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Published in:
Work, Aging and Retirement

DOI:
[10.1093/workar/wax022](https://doi.org/10.1093/workar/wax022)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2018

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Hommelhoff, S., Müller, T., & Scheibe, S. (2018). Experimental evidence for the influence of occupational future time perspective on social preferences during lunch breaks. *Work, Aging and Retirement*, 4(4), 367–380. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1093/workar/wax022>

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Experimental Evidence for the Influence of Occupational Future Time Perspective on Social Preferences During Lunch Breaks

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ABSTRACT

Socioemotional selectivity theory predicts shifts in social motives from resource acquisition to emotional well-being when endings are salient. In the work context, the theory has instigated much research on understanding age-related shifts in motivation, yet this research has exclusively relied on correlational paradigms. To provide experimental evidence for key tenets of the theory, we manipulated employees' occupational future time perspective in 2 scenario-experiments ($N1 = 150$, $N2 = 240$) to understand why some employees prefer emotionally close social partners for a joint lunch break, while others prefer instrumental ones. We found that emotionally close companions were generally preferred for a joint lunch. At the same time, employees with a long-term perspective (those imagining a permanent employment contract or being far from retirement) preferred instrumental social partners relatively more often than employees with a limited time perspective (those imagining having resigned or being close to retirement). Having limited future goals (i.e., imagining low career ambitions) further led to preferring fewer instrumental and even more emotionally close companions. Overall, this research shows that the main tenets of socioemotional selectivity theory are directly applicable to the work context and, further, that work-related social contacts seem to change not only after retirement, but also before when this life event is approaching. In terms of practical implications, our findings suggest to consider that employees with different time horizons and career ambitions might have different social motivations at work.

Socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 2006; Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999) posits that the subjective sense of future time systematically influences motivation. Since aging naturally limits individuals' sense of future time (Lang & Carstensen, 2002), the theory allows making predictions about age differences in social-motivational processes. In recent years, organizational researchers have embraced socioemotional selectivity theory and applied it to the context of work, in order to understand how aging affects work motivation and occupational well-being (e.g., Scheibe, Stamov-Roßnagel, & Zacher, 2015; Thielgen, Krumm, Rauschenbach, & Hertel, 2015; Zaniboni, Truxillo, Fraccaroli, McCune, & Bertolino, 2014). However, socioemotional selectivity theory is not inherently about age; instead, the core tenet is that people set their (social) goals as a function of their subjective sense of remaining time (Carstensen, 2006). In the work context, subjective sense of remaining time manifests in "job-holders' sense of time remaining within their occupation or organization," in short, their 'occupational future time perspective' (Zacher &

Frese, 2009), which becomes shorter, for example, when retirement or another kind of ending are approaching. Besides limited time, research testing predictions of socioemotional selectivity theory has revealed that limited future goals (in addition to time) also help to explain the choice of social partners (Fung & Carstensen, 2004); yet this prediction has so far remained untested in organizational research.

Existing research on occupational future time perspective has employed correlational designs (e.g., Gielnik, Zacher, & Frese, 2012; Kooij, de Lange, Jansen, & Dijkers, 2013; Kooij & Zacher, 2016; Weikamp & Görnitz, 2015, 2016; for a review, see Henry, Zacher, & Desmette, 2017). Although it is routinely acknowledged that such designs preclude drawing causal conclusions about the role of occupational future time perspective, experimental research in the work setting does not currently exist. To fill this gap, which has also been mentioned by Henry et al. (2017), we opted for an experimental design that directly manipulates workers' future time perspective and future goals to draw causal conclusions regarding these important

age-related mechanisms. Since social partners at work are often not voluntarily chosen (Lang, 2003; Lincoln & Miller, 1979), we focused on social preferences during joint lunch breaks from work to examine our hypotheses. That is, the composition of a department or a project team might be decided mainly by supervisors; however, the companions for a coffee or lunch break are chosen more freely (Trougakos, Beal, Green, & Weiss, 2008). This renders social preferences during joint lunch breaks an ideal context to demonstrate the causal influence of time perspective and future goals at work.

Although within-day work breaks such as lunch mainly serve recovery (Trougakos & Hideg, 2009), they also allow networking and career-building (Ceniza-Levine, 2016; Hewlett, 2013; Pinsel & Dienhart, 1984). It has even been said humorously that while breakfast is the most important meal for one's health, lunch is the most important meal for one's career (Morrison, 2012). That is, some employees use their lunch break for networking (Wolff & Moser, 2009), thus seeking instrumental contacts to develop their social capital (Adler & Kwon 2002; Fombrun, 1982; Ibarra, 1993), while others mainly seek expressive, emotional contacts and thus higher levels of trust, closeness, and communion (Barrick, Stewart, & Piotrowski, 2002; Ibarra, 1993; Krackhardt, 1992). In this article, we tested the hypotheses that workers' sense of occupational future time and future goals represent important factors driving these different social preferences for a joint lunch break.

Overall, this article contributes to theory and practice in at least four ways. First, it complements correlational research on socioemotional selectivity theory in the work context by directly manipulating jobholders' future time perspective (and future goals). Second, it adds to the workplace aging literature in suggesting that work-related social contacts do not only change after retirement (e.g., Tilburg, 2003), but also prior to this life event. Third, it also extends research on (within-day) work breaks in distinguishing between different kinds of social partners, which previously have been subsumed under the general term 'social activities' (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005; Sonnentag, 2001). Finally, this article also supports practitioners in understanding employees' social motivation and the social dynamics at work, which tend to be age-related.

SOCIOEMOTIONAL SELECTIVITY THEORY AND ITS APPLICATION TO THE WORK SETTING

Socioemotional selectivity theory holds that social goals are always set in consideration of the temporal context (Carstensen, 2006; Carstensen et al., 1999). People have a subjective sense of future time, which is shaped by the awareness of endings and can range from expansive and open-ended to limited and constrained. A typical driver of shifts towards a more limited future time perspective is aging, yet a shift in future time perspective also occurs in other contexts that limit subjective future time, such as a relocation or illness (Carstensen, 2006). The theory further holds that future time perspective influences the relative priority placed on two classes of social goals. When perceiving time as expansive and open-ended, people are more motivated to learn, take risks, and acquire knowledge that help them maximize future outcomes. In contrast, when perceiving time as limited and constrained, people are more motivated to experience communion and emotional satisfaction in the present. Notably, these two classes

of social goals map onto the two types of social ties, instrumental and emotional, that are often distinguished in social network research at work (see next subchapter on social preferences at work). Accordingly, socioemotional selectivity theory allows making predictions about preferences for either type of social tie in situations where social partners can be freely chosen.

A classical demonstration of the motivational shifts predicted by socioemotional selectivity theory was provided by Fredrickson and Carstensen (1990). In a scenario study, these authors primed young adults with an ending (by asking them to imagine that they would soon move across the country) and asked them to choose between social partners who were either interesting (e.g., "a recent acquaintance, with whom you seem to have much in common," "the author of a book you've read") or emotionally close (e.g., "a member of your immediate family"). In a control condition, young adults preferred the interesting, novel social partner, yet their preference shifted towards the emotionally close social partner in the relocation condition. Subsequent studies yielded similar findings in other contexts with endings such as terminal illness, graduation, or political change (Carstensen & Fredrickson, 1998; Ersner-Hershfield, Mikels, Sullivan, & Carstensen, 2008; Fung, Carstensen, & Lutz, 1999). Aging research linking future time perspective with social partner preferences also supports the prioritization of instrumental contacts with an expanded future time perspective and the prioritization of emotionally meaningful contacts with a more limited future time perspective (Lang & Carstensen, 2002). Complementing socioemotional selectivity theory, Fung and Carstensen (2004) varied not only future time, but also future goals. They showed that perceived constraints on future goals also lead to an increased emphasis in the search of emotionally meaningful social partners. That is, emotionally close social partners might be sought after not only because of one's limited time perspective, but also when nonemotional goals are blocked.

In the context of work, socioemotional selectivity theory constitutes a prominent theoretical framework for age-related research; thus, age is used as a proxy for future time perspective (e.g., de Lange et al., 2010; Inceoglu, Segers, & Bartram, 2012; Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004; Kooij, de Lange, Jansen, Kanfer, & Dikkers, 2011; Ng & Feldman, 2010, 2012; Scheibe, et al., 2015; Thielgen et al., 2015; Wang, Burlacu, Truxillo, James, & Yao, 2015; Wolfson, Cavanagh, & Kraiger, 2014; Zaniboni et al., 2014). It has been shown, for instance, that with retirement approaching, older employees are somewhat less motivated to learn and to participate in trainings (de Lange et al., 2010; Ng & Feldman, 2010) as well as a higher level of intrinsic motivation (Inceoglu et al., 2012; Kooij et al., 2011; Ng & Feldman, 2010) and a higher congruency between implicit and explicit motive systems (Thielgen et al., 2015). These studies generally suggest that older people seek more emotionally rewarding situations and thus experience more positive emotions at work than young people.

Some researchers have also measured future time perspective directly. Zacher and Frese (2009) were the first to adapt Carstensen's concept of future time perspective to the work context and introduced a self-report measure of occupational future time perspective, which distinguishes the perception of remaining future opportunities and remaining time to set and achieve work-related goals. In their study, they have shown negative relationships between age and remaining

time and opportunities at work. Subsequent studies have adopted this measure and have established occupational future time perspective as a mediator for links between age and work outcomes (e.g., [Gielnik, Zacher, & Frese, 2012](#); [Kooij, Bal, & Kanfer, 2014](#); [Kooij, de Lange, Jansen, & Dikkers, 2013](#); [Kooij & Zacher, 2016](#); for a review, see [Henry et al., 2017](#)). However, so far all research on occupational future time perspective has been correlational. To our knowledge, there is thus far no study that directly manipulates workers' future time perspective in an experimental paradigm. Yet, experimental designs are necessary to fully understand the mechanisms that drive development during adulthood ([Freund & Isacowitz, 2013](#)).

SOCIAL PREFERENCES AT WORK

One relevant context to demonstrate the causal role of future time perspective are social relationships in the workplace. Researchers have distinguished between two broad classes of relations or ties at work, emotional and instrumental ties (further terms that have been used are expressive, personal, primary, or affective ties for emotional contacts and professional, work-related, task-related, or networking ties for instrumental contacts; e.g., [Casciaro, Gino, & Kouchaki, 2014](#); [Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008](#); [Fombrun, 1982](#); [Gibbons, 2004](#); [Ibarra, 1993](#); [Lincoln & Miller, 1979](#); [Morrison, 2009](#); [Verbrugge, 1979](#)). That is, past research has distinguished relations that provide knowledge, resources, and instrumental support from relations that provide emotional support and expressive and affective benefits. Of course, both kinds of relations can be intertwined when affect and instrumentality coincide ([Ingram & Zou, 2008](#); [Verbrugge, 1979](#)).

Given the wealth of studies on social preferences at work and the finding that social cohesion is important for older workers ([Taneva, Arnold, & Nicolson, 2016](#)), it comes as a surprise that research on age differences in social preferences at the workplace is practically nonexistent. Studies that distinguish between emotional and instrumental contacts at work often consider gender but not age (e.g., [Ibarra, 1992](#); [Morrison, 2009](#)); some articles do not even include age in the correlation matrix (e.g., [Chua, Ingram, & Morris, 2008](#); [Ibarra, 1992](#)). Thus, although there is both research on age differences in social preferences in general (e.g., [Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990](#); [Fung, Carstensen, & Lang, 2001](#)) and research on social preferences at work (e.g., [Casciaro et al., 2014](#); [Lincoln & Miller, 1979](#)), there seems to be—to the best of our knowledge—no research on age differences in social preferences at the workplace. Relatedly, a recent meta-analysis by [Wrzus, Hänel, Wagner, and Neyer \(2013\)](#) revealed that there is also a lack of research on social network size and age at work. While the majority of studies on social network size at the workplace focus on coworkers between 30 and 40 years of age ([Wrzus et al., 2013](#)), studies on social ties in the context of retirement usually focus on the time 'after' retirement (e.g., [Sabbath, Lubben, Goldberg, Zins, & Berkman, 2015](#); [Tilburg, 1992, 2003](#)). It has been shown, for example, that most relationships with former colleagues are terminated after retirement ([Tilburg, 1992, 2003](#)). However, a more recent study shows that retirement might have become less disruptive over time, thus the decline of ties to former colleagues has become less pronounced ([Cozijnsen, Stevens, & Tilburg, 2010](#)). Complementing this past research, our work addresses social preferences at work *prior* to retirement, when this normative life event is approaching.

In regards to social preferences at work in general, it has been demonstrated that likability and familiarity are crucial. [Casciaro and Lobo](#)

(2008) showed, for instance, that liking or disliking someone can be more important for task interactions and choice of work partners than evaluations of task-related competence. Further, research has revealed that employees tend to socialize with people they know and like, even at networking events ("mixers") that people visit with the intent to make new contacts ([Ingram & Morris, 2007](#)). This general preference for familiar, more emotionally close contacts might be explained by a further study showing that networking (i.e., the purposeful building of instrumental ties) can lead to feeling of 'being dirty' for approaching others for instrumental reasons only ([Casciaro et al., 2014](#)).

Despite the general importance of liking, research on work partner selection has also revealed that individuals with high achievement and low affiliation motivation prefer competent non-friends to less competent friends ([French, 1956](#)). Moreover, it has been shown that employees strive for predictability when choosing work partners. That is, they take into account whether they have successfully worked together in the past or whether the potential work partner has a reputation for being competent ([Hinds, Carley, Krackhardt, & Wholey, 2000](#)). Notably, most of the existing research on workplace relationships has focused on how social partners are selected for work tasks. To our knowledge, there is no research on how social partners are chosen for within-day work breaks—although breaks allow more autonomy in choosing partners and are important for rejuvenating, thus ensuring good work results in the future ([Trougakos & Hideg, 2009](#)).

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES DURING WORK BREAKS

Longer breaks from work, such as weekends or vacations, are important for workers' recovery and well-being ([Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005](#); [Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006](#)). However, recent research has demonstrated that even short breaks within the work day can serve recovery ([Trougakos & Hideg, 2009](#)). Within-day work breaks comprise both micro-breaks such as shortly chatting with a colleague or going to the bathroom ([Fritz, Lam, & Spreitzer, 2011](#); [Zacher, Brailsford, & Parker, 2014](#)) as well as somewhat longer, often scheduled breaks such as lunch or coffee breaks ([Trougakos & Hideg, 2009](#)). Breaks are usually defined as time periods in which work tasks are not expected or required ([Trougakos et al., 2008](#)). Still, it has been argued that breaks are not always relaxing since they can also involve effortful tasks, duties, or chores ([Sonnentag, 2001](#); [Trougakos et al., 2008](#)). Apart from recovery or doing one's chores, breaks—and especially within-day work breaks such as lunch—have also been ascribed the function of networking and career building ([Hewlett, 2013](#); [Pinsel & Dienhart, 1984](#)). That is, jobholders are sometimes reminded to spend their lunch or coffee break with others who might be novel, knowledgeable, well-connected, and influential.

Although past research has looked into various kinds of activities (e.g., small talk, progressive muscle relaxation, or child care) during different kinds of breaks (e.g., [Krajewski, Wieland, & Sauerland, 2010](#); [Sonnentag, 2001](#); [Trougakos et al., 2008](#); [Trougakos, Hideg, Cheng, & Beal, 2014](#)), socializing with others has been mainly subsumed under the general term 'social activities'. Social activities (e.g., meeting with others) during evening or weekend breaks have been found to be positively related to workers' well-being ([Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005](#); [Sonnentag, 2001](#)). Commensality (i.e., eating together) at work has also been linked to higher levels of team performance ([Kniffin, Wansink, Devine, & Sobal, 2015](#)).

However, Trougakos and colleagues (2014) have shown that socializing during lunch breaks is not positive per se. In their study, social activities during lunch only led to reduced fatigue when there was a high degree of autonomous choice associated with the break. The authors also argue that socializing per se might be too broad a category since the motives for engaging in social interaction can vary (Trougakos et al., 2008, 2014). That is, it might be fruitful for research on work breaks to distinguish between emotional and instrumental social partners—a distinction that is also at the heart of socioemotional selectivity theory. To our knowledge, there is only one current study that implicitly includes this distinction, showing that lunch breaks with supervisors are differently related to vigor after lunch and at the end of the workday than lunch breaks with colleagues (Dreden & Binnewies, 2017). However, this study did not explicitly focus on the distinction between emotional and instrumental social ties (e.g., colleagues are not always emotional partners).

THE PRESENT RESEARCH

Although there is mounting research on socioemotional selectivity theory in the work context, mainly focusing on age, no study has thus far examined the selection of social partners as it has been studied in non-work contexts (Carstensen & Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990; Fung et al., 1999). In our research, we applied socioemotional selectivity theory to the context of social preferences at work or, more specifically, to social partner choices for lunch as a within-day work break. Our overall aim was to further the understanding of differences in social preferences at work by establishing the causal role of future time perspective in driving social preferences.

Because lunch partners can be selected more freely than work partners (Trougakos et al., 2008) and because of employees' general tendency to approach likeable, familiar others at work (Casciaro & Lobo, 2008; Ingram & Morris, 2007) and to feel uncomfortable when approaching others for instrumental reasons only (Casciaro et al., 2014), we expected:

Hypothesis 1: Employees overall prefer to spend their lunch break with emotionally close social partners as compared to instrumental social partners.

However, in line with the main tenets of socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 2006), we further expected that employees' occupational future time perspective will influence their choice of lunch break companions. We argue that anticipated endings, such as retirement or resignation (with only few weeks left to work in the organization), will lead employees to select more emotional social partners in moments of free social choice—such as the choice of companions for a joint lunch break from work. We hypothesized that employees with a relatively open-ended time perspective will choose instrumental social partners (e.g., well-informed, useful, and well-connected others) more often than employees with a limited time perspective. In contrast, we assumed that employees with a limited time perspective will choose emotionally close social partners (e.g., familiar, friendly, and likable others) more often than employees with a relatively open-ended time perspective:

Hypothesis 2: Employees with a more open-ended occupational future time perspective prefer to spend their lunch (a) relatively more with

instrumental social partners and (b) relatively less with emotionally close social partners than employees with a limited occupational future time perspective.

Apart from perceived future time, there might be further variables influencing employees' social choices. Following Fung and Carstensen (2004) who have demonstrated that not only limited time, but also limited or blocked future goals can help to explain the preference for emotionally close partners, we expected that limited future career goals (e.g., having low career ambitions) will impact employees' lunch partner preferences. In line with this idea that career goals influence short-term daily behavior and preferences, London (1983) has argued that career motivation has an impact on daily working hours, personal contacts at work, communication, and information seeking. In our hypothesis, we reason that low career ambitions confine future occupational opportunities in a way endings like retirement or resignation do:

Hypothesis 3 (Study 2): Employees with low career ambitions prefer to spend their lunch (a) relatively more with emotionally close social partners and (b) relatively less with instrumental social partners than employees with high career ambitions.

We tested these hypotheses in two experiments in which employees' occupational future time perspective (Study 1 and Study 2) as well as their future career goals (Study 2) were manipulated through scenarios. Study 1 used a within-subjects design to examine how working adults choose social partners for lunch when they are either told that they have a permanent employment contract or that they have resigned and only 3 months left to work in the organization. Study 2 used a between-subjects design to examine how working adults choose social partners for lunch when they imagine having low or high career ambitions while being close or far from retirement.

STUDY 1

Method

Design and participants

A sample of 150 German working adults (52% female, $M = 33.83$ years, $SD = 11.12$ years, range 20–61 years) was recruited both online (via professional social networks) and via phone to take part in an online study on workplace relationships. The sample size was based on power analysis (Cohen, 1992; Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) that yielded a minimum sample size of $N = 128$ for this within-subjects experiment ($\alpha = .05$, power = .80, medium effect size: $f = .25$). Of our sample, 79.3% were salaried employees, 12.7% were civil servants, and 8% were self-employed. One quarter (25.3%) held a leadership position and about half (55.3%) had a university degree. As an incentive, three gift cards (€10 each) were raffled among participants.

Materials and procedure

Participants were assigned to two scenarios in randomized order (Within-subjects designs are sometimes criticized because they make the manipulated variables and therefore the research hypotheses

more transparent than between-subjects designs (e.g., Kahneman & Frederick, 2005). Further questions to check manipulations can make the reasoning of the experimenter even more transparent. Therefore, researchers often use counterbalancing, but they do not include manipulation check questions (e.g., Baltes & Rudolph, 2010; Shoss & Strube, 2011; Wakslak, 2012; but see Carmon, Wertenbroch, and Zeelenberg, 2003). We also followed this approach (i.e., using counterbalancing but no explicit manipulation check question in our within-subjects study). The scenarios were designed to induce different occupational future time perspectives. One scenario described a job situation in which participants should imagine having an open-ended employment contract ('Please imagine that you have been working for a company for quite a while. You have a permanent employment contract'). The other scenario described a situation in which participants were asked to imagine having resigned from their current position ('Please imagine that you have resigned your job due to personal reasons. You leave on amicable terms. After your resignation, you have to remain at work for 3 months before you leave'). The scenarios were based on five pilot interviews. In these interviews, participants (three female and two male participants, ranging from 23 to 50 years) described resignations due to personal reasons as less emotional than being dismissed. To avoid strong emotions that might have distorted our findings, we chose the less emotional option of resignation on amicable terms to experimentally shorten the occupational future time perspective.

After imagining each scenario, participants were asked which social partners they would choose to spend time with during a joint lunch break of 30–60 min in the cafeteria on a scale from 1 (*very rarely*) to 6 (*very frequently*). Based on prior research (Carstensen & Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990; Fung et al., 1999), we constructed eight different social partners to choose from. The four instrumental social partners comprised *the general manager*; *my supervisor*; *a well-connected colleague from the department next door*; and *a well-informed colleague from the department next door*. The four emotionally close partners were *my assistant whom I get along with very well*; *our janitor who engages in the same hobby and whom I like very much*; *a colleague I like to spend time with from the department next door*; and *a colleague I hardly have contact with at work but whom I personally know and like for a long time*. We pre-tested these social partners in a separate, short online survey with $N = 154$ working adults (38% female, $M = 28.90$ years, $SD = 4.65$ years, range 20–50 years)

who were asked to rate these eight social partners on two five-point bipolar items (1 = *knowledgeable and useful for my career* versus 5 = *not knowledgeable and useful for my career*; 1 = *likeable and amiable* versus 5 = *not likeable and amiable*). Our pre-test confirmed that instrumental partners were regarded as significantly more knowledgeable and useful for one's career than emotional partners ($M_{\text{instrumental}} = 1.99$, $SD = 0.79$ vs. $M_{\text{emotional}} = 3.16$, $SD = 0.82$), $t(153) = 17.68$, $p < .001$, whereas emotional partners were evaluated significantly more likeable and amiable than instrumental partners ($M_{\text{emotional}} = 1.69$, $SD = 0.79$ vs. $M_{\text{instrumental}} = 2.21$, $SD = 0.77$), $t(153) = 8.20$, $p < .001$. For further analyses in Study 1, we aggregated the ratings of the four instrumental social partners and the four emotionally close social partners to separate scales ($\alpha_{\text{instrumental}} = .78$ and $\alpha_{\text{emotional}} = .75$).

Statistical analysis

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a repeated measures analysis of variance with social preference (instrumental or emotionally close social partner) and occupational future time perspective (limited or open-ended) as within-participant conditions while controlling for age and order of scenarios.

Results

Correlations

Table 1 displays the descriptives and intercorrelations of central study variables. Overall, age was negatively associated with both the preference for instrumental ($r = -.17$, $p < .05$) and emotional lunch partners ($r = -.17$, $p < .05$)—a pattern one might not expect on the basis of socioemotional selectivity theory. However, correlations in the context of experiments should be treated with caution since they do not focus on the experimental manipulation and thus the core of the experiment. Still, gender showed a more consistent pattern with prior findings (e.g., Morrison, 2009); that is, women in general tended to prefer emotional partners ($r = .19$, $p < .05$).

Hypothesis testing

The order of scenarios showed no effect, $F(1, 147) = 0.10$, $p = .75$. In line with Hypothesis 1, analyses revealed a significant main effect of social preferences in that emotionally close social partners were generally preferred over instrumental partners for a joint lunch break from work ($M_{\text{emotional}} = 4.71$, $SD = 0.77$; $M_{\text{instrumental}} = 3.16$, $SD = 0.85$),

Table 1. Intercorrelations and Descriptives (Study 1)

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	33.83	11.12	–						
2. Gender (0 = male, 1 = female)	–	–	–.16	–					
3. Instrumental partners averaged	3.16	0.85	–.17*	–.14	–				
4. Emotional partners averaged	4.71	0.77	–.17*	.19*	.12	–			
5. Instrumental partners open-ended	3.40	0.88	–.21*	–.11	.90**	.19*	–		
6. Emotional partners open-ended	4.68	0.84	–.15	.15	.15	.93**	.19*	–	
7. Instrumental partners limited	2.93	0.97	–.10	–.14	.92**	.04	.66**	.09	–
8. Emotional partners limited	4.73	0.81	–.17*	.20*	.07	.93**	.16	.72**	–.01

Note. $N = 150$. averaged = averaged over both conditions of the within-subjects experiment; open-ended refers to the experimental condition with a permanent contract (open-ended perspective); limited refers to the resignation-condition with only 3 months left in the organization (limited perspective). Apart from age and gender, numbers refer to preference for a joint lunch (1 = *very rarely*, 6 = *very frequently*) with instrumental or emotional partners.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

$F(1,147) = 28.32, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16$. Moreover, analyses showed a significant interaction effect between occupational time perspective and social preference, $F(1,147) = 8.47, p = .004, \eta^2 = .05$. As demonstrated in Figure 1, subsequent univariate analyses showed that participants reported that they would choose instrumental social partners for lunch more frequently when the contract was permanent and thus the time perspective relatively open-ended than when the time perspective was limited to 3 months due to resignation ($M_{\text{open-ended}} = 3.40, SD = 0.88; M_{\text{limited}} = 2.93, SD = 0.97, F(1,147) = 13.13, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$). Hence, Hypothesis 2a was supported. However, analyses showed no difference in the preference for emotionally close social partners depending on the time perspective, $F(1, 147) = .34, p = .56, \eta^2 = .002$. Hence, Hypothesis 2b was not supported.

The same pattern of main and interaction effects emerged when age was not considered as a covariate in the analyses. When considered as a covariate, age showed no effects in our analyses. Neither the interaction between age and social preference reached significance, $F(1, 147) = 0.03, p = .87, \eta^2 < .001$, nor the interaction between age and occupational time perspective $F(1, 147) = 0.70, p = .40, \eta^2 = .01$. Further, there was no three-way interaction between age, social preference, and occupational future time perspective $F(1, 147) = 1.09, p = .30, \eta^2 = .01$.

Discussion

Study 1 provides first evidence that the main tenets of socioemotional selectivity theory are applicable to the work context, despite the fact that this context generally provides less freedom to choose social partners. Study 1 shows that the motives for the choice of lunch break companions seem to depend at least partly on employees' occupational future time perspective. Participants who imagined to have resigned their position, which limited their perspective to only three further months at this workplace, chose instrumental (i.e., knowledgeable, well-informed, and well-connected) social partners less often than employees with a relatively open-ended perspective. However, Study 1 also indicates that emotionally close partners are usually preferred

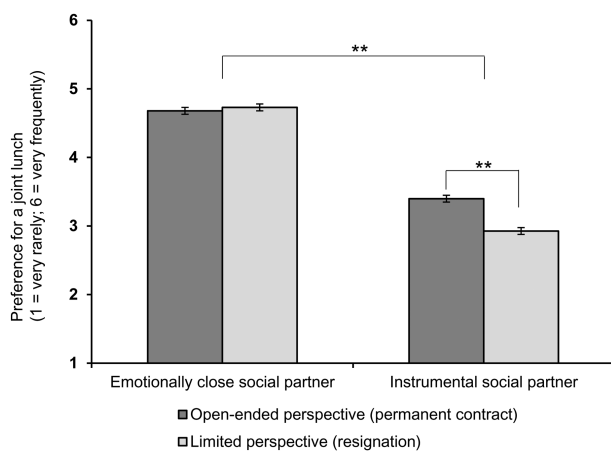


Figure 1. Effect of manipulated occupational future time perspective (permanent contract or 3 months left to work after resignation) on the preferences for emotionally close and instrumental social partners for a joint lunch break in Study 1. $**p < .001$. Error bars represent standard errors of the mean.

overall; a limited time perspective at work due to resignation does not seem to increase this general trend towards the choice of emotionally close lunch companions. To extend and corroborate these findings, we set up a second study, in which we aimed to replicate the findings of Study 1 using a different study design and a further manipulation of the occupational future time perspective. Specifically, we opted for a more conservative between-subjects design (Charness, Gneezy, & Kuhn, 2012) and used the time to retirement—being either close or far from retirement—as a manipulation of the occupational future time perspective. Moreover, we followed the idea of Fung and Carstensen (2004) that not only limited time, but also limited future goals might impact social choices. We therefore also manipulated participants' future career ambitions through scenarios.

STUDY 2

Method

Design and participants

This study used a 2×2 experimental design with *retirement* (close or far from retirement) and *career ambitions* (low or high career ambitions) as between-participants conditions. The experiment was conducted online. The study link was sent to an online panel provider that distributed the link to a sample of German-speaking working adults. Participants received €1 for their participation. The initial sample size consisted of $N = 453$ employed persons (51% female, $M = 42.26$ years, $SD = 11.85$ years, range 19–65 years). Since this study involved a difficult manipulation check that respondents could either pass or fail (see next section) and that was placed after the assessment of the dependent variables (which possibly acted as distractors), the final sample size of respondents who passed the manipulation check was $N = 240$ (49% female, $M = 40.79$ years, $SD = 11.62$ years, range 19–64 years).

Of our final sample, 85.8% were salaried employees, 5% were civil servants, and 9.2% were self-employed. Similar to Study 1, about one quarter (23.3%) held a leadership position; and a bit less than half (41.3%) had a university degree. The final cell sizes were $n_{\text{retirementclose_careerhigh}} = 43$ (44% female, $M = 44.42$ years, $SD = 10.80$ years, range 26–63 years), $n_{\text{retirementclose_careerlow}} = 64$ (48% female, $M = 44.25$ years, $SD = 12.44$ years, range 21–64 years), $n_{\text{retirementfar_careerhigh}} = 68$ (49% female, $M = 36.97$ years, $SD = 11.05$ years, range 20–62 years), and $n_{\text{retirementfar_careerlow}} = 65$ (52% female, $M = 38.97$ years, $SD = 10.39$ years, range 19–60 years). Although the manipulation check led to a considerable reduction in sample size, the failure rate in our study (47%) is comparable to earlier research (e.g., 46% in Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009). Sample reduction is usually recommended under such conditions to ensure high data quality that otherwise could have been compromised by satisficing participants (Cooper, 2016; Oppenheimer et al., 2009). Prior power analyses (Faul et al., 2007) yielded a minimum sample size of $N = 116$ ($\alpha = .05$, power = .80, medium effect size: $f^2 = .0625$), which was still ensured after the sample reduction based on the manipulation check. In the results section, we will also briefly report the findings from the initially larger sample to allow comparisons with the final sample of $N = 240$. We further compared the sample characteristics of the subsample that answered the manipulation check correctly (and therefore represents our final sample, $n = 240$) with the subsample that answered the manipulation check incorrectly ($n = 213$). Mean comparisons and chi-square

tests revealed no differences ($p > .05$) in number of working hours, gender, household size, number of children in household, share of subsamples working full or part time, and the two baseline questions of this study. However, the analyses revealed significant differences in terms of age and education. The sample that answered the manipulation check incorrectly was, on average, about 3 years older ($M = 43.91$ years, $SD = 11.92$ years, range 20–65 years) than the sample that answered the manipulation check correctly ($M = 40.79$ years, $SD = 11.62$ years, range 19–64 years), $F(1, 451) = 7.96$, $p = .005$. In terms of education, it became obvious that there were more respondents with a lower secondary school-leaving certificate (German *Hauptschulabschluss*) in the subsample that answered the manipulation check incorrectly than in the subsample that answered the manipulation check correctly ($\alpha = .05$; $\chi^2_{(1, 95\%)} = 9.98$). Further, there were more respondents with a university degree in the subsample that answered the manipulation check correctly than in the subsample that answered the manipulation check incorrectly ($\alpha = .05$; $\chi^2_{(1, 95\%)} = 17.25$). Hence, the manipulation check turned out to be particularly difficult for respondents with fewer years of education. In terms of age differences, it is also obvious from the final cell composition that the respondents in the “retirement close” conditions were, despite randomization to conditions, older ($M = 44.32$ years, $SD = 11.76$ years) than respondents in the “retirement far” condition ($M = 37.95$ years, $SD = 10.74$ years), $F(1, 238) = 19.18$, $p < .001$. That is, it seems that older respondents found it easier to imagine a situation that is more closely related to their actual life reality, thus the dropout due to failing the manipulation check was not completely random.

Materials and procedure

The experimental procedure comprised four steps. First, participants were asked two baseline questions to control for selection bias. These questions were “At work, I mainly seek the company of people I really like” and “At work, I mainly seek the company of people who might be useful for me someday,” each measured on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). In the second step, participants were randomized to the four different experimental conditions. Each participant read one of four scenarios that differed in terms of time to retirement and career ambitions (“Please imagine that you have been working for a company for quite a while. You have a permanent employment contract. Your retirement is just around the corner / You have just entered into employment; A successful career has always been important to you / A successful career has never been important to you”).

In the third step, we assessed the dependent variables. That is, participants were asked which social partners they would choose to spend time with during a joint lunch break of 30–60 min in the cafeteria on a scale from 1 (*very rarely*) to 5 (*very frequently*). They were asked to rate three instrumental *social partners* (the general manager; my supervisor; a well-informed colleague from the department next door, also see Study 1; $\alpha = .78$) and three emotionally close *social partners* (my assistant whom I get along with very well; our janitor who engages in the same hobby and whom I like very much; a colleague I hardly have contact with at work but whom I personally know and like for a long time, also see Study 1; $\alpha = .76$).

The fourth step of the experiment consisted of a manipulation check that participants could either pass or fail. They were asked to indicate which situation they have been asked to imagine earlier in the

study (‘1. Your retirement is just around the corner. A successful career has always been important to you. 2. Your retirement is just around the corner. A successful career has never been important to you. 3. You have just entered into employment. A successful career has always been important to you. 4. You have just entered into employment. A successful career has never been important to you’). In general, this manipulation check can be described as conservative or difficult for participants because they had to remember and combine two kinds of information in one question at the end of the experiment. That is, our question was complex and the dependent variables (lunch partners) that were assessed in between might have acted as distractors for some respondents. Although this conservative manipulation check ensures that the final sample consists only of respondents who were fully attentive throughout the whole experiment, future experiments may also use less conservative manipulation checks (e.g., asking less complex questions, placing the manipulation check earlier in the study, or using rating formats instead of pass or fail questions).

Statistical analysis

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a mixed analysis of variance with social preference (instrumental or emotionally close social partner) as within-participant condition and occupational future time perspective (far from or close to retirement) and future career goals (high or low career ambitions) as between participant conditions while controlling for participants’ age.

Results

Correlations

Table 2 presents the descriptives and intercorrelations of central study variables. Similar to Study 1, age showed no consistent pattern in terms of preferences for emotional or instrumental lunch partners, indicating that the experimental manipulation, not age per se, was driving potential differences in outcomes. Again, gender showed a slightly more consistent pattern, this time not a female preference for emotional partners but a disfavor of instrumental partners in general ($r = -.15$, $p < .05$).

Hypothesis testing

The four experimental groups did not differ in their response to the two baseline questions, $F(3, 236) = 1.03$, $p = .38$ and $F(3, 236) = 1.69$, $p = .17$. Hence, there were no between-group differences in the general preference for instrumental versus emotionally close partners from the outset of the study. The hypothesized main effect of a generally higher preference for emotionally close partners (Hypothesis 1) was also reflected in the answers to the two baseline questions, in which participants indicated to prefer fellow workers they like to those who might be useful for them someday ($M_{\text{like}} = 3.73$, $SD = 1.12$, $M_{\text{useful}} = 2.89$, $SD = 1.10$; $t(239) = 11.66$, $p < .001$). The manipulation check turned out to be difficult and reduced the sample considerably, as described in the method section. The following results refer to the final sample ($N = 240$) that answered the manipulation check question correctly (for the results of the initially larger sample see the following text).

Supporting Hypothesis 1, we found a significant main effect for social preference, that is, emotionally close social partners were generally preferred as lunch partners over instrumental social partners ($M_{\text{emotional}} = 3.93$, $SD = 0.82$; $M_{\text{instrumental}} = 2.56$, $SD = 0.94$), $F(1, 235) = 37.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .14$. Regarding Hypotheses 2 and 3,

Table 2. Intercorrelations and Descriptives (Study 2)

		M	SD	1	2	3
1. Age	Overall	40.79	11.62			
	Cell 1 _{retirement close_career high}	44.42	10.80			
	Cell 2 _{retirement close_career low}	44.25	12.44	–		
	Cell 3 _{retirement far_career high}	36.97	11.05			
	Cell 4 _{retirement far_career low}	38.97	10.39			
2. Gender	Overall			–.27**		
	Cell 1 _{retirement close_career high}			–.25		
	Cell 2 _{retirement close_career low}	–	–	–.33*	–	
	Cell 3 _{retirement far_career high}			–.20		
	Cell 4 _{retirement far_career low}			–.29*		
3. Instrumental partners	Overall	2.56	0.94	–.06	–.15*	
	Cell 1 _{retirement close_career high}	2.64	1.02	–.20	.15	
	Cell 2 _{retirement close_career low}	2.14	0.85	.00	–.21	–
	Cell 3 _{retirement far_career high}	2.98	0.87	–.02	–.18	
	Cell 4 _{retirement far_career low}	2.47	0.87	.20	–.31*	
4. Emotional partners	Overall	3.93	0.82	–.12	.10	–.14*
	Cell 1 _{retirement close_career high}	3.80	0.82	.10	.22	–.07
	Cell 2 _{retirement close_career low}	4.17	0.77	–.39**	.19	–.04
	Cell 3 _{retirement far_career high}	3.70	0.88	–.10	–.13	.02
	Cell 4 _{retirement far_career low}	4.03	0.74	–.18	.18	–.23

Note. Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female; Overall: $N = 240$; Cell 1 (retirement close, career high): $n = 43$; Cell 2 (retirement close, career low): $n = 64$; Cell 3 (retirement far, career high): $n = 68$; Cell 4 (retirement far, career low): $n = 65$. Apart from age and gender, numbers refer to preference for a joint lunch (1 = very rarely, 5 = very frequently) with instrumental or emotional partners.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

analyses furthermore showed a significant interaction effect between occupational future time perspective and social preference, $F(1, 235) = 10.12$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .04$ and a significant interaction effect between future career goals and social preference, $F(1, 235) = 28.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$. Further, there was no three-way interaction between future time perspective, career goals, and social preference, $F(1, 235) = 0.001$, $p = .98$, $\eta^2 < .001$. As demonstrated in Figure 2, subsequent univariate analyses showed that participants who imagined being far from retirement reported that they would choose instrumental social partners for lunch more frequently than participants who imagined being close to retirement ($M_{\text{far}} = 2.73$, $SD = 0.91$; $M_{\text{close}} = 2.34$, $SD = 0.95$), $F(1, 238) = 10.84$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$. Hence, Hypothesis 2a was supported. However, analyses showed no difference in the preference for emotionally close social partners depending on the time perspective, $F(1, 238) = 2.25$, $p = .14$, $\eta^2 = .01$. Hence, Hypothesis 2b was not supported.

In contrast to the findings in terms of the time perspective, univariate analyses showed, also illustrated in Figure 2, that participants in the low career ambition groups reported to choose emotionally close social partners more frequently for a joint lunch than participants in the high career ambitions groups ($M_{\text{low}} = 4.10$, $SD = 0.75$; $M_{\text{high}} = 3.74$, $SD = 0.86$), $F(1, 238) = 12.14$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .05$. Thus, Hypothesis 3a was supported. In line with Hypothesis 3b, univariate analyses also demonstrated that participants with high career ambitions reported to choose instrumental social partners for lunch more often than participants with low career ambitions ($M_{\text{high}} = 2.85$, $SD = 0.94$; $M_{\text{low}} = 2.30$, $SD = 0.87$), $F(1, 238) = 21.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$.

The same pattern of main and interaction effects emerged when age was not considered as a covariate in the analyses. When considered as a covariate, age showed no effects in our analyses. There was no

interaction effect between age and social preference, $F(1, 235) = 2.89$, $p = .09$, $\eta^2 = .01$.

Overall, findings from the initially larger sample ($N = 453$) revealed a similar pattern of results: Hypothesis 1, stating that emotionally close social partners are generally preferred for a joint lunch, was supported ($M_{\text{emotional}} = 3.84$, $SD = 0.88$; $M_{\text{instrumental}} = 2.63$, $SD = 0.92$), $F(1, 448) = 34.15$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .07$. Even though Hypothesis 2 was not supported, the interaction between occupational future time perspective and social preference reached trend level, $F(1, 448) = 3.08$, $p = .08$, $\eta^2 = .01$. Hypothesis 3 was supported: The interaction between future career goals and social preference was significant, $F(1, 448) = 20.86$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$. Univariate analyses showed that participants with low career ambitions reported to choose emotionally close social partners more frequently for a joint lunch than participants with high career ambitions ($M_{\text{low}} = 3.95$, $SD = 0.87$; $M_{\text{high}} = 3.73$, $SD = 0.87$), $F(1, 451) = 6.73$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$; moreover, participants with high career ambitions reported to choose instrumental social partners for lunch more often than participants with low career ambitions ($M_{\text{high}} = 2.79$, $SD = 0.94$; $M_{\text{low}} = 2.47$, $SD = 0.87$), $F(1, 451) = 14.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Further in line with the findings from the final sample, there was no three-way interaction between future time perspective, career goals, and social preference, $F(1, 448) = 0.26$, $p = .61$, $\eta^2 = .001$.

Discussion

In line with socioemotional selectivity theory, Study 2 replicates Study 1 and provides further evidence that time perspective matters, also at work, for the selection of social partners. It further indicates, in agreement with earlier research in non-work settings (Fung & Carstensen, 2004), that limitations in future goals also matter for the choice of

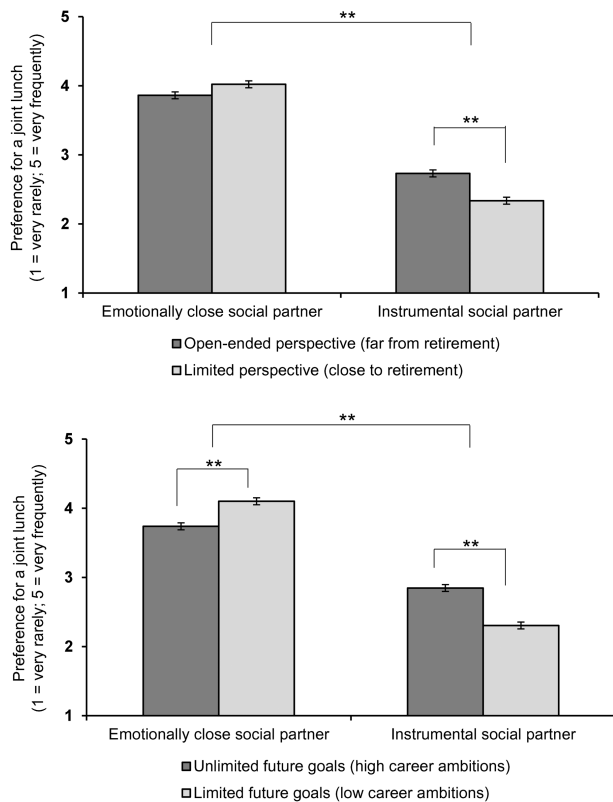


Figure 2. Effect of manipulated occupational future time perspective (far from or close to retirement) and future goals (high or low career ambitions) on the preferences for emotionally close and instrumental social partners for a joint lunch break in Study 2. $**p \leq .001$. Error bars represent standard errors of the mean.

social partners. That is, participants who imagined being far away from retirement and participants who imagined having high career ambitions chose potentially knowledgeable and useful social partners for lunch more frequently than participants who imagined a more confined work situation (i.e., being close to retirement or having low career ambitions).

Like Study 1, Study 2 indicates that emotionally close social partners are generally preferred for a joint break at work. However, emotionally close partners were chosen relatively less frequently for a lunch break when career ambitions were high rather than low. This hypothesized pattern was only found in terms of career ambition (i.e., in the future goal condition) but not in terms of retirement (i.e., in the future time perspective condition). Hence, it seems that employees with ambitious future career goals are somewhat more willing to accept a potentially less emotionally pleasant lunch break for the sake of a lunch that provides learning and networking opportunities. This direct trade-off, however, should also be examined in further studies, for example, using a forced choice paradigm, which asks for a definitive decision between an emotionally close and an instrumental social partner. According to socioemotional selectivity theory, it is in contexts where instrumental and emotional goals compete with each other that differences in social preferences are most visible (Carstensen et al., 1999).

Notably, there was no interaction effect between occupational future time perspective, future career goals, and social partner choice.

Thus, the effects of different confining conditions such as upcoming retirement and low career ambitions do not seem to intensify each other. Likewise, the two unconstrained conditions (retirement far ahead while having high career ambitions) do not seem to potentiate each other. A possible explanation for the lack of an interaction effect is that time to retirement and career ambitions could be positively correlated in participants' minds anyway. Thus, the conditions in which participants were asked to imagine being far from retirement while having high career ambitions and being close to retirement while having low career ambitions might have been perceived as inherently consistent and not as intensifying each other. It is also notable in this context that the largest dropout in terms of the failed manipulation check was apparent in the cell that might be perceived as relatively unusual (close to retirement and high career ambitions).

Future research could add further confining conditions, for example, external forces such as dismissals or bankruptcy, to examine combined effects more closely. Moreover, future research could focus more closely on the controllability of employees' future time perspective. In our experiments, we found similar effects of relatively controllable and relatively uncontrollable experimental conditions (i.e., resignation and closeness to retirement, respectively). Further conditions such as temporary work, project work or mass redundancies might be worthwhile investigating in future research as well. It is possible, for example, that employees with a short-term contract and thus a currently limited future time perspective might prefer instrumental social partners who might help to extend the labor contract; without the prospect of an extension, however, these employees might prefer emotionally close social partners.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

A key assumption in research on work and aging is that a reduced sense of future time perspective at work and reductions of future career goals are responsible for changes in motivational outcomes. To our knowledge, this is the first experimental study to test these age-related mechanisms in order to draw causal conclusions. In two scenario experiments, we found consistent evidence that jobholders' occupational future time perspective predicts their social preferences during lunch breaks. Employees with a relatively open-ended time perspective (i.e., imagining a permanent employment contract in Study 1 or being far away from retirement in Study 2) chose instrumental social partners more often than employees with a more limited time perspective (i.e., imagining having resigned in Study 1 or being close to retirement in Study 2). However, we also found in both studies that emotionally close social partners were generally preferred for a joint lunch break. This general preference was not significantly increased by the manipulation of the occupational future time perspective. Yet, having limited future goals (i.e., imagining low career ambitions in Study 2) led to the choice of fewer instrumental and even more emotionally close social partners.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Overall, this research shows that both employees' occupational future time perspective and their future career goals have an impact on whom they prefer to spend their within-day work breaks with. More specifically, this research contributes both to the existing literature on socioemotional selectivity theory in the work setting and to existing

research on social ties in the later career and in the context of retirement. Further, it also adds to past work on (within-day) work breaks.

In terms of socioemotional selectivity theory in the work setting, we extend prior work that has either used age as a proxy for occupational future time perspective (e.g., Zaniboni et al., 2014), or measured it using self-report in correlational designs (e.g., Kooij & Zacher, 2016). Since the centerpiece of socioemotional selectivity theory is not age per se but individuals' future time perspective (Carstensen, 2006), our studies highlight that the main tenets of this theory are also applicable to social preferences during within-day work breaks. That is, when endings are salient, individuals do not only choose fewer instrumental social partners outside the work domain (Carstensen & Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990; Fung et al., 1999), but also at the workplace—despite the fact that this context usually limits our scope to choose social partners. In line with prior research that has tested alternatives to socioemotional selectivity theory (Fung & Carstensen, 2004), we also find that not only constrained future time influences social goals, but also constrained future goals drive social preferences. Thus, in our research, low career ambitions (and hence confined career perspectives) led to the choice of fewer instrumental and more emotionally close social partners for a joint lunch break.

In terms of the literature on workplace aging and retirement, our research suggests that work-related social contacts change not only after retirement (e.g., Tilburg, 1992, 2003), but also before when this life event is approaching. That is, when the retirement transition comes closer, employees appear to prefer fewer instrumental social partners for joint within-day work breaks as compared to employees whose retirement lies in the distant future. Since retirement is not a uniform transition, it would be worthwhile for future research to examine more closely what kinds of former workplace relationships—emotional, instrumental, or both—are maintained by different groups of retirees that have been identified in earlier research on retirement and well-being (Pinquart & Schindler, 2007; Wang, 2007). In terms of workplace relationships prior to retirement, it would be interesting to investigate social preferences at work in further situations, for example, not only in terms of partner choices for lunch, but also, if possible, in terms of partner choices for work-related advice or project teams. One might argue that employees have more and more leeway to decide with whom to interact in terms of work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), not only in terms of work breaks.

Finally, in terms of work breaks, our studies show that it is helpful to differentiate broad terms such as *socializing* or *social activities* that have been used before in the context of break activities (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005; Sonnentag, 2001; Trougakos et al., 2008). That is, the general distinction between instrumental and emotional social partners, which is common in research on workplace relationships (e.g., Fombrun, 1982; Ibarra, 1993), seems to be of relevance in the specific context of work break preferences as well. This distinction further involves that it is meaningful to examine the so far neglected networking function of lunch breaks more closely. That is, our findings imply that social partner choices during breaks are not only driven by recovery goals, but also by instrumental considerations.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Beyond the theoretical relevance, our research has also practical implications. Both employees and supervisors should take into

consideration that employees with differing occupational future time perspectives and career ambitions might have different social motivations at work. Employees, for example, should not take it personal if companioned colleagues sometimes prefer to lunch with more knowledgeable and well-connected social partners—since this seems natural for employees with an extended occupational future time perspective or high career ambitions. Moreover, line managers should consider that employees with different occupational time and career perspectives might differ in their social preferences at the workplace. That is, differing future career goals and endings like retirement or resignation do not only implicate personal and administrative changes, but also new developments in the social dynamics at work.

On a more general level, our research touches on the question of the right balance between instrumental and emotional ties at work. A workplace where people primarily seek out others for instrumental reasons might not be a desirable place to work—that is, a place too predominated by a focus on utility, effectiveness, and competitive advantages, also during breaks. The exclusive choice of emotionally close social partners (for within-day work breaks), in contrast, might hinder potentially valuable and useful informal conversations and idea generations. Our findings indicate that some diversity in terms of employees' occupational future time perspectives and career goals might be helpful to achieve a balance between the choice of instrumental and emotionally close social partners at work. That is, a workplace dominated by young and ambitious employees might profit from older or less ambitious employees in terms of the social dynamics at work. Future research could address this question of the right balance between instrumental and emotional ties at work more directly.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Similar to other previous research on social preferences (e.g., Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990), our findings stem from hypothetical scenarios. Even if it is relatively easy for working professionals to imagine a situation in which they have to choose a lunch partner, it remains a topic for further research to examine social preferences in situ, for example, using field experiments (in which the experimental group could receive material that makes their occupational future time perspective particularly salient) or diary studies (that track employees' social partner choices during breaks across several days, see e.g., Dreden & Binnewies, 2017, Hunter & Wu, 2016 or Kim, Park, & Niu, 2016). Such studies could replicate our experimental work in investigating social partner choices depending on employees' career ambitions and their occupational future time perspective (e.g., their closeness to retirement or the time perspective implied in their employment contract). However, such studies could go beyond these questions and could assess further factors that might drive these choices as well, for example, personality characteristics or situational factors; moreover, they could also assess outcomes like recovery or performance after lunch. It would be intriguing to find out, for example, if jobholders feel more recovered when they spend their lunch break with emotionally close versus instrumental social partners. That is, it would be interesting to examine if a break with instrumental social partners is rather regarded as working during lunch (i.e., as the term *networking* suggests), while a break with emotionally close social partners is rather regarded as relaxation. In line with this reasoning, a recent Twitter message said “lunch break with boss doesn't count”

(Torto99, 2016). However, it is also possible that it is not only interesting, but also relaxing for very ambitious employees if they can spend their lunch with instrumental social partners—which would correspond to prior research emphasizing the importance of autonomy associated with lunch breaks (Trougakos et al., 2014). More generally, we argue that lunch breaks deserve more research attention because they not only affect our well-being (Trougakos et al., 2008) and future performance (Kniffin et al., 2015) but also involve important informal conversations and the exchange of rumors and gossip (Baker & Jones, 1996).

Moreover, future work could also address two further aspects not considered in the present research. First, social preferences for within-day work breaks may change if social partners are multiplex, that is, both emotionally close and instrumental at the same time (Ingram & Zou, 2008; Verbrugge, 1979). In our studies, we intentionally constructed a choice of lunch partners who were either predominantly emotionally close or instrumental. However, in everyday organizational life, there are also highly likeable supervisors or general managers, for instance, who might simultaneously represent an instrumental and an emotional tie. It would be interesting to see if such a social partner would represent an ideal lunch companion—or if the instrumental aspect somehow undermines the emotional tie. Second, future research should take into account that employees do not only actively pick lunch partners themselves—they are also picked for lunch by others. That is, it would be meaningful to assess, for instance within team-level diary studies, if employees who are temporary or close to retirement are more often asked to spend lunch together by less ambitious employees.

A further open question is whether social partners lose their instrumental character when employees resign or are close to retirement. This argument implies that, for example, after resignation, supervisors or general managers might lose their instrumental value and no longer represent instrumental social partners. However, we argue—also in line with prior work (Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990)—that these social partners do not lose their character or value. Just as an emotionally close social partner remains emotionally close, a general manager, for example, remains well-connected, well-informed, and knowledgeable, independent of an employee resigning or remaining. That is, even if employees resign, they can still learn more, in an instrumental sense, from a lunch with a well-informed and well-connected expert than from a lunch with a nonexpert but highly likeable social partner.

Future experiments on social preferences during within-day work breaks should also include different kinds of manipulation checks (e.g., asking two simple questions instead of one complex question, as mentioned in the method section of Study 2) to avoid age and education effects. That is, when interpreting the findings of Study 2, it should be taken into account that they are particularly valid for respondents who tend to be younger and who are relatively well educated. Aside from this methodological aspect, research in this context can also benefit from including further theoretical perspectives. For instance, the choice of social partners (for lunch) could be understood as a form of relational job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). That is, by choosing certain partners and not others, employees actively alter their interactions at work and thus craft their jobs. Since employees might not only choose certain social partners, but, by doing so, also certain emotions, this research topic might also benefit from Tamir's (2009)

work on pleasure and utility in emotion regulation. From this perspective, which often leads to similar predictions as socioemotional selectivity theory, employees with high career ambitions would choose less pleasant emotions by going to lunch with instrumental social partners more frequently. That is, the *emotional* but not the social preferences would be central.

CONCLUSION

Our findings from two experiments show consistent evidence that employees' occupational future time perspective impacts their social preferences during lunch breaks, thereby providing the first experimental evidence of the influence of future time perspective in work contexts. Employees with a relatively open-ended time perspective choose instrumental social partners more frequently than employees with a more limited time perspective. However, emotionally close social partners are generally preferred for a joint break. Limited future career goals further lead to the choice of fewer instrumental and even more emotionally close social partners for a joint lunch break. Overall, this research shows that the cardinal tenets of socioemotional selectivity theory are directly applicable to the work context. Findings provide an important experimental validation of the role of occupational future time perspective in driving differences in social-motivational processes at work.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was supported by a grant from *Universitätsbund Erlangen-Nürnberg* awarded to S. Hommelhoff.

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