

#BLACKEMPLOYEESMATTER: MEGA-THREATS, IDENTITY FUSION, AND ENACTING POSITIVE DEVIANCE IN ORGANIZATIONS

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Despite recognizing the importance of events, researchers have rarely explored the influence of broader societal events on employee experiences and behaviors at work. We integrate perspectives on events and social identities to develop a cross-level theoretical model of the spillover effects of mega-threats, which we define as negative, large-scale, diversity-related episodes that receive significant media attention. With a focus on highly publicized instances of violence enacted against Black Americans by law enforcement as the mega-threat under study, we propose that the coupling of intrapsychic and group-level processes that occur as a result of a mega-threat leads minorities to experience identity fusion that involves the blurring of organizational and social identities through both affective and cognitive pathways. We further propose that identity fusion compels minorities to engage in task and relational positively deviant behaviors: progroup voice and relational bridging. We also propose that factors within the organizational context, including leader compassion, organizational climate for inclusion, and organizational demography, serve to empower minority employees, heightening the functional outcomes of mega-threats.

If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon Martin. When I think about this boy, I think about my own kids (President Barack Obama, response to Trayvon Martin shooting, March 23, 2012).

It's crazy we have to be afraid to get pulled over or lord forbid we run out of gas or get a flat tire cause now your life is at stake (Kapri Bibbs, NFL player, Twitter response to Terence Crutcher shooting, September 20, 2016).

Oscar Grant could have been any one of our sons, nephews or grandsons (members of International Longshore and Warehouse Union 10, comment on shutting down commerce for a day in honor of Oscar Grant, October 27, 2010).

Events in our world impinge on us. They incite emotions, elicit cognitions, influence our interactions, and change our behaviors, even when they do not directly happen to us (Morgeson,

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Mitchell, & Liu, 2015). In the epigraphs above, Black Americans describe feeling injured, even personally targeted, when they hear news of unarmed Black Americans being shot by law enforcement or other authority figures. The sources of these quotes are varied—a dock workers union, a professional football player, and the former President of the United States—yet all express a common sense of shared racial group membership and are powerful illustrations of the influence that broader societal events can have on individuals' emotions, cognitions, and behaviors. Given the permeability of organizational boundaries (Katz & Kahn, 1978), experiences of diversity that have been traditionally construed as more or less stable (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) may actually shift or change as a result of events that occur outside of the organizational context. In particular, research in this domain may benefit from examining diversity as a dynamic experience, one that may evolve in response to events that occur in the broader societal context.

A long tradition of organizational research has shown that events in employees' lives can influence critical workplace outcomes. While research on the influence of events has focused mainly on self-relevant events, or events that directly or

personally happen to the individual under study (Mark & Mellor, 1991), scholars are beginning to recognize the criticality of non-self-relevant events, which occur to others. In this vein, Tilcsik and Marquis (2013) introduced a theory of *mega-events*—large-scale cultural, political, or commercial events that attract significant media attention—and have begun to study the impact of mega-events on firm-level outcomes. In this work mega-events are found to influence firm-level actions related to philanthropic spending (Luo, Zhang, & Marquis, 2016; Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013) and to enhance mutual dependence among firms (McNamara, Pazzaglia, & Sonpar, 2018). While this research has added to our knowledge about the impact of mega-events for firms as a whole, it has not considered the top-down impact of mega-events on individuals within organizations.

Thus, the purpose of this article is to extend mega-events theorizing beyond the current framing by presenting a model that explains the cross-level impact of these events on individuals' mutable experiences of diversity at work. Given that organizations are more likely to respond to mega-events that occur within their local communities because they are more relevant to them (Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013), we argue that employees also respond differentially to societal events, based on the extent to which they identify with the individuals or groups implicated in the event. Focusing primarily on minority employees, which Ragins (1997) defined as organizational members who belong to social identity groups that have lower levels of power within organizations and society, in this article we seek to understand how minority employees respond to a particular form of mega-event—a *mega-threat*—which we define as a negative, large-scale, diversity-related episode that receives significant media attention. Based on this definition, a mega-threat occurs when an individual or group is targeted, attacked, or harmed because of their social identity group and that event is then highly publicized. Recent examples of mega-threats abound: the 2016 Orlando Pulse nightclub shooting, the implementation of the U.S. Muslim immigration ban, the separation of families at the U.S./Mexican border by U.S. immigration officials, the 2017 Finsbury Park attack in London where a van was driven into a crowd of pedestrians near a Muslim mosque, the highly publicized accusations of sexual harassment by Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, and the shooting death

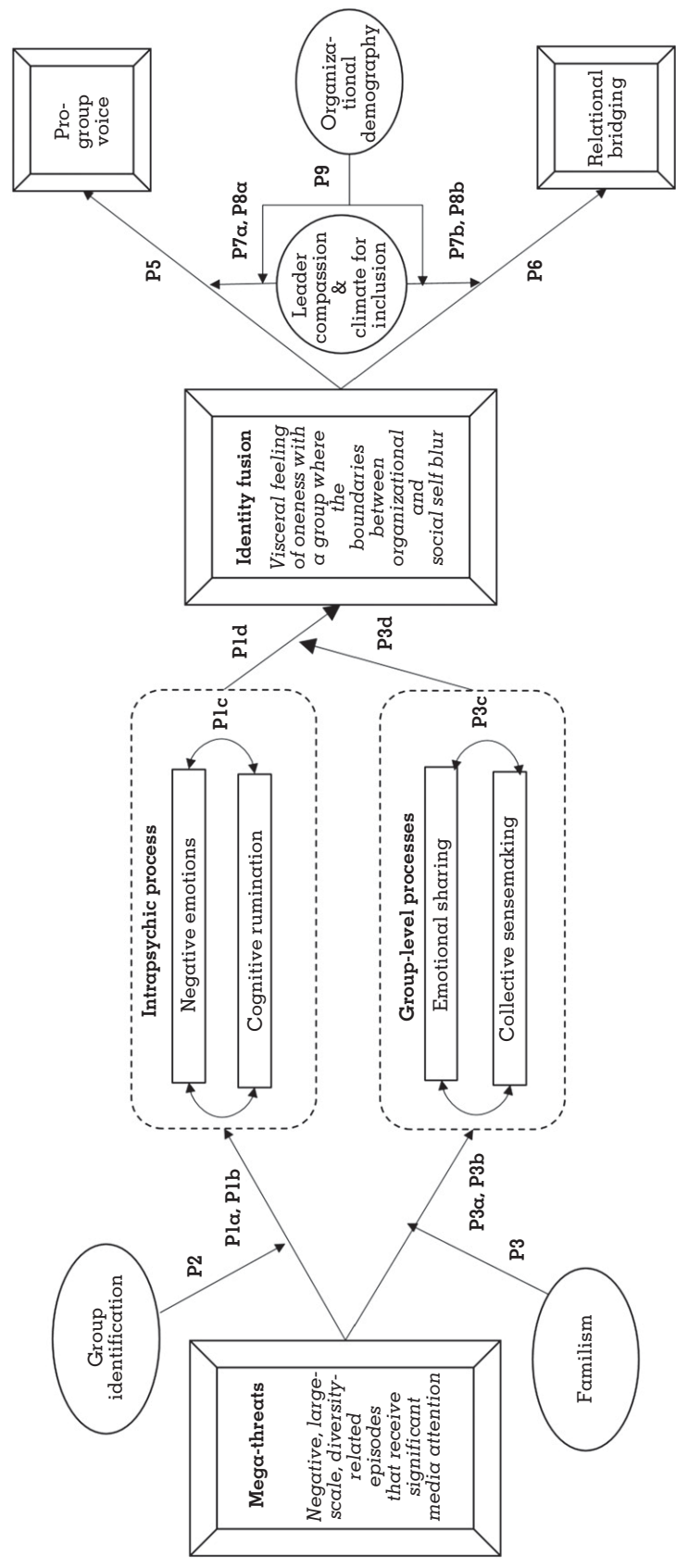
of Black American Michael Brown by a law enforcement officer.

In this article we focus on a particular type of mega-threat: highly publicized instances of police violence and shootings of Black Americans. As evidenced by the epigraphs at the beginning of this article and in recent research (Bor, Venkataramani, Williams, & Tsai, 2018), instances of police brutality enacted against Black Americans elicit visceral reactions, especially from those who share the same racial identity as the victims. With this mega-threat in the foreground, we present a conceptual model that illustrates the influence of mega-threats on Black employees at work (see Figure 1 for full model).

Our proposed dual-pathway model suggests that mega-threats spill over into the workplace by leading social identity group members to experience cognitions and emotions that trigger changes in the relationship between their identities and subsequent behaviors. On a routine basis, most individuals are likely to enact only the identity that is considered most relevant to the situation, turning on their organizational identities and turning off their personal and social identities when entering the workplace (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006). For minorities this on/off switching process is particularly poignant because they are more likely to see their racial identities as misaligned with the professional environment (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). Thus, under normal circumstances many minority employees may choose to engage in identity strategies that mask, ignore, or disregard their social identities at work (Phillips, Rothbard, & Dumas, 2009; Roberts, Cha, & Kim, 2014), even as these identities remain salient lenses through which they perceive their workplaces (Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002).

We suggest, however, that because mega-threats cause individuals to experience adverse intrapsychic outcomes—namely, negative emotions and rumination—they impel these social identities to become activated and stay at the fore within the workplace, along with their already activated organizational identities. Because these identities often operate with opposing and independent sets of expectations, scripts, and values (Bell, 1990; Roberts, 2005), their simultaneous activation will typically lead to an experience of identity conflict or interference (Bell, 1990; Rothbard & Ramarajan, 2009; Settles, 2004). However, we argue that because mega-threats

FIGURE 1
A Model of the Influence of Mega-Threats and Identity Fusion on Individuals in Organizations



concern *all* members of a social identity group, affected employees will also engage in affective and cognitive group-level processes with other ingroup members to make sense of the threats. We posit that these group-level processes will then interact with individuals' intrapsychic experiences to kindle *identity fusion*, in which individuals experience the reconstruction or elimination of the boundaries between their organizational and social identities such that they experience a deep, visceral feeling of "oneness" with their group (Swann, Gómez, Seyle, Morales, & Huici, 2009; Swann, Jetten, Gómez, Whitehouse, & Bastian, 2012). We then posit that this experience of identity fusion will act as a catalyst to motivate personally risky, progroup behavior (e.g., Gómez et al., 2011; Swann et al., 2009), which, in organizational settings, takes the form of positive deviance, or intentional actions that depart from organizational norms to benefit an individual's group (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004; Vadera, Pratt, & Mishra, 2013).

In this article we focus on two positively deviant worker behaviors that are task related and relational, which are *progroup voice*—speaking up on behalf of one's group—and *relational bridging*—building high-quality connections with diverse others—respectively. Furthermore, we describe three contextual facilitating factors that may enhance individuals' internal experience of power to engage in these risky progroup behaviors: leader compassion, an organizational climate for inclusion, and organizational demography. We assert that these factors, when combined with identity fusion, have especially potent effects on the enactment of positive deviance, countering organizational expectations that minority employees accept the status quo and stay silent at work.

Our goals in this article are threefold. First, by highlighting the far-reaching spillover effects of large-scale, diversity-related occurrences (i.e., mega-threats) on experiences of diversity in organizations, we address calls for research on the influence of changes in macrosocietal context on individual organizational experiences (Johns, 2006; Morgeson et al., 2015) and perceptions of diversity (Joshi & Roh, 2009). Diversity—that is, differences among individuals that arise from demographic characteristics, experiences, and/or perspectives (Thomas & Ely, 1996)—typically has been examined as a static phenomenon and treated as fixed or unchanging (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). By contrast, our theory assumes

that diversity experiences are dynamic: we posit that mega-threats forcibly alter the relationship between organizational and social identities, changing how minority organizational members view their experiences of diversity.

Our second goal in this article is to propose a mechanism whereby mega-threats lead to functional organizational outcomes. Specifically, we argue that identity fusion, a possible consequence of a mega-threat, is an important antecedent to positive change within organizations since it leads individuals to engage in two productive behaviors: progroup voice and relational bridging aimed at improving the social stature of a group within the organizational context. We also postulate that factors in the organizational context, including leader compassion, a climate for inclusion, and organizational demography, serve to empower minority employees to act more audaciously and heighten the functional outcomes of mega-threats.

Last, our third goal in this article is to shine a light on the unique experiences of Black employees. Organizational scholars have noted that management researchers typically take a homogeneous approach to theorizing, with minority perspectives typically being overlooked or ignored (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Nkomo, 1992). While our theory is relevant for any minority employee coping with the occurrence of a relevant mega-threat, we specifically focus on highly publicized instances of violence enacted against Black Americans by law enforcement officers as the specific mega-threat under study. To underscore the reason why we focus on this particular mega-threat: Black Americans are three times more likely than are White Americans to be killed by police and five times more likely to be killed unarmed (Buehler, 2017). Thus, we suggest that Black employees in particular are constantly coping with the occurrence of group-relevant mega-threats. However, the spillover effects of these societal events on Black employees have largely been overlooked by management scholars. By centering our theorizing on the experiences of Black workers after instances of police violence enacted against Black Americans, we add to a nascent body of organizational research in which scholars have begun to investigate the unique challenges and experiences of Black workers (Ashburn-Nardo, Thomas, & Robinson, 2017; McCluney, Bryant, King, & Ali, 2017; Opie & Roberts, 2017).

In sum, our model of mega-threats specifies why, when, and how these events can be galvanizing for minority employees and the organizations they belong to. We integrate fragmented and disparate bodies of literature on events, emotions, and identities to build a dual-pathway (individual- and group-level) model that includes both affective and cognitive components. Accordingly, we highlight the factors that cultivate identity fusion and its potentially functional effects, and we offer critical moderators upon which these outcomes depend. We conclude by offering an agenda for future theory and research.

BUILDING A THEORY OF MEGA-THREATS IN ORGANIZATIONS

Since the early days of organizational research (Allport, 1940; Pepper, 1948), scholars have recognized that organizational phenomena are best understood by virtue of the events that are encountered by organizations as a whole and the entities within them. Defined as discrete, observable, discontinuous, nonroutine episodes that occur within or outside of an organization’s environment (Morgeson et al., 2015), organizational events have also been referred to as “critical incidents” (Flanagan, 1954), “shocks” (Lee & Mitchell, 1994), “jolts” (Meyer, 1982), “milestones” (Hoffmann, 1999), “occurrences” (Basch & Fischer, 1998), and “emergencies” (Latané & Darley, 1969). Highlighting their import, researchers have stated that these events occur “at every hierarchical level, from the most molar environmental level to the most molecular individual level” (Morgeson et al., 2015: 515). For instance, at the individual level, “affective events” (Weiss &

Cropanzano, 1996) are proximal causes of intrapsychic emotions; at the dyadic level, “anchoring events” affect interpersonal relationships (Ballinger & Rockmann, 2010); at the team level, “critical events” and “interruptive events” impinge on team processes to influence team performance (Morgeson & DeRue, 2006; Zellmer-Bruhn, 2003); and at the firm level, events such as technology introductions and mergers have far-reaching effects on organizational performance (Barley, 1986; Burkhardt & Brass, 1990).

While this wide-ranging work provides a thorough picture of the vital role of events at work, it also exemplifies how “event” researchers tend to focus on the single-level effects of events, converging on how an event at a particular level (i.e., individual, team, organization) shapes responses at that same level (Morgeson et al., 2015). However, this approach ignores cross-level effects of events, thus precluding a deeper understanding of how events that occur in the broader societal context may influence lower-level phenomena—that is, the organizations, teams, and individuals who are not directly involved in the event (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000; Morgeson et al., 2015). In an attempt to begin closing this gap, scholars have proposed that “mega-events”—large-scale cultural, political, athletic, or commercial occurrences that befall a community and garner significant media attention (Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013)—exert a powerful impact on firm-level actions, such as corporate giving. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship among mega-events and other types of events.

However, this work has yet to explore how mega-events influence individual outcomes (Morgeson et al., 2015). We therefore extend

FIGURE 2
A Typology of Events Within the Organizational Literature

		Event location	
		Inside organization	Outside organization
Event relevance	Self	Occurrences that happen <i>directly to actors inside</i> the boundaries of an organization Example theories: Affective events (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), lunch breaks (Troughakos, Hideg, Cheng, & Beal, 2014), traumatic work events (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Vashdi, 2005), identity threat (Petriglieri, 2011)	Occurrences that happen <i>directly to focal actors outside</i> the boundaries of an organization Example theories: Life events (Bhagat, 1983), discontinuous career transition (Haynie & Shepherd, 2011), work commutes (Hennessy, 2008), work-family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985)
	Other	Occurrences that happen to <i>distant others inside</i> the boundaries of an organization Example theories: Event system (Morgeson, Mitchell, & Liu, 2015), organizational identity threats (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996)	Occurrences that happen to <i>distant others outside</i> the boundaries of an organization Example theories: Mega-events (Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013)

research on mega-events by building a theory of how individuals are impacted by one type of mega-event—a mega-threat—which we define as *negative, large-scale, diversity-related episodes that receive significant media attention*. We identify three defining characteristics of mega-threats: identity relevance, negativity, and broad impact. First, regarding identity relevance, research on mega-events has shown that both planned events (e.g., the Olympic Games or the Super Bowl) and exogenous shocks (e.g., natural disasters) can affect individuals, groups, and organizations that make up the community where the event has occurred (Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013). Yet this focus on community as a geographic location is somewhat restrictive when we consider that a community can be more comprehensively defined as a group of people *having a particular interest or characteristic in common* (Bender, 1978; see *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*). We draw on this more inclusive definition of community to posit that mega-threats are diversity related—that is, highly germane to any individual who shares a social identity with an individual or group involved in the event, such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, or other identity characteristic, regardless of the individual's geographic location in relation to the event. Second, because the identity groups in question are threatened, devalued, or harmed by mega-threats, we identify these events as inherently negative. Finally, mega-threats garner significant media attention. This includes traditional media attention (Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013), such as coverage on the news, as well as more contemporary forms of media attention on platforms like Facebook and Twitter (Leonardi & Vaast, 2017). Together, these three characteristics distinguish mega-threats from other large-scale events.

In this article we demonstrate the main tenets of our theory by considering one major type of mega-threat: instances of police shootings and brutality enacted against Black men and women that have received significant media attention over the past decade. A few examples of these mega-threats include the 2014 shooting of Black teenager Michael Brown by a police officer, the 2015 death of Sandra Bland in police custody following an illegal arrest, the 2015 death of Eric Garner as a result of an illegal police chokehold, and the 2018 shooting of Stephon Clark by two Sacramento police officers, all of which underscore the

experience of danger for Black Americans in interactions with law enforcement. As per our definition, these tragic instances were accompanied by considerable media attention; for instance, 3.7 million tweets were posted in response to the Michael Brown shooting, making it one of the most-tweeted topics in 2014 (Kamarck, 2015). These examples each fit the definition of a mega-threat in that they are large-scale events that particularly threaten Black Americans because they contradict a value shared that all Americans, regardless of race or ethnicity, are united under the motto of *e pluribus unum* (out of many, one) and, thus, should be treated equally and justly under the law (McAuliffe, 2010). Table 1 provides details regarding the numerous mega-threats referenced in this article.

A DUAL-PATHWAY MODEL OF MEGA THREATS

To understand how mega-threats influence downstream outcomes for individuals' identities and work behaviors, we propose a dual-pathway process that has both affective and cognitive processes operating simultaneously at the individual and group levels. At the individual level, we argue that mega-threats act as stressors that lead minorities to experience negative emotions and cognitive rumination. We then argue that mega-threats trigger a second group-level pathway, where group members collectively engage in the social sharing of emotion and sensemaking about the event, and that it is the combination of these intrapsychic and group processes that leads to identity fusion. We then describe how individual-level group identification and group-level cultural values moderate intrapsychic- and group-level pathways, respectively.

We posit that these pathways serve as the proximal mechanisms that influence how individuals' identities operate at work. Individuals in organizations have multiple identities (Ramarajan, 2014), including personal identities, or idiosyncratic characteristics of an individual; social identities, or aspects of an individual's self-concept that are derived from membership in social groups (e.g., race or gender); and organizational identities, which include the self-definitions that arise from workgroups or roles within organizations (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Typically, researchers view identities as distinct entities that are separated from each other, operating such that situational features of an

TABLE 1
Examples of Recent Mega-Threats

Name of Mega-Threat	Description of Mega-Threat	Date of Occurrence	Identity Group Threatened by the Event
Shooting death of Trayvon Martin	Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teen, was shot by a neighborhood watch volunteer in Florida, sparking the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement	2/26/2012	Black Americans
Shooting death of Terence Crutcher	Terence Crutcher, an unarmed Black man, was shot by police after having car trouble on a highway in Tulsa, OK	9/16/2016	Black Americans
Orlando Pulse nightclub shooting	49 people were killed and 58 were wounded in a mass shooting/hate crime inside Pulse nightclub, a LGBTQ nightclub in Orlando, FL	6/12/2016	LGBTQ community
U.S. Muslim immigration ban	Executive Order 13769 suspended the entry of Syrian refugees and immigrants from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen (6 of 7 Muslim-majority countries) into the United States	1/27/2017	Muslims/immigrants
Separation of families at the U.S./Mexico border	"Zero tolerance" policy enacted that criminalized all immigrants into the United States, including those seeking asylum, and separated thousands of families at the border	5/7/2018	Latin Americans/immigrants
Finsbury Park attack in London, England	Darren Osborne drove a van into a crowd of Muslims leaving evening prayer during the month of Ramadan; 1 person was killed and 10 others were injured	6/19/2017	Muslims
Harvey Weinstein sexual harassment allegations	The <i>New York Times</i> published an investigative report chronicling accusations of sexual misconduct and harassment against Harvey Weinstein	10/5/2017	Women
Death of Sandra Bland	Sandra Bland, a Black woman, was found hanging in a jail cell 3 days after an illegal arrest in Texas	7/13/2015	Black Americans
Shooting death of Michael Brown	Michael Brown, an unarmed Black teen, was shot by a police officer, sparking months of protest and unrest in Ferguson, MO	8/9/2014	Black Americans
Death of Eric Garner	Eric Garner, a Black man, was killed in an altercation with police, where 5 officers held him in an illegal chokehold while he yelled, "I can't breathe"	7/17/2014	Black Americans
Shooting of Stephon Clark	Stephon Clark, a Black man, was shot by 2 police officers who confronted him while in his grandmother's backyard in Sacramento, CA	3/18/2018	Black Americans

Note: The events are listed in the order they are referenced in the article.

individual's context at any given moment triggers the activation of one identity and quells the others (Kreiner et al., 2006; Phinney, 1990; Rothbard & Ramarajan, 2009). Accordingly, this research suggests that the work context likely activates individuals' organizational identities while deactivating their social identities (Kreiner et al., 2006). This identity-switching process is particularly important for minority employees whose social identities are intentionally managed or masked so as not to draw attention to characteristics that make them appear visibly different within the workplace (Roberts et al., 2014). Even if they are not

entirely "switched off," these social identities may stay salient, operating passively in the background and enabling minority individuals to stay vigilant for cues of possible devaluation (Emerson & Murphy, 2014; Major et al., 2002); under normal circumstances minority employees may not allow their social identities to remain activated guiding behavior while at work. Yet scholars have also posited that identities can be simultaneously coactivated, either in a compatible way, working in harmony with each other, or in a conflictual manner, interfering with one another (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Rothbard & Ramarajan, 2009).

Drawing from this work, we argue below that when decoupled from group-level processes, mega-threats have negative intrapsychic outcomes, engendering negative emotions and rumination processes that rouse minority employees' social identities and highlight the aspects of how these social identities conflict with their organizational identities. Because of the tension involved in managing both of these conflicting identities at the same time, individuals will likely experience identity interference (Hirsh & Kang, 2016; Settles, 2004) between their organizational and social identities, impeding them from fully enacting their organizational roles. However, when minority employees engage in group-level processes in response to mega-threats, these group processes act in concert with intrapsychic ones, compelling minorities to reconstruct the relationship between their conflicting organizational and social identities to produce identity fusion, a visceral sense of oneness between social and organizational identities that, we suggest, has positive organizational outcomes.

Intrapsychic Outcomes of Mega-Threats

Individual-level affective process: Negative emotions. We draw from appraisal theories of emotions (for a review see Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003) to understand individuals' affective responses to mega-threats. At the crux of this theoretical perspective is the stimulus event (Lazarus, 1991; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Events that are attention grabbing, vivid, novel, unexpected, and relevant to the needs, values, goals, or beliefs of the affected individual (Frijda, 1988; Lazarus, 1991) act as a gateway to emotion. If the event is appraised as irrelevant to the individual's concerns, the individual will return to baseline and no specific emotion will develop. If the event draws attention and is evaluated as significant with respect to an individual's goals and desires, the individual will then judge its intrinsic level of pleasantness or unpleasantness (Zajonc, 1980) as part of a swift, unconscious assessment process that is indistinguishable from the experience of attention itself (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003). An appraisal of pleasantness and overall benefit will elicit positive emotions, whereas an evaluation of unpleasantness and appraised harm will produce negative emotions (Smith & Lazarus, 1993).

We suggest that mega-threats, which are inherently negative, identity devaluing, and attention

garnering, are likely to be appraised as undesirable, deleterious occurrences for relevant groups and the individuals that belong to them. Drawing on research that has demonstrated that experiences of identity devaluation and negativity lead to anger, anxiety, and increased vigilance (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010; Vescio, Gervais, Snyder, & Hoover, 2005), we propose that mega-threats lead impacted identity group members to experience intensely negative emotions. Critically, these negative emotions also arise when individuals themselves are not directly involved in the triggering situation (Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000). For example, terror attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001, led to crippling anxiety and stress for many Americans, even those not directly involved in the attacks (Yzerbyt, Dumont, Wigboldus, & Gordijn, 2003).

In turn, we posit that a relevant mega-threat, such as a highly publicized instance of police violence enacted against a Black American, will lead Black Americans to affectively appraise this event as harmful because it highlights the potentially dangerous consequences of discrimination and racism that may befall any member of this group (Harrell, Hall, & Taliaferro, 2003; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). Based on this set of appraisals, we argue that Black Americans will be more likely to experience high-arousal, negative emotions like anger, fear, anxiety, and grief in response to this event (Bor et al., 2018; Mackie et al., 2000). By contrast, Americans of other races, for whom this event carries neither personal nor group relevance, will likely perceive this event as but one of the numerous mega-threats occurring across the world every day. Because of a habituation process that makes it difficult for individuals to have arousing, negative affective reactions to every non-self-relevant event (Anderson & Bushman, 2001), Americans who are not Black will be more likely to experience emotions like empathy, pity, or sadness, rather than the anger and anxiety experienced by Black Americans.

Individual-level cognitive process: Cognitive rumination. When exposed to a mega-threat, group members are also likely to engage in cognitive rumination in an attempt to understand the event. Rumination—repetitive, intrusive thoughts—is a common response to significant events, from interpersonal interactions to noteworthy personal life experiences (Kashdan & Roberts, 2007; Weick, 1993). We argue that, similar

to personally threatening events, mega-threats cause postevent cognitive rumination, in which individuals ruminate about the relevance of the event to themselves as individuals as well as their social identity groups.

Mega-threats cause individuals to ruminate about their social identities because these events challenge taken-for-granted notions that we live in a predictable world. As such, because people generally believe that they are personally invulnerable to negative events, that they themselves are worthy individuals, and that other people get what they deserve, exposure to mega-threats highlighting to minority group members that their identities are perceived as lower in status and desirability shatters these positive assumptions (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Because these events are perceived as unfair and in opposition to beliefs of how the world works, they cause individuals to view the world as malevolent and frightening, instead of benevolent and just (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1983), and, thus, they lead individuals to hyperfocus on their social identities. Focusing on making sense of the event and how it affects their identities—a form of cognitive rumination, or a “cognitive chewing the cud” (Cann et al., 2011: 138)—helps affected individuals rebuild an understanding of their place in the world. For instance, in reacting to the shooting of Terence Crutcher in the epigraph at the beginning of the article, Karpis Bibbs expressed fear for his personal safety and the safety of other Black Americans when interacting with police. This quote is an example of ruminative thoughts triggered by a mega-threat.

Affective-cognitive feedback loop and link to identity interference and conflict. Once triggered, these intrapsychic affective and cognitive processes are likely to have bidirectional effects (Pachankis, 2007). Cognitive rumination can maintain and intensify negative affective states (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000; Smith & Alloy, 2009) by negatively biasing individuals’ interpretations of their environment and preventing individuals from taking action to improve their mood (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995). Additionally, experiences of negative emotions also increase ruminative thought as individuals seek to understand these emotions, which then serves to further prolong experiences of negative affect (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000).

We argue that these affective and cognitive processes cause the social identity implicated by

the mega-threat to become activated at work. This experience stands in contrast to the typical identity transition process, where organizational identities switch on and non-work-relevant social identities switch off at work (Kreiner et al., 2006). This on/off switching process is especially relevant for minority employees who are more likely to censor and mask their social identities while displaying organizational ones in an attempt to reduce the salience of visible differences (Roberts et al., 2014), decrease feelings of dissimilarity in interactions with majority group members (Dumas, Phillips, & Rothbard, 2013), and exhibit a professional image (Roberts, 2005). Examples of this on/off switching abound in the literature: female scientists describe hiding their female identities when enacting a scientist identity (Settles, 2004), mothers “put on their work hats” when they enter the workplace (Ladge, Clair, & Greenberg, 2012), Black female employees describe needing to “lose their Blackness” and “act White” at work (Bell & Nkomo, 2001: 13), and homosexual men prefer to keep “personal matters out of the office” (Woods & Lucas, 1993: 68).

However, in the face of this identity-switching strategy, the shock of a mega-threat and its accompanying negative intrapsychic processes are likely to keep the social identity activated even at work, an arena in which an individual’s organizational identity is typically at the fore. From a cognitive standpoint, the process of cognitive rumination keeps the social identity at the forefront of an individual’s mind, since attempts to suppress negative thoughts about the identity are likely to fail. Indeed, research shows that during rumination, participants continue to face intrusive thoughts (Smart & Wegner, 1999) and experience a rebound effect where thoughts of the target emerge even during attempts at suppression (Wegner, Schneider, Carter, & White, 1987). This effect is especially likely at work, where resources focused on additional cognitive tasks make thought suppression an even more difficult process (Wegner & Erber, 1992). Compounding this challenge is the role of negative emotions; research has shown that thoughts that have an emotional component are more difficult to suppress and more likely to recur, especially when the emotions associated with the ruminating thoughts are negative (Edwards & Bryan, 1997; Petrie, Booth, & Pennebaker, 1998). Together, the individual’s experience of negative emotions and rumination creates an escalating effect in which

the previously switched-off social identity stays at the forefront of an individual's mind.

The activation of a social identity along with an organizational one is likely to be problematic for minority individuals because their social identities may provide divergent and incompatible sets of expectations about how to engage with others and enact behaviors at work. This, along with the negative rumination and emotions that occur as a result of a mega-threat, restricts an individual's cognitive capacity and prevents them from making positive connections between their simultaneously activated identities (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010; Rothbard & Ramarajan, 2009). Instead, we posit that the negative intrapsychic experience of mega-threats leads to the negative chronic activation of two incompatible identities, organizational and social, which will lead to identity conflict or interference (Hirsh & Kang, 2016; Rothbard & Ramarajan, 2009; Settles, 2004).

Proposition 1: Mega-threats lead to individual-level (a) negative emotions and (b) cognitive rumination that (c) influence each other through a feedback loop that (d) leads to identity interference and conflict.

The Moderating Role of Group Identification

We propose that group identification has an important moderating influence on the intrapsychic experience of mega-threats. Group identification refers to the extent to which one's membership in a particular group is incorporated into one's self-definition (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Individuals high in group identification are likely to view themselves as representatives of their group as a whole and to define themselves in terms of their group (Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Spears, Doosje, & Ellmers, 1997); in contrast, those low in group identification are likely to view their group identity as a peripheral or even a non-existent aspect of their self. For members of stigmatized groups, group identification is an important antecedent to perceptions of discrimination, and highly identified individuals are more likely to be aware of and acknowledge personal and group experiences of discrimination (Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Individuals who are highly identified with their groups are also more likely to experience identity-related threats as psychologically painful because the threats hurt a central aspect of themselves (Settles, 2004).

Building on this research, we posit that the intrapsychic experience of mega-threats will be heightened for individuals high in group identification. Because these individuals have a heightened sense of connection to their group, a mega-threat involving another group member will trigger highly arousing negative emotions. Indeed, related experiences of discrimination against their ingroup leads highly identified individuals to experience depression, sadness, and anger (Hansen & Sassenberg, 2006; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Highly identified individuals are also more likely to ruminate about a mega-threat because the event challenges an identity that is a core aspect of their self-concept, leading to repetitive negative thoughts about the event. Taking these findings together, we argue that high levels of group identification heighten the intrapsychic experience following the occurrence of a mega-threat, leading individuals to experience stronger negative emotions and higher levels of rumination. Yet we also hold that those low in group identification are also affected, albeit to a lesser degree. As such, a mega-threat may serve as the less-identified individual's first encounter with racism that triggers an awakening (Kim, 1981; Phinney, 1990), spurs the experience of immersion within their own social identity group (Cross, 1995), and leads to an increase in group identification. We therefore hold that for individuals who have low group identification, mega-threats may goad these individuals into recognizing their status as minority group members and perceiving the potential threats associated with being a member of their group. Hence, while the intrapsychic experience of mega-threats may be particularly strong for highly identified individuals, we argue that individuals low in identification also experience negative emotions and cognitions as a result of a mega-threat.

Proposition 2: Group identification will moderate the effect of mega-threats on the individual-level intrapsychic experience of mega-threats such that higher levels of identification will lead to increased negative emotions and rumination.

Facilitating Role of Group-Level Outcomes

Because mega-threats pertain to all members of a social group, individuals confronted by a

mega-threat are likely to seek out group members for emotional support and social validation. We predict that these group interactions involving group-level affective processes of emotional sharing and cognitive processes of collective sensemaking will then combine with intrapsychic identity responses to mega-threats to engender identity fusion. Identity fusion is a form of group alignment that has cognitive and affective antecedents and entails a deep, visceral feeling of "oneness" with one's groups (Swann et al., 2012). For highly fused individuals, the boundaries between their identities becomes permeable, and these identities mutually influence each other such that activating one identity necessarily activates the other (Swann et al., 2012). Below we discuss the facilitating effect of group-level processes on the development of identity fusion.

Group-level affective process: Shared emotions. Since members of a group will likely have similar individual-level emotional appraisals of a group-relevant mega-threat, we propose that processes of emotional sharing (Rimé, 1998) and emotional contagion (Barsade, 2002) will lead to group-level shared emotion. With regard to emotional sharing, abundant data demonstrate that when people directly or indirectly experience an emotionally charged event, they feel compelled to discuss their subsequent feelings with others, through a process known as the social sharing of emotion (Rimé, 2009). The more intense the emotion associated with the event, the more likely individuals are to talk about it (Luminet, Bouts, Delie, Manstead, & Rimé, 2000), and they are also likely to do so almost immediately after the emotional event has occurred, with 60 percent of people sharing their emotions on the day of the event (Gable & Reis, 2010).

This process of emotional sharing reactivates the emotional experience for the person retelling their story (Rimé, 2009), and this is especially likely for negative emotions (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). For the receiver of the emotion, the emotional narrative is in itself an emotion-eliciting situation that generates or exacerbates similar emotions (Zech & Rimé, 2005). Because people are more likely to engage in emotional sharing with members of their ingroup (Peters & Kashima, 2007), a mega-threat may be an especially potent event. For example, an online video of the shooting of a Black teen by police is likely to set off a social sharing

chain reaction among Black people, wherein every round of sharing reactivates the felt emotion within the group (Rimé, 2009) and cascades into a group-level shared emotion.

In addition, because simply interacting with an emotionally expressive individual can trigger emotional contagion processes in both face-to-face interactions (Barsade, 2002) and online communications (Kramer, Guillory, & Hancock, 2014), the emotions expressed by the sharer are also likely to be "caught" by those on the receiving end. Emotional contagion with a resulting consolidated emotion is even more likely when the receivers have experienced the same emotion-eliciting event (Elfenbein, 2014), when individuals see themselves as being on the "same side" (Lanzetta & Englis, 1989), and when they belong to the same ingroup (Van der Schalk, Fischer, Doosje, Wigbodus, & Hawk, 2011)—all factors that are relevant when members of a social group are discussing a mega-threat. Together, these affective sharing experiences will increase group shared emotion.

Group-level cognitive process: Collective sensemaking. We also propose that group members engage in collective sensemaking in which they jointly work as a group to attempt to reduce confusion in the uncertain environment created by a mega-threat. Specifically, we argue that mega-threats foment a contextual ambiguity regarding the value and meaning of social identities and that group members use collective sensemaking to reduce this ambiguity. Because collective sensemaking typically occurs through social interactions (Ashforth, 1985; Ibarra & Andrews, 1993), individuals will aim to make sense of mega-threats by interacting with similar others with whom they can engage in more intimate and open self-disclosure and also validate their beliefs (Festinger, 1954; Phillips et al., 2009).

Critically, given that individuals are more likely to engage in open communication with similar group members, they are more able to then develop a mutual understanding of the meaning of an uncertain situation (Schneider & Reichers, 1983). This development of mutual understanding may be of particular importance to Black Americans, for whom storytelling is an important tradition (Cannon, 1995; Haight, 1998) and serves as a means of conveying and preserving history (Kouyate, 1989). For example, following the death of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, African Americans created a number of Twitter

hashtags, including #WeAreTrayvonMartin, #BlackLivesMatter, and #HandsUpDontShoot, that quickly spread among Black Americans and became rallying cries for the Black Lives Matter movement (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2017; Garza, 2014). This shared sentiment among Black Americans that society does not value Black lives and that their value must be reaffirmed is an example of the collective sensemaking process that occurs among group members following a mega-threat.

The combination of group-level and individual-level processes and the development of identity fusion. These group-level affective and cognitive processes influence each other, since the cognitive process of sensemaking is an affectively charged experience for dyads and groups (Bartunek, Rousseau, Rudolph, & DePalma, 2006) and group-level shared affect is also linked to an increase in sensemaking (Kataria, Kreiner, Hollensbe, Sheep, & Stambaugh, 2018; Rimé, 2009). We posit that an overarching group-level affective and cognitive feedback loop then combines with the intrapsychic outcomes of mega-threats, leading minorities to experience identity fusion, or a visceral sense of oneness with a group that involves the elimination of boundaries between organizational and social identities (Swann et al., 2009; Swann et al., 2012).

While in prior research on identity fusion scholars have predominantly investigated fusion between personal and social identities, we posit that because identity fusion can occur with any set of salient identities (Swann et al., 2012), individuals can also experience fusion between their organizational and social identities while at work, thus compelling the continued activation of social identities, even while individuals enact their organizational roles. When coupled with the individual experience of mega-threats, the extreme group solidarity and connection fostered through group-level processes begins to spill over into an individual's organizational identity such that the organizational definition of the self begins to include the social definition of the self. Thus, highly fused individuals are likely to answer in the affirmative to both the statements "My group membership is an important part of my work identity" and "My work identity is important to my group identity." Indeed, while identity fusion—an experience that involves the simultaneous coactivation of an individual's identities—has been shown to be different from group identification—in which an individual's identities operate like a hydraulic system, with an

activated social identity reducing the salience of another identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1985)—we also suggest that it is different from similar structural identity constructs like identity coactivation (Rothbard & Ramarajan, 2009), identity integration (Kreiner et al., 2006), and identity complementarity (Dutton et al., 2010). Specifically, we suggest that while these particular constructs are similar to identity fusion because they also involve activated and merged identities, the causes, characteristics, and consequences of identity fusion differentiate this identity experience from the others. The four differentiating criteria that characterize identity fusion include the unexpected and dysphoric nature of mega-threats, the accompanying negative intrapsychic processes of rumination and emotional arousal, the coupling of these individual-level processes with group-level emotions and cognitions about mega-threats among group members, and the enactment of personally risky, progroup behaviors.

First, unlike identity coactivation and integration, which are experiences that occur in routine day-to-day situations (Kreiner et al., 2006; Rothbard & Ramarajan, 2009), identity fusion occurs as a result of unexpected, "dysphoric (i.e., painful and frightening)" occurrences experienced by all members of a group (Whitehouse et al., 2017: 2). Given that mega-threats are particularly intense dysphoric events, we posit that they are precursors to identity fusion. For example, Black Americans have been found to experience symptoms of trauma, such as loss of social status or self-regard and increased fear and anger, as a result of a police shooting of an unarmed Black American (Bor et al., 2018).

The painful nature of these events highlights the second and critical antecedent to identity fusion. Specifically, these events lead to intrapsychic processes of personal reflection (Whitehouse & Lanman, 2014) and emotional arousal (Swann, Gómez, Dovidio, Hart, & Jetten, 2010), which create intense, traumatic imagery that becomes part of individuals' self-concepts. The resulting negative emotions and rumination, which serve as one of the facilitating conditions for identity fusion, are experienced as arousing and uncomfortable and, thus, at odds with other identity constructs in which simultaneously activated identities are experienced in a positive and harmonious manner (Dutton et al., 2010; Rothbard & Ramarajan, 2009).

Third, unlike other identity coactivation experiences that are primarily individually oriented

and experienced, because mega-threats are group experiences shared by all members of a social group, they also lead to a visceral and inherent sense of similarity and connection with group members (Swann et al., 2012), and we suggest that it is this group-level connection that couples with the negative intrapsychic outcomes to lead to identity fusion. By seeing other ingroup members emotionally reacting to and making sense of the same set of upsetting experiences, individuals are likely to feel more tightly coupled with their social group (Whitehouse et al., 2017). Recent research supports our proposition by showing that reflection about shared experiences (Jong, Whitehouse, Kavanagh, & Lane, 2015; Whitehouse & Lanman, 2014) and synchronized emotions (Páez, Rimé, Basabe, Włodarczyk, & Zumeta, 2015) strengthen identity fusion by making the fused individual see all social group members, even those with whom they have little to no direct contact, as potential family members or psychological kin. For instance, while a police shooting only directly implicates the officer(s) and the victim(s) of violence, because the event makes salient the inherent risk of discrimination or harm to all identity group members, individuals in the affected group will start to perceive harm toward any of their group member(s) as harm to themselves. Last, as we describe below, the arousing and discomfiting intrapsychic experiences, coupled with group-level relevance and connections, lead individuals to engage in behaviors that are beneficial for their group but may have perilous individual outcomes.

Overall, our proposition suggests that rather than the two identities undermining or interfering with each other, as in the case of identity interference, the intrapsychic and group-level processes combine to foster fusion or interconnection between the two identities.

Proposition 3: Mega-threats lead to group-level (a) shared emotions and (b) collective sensemaking that (c) influence each other through a feedback loop that (d) interacts with individual intrapsychic responses to lead to identity fusion.

The Moderating Role of the Cultural Value of Familism

An important cultural value of many social groups is familism, an orientation toward the welfare of one's own immediate or extended

family (Gaines et al., 1997). We predict that this value of familism influences how groups respond to a mega-threat. For groups high in familism, group members are more likely to turn to each other for psychological and emotional support, which could enhance the link between mega-threats and group-level processes. In essence, high levels of familism increase the likelihood that group members will feel comfortable sharing their emotions and will engage in group sense-making processes following events that impact any member of the group. In contrast, individuals who belong to groups lower in familism are less likely to receive psychological or emotional support from their groups and are therefore less likely to share their internal cognitions or emotions with group members.

The value of familism is especially relevant to our model because minority groups, including Black Americans, tend to have higher levels of familism compared to other social groups. Consistent with an Afrocentric cultural orientation, community members are viewed as primary resources for psychological, political, and economic support, thus reinforcing familistic values for Black Americans (Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1995). Additionally, a history of oppression, including the enslavement of Africans and continued discrimination in the United States, have forced Black Americans to seek strength in numbers (Harrison et al., 1995), thus leading to increased familism. In the wake of the death of Trayvon Martin, Black Americans created the hashtag #WeAreTrayvon to express a familistic kinship with the slain teenager. This hashtag provided a common language for the shared experience, enhancing group-level emotional sharing and sensemaking.

Proposition 4: Familism will moderate the effect of mega-threats on group-level processes such that higher levels of familism will lead to increased emotional sharing and group sensemaking.

IDENTITY FUSION AND ENACTING POSITIVE DEVIANCE IN ORGANIZATIONS

We have argued that when the negative intrapsychic experience of mega-threats is decoupled from group-level processes, the coactivation of individuals' organizational and social identities leads minority employees to experience identity interference. Identities that are coactivated yet

incompatible provide opposing guidance and heighten uncertainty and conflict (Rothbard & Ramarajan, 2009), an internal experience that activates the behavioral inhibition system (BIS; Gray, 1982). The BIS, in turn, enhances anxiety, turns attention to negatively valenced information, and increases an individual's sensitivity to potential environmental threats (Hirsh & Kang, 2016). These appraisals make behavioral action seem riskier (Loewenstein, Weber, Hsee, & Welch, 2001), make individuals more reluctant to freely express their thoughts (Rubin & Asendorpf, 1993), and increase social inhibition (Hirsh & Kang, 2016). It follows, then, that the activation of the BIS that accompanies identity interference triggered by a mega-threat will lead individuals to shut down socially, remain silent, and withdraw from their organizations.

In contrast to the negative outcomes of identity interference, we argue that identity fusion, which occurs as a result of both intrapsychic and group-level processes, acts as a catalyst to positive deviance, heightening "intentional behaviors that depart from the norms of a referent group in honorable ways" (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004: 209). We posit that when minorities engage in behaviors on behalf of their social group within the organizational context, these behaviors are, in fact, "positively deviant" because they depart from organizational norms, which dictate that social identities should be deactivated—and not drive behavior—at work (Dumas et al., 2013; Roberts, 2005). Because identity fusion provides individuals with the motivational machinery to act on behalf of their group, even when those behaviors carry self-relevant risks (Swann et al., 2012), we predict that identity fusion will enhance positive deviance. Within the construct of positive deviance, we focus on the impact of identity fusion on a task-related behavior, *progroup voice*, which is a speaking-up behavior that aims to improve the organizational context for a specific social group (Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton, 1998; Bell, Özbilgin, Beauregard, & Surgevil, 2011), and a relational behavior, *relational bridging*, which involves creating ties with dissimilar others (McEvily & Zaheer, 1999).

Identity Fusion and Progroup Voice

While "voice" is broadly described as discretionary speaking-up behavior aimed at enhancing organizational functioning (for a review see Morrison, 2014), we focus specifically on *progroup*

voice, a speaking-up behavior that aims to improve the organizational context for employees who belong to a specific social group (Ashford et al., 1998; Bell et al., 2011). This form of voice is aimed at improving the organization because it fosters a sense of inclusion, empowerment, and belonging for minority employees (Bell et al., 2011), but it may be considered an act of positive deviance because it challenges the status quo (Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). For minority employees in particular, who are accustomed to concealing their identities at work (Phillips et al., 2009) for fear of drawing attention to differences that activate low-status demographic stereotypes or result in backlash (Hekman, Johnson, Foo, & Yang, 2017; Roberts, 2005), engaging in this form of voice may be especially risky. Given pressures to remain silent, many minority employees may decide not to engage in *progroup voice*, a decision that would prevent organizations from successfully achieving parity and inclusion across groups.

We argue that one important antecedent to *progroup voice* is identity fusion, a state that provides minorities with the motivation necessary to engage in risky *progroup voice* for two reasons. First, strongly fused individuals come to see their group members as family (Swann et al., 2014), a perception often manifested in linguistic expressions of kinship among group members (e.g., Black Americans routinely refer to each other as "brothers and sisters"; Atran, 2010; Baugh, 1991). This experience of kinship causes group members to perceive a threat to any group member as a threat to the self, compelling fused individuals to defend the group (Swann et al., 2009). Second, because identity fusion involves the simultaneous activation of personal and social selves, activating either identity inevitably galvanizes the other and produces a "motivational oomph" (Swann et al., 2012: 3) that drives fused individuals to engage in risky *progroup* behavior, such as fighting and dying on behalf of one's group (Buhrmester, Fraser, Lanman, Whitehouse, & Swann, 2014; Gómez et al., 2011).

At work, *progroup voice* allows fused individuals to continue to enact organizational roles while simultaneously demonstrating commitment to their social group. Football player Colin Kaepernick's decision to take a knee during the U.S. National Anthem before an NFL game is an example of organizational *progroup voice*. Kaepernick has described feeling compelled to

voice his concern about the injustice and brutality routinely faced by fellow Black Americans at the hands of police, even while continuing to enact his role as an NFL player during football games. In line with this sentiment, Kaepernick stated, in an August 28, 2016, interview:

This stand wasn't for me. This stand wasn't because I feel like I'm being put down in any kind of way. This is because I'm seeing things happen to people that don't have a voice, people that don't have a platform to talk and have their voices heard, and effect change. I refuse to be one of those people who watches injustices yet does nothing (Biderman, 2016).

Based on this, we propose the following.

Proposition 5: Identity fusion leads minority employees to engage in pro-group voice within organizations.

Identity Fusion and Relational Bridging

Diversity research shows that people prefer to interact with those who share their demographic characteristics (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001), forming bonding ties with similar others even in diverse group settings (Mollica, Gray, & Trevino, 2003). However, these bonding ties, while individually beneficial, also cause groups to become fragmented and insulated (Carton & Cummings, 2013). Importantly, alongside relational bonding that occurs with similar others, individuals can also engage in *relational bridging*, connecting with dissimilar persons or with fragmented groups (McEvily & Zaheer, 1999). This can be considered a positively deviant behavior for minorities because it involves going against organizational norms by integrating "one's gendered and cultural experiences into the values and practices of the work environment" (Roberts, 2012: 834). Indeed, because high-quality organizational relationships are developed through the exchange of authentic self-disclosure and the expression of both positive and negative emotions (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003), minorities' engagement in relational bridging with dissimilar others involves "peeling off the mask" (Roberts, 2012: 834) in interactions—that is, revealing their authentic selves. This process can be challenging because divulging aspects of social identities with dissimilar others may lead to the revelation of dissimilarities or the confirmation of negative group stereotypes (Dumas et al., 2013; Shelton & Richeson, 2005).

Critically, however, authentically building strong ties with majority group members while maintaining connections with their minority group enables individuals to use the organizational rhetoric of majority powerholders to help majority group members engage in perspective taking (Batson et al., 1997), to build coalitions (Meyerson & Scully, 1995), and to build momentum toward change on behalf of lower-status members (Bell, Meyerson, Nkomo, & Scully, 2003). We posit that identity fusion acts as a catalyst that enables relational bridging. As such, fusion between organizational and social identities enhances a sense of authenticity (Roberts, 2012) and wholeness (Kahn, 1990) that provides minority organizational members with the motivation to integrate aspects of their cultural heritage into their organizational relationships, which, in turn, allows them to build authentic relationships with similar and dissimilar others (Dutton et al., 2010; Roberts, 2012). Additionally, based on research positing that fused individuals perceive all identity group members as psychological kin (Swann et al., 2012), we assert that identity fusion leads minorities to view individuals from their social group *as well as* their organization as related and, thus, similar to them. These perceptions of similarity magnify connectedness to members within the organization and decrease the perceived risk of self-disclosure that typically accompanies interactions with dissimilar others (Phillips et al., 2009). Thus, identity fusion provides individuals with the courage to go against organizational norms and express their authentic selves while interacting with dissimilar others, which provides the foundation for the development of broader and deeper relationships with others (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Roberts, 2012). Examples of relational bridging sparked by mega-threats and identity fusion can be found in NFL locker rooms across the country. Sports commentators have noted that NFL locker rooms have become "cauldrons of activism," where teammates who belong to different racial groups engage in discussions about race and politics (Freeman, 2017), which has led players to develop deeper relationships across racial divides. These bridging behaviors have led White players, like Aaron Rodgers, to engage in discussions about racial inequality (*The Guardian*, 2017a) and others, like Seth DeValve, to take a knee during the anthem, stating in an August 21, 2017, interview, "I wanted to take the opportunity with my teammates during the

anthem to pray for our country, and also to draw attention to the fact that we have work to do" (*The Guardian*, 2017b).

Based on these arguments, we propose the following.

Proposition 6: Identity fusion leads minority employees to engage in relational bridging within organizations.

MODERATORS OF THE IDENTITY FUSION-POSITIVE DEVIANCE LINK

While identity fusion may add fuel to the motivational fire, enabling fused individuals to engage in positive deviance behaviors, the risks of termination and demotion that often are associated with these behaviors (Detert & Edmondson, 2011) may constrain individuals, forcing them to remain withdrawn and silent. However, we suggest that when individuals feel empowered to enact change, this experience of psychological power provides them with the agency to act on behalf of their identity groups, because power increases the likelihood that individuals will defy social norms (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003) and engage in risky behaviors (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006). Individuals who have powerful allies or are positioned within an empowering environment are more likely to experience a higher sense of power (Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984), which, in turn, drives positive deviance behaviors. Thus, we explore three empowering and facilitating factors that enhance the likelihood that fusion will lead to positive change: leader compassion, organizational climate for inclusion, and organizational demography.

The Moderating Role of Leader Compassion

We propose that leader compassion moderates the influence of identity fusion on the enactment of positive deviance. Compassion, a discrete emotion (Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010), involves three subprocesses: noticing a person's suffering, vicariously placing oneself in that person's "emotional shoes," and responding by taking action to alleviate the suffering (Kanov et al., 2004). At work, leaders' compassion is especially effective since their higher levels of power enable them to recognize and offer assistance upon noticing their followers' distress (Melwani, Mueller, & Overbeck, 2012). This other-focus facilitates leaders' ability to engage in supportive helping

behaviors, such as listening, counseling, and advocating (Settoon & Mossholder, 2002), when their followers are suffering owing to the occurrence of a mega-threat. Importantly, because the experience of compassion makes leaders more likely to vicariously experience their subordinates' suffering (Kanov et al., 2004), higher levels of leader compassion may increase the likelihood that leaders will engage in helping behaviors or encourage progroup behavior even in situations where the leaders, or the organizations they belong to, are not especially inclusive of diversity. The short-term experience and expression of leader compassion then serves as a model of appropriate responses to others in the organization, setting the stage for a more inclusive organization in the long term (Dutton, Frost, Worline, Lilius, & Kanov, 2002).

Low-power minority employees who perceive that their leaders understand their travails and are aiming to help them will feel empowered to speak up on behalf of their group. Additionally, because compassionate leaders are likely to display concern for their followers' well-being (Scott, Colquitt, Paddock, & Judge, 2010), this should increase self-disclosure, setting the foundation for relational bridging ties. Thus, compassionate leaders strengthen the effect of identity fusion on progroup voice and relational bridging such that these leaders provide their followers with the social support and empowerment needed to engage in task- and relational-oriented change. We therefore propose the following.

Proposition 7: Leader compassion moderates the effect of identity fusion on progroup voice and relational bridging in organizations such that high levels of leader compassion (a) increase progroup voice and (b) increase relational bridging after a mega-threat.

The Moderating Role of Organizational Climate

We propose that, at the organizational level, organizational climate for inclusion is an additional moderator of the influence of identity fusion on positive deviance. Inclusion is defined as an employee's perception that their unique contribution to an organization is fully appreciated and their full participation is encouraged (Mor Barak, 2015; Shore et al., 2011); in turn, a climate for inclusion is the shared perception that inclusive behaviors are expected, supported, and rewarded

within the organization (Nishii, 2013; Shore et al., 2011).

An organization's climate for inclusion includes fairly implemented employment practices, integration of differences, and inclusion in decision making (Nishii, 2013). These components collectively lower the risk and increase individuals' power to reveal core aspects of their self-concept or culture without suffering negative consequences (Nishii, 2013), thus making it imperative to the enactment of positive deviance within organizations. Specifically, based on the assertion that a high climate for inclusion ensures that diverse individuals are included in decision-making processes (Nishii, 2013; Shore et al., 2011), we argue that these environments lead individuals who are motivated to speak up on behalf of their group to feel psychologically empowered (Spreitzer, 1996) to do so, thus increasing progroup voice. In contrast, organizations with exclusionary climates may penalize individuals for speaking up on behalf of their marginalized groups, a notion supported by the NFL's recent decision to fine players engaging in progroup voice by kneeling on the football field during the National Anthem (Ortiz, 2018). Indeed, while many players may still have the motivation to engage in progroup voice by taking a knee, the NFL's lack of support for these actions may preclude players from engaging in this positively deviant behavior.

Additionally, within inclusionary organizations that integrate differences across their members by enabling them to routinely include portions of their cultural identities into their workplace interactions (Nishii, 2013), individuals may feel more empowered to reveal their social identities in interpersonal interactions with dissimilar others and, thus, engage in higher levels of relational bridging. Based on this, we propose the following.

Proposition 8: Climate for inclusion moderates the effect of identity fusion on progroup voice and relational bridging such that high levels of climate for inclusion (a) increase progroup voice and (b) increase relational bridging following a mega-threat.

The Crucial Role of Organizational Demography

Organizational demography, which we define as the demographic composition of an organization

(Williams & O'Reilly, 1998), is a powerful cue about who is valued within organizations. A large representation of minority group members in an organizational context, especially at higher levels in a firm, signals to employees that minorities are esteemed members of the organization and that it is safe to include characteristics or aspects of a represented social identity in the organizational context (Ely, 1995). We therefore argue that higher levels of organizational demographic diversity boost the effects of identity fusion on positive deviance by enhancing leader compassion and perceptions of an inclusionary climate.

With regard to leaders' experiences and expressions of compassion, shared demographic attributes, or even a common experience of "otherness," will enable those in positions of power to notice their subordinates' experiences of distress, as well as readily empathize with them. This will inevitably lead to increased expressions of compassion, which will, in turn, enable fused minority individuals to engage in more risky change-oriented behaviors across the organization. Even when the leaders themselves are not demographically similar to their subordinates, an organization with a large number of demographically diverse leaders will be more aware of negative, identity-relevant mega-threats, and this increased level of consciousness may cascade through the organization. Furthermore, higher levels of minority representation is an essential component of individuals' perceptions of how inclusionary the organizational climate is (Roberson, 2006), especially when the demographic diversity is at the upper echelons of the organization (Ely, 1995). Thus, in a demographically diverse organization, because individuals are likely to perceive higher levels of tolerance, openness, and inclusion (Kanter, 1977), they may be more likely to view the organization as a safe place to take risks and speak up about issues related to their social group.

Proposition 9: Organizational demographic diversity moderates the effect of leader compassion and climate for inclusion on the enactment of positive deviance such that high levels of organizational demographic diversity (a) increase leader compassion and (b) increase organizational climate for inclusion.

DISCUSSION

Organizations, often described as open systems (Katz & Kahn, 1978), are impacted by events that occur both within and outside their boundaries. However, management theories have traditionally remained silent about the influence of macrolevel or societal-level events on organizations and the employees within them (Johns, 2006; Morgeson et al., 2015). In this article we develop a dual-pathway model that explains the psychological effects of one type of societal event—mega-threats—on minority employees in organizations. We argue that the coupling of intrapsychic reactions and group-level interactions triggered by mega-threats leads employees belonging to affected identity groups to become more deeply connected to their social groups, and this connection remains salient even at work when organizational identities come to the fore. This blurring of the boundaries between organizational and social identities, an experience called identity fusion, then compels employees to engage in progroup voice and relational bridging—positive deviance behaviors that go against individual and organizational norms dictating that minorities suppress their social identities at work. Below we describe three important theoretical implications of our model for research.

Theoretical Contributions

Research on events. As a solution to Johns's concern that "research in organizational behavior is seldom timely enough to capture the impact of such events as the Enron meltdown or the September 11 tragedy" (2006: 390), we develop a model of the top-down effects of mega-threats on organizations. By explicating the process through which mega-threats influence lower-level organizational phenomena, our model makes numerous theoretical contributions to research on events and diversity. First, by introducing the concept of mega-threats and highlighting the unique influence of mega-threats on minority employees, we extend research on mega-events (Luo et al., 2016; McNamara et al., 2018; Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013). Prior work has demonstrated that mega-events, such as the Olympics or natural disasters, have important organizational consequences (Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013). However, scholars have not considered the influence of other types of important, highly publicized societal events, like police shootings or religious

attacks. Our theory suggests that mega-threats are especially pertinent occurrences for minority employees, because these events act as stressors that highlight discrimination and/or harm that routinely befalls minority group members both in organizations and in society. Moreover, we suggest that these events cause minority group members to experience adverse intrapsychic outcomes that in the absence of group-level interactions may lead to negative organizational consequences, such as silence or withdrawal. By explaining the spillover effects of mega-threats on minority employees, our theory demonstrates the far-reaching consequences of mega-threats on organizations and the individuals within them. Second, our article advances diversity research by calling attention to societal events as an underexplored influence on organizational diversity. In examining the effect of diversity on organizational outcomes, scholars have rarely considered the influence of macrosocietal context on diversity (Joshi & Roh, 2009). Our model takes a step toward filling this gap by highlighting the cross-level effects of changes in macrosocietal context on perceptions of organizational diversity. We suggest that mega-threats trigger the chronic activation of social identities, which, in turn, motivates minority employees to enact behaviors to advance their social identity group within their organizations. By highlighting the permeability of societal and organizational boundaries, our work illuminates the connection between macrosocietal occurrences and diversity-related cognitions and behaviors within organizations.

Third, our article also contributes to research on social media use and its outcomes in organizations (Mcfarland & Ployhart, 2015) in two ways. As such, because of the wide and fast reach of online news media, organizational boundaries have become more permeable, which we posit enables external societal events to capture the attention of employees and influence employee behavior at work. Furthermore, because social media platforms have revolutionized the way people connect and communicate with each other (Beal & Strauss, 2008), facilitating virtual community building, employees can easily apprehend the reactions of ingroup members similarly affected by an event, even those who are not part of their organization. We theorize that these group-level interactions, coupled with intrapsychic responses to mega-threats, foster a deep connection between an

individual and their social group, which may influence behavior in the workplace. Consequently, even for individuals who do not have other ingroup members to talk to at work, they may still experience the benefits of group-level processing by engaging in interactions with other group members online.

Dynamic experiences of diversity in organizations. Understanding the influence of mega-threats on minority employees has important implications for the organizational diversity literature. In most diversity research scholars operate under the assumption that an organization's diversity, and employees' experiences of diversity within organizations, remains static and unchanging (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). However, taking an identity lens, we illustrate that, in fact, diversity is a mutable characteristic, and broad societal factors can influence how it changes. Specifically, by explaining how mega-threats alter the relationship between organizational and social identities and, thus, lead to changes in experiences and perspectives of minority organizational members, we demonstrate the dynamic nature of diversity within organizations.

The implications of diversity's being variable rather than stable are many. For instance, our model suggests that perceptions of inclusion within a particular organizational context may change as a result of the occurrence of a mega-threat. We posit that mega-threats bring social identities to the fore, which may lead minority employees to then reexamine their organization's support of diversity, especially in light of the event. If minority employees assess their organization's actions as deficient, diminished perceptions of inclusion could then lead these employees to feel alienated, reducing morale and increasing turnover (Shore et al., 2011), even without any change in organizational diversity policies. Furthermore, we suggest that these altered identities could lead minorities to engage in change-oriented behaviors aimed at moving their organizations from monocultural environments, in which racial differences are minimized or ignored, to ones that value differences and deal openly with racial conflict and diversity issues (Cox, 1991). These varied responses to mega-threats create different environments that may enhance or inhibit minority employee retention.

In addition, in integrating research on diversity and positive deviance, our article highlights the

potential paradoxical effect of mega-threats on organizations. While mega-threats are overwhelmingly negative occurrences, our propositions suggest that organizations may, in fact, reap positive long-term benefits from these events. Our theory posits that identity fusion, experienced as a result of a mega-threat, motivates employees to engage in risky change-oriented behaviors that benefit their social group in organizations. In examining the positive effects of organizational deviant behavior, researchers have examined behaviors such as voice, whistle-blowing, and issue selling (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004; Vadera et al., 2013). We complement these perspectives by highlighting the positively deviant nature of two diversity-related behaviors: pro-group voice and relational bridging. Moreover, existing positive deviance theory has not considered the moderating organizational factors that may inhibit positive deviance (Vadera et al., 2013). Our theory posits that climate for inclusion, leader compassion, and organizational demography are important organizational factors that may enhance or inhibit the enactment of positive deviance. In doing so our article highlights the important influence of context on positive deviance.

Last, our article introduces the identity construct of identity fusion to the organizational identity literature. Although there are numerous constructs that describe the typical identity processes that individuals continually engage in while transitioning from different contexts or performing different roles (Dutton et al., 2010; Kreiner et al., 2006; Rothbard & Ramarajan, 2009), the antecedents of identity fusion differ from these existing identity processes in two important ways. First, existing theories assume that individuals consciously employ integration tactics or experience positive emotions that allow them to build linkages among their multiple identities (Dutton et al., 2010; Kreiner et al., 2006). Conversely, the development of identity fusion is primarily unconscious and occurs because of an exogenous unexpected dysphoric experience (Whitehouse et al., 2017). Second, these theories primarily focus on intrapsychic identity processes, remaining silent on the influence of group-level processes on individuals' identities. In contrast, we suggest that it is the coupling of individual personal reflection and group-level interactions that kindles identity fusion (Jong et al., 2015; Swann et al., 2012). Thus, identity

fusion provides important contributions to the organizational identity literature because it explains the influence of both individual- and group-level processes that may unfold as a result of a negative experience—namely, a mega-threat. Moreover, the unique experience and outcomes of identity fusion—specifically, the extreme feeling of oneness with a group that defines identity fusion and the resulting enactment of zealous progroup behavior (e.g., Swann et al., 2009)—add to the existing literature by providing a theoretical mechanism that explains the influence of societal-level threats on progroup behavior enacted in organizations.

Highlighting the experience of Black employees. By focusing particularly on police brutality and violence enacted against Black Americans as the mega-threat under study, our theory contributes a unique perspective to the organizational literature. Most organizational theories are race-neutral, and discussions of race and the experiences of minorities remain scarce (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Nkomo, 1992). By focusing on the experiences of Black Americans coping with mega-threats, our theory joins a growing body of research that is centered on the experiences of Black employees (e.g., Bell & Nkomo, 2001; McCluney et al., 2017; Opie & Roberts, 2017). We theorize that high levels of connection or familism (Gaines et al., 1997) among Black Americans lead group members to experience highly arousing negative cognitions and emotions after a mega-threat involving Black victims, and these cognitions and emotions permeate their organizational lives, compelling progroup behavior within organizations. By using examples that are particularly relevant to Black Americans, our article demonstrates the importance of understanding the experiences of minority organizational members for fully understanding and predicting behavior in organizations.

Directions for Future Research

Positive versus negative mega-events. While our article focuses on mega-threats alone, research in this domain would gain from a better understanding of positive mega-events as well. For example, in contrast to our examples of police shootings of Black Americans, how would a contrasting positive event, such as the historic election of President Barack H. Obama in 2008, affect Black Americans at work? Indeed, although prior

work suggests that negative dysphoric experiences associated with mega-threats are crucial to the development of identity fusion, a recent study highlights that positive group events may also have similar effects on identity fusion (Newson, Buhrmester, & Whitehouse, 2016). While this remains an open question, further research is also needed to clarify whether the pathways to identity fusion are the same for both euphoric and dysphoric experiences. Research is also needed to better understand the differences in the downstream consequences of positive and negative events for ingroup members.

In addition, while we explore the effects of mega-threats for minority group members and propose that majority group members may also feel negative emotions in response to mega-threats, it is important to explore how majority group members may respond to mega-events that have positive outcomes for minority groups. Mega-threats enable majority group members to engage in compassion and other helping behaviors, which, while valuable, may also serve the purpose of maintaining the status quo such that members of dominant groups can preserve the status hierarchy by reminding minorities that their rewards and resources are at least partly dependent on majority members' largesse. However, positive mega-events that have the capacity to disrupt societal hierarchical arrangements may benefit minorities but may also be threatening for those in majority groups. For example, the U.S. Supreme Court decision to nationally legalize same-sex marriage was positive for LGBTQ group members and allies, but this event was perceived negatively and actively attacked by many dominant religious groups (Pearson, Sanchez, & Martinez, 2015). Similarly, the election of President Obama led an already dominant majority group to experience threat, triggering a protective defense of their own ingroup and outgroup negativity (Mutz, 2018).

Role of majority members. In continuing the discussion of the role of majority members, further research questions arise. First, future research should investigate how majority group members respond to mega-threats for their own group. One possible outcome is that majority group members are less likely to experience identity fusion in response to a mega-threat because majority groups have lower levels of familism compared to minority groups (Gaines et al., 1997). A lack of familistic values prevents individuals from engaging

in group-level processes and experiencing their fusion-related outcomes.

A second question concerns whether individuals in dominant groups are immune to the effects of mega-threats. Because dominant group members (e.g., White males) do not routinely experience discrimination in society, they may be buffered from actually experiencing threat as a result of a mega-threat. Yet, because individuals in positions of power are sensitive to potential losses of power (Mutz, 2018), these dominant group members may be especially susceptible to the experience of mega-threats. Thus, scholars should investigate whether the experience of threat and the downstream consequences of these events are the same for majority and minority social groups.

In addition, future work should also investigate the role of majority allies who work to ameliorate threat for minority group members. In our discussion of compassionate leaders, we suggest that majority group members may enable positive deviance by empowering their employees to defy organizational norms (Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Zanoni & Janssens, 2007). However, future research would benefit from a more comprehensive review of the facilitating role that majority group members play in the enactment of progroup positive deviance in organizations.

Additional moderators. We also recommend that researchers examine additional moderators of the effect of mega-threats on identity fusion. Features of mega-threats, such as the event length or frequency, may be important factors in the development of identity fusion. Our model provides a snapshot of individuals' responses to mega-threats; however, the mega-threats themselves may have varying levels of lasting power. While the effects of shorter mega-threats (e.g., shooting of a Black teen) may be short-lived, the influence of longer mega-threats (e.g., slavery) may continue to be passed down to subsequent generations through traditions and oral histories, thus keeping the threat alive. Furthermore, multiple events like police shootings that occur closely in space and time form a distinctive event "cluster" (Morgeson et al., 2015) that can have significantly stronger effects on individual and group outcomes. Finally, the location of a mega-threat may be an important factor that influences the effect of the event. While we primarily have used examples of police shootings of Black Americans to demonstrate the main tenets of our

theory, we developed our model to explain the organizational effects of all mega-threats that occur both within and outside of the United States. Future research would benefit from investigating the applicability of our model in other contexts and with other mega-threats that are relevant to other types of social identities (e.g., religion, sexuality, etc.).

Additional moderators may also occur at the individual, dyadic, or group level. For instance, at the individual level, an individual's organizational identification may play an important role. For individuals high in organizational identification whose organizational role is an important aspect of their self-definition, fusion between social and organizational identities may be more likely to occur since both are extremely important to their self-concept. However, it is also plausible that high levels of organizational identification could reduce an individual's connection with their group, which may prevent identity fusion. Another individual-level factor that may influence the development of identity fusion is the employee's level of power. Individuals who have high levels of legitimate power coupled with high levels of personal power may be more likely to act when in a fused state, compared to those with lower levels of power. At the dyadic level, an employee's relationship with their leader, as well as a leader's own values, background, and prior experiences of trauma, may influence the extent to which the leader experiences compassion and acts to help their employees. At the group level, given that our theory suggests that ingroup interactions are the chief precursor to identity fusion, future research should explore whether the location of these ingroup interactions, either at work or outside of work, influences the development of fusion between organizational and social identities. While we stay agnostic about the location of these interactions and whether they occur face to face or online, this research can explore whether the effects of the group are stronger or weaker when they happen at or outside of work.

Practical Implications

Because organizations typically provide few guidelines for responding to external events (Johns, 2006), managers may often overlook or ignore the influence of these events on their followers. Our model may assist managers in

understanding and supporting their employees when they are coping with a mega-threat. One important implication of our theory is that diversity is dynamic and differences that are due to social identity group membership can become more pronounced after a mega-threat. Importantly, our theory highlights that in order to successfully manage a diverse workforce, organizations must attend to both internal and external events. This may seem like a tall order, but we do not believe that organizations must respond individually to every mega-threat as they occur. Instead, deriving from our propositions, we argue that compassionate leaders provide support to their followers that may empower them to respond to mega-threats in a positive manner.

A second practical implication of our theory is that while mega-threats are negative occurrences, organizations may reap positive benefits from these occurrences, in the form of increased progroupp voice and relational bridging. These behaviors are similar to extrarole behaviors, like helping behaviors, which may be outside the scope of an individual's core job tasks but are beneficial to organizations in the long run. However, we argue that minorities will only engage in such behavior when the organizational context supports the enactment of social identities, which may be different from those typically enacted within the organizational environment. Thus, our theory argues that organizations that have high levels of inclusion facilitate the enactment of identity fusion and the resulting positive behaviors that allow organizations to reap long-term benefits from mega-threats.

CONCLUSION

This article highlights the importance of examining the influence of events occurring outside an organization on individuals and diversity at work. We join other organizational scholars who have recently highlighted the importance of societal context (Johns, 2006) and mega-events on organizations (Luo et al., 2016; McNamara et al., 2018; Morgeson et al., 2015; Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013), and we begin to answer the call to develop theory that explains the dynamic nature of diversity (Shore et al., 2009) at work. It is our hope that our theory of mega-threats generates additional momentum in the study of events and the dynamic nature of diversity.

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