The role of fear of negative evaluation in interview anxiety and social-evaluative workplace anxiety

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Abstract
We investigated the consequences of interview and social-evaluative workplace anxiety on job performance, and whether these two anxieties share a common antecedent–fear of negative evaluation. Job applicants (n = 128) completed a survey following their interview and halfway through their work term; supervisory performance ratings were collected at the end of the work term. Fear of negative evaluation was positively correlated with both interview anxiety and social-evaluative workplace anxiety. The correlation between interview anxiety and job performance was near zero, as was the correlation between social-evaluative workplace anxiety and job performance; these relations were not moderated by the social-evaluative nature of the job. This study suggests that anxious interviewees and employees perform as well as their less anxious counterparts, even in social-evaluative jobs.

Keywords
fear of negative evaluation, interview anxiety, workplace anxiety

Key points
• Anxiety about employment interviews and anxiety in the workplace are common experiences for many people.
• Both types of anxiety are related to a trait called fear of negative evaluation.
• Although commonly experienced, neither interview anxiety nor workplace anxiety are predictors of later job performance.
• Managers are encouraged not to overlook anxious interviewees during hiring or anxious employees during promotions because anxiety does not hinder job performance.

1 | INTRODUCTION
For many people, the workplace is a source of worry and apprehension (Muschalla et al., 2013). Indeed, employees may experience anxiety during specific moments on the job, such as before confronting colleagues or during a client interaction (Muschalla et al., 2013; Muschalla & Linden, 2013). Moreover, jobseekers frequently report high levels of anxiety before and during a job interview (McCarthy & Goffin, 2004). Notably, 40% of Americans report experiencing anxiety at work (American Psychological Association, 2009; Crompton, 2015) and 92% of Americans say they feel nervous about some aspect of the job interview (Horn, 2013).
Experiencing anxiety related to work is not without consequences. Certainly, negative workplace experiences are detrimental to mental health (Howatt & Adams, 2017). But anxiety might also have more direct work-related costs. Indeed, managers often have negative perceptions of anxious interviewees (Powell et al., 2018) and anxious employees (McCarthy et al., 2016), in both cases perceiving them as lower performers. That managers discount anxious interviewees and employees is problematic, because despite the prevalence of interview and workplace anxiety, it is still unclear whether these anxieties truly result in lower job performance.

The current study investigates the consequences of interview and workplace anxieties on job performance and seeks to uncover whether interview anxiety and workplace anxiety share a common antecedent, namely, the fear of negative evaluation. In doing so, this study makes both theoretical and practical contributions. Specifically, we seek to replicate, extend, and explain a pattern of recent results that found a null relationship between interview anxiety and later job performance (McCarthy et al., 2018) and anxious employees (McCarthy et al., 2016), in both cases perceiving them as lower performers. That managers discount anxious interviewees and employees is problematic, because despite the prevalence of interview and workplace anxiety, it is still unclear whether these anxieties truly result in lower job performance.

The current study investigates the consequences of interview and workplace anxieties on job performance and seeks to uncover whether interview anxiety and workplace anxiety share a common antecedent, namely, the fear of negative evaluation. In doing so, this study makes both theoretical and practical contributions. Specifically, we seek to replicate, extend, and explain a pattern of recent results that found a null relationship between interview anxiety and later job performance (Schneider et al., 2019; Voyles, 2019). Whereas these recent studies focused on one specific real or simulated job, in the current study we look at a variety of jobs from different industries, and we investigate whether the type of work environment moderates the relation between interview anxiety and job performance. We also seek to replicate the findings from McCarthy et al. (2016) who found a small negative relationship between workplace anxiety and job performance. From a practical angle, we seek to clarify whether managers are justified in discounting anxious interviewees or employees.

1.1 Interview anxiety

Interview anxiety refers to the “feelings of nervousness or apprehension” that only emerge in job interview situations (McCarthy & Goffin, 2004, p. 616). It is a type of situation-specific anxiety akin to test anxiety (Pekrun et al., 2004) or public speaking anxiety (Bodie, 2010). McCarthy and Goffin (2004) describe five dimensions of interview anxiety that capture worries about specific aspects of the interview: communication anxiety (i.e., anxiety about verbal and nonverbal communication), appearance anxiety (i.e., concerns about appearance, body image, or dress style), social anxiety (i.e., worries about appropriate social behaviors), performance anxiety (i.e., worries about the outcome of the interview), and behavioral anxiety (i.e., bodily reactions to anxiety such as fast heartbeat). Although the five interview anxiety dimensions are conceptually distinct, most research has focused on overall interview anxiety (e.g., Feiler & Powell, 2013; Gong et al., 2016). These dimensions of interview anxiety, as conceptualized by McCarthy and Goffin (2004), underscore the interpersonal, social, and evaluative nature that is characteristic of interviews.

1.2 Workplace anxiety

Workplace anxiety refers to the worry, tension, and unease about one’s work performance or the accomplishment of work tasks (McCarthy et al., 2016). Like interview anxiety, it is a domain-specific type of performance anxiety because the level of workplace anxiety experienced will depend on the specific workplace context and individual differences (McCarthy et al., 2016). In parallel, and taking a rehabilitation sciences approach, Muschalla et al. (e.g., Muschalla, 2016; Muschalla et al., 2010) have developed a clinical framework for work-related anxieties. Research in this field has conceptualized work-related anxieties as multidimensional in nature, consisting of social anxiety (i.e., anxiety related to contact with others in the workplace), stimulus-related phobic anxiety (i.e., anxiety about specific tasks, situations, etc.), health and body-related anxieties (i.e., excessive worries about physical health at work), anxiety about inadequacy (i.e., anxiety about competence), general work-related worry (i.e., constant worrying about daily work matters), and workplace phobia (i.e., acute physiological reaction triggered by work) (see Muschalla, 2016, for a review). Importantly, work-related anxieties are an individual differences construct and range in severity, from relatively mild to more extreme. Of note, a particularly acute dimension of work-related anxieties, workplace phobia, is “severe and disabling” (Muschalla & Linden, 2009, p. 603), “a phobic anxiety reaction with symptoms of panic occurring when thinking of or approaching the workplace” (p. 591). Research has demonstrated the divergent validity of work-related anxieties (as measured through the Job Anxiety Scale) with trait anxiety in clinical and nonclinical populations (Muschalla et al., 2013, 2010).

In this paper, we were interested in nonclinical levels of anxiety; as such, we follow the definition of workplace anxiety advanced by Cheng and McCarthy (2018) who define dispositional workplace anxiety as “individual differences in feelings of nervousness, uneasiness, and tension about job performance” (p. 539). Given our focus on the social nature of some workplaces, we expand their conceptualization of workplace anxiety to also include concerns about the social component of the workplace. Just as interviews may cause anxiety because of the need to interact with a stranger, the workplace may invoke anxiety because of the need to interact with others who may be judging one’s performance (e.g., customers, supervisors; Muschalla & Linden, 2013).

1.2.1 Fear of negative evaluations as a common antecedent to interview and workplace anxiety

Broadly speaking, both interview anxiety and workplace anxiety are types of social anxieties that are triggered by “the prospect or presence of personal evaluation in real or imagined social situations” (Schlenker & Leary, 1982, p. 642). Thus, heightened anxiety in job interviews and in workplace settings might have a common antecedent, namely, whether individuals fear receiving a negative evaluation (e.g., criticism, rejection) from others. The job interview can be perceived as a threatening, high-stakes testing situation where individuals are expected to make a positive impression on interviewers (McCarthy & Goffin, 2004). Likewise, in some jobs, individuals may encounter similar situations where making a good impression is important for job performance (Schneider et al., 2019). In these situations, individuals who are predisposed to worry about negative judgment from others may experience greater anxiety than those who do not fear negative judgment.
The fear of negative evaluation refers to a fear of being judged negatively by others, reacting poorly when receiving negative evaluations, and assuming others judge oneself negatively (Watson & Friend, 1969). It is one of three fundamental fears identified by Reiss's Expectancy Theory of fear. Fundamental fears are dispositional, individual difference variables that suggest that certain individuals are more likely than others to be fearful of specific types of threats. For example, those who have a fear of negative social evaluation would have a higher expectation of criticism from others (e.g., “the interviewer is definitely not going to like me”) and perceive such criticism as more personally harmful (e.g., “I will be extremely embarrassed when I don't get the job”) than the average person (Reiss et al., 1986). Although fear and anxiety are conceptually distinct, the Expectancy Theory of Fear stipulates that they are related because the fundamental fear(s) endorsed by an individual should inform the specific kinds of anxieties that they experience. The fundamental fear(s) that an individual is particularly sensitive to should account for variance in their more specific anxious cognitions (Reiss, 1991; Taylor, 1993). It follows that individuals who are highly sensitive to fear of negative evaluation are more likely to feel anxious in social situations where there is a possibility of others evaluating their performance, such as job interviews or socially evaluative situations at work. As such, we hypothesized that:

H1: Fear of negative evaluation will be positively related to (a) interview anxiety and (b) workplace anxiety.

H2: Interview anxiety and workplace anxiety will be positively correlated, and this correlation will be partially accounted for by fear of negative evaluation.

1.2.2 Anxiety and performance

Heightened anxiety has consistently been associated with lowered performance in a variety of domains, such as academic test-taking and sports performance (Hembree, 1988; Namkung et al., 2019; Woodman & Hardy, 2003). With regard to interview anxiety, a recent meta-analysis revealed a moderate negative correlation between interview anxiety and interview performance (r = −.19; Powell et al., 2018). Similarly, a study on workplace anxiety and job performance with police officers found a direct negative correlation between these variables (r = −.16; McCarthy et al., 2016). Thus, there is evidence that interview anxiety is generally negatively related to interview performance across many jobs, and workplace anxiety is negatively related to job performance in a sample of police officers. Moreover, pointing to the possible impact of work-related anxieties on organizationally relevant outcomes beyond job performance, Muschalla et al. (2010) report that higher levels of work-related anxieties are related to longer term sick leave in a population of inpatients; a finding particularly pronounced for patients with workplace phobia (Muschalla & Linden, 2009).

Based on these findings, we hypothesize that:

H3: There will be a negative relation between (a) interview anxiety and job performance and (b) workplace anxiety and job performance.

Might there be a relation between interview anxiety, workplace anxiety and job performance? It could be the case that those who become very nervous and perform worse in interviews may also be very nervous once hired (i.e., experience higher workplace anxiety) and perform worse than their colleagues. However, two previous studies investigating interview anxiety and its relation to later job performance showed no direct relation between the two variables. Specifically, Schneider et al. (2019) looked at this relation in a sample of university residence assistants while Voyles (2019) used laboratory tasks to simulate clerical, communication, and creative work. Notably, these two studies focused on limited (real or simulated) job tasks and only explored a direct relation between interview anxiety and job performance. However, it may be that the relation between interview anxiety and job performance is stronger in jobs that have similar features to the interview. This would be the case for jobs that contain repeated social situations where a person could be judged; that is, jobs that are highly socially evaluative.

Situations with social-evaluative threat are defined as any situation where others may negatively judge an individual (Dickerson, 2008; Dickerson et al., 2009). Social-evaluative situations produce additional stress beyond what would normally be experienced in performing a task (Woody et al., 2018). Because interviews are social-evaluative situations, interview anxiety might be negatively related to job performance when jobs are also high in social-evaluative situations. As such, we hypothesize that:

H4: The (negative) relation between interview anxiety and job performance will be stronger when social-evaluative job content is higher.

The social-evaluative nature of situations may also moderate the relation between workplace anxiety and job performance. If fear of negative evaluation combines with high social-evaluative threat situations to produce heightened workplace anxiety, then workplace anxiety may contribute to performance loss only in jobs with a high degree of social-evaluative threat. Thus, we hypothesize that:

H5: The (negative) relation between workplace anxiety and job performance will be stronger when social-evaluative job content is higher.

In summary, in this study we will explore a direct relation between interview anxiety and job performance to replicate the Schneider et al. (2019) and Voyles (2019). Moreover, based on McCarthy et al. (2016), we expect a direct negative relation between workplace anxiety and job performance. We will also test for a moderation effect to examine whether interview anxiety is related to job performance to a greater extent in jobs that are highly socially evaluative as compared to jobs that are less socially evaluative. Finally, we also investigate whether social-evaluative job content moderates the relation between workplace anxiety and job performance.
2 | METHODS

2.1 | Participants and procedures

Participants were 128 cooperative education university students. Cooperative education is a common form of work-integrated learning in Canada where students complete their degree while alternating between academic terms and paid full-time work terms with various organizations. Participants were enrolled in a variety of programs (e.g., Engineering, Social Science, Business, Physical Sciences) and were employed in a variety of industries with a wide range of job titles (e.g., Marketing Coordinator, Software Developer, Food Technologist, Real Estate Asset Management Analyst). Participants’ age ranged from 18 to 23 years ($M = 19.84$, $SD = 1.06$). The majority (72.7%) identified as female, 26.6% as male, and 0.8% chose not to respond. Most participants identified as White (71.5%), with other represented ethnicities being Southeast Asian (11.4%), South Asian (10.6%), Arab (3.1%), Latin American (2.4%), and Black/African/Caribbean (1.6%). Participants were most often second year (40.6%), third year (34.4%), or fourth year (23.4%) undergraduate students. We also asked participants to report if they had a diagnosed anxiety disorder (e.g., social anxiety disorder, generalized anxiety disorder) and 15 (12%) of the participants reported “yes” to that question.

An online survey link was emailed by the cooperative education department to students who had accepted job offers in Fall 2019 (Time 1). Participants were surveyed again halfway through their full-time work term in March 2020 (Time 2). In May 2020, upon the completion of the 4-month work term, the cooperative education department provided the researchers with the employers’ performance evaluations.

2.2 | Data quality

To ensure participants were eligible and attentive for the study, prescreening questions and attention check items were included in both online surveys.

2.2.1 | Time 1 survey

A prescreening question asked if participants had gone through a job interview for the position beginning in January 2020. If participants answered “No,” they were redirected to the end of the survey. Of the 276 people who started the survey, 46 chose “no” for this answer and therefore did not complete the survey. For the remaining 230 participants who completed the survey, two kinds of attention check items were built into each survey. First, a self-reported study engagement item (Meade & Craig, 2012) at the end of the survey stated that ensuring high quality research was important, and asked participants to honestly answer whether they carefully responded to all questions in the survey. Those who responded “No” were excluded from analyses. In the Time 1 survey, 6 participants (out of 230) responded “No” and 31 participants did not respond to that item (leaving 193 participants). As well, within each survey there was an instructed response item (Meade & Craig, 2012; e.g., “Please choose ‘Strongly Agree’ for the response choice to this question”). Cases were excluded if they failed to respond to the instructed response item correctly. This occurred for 0 participants in the Time 1 survey, leaving a sample of 193 participants.

2.2.2 | Time 2 survey

One hundred sixty-three people started the Time 2 survey, and 11 chose “no” for the prescreening question (asking if they took part in an interview.) Of the remaining 152 participants, four people did not respond to the self-reported engagement item and were removed from the study (leaving 148 participants). As well, 13 participants were removed for incorrectly answering the instructed response item, leaving 135 participants who filled out the Time 2 survey. When we combined the 193 completed Time 1 surveys with the 135 completed Time 2 surveys, 7 of the Time 2 participants had not completed the Time 1 survey and were removed. Thus, our final matched sample size was 128.

The demographic information reported above only includes the participants who were retained in the sample after these data quality checks.

2.3 | Measures—Time 1

Fear of negative evaluation was measured using the 8-item Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale, Straightforward Items (Rodebaugh et al., 2004). The scale was scored using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all characteristic of me to 5 = entirely characteristic of me). A sample item is: “I am afraid that people will find fault with me.” The reliability of the scale was $\alpha = .91$.

Interview anxiety was measured using the 30-item Measure of Anxiety in Selection Interviews (MASI; McCarthy & Goffin, 2004). This measure uses 5-point Likert response scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). As recommended (McCarthy & Goffin, 2004), scores on the MASI were averaged across the five subscales, creating an overall score of interview anxiety for each participant. A sample item is: “I become so apprehensive in job interviews that I am unable to express my thoughts clearly.” The reliability of the scale was $\alpha = .91$.

2.3.1 | Demographics

Participants reported their age, gender, ethnicity, program, year, and job title.
2.4 | Measures—Time 2

2.4.1 | Workplace anxiety

We adapted the Workplace Anxiety Scale from McCarthy et al. (2016). McCarthy et al. (2016) created their Workplace Anxiety Scale from the performance anxiety subscale of the MASI (McCarthy & Goffin, 2004). For instance, the MASI item "I am overwhelmed by thoughts of doing poorly when I am in job interview situations" was changed to "I am overwhelmed by thoughts of doing poorly at work" in the Workplace Anxiety Scale. Because this scale only captured the "evaluative" aspect of social-evaluative threat situations, we added in six additional items to capture the "social" aspect of anxiety. To do so, items from the MASI social anxiety subscale were adapted to create a subscale of social workplace anxiety. For example, the MASI item "I become very uptight about having to social with the job interviewer" was changed to "I become very uptight about having to social with others at work". Items were rated on a 5-point Likert response scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). We pilot-tested this new, adapted Workplace Anxiety Scale with an initial study of 364 Amazon Mechanical Turk workers. Participants had a mean age of 34.49 years (SD = 10.95), 42% were female, 58% were male and most participants identified as White (78%). In our MTurk sample, the internal consistency of the 14-item scale was $\alpha = .95$. In the main study this newly adapted measure had a reliability of $\alpha = .89$.

2.4.2 | Social-evaluative job content

We developed a 16-item measure of social-evaluative job content for this study (see the Supporting Information Materials on the Open Science Framework) by adapting items that were about social interaction and evaluation by others (e.g., coworkers, supervisor, clients) from the Position Analysis Questionnaire (McCormick et al., 1969). This measure requested participants to report frequency of specific job experiences, such as "How often do you influence or persuade others toward some action or point of view, for example, selling, campaigning, convincing" on the following scale: 0 = Does not apply, 1 = Very infrequently to 5 = Very frequently. This new social-evaluative job content scale was also pilot tested with the MTurk sample. We also collected qualitative comments from the participants about the scale items. Since many participants observed conceptual redundancy between two questions, we combined them. The final 16-item scale yielded an internal reliability consistency of $\alpha = .80$ in the pilot study and $\alpha = .79$ in the current study.

2.4.3 | Job performance

Job performance was assessed with a standardized supervisor-rated job performance form. Of the 187 participants who consented to the researchers accessing their job performance ratings (in the Time 1 survey), 151 supervisors provided a job performance rating, yielding a response rate from supervisors of 81%. The 11-item performance appraisal form was designed by the career services department, with no input from the research team. A strength of this measure was that the same form was used to assess employees across all the varying industries/jobs. At the end of four months of job experience, the workplace supervisors rated employee performance using the standardized form on the following dimensions: quality of work, productivity, organization and planning skills, decision making and judgment skills, oral and written communication skills, ability to work with others, ability to learn, demonstrated initiative, reliability and dependability, progress toward learning goals, and an overall assessment of performance. Each dimension was rated from 1 (Unsatisfactory) to 5 (Outstanding). We used a composite score for each participant by averaging the supervisor ratings given on each of the eleven items. The internal consistency for the job performance scale was $\alpha = .95$.

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Hypothesis testing

Descriptive statistics are in Table 1. We also conducted a confirmatory factor analysis of the items in the Workplace Anxiety Scale, to test the fit of a one-factor versus a two-factor model.

| Variable                        | M    | SD   | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | 6    | 7    |
|--------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1. Interview anxiety           | 2.90 | 0.56 | .91  |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| 2. Fear of negative evaluation | 3.06 | 0.87 | .63**| .91  |      |      |      |      |      |
| 3. Workplace anxiety—overall   | 2.92 | 0.71 | .66**| .67**| .89**|      |      |      |      |
| 4. Workplace anxiety—performance | 3.06 | 0.81 | .51**| .57**| .89**| .88  |      |      |      |
| 5. Workplace anxiety—social    | 2.75 | 0.86 | .62**| .58**| .81**| .45**| .85  |      |      |
| 6. Social-evaluative job content | 3.23 | 0.60 | .18  | .09  | .02  | .00  | .05  | .79  |      |
| 7. Job performance             | 4.18 | 0.61 | .03  | .15  | .03  | .08  | .16  | .08  | .95  |

Note: M and SD are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Reliabilities are on the diagonal. N = 128 for interview anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, workplace anxiety, and social-evaluative job content; N = 96 for job performance. **p < .01; *p < .05.
A one-factor model that grouped all items onto a single factor was a poorer fit (root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = 0.15, comparative fit index [CFI] = 0.73, factor loadings ranged from 0.38 to 0.77) than a two-factor model with factors for performance anxiety and social anxiety (RMSEA = 0.08, CFI = 0.92, factor loadings ranged from 0.53 to 0.88). Therefore, we have included the two subscales in our correlation matrix. However, because we had conceptualized this scale as a single factor scale to parallel the MASI, our hypothesis tests were conducted with the single-factor scale.

Supporting Hypothesis 1, fear of negative evaluation was positively correlated with both interview anxiety (r = .63, 95% confidence interval [CI]: 0.51–0.72, p < .001) and workplace anxiety (r = .67, 95% CI: 0.56–0.76, p < .001).

Supporting Hypothesis 2, the correlation between interview anxiety and workplace anxiety was r = .66, p < .001, and the partial correlation (controlling for fear of negative evaluation) was r_{xy.z} = .41, p < .001, indicating this relation was partially accounted for by fear of negative evaluation.

Hypothesis 3 was not supported; the correlation between interview anxiety and job performance was r = .03, p = .76, 95% CI: −0.17, 0.23 and the correlation between workplace anxiety and job performance was r = .03, p = .77, 95% CI: −0.17, 0.23.

Contrary to Hypothesis 4, and as shown in Table 2, there was no evidence for a significant negative relation between interview anxiety and workplace anxiety; this relation was not significantly moderated by social-evaluative job content (β = −.18, p = .07).

Contrary to Hypothesis 5, and as shown in Table 3, there was no evidence for a significant negative relation between workplace anxiety and job performance; this relation was not significantly moderated by social-evaluative job content (β = −.02, p = .81).

4 | DISCUSSION

The existing literature on the relations between interview anxiety, workplace anxiety, and job performance is still emerging. Our study adds to this literature by investigating whether interview anxiety and workplace anxiety predict lower job performance across various types of jobs, and whether these two types of anxieties share a common antecedent. We found support that fear of negative evaluation is a dispositional variable, which corresponds to higher levels of anxieties related to work, and accounts for part of the relation between interview anxiety and workplace anxiety. This finding supports the idea that fear of negative evaluation is, as Reiss (1991) suggested, a fundamental fear. The nature of fundamental fears is such that they should account for variance in an individual’s trait anxiety and the production of specific anxious thoughts (Taylor, 1993). Thus, those who generally tend to fear social situations where others may judge them negatively (e.g., meeting new people at a party or playing at a music recital) would also be more likely to feel anxious in work-related situations that also include social judgment, like job interviews and in the workplace. These results mirror current literature, which suggests that fear and anxiety may contribute to the same overall goal (i.e., warning individuals to pay close attention to threats and avoid danger; Steimer, 2002) but are functionally different (i.e., anxiety is forward-looking to

| Predictor | B    | SE (B) | β    | t     | p value | r² Fit |
|-----------|------|--------|------|-------|---------|-------|
| Constant  | 4.199| 0.062  | 67.653| .000  |
| Interview anxiety | 0.037| 0.106  | .036 | 0.349 | .73  0.001 |
| Social evaluative job content | 0.101| 0.103  | .102 | 0.981 | .33  0.010 |
| Interview anxiety × social-evaluative job content interaction | −0.300| 0.165  | −0.179| −1.822| .07  0.035 |

R² = .042
p < .001

| Predictor | B    | SE (B) | β    | t     | p value | r² Fit |
|-----------|------|--------|------|-------|---------|-------|
| Constant  | 4.184| 0.063  | 66.838| .000  |
| Workplace anxiety | 0.022| 0.088  | .026 | 0.247 | .805  0.001 |
| Social evaluative job content | 0.087| 0.107  | .087 | 0.810 | .420  0.007 |
| Workplace anxiety × social-evaluative job content interaction | −0.035| 0.149  | −.025| −0.236| .814  0.001 |

R² = .008
p < .001
potential threat, whereas fear is focused on the present and monitors existing threats in the environment; Craig et al., 1995).

We found no evidence that work-related anxieties are negatively related to work performance. Interview anxiety and job performance were not related, and social-evaluative job content did not moderate this relation. This study provides a third replication of the lack of direct relation between interview anxiety and job performance. This finding mirrors the results of Schneider et al. (2019) and Voyles (2019) who also found no evidence that interview anxiety is related to later job performance. It may be that interview anxiety is a social-evaluative situation that is highly distinct from any similar social-evaluative situations experienced on the job, and the outcomes of interview anxiety would therefore be far removed from any future outcomes experienced at work.

We also found that employees who feel anxious at work were not more likely to have lower job performance, regardless of the social-evaluative content of the job. One potential reason for this may be a self-selection bias, where individuals may purposefully select certain jobs for themselves based on their personal interests and talents. Wilk et al. (1995) found support for the "gravitational hypothesis" whereby individuals gravitate to jobs that are commensurate with their abilities. Although Wilk et al. assessed cognitive abilities, it could also be the case that individuals who have heightened fear of negative evaluation may be motivated to avoid the negative arousal they would experience in social-evaluative situations; as such they may gravitate away from, or not apply for, jobs with higher amounts of social-evaluative job content. If individuals engaged in self-selection by applying for jobs based on how comfortable they feel performing in social-evaluative situations, then the relationships reported between workplace anxiety and performance may be weakened.

As an exploratory analysis of the gravitational hypothesis, we divided our participants into three groups based on the social-evaluative job content measure and compared the high and low groups (excluding the middle), thereby creating a sort of post-hoc extreme group design. The low social evaluative job content group had 45 people and a mean Fear of Negative Evaluation score of 2.92 (SD = 0.88) and the high social evaluative job content group had 48 people and a mean Fear of Negative Evaluation of 3.06 (SD = 0.91). These means were not significantly different; t(91) = .78, p = .44. Thus, although the gravitational hypothesis is a potential mechanism, we do not have evidence that this was the reason for a lack of relation between workplace anxiety and job performance.

4.1 | Strengths, limitations, and future directions

The main strengths of this study are that the study sampled a variety of jobs and used a field design to gain observations of real work scenarios. Notably, we were able to obtain data from a variety of industries and a wide range of job titles. Moreover, the measure of supervisor-rated job performance used for this study was the same to evaluate all participants. This design feature ensured that there was a diverse array of jobs and industries to test whether work-related anxieties affect job performance, and whether this relation is moderated by the social-evaluative job content with the added benefit of using a common measure of job performance across all jobs and industries. In doing so, this study extended past study designs by Schneider et al. (2019) and McCarthy et al. (2016), which looked at only one profession to see whether work-related anxiety affected job performance. The field design was also more realistic than a laboratory study, as participants worked in genuine employment situations in full time-positions, where they reported to supervisors, kept a regular work schedule, performed an array of tasks, received compensation for their work, and increased the size of their professional networks. Consequently, this study extended Voyles’ (2019) study of interview anxiety and job performance that simulated working conditions in a laboratory.

The greatest limitation of this study was the nature and size of the sample (N = 128 for the predictor variables and 96 for job performance). As is common with field studies, particularly with multiple data collection phases, it was difficult to receive a high response rate of good-quality responses to each data collection point. The sample was also composed of young adults, at the beginning of their careers, and mostly female. It will, therefore, be important to replicate this study with a more diverse sample with respect to demographics, especially age or job experience. While Muschalla et al. (2010) reported no relation between age and work-related anxieties, most of the research on interview anxiety and job performance has focused on young adults (Powell et al., 2018). The interview context might be challenging for some older adults who are newly on the job market (e.g., after experiencing job loss; Wanberg et al., 2016). Despite significant work experiences to draw from in an interview, they might feel "out of practice" and thus find the interview anxiety-provoking.

A second limitation of the current study is the nature of the measure of workplace anxiety that we used. In terms of content, we focused on the evaluative and social aspects of workplace anxiety, because these were the components that were most parallel to an interview situation. However, our results might have been different with a broader and multifaceted conceptualization and a focus on clinical levels of anxiety. In fact, Muschalla and Linden (2013) describe a number of work-related anxiety disorders (e.g., specific social phobia, unspecific social phobia, insufficiency anxiety, generalized anxiety, hypochondriac anxiety, adjustment disorder related to a work problem, PTSD, and workplace phobia). Using this conceptualization of workplace-related anxieties, their work has shown relations between work-related anxieties and performance difficulties such as increased absenteeism (e.g., Muschalla et al., 2010). We encourage future research to adopt both the more targeted workplace anxiety conceptualization (McCarthy et al., 2016) and the larger construct space of work-related anxieties (Muschalla, 2016) to develop a comprehensive conceptualization of anxieties that occur in, and are related to work and the workplace.

In addition to the content of our items, the choice of workplace anxiety response scale may also have affected the results. Following McCarthy et al. (2016), we used an agreement scale. However, other
researchers have measured anxiety using frequency (e.g., “almost never” to “always”) or severity (e.g., “not at all” to “very much so”) scales (Spielberger, 1983). Frequency or severity scales could provide different information about how negatively people are impacted by anxiety. It may be helpful in future research on the anxiety-performance relations to consider using a frequency or severity scale to capture different aspects of the nature of people’s experience with anxiety.

A third limitation was observed range restriction in job performance, the criterion variable. While supervisors were able to give performance scores between 1 (Unsatisfactory) to 5 (Outstanding) to their co-op student subordinates, the distribution of performance scores was heavily skewed to the left. Specifically, the mean of the job performance composite scores was 4.18, with a standard deviation of 0.61 and a range of 2.18–5.00. This indicates that most co-op students had above-average performance during their 4-month work terms, according to their supervisors. It is possible that supervisors were more lenient towards co-op students as many were still just beginning to accumulate job experience, or that selection procedures for the organizations were working well to hire high performers. Range restriction due to having few poor performers in the sample may have impacted the results of this study because any hypothesized correlations with job performance (e.g., correlation of workplace anxiety to job performance) may have underestimated the true correlation size in the population. Thus, those results should be interpreted with caution. Future research could expand the criterion domain to include other indicators of performance difficulties in the workplace, such as increased tardiness and absenteeism, decreased customer satisfaction, decreased citizenship behaviors, or, as done by Muschalla and Linden (2009), sick leave rates and duration. It would also be interesting for future research to assess self-rated job performance in addition to other-rated performance. It may be that anxious employees evaluate their performance more negatively than their supervisors, given that self-doubts often accompany experiences of anxiety (Cheng & McCarthy, 2018). Expanding the criterion domain to reflect both subjective (e.g., self- and other-rated performance) and objective (e.g., error rates, sales records, absenteeism from personnel records) performance measures could provide a more in-depth test of the relation between interview or workplace anxiety on the one hand, and behaviors denoting aspects of work performance on the other.

5 | CONCLUSION

This study examined whether two kinds of anxieties related to work—in interview anxiety and workplace anxiety—were negatively associated with job performance, whether fear of negative evaluation positively related to these anxieties, and whether social-evaluative job content affected the strength of the anxiety and performance relationships. Overall, our results suggest that fear of negative evaluation is an individual difference variable that corresponds to higher levels of anxieties related to work, and accounts for part of the association between interview anxiety and workplace anxiety. However, there was no evidence that interview anxiety and workplace anxiety are negatively related with work performance, whether on their own or in tandem with a situational moderator (i.e., social-evaluative job content) variable. This study provides further insight into a possible antecedent of anxieties related to work and suggests that anxious interviewees and employees might perform just as well, even in social-evaluative job situations, as their less anxious counterparts. The main takeaway from this study for organizations and individual jobseekers is that both interview anxiety and workplace anxiety do not appear to be related to lower employee job performance. It is, therefore, crucial not to overlook promising candidates during the selection process, or current employees during promotion decisions, simply because they exhibit high levels of anxiety at work.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available on OSF at https://osf.io/pzxgw/?view_only=411ab3f216c84b1580e09b4605665a1

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ENDNOTES

1The other two fundamental fears consist of the fear of danger/harm/injury, and the fear of anxiety itself (e.g., fear of physical symptoms of anxiety; Reiss, 1991).

2We initially had 193 participants who accurately filled out the Time 1 survey; we found no significant differences in interview anxiety or fear of negative evaluation between the group who filled out surveys at Time 1 and Time 2 and the group who only filled out the survey at Time 1.

3A full list of items, and a more detailed description of the pilot study and full correlation table is available on the Open Science Framework at https://osf.io/pzxgw/?view_only=feb3af562d22495f8a2b443dc3562dde

4We also conducted an exploratory analysis, following a reviewer’s suggestion, and carried out the moderation analyses in Hypothesis 5 with only the social dimension of workplace anxiety. For completeness, we also conducted a separate analysis with only the evaluative dimension of workplace anxiety. Tables containing these nonsignificant results are available in the Supporting Information Materials.

5Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

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