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# Insecurity Threat and its Implications for Leadership Preference

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INSECURITY THREAT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS  
FOR LEADERSHIP PREFERENCE

A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of Psychological Sciences  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science

By  
Allen Lee

May 2016

INSECURITY THREAT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS  
FOR LEADERSHIP PREFERENCE

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I dedicate this thesis to my family, the Industrial-Organizational Psychology professors,

Dr. Elizabeth L. Shoenfelt, Dr. Amber N. Schroeder, and Dr. Reagan D. Brown,

Dr. Aaron L. Wichman, and my cohort class of 2016.

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I wish to thank the members of my committee for their support, patience, and suggestions. Dr. Elizabeth L. Shoenfelt has been helpful in guiding me toward a sound methodology. Dr. Amber N. Schroeder's specific comments allowed me to perform a thorough investigation of the subject of leadership. I would also like to thank my cohort members, Kayla Finuf and Sarah Adams, for their aid in my statistical analyses. Finally, I would like to thank my thesis director, Dr. Aaron L. Wichman, for his encouraging words and endless guidance.

## PREFACE

Since the beginning of my academic career as a student, I have been very much interested in leadership, both in the academic setting and the organizational setting. Through this thesis, I was given an opportunity to explore people's preference for leaders, particularly under stressful or negative times. I believe it is valuable to know what people look for in a leader when those stressful times, such as when they are unsure about their performance on the job, in terms of the leader type.

It is hoped that this thesis will be an impetus for students to further this area of research, particularly in organizations.

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INSECURITY THREAT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS  
FOR LEADERSHIP PREFERENCE

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40 Pages

Directed by: Aaron Wichman, Elizabeth L. Shoenfelt, and Amber Schroeder

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I investigated insecurity threat and its implications for employee leadership preferences. Preferences for three types of leadership style were examined: charismatic, relationship-oriented, and task-oriented leadership. It was anticipated that individuals' salient work values would predict leadership preference more strongly after insecurity threat than under control conditions. Two different types of threats were investigated in comparison to a neutral control condition.

Results showed that there were no statistically significant differences in leader ratings between threat conditions. My results suggest that threat does not significantly influence preference for charismatic or task-oriented leaders. Work values did not significantly predict a preference for a leadership type.

## **Introduction**

Across many firms, businesses, and countries the issue of insecurity, such as job insecurity, has become a major issue. Insecurity is related to negative employee attitudes and behaviors, as well as having an impact on those employees' health (Reisel, Chia, Maloles, & Slocum, 2007). Downsizing, mergers, acquisitions, and restructuring all can have a profound effect on the employee. Ashford, Lee and Bobko (1989) recognized that organizational change can cause feelings of insecurity, anxiety, demoralization, and suspicion of the organization. Not only does this result in adverse employee performance, but it also results in an atmosphere of job insecurity within the organization that changes the overall climate, whereby employees have a tendency to become rigid in their work practices (Kinnunen, Mauno, Nätti, & Happonen, 2000; Probst, Stewart, Gruys, & Tierney, 2007). Another effect includes less cognitive flexibility (Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981). In general, when faced with insecurity, individuals may become more rigid and show reduced creativity, resulting in products, solutions, or work habits that are less than innovative (Probst et al., 2007).

Stress from having insecurity in the workplace also may result in physical strain on the employee, an important issue from a humanitarian perspective (Ashford, Lee & Bobko, 1989). However, just as important is the effect insecurities have on the organization in terms of truancy, such as employees calling in for sick days and health-care costs (Ashford et al., 1989; Probst et al., 2007). Most organizations must bear the costs related to stress, especially when it has an adverse impact on the employee's health (Ashford et al., 1989; Probst et al., 2007). Diminished productive behavior and outputs, both on the individual level and organizational level, can severely damage the

organization (Probst et al., 2007). Any knowledge that can be used to mitigate the effects of insecurity is therefore useful.

One potential source of mitigation is leadership. Most employees in an organization operate under the management of a superior. Under supervision, many employees will remain loyal to the company when given perceived supervisory support (Waldman, Carter, & Hom, 2012). Certain leaders, by expressing individual considerations toward employees, forge stronger emotional attachments to the organization, which in turn are related to stronger employee interpersonal identification with the leader (Ashford et al., 1989; Waldman et al., 2012). This interpersonal identification can generalize to encompass organizational identification because employees perceive the leaders as representatives of the organization, increasing the employees' ties with the organization as a whole (Waldman et al., 2012). In this sense, the relationship between the employees, leaders, and the organization are interconnected.

One goal of this thesis is to examine the impact of insecurity threat on preferences for leadership. Another goal is to examine the possibility that salient leadership norms may become especially predictive of ultimate leadership preferences under conditions of perceived insecurity. These goals are explained more fully in the following sections. I note that although the manipulations and measures described here stand-alone, they are part of a larger study including a variety of other predictors and measures. In no case were these other variables confounded with the predictor variables in this study.

### **Insecurity Threat and its Effects**

The concept of security is thought to be a basic need (Huddy, Feldman, & Weber, 2007). The concept of security is defined as the state in which a person is free from real

or perceived danger or threat (Greenhalgh & Rosenblott, 1984). Insecurity threat would be just the opposite, when a person is in a state of danger or threat. Maslow's hierarchy of needs depicts the basic needs for a person as including physiological, security, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1954). Once the need for a level in the hierarchy is satisfied, the next hierarchical level becomes the focus (Maslow, 1954). Based on Maslow's indirect application of his need hierarchy to organizational settings (Greenhalgh & Rosenblott, 1984), job insecurity threat is conceptualized as a threat in which employees feel their continuity in the organization is subject to termination, or that job loss is imminent (Ashford et al., 1989; Kinnunen et al., 2000; Størseth, 2006).

Reisel, Chia, Maloles, & Slocum (2007) partitions job insecurity effects into immediate or long-term effects. Immediate effects include those related to job attitudes, such as organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Harrison, Newman, & Roth, 2006; Reisel et al., 2007). Organizational commitment can be conceptualized as the employee's loyalty and willingness to work for the organization; job satisfaction is how pleased or happy the employee is with his or her job. Long-term effects associated with insecurity are more diffuse, and include dizziness, hypertension, loss of appetite, and other somatic issues (Ashford et al., 1989; Reisel et al., 2007).

Probst, Stewart, Gruys, and Tierney (2007) indicated work-related health issues can result in organizational loss, such as sabotaging equipment or wasting resources, reduced individual performance, and intentions to quit. Assuming that organizations will have to replace the vacant positions, resulting in hiring, selection, and possible training to replace the employee, this costs the company time and money. In terms of reduced individual performance, Probst and colleagues (2007) explained that health issues may

lead to counterproductive work behavior (CWB), such as absenteeism. Probst et al. raised the possibility that employees who engage in more CWBs might engage in reduced CWB to regain control over their work situation and setting or in fear of losing their jobs. Correspondingly, one study found that there was an increase in productivity when participants were subjected to job loss threats, though outputs were lower in quality and accompanied by increased violations of safety (Probst, 2002). Fear of job loss may increase the employees' willingness to increase their work inputs as a mechanism of coping (Probst et al., 2007; Reisel et al., 2007).

The stress placed on employees from the threat of job insecurity may contribute to counterproductive work behaviors (Probst et al., 2007). This is not always the case, however. As noted above, insecurity can sometimes increase productivity. Probst et al. (2007) found that job insecurity sometimes improved productivity, while simultaneously decreasing CWBs. One reason for this result may be due to the insecurity stress serving as a source of motivation, leading to increased productivity (Probst, 2002; Probst et al., 2007). The idea of increased productivity from some of the employees is plausible. Employees with moderate levels of job insecurity seem to be the ones that exert the most effort because they do not feel as though they are able to change their situation. Employees may have low work efforts because of their perceived job security. Employees considered to be low performers, or those most likely to be terminated or fired, also may have low work efforts because of the idea that lay-offs would not affect them, or feelings of helplessness due to perceptions of no control of the outcomes (Klehe, Zikic, Van Vianen & De Pater, 2011; Probst, 2002). Employees may be thinking that they should not waste any effort if it is not going to affect their situation.

When under the threat of insecurity, employees tend to focus on personal concerns, resulting in lowered performance on the job (Ashford et al., 1989). Organizational leaders that implement change often complain about the reduced job performance from employees. Employees threatened with job loss may be engaged in higher productivity as an attempt to regain control over their future, but they may achieve lower quality outputs, accompanied by numerous safety violations (Ashford et al., 1989; Probst et al., 2007). One inference from these findings is that even if employees show higher amounts of work in response to insecurity threat, leaders may perceive the lower quality outputs, accompanied by issues of safety, as lower employee job performance. Although those leaders may not attribute the lowered job performance to job insecurity, they should be concerned with it, especially when the organization is changing or downsizing. When employees face the threat of losing their job, it fosters a sense of loyalty to one's career rather than the organization (Klehe et al., 2011).

Research suggests that job insecurity is especially undermining for motivation under conditions of low communication with executive management (Reisel et al., 2007). According to some studies, many employees will seek out information from other employees due to lack of communication with the managers, which can lead to the spreading of rumors (Probst et al., 2007; Reisel et al., 2007). These rumors may then increase the effect of felt insecurities, resulting in lower performance, or even the employees quitting.

### **Leadership Styles and Insecurity**

There are a variety of leadership styles, and research shows that different situations call for different types of leadership (Cohen, Solomon, Maxfield, Pyszczynski,

& Greenberg, 2004; Nail, McGregor, Drinkwater, Steele, & Thompson, 2009; Waldman et al., 2012). Given existing situational effects on leadership style efficacy, it seems reasonable to believe that leadership preferences might also change depending on an individual's level of perceived insecurity. Some evidence for this idea already exists. For instance, one study found that those intent on quitting, a behavior which may result from job insecurity, were less likely to quit if the leader displayed a charismatic leadership style (Waldman et al., 2012). This finding is supported by work showing that perceived security seems to change attitudes toward charismatic leaders. Gillath and Hart (2010) have suggested that a sense of security can buffer against the effects of insecurity, indicating that preference for a type of leader may be partially dependent upon the individual's existing sense of security. Specifically, Gillath and Hart found that people who had a high sense of security, which is associated with protection, safety, and the collective self-esteem (i.e., the examined group's perceived self-worth), are more inclined to disapprove of leaders with charismatic attitudes (Gillath & Hart, 2010). Employees that show higher levels of trait security also show more openness to differing beliefs and show more sociability toward outgroups (Gillath & Hart, 2010). It is likely that employees who have high security would desire a leader who shows these more open qualities and thus be less likely to want a leader that is conservative in his or her policies. Aside from charismatic leadership, though, a variety of leadership style preferences may be impacted by insecurity. In the following, I describe the three major types of leadership I will investigate in this paper.

**Charismatic Leadership.** Some conceptualizations that refer to the category of charismatic leadership include transformational and inspirational leadership styles (Crant & Bateman, 2000). Although there are many conceptualizations of charismatic leadership style, they were used interchangeably for the purpose of this thesis (Ehrhart & Klein, 2001). Charismatic leaders take risks, exude impressions of extraordinariness, arouse confidence, and instill a collective sense of purpose (Crant & Bateman, 2000; Ehrhart & Klein, 2001; Gillath & Hart, 2010; Waldman et al., 2012).

However, researchers note that charismatic leadership is neither contingent on what the leader does nor on specific behaviors of the employees; it is dependent on the relationship between the leader and the follower (Ehrhart & Klein, 2001; Levay, 2010). The charismatic leader's confidence relies on whether the employees actually consider the leader to possess superior qualities, having superhuman or, at least, exceptional powers and abilities (Levay, 2010). Thus, in this type of leader-follower relationship, employees are key to a charismatic leader's success (Levay, 2010). The charismatic leader needs followers to be convinced that the leader in charge has exceptional powers and abilities, whether the charismatic leader indeed has these powers or not (Levay, 2010).

**Relationship-Oriented Leadership.** Relationship oriented leaders can be described as leaders that focus on relations with others that do not require any specific work-related exchanges, emphasizing subordinate communication, trust of subordinates, and recognition and appreciation of the subordinate's work and contributions (Cohen et al., 2004; Ehrhart & Klein, 2001; Tabernero et al., 2009). Employees that value security, that is, those that prefer a predictable and stable environment, may prefer this type of

leadership, as the leader fosters a caring environment and adopts a considerate persona, possibly reducing the amount of felt insecurity by the employee. However, it is also possible that employees who associate security with task-heavy work, focusing heavily on job objectives and/or goals, see this type of leader as incompetent, possibly furthering their feelings of insecurity. Relationship-oriented leaders are empathetic, look out for employees' welfare, and are associated with employee satisfaction (Judge, Piccolo, & Ilies, 2004).

**Task-Oriented Leadership.** Task-oriented leaders are those that set high, achievable goals for employees, who focus on exchange of work and outcomes, and who plan specific responsibilities for each employee (Ehrhart & Klein, 2001). Task-oriented leaders that focus on predictable goals and consistency may be attractive to employees that highly value security and stability. This leader exudes goal attainment attitudes, organizes roles of followers, and is perceived as being effective (Judge et al., 2004; Tabernero et al., 2009).

**Leadership Comparisons.** Compared to the relationship and task-oriented leaders, charismatic leaders have more of a proactive personality and affect change in the organizational environment by showing initiative (Crant & Batemen, 2000).

Relationship-oriented leaders, in contrast, contribute to perceptions of job security (Størseth, 2006). Preferences for these differences between leaders are derived in part from certain characteristics of their followers. Specifically, Ehrhart and Klein (2001) posited that follower characteristics would predict preferences for certain types of leaders. The follower characteristics included intrinsic, extrinsic, interpersonal relations, security, and participation work values. The current study will focus on these five

follower characteristics and investigate their association with leadership preferences under control and threat conditions. Each work value the current study focuses on pertains to different ideals. Intrinsic work values pertain to responsibility and challenge at work. Extrinsic work values pertain to quality of pay and benefits. Interpersonal relations work values pertain to relationships with co-workers and management. Security work values pertain to job security and work stability. Participation work value pertains to having influence for mutual benefit at work. These different values are associated with different types of leader preferences.

For instance, Ehrhart and Klein (2001) found that participants who valued interpersonal relations and security preferred task-oriented leaders. Ehrhart and Klein also found that participants who valued extrinsic rewards preferred a relationship oriented leader, participants that valued participation in decision-making preferred a charismatic leader, and participants that valued a desire for structure preferred task-oriented leaders. Overall, the demographic variables with follower characteristics in Ehrhart and Klein's study explained 21% of variance for charismatic leader preference, compared to 14% and 17% for relationship- and task-oriented leaders, respectively.

**Relationships between Insecurity and Leadership Preferences.** In addition to work values predicting leadership preferences, perceptions of security also predict leadership preferences. For example, Gillath and Hart (2010) used a unique approach in that they used a security prime, different from the insecurity primes used in several other studies (e.g. Ashford et al., 1989; Ehrhart and Klein, 2001; Probst et al., 2007). Gillath and Hart (2010) found that a security prime led to decreased positive ratings of a

charismatic leader, suggesting that both psychological insecurity and psychological security have an impact on the preference for a certain type of leader.

Furthermore, the psychological aspect of security for the preference of a leader is affected by the individual's actual thought of being secure. Although an employee may place high value on security, it does not necessarily mean he or she possesses actual feelings of security. An employee may place low value on security, whilst having feelings of security. In short, level of security can be independent of the value one places on security. Employees who value security or stability and who feel secure may find charismatic leaders to be unnerving due to their risk-taking quality (Ehrhart & Klein, 2001). Work from Ehrhart and Klein (2001) indicates that those who value security prefer task-oriented leaders, which coincides with Gillath and Hart's (2010) results. The findings from these two studies suggest that people who valued security, while not possessing a high sense of security, preferred charismatic leaders. However, people who valued security while already possessing a high sense of security preferred task-oriented leaders.

In spite of findings showing that there are conditions where not all people will shift to favor more charismatic leaders after a threat, in general, insecurity threats seem to cause preferences for charismatic leaders. Evidence for this comes from findings such as those showing that even individuals that consider themselves liberal or who do not habitually feel drawn to charismatic leadership become more positive toward this leadership style after an experimentally induced threat (Nail et al., 2009). Similarly, Cohen et al. (2004) found 33% of participants under the manipulated threat condition voted for a charismatic leader, compared to 4% in the control condition. The charismatic

leader also received higher evaluation scores from participants under the threat condition compared to the control group, indicating the influence of the threat on preference for charismatic leaders.

**Focus Theory of Normative Conduct.** Insecurity threat is dealt with in a variety of ways. A leading theory of how people respond to threat, terror management theory (TMT), suggests that living up to cultural values will provide threat-induced anxiety protection (Cohen et al., 2004; Jonas, Martens, Kayser, Fritsche, Sullivan, & Greenberg, 2008). TMT research shows that after an insecurity threat, people are more likely to embrace norms and values, and base reactions and decisions on those norms. Adherence to norms after a threat is a finding found in many cultures, but the norms themselves may differ, depending on culture. In short, culture may make certain norms more salient, which leads to their greater acceptance under threat (Jonas et al., 2008; Nail et al., 2009). The focus theory of normative conduct (Jonas et al., 2008) explains this finding. This theory proposes that norms can guide or direct behavior, but these norms must be salient or otherwise accessible in order for this to happen. People either dispositionally pay attention to the norm or situational conditions make the norm salient (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991; Jonas et al., 2008). Norms only direct behavior if the individual is focused on these norms. This perspective suggests that people's salient values may more strongly predict leader preference under threat than when not under threat (Ehrhart & Klein, 2015; Jonas et al., 2008; Nail et al., 2009). As an example, when researchers made salient opposing values (e.g., prosocial vs. proself), participants' behavior following threat corresponded to whichever value had been made salient (Jonas et al., 2008). The implication of this finding for applied settings is the possibility that threat increases the

correspondence between salient personal leadership preferences and post-threat leadership attitudes.

### **The Current Study**

The current study was conducted to better understand the interaction between threat, norm salience, and leadership preferences. Based on my review of the literature, charismatic leadership, with its focus on inspiration, arousing confidence, and proactive style, may be the preferred leadership style under conditions of insecurity, when compared to the control condition. However, this preference is likely moderated by additional factors (see e.g., Gillath & Hart, 2010), as described in the following. Fig. 1 shows a depiction of the proposed model. Clearly, insecurity threat may bias preferences towards charismatic leaders. In addition, norms and values that become salient under threat conditions may cause preference for leaders who show qualities consistent with salient values or norms. Based on the review of the literature, the following is hypothesized:

*Hypothesis 1:* Threat will increase preference for charismatic leaders, relative to the control condition.

*Hypothesis 2:* For each leadership preference type, the related work value scale will more strongly predict its associated leadership preference type under threat than in the control condition. The following specific associated leadership preferences are hypothesized.

2a. Charismatic leader preferences will be more strongly predicted by security work value under threat than under control conditions.

2b. Charismatic leader preferences will be more strongly predicted by participation work value under threat than under control conditions.

2c. Relationship oriented leader preferences will be more strongly predicted by extrinsic reward value under threat than under control conditions.

2d. Task oriented leader preferences will be more strongly predicted by intrinsic reward value under threat than under control conditions.

2e. Task oriented leader preferences will be more strongly predicted by interpersonal relations work value under threat than under control conditions.

2f. Task oriented leader preferences will be more strongly predicted by security work value under threat than under control conditions.

2g. Task oriented leader preferences will be more strongly predicted by participation work value under threat than under control conditions.

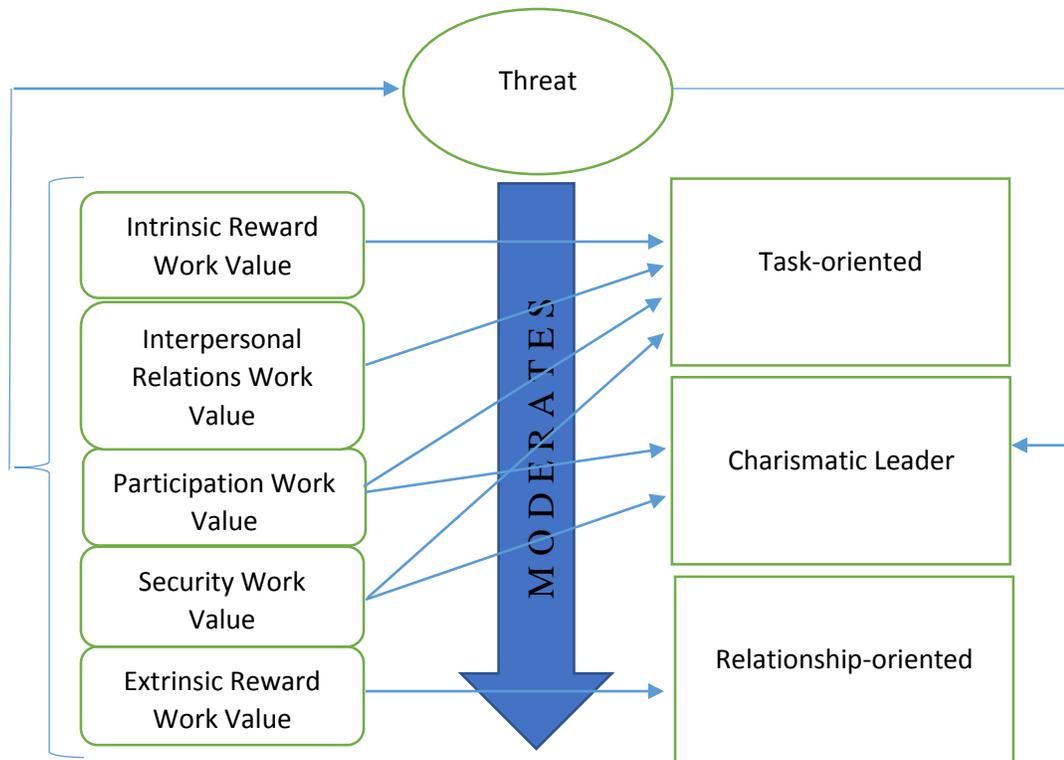


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Expected Effects

## **Method**

### **Participants and Design**

Data from the initial sample of 165 participants were inspected for missingness and affirmative responses to a question at the end of the survey asking “Is there any reason we should not use your data?”(see Meade & Craig, 2012). This inspection led to 3 cases being removed due to not completing the survey, and 26 cases being removed for affirmative answers to the data usage question. This yielded a sample of 136 participants. These data were collected at Western Kentucky University. The sample was comprised of 110 females and 26 males ranging in age from 18 to 44,  $M = 20.43$ ,  $SD = 4.46$ . The sample was predominantly white (92.1% White, 7.2% Black or African American, 1.4% Asian, 1.4% Hispanic or Latino, 0.7% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 2.2% other). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two insecurity threat conditions, or a control condition. The independent variable was threat with three levels.

### **Procedure**

Participants were recruited from Study Board. Participants completed measures of their dispositional leadership preferences, as well as individual difference measures related to their expected sensitivity to the independent variable. Participants then were exposed to one of two types of insecurity threat or a neutral writing task. Participants then read a number of vignettes describing different leaders who exemplified the qualities of either charismatic, relationship-focused, or task-focused leadership. They then indicated for each vignette their level of interest in working for a leader who had the characteristics described in the vignette, as well as indicated the extent to which they believed each leader might exhibit other leadership attributes not directly described in the vignette.

These measures are described in brief below. The full text of all measures and manipulations is included in the appendices.

**Right-Wing Authoritarianism.** The short 32-item version of the right-wing authoritarianism scale (RWA) from Altemeyer (1998) and Altemeyer (1996; as cited in Rattazzi, Bobbio, & Canova, 2007) was used as a control variable. This scale was used to measure submission to authority, aggressive feelings toward norm violators, and desire that norms are followed (Rattazzi et al., 2007). Sample items include “Obedience and respect for authority are the most important values children should learn” and a reverse scored item, “There is absolutely nothing wrong with nudist camps.” Previous research shows that the scale is correlated with prejudice and authoritarianism (Rattazzi et al., 2007). It was expected that this measure helped to control for dispositional preferences for charismatic leaders, as Altemeyer found a positive link for prediction of charismatic leadership preference with the scale (Rattazzi et al., 2007). The scale ranges from -4 (Very strongly disagree) to 4 (Very strongly agree). An average was calculated for the authoritarianism aggression and submission subscale ( $\alpha = .91$ ) and the conservatism subscale ( $\alpha = .87$ ). This scale can be found in Appendix A.

**Personal Need for Structure.** The 12-item personal need for structure (PNS) scale from Neuberg and Newsom (1993) was used as a control variable. Sample items include “I enjoy having a clear and structured mode of life,” and a reverse scored item, “I enjoy being spontaneous.” For instance, Wichman (2012) showed that after an uncertainty threat, PNS predicted greater stereotyping, an expression of cognitive simplicity in response to threat. This scale ranges from -4, “Very strongly disagree,” to, 4

“Very strongly agree.” An average agreement score from the scale was calculated for this measure ( $\alpha = .50$ ). This scale can be found in Appendix B.

**Work Values Scale.** I used an 18-item work values scales based on Ehrhart and Klein’s (2001) study. The scale ranged from 1, “Not at all important,” to 5, “Extremely important.” There were five subscales: intrinsic reward (6 items), extrinsic reward (4 items), interpersonal relations (2 items), security (2 items), and participation work value (4 items). The work values subscales were all moderately reliable: intrinsic reward work value ( $\alpha = .67$ ), interpersonal work value ( $\alpha = .62$ ), participation work value ( $\alpha = .57$ ), security work value ( $\alpha = .74$ ), and extrinsic reward work value ( $\alpha = .66$ ). Scores for each subscale were combined and averaged so that higher values indicated higher importance for that subscale. Sample items include “Opportunity to use initiative” and “Good job security.” This scale can be found in Appendix C.

**Threat Conditions.** There were two threat conditions. Participants were asked to indicate the emotions and physiological responses they have in response to general insecurity, presentation apprehension threat, or the neutral experience (control condition) of watching television (TV). Under the first insecurity manipulation, participants were asked to think about general insecurities. This insecurity threat manipulation followed the threat manipulation structure of van den Bos, McGregor, and Martin (2015). Specifically, the insecurity-salient condition will read:

*We are interested in individual responses to different common personal experiences, because these can yield insight into personality. Please tell us about your personal experience of feeling insecure about yourself or insecure about something else important to you.*

*(1) Please briefly describe the emotions that thought of being insecure about yourself arouses in you.*

*(2) Please write down, as specifically as you can, what you think physically will happen to you as you feel insecure about yourself.*

Participants in the second threat condition were informed that they will have a chance of being selected to present about research to an introductory psychology class, a more active approach to triggering insecurity threat. The second threat condition was manipulated as follows:

*Now that you have agreed to participate, we need to inform you that we are randomly selecting ½ (50%) of all participants to make a presentation about research methodology in psychology to a Psych 100 class. This means that you will have a 50% chance of having to present a description of this study. Participants who are randomly chosen must present this information within 3 days of the experiment participation. Your chances of being required to present is 50:50. For our records, please do the following:*

*(1) Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of making this presentation arouses in you.*

*(2) Please write down, as specifically as you can, what you think physically will happen to you as you do your presentation in Psychology.*

The control, no insecurity condition, was the same except instead of having participants recall insecurities, they were asked to answer the same questions about watching TV (van den Bos, 2001). Specifically, the nonsalient condition read:

*We are interested in individual responses to different common personal experiences, because these can yield insight into personality. Please tell us about your personal experience of watching shows on TV in the way you are used to doing.*

*(1) Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of watching TV arouses in you.*

*(2) Please write down, as specifically as you can, what physically happens to you when you watch TV.*

### **Dependent Variables**

**Scenario-based leadership attitudes.** Participants were asked to indicate their attitudes toward leaders after reading scenario-based descriptions of each leadership style. Participants were asked to imagine working with each of three leaders as described by scenarios prototypic of charismatic, relationship-oriented, and task-oriented leadership styles, then to rate each leader holistically on preference.

The specific leadership prompt and style descriptions were as follows:

*We will next show you different descriptions of managers. Please read each one and think about how you would feel toward them if you worked for them. After reading about each one and indicating your attitudes, you will also be asked some additional questions about each leader.*

The leader descriptions were adapted from Ehrhart and Klein's (2001) study and Cohen, Solomon, Maxfield, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg's (2004) study. Questions about the leader described in each vignette were answered immediately after reading each vignette, before moving to the next vignette. After each description, participants indicated their preference for that leader. A 9-point scale was used for preference ranging from 1,

“Strongly Prefer,” to 9, “Strongly Not Prefer.” Following this preference rating, semantic differentials were completed for each vignette. Order for leadership presentations was balanced.

*Semantic differentials.* After each vignette and after making their ratings indicating their preference for working for each leader, participants were asked to rate the leaders based on semantic differential scales, indicating where they believe the leader lay between the two adjectives (Kervyn, Fiske, & Yzerbyt, 2013). Specifically, participants rated the leader on the semantic differential dimension of evaluation (scale anchors: good/bad, positive/negative, and wise/foolish). The scale ranged from 1 (extremely good) to 7 (extremely bad). The scale changed to accompany the adjectives that were being assessed. For example, for positive/negative the scale ranged from 1 (extremely positive) to 7 (extremely negative). All three ratings on the dimension were standardized and averaged. Semantic differential scales scores were summed with leader ratings, then averaged. The leader vignettes are described in the following section.

*Description of the charismatic leader.* I am a successful leader because I am committed to my company and its goals. I have high expectations for my employees, and I expect them to do all they can to meet or exceed them. Reaching those expectations helps the organization, but also improves my employee’s personal potential and helps them achieve personal goals. I am confident in their abilities to think outside the box to get the job done, and I am willing to take some risks to prove that there are better ways to complete tasks. I emphasize that they are the lifeline of the organization, making a difference in the company with every move they make.

*Description of the relationship-oriented leader.* My success as a leader stems from my responsibility for the well-being of my employees. I try to be as friendly and understanding among all conversations that I have with my employees. Even when there is a lot of work to be done, I believe being courteous and respectful supports getting the job done. During times of high stress, I do not mind, and sometimes encourage, employees to come and speak to me about their issues, whether it is work-related or not. I try my best to let my employees know I trust them whole-heartedly and that they can achieve their best work. If they do well, I will recognize their contributions, even if I have to go out of my way.

*Description of the task-oriented leader.* Emphasizing accomplishments of tasks has led me to become a successful leader. I work with my employees to establish clear and attainable, yet challenging, work goals. I am explicit in my directions and plans for what they need to do. Having clear instructions and a period for task completion ensures that there is no ambiguity. After that step, I check that they have everything they need to complete the task or goal, whether it be supplies or assistance. Employees each have their own roles and I make sure there is no overlap, which could cause confusion. With that, clear roles and goals allow the employees to see how their work contributes to the success of the company.

## **Results**

### **Leadership Preferences**

Semantic differential scores were converted to a  $z$ -score. Holistic ratings for leaders also were converted to  $z$ -scores. An overall rating was obtained by averaging the combined scores of the standardized holistic rating and the standardized semantic

differential scores. Leadership preference ratings were compared only between charismatic leader and task-oriented leaders, as there was an issue with the relationship-oriented leader's slider bar in the survey due to experimenter error. The slider bar did not appear on the screen when the relationship-oriented leader vignette appeared on the screen. Because of the error, there were inadequate preference rating data for the relationship-oriented leader. Thus, only the data for charismatic preference ratings were compared with the data for task-oriented leader. The data did contain semantic differential data for the relationship-oriented leader, but because leader preference ratings were a critical part of the leader preference composite, these data were not analyzed.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the leadership preference in insecurity threat and presentation apprehension conditions. There was no significant difference, based on averaged standardized scores of holistic ratings and semantic differentials, in the preference for charismatic leaders under insecurity threat ( $M = .12$ ,  $SD = .73$ ) and presentation apprehension threat ( $M = -.05$ ,  $SD = .57$ );  $t(89) = 1.20$ ,  $p = .23$ . There also was no significant difference, based on averaged standardized scores of holistic ratings and semantic differentials, in the preference for task-oriented leaders for insecurity threat ( $M = .10$ ,  $SD = .64$ ) and presentation apprehension ( $M = -.02$ ,  $SD = .52$ );  $t(88) = .97$ ,  $p = .33$ , suggesting that both insecurity threat types were not different. Please refer to Appendix E for the unstandardized table of means for leadership preference ratings on threat conditions.

Independent-samples t-tests then were conducted to compare leadership preference between insecurity threat and control conditions. There was a marginal, difference in preference for the charismatic leader under insecurity threat ( $M = .12$ ,  $SD =$

.73) and control condition ( $M = -.12, SD = .56$ );  $t(93) = 1.80, p = .08$ . There was no significant difference in preference for the task-oriented leader ( $M = -.10, SD = .64$ ) and control condition ( $M = -.08, SD = .56$ );  $t(94) = 1.47, p = .15$ . Results do not support Hypothesis 1. Please refer to Appendix F for the standardized table of means for combined leadership rating and semantic differentials on threat conditions.

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine effects of gender (male and female) and conditions (insecurity, presentation apprehension, and control) on leadership preferences. Although not specified in the hypotheses, the researcher was interested to see if there were any differences in leadership preference between males and females. There was no main effect ( $p = .32$ ) or a significant interaction between gender and conditions on preference for charismatic leader,  $F(2, 127) = .94, p = .39, \eta_p^2 = .02$ . There was no main effect ( $p = .67$ ) or a significant interaction between effects of gender and conditions on preference for task-oriented leader,  $F(2, 127) = .01, p = .99, \eta_p^2 = .00$ . These results suggest that gender does not influence preference for leadership type under either threat condition. Gender was no longer considered in further analyses.

### **Work Values**

A regression analysis was run to examine the main effects of threat conditions and work value subscales, as well as the possible interaction between each condition and each work value subscale. Conditions were dummy coded so that the watching TV condition was treated as the control condition.

The model was specified by first dummy coding the 3-level threat factor into 2 dummy codes, each representing contrast from the TV writing control condition. These dummy variables and each of the standardized work value scales was entered, along with

the interaction of each dummy variable with each work value subscale. This allowed both an examination of the relationship between work value subscales and leader preference under control conditions, and also separately under both threat conditions, via the work value scales' interaction with the dummy variables. These models were fit while alternately controlling for RWA and PNS, and results were not substantially different.

In brief, for charismatic leader preference, results indicated that there was no main effect for insecurity threat condition,  $F(1, 113) = 2.53, p = .11, \eta_p^2 = .022$  or main effect for presentation apprehension threat condition,  $F(1, 113) = .002, p = .97, \eta_p^2 = .000$ . There were also no main effects for any work value subscales (lowest  $p = .50$ ). There also were no significant interactions between conditions and the work values subscales (lowest  $p = .21$ ).

For task-oriented leader preference, there was no simple effect for insecurity threat condition compared to the control condition,  $F(1, 113) = 1.63, p = .21, \eta_p^2 = .014$ , or a simple effect for presentation apprehension threat condition compared to the control condition,  $F(1, 113) = .044, p = .84, \eta_p^2 = .000$ . There were also no main effects for any work value subscale (lowest  $p = 0.23$ ). There were also no significant interactions between conditions and work values subscales (lowest  $p = 0.30$ ). Results from both analyses do not support Hypotheses 2d, 2e, 2f, or 2g. Exclusion of the relationship-oriented leader data resulted in inconclusive speculation of Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine threat and its effects on leadership preference. There was some speculation that the presentation apprehension threat would be different in its effect on leadership preference from the effect of insecurity threat, as

having the students think about the possibility of giving a presentation to an undergraduate psychology class was expected to be an increase in the intensity of insecurities above merely thinking about one's insecurities. However, this was not borne out in the data. However, results show that there was no difference between these two types of insecurity threat.

It was also believed that certain work values would predict preference for certain types of leaders. According to the results, work values did not significantly predict specific leader preferences. A possible reason for this result is that the work values were not relevant enough to the student sample.

Considering the ANOVA showing no differences between men and women on leadership preference, a main effect of gender may not have been detected because of the large disparities in the number of men and women in this study. The sample in this study was comprised of 81% female and 19% male; this disparity may have reduced the power of the test for gender effects.

### **Limitations**

One of the limiting factors in this study was the distribution of the survey via the internet, outside of the controlled lab setting. The reason for distributing the survey through the internet was that it was easier and quicker than other mediums to recruit participants, as well as obtaining a good sample size. Because participants were given freedom in choosing the time, location, and electronic format (i.e., computer, mobile phone, or tablet), environmental influences may have biased participant's answers. For example, if a participant chose to complete the survey on his or her personal laptop at home, it is possible that he or she could go to another area in the house, such as the

bathroom, during the completion of the survey, possibly distracting participants from presented material. Because I could not ensure that the participants focus was solely on the task at hand, participants focus on the survey may have been diverted elsewhere, negating the effects of the felt threat. This is important because the focus theory of normative conduct and its theoretical basis for this study imply that extraneous variables may supplant theoretically important ones if attention is focused away. In reference to the example that participants did not complete the survey in an experimental setting, the effect of threat may have been hampered by extraneous variables. In a controlled experimental setting, controlling those extraneous variables might increase the effect of threat and assure that the participant's attention was devoted to the task at hand.

With regard to the formulated hypotheses, different operationalization of constructs could improve results. Since the current study's predictions were made according to the focus theory of normative conduct, hypotheses generated under a different theory and underlying rationale may also contribute to better results.

After analyzing the reliability of the work value subscales, most alphas obtained were below the rule-of-thumb alpha reliability of .70. Increased internal consistency may have resulted in the work value scales more clearly predicting leader preferences. It may have improved results to have developed a values scale that included work values that are relevant to the sample used in the survey. The sample of this study was comprised of students, while the work value subscales that were developed were developed with regard to individuals in an organizational setting. Much as how it does not make sense to generalize work values scale to students (because they are not likely to be focused on work in a school setting), values can be seen as specific to a target population.

Another factor that is of concern is the uncertainty construct validity of the vignettes. Although the vignettes were developed using typical attributes associated with each leader type based on literature review, validation of the vignettes might have yielded changes that made this study more likely to find effects. The same vignettes in Ehrhart and Klein (2001) were used, however, they conducted no formal validity analysis, either.

Another possible limiting factor is the number of participants in this study. It is possible that increasing the sample size could result in detection of effects due to increased power. Other avenues to obtain participants could have been used, but the student population provided the *a priori* access to maximize the number of participants.

The experimenter error of the missing slider bar for the relationship-oriented leader rating could also have been a factor in shifting participant's responses from the true response, as their attention was shifted from the effect of threat to the, now salient, missing slider bar on the screen.

### **Future Research**

Suggestions for future research include the validation of leader vignettes. This could include piloting the study using subject matter experts to read and rate the leader vignettes. Further, the sample size for each cell in the design was relatively small. Again, the sample size could have been the reason for the inability to detect any effects. Increasing the sample size would increase the study's power, increasing the likelihood of detecting effects that exist.

Along with an increased sample size, gender difference on leadership preference might be found. As the sample in the study were mostly psychology students, obtaining

values from psychology students and validating those values for psychology students could have improved results. Along with altering the value association, tailoring the vignettes to the target population so that teachers were the leaders could be a better option.

### **Conclusion**

The current study examined the implications of the focus theory of normative conduct and threat manipulation on leadership preference. Previous research has found that, under threat, participants are more attracted to charismatic leaders (Cohen et al., 2004; Ehrhart & Klein, 2001). My results suggest that threat does not significantly influence preference for charismatic or task-oriented leaders. Work values did not significantly predict a preference for a leadership type.

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## Appendix A

### Right Wing Authoritarianism Scale

This survey is part of an investigation of general public opinion concerning a variety of social issues. You will probably find that you agree with some of the statements, and disagree with others, to varying extents. Please indicate your reaction to each statement according to the following scale:

-4 = You very strongly disagree with the statement.

-3 = You strongly disagree with the statement.

-2 = You moderately disagree with the statement.

-1 = You slightly disagree with the statement.

0 = You feel exactly and precisely neutral about the statement.

1 = You slightly agree with the statement.

2 = You moderately agree with the statement.

3 = You strongly agree with the statement.

4 = You very strongly agree with the statement.

Important: You may find that you sometimes have different reactions to different parts of a statement. For example, you might very strongly disagree (“-4”) with one idea in a statement, but slightly agree (“+1”) with another idea in the same item. When this happens, please combine your reactions, and [record] how you feel on balance (a “-3” in this case).

1. Our country desperately needs a mighty leader who will do what has to be done to destroy the radical new ways and sinfulness that are ruining us
- 8. THE MAJORITY OF THOSE WHO CRITICIZE PROPER AUTHORITIES IN GOVERNMENT AND RELIGION ONLY CREATE USELESS DOUBTS IN PEOPLE'S MIND**
13. The situation in our country is getting so serious, the strongest method would be justified if they eliminated the troublemakers and got us back to our true path
- 23. WHAT OUR COUNTRY REALLY NEEDS INSTEAD OF MORE "CIVIL RIGHTS" IS A GOOD STIFF DOSE OF LAW AND ORDER**
25. Obedience and respect for authority are the most important values children should learn
- 29. THE FACT ON CRIME, SEXUAL IMMORALITY AND THE RECENT PUBLIC DISORDERS ALL SHOW WE HAVE TO CRACK DOWN HARDER ON DEVIANT GROUPS AND TROUBLEMAKERS, IT WE ARE GOING TO SAVE OUR MORAL STANDARDS AND PRESERVE LAW AND ORDER**
31. What our country needs most is disciplined citizens, following national leaders in unity
18. The only way our country can get through the crisis ahead is to get back to our traditional values, put some tough leader in power, and silence the troublemakers spreading bad ideas
- 27. ONCE OUR GOVERNMENT LEADERS GIVE US THE "GO AHEAD", IT WILL BE THE DUTY OF EVERY PATRIOTIC CITIZEN TO HELP STOMP OUT THE ROT THAT IS POISONING OUR COUNTRY FROM WITHIN**
30. What our country really needs is a strong, determined leader who will crush evil, and take us back to our path

***CONSERVATISM ITEMS***

4. Atheists and other who have rebelled against the established religions are no doubt every bit as good and virtuous as those who attend church regularly
- 6. A LOT OF OUR RULES REGARDING SEXUAL BEHAVIOR ARE JUST CUSTOMS WHICH ARE NOT NECESSARILY ANY BETTER OR HOLIER THAN THOSE WHICH OTHER PEOPLE FOLLOW**
9. There is absolutely nothing wrong with nudist camps
- 12. HOMOSEXUALS AND FEMINISTS SHOULD BE PRAISED FOR BEING BRAVE ENOUGH TO DEFY “TRADITIONAL FAMILY VALUES”**
- 15. EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE THEIR OWN LIFESTYLE, RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, AND SEXUAL PREFERENCES, EVEN IF IT MAKES THEM DIFFERENT FROM EVERYONE ELSE**
17. People should pay less attention to the church and the pope, and instead develop their own personal standards of what is moral and immoral
- 22. IT IS GOOD THAT NOWADAYS YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE GREATER FREEDOM “TO MAKE THEIR OWN RULES” AND TO PROTESTS AGAINST THINGS THEY DON’T LIKE**
2. Gays and lesbians are just as healthy and moral as anybody else
- 10. THERE IS NO “ONE RIGHT WAY” TO LIVE LIFE; EVERYBODY HAS TO CREATE THEIR OWN WAY**
20. There is nothing wrong with premarital sexual intercourse
28. We should treat protesters and radicals with open arms and open minds, since new ideas are the lifeblood of progressive change

## Appendix B

### Personal Need for Structure Scale

Read each of the following statements and decide how much you agree with each according to your attitudes, beliefs, and experiences. It is important for you to realize that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers to these questions. People are different, and we are interested in how you feel. Please respond according to the following scale:

-4 = very strongly disagree

-3 = strongly disagree

-2 = moderately disagree

-1 = slightly disagree

0 = You feel exactly and precisely neutral about the statement.

1 = slightly agree

2 = moderately agree

3 = strongly agree

4 = very strongly agree

1. It upsets me to go into a situation without knowing what I can expect from it.
2. I'm not bothered by things that interrupt my daily routine.<sup>a</sup>
3. I enjoy having a clear and structured mode of life.
4. I like to have a place for everything and everything in its place.
5. I enjoy being spontaneous.<sup>a</sup>
6. I find that a well-ordered life with regular hours makes my life tedious.<sup>a</sup>
7. I don't like situations that are uncertain.
8. I hate to change my plans at the last minute.
9. I hate to be with people who are unpredictable.
10. I find that a consistent routine enables me to enjoy life more.
11. I enjoy the exhilaration of being in unpredictable situations.<sup>a</sup>
12. I become uncomfortable when the rules in a situation are not clear.

<sup>a</sup> Item is reverse-scored.

## Appendix C

### Work Values Scale

The items were presented in a random order. Participants were asked to read each item, using the scale provided to rate importance for each item. Specifically, participants were asked, "How important is this attribute to you in a job?" Think about what you value in jobs general instead of any specific job you've had.

1 = Not at all important

2 = Somewhat important

3 = Moderately important

4 = Very important

5 = Extremely important

#### **Intrinsic rewards at work**

1. Opportunity to use initiative
2. Responsibility
3. Meets your abilities
4. Interesting work
5. Challenging
6. Variety

#### **Extrinsic rewards at work**

1. Good pay
2. Good fringe benefits
3. Generous holidays
4. Good hours

#### **Interpersonal relations**

1. Co-worker friendliness
2. Good relations with management

#### **Security**

1. Good job security
2. Stability

#### **Worker participation in decision-making**

1. Influence in company matters
2. Working for mutual benefit
3. Democratic control
4. No 'us' and 'them'

## Appendix D

### Leadership Attributes

| Charismatic                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Relationship-oriented                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Task-oriented                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Inspiring</b></li><li>• <b>Encouraging</b></li><li>• <b>Empowering</b></li><br/><li>• <b>Genuine</b></li><li>• <b>Respectable</b></li><li>• <b>Confident</b></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>People-Oriented</b></li><li>• <b>Sympathetic</b></li><li>• <b>Loyal to employees</b></li><br/><li>• <b>Considerate</b></li><li>• <b>Empathetic</b></li><li>• <b>Personable</b></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Straightforward</b></li><li>• <b>Goal-oriented</b></li><li>• <b>Gives Good Instructions</b></li><li>• <b>Task-Focused</b></li><li>• <b>Outcome-Focused</b></li><li>• <b>Diligent</b></li></ul> |

Scale used for pre-threat leadership attribute importance.

- 1 = not at all important
- 2 = somewhat important
- 3 = moderately important
- 4 = quite important
- 5 = one of the most important

Scale used for post-threat leadership attribute rating.

- 1 = would definitely not demonstrate
- 2 = would somewhat not demonstrate
- 3 = unsure if they would or would not demonstrate
- 4 = would somewhat demonstrate
- 5 = would definitely demonstrate

## Appendix E

Table 1

*Unstandardized means for charismatic leadership preference on threat condition*

| Condition                 | <i>N</i> | Mean | S.D. |
|---------------------------|----------|------|------|
| Insecurity Threat         | 54       | 2.37 | 1.64 |
| Presentation Apprehension | 38       | 2.71 | 1.43 |
| Watching TV (control)     | 44       | 2.64 | 1.40 |

Table 2

*Unstandardized means for task-oriented leadership preference on threat condition*

| Condition                 | <i>N</i> | Mean | S.D. |
|---------------------------|----------|------|------|
| Insecurity Threat         | 54       | 2.17 | 1.63 |
| Presentation Apprehension | 37       | 2.16 | 1.68 |
| Watching TV (control)     | 44       | 2.68 | 1.51 |

Appendix F

Table 3

*Standardized means for combined charismatic leadership preference and semantic differentials on threat condition*

| Condition                 | <i>N</i> | Mean | <i>SD</i> |
|---------------------------|----------|------|-----------|
| Insecurity Threat         | 53       | .12  | .73       |
| Presentation Apprehension | 38       | -.05 | .57       |
| Watching TV (control)     | 42       | -.12 | .50       |

Table 4

*Standardized means for combined task-oriented leadership preference and semantic differentials on threat condition*

| Condition                 | <i>N</i> | Mean | S.D. |
|---------------------------|----------|------|------|
| Insecurity Threat         | 54       | .10  | .64  |
| Presentation Apprehension | 37       | -.02 | .52  |
| Watching TV (control)     | 43       | -.08 | .56  |