adapted the scalar invariance version of the measurement model by adding the manifest variable political orientation, the control variable age, and the hypothesized causal paths. This model included autoregressive paths of all latent factors on themselves; paths from job insecurity to identification with the working population and with unemployed people at the next time point; paths from the two identification factors to antiegalitarianism and political orientation at the next time point. This produced a satisfactorily fitting baseline model according to standard cut-off criteria (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000) (please see Table 2 for model fit indices).

Starting from this baseline model (M1), we subsequently fixed paths in this model invariant in order to test the robustness of our effects. First of all, all autoregressive paths were set equal between the time points. As can be seen in Table 2, the resulting model fitted very well to the data, but did so significantly worse than the unrestricted model according to Chi^2 comparison tests. The actual change of fit indices, aside from χ^2 is, however, marginal, RMSEA and TLI do not change, CFI and SRMR change by 0.001 each. Given the complexity of our model and in line with Cheung and Rensvold (2002), Chen (2007) and Putnick and Bornstein (2016), we presume that these changes in χ^2 indicate non-meaningful changes in model fit. Further restrictions of setting paths time stable did not significantly affect the fit indices in any meaningful way. The final model to test our hypotheses (M4) consists of stable paths from independent to mediating variables and from mediating to dependent variables over time, as well as stable autoregressive paths. In other words, the inspected effects can be regarded as robust. All discussed effects below describe relationships over time, controlling for autoregressive effects; all cross-lagged paths were set time stable to be the same between T1 to T2 and T2 to T3 and T3 to T4.

Inspecting the individual path coefficients reveals that, as hypothesized, there was a significant negative effect of job insecurity on the identification

TABLE 2
Fit Indices of the Hypothesized Structural Model, Gradually Fixed for Time Stability, Plus Results of Model Difference Tests

Model		Chi^2	*df*	*RMSEA*	*CFI*	*TLI*	*SRMR*	*Difference test*	ΔChi^2	Δdf	*p*
M1	Baseline model	3196.62	1458	0.035	0.933	0.927	0.065	–	–	–	–
M2	M1 + autoregressive paths set equal	3228.982	1468	0.035	0.933	0.927	0.066	M2 vs M1	32.362	10	0.000
M3	M2 + JI to SI set equal	3234.132	1472	0.035	0.932	0.927	0.066	M3 vs M2	5.15	4	0.272
M4	M3 + SI to DVs set equal	3254.975	1480	0.035	0.932	0.927	0.067	M4 vs M3	20.843	8	0.008

with the working population at a later time point (B = −0.042, SEB = 0.016, p = .010), while there was no effect on the identification with unemployed people. This supports Hypothesis 1a but not Hypothesis 1b.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that the greater the threat to work-related identity, the less in favor of group equality people would be and the more they would politically self-identify to the right, over time. Work-related identity threat was operationalized in two ways in this study: as decreased identification with the working population and increased identification with unemployed people. The hypothesis was partially supported, but only for one type of identity threat. In line with the expectations, identifying less with the working population led people to show more antiegalitarianism (B = −0.045, SEB = 0.021, p = .029) over time, but there was no association with political orientation. Contrary to what was expected, the other type of identity threat led to opposite results. People who identified more strongly with unemployed people, showed *less* (rather than more) antiegalitarianism (B = −0.057, SEB = 0.013, p < .001) and *less* (rather than more) political orientation to the right (B = −0.059, SEB = 0.022, p = .009), over time. Figure 2 presents a graphic depiction of the effects.

Finally, to test Hypothesis 3, and establish the indirect effect of job insecurity on antiegalitarian attitudes via identification with the working population,

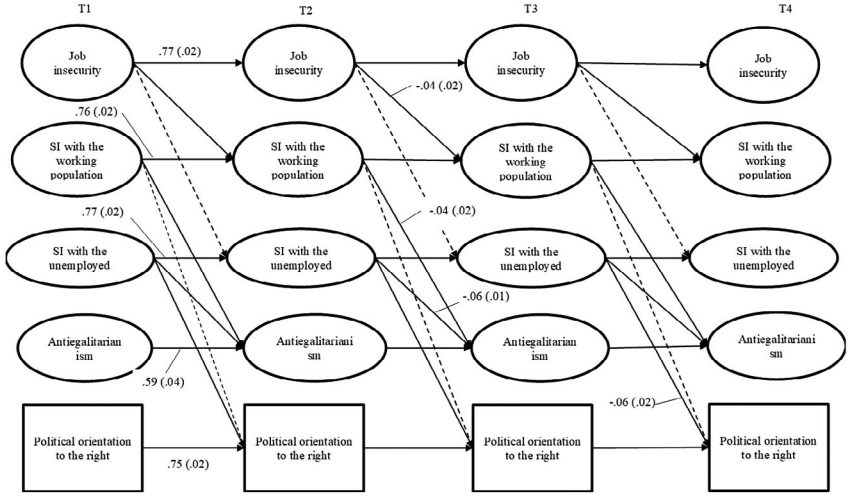

FIGURE 2. Unstandardized path estimators and standard errors for the relationship of job insecurity with identification and political attitudes. *Note.* Latent variables are shown in ellipses, observed variables in rectangles. Control variables, factor indicators and covariances are omitted for clarity. Solid lines indicate significant relationships at p < .05 and lower; dashed lines indicate non-significant relationships. Coefficients between T2 and T3, T3 and T4 were fixed to be equal those between T1 and T2, only one coefficient is shown for clarity.

a bootstrapping analysis was carried out, using 10.000 repetitions. The resulting estimate of the indirect effect B = 0.002, SEB = 0.001, 95% CI [.000; .006] was not significant, Hypothesis 3 was hence not supported.

DISCUSSION

The presented paper introduces an identity perspective to explain the effects of job insecurity and proposes that it is through identity threat that job insecurity can lead to a change in political attitudes. We argue that job insecurity threatens people's work-related identity in two ways: people will be afraid of losing an important identity (their status as employed people) and of gaining an unwanted one (becoming a member of a stigmatized group of unemployed people) (Markus & Nurius, 1986). These identity effects are deemed to activate cognitive and affective processes (in the form of derogating others and more narrow-minded thinking), which will impact political views, as expressed by people's antiegalitarianism and their self-declared political standing on a leftwing–rightwing continuum. The results of a four-wave data set provide interesting evidence for some (but not all) of these assumptions.

The identity threat assumption was partly supported, but only for one type of threat. In line with the predictions, feeling more job insecure threatened the identity as a working person, as expressed in a lowered identification with the working population over time. This threat to a person's identity as a member of the working population then led people to be less in favor for group equality, although the threat was not associated with a shift in political preferences. Anti-egalitarianism is often discussed as an indicator of political conservativism in the literature (Jost et al., 2003). This effect on antiegalitarianism was found over time and independent of the time of assessment. This confirms theoretical predictions by Branscombe and colleagues (1999) whereas people under identity threat (as signaled by the reduction in belonging to the working population) would react in a more competitive way.

Contrary to the expectations, job insecurity did not activate people's future feared self as an unemployed person, or at least it was not expressed in a heightened identification with unemployed people (although there was a correlation within time points). People who were more job insecure did not feel different in their identification as unemployed persons over time.[1] Furthermore, people who *did* perceive more identity threat of this kind, did

[1] Interestingly, the relationship was found cross-sectionally, which could also suggest a short-lived effect. A short-term connection might be more likely also given that future-directed thought often tends to be influenced more by the proximal context a person finds themselves in (Peetz & Wilson, 2008). Perhaps a better timing of the longitudinal waves would be advisable, including shorter spaced waves (less than four months) to be better able to track the development of the effect of job insecurity.

not report fewer egalitarian attitudes or a shift in their political positions to the right, on the contrary. Rather, it was found that people who identified more with being unemployed showed *less* antiegalitarianism and declared themselves to be more politically *left*. While unexpected, this finding can be understood from a perspective suggested by Jost et al. (2003), in that perceived similarity might enhance solidarity and politically more left-leaning positions. Perhaps identifying more with unemployed people, despite them being a negatively evaluated group, leads to more solidarity.

It is noteworthy that both types of identity threat, the fear of losing membership to the employed group and gaining membership of the unemployed group (expressed in a lowered identification as a member of the working population and a heightened identification with the unemployed group), were factorially distinct and not correlated, which suggests that they are two independent aspects of work-related identity: some people can feel part of the working population and part of the unemployed, others will identify more with one of these groups than with the other, yet, some might not identify with either of them.

There are several lessons to be learned from this study. Most importantly, the results show that the relationship between job insecurity, identity threat and political attitudes is not straightforward. If a person feared to lose a valued membership, and felt less identified with working people in general, an increase of antiegalitarian attitudes was found, but no effect on political preferences could be detected. If people feared to gain the stigmatized identity as an unemployed person and felt more similar to unemployed people (independent of job insecurity), a decrease of antiegalitarian attitudes and a shift in political preferences to the left was the consequence. What is interesting is that work-related identities and the assessment of work's sustainability play a role in the prediction of political attitudes.

Job insecurity leads to identity threat in the form of anticipated loss, but not in the form of anticipated (negative) gain. It would be important to establish which other job-related aspects, next to job insecurity, might threaten the identification with the working population. For example, the wider context of job insecurity might play a decisive role (Randel, 2002). In a situation where unemployment is high, the future self as being unemployed might more likely become salient, whereas in a situation where everyone else is safely employed, perhaps it is rather a future self as a different organizational member that is evoked. Also, individual dispositions might play a role in determining whether and which feared future self becomes salient (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

There are several theoretical contributions this study makes. Most prominently this study is the first of our knowledge to offer a theoretically sound and empirically evidenced explanation for the relationship between job insecurity and political attitudes—by proposing that identity threat plays a role.

However, the study also shows that the identity threats that can occur in the context of job insecurity are complex: different threats can have different consequences. Only an indirect effect of job insecurity via anticipated loss on antiegalitarianism could be found, but not on self-declared political positioning. This study also illustrates why it has been challenging to transfer well-established experimental findings on identity (e.g., Ruvolo & Markus, 1992; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001) to the context of work—as those contexts allow for multiple identities to become relevant simultaneously (see Ramarajan, 2014, for a discussion of this issue). Furthermore, this study shows that identity might be a bridge between the domain of work and the domain of private (political) life. To investigate how work-related identities are triggered outside work contexts would be an interesting avenue and potentially open up new perspectives to researchers interested in work-life research (see Selenko et al., 2018).

The results also have practical implications. We found that a threatened identity as a member of the working population leads to more antiegalitarianism. This resonates with studies by political scientists conducted in other countries (e.g., Mutz, 2018; De Witte & Meuleman, 2007), which also argue that people who feel threatened in their status in the population in general show more antiegalitarianism. Antiegalitarianism is generally found to be a predictor of more right-wing political positioning, but researchers concur that it could potentially also be associated with other, more "liberal" political attitudes in rare cases (Jost et al., 2003). This perhaps explains why job insecurity often fails to be clearly related to political outcomes (e.g., Mutz, 2018), as the complex intervening mechanisms of identity threat and antiegalitarianism are not looked at. If people felt more similar with unemployed people, less antiegalitarianism and a shift in self-declared political standing to the left occurred. In sum, work-related identity threat plays a critical role for political attitudes, and policy makers would be well advised to think hard about how work-related identity can be protected in times of job insecurity, in order to prevent societies from drifting apart through extremist voting. Next to ensuring more job *security,* measures could be set in place to help people through the affective and cognitive consequences of identity threat, particularly the threat of losing the identity as a member of the working population, and help them adjust to changes in their self-understanding. This could be attempted by creating appreciative social contexts in the form of social support exclusively available for job insecure people, for example, that allow people to frame experiences of job insecurity not only in terms of loss and unemployment (see Selenko, 2019 for specific policy suggestions). Also, it might be worthwhile to make alternative sources of work-related identities more salient (e.g., volunteering, Selenko, Stiglbauer, & Batinic, 2020; Wehrle et al., 2018).

Certainly, there are a few limitations to this study. Obviously, political behaviors are predicted by multiple factors, more than were assessed in this study. Also, there is some caution as to whether antiegalitarianism and cognitive rigidity are hallmarks of political conservativism only, or whether they could also predict other types of political attitudes (Jost et al., 2003; Tetlock, 2007). Still empirically, antiegalitarian attitudes have been found to predict right-wing voting (Cornelis & Van Hiel, 2015). We hope that by looking at change effects rather than absolute effects, potential mean level distortions due to self-report will have played less of a role. Also, the convenience sampling of this study might have affected the results: job insecurity predicted participation in subsequent waves of this study. This implies that the cross-lagged relationships might potentially be different or weaker for people with low job insecurity. Second, while there are good arguments (building on heuristics) as to why work-related identity threat manifests in lowered identification with the working population and heightened identification with the unemployed, we need to point out that we do not assess identity threat directly. Identity threat is difficult to measure through self-reports; researchers instead resort to experimental manipulations and physiological measures; both of which are not practicable in work psychological research (Bettencourt, Miller, & Hume, 1999; Branscombe et al., 1999; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005; Scheepers, Ellemers, & Sintemaartensdijk, 2009). Related to this, although we presume that perceived similarity with the unemployed people taps into notions of a future feared self, we did not measure whether people actually saw themselves as being unemployed in the future, or how much they actually feared this state. A replication of our findings using alternative measures of threat would be valuable. Also, it needs to be noted that antiegalitarianism was captured with a limited (albeit well-established) number of items, which might have restricted its validity; future studies might want to include a broader measure in order to establish more specific effects.

Finally, we need to acknowledge that while our effects are robust and time-stable, they were also quite small in their size, which evidences that there might be other more prominent factors predicting our dependent variables. One factor that might be worthwhile including here is affect (Warr et al., 2014). Depending on how active or passive, positive or negative the triggered affect, different effects of identity threat would be expected. Also the timing of the waves of the longitudinal part of the study might have influenced the results, with shorter waves potentially leading to stronger effects.

We hope to offer a convincing illustration of how job insecurity can be understood as a threat to a person's identity and political attitudes. Work is a substantial part of who we are, and as we can show, job insecurity poses a serious threat to that part of our identity. This might have widespread effects—even on political attitudes that span beyond the workplace. There

has been a call for more non-organizational work psychology lately (Selenko et al., 2018; Spreitzer et al., 2017) and we believe our study contributes to that field by showing how far beyond the organization the effects of job insecurity can reach.

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