










Preparing for a rainy day: A regulatory focus perspective on job insecurity and proactive career behaviors

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Funding information

This research was supported by the International Research and Collaboration Small Grant from the Society of Industrial Organizational Psychology. Hai-Jiang Wang's work was supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (72472056 and 72132001).

Abstract

Previous research has primarily focused on how employees passively react to job insecurity (e.g., withdrawal). We shift this focus by examining when and for whom job insecurity may relate to proactive career behaviors. Leveraging regulatory focus theory and the diminishing marginal utility principle, we theorize a nonlinear moderated mediation model that links job insecurity to two proactive career behaviors — networking and seeking mentorship — through

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avoidance work motivation and depending on collectivism orientation. Two data sets, consisting of three-wave time-lagged surveys of employees from Chile and Australia, were used to examine our hypotheses. In both samples, for those high in collectivism orientation, job insecurity increased avoidance work motivation and subsequent proactive career behaviors up to a point, after which job insecurity was no longer related to these variables. For those low in collectivism orientation, regardless of the levels of job insecurity, there were no significant relations of job insecurity with avoidance motivation and subsequent proactive career behaviors in the Australian sample; however, the non-significant relations of job insecurity with avoidance motivation and subsequent proactive career behaviors turned positive in the Chilean sample. Overall, our research extends the job insecurity literature by demonstrating the conditions under which job insecurity increases proactive career behaviors.

KEYWORDS

avoidance motivation, collectivism orientation, job insecurity, proactive career behaviors

INTRODUCTION

We are living in an age of employment uncertainty. Due to the rise of automation and artificial intelligence, geopolitical instability, higher-than-expected inflation, and a looming global recession, job insecurity, or the threat of losing one's current employment in the future (Shoss, 2017), is a prevalent work stressor that many employees face at some point of their work life. Given that job insecurity affects a significant portion of the workforce across diverse cultural conditions (Jiang et al., 2021), shedding light on its impacts is crucial.

Our current knowledge of the impacts of job insecurity is mainly built on the appraisal and resource-based models of stress (e.g., Transactional Stress theory by Lazarus & Folkman, 1984 and Conservation of Resources theory by Hobfoll, 1989). A key argument derived from these theories is that job insecurity arises from the appraisal that valued resources are under threat (Shoss, 2017). Supporting this perspective, the existing literature has documented employee negative, passive reactions to job insecurity, such as increased work withdrawal and strain, as well as diminished job attitudes and well-being (e.g., Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018; Lee et al., 2018). While this approach has produced important insights, it overlooks the possibility that job insecurity may also *motivate* employees to *avoid* potential job loss and proactively manage their careers.

In this research, we turn to regulatory focus theory,¹ positing that an impending loss can trigger an avoidance motivation strategy, which may promote proactive behavioral tactics aimed at counteracting the anticipated loss (Higgins, 1997, 1998; Zou et al., 2020). Thus, job insecurity may result in *avoidance work motivation* (i.e., the extent to which individuals are motivated to move away from negative stimuli at work; Johnson et al., 2013) and subsequent proactive career behaviors. We study two forms of proactive career behaviors: *networking behavior* (individuals' attempts to develop and maintain relationships with others who have the potential to assist them in their career; Forret & Dougherty, 2004) and *seeking mentorship* (individuals' attempts to seek advice and insights from and build a relationship with, a more experienced mentor; Turban & Dougherty, 1994). Aimed at building "knowing-whom" social capital (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994), both are crucial for individuals seeking to enhance their employability (Niu et al., 2024; Pandow & Salem, 2020) and pursue reemployment (McArdle et al., 2007). Indeed, studies estimate that 56% (Granovetter, 1995) to 80% of jobs (Fisher, 2019) are filled through social connections.

However, the relations of job insecurity with avoidance work motivation and subsequent proactive career behaviors may be complex and contingent upon certain conditions. Indeed, the diminishing marginal utility principle suggests that the additional value obtained from consuming each unit of a particular commodity decreases (Gossen, 1854/1983). Thus, the associations of job insecurity with avoidance work motivation and subsequent proactive career behaviors may be positive up to a point, beyond which job insecurity is no longer related to them. Using a rainy-day analogy, experiencing job insecurity is like a weather forecast predicting rain. People are motivated to avoid getting wet (i.e., avoidance motivation) by taking an umbrella to cope with impending rain. However, when the chance of rain increases from 80% to 90%, it does not further boost their avoidance motivation because their motivation peaks at a 70% chance of rain. Thus, we challenge the dominant assumption of linearity and propose that the effects of job insecurity are nonlinear.

Additionally, the regulatory focus perspective (Higgins, 1997, 1998; Zou et al., 2020) emphasizes the importance of individual differences in regulatory focus goals (i.e., promotion vs. prevention goals). Therefore, we further theorize that the nonlinear effects of job insecurity are contingent upon individual collectivism orientation (an orientation toward self as embedded in a complex web of social connections; House et al., 2004). Those high in collectivism orientation tend to have a prevention focus goal (Kurman & Hui, 2011), making them more sensitive to the domain of losses (Zou et al., 2020), such as job insecurity.

We examine our proposed nonlinear moderated mediation model (Figure 1) in two samples—a Chilean sample and an Australian sample, thereby making three contributions to the job insecurity literature. First, while prior research has primarily focused on the passive, negative outcomes of job insecurity (e.g., Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018), we investigate the conditions under which job-insecure employees may take proactive actions to improve their career prospects. Taking the initiatives to manage one's career is paramount in today's uncertain work environment (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) where employers have steadily shifted market risks from themselves to employees and largely adopted flexible labor arrangements (e.g., the extensive use of outsourcing and contingent workers; Jiang, 2020). Moreover, job-insecure employees usually lack the influence needed to protect against the loss of their current job, should they arise. Thus, for employees who are unable to shift the uncertain situation in their favor, the best course of action is to build social capital *beyond* their current organization. Thus, investigating the proactive career behaviors of job-insecure employees may shift the focus from passive reactions to proactive coping strategies in response to job insecurity.

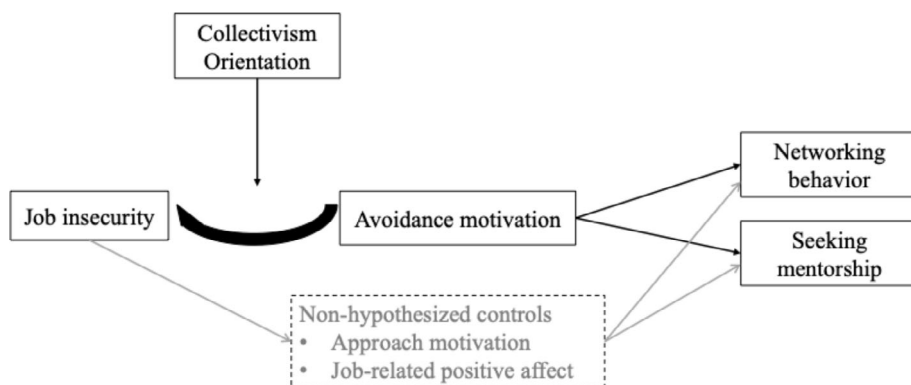


FIGURE 1 An integrative model.

Second, we identify avoidance work motivation as a mediator explaining *why* job insecurity relates to networking and seeking mentorship. Part of the reason for the sparse research on the proactive outcomes of job insecurity is the neglect of employee motivation (Shoss, 2017). Previous research has mainly examined stress-related (e.g., threat to manifest and latent benefits of work in Vander Elst, Näswall, et al., 2016; frustration of psychological needs in Vander Elst et al., 2012; sense of control in Vander Elst, De Cuyper, et al., 2016) and social exchange-related mediators (e.g., psychological contract breach in Vander Elst, De Cuyper, et al., 2016; organizational injustice in Piccoli & De Witte, 2015) in the relationships between job insecurity and outcomes of interest. We contribute to the literature by offering a new perspective (i.e., regulatory focus theory) on how and why job insecurity may motivate employees to proactively build social capital under certain circumstances.

Third, we identify collectivism cultural value orientation as an individual difference that may change the nonlinear effects of job insecurity. To the best of our knowledge, only one empirical study has examined the moderating role of individual collectivism orientation in the linear relations between job insecurity and outcomes of interest (Probst & Lawler, 2006), while most studies have focused on country-level cultural moderators such as individualism–collectivism (Probst & Lawler, 2006), power distance (Xu et al., 2022), enacted uncertainty avoidance (Debus et al., 2012), and masculinity (Debus et al., 2020). By examining collectivism orientation as a moderator in the proposed nonlinear effects of job insecurity, we respond to Shoss's (2017) call for research on deepening the understanding of psychological vulnerabilities when facing job insecurity.

PROACTIVE REACTIONS TO JOB INSECURITY: A REGULATORY FOCUS PERSPECTIVE

We begin by introducing regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997, 1998; Zou et al., 2020) to establish an overarching theoretical framework and link this theory to our proposed model. Integrating this theoretical perspective with the diminishing marginal utility principle (Gossen, 1854/1983), we then predict a nonlinear relationship between job insecurity and avoidance motivation and examine how collectivism orientation may moderate this nonlinear relationship. Next, we propose how avoidance motivation may relate to networking and seeking

mentorship, and develop a mediation model for the nonlinear interactive effects of job insecurity and collectivism orientation on networking and seeking mentorship through avoidance motivation.

Regulatory focus theory

Regulatory focus theory differentiates two coexisting, but orthogonal, motivational systems, the prevention and promotion systems (Higgins, 1997, 1998). Regulatory focus *independently* operates across three levels of motivational abstraction: system, strategic, and tactical (Johnson et al., 2015; Scholer & Higgins, 2008). The *system* level of regulatory focus pertains to individual overarching goals and end-state preferences (Higgins, 1997), which are often operationalized as a chronic prevention or promotion focus orientation (Johnson et al., 2015). Individuals, who are prevention-focused, emphasize safety, security, and responsibility, whereas individuals, who are promotion-focused, emphasize growth, advancement, and accomplishment. As will be clarified below, in our investigation, individuals high in collectivism orientation can be conceptualized as having a chronic prevention goal, and those with a low collectivism orientation as having a chronic promotion goal (Kurman & Hui, 2011).

Independent of the system level, regulatory focus at the *strategic* level focuses on the general means for goal pursuit (Higgins, 1997). A prevention focus tends to exhibit vigilant, avoidance motivational strategies, whereas a promotion focus tends to exhibit eager, approach motivational strategies (Johnson et al., 2015; Scholer & Higgins, 2008). Consistent with prior research (e.g., Tu et al., 2024), avoidance work motivation in our investigation operates at the strategic level.

Independent of the strategic level, regulatory focus at the *tactical* level addresses behavioral tactics adopted in specific situations for goal pursuit (Johnson et al., 2015; Scholer & Higgins, 2008). For example, after incurring a loss from their first investment, individuals may opt for either a riskier or a safer stock option for their second investment (e.g., Scholer et al., 2010). In our investigation, networking behavior and seeking mentorship operate at the tactical level. Because the three levels of regulatory focus are independent, individuals self-regulate behaviors to meet the situational demands (Johnson et al., 2015).

For simplicity, regulatory focus theory describes the situational demands in three states: the status quo (i.e., “0”), the domain of gains (i.e., “+1”), and the domain of losses (i.e., “-1”; Zou et al., 2020). More importantly, the significance of the same state differs depending on individuals' goal at the system level (i.e., chronic regulatory focus orientation; Johnson et al., 2015; Zou et al., 2020). “Given the differing sensitivities of the two systems, falling below the status quo is *unacceptable* for prevention-focused individuals in a way that is not true for promotion-focused individuals” (Scholer et al., 2010, p. 217, emphasis added). That is, prevention-focused individuals with a goal of maintaining the status quo are motivated to move away from the domain of losses (“-1”) toward the status quo (“0”) because “there is a significant difference between 0 and -1” (Scholer et al., 2010, p. 217). In contrast, promotion-focused individuals with a goal of making clear progress are motivated to move away from the status quo (“0”) toward the domain of gains (“+1”) but “there is no strong distinction between 0 and -1, because both represent nongains” (Scholer et al., 2010, p. 217). That is, the status quo (“0”) is desirable for a prevention goal but undesirable for a promotion goal (Zou et al., 2020).

Therefore, prevention- and promotion-focused individuals experience (Scholer & Higgins, 2010) and react to losses differently (Scholer et al., 2010). Because acceptable progress

is measured by whether it returns them to the status quo, prevention-focused individuals (the system level) are driven by avoidance motivation (the strategic level) to do *whatever is necessary* (the tactical level) to return to the status quo. For example, Scholer et al. (2010) showed that counter to preferences at the system and strategic level (i.e., risk aversion and vigilant avoidance strategy), prevention-focused individuals choose riskier (as opposed to safer) options when these are the only way to restore a status quo state from a loss state. In contrast, promotion-focused individuals are motivated to make progress away from the status quo; acceptable progress is measured by whether there is advancement toward gains. In Scholer et al.'s investigation, "promotion-focused decision makers are *indifferent* between the more and the less risky options because neither can serve their goal to make significant progress beyond the status quo" (Zou et al., 2020, p. 83, emphasis added).

Regulatory focus systems constitute fundamental motivational concerns (Higgins, 1997). Both the promotion and prevention systems are necessary for individuals to survive and thrive. Thus, individuals tend to alternate between a promotion state and a prevention state over time. However, at any given moment, the concerns of one system may dominate the other (Zou et al., 2020). The dominant motivational strategy at any given moment can be understood as either an avoidance or approach motivational strategy that directs individual tactical behaviors (Johnson et al., 2015; Tu et al., 2024; Zou et al., 2020). This depends on both the immediate situation triggering a specific focus and the extent to which one regulatory focus is more chronically accessible for that individual (i.e., a chronic orientation; Higgins, 1997, 1998), thereby implying an interaction between the current state and individual differences in regulatory focus goals. Thus, job insecurity (i.e., the domain of losses) should interact with collectivism orientation (characterized by a chronic prevention goal at the system level) to predict motivation (specifically, avoidance motivation at the strategic level) and subsequent behaviors (at the tactical level).

A nonlinear relationship between job insecurity and avoidance motivation

Job insecurity represents the current state in the domain of *losses* because it implies the possibility of losing one's current employment (Shoss, 2017). In other words, job insecurity indicates that an individual's job status may change from having a job to becoming jobless, representing a possible change from nonloss to losses or from the status quo to a worse state (Long et al., 2022; Tu et al., 2020). Because job insecurity is in the domain of losses, regulatory focus theory expects it to prompt one's momentary avoidance strategy, which is conceptualized as *avoidance work motivation* in this investigation.

As indicated prior, regulatory focus theory only considers the categorical values of the current state being gained (i.e., "1"), the status quo (i.e., "0"), and losses (i.e., "-1"; Zou et al., 2020). Its empirical evidence is primarily derived from laboratory experiments (e.g., Scholer et al., 2010). Consequently, it lacks precise predictions about people's reactions when facing an increasingly uncertain situation. That is, the current state may be more nuanced than what is hypothesized by regulatory focus theory. Given that job insecurity is a continuous variable rather than a categorical shift from the status quo (i.e., "0") to losses (i.e., "-1"), the diminishing marginal utility principle (Gossen, 1854/1983) may be more effective in explaining people's motivational reactions to job insecurity.

The diminishing marginal utility principle states that there is a decline in the value derived from consuming additional units of a particular commodity (Gossen, 1854/1983). That is, the positive impact of a particular commodity is restricted to the low end of the spectrum, with the benefits of additional consumption substantially diminishing at the high end. This principle has been supported with regard to the impacts of money on subjective well-being (Veenhoven, 1991). For example, while an income increase from \$20,000 to \$30,000 significantly boosts subjective well-being, the same increase from \$170,000 to \$180,000 has minimal or no effect (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). That is, the association between income and subjective well-being is only positive up to a point, beyond which income is no longer associated with well-being. Similar asymptotic relationships have been observed in various contexts, including the social impact of group size on a target individual (DeWall et al., 2010), the effect of social contact frequency on physical health (Stavrova & Ren, 2020), and the influence of discretionary time on subjective well-being (Sharif et al., 2021).

Integrating regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997) with the diminishing marginal utility principle (Gossen, 1854/1983), we posit that the positive relationship between job insecurity and avoidance motivation may turn nonsignificant after its inflection point. That is, when job insecurity reaches the inflection point, after which its relationship with avoidance motivation ceases to be significant. Specifically, when it is below the inflection point, job insecurity, representing an impending loss, may activate avoidance motivation, leading to a positive relationship between job insecurity and avoidance motivation. When job insecurity rises to the inflection point, the threat of losing one's employment becomes a palpable reality, making the prospect of unemployment feel immediate, tangible, and vivid (Lam et al., 2015). Consequently, one's motivation to avoid the future failure of being unemployed reaches the highest level. Once job insecurity surpasses the inflection point, further increases in job insecurity no longer confer additional benefits to avoidance motivation; that is, avoidance motivation plateaus at the inflection point and remains at that level.

Since there is no additional increase in avoidance motivation even if job insecurity continues to grow, we argue for an asymptotic relationship between job insecurity and avoidance motivation where their positive relationship may turn nonsignificant after its inflection point. Given that individual differences in regulatory focus goals (e.g., those with a chronic prevention goal) influence how individuals react to the domain of losses (Scholer et al., 2010), collectivism orientation may moderate the nonlinear relationship between job insecurity and avoidance motivation.

The moderating role of collectivism orientation

Collectivists emphasize group harmony, cooperation, respect for community rules, loyalty, and generosity (Hofstede et al., 2010; House et al., 2004; also see Fischer et al., 2009; Jackson et al., 2006). They have high psychological needs for affiliation, security, and stability (Taras et al., 2010; Triandis, 1995). Thus, collectivists tend to view maintaining social ties as a salient personal goal, prefer job security (Probst & Lawler, 2006), and bias toward negative information (Hamamura et al., 2009). Moreover, collectivists emphasize employment contracts based on moral commitments and prefer long-term relationships between the employer and employees (Gomez-Mejia & Welbourne, 1991) and human resource management practices that facilitate job security (Ramamoorthy & Carroll, 1998). Additionally, collectivists perceive the boundaries between in-groups and out-groups to be stable, relatively impermeable, and

important (Oyserman, 2011). Therefore, maintaining their current organizational membership is vital for those who are high in collectivism orientation. Empirical research provides strong support for the importance of job security among those high (vs. low) in collectivism orientation (Oyserman et al., 2002), who react more negatively to job insecurity (Probst & Lawler, 2006).

From the perspective of regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1998), those high in collectivism orientation tend to have a chronic prevention goal (Kurman & Hui, 2011). For example, in experimental studies, Lee et al. (2000) showed that temporarily induced collectivist mindsets can create a prevention focus, whereas temporarily induced individualistic mindsets can create a promotion focus. In survey research, Lockwood et al. (2005) found that interdependent self-construal is related to prevention focus, while independent self-construal is related to promotion focus. Moreover, Asian-Canadians are more prevention-focused than Euro-Canadians (Lockwood et al., 2005). Together, the existing evidence suggests that those high in collectivism orientation (i.e., collectivists) tend to hold a chronic prevention goal.

According to regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997, 1998; Zou et al., 2020), collectivists with a prevention goal are more concerned with the absence and presence of negative stimuli and more sensitive to losses (in this investigation, job insecurity). Thus, integrating it with the diminishing marginal utility principle (Gossen, 1854/1983), job insecurity may interact with collectivism orientation to nonlinearly prompt avoidance work motivation.

Specifically, collectivists place a great emphasis on security and in-group relationship ties (House et al., 2004). The possibility of losing one's current employment and the associated social ties signals a pressing threat to the core value of security. Moreover, collectivists are more sensitive to negative signals, especially those that could harm or disrupt their group (Elliot et al., 2001). Therefore, those high in collectivism orientation tend to notice environmental threats and interpret their experienced job insecurity as a "signal" or even a "warning" that activates their avoidance motivation. Thus, collectivists may experience a positive relation between job insecurity and avoidance work motivation before the inflection point. After the inflection point, those high in collectivism orientation may remain motivated to avoid job insecurity (the "pull" factor); at the high end of the job insecurity spectrum, however, employees may also be overwhelmed and distracted (the "push" factor; Probst et al., 2020). Together, these "push" and "pull" factors associated with the high end of job insecurity may neutralize each other, leading to a null relation between job insecurity and avoidance motivation. Together, for those high in collectivism orientation, the relation between job insecurity and avoidance motivation is positive up to a point, beyond which additional job insecurity does not relate to further increases in avoidance motivation.

By contrast, those low in collectivism orientation with a promotion goal (Kurman & Hui, 2011) are *less sensitive* to negative deviations from the status quo or the domain of losses (Higgins, 1997, 1998; Scholer et al., 2010; Zou et al., 2020). For example, whereas prevention-focused individuals tend to encode and remember loss-relevant information, promotion-focused individuals tend to encode and remember gain-relevant information (Higgins & Tykocinski, 1992). That is, for individuals with a promotion goal, the threat of losses lacks motivational functions because these individuals do not differentiate between the status quo and the domain of losses (Scholer et al., 2010), as neither serves their goal of making significant progress beyond the status quo (Zou et al., 2020). Indeed, in all four studies, Scholer et al. demonstrated that having a promotion focus did not lead to take risks when they were confronted with the possibility of losses. That is, individuals with a promotion goal are *indifferent* to the choice (risky vs. safer) options because neither option allows them to advance beyond the current state. Indeed, previous empirical studies typically do not predict or find a significant interaction effect

between job insecurity and individual promotion focus goal on outcomes of interest (Tu et al., 2020, 2024). Therefore, for those low in collectivism orientation with a promotion goal (Kurman & Hui, 2011), job insecurity in the domain of losses may not relate to avoidance motivation. Together, we predict that:

Hypothesis 1. Collectivism cultural value orientation will moderate the nonlinear relationship between job insecurity and avoidance work motivation such that for those high in collectivism orientation, a positive relationship between job insecurity and avoidance motivation will turn nonsignificant after its inflection point, whereas for those low in collectivism orientation, there will be a nonsignificant relationship between job insecurity and avoidance motivation.

The nonlinear moderated mediation model

Thus far, we have reasoned that the interaction between job insecurity and collectivism orientation nonlinearly relates to avoidance work motivation. We now develop the idea that avoidance work motivation may explain the relations of job insecurity with networking and seeking mentorship, especially among those high in collectivism orientation. By definition, avoidance work motivation guides behaviors away from negative objects and possibilities at work (Johnson et al., 2013; Tu et al., 2024). In our investigation, to move away from job insecurity, individuals may engage in networking and seeking mentorship, both of which are instrumental to increase employability and secure alternative employment.

According to regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997, 1998; Zou et al., 2020), the primary concern of a prevention focus is to maintain the status quo. When individuals in a prevention focus face a loss event, they are willing to take risks if it is the only way to return to the status quo (Scholer et al., 2010). That is, when prevention-focused individuals are in an *unsatisfactory* state, they are motivated by vigilant avoidance motivational strategy to adopt behavioral tactics that are instrumental to attain their goal (i.e., instrumentality; Hamstra & Higgins, 2024). As mentioned earlier, regulatory focus theory emphasizes the independence of the hierarchy of regulatory focus (i.e., regulatory focus at the system level, the strategic level, and the tactical level; Johnson et al., 2015). Consequently, tactical behaviors may *not* align with motivation at the strategic level if these behaviors serve the goal of returning to the desired end state.

For example, previous research has shown that following social discrimination, individuals in a prevention focus show an *increased* motivation to act against discriminatory judgment (Sassenberg & Hansen, 2007). It suggests that the prevention system was associated with taking *greater* action following perceived social discrimination. That is, individuals in a prevention focus perceived themselves as being below the status quo. They were consequently willing to do *whatever was necessary* to resolve it, including taking even risky actions (e.g., confronting a superior; Scholer & Higgins, 2010).

When facing the potential of job loss, collectivists' prevention goal of maintaining the status quo is not satisfied. As a result, these individuals are motivated to leave the worse state and return to the status quo. They are driven by avoidance motivation at the strategic level to engage in tactical behaviors that are *instrumental* to return to the status quo. In other words, avoidance motivation can energize and channel employee behaviors in a precise way to specifically address the threat of job insecurity. Because of the independence of the hierarchy of regulatory focus (Johnson et al., 2015), these tactical behaviors that are specific to the context of job

insecurity can be *proactive* in nature if they are to serve one's prevention goal at the system level. These behaviors at the tactical level are instrumental, providing the best opportunity for goal attainment (Hamstra & Higgins, 2024; Zou et al., 2020). In the face of job insecurity, networking behavior and seeking mentorship are instrumental because they can enhance employees' employability (Niu et al., 2024; Pandow & Salem, 2020) and help them secure alternative employment opportunities (Wanberg et al., 2020). Therefore, avoidance work motivation driven by job insecurity can promote networking behavior and seeking mentorship aimed at replacing the current job in the event of job loss and giving job-insecure individuals alternative options. Together, when confronted with certain levels of job insecurity, collectivists with a prevention focus (Kurman & Hui, 2011) may be energized by avoidance motivation to network and seek mentorship, thereby increasing their employability and enhancing their chance of gaining reemployment.

Based on regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997, 1998; Zou et al., 2020), for collectivists with a prevention-focused goal (Kurman & Hui, 2011), job insecurity is an undesired state. They are motivated to avoid unemployment, thereby actively networking and seeking mentorship to return to their desired end state (the status quo). Integrating it with the diminishing marginal utility principle (Gossen, 1854/1983), the relations of job insecurity with avoidance motivation as well as subsequent networking behavior and seeking mentorship might be positive up to a point, beyond which job insecurity is no longer associated with avoidance motivation or subsequent networking and seeking mentorship. In contrast, those low in collectivism orientation with a chronic promotion focus (Kurman & Hui, 2011) may be less sensitive to job insecurity. For them, job insecurity may not be related to avoidance motivation or subsequent networking and seeking mentorship. Together, collectivism orientation may moderate the indirect, nonlinear relations of job insecurity with networking behavior and seeking mentorship through avoidance work motivation.

Hypothesis 2. Collectivism cultural orientation will moderate the nonlinear indirect associations of job insecurity with networking behavior (H2a) and seeking mentorship (H2b) via avoidance motivation.

METHOD

We examined both hypotheses in two different countries, Chile and Australia.

Sample 1: Chilean employee sample and procedures

Participants were working adults who were enrolling in a business specialization program at one of the major universities in Chile. Research assistants introduced the project to participants and the voluntary nature of participation. Those who were interested completed paper-based surveys at three-time points. An individualized identification code was used to match these surveys with a one month in between each time point. We received 433, 230, and 174 responses at Time 1, Time 2, and Time 3, respectively. Removing two participants who failed to provide sufficient information on key variables, the final sample included 172 Chilean employees. The sample was mainly female (61.6%), and full-time employees (94.8%) with permanent contracts

(87.9%). Participants' mean age was 38.47 ($SD = 10.42$), and the mean organizational tenure was 7.91 years ($SD = 6.93$).

Sample 2: Australian employee sample and procedures

Three-wave time-lagged data were collected from Australian employees via Prolific with one month in between each measurement point. We obtained responses from 568, 448, and 337 employees at Time 1, Time 2, and Time 3, respectively. We retained participants who answered all quality check questions correctly and provided sufficient responses, leading to a final sample of 254 employees. The mean age was 32.43 ($SD = 9.17$) and the mean organizational tenure was 5.21 years ($SD = 5.30$). The sample consisted of 52% female employees. Most participants worked full-time (61%) and held a permanent contract (72%).

In both samples, job insecurity, collectivism orientation, and four other cultural orientations as controls were measured at Time 1, avoidance motivation and control variables of approach motivation and job-related positive affect at Time 2, and networking behavior and seeking mentorship at Time 3.

Measures

Unless otherwise noted, five-point Likert-type agreement scales ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”) were used. In the Chilean sample, we translated the English version of the scales below into Spanish using the standard translation-back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1980).

Job insecurity was measured using four items from Oldham et al. (1986; $\alpha_{\text{sample 1}} = .90$; $\alpha_{\text{sample 2}} = .90$; e.g., “My job is not a secure one”).

Collectivism orientation was measured using six items from Yoo et al.'s scale (2011; $\alpha_{\text{sample 1}} = .81$; $\alpha_{\text{sample 2}} = .82$; e.g., “Individuals should sacrifice self-interest for the group”).

Avoidance work motivation was measured using six items from Johnson et al. (2013; $\alpha_{\text{sample 1}} = .80$; $\alpha_{\text{sample 2}} = .84$). In the instruction, participants were asked to reflect on their work experiences in the past month when responding to items tapping into avoidance work motivation (e.g., “I was focused on failure experiences that occurred at work while working”).

Networking behavior was measured ($\alpha_{\text{sample 1}} = .95$; $\alpha_{\text{sample 2}} = .94$) using nine items from Wolff and Spurk (2020) on a 5-point scale (1 = very infrequently; 5 = very frequently). In the instruction, participants were asked to reflect on how often they engaged in the items tapping into networking behaviors (e.g., “I used external events to build new contacts with persons from other organizations”) in the past month.

Seeking mentorship was assessed ($\alpha_{\text{sample 1}} = .92$; $\alpha_{\text{sample 2}} = .95$) using five items from Aryee et al. (1999) on a 5-point scale (1 = very infrequently; 5 = very frequently). In the instruction, participants were asked to reflect on how often they engaged in the items tapping into seeking mentorship (e.g., “I sought to become acquainted with someone with more experiences”) in the past month.

Control variables. We controlled for several variables that may confound the investigated relationships (Carlson & Wu, 2012). To isolate the effect of collectivism orientation, we controlled for four other cultural orientations (Hofstede, 2001): power distance orientation (five items; “People in higher positions should make most decisions without consulting people in

lower positions”; $\alpha_{\text{sample 1}} = .64$; $\alpha_{\text{sample 2}} = .75$), masculine orientation (four items; “It is more important for men to have a professional career than it is for women”; $\alpha_{\text{sample 1}} = .79$; $\alpha_{\text{sample 2}} = .84$), long-term orientation (six items; we asked participants to rate the importance of each statement such as “Long-term planning” on a five-point scale ranging from “not at all important” to “extremely important”; $\alpha_{\text{sample 1}} = .72$; $\alpha_{\text{sample 2}} = .67$), and uncertainty avoidance orientation (five items; “It is important to have instructions spelled out in detail so that I always know what I’m expected to do”; $\alpha_{\text{sample 1}} = .78$; $\alpha_{\text{sample 2}} = .78$). All were measured at Time 1 with the respective scales from Yoo et al. (2011). Building on studies showing significant relations of age (Kooij et al., 2011) and gender (Meece et al., 2006) with motives, we followed previous research (e.g., Sommet et al., 2019) and controlled for employee age and gender. Results with and without controls were consistent. Results without controls are in Supplemental Material (Table S1).

When relating to networking behavior and seeking mentorship, we controlled for age and gender because previous research has shown that there are age (e.g., Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008) and gender (e.g., Allen et al., 2000) differences in networking behavior and seeking mentorship.

Based on recommendations for including controls when there is a strong theoretical justification (Bernierth & Aguinis, 2016; Spector & Brannick, 2011), we included two additional key controls — job-related positive affect and approach motivation when predicting networking behavior and seeking mentorship. Both variables are confounders as they are theoretically related to outcomes of interest in our model. Accounting for confounders can ensure an unbiased estimation of the associations between predictors and outcomes (MacKinnon et al., 2000).

Specifically, we controlled for *job-related positive affect* because it is a positive motivational state that can enhance one’s career management behaviors (Lent et al., 2017; Parker et al., 2010). Indeed, positive affect has been argued to function as a motivational fuel, propelling individuals to bring about change (Bindl et al., 2012). Therefore, it serves as a competing pathway for the relationships between job insecurity and outcomes of interest. Job-related positive affect ($\alpha_{\text{sample 1}} = .87$; $\alpha_{\text{sample 2}} = .90$) was measured with six items (Basińska et al., 2014; e.g., “my job made me feel at ease”) on a five-point frequency scale (1 = not at all; 5 = extremely).

Moreover, we controlled for *approach motivation*. Approach motivation represents a competing theoretical explanation for the relationships between job insecurity and the outcomes of interest. Avoidance motivation and approach motivation are fundamental drivers of human behaviors (Davidson, 1998). Approach motivation is theorized to guide overt approach-oriented behaviors (Elliot & Thrash, 2002) such as networking behaviors and seeking mentorship. Therefore, we controlled for approach motivation to better isolate the effects of avoidance motivation. Approach motivation was measured using six items from Johnson et al. (2013; $\alpha_{\text{sample 1}} = .82$; $\alpha_{\text{sample 2}} = .86$; e.g., “My goal at work was to fulfil my potential to the fullest in my job”) on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”).

Analytic approach

We examined both hypotheses using path analyses with *Mplus 8* (Muthén & Muthén, 2017) and standardized both the predictor of job insecurity and the moderator of collectivism orientation before analyses to avoid multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991; also see Le et al., 2011).

Hypothesis 1 specified a moderation effect of collectivism orientation on the nonlinear relationship between job insecurity and avoidance motivation. We used the following equation to test Hypothesis 1:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Avoidance motivation} = & b_0 + b_1 (\text{job} - \text{insecurity}) + b_2 (\text{job} - \text{insecurity squared}) \\ & + b_3 (\text{collectivism orientation}) \\ & + b_4 (\text{collectivism orientation} \times \text{job} - \text{insecurity}) \\ & + b_5 (\text{collectivism orientation} \times \text{job} - \text{insecurity squared}) \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

If b_5 is statistically significant, this indicates that collectivism orientation moderates the nonlinear relationship between job insecurity and avoidance motivation (J. Jiang et al., 2022).

According to Pierce and Aguinis (2013; also see J. Jiang et al., 2022), the inflection point was calculated as $-(b_1 + b_4 \text{ collectivism orientation})/2(b_2 + b_5 \text{ collectivism orientation})$. The inflection point must be within the data range. Moreover, using Preacher et al.'s (2006) approach, we examined the simple slopes of the nonlinear relationship between job insecurity and avoidance motivation at the high and low ends of the job insecurity spectrum (i.e., one *SD* above and below the inflection point of standardized job insecurity) for those reporting high (one *SD* above the mean) and low (one *SD* below the mean) levels of collectivism orientation separately. Consistent results from two-lines tests (Simonsohn, 2018) can be found in the Supplemental Material.

Hypothesis 2 addressed the nonlinear moderated mediation relationships. Based on Hayes and Preacher (2010); also see Lin et al., (2017), a nonlinear mediation effect is a special case of a more general expression of an indirect effect in which a predictor (X) is *nonlinearly* related to a mediator (Me), and in turn linearly related to an outcome (Y). In its most general form, the rate at which a change in X affects Y indirectly through changes in Me , denoted as θ , can be calculated by multiplying the first partial derivative of the function of Me with respect to X by the first partial derivative of the function of Y with respect to Me :

$$\theta = \frac{\partial Me}{\partial X} \frac{\partial Y}{\partial Me} \quad (2)$$

To calculate the instantaneous indirect effect, we substituted job insecurity for X , avoidance motivation for Me , and the outcome (i.e., networking or seeking mentorship) for Y . Since we hypothesized a linear relationship between avoidance motivation and networking behavior (as an example), the equation can be written as:

$$\text{Networking behavior} = b_6 + b_7 (\text{avoidance motivation}) \quad (3)$$

Next, we derived the partial derivative of avoidance motivation with respect to job insecurity from Equation (1) and the partial derivative of networking with respect to avoidance motivation from Equation (3):

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial Me}{\partial X} = & b_1 + b_4 (\text{collectivism orientation}) + 2b_2 (\text{job} - \text{insecurity}) \\ & + 2b_5 (\text{collectivism orientation} \times \text{job} - \text{insecurity}) \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$

According to Equation (2) and $\frac{\partial Y}{\partial Me} = b_7$, the instantaneous indirect effect of job insecurity-collectivism orientation on networking through avoidance motivation is:

$$\theta = \left[b_1 + 2b_2(\text{job} - \text{insecurity}) + b_4(\text{collectivism orientation}) + 2b_5(\text{job insecurity} \times \text{collectivism orientation}) \right] \times b_7 \quad (5)$$

In Equation (5), θ is not a constant, but a function of job insecurity and collectivism orientation. According to previous research (J. Jiang et al., 2022; Hu et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2017), if the difference in θ at high and low levels of job insecurity and collectivism orientation is statistically significant, this supports the specification of a nonlinear moderated mediation effect. We also used Equation (5) to calculate the nonlinear mediation effect at the high and low ends of the job insecurity spectrum (i.e., one *SD* above and below the inflection point of standardized job insecurity) for those reporting high (one *SD* above the mean) and low (one *SD* below the mean) levels of collectivism orientation separately.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations in both samples. Before testing our hypotheses, we performed CFAs and found support for the distinctiveness of the study variables in both samples (Table 2).

Results in Table 3 indicated that collectivism orientation significantly interacted with job insecurity-squared to influence avoidance motivation ($b_{\text{sample1}} = -.11$, $p = .010$; $b_{\text{sample2}} = -.11$, $p = .019$).² Figures 2 and 3 display the moderating effect of collectivism orientation for Samples 1 and 2, respectively. In Sample 1, for those *high* in collectivism orientation (one *SD* above the mean), the inflection point was 1.03, within the range of standardized job insecurity (−1.33 to 1.77); simple slope tests (Preacher et al., 2006; Table 4) revealed that when job insecurity was low (one *SD* below the inflection point), there was a positive relationship between job insecurity and avoidance motivation (simple slope = .195, $p = .002$); conversely, when job insecurity was high (one *SD* above the inflection point), there was no significant relationship between job insecurity and avoidance motivation (simple slope = −.003, $p = .983$); thus, the positive relationship between job insecurity and avoidance motivation turned nonsignificant after its inflection point. For those *low* in collectivism orientation (one *SD* below the mean), the inflection point was −0.80, within the range of standardized job insecurity (−1.33 to 2.80)³; when job insecurity was low (one *SD* below the inflection point), there was no significant relation between job insecurity and avoidance motivation (simple slope = −.017, $p = .909$); however, when job insecurity was high (one *SD* above the inflection point), there was a positive relation between job insecurity and avoidance motivation (simple slope = .233, $p = .001$); thus, a nonsignificant relation between job insecurity and avoidance motivation turned positive and significant after its inflection point.

In Sample 2, for those *high* in collectivism orientation (one *SD* above the mean), the inflection point was 1.16, within the range of standardized job insecurity (−1.33 to 2.50); simple slope tests (Table 4) showed that when job insecurity was low (one *SD* below the inflection point), there was a positive relation between job insecurity and avoidance motivation (simple slope = .334, $p < .001$); conversely, when job insecurity was high (one *SD* above the inflection

TABLE 1 Mean, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities for variables in Samples 1 and 2.

		Sample 2															
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Mean	SD	α
Sample 1	Mean	38.84	0.61	2.29	3.43	1.65	3.85	3.98	1.58	2.73	4.06	3.09	2.44	3.10			
	SD	10.44	0.49	0.97	0.70	0.53	0.57	0.54	0.71	0.76	0.60	0.77	1.00	1.08			
	α	NA	NA	.90	.81	.64	.79	.72	.78	.80	.82	.87	.95	.93			
1. Age			-.22**	.02	.06	.04	-.01	-.06	.22**	-.12	.06	.03	-.12	-.04	32.43	9.17	NA
2. Gender				.00	-.18	-.06	-.06	-.03	-.21**	-.04	-.02	.07	-.01	-.16*	.51	.50	NA
3. T1 job insecurity				-.02	-.09	.02	.02	-.09	.02	.30**	-.08	-.21**	-.05	.04	2.39	1.04	.90
4. T1 collectivism orientation				.00	-.14*	-.13*	.00	.17**	.09	.07	-.08	.11	.04	-.01	3.20	.73	.87
5. T1 PDO				.07	-.11	.03	.18**	-.16	.20**	.20**	-.09	-.14*	.07	.01	1.83	.67	.75
6. T1 UAO				-.08	.04	-.09	.14*	.06	.02	.07	.22**	.04	.06	.01	3.99	.60	.78
7. T1 LTO				.04	-.10	.05	.16*	-.02	.25**	-.06	.12	.28**	.12	.06	3.88	.54	.67
8. T1 MAS				.00	-.28**	-.01	.11	.45**	.11	.13*	-.17*	-.17	-.04	-.04	1.73	.94	.84
9. T2 avoidance motivation				-.16*	.17**	.23**	-.09	.02	.10	-.08	-.04	-.21**	.01	.06	2.98	.85	.82
10. T2 approach motivation				.18**	-.10	-.10	.15*	-.09	-.02	.26**	.02	.45**	.21**	.17*	3.69	.78	.86
11. T2 job-related positive affect				.20**	-.16**	-.17**	.16*	.06	-.02	.24**	.12	.63**	.30**	.25**	2.44	.83	.90
12. T3 networking behavior				-.08	-.09	.10	.17**	.12	-.21**	.14*	.07	.21**	.21**	.63**	1.90	.89	.94
13. T3 seeking mentorship				-.09	-.12	.03	.10	.04	-.16*	.19**	.10	.33**	.65**	2.26	1.06	.91	

Note: The correlations above the diagonal were for Sample 1, whereas the correlations below the diagonal were for Sample 2. PDO = power distance orientation; UAO = uncertainty avoidance orientation; LTO = long-term orientation; MAS = masculine orientation. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Male was coded as 0, while female as 1. T1 = Time 1. T2 = Time 2. T3 = Time 3.

TABLE 2 Results of confirmatory factor analysis in samples 1 and 2.

Models	χ^2/df	χ^2	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Study 1						
Model 1: Five-factor model	2.37	935.54	.885	.874	.056	.065
Model 2: Four-factor model	3.33	1328.02	.803	.785	.073	.077
Model 3: Four-factor model	3.31	1319.18	.805	.787	.073	.110
Model 4: Four-factor model	3.27	1305.81	.808	.790	.072	.121
Model 5: Four-factor model	4.32	1723.51	.719	.694	.088	.099
Model 6: Four-factor model	3.11	1241.67	.821	.805	.070	.088
Model 7: Four-factor model	3.29	1313.64	.806	.789	.073	.103
Model 8: One-factor model	7.85	3180.87	.411	.368	.126	.327
Study 2						
Model 1: Five-factor model	2.13	839.99	.903	.894	.066	.055
Model 2: Four-factor model	3.05	1218.81	.822	.806	.090	.065
Model 3: Four-factor model	3.16	1261.82	.813	.796	.092	.093
Model 4: Four-factor model	3.15	1260.44	.813	.796	.092	.094
Model 5: Four-factor model	3.40	1356.41	.792	.773	.097	.105
Model 6: Four-factor model	3.06	1219.05	.822	.806	.090	.087
Model 7: Four-factor model	3.18	1267.45	.811	.794	.092	.098
Model 8: One-factor model	No convergence					

Note: For both samples, in Model 2, networking and seeking mentorship were combined to a single factor; in Model 3, networking and avoidance motivation were combined to a single factor; in Model 4, seeking mentorship and avoidance motivation were combined to a single factor; in Model 5, job insecurity and collectivism orientation were combined to a single factor; in Model 6, job insecurity and avoidance motivation were combined to a single factor; in Model 7, collectivism orientation and avoidance motivation were combined to a single factor.

CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root-mean-square residual.

point), there was no significant relationship between job insecurity and avoidance motivation (simple slope = .026, $p = .830$); thus, the positive relationship between job insecurity and avoidance motivation turned nonsignificant after its inflection point. For those *low* in collectivism orientation (one *SD* below the mean), the inflection point was -0.48 , within the range of standardized job insecurity (-1.33 to 2.50); simple slope tests revealed that job insecurity was not significantly related to avoidance motivation when job insecurity was low (one *SD* below the inflection point; simple slope = $-.033$, $p = .845$) or high (one *SD* above the inflection point; simple slope = .091, $p = .215$). Together, while Sample 1 partially supported Hypothesis 1, Sample 2 fully supported Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the nonlinear indirect effects of job insecurity on the outcomes (networking behavior and seeking mentorship) via avoidance motivation depended on collectivism orientation. To examine the nonlinear indirect effects specified in Hypothesis 2, we multiplied the effect size of the interaction of squared job insecurity and collectivism orientation on avoidance motivation by the effects of avoidance motivation on networking and seeking mentorship (J. Jiang et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2017). Results in Table 5 showed that there were positive relationships of avoidance motivation with networking behavior ($b_{\text{sample1}} = .29$, $p = .015$;

TABLE 3 Nonlinear and moderated nonlinear results of samples 1 and 2.

Variables	Sample 1			Sample 2		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Control variables						
Age	−0.012	.005	.009	−0.012	.006	.032
Gender	−0.069	.102	.499	0.245	.110	.026
T1 PDO	−0.144	.049	.004	0.050	.059	.400
T1 UAO	0.050	.048	.299	0.090	.055	.101
T1 LTO	−0.075	.049	.127	−0.063	.054	.244
T1 MAS	0.092	.051	.069	−0.016	.061	.798
Main effect						
Age	−0.013	.005	.005	−0.012	.006	.032
Gender	−0.075	.096	.437	0.194	.108	.072
T1 PDO	0.145	.047	.002	0.041	.057	.477
T1 UAO	0.041	.046	.365	0.113	.054	.036
T1 LTO	−0.053	.047	.258	−0.081	.053	.126
T1 MAS	0.090	.048	.060	−0.019	.059	.744
T1 job insecurity	0.231	.045	.000	0.189	.051	.000
Nonlinear effect						
Age	−0.014	.005	.003	−0.012	.006	.035
Gender	−0.087	.097	.372	0.211	.109	.052
T1 PDO	0.148	.047	.002	0.030	.058	.607
T1 UAO	0.038	.046	.411	0.117	.054	.029
T1 LTO	−0.056	.047	.230	−0.079	.053	.138
T1 MAS	0.096	.048	.048	−0.022	.059	.717
T1 job insecurity	0.214	.050	.000	0.221	.059	.000
T1 job insecurity-squared	0.034	.041	.410	−0.052	.047	.262
Moderated nonlinear						
Age	−0.013	.005	.003	−0.009	.006	.091
Gender	−0.106	.098	.277	0.178	.108	.101
T1 PDO	0.150	.046	.001	−0.004	.061	.945
T1 UAO	0.054	.046	.244	0.127	.053	.017
T1 LTO	−0.050	.046	.274	−0.058	.053	.274
T1 MAS	0.088	.048	.064	0.010	.060	.870
T1 job insecurity	0.202	.049	.000	0.209	.059	.000
T1 job insecurity-squared	0.007	.042	.861	−0.046	.047	.318
T1 collectivism	0.076	.062	.220	0.068	.072	.347
T1 job insecurity X T1 collectivism	0.013	.050	.795	0.150	.061	.015
T1 job insecurity-squared X T1 collectivism	−0.111	.043	.010	−0.108	.046	.019

Supplementary analysis

(Continues)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Variables	Sample 1			Sample 2		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Age	-.014	.005	.003	-.010	.006	.088
Gender	-.110	.098	.261	.187	.109	.086
T1 PDO	.147	.046	.001	-.001	.061	.993
T1 LTO	-.049	.046	.292	-.059	.053	.265
T1 MAS	.088	.048	.065	.011	.060	.849
T1 UAO	.040	.063	.532	.155	.069	.024
T1 collectivism	.075	.062	.222	.065	.072	.369
T1 job insecurity	.205	.050	.000	.201	.059	.001
T1 job insecurity-squared	.010	.044	.812	-.043	.047	.362
T1 job insecurity X T1 UAO	-.039	.051	.447	-.047	.058	.412
T1 job insecurity-squared X T1 UAO	.008	.047	.866	-.030	.044	.491
T1 job insecurity X T1 collectivism	.023	.052	.658	.143	.062	.021
T1 job insecurity-squared X T1 collectivism	-.111	.044	.012	-.103	.047	.027

Note: Unstandardized coefficients are reported. *SE* = Standard error. PDO = power distance orientation; UAO = Uncertainty avoidance orientation; LTO = long-term orientation; MAS = masculine orientation. T1 = Time 1.

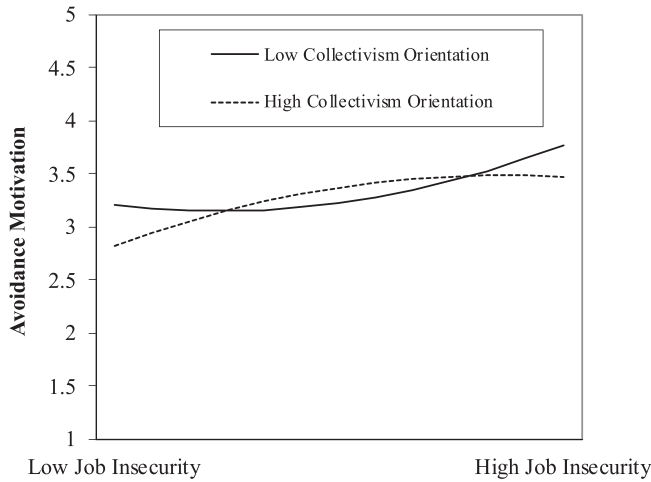


FIGURE 2 Collectivism orientation as a moderator for the nonlinear relation between job insecurity and avoidance motivation in sample 1.

$b_{sample2} = .22, p = .001$) and seeking mentorship ($b_{sample1} = .34, p = .007; b_{sample2} = .27, p < .001$). When networking behavior was the outcome, the differences in θ for low job insecurity when collectivism orientation was low versus high was $-.137$ and $-.155$ in Samples 1 and 2, respectively; the difference in θ for high job insecurity when collectivism orientation was low

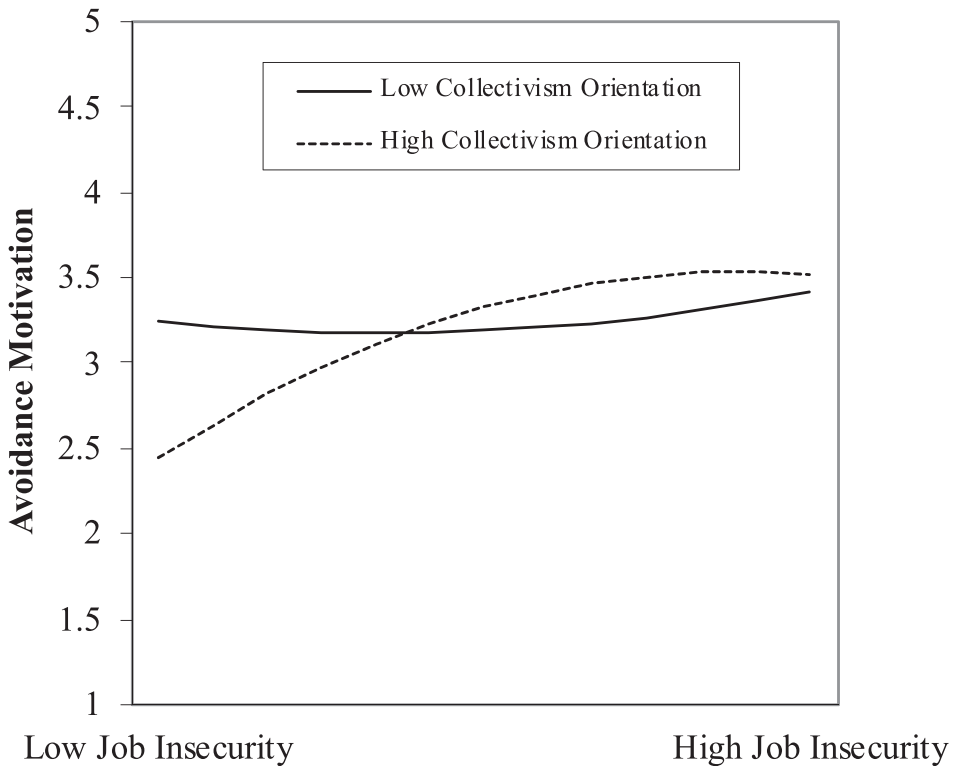


FIGURE 3 Collectivism orientation as a moderator for the nonlinear relation between job insecurity and avoidance motivation in sample 2.

TABLE 4 The results of the simple slope and conditional indirect effects in samples 1 and 2.

	Sample	Levels of job insecurity	Simple slope	JI→AM→NB	JI→AM→SM
High collectivism orientation	1	One SD below the IP	0.195**	0.060 [†]	0.071*
	1	One SD above the IP	-0.003	-0.060	-0.071
	2	One SD below the IP	0.334***	0.067*	0.085**
	2	One SD above the IP	0.026	-0.066	-0.084
Low collectivism orientation	1	One SD below the IP	-0.017	-0.069	-0.082
	1	One SD above the IP	0.233**	0.068*	0.081*
	2	One SD below the IP	-0.033	-0.027	-0.034
	2	One SD above the IP	0.091	0.026	0.034

Note: IP = Inflection point; JI = Job insecurity; AM = Avoidance motivation; NB = networking behavior; SM = seeking mentorship.

[†]*p* < .10;

**p* < .05;

***p* < .01.



TABLE 5 Results of path analyses for samples 1 and 2.

Variables	T3 networking behavior						T3 seeking mentorship					
	Sample 1			Sample 2			Sample 1			Sample 2		
	b	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p
Age	−0.005	0.007	.465	−0.014	0.006	.016	−0.018	0.008	.021	−0.018	0.006	.006
Gender	−0.311	0.154	.043	−0.120	0.108	.265	−0.142	0.164	.386	−0.164	0.123	.181
T1 PDO	0.117	0.077	.126	0.116	0.061	.055	0.070	0.082	.393	0.009	0.069	.898
T1 UAO	−0.044	0.076	.560	−0.254	0.053	.000	−0.088	0.081	.278	−0.243	0.061	.000
T1 LTO	0.039	0.072	.587	0.104	0.055	.056	0.218	0.077	.005	0.133	0.062	.032
T1 MAS	−0.017	0.076	.825	0.000	0.059	.996	0.026	0.081	.748	0.093	0.067	.167
T1 job insecurity	−0.069	0.081	.396	0.042	0.060	.480	0.048	0.086	.582	0.001	0.068	.983
T1 job insecurity-squared	0.141	0.079	.073	0.051	0.046	.271	0.103	0.084	.218	0.045	0.053	.397
T1 collectivism	−0.058	0.099	.559	0.062	0.071	.382	−0.022	0.106	.837	0.068	0.081	.405
T1 job insecurity X T1 collectivism	−0.076	0.087	.385	0.057	0.062	.356	−0.004	0.093	.962	0.196	0.070	.005
T1 job insecurity-squared X T1 collectivism	0.105	0.086	.216	0.045	0.046	.325	0.047	0.091	.606	−0.042	0.053	.420
T2 job-related positive affect	0.455	0.112	.000	0.220	0.083	.009	0.480	0.119	.000	0.328	0.095	.001
T2 approach motivation	0.194	0.141	.169	0.098	0.085	.246	0.111	0.150	.461	0.287	0.097	.003
T2 avoidance motivation	0.290	0.119	.015	0.216	0.067	.001	0.342	0.126	.007	0.274	0.076	.000

Note: Unstandardized coefficients are reported. SE = Standard error. PDO = power distance orientation; UAO = Uncertainty avoidance orientation; LTO = long-term orientation; MAS = masculine orientation. T1 = Time 1. T2 = Time 2. T3 = Time 3.

versus high was .122 and .028 in Samples 1 and 2, respectively. The difference between these two values approached significance in both samples ($\Delta_{\text{sample1}} = -.258, p = .076$; $\Delta_{\text{sample2}} = -.183, p = .059$).

We calculated the nonlinear indirect effect of job insecurity on networking via avoidance motivation at high vs. low levels of collectivism orientation (Table 4). For those *high* in collectivism orientation, when job insecurity was low (one *SD* below the inflection point), there was a positive, indirect relation between job insecurity and networking via avoidance motivation (Estimate $_{\text{sample1}} = .060, p = .057$; Estimate $_{\text{sample2}} = .067, p = .011$); conversely, when job insecurity was high (one *SD* above the inflection point), avoidance motivation did not mediate the relation between job insecurity and networking (Estimate $_{\text{sample1}} = -.060, p = .448$; Estimate $_{\text{sample2}} = -.066, p = .250$). For those *low* in collectivism orientation, when job insecurity was low (one *SD* below the inflection point), in Sample 1, there was no significant, indirect relation between job insecurity and networking via avoidance motivation (Estimate = $-.069, p = .347$); conversely, when job insecurity was high (one *SD* above the inflection point), there was a positive, indirect relation between job insecurity and networking via avoidance motivation (Estimate = $.068, p = .041$). In Sample 2, avoidance motivation did not mediate the relation between job insecurity and networking when job insecurity was low (one *SD* below the inflection point; Estimate = $-.027, p = .631$) or high (one *SD* above the inflection point; Estimate = $.026, p = .127$).

When seeking mentorship was the outcome, the differences in θ for low job insecurity when collectivism orientation was low versus high was $-.161$ in Sample 1 and $-.217$ in Sample 2; the difference in θ for high job insecurity when collectivism orientation was low versus high was $.143$ in Sample 1 and 0.039 in Sample 2. The difference between these two values approached significance in Sample 1 ($\Delta = -.304, p = .061$) and was significant in Sample 2 ($\Delta = -.256, p = .044$).

As shown in Table 4, for those *high* in collectivism orientation (one *SD* above the mean), when job insecurity was low (one *SD* below the inflection point), there was a positive, indirect relation between job insecurity and seeking mentorship via avoidance motivation in both samples (Estimate $_{\text{sample1}} = .071, p = .044$; Estimate $_{\text{sample2}} = .085, p = .006$); conversely, when job insecurity was high (one *SD* above the inflection point), avoidance motivation did not mediate the relation between job insecurity and seeking mentorship (Estimate $_{\text{sample1}} = -.071, p = .444$; Estimate $_{\text{sample2}} = -.084, p = .244$) in both samples. For those *low* in collectivism orientation (one *SD* below the mean), in Sample 1, when job insecurity was low (one *SD* below the inflection point), avoidance motivation did not mediate the relation between job insecurity and seeking mentorship (Estimate = $-.082, p = .340$); however, when job insecurity was high (one *SD* above the inflection point), there was a positive, indirect relation between job insecurity and seeking mentorship via avoidance motivation (Estimate = $.081, p = .029$); in Sample 2, avoidance motivation did not mediate the relation between job insecurity and seeking mentorship when job insecurity was low (one *SD* below the inflection point; Estimate = $-.034, p = .630$) or high (one *SD* above the inflection point; Estimate = $.034, p = .118$).

These results showed that collectivism orientation moderated the nonlinear effects of job insecurity on networking behavior and seeking mentorship through avoidance motivation as an intervening variable, supporting Hypothesis 2.⁴

Supplementary analyses⁵

Uncertainty avoidance orientation, or the extent to which an individual tolerates ambiguity and risks concerning the future (House et al., 2004), may be another factor that interacts with job

insecurity to predict avoidance motivation. Indeed, research has suggested that those high in uncertainty avoidance orientation may have a chronic prevention goal, whereas those low in uncertainty avoidance orientation may have a chronic promotion goal (Astvansh et al., 2023; Bozer & Delegach, 2019). Thus, uncertainty avoidance orientation may play a similar moderating role as collectivism orientation. We therefore ran the same moderating analysis for uncertainty avoidance orientation as for collectivism orientation. We found that uncertainty avoidance orientation did not interact with the quadratic job insecurity term to predict avoidance motivation (Sample 1: $b = .01$, $p = .866$; Sample 2: $b = -.03$, $p = .491$; Table 3).

DISCUSSION

To shift the primary focus from employee passive reactions to job insecurity, we aim to understand whether, how, and under what conditions job insecurity may increase proactive career behaviors. Our hypotheses were guided by regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997, 1998; Zou et al., 2020) and the diminishing marginal utility principle (Gossen, 1854/1983) and tested using survey data collected at three measurement points from two countries (i.e., Chile and Australia). We demonstrated that among employees high in collectivism orientation, the positive relationship between job insecurity and avoidance motivation, as well as the indirect relationships of job insecurity with networking behavior and seeking mentorship via avoidance motivation, turned nonsignificant after the inflection point. That is, increasing job insecurity beyond a certain point had little to no impact on avoidance motivation and subsequent proactive career behaviors. On the other hand, in the Chilean sample, inconsistent with our hypotheses, for those low in collectivism orientation, the nonsignificant relationships of job insecurity with avoidance motivation and subsequent proactive career behaviors turned positive after the inflection point. However, for Australian employees low in collectivism orientation, there were no significant relationships of job insecurity with avoidance motivation, as well as subsequent networking behavior and seeking mentorship, supporting our hypotheses.

The differing findings among employees with low collectivism orientation in Chile and Australia may be attributed to societal-level differences between these two countries. From the cultural perspective, Chile and Australia have similar levels of masculinity and long-term orientation but differ in collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004). That is, Chile has high collectivism and low power distance and uncertainty avoidance, while Australia has low collectivism but high power distance and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004). From the perspective of governmental protections, Australia's social safety net is comprehensive and flexible (Phillips & Narayanan, 2021), while Chile's is more time-limited and targeted (Sehnbruch et al., 2022). Finally, from an economic perspective, in 2021, the year of our data collection, the per capita GDP was \$16,185.91 USD for Chile and \$60,697.25 USD for Australia. Thus, the differences in cultural dimensions, governmental protections, and the financial standing of each country may explain the varying findings among those low in collectivism orientation in Chile and Australia. For example, unemployment benefits in Australia, provided through the JobSeeker Payment, do not have a strict time limit (Phillips & Narayanan, 2021). In contrast, unemployment benefits in Chile are more restrictive, with support closely tied to prior contributions and limited to a short duration of assistance (Sehnbruch et al., 2022). The limited governmental social protection programs for the unemployed may make certain levels of job insecurity a pressing concern for Chilean employees low in collectivism orientation. Indeed, we found that when standardized job

insecurity values rose above -0.80 , job insecurity enhanced proactive career behaviors through avoidance motivation among Chilean employees low in collectivism orientation.

Notably, uncertainty avoidance orientation did not moderate the nonlinear effect of job insecurity on avoidance motivation. We could identify only one empirical article examining uncertainty avoidance orientation as a moderator in altering people's response to job insecurity (Roll et al., 2015). However, the measurement scale in Roll et al. did not fully align with the conceptualization of uncertainty avoidance orientation. Thus, we derived our insights based on evidence from uncertainty avoidance at the societal level. Interestingly, research generally suggested that *enacted* uncertainty avoidance at the societal level buffers the negative impacts of job insecurity on job attitudes (Debus et al., 2012; Sender et al., 2017). While uncertainty avoidance at the societal level reflects the extent to which ambiguous situations are disliked within a society (Hofstede, 2001), *enacted* uncertainty avoidance is the practical consequence of this dislike and represents the extent to which people from a society rely on "social norms, rules and procedures to alleviate the unpredictability of future events" (House et al., 2004, p. 30). That is, societies high in enacted uncertainty avoidance may have extensive norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate uncertain situations, including but not limited to, unemployment. Applying this to individual-level uncertainty avoidance orientation suggests that individuals high in uncertainty avoidance may have already developed coping strategies for potential job loss, even without job insecurity. Future research may examine the moderating role of *enacted* uncertainty avoidance at the individual level in shaping employees' reactions to job insecurity.

Theoretical implications

By investigating the nonlinear mediating effect of avoidance work motivation that translated job insecurity into proactive career behaviors, including networking behavior and seeking mentorship, our research contributes theoretically and empirically to the job insecurity literature. First, we examine how job insecurity may prompt people to proactively network and seek mentorship. In doing so, our research shifts the near-exclusive focus on passive reactions to job insecurity in the literature. For example, in a meta-analysis, Jiang and Lavaysse (2018) identified as many as 41 negative, passive outcomes of job insecurity, including, but not limited to, decreased job attitudes and work engagement, as well as increased burnout and strain. To the best of our knowledge, two studies have examined the relationships between job insecurity and certain forms of proactive career behaviors, but they reached mixed conclusions. Specifically, Huang et al. (2021) found that job insecurity negatively related to proactive career behaviors such as skill development via their career commitment, especially among older employees. In contrast, according to Klehe et al. (2011), in organizations that have adopted strategic downsizing, employees who knew their jobs being made redundant showed an increase in both career planning and exploration. By examining networking behavior and seeking mentorship as outcomes of job insecurity in this research, we contribute to the growing body of literature on the relationship between job insecurity and proactive career behaviors, while broadening the spectrum of theoretically relevant outcomes associated with job insecurity.

The historical focus on passive consequences of job insecurity is understandable, considering that living under the constant threat of potential job loss can be stressful. However, doing so overlooks the perspective that people may be motivated to avoid losses, especially when confronted with potential threats (Scholer et al., 2010). Building on regulatory focus theory, we offer a novel perspective acknowledging that job-insecure employees can be motivated to take

proactive steps in shaping their own future. Indeed, because “it’s not *what* you know, it’s *who* you know,” networking and seeking mentorship may assist individuals in obtaining career-related advice and support from others, enhancing their career-related self-efficacy and employability (Jiang et al., 2023), and placing them in a better position to gain reemployment in the event of job loss (Wanberg et al., 2020). By focusing on the proactive career outcomes of job insecurity, we challenge the prevailing consensus that views employees as passive victims. Instead, we highlight an overlooked perspective: job insecurity may enable employees to actively navigate their stressful situations. This shift in perspective invites further exploration of how job insecurity can act as a catalyst for professional growth, prompting employees to adopt proactive strategies that enhance their employability and career development.

Second, we examine avoidance motivation as a proximal motivational state underlying the indirect nonlinear relationships of job insecurity with networking behavior and seeking mentorship. The job insecurity literature has long focused on stress-related and social-exchange mechanisms (Shoss, 2017). Unfortunately, their prominence overshadows how job insecurity may relate to motivational processes. Our research brings the latter perspective forward and adds to the literature by integrating regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997, 1998; Zou et al., 2020) with the diminishing marginal utility principle (Gossen, 1854/1983). By theorizing and empirically demonstrating the mediating role of avoidance work motivation in the nonlinear relationships between job insecurity and subsequent proactive, tactical career behaviors, we highlight a new avenue for understanding when and why varying levels of job insecurity may impact employee proactive behaviors, such as networking behavior and seeking mentorship (via motivational strategies). Identifying this motivational pathway is important as it complements the dominant stress and social-exchange mechanisms, providing a more comprehensive understanding of why job insecurity may influence behavioral outcomes.

Third, our research unveils one individual difference that influences who is more likely to experience avoidance motivation and subsequent proactive career behaviors in response to job insecurity. Consistent with regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997, 1998; Zou et al., 2020), we hypothesize that those high in collectivism orientation are more likely to have a chronic prevention goal (Kurman & Hui, 2011), which may influence the extent to which they are sensitive to the potential losses associated with job insecurity. Results from two diverse samples (Chile and Australia) with salient differences in many important aspects support our theorizing. For those high in collectivism orientation, the relationship between job insecurity and avoidance motivation is positive up to a point, after which job insecurity is no longer related to avoidance motivation or subsequent proactive career behaviors. For those low in collectivism orientation with a chronic promotion focus (Kurman & Hui, 2011), job insecurity is not significantly related to avoidance motivation or subsequent proactive career behaviors in the Australian sample. However, after the inflection point, a nonsignificant relationship of job insecurity with avoidance motivation and proactive career behaviors turns positive among Chilean employees, who have limited governmental protections. This finding is important because it demonstrates that collectivism orientation can shape the ways in which job insecurity is experienced. By examining the moderating role of collectivism orientation in the nonlinear effects of job insecurity, we extend previous research that only reveals the moderating role of cultural orientations in the linear outcomes of job insecurity. In doing so, we identify a key boundary condition for job insecurity’s nonlinear effects and emphasize the critical role of considering cultural factors when examining its consequences.

Practical implications

Our research has novel practical implications for both employees and employers. First, our research suggests that, for employees high in collectivism orientation, certain levels of job insecurity can enhance their avoidance work motivation, which, in turn, prompts them to engage in proactive career behaviors to prepare for potential future losses. Specifically, to mitigate the risk of future job loss, employees take important measures to shape their career paths by actively networking and seeking mentorship, both of which can benefit employees, including favorable performance ratings, subjective and objective measures of career success, and improved employability (Jiang et al., 2023). Furthermore, networking and seeking mentorship can create alternative career opportunities for employees, broaden their career options, and enhance their resilience to potential job loss, as well as their ability to secure reemployment or pursue alternative employment (McArdle et al., 2007). Therefore, employees who are indirectly motivated by certain levels of job insecurity to network and seek mentorship tend to have higher levels of perceived employability and better career advancement opportunities, which are associated with improved well-being (Harari et al., 2023), health (Berntson & Marklund, 2007), and productivity (Delbari et al., 2021). Based on these important findings, career counselors and advice literature should encourage job-insecure employees to engage in proactive career behaviors, highlighting that they have the resources to actively address and improve their current job situation.

Second, the moderation effect of collectivism orientation suggests that when designing interventions to assist employees in managing job insecurity, employers and managers may need to consider employees' individual differences in collectivism orientation and their resulting prevention or promotion focus. For instance, managers may encourage individuals high in collectivism orientation to take a broader range of proactive actions beyond networking and seeking mentorship examined here, such as developing in-demand skills and creating an emergency fund. Doing so can help this group of employees to better manage job insecurity and avoid its associated negative consequences (Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018). On the other hand, individuals low in collectivism orientation may be less sensitive to the threat of job loss, leaving them unprepared and potentially harming their well-being and long-term career prospects. Therefore, for this group of employees, employers and managers should emphasize the significant consequences of actual job loss (Brand, 2015), remind employees of the risks associated with a lack of career planning and preparation (Paul et al., 2018), and encourage them to take proactive actions. Collectively, by tailoring interventions to align with employees' individual differences in collectivism orientation, organizations can design more targeted strategies to help employees effectively manage job insecurity and its implications.

Notably, we do not encourage organizations to promote job insecurity or ignore its negative impacts. Rather, organizations should actively reduce job insecurity from its sources due to the overwhelmingly negative outcomes of job insecurity (Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018; Lee et al., 2018; Shoss, 2017) and the hidden costs of social capital building behaviors to the organization (Wanberg et al., 2020). For instance, networking behavior and seeking mentorship may enable employees to have in-the-moment assistance such as referrals, effective job search strategies, problem reformulation, and validation, resulting in prompt and high-quality job offers (Wanberg et al., 2020). Consequently, the current organization may lose talent. Thus, we encourage organizations to address the root causes of job insecurity through multiple practices, such as improving work designs (Jiang et al., 2021), increasing organizational communication (Jiang & Probst, 2014), and boosting employee trust in management (Jiang & Probst, 2019). By

addressing the root causes of job insecurity, employers can build a resilient workforce, retain top talent, foster innovation, and promote long-term organizational growth.

Limitations and future directions

To ensure the robustness of our findings and promote replication across contexts, we examined our hypotheses in two countries (Chile and Australia). As is common in the field of Applied Psychology research, these two countries were selected for convenience. Although the convergence of evidence regarding individuals high in collectivism orientation demonstrated external validity and increased confidence in the conclusions, the substantial differences between the two countries may account for the varied findings among those low in collectivism orientation. Future research may replicate our findings using samples from other countries.

Moreover, common method bias may be a concern because our variables are measured by self-reports. However, the three-wave time-lagged designs may help alleviate this concern (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Further, self-reports are appropriate for assessing variables that reflect individuals' perceptions and values, such as job insecurity and collectivism orientation, as well as inner motivation processes that are not observable by others, such as avoidance motivation. Finally, common method bias is not a concern when detecting significant interactions (Siemsen et al., 2010). Nevertheless, we call for future research to adopt alternative objective measurements and/or other reports to replicate our findings. Moreover, while we measured variables of interest at different time points, we cannot establish causal relationships. Therefore, future research should aim to design experiments that enable stronger causal conclusions in this regard.

Although the overall nonlinear pattern supported our hypotheses, the inflection points in both samples for those high in collectivism orientation were higher than one standard deviation above the mean. Specifically, the Chilean and Australian samples reported inflection points at 1.03 and 1.16 standard deviations above the mean on the job insecurity continuum, respectively. It indicates that the relation between job insecurity and avoidance motivation was positive and significant up to these turning points, beyond which the motivational benefit of job insecurity diminished. These turning points were higher than the traditional "Golden Mean" of zero. This may be expected in the context of job insecurity, as a standardized job insecurity value of zero might be psychologically closer to the status quo state than to the domain of losses. However, as job insecurity moves toward the high end of the spectrum, the possibility of losing one's employment becomes real and vivid (Lam et al., 2015). Returning to our rainy-day analogy, we expect the turning point to be at the high end of the continuum (e.g., a 70% chance of rain). Beyond this point, the relation between the rainy-day forecast and motivation to avoid getting wet may diminish, as avoidance motivation peaks at a 70% chance of rain. Since existing theories cannot predict the specific location of context-dependent inflection points, we call for future research to identify the precise points (Pierce & Aguinis, 2013) on the job insecurity spectrum where the relation between job insecurity and outcomes of interest becomes nonsignificant or changes direction.

Additionally, future research may examine how other personal and situational factors may affect the nonlinear effects of job insecurity. For example, although conscientiousness has not been found to interact with job insecurity to impact employees' reactions (e.g., Iliescu et al., 2017), conscientiousness featuring dependability, thoroughness, and responsibility (Barrick & Mount, 1991) may shape the nonlinear effects of job insecurity. Alternatively, future

research may investigate whether and how precarity *at* work and precarity *from* work may interact with job insecurity, conceptualized as precarity *of* work (Allan et al., 2021), to either motivate employees to act or undermine them.

Finally, future research may adopt a dynamic approach to examine the outcomes of networking behavior and seeking mentorship in response to job insecurity. For example, can individuals who engage in networking behavior and seeking mentorship reduce their job insecurity (cf. Huang et al., 2013)? If engaging in such behaviors did not reduce subsequent job insecurity (e.g., Langerak et al., 2022), will individuals continue doing so or adopt other actions to cope with job insecurity? We encourage researchers to adopt longitudinal designs to explore the bidirectional relations between job insecurity and these behaviors over time.

CONCLUSION

Integrating regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997, 1998; Zou et al., 2020) with the diminishing marginal utility principle (Gossen, 1854/1983), we challenge the prevalent focus on employee passive reactions to job insecurity. In two samples from Chile and Australia, for those high in collectivism orientation, before inflection points, job insecurity can increase avoidance motivation and subsequent networking behavior and seeking mentorship; after inflection points, these relations become nonsignificant. However, for those low in collectivism orientation, the Chilean and Australian samples display different reactions to job insecurity; in the Australian sample, job insecurity does not relate to avoidance motivation nor subsequent proactive career behaviors; conversely, in the Chilean sample, job insecurity significantly relates to avoidance motivation and subsequent proactive career behaviors after its inflection point. By examining the process and the boundary condition for directing job insecurity toward proactive career behaviors, these findings represent a shift in understanding the complexities of job insecurity, providing inspiration for future research to explore when, how, and why employees may be proactive when facing job insecurity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was supported by the International Research and Collaboration Small Grant from the Society of Industrial Organizational Psychology. Hai-Jiang Wang's work was supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (72472056 and 72132001). Open access publishing facilitated by The University of Auckland, as part of the Wiley - The University of Auckland agreement via the Council of Australian University Librarians.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There is no conflict of interest to disclose.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this research are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Both studies received ethical approval: Study 1 from the Institutional Ethics Committee of the University of Santiago, Chile, (report no. 54-2018) and Study 2 from the University Human Research Ethics Committee at Queensland University of Technology (2020-3497-3901).

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ We thank an anonymous reviewer for this insight.
- ² The nonlinear and moderated nonlinear effects of job insecurity on job-related positive affect and approach work motivation can be found in Supplemental Material Tables S2.
- ³ There was one participant with a low collectivism orientation who reported a standardized job insecurity score of 2.80. After removing this participant, the range of standardized job insecurity among those with low collectivism orientation was -1.33 to 1.51 , which was comparable to the range (-1.33 to 1.77) among those with high collectivism orientation. Removing this participant did not alter our results; therefore, we included this participant in our reported results.
- ⁴ For both samples, while Hypothesis 1 was supported with or without controls, Hypothesis 2 was not supported without controls. Specifically, we found that approach motivation and job-related positive affect were empirical confounders. A confounder is defined as “a variable related to two factors of interest that falsely obscures or accentuates the relationship between them” (Meinert, 1986, p. 285). It is essential to include theoretically relevant confounders because doing so provides an undistorted estimate of the relationship between predictors and outcomes (Atinc et al., 2012; Carlson & Wu, 2012; MacKinnon et al., 2000). Thus, analyses with controls are an appropriate test of our hypotheses (also see Lebel et al., 2023). Full details of results without controls are in Supplemental Material (Table S3).
- ⁵ We thank an anonymous reviewer for this insight.

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How to cite this article: Jiang, L., Debus, M. E., Xu, X., Hu, X., Lopez-Bohle, S., Petitta, L., Roll, L. C., Stander, M., & Wang, H. (2025). Preparing for a rainy day: A regulatory focus perspective on job insecurity and proactive career behaviors. *Applied Psychology*, 74(2), e70004. <https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.70004>