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"AM I NEXT?" THE SPILLOVER EFFECTS OF MEGA-THREATS ON AVOIDANT BEHAVIORS AT WORK

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"Mega-threats"—negative, identity-relevant societal events that receive significant media attention—are frequent occurrences in society, yet the influence of these events on employees remains unclear. We draw on the theory of racialized organizations to explain the process whereby exposure to mega-threats leads to heightened avoidant work behaviors for racial minority employees. We theorize and find—across two studies centered upon various mega-threats, including a mass shooting targeting Asian Americans and police killings of Black civilians—that event observers who share identities with mega-threat victims become vicarious victims, which triggers an experience of "embodied threat," an appraisal of the increased likelihood of personally encountering identity-based harm. The experience of embodied threat coupled with the racialized nature of organizational structures, which limits the agency of racial minorities, then compels employees to engage in threat suppression. Furthermore, we find that threat suppression consumes psychological resources, leading to heightened avoidant work behaviors, or higher work withdrawal and lower social engagement, but, when the psychological safety of identity-based discussions is high, it attenuates this effect. Altogether, our paper advances research on mega-threats and race in organizations, and yields practical insights that can assist managers in reducing the detrimental effects of mega-threats on employees.

Societal events have the potential to shake the foundations of communities and organizations. The 2012 shooting of Black teenager Trayvon Martin by a White neighborhood watch volunteer captured the attention of millions of Americans and sparked the creation of the Black Lives Matter social movement. The highly publicized exposé detailing numerous sexual assault allegations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein in October 2017 inspired 1.7 million tweets and ignited the #MeToo social movement. In 2020, millions of people watched a video of a Black man named George Floyd being brutally murdered by police, sparking global protests against police brutality and racism and instigating structural police reform (Hassan & O'Grady, 2020). While these examples highlight the far-reaching influence that large-scale events have had on societal structures (Zald, Morrill, & Rao, 2005), the impact of these events on organizations has received limited attention from management scholars (cf. Leigh & Melwani, 2019; McCluney, Bryant, King, & Ali, 2017).

Recognizing the importance of these large-scale societal events for organizations, Leigh and Melwani (2019) introduced the construct of "mega-threats," defined as negative, identity-relevant occurrences that receive significant media attention. With the mega-threat of police brutality against Black Americans in the foreground, the authors proposed that these mega-threats elicit visceral emotional and cognitive reactions from Black Americans, who share a racial identity with event victims. This prediction was borne out in a multi-wave survey of more than

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100,000 Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) that provided a disheartening picture of the impact of mega-threats on Black Americans. In the week after the murder of George Floyd, the number of Black Americans with chronic levels of anxiety and depression jumped from 36% to 41%: an increase of 1.4 million people. In contrast, White respondents did not have similar adverse mental health effects. Additional work shows that Black Americans, but not White Americans, report a higher number of poor mental health days during weeks when two or more incidents of anti-Black violence occur and when national interest in these events is high (Curtis et al., 2021). These findings demonstrate that mega-threats reduce identity group members' psychological well-being. In this paper, we delve deeper by asking how and why exposure to mega-threats influence individual work behaviors.

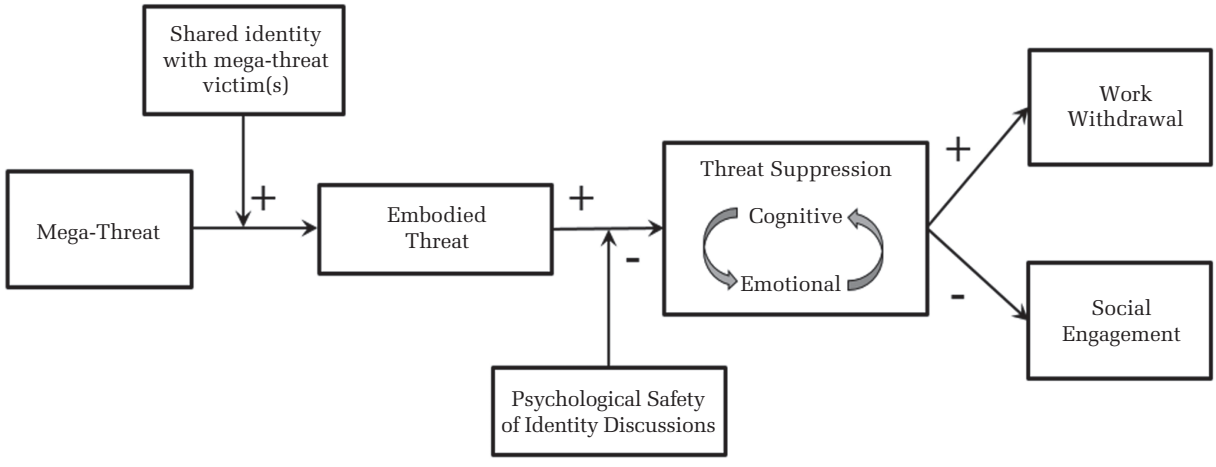
We addressed this open research question by theorizing and empirically testing a multistage process model demonstrating that mega-threats traverse organizational boundaries to have deleterious downstream effects on individual-level work behaviors. Deviating from traditional organizational scholarship, which often relies on the assumption that organizations are race-neutral, bureaucratic structures (Nkomo, 1992), we use the theory of racialized organizations (Ray, 2019) to guide our research. This theory views race as a foundational aspect of organizations that permeates all aspects of organizational life (Ray, 2019). With this theory at the center, the overarching proposition of our paper is that the racialized nature of organizations (Ray, 2019) compels racial minority employees to suppress their reactions to mega-threats, leading to adverse avoidant work behaviors in both task and interpersonal domains.

We explicate the process through which mega-threats lead to avoidant work behaviors by integrating Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations with those of identity (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008) and embodied cognition (Barsalou, 1999; Freeman, 2017). We propose that, because mega-threats are identity related (or event observers perceive that victims of mega-threats were harmed because of their identity; Leigh & Melwani, 2019), observers who share this harmed identity become *vicarious victims* of the event. A process of embodied cognition (Barsalou, 1999; Freeman, 2017) then leads these vicarious victims to experience "embodied threat," a heightened awareness of the increased likelihood of personally experiencing harm because of one's identity. We posit that embodied threat, similar to other identity-based experiences of threat (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Schmader et al., 2008), is a negative, highly arousing experience that remains at the fore even as individuals enter their workspaces. Then, because organizations are racialized structures that diminish the agency and constrain the emotional expressions of racial minorities (Hitlin & Elder, 2007; Ray, 2019; Wingfield, 2010), those experiencing embodied threat are compelled to suppress this threat at work. This effortful threat suppression process then consumes psychological resources and prompts avoidance behaviors that manifest as increased work withdrawal (Hanisch & Hulin, 1990) and decreased social engagement (Soane, Truss, Alfes, Shantz, Rees, & Gatenby, 2012), which allow employees to conserve their remaining resources (Hobfoll, 1989).

We also aim to answer the question of how organizations can buffer threatened employees from the negative consequences of mega-threats. Drawing from work on psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999; Liang, Farh, & Farh, 2012) and identity safety (Bell, Özbilgin, Beauregard, & Sürgevil, 2011; McCluney et al., 2017), we propose that the presence or absence of discussions about race and other stigmatized identities within organizations leads individuals to develop implicit beliefs about the safety of discussing experiences related to their identities (Bell et al., 2011; McCluney et al., 2017; Purdie-Vaughns & Walton, 2011). When the psychological safety of identity-based discussions is low, or individuals believe that it is especially unsafe to engage in identity-based discussions, it encourages silence (Sherf, Parke, & Isaakyan, 2021) or compels individuals to suppress their experience of embodied threat. However, when the psychological safety of identity-based discussions is high, it reduces the need for individuals to engage in threat suppression, effectively interrupting the deleterious process through which mega-threats lead to increased avoidant work behaviors.

Overall, our research makes four important contributions to management theory. First, we center on the role of race in organizations. Nkomo (1992, 2021) asserted that, although race represents a major basis of power in society and organizations, the influence of race is rarely considered when developing management theories. Instead, most existing theories treat organizations as if they are race neutral. With Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations in the foreground, we explicate how White organizational norms and racialized feeling rules affect how racial

FIGURE 1
Theoretical Model of the Influence of Mega-Threats on Avoidant Work Behaviors



Notes: Figure 1 is a pictorial representation of our theory. In our empirical investigation of mega-threats, we examine employees' psychological responses to mega-threats after they occur. Thus, our hypotheses and analyses examine shared identity with mega-threat victim(s) (or race) as the independent variable.

minority employees respond to mega-threats at work. Second, by explicating the process through which mega-threats lead to increased avoidant work behaviors, we add to research outside of the management field that has demonstrated the detrimental effects of mega-threats on individual's psychological well-being (Bor, Venkataramani, Williams, & Tsai, 2018; Curtis et al., 2021; Paterson, Brown, & Walters, 2019) and we address calls for management scholarship on contemporary issues, such as the impact of societal occurrences on diversity (Nkomo, Bell, Roberts, Joshi, & Thatcher, 2019). Third, by developing the construct of embodied threat, we contribute to existing research on identity-based threats (Holmes, Whitman, Campbell, & Johnson, 2016; Petriglieri, 2011). This construct adds to current conceptions of identity threat, which primarily focus on stereotyping or identity devaluation, by more explicitly considering threat that arises due to fear of personally encountering identity-based physical harm, including death. Last, our paper extends research on diversity and psychological safety (Bell et al., 2011; Purdie-Vaughns & Walton, 2011). Our work suggests that, when individuals feel safe to discuss issues related to identity in the workplace, it can reduce the need to engage in threat suppression. Thus, we offer insight into the relationship between the psychological safety of identity-based discussions and the effects of mega-threats on employees.

In sum, this paper provides a comprehensive theory that explicates the negative consequences of mega-threats on racial minority employees at work (see Figure 1), and we empirically test this theory across two studies. We conclude by offering theoretical and practical insights from our research and an agenda for future research into the effects of mega-threats on organizations.

CONCEPTUALIZING MEGA-THREATS

Event system theory describes organizations as open systems (Scott & Davis, 2015) in which individual employees are affected by extraordinary events that occur both within and outside the confines of organizations (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Morgeson, Mitchell, & Liu, 2015). This theory explains that "events"—defined as discrete, observable, nonroutine episodes that have a discernable beginning and end (Morgeson et al., 2015)—have multilevel effects within organizations and traverse the work–life interface. Building on this work, recent research suggests that highly publicized societal-level events also have far-reaching effects at multiple levels, from the organizational (Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013) to the individual level (Leigh & Melwani, 2019). Indeed, theorizing on the direct impact of societal events, Morgeson and colleagues (2015) : 525) stated that "one has only to look at such things as serious natural disasters, extreme market fluctuations, or terrorist attacks to understand how virtually every aspect of organizational life can be affected."

Drawing from this work, Leigh and Melwani (2019) introduced a theory of *mega-threats*, defined by three criteria. First, mega-threats are overwhelmingly adverse events that involve attacks, threats, or violence directed toward an individual(s). These cataclysmic events often involve a violation of dignity, an action of brutality, and a visible loss of life for their victims (Levin & MacDermitt, 2013). Second, mega-threats are identity related in that observers make the attribution that the event was motivated by bias, hostility, or prejudice against a specific identity group that has been historically devalued in society (e.g., racial minorities in the United States [Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991]). Given that mega-threats are identity-related events, they become highly germane to any individual who shares identity with event victims (Leigh & Melwani, 2019).

While these two criteria characterize most personal direct experiences of identity devaluation (Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002), mega-threats have a necessary third criterion: the scale of public attention. Mega-threats are unique because they are highly publicized through both traditional news outlets and social media (Curtis et al., 2021; Leigh & Melwani, 2019), extending their effects beyond the local regions where they occur. Exposure to mega-threats includes hearing about the event through traditional media sources (Curtis et al., 2021), discussing the event with personal contacts (Lowe & Galea, 2017; Neria & Sullivan, 2011), and learning about the mega-threat through social media, which people routinely turn to after societal events (Anderson & Hitlin, 2016). In turn, this widespread media attention serves to vicariously expose multitudes of individuals to the same event.

Despite their wide reach, little research has explored the effects of vicarious exposure to mega-threats for employees at work. The small body of work centered upon this topic theorizes that their effects are far reaching. McCluney and colleagues (2017) posited that police killings of unarmed Black civilians can lead to racial trauma and reduced organizational functioning for Black employees. In contrast, Leigh and Melwani (2019) proposed that, while harmful, mega-threats have the potential to galvanize or motivate Black employees to engage in interpersonally risky but functional work behaviors, such as pro-group voice to help their identity group. Even amid these divergent propositions, McCluney and colleagues (2017) and Leigh and Melwani (2019) highlighted that organizational factors—such as high levels of leader compassion, a high climate for inclusion, and increased diverse employee representation—provide employees with the resources to cope with the trauma of mega-threats and empower them to engage in positive work behaviors on behalf of their group.

However, most organizations remain racialized, White-dominant environments that limit the agency and efficacy of racial minority groups (Nkomo et al., 2019; Ray, 2019). It then follows that most organizations are not designed to foster and reward functional work behaviors that could arise because of mega-threats. Instead, mega-threats are more likely to result in deleterious work outcomes for employees who are affected by these events. Furthermore, while the definition of mega-threats suggests that these events may impact employees who belong to varied racial minority groups (e.g., Asian and Latinx employees), prior theorizing on mega-threats has largely centered upon Black employees (Leigh & Melwani, 2019; McCluney et al., 2017). Thus, we aim to advance organizational scholarship by comprehensively explaining the process through which mega-threats result in negative organizational outcomes—namely, avoidant work behaviors—for racial minority employees. Given that our theory proposes that these adverse effects stem from racialized organizational norms that constrain the expression of identity-based cognitions and emotions, we also propose a boundary condition: the psychological safety of identity-based workplace discussions that attenuates these effects. Below, we explicate our theory that explains how and why mega-threats lead racial minority employees to engage in increased avoidant work behaviors.

BUILDING A MODEL OF THE IMPACT OF MEGA-THREATS ON EMPLOYEES

To understand the impact of mega-threats on individuals at work, we propose a multistage theoretical model. First, we argue that the consequences of mega-threats differ based on identity group membership, such that, in the wake of a mega-threat, individuals who belong to the harmed identity group are more likely to experience embodied threat. Next, we posit that this embodied threat remains active when individuals enter the workplace and that the racialized nature of organizational environments compels the suppression of this threat. Finally, because threat suppression is an effortful process that consumes psychological resources, it leads to increased work withdrawal and decreased social engagement. We describe this process in detail below.

Mega-Threats and Embodied Threat

Social identity theory proposes that people derive their sense of self partly by identifying with social groups (e.g., race, religion, or sexual orientation; Tajfel & Turner, 1985) and that these social identities are typically valued and significant (Tajfel, 1974). Furthermore, self-categorization theory, an extension of social identity theory (Hogg & Terry, 2000), explains that categorizing oneself as part of an in-group leads individuals to personalize the experiences of other members of their group. This leads individuals to feel more connected to other in-group members (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995) and leads to increased empathy for in-group members' misfortunes (Tarrant, Dazeley, & Cottom, 2009). In turn, we argue that, for vicarious victims (i.e., event observers who share identity group membership with mega-threat victims), the harm that befell the mega-threat victim becomes representative of harm that could befall any member of the identity group. In other words, above the concern that may arise for event victims from any individual who learns about a mega-threat (Aust & Zillmann, 1996), these occurrences emit a distinct warning to members of the victim's identity group that they too could be harmed because of their identity. We propose that this heightened salience of identity-based harm leads to a particular form of identity-based threat: "embodied threat," or an assessment that an individual is at an increased likelihood of experiencing harm *because* of their identity. Harm, in this case, can be emotional, verbal, physical, or even fatal. Put simply, observing a mega-threat wherein an in-group member is on the receiving end of identity-based violence leads to the perception "I could be next," the underlying sentiment that defines embodied threat.

To understand how and why these embodied threat appraisals arise, we draw from research on embodied cognition that suggests that even thinking about an object produces embodied states as if the object were actually present (Niedenthal, Barsalou, Winkielman, Krauth-Gruber, & Ric, 2005). This work highlights two reasons why vicarious victims experience heightened levels of embodied threat in the wake of mega-threats. First, because mega-threats are identity based, vicarious victims are likely to become more vigilant to similar cues of potential harm in their own environment. In turn, they may view harm as becoming *physically* closer. People tend to represent threatening objects as physically closer to them than non-threatening objects. For example, individuals with threatening expressions are judged as being nearer than those with more neutral expressions (Cole, Balcetis, & Dunning, 2013), and threatening out-groups are perceived as subjectively closer than non-threatening out-groups (Xiao & Van Bavel, 2012). Thus, when faced with harm that has befallen another in-group member, individuals may embody this harm and the potential for physical danger as being closer, enhancing the perception that harm could personally befall the vicarious victim.

Second, because members of stigmatized identity groups often personally experience identity threat (Holmes et al., 2016; Major & Brien, 2005), they may start to embody or relive these threat experiences in the wake of a group-relevant mega-threat. For instance, Freeman (2017) argued that the experience of stereotype identity threat (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002) can be embodied, leading individuals to see themselves through the lens of harmful stereotypes. In describing this embodiment, Freeman (2017: 647) asserted that "it can limit one's capacity to navigate the world free of anxiety and without being forced to constantly take stock of one's bodily existence as not just other, but as subordinate and inferior." Building upon Freeman's (2017) work, we propose that reactions to mega-threats are embodied for individuals from racial minority groups because these events lead them to see themselves through the lens of others who hold harmful prejudices against their group. This, in turn, heightens their perception of imminent identity-based harm.

While research has not directly explored embodied threat, there is evidence that shared identity group membership with victims of mega-threats causes individuals to alter their behavior in ways suggesting they are more attuned to the possibility of personally encountering identity-based harm. For example, scholars have found that hate crimes directed toward LGBTQ+ victims lead LGBTQ+ identity members to change the way they dress and express themselves (Bell & Perry, 2015), ostensibly because these changes reduce the likelihood that the individual will encounter the same harm because of their own identity expression. Similarly, Dassouri and Silva (1998) found that their Mexican American patient experienced PTSD symptoms after witnessing televised border patrol beatings of possibly undocumented Mexican immigrants, even though this patient had not personally experienced this harm. Moreover, the 2012 murder of Black teenager Trayvon Martin, who was wearing a hoodie when he was killed, led other Black Americans to publicly express their anxiety that they or their families could

become the target of similar racially motivated violence. For example, singer/songwriter Sean "Puff Daddy" Combs said, "I didn't know wearing a hoodie made *me* such a target" (Fowler, 2012), and then U.S. President Barack Obama said, "If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon Martin. When I think about this boy, I think about *my own* kids" (Tau, 2012). Taking this together, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1. When a mega-threat occurs, individuals who are members of the harmed identity group will experience higher levels of embodied threat than those who are not members of this group.

Embodied Threat Spillover and Threat-Suppression Processes

Research on other forms of identity-based threats highlights that these threat experiences trigger negative cognitions and highly arousing negative emotions (see Schmader et al., 2008, for a review). As embodied threat involves heightened attention to the likelihood of experiencing identity-based harm, it may lead to increased rumination (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005) and heightened negative threat-based emotions (Bor et al., 2018; Reinka & Leach, 2018). These threat-related cognitions and emotions endure, even when individuals are no longer exposed to the original threat (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010). Accordingly, we suggest that this experience of embodied threat does not dissipate when individuals enter their workspaces. Instead, it persists and spills over into the work context, requiring individuals to actively manage their embodied threat experience at work.

We further pose that the racialized nature of organizations induces individuals to suppress the cognitions and emotions associated with embodied threat at work. Theories of race in organizations suggest that threat suppression likely occurs for two reasons. First, while organizations are typically depicted as bureaucratic structures that are devoid of race (Nkomo, 1992), most U.S.-based organizational environments are characterized by White Eurocentric practices and norms. Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations also suggests that organizations diminish the agency of individuals who belong to racial minority groups by compelling them to conform to the norms of dominant White culture (Feagin, 1987; Nkomo, 1992; Ray, 2019). Weakened agency causes these individuals to strategically manage aspects of their identity and utilize proscribed behaviors to counteract devaluation and effectively navigate their workplace interactions (Roberts, 2005; Roberts, Cha, & Kim, 2014). Organizations also diminish the agency of racial minorities by decoupling formal organizational rules from actual organizational practices and norms. While many organizations formally espouse commitments to diversity and equity (Ely & Thomas, 1996, 2001), actual organizational practices and norms remain racially unequal. For instance, although organizational rhetoric often celebrates diversity by welcoming employees from various identity groups (Bell & Hartmann, 2007), organizational norms also often discourage discussion or even mere acknowledgment of negative aspects of identity group membership, such as racism and other forms of oppression (Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012; Bell et al., 2011; Nkomo, 1992). We propose that organizational practices that ignore and obscure identity group-based experiences and differences (Chrobot-Mason & Thomas, 2002) compel racial minority employees to suppress their experience of embodied threat at work.

The second reason why threat suppression may occur is due to racialized emotional norms, also referred to as "racialized feeling rules" (Wingfield, 2010), that regulate racial minority employees' emotional expressions (Mirchandani, 2003; Wingfield, 2010). Emotional expressions in organizations are typically constrained by display rules such that expressions of neutrality or positivity are generally preferred and rewarded (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1979). These display rules often ignore the fact that emotions may be differentially experienced and expressed based on identity group membership (Ray, 2019), and they tend to reinforce racial hierarchies by preventing racial minorities from having the autonomy to express the same range of emotions as their White male colleagues (Acker, 1990; Mirchandani, 2003). For instance, Rabelo, Robotham, and McCluney (2021) found that racialized feeling rules are frequently imposed on Black women professionals through a process of "tone policing," where Black women are perceived as threatening or angry, even when they are acting in a neutral manner. Given that the emotional expressions of members of racial minority employees are more deeply scrutinized (Ray, 2019; Wingfield, 2010), which makes displaying negative threat-based emotions especially risky (Mirchandani, 2003), we propose that racial minority employees are especially likely to suppress their experiences of embodied threat at work.

As embodied threat encompasses both cognitive and affective processes, we argue that, when racial minority employees experience embodied threat, they will likely engage in threat suppression, which

involves both cognitive and emotional suppression (Grandey, 2000; Schmader et al., 2008), or hiding or masking authentic emotions and avoiding discussing authentic thoughts about mega-threats. Overall, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2. When a mega-threat occurs, individuals who share identity group membership with victims of the event will engage in increased threat suppression in the workplace, which is mediated by embodied threat.

The Effects of Threat Suppression on Avoidant Work Behaviors

In the final stage of our model, we posit that threat suppression has adverse effects on work behaviors. Integrating insights from Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations with those from conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993), we posit that threat suppression leads to increased avoidant work behaviors. Avoidant work behaviors share two characteristics: they represent movement away from, rather than toward, activities, and they involve purposeful inaction (Urdan, Ryan, Anderman, & Gheen, 2014). Given that operating successfully at work typically requires individuals to work both independently and interdependently with others (Soane et al., 2012), we examine the process through which mega-threats lead to heightened task and interpersonal avoidance. We posit that mega-threats ultimately lead to increased "work withdrawal" (discretionary input reduction behaviors where employees attempt to distance themselves from work tasks while remaining members of their organizations; Hanisch & Hulin, 1990) and decreased "social engagement" (purposeful reduction in individuals' interpersonal connection with their work colleagues; Soane et al., 2012).

To understand the links between Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations and conservation of resources theory, we begin with Ray's assessment of how organizations perpetuate and reinforce racial inequity. Ray (2019) explained that organizations enact practices that coerce racial minority employees into occupations at the bottom of organizational hierarchies and pressure these employees into behaviors that conform to White norms and emotional expectations. As modifying one's behavior and masking cognitions and emotions requires energy and effort (Grandey, 2000; Roberts, 2005; Scott & Barnes, 2011), contending with these organizational forces requires a heightened investment of psychological resources. Conservation of resources theory suggests that individuals strive to protect their psychological resources, and, when these resources are depleted, individuals enact protective behaviors to avoid additional resource utilization (Hobfoll, 1989; Urdan et al., 2014). Integrating insights from these theories suggests that, when racial minority employees engage in threat suppression, it consumes psychological resources and prompts increased avoidant work behaviors.

Given that fully investing oneself in work tasks and interacting with work colleagues are both resource-consuming actions (Grandey, 2000; Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciarocco, 2005), we propose that the racialized nature of organizations prompts heightened avoidance of work tasks and work colleagues for two reasons. First, prior research suggests that cognitive and emotional suppression leads to increased work withdrawal because distancing oneself from work tasks allows individuals to replenish their psychological resources (Grandey, 2000; Scott & Barnes, 2011). Given that racial minority employees are limited in their agency (Ray, 2019), which also limits their ability to select a coping method that could replenish their depleted resources (e.g., taking a day off work in the wake of a mega-threat; McCluney et al., 2017), withdrawing from work tasks may allow these employees to avoid further resource depletion, while still remaining within their organizations.

Furthermore, because managing social interactions with work colleagues also requires individuals to regulate their behaviors or invest psychological resources, suppressing experiences of embodied threat also leads employees to disengage from their work colleagues. Organizational scholarship suggests that, when workplace interactions are more habitual, they require less effort and fewer resources. However, when individuals must present themselves to work colleagues under challenging or unusual circumstances, these interactions can become more demanding and consume additional psychological resources (Vohs et al., 2005). While the racialized nature of organizations often leads racial minorities to hide their true emotions and cognitions (Ray, 2019; Roberts, 2005), the highly arousing nature of embodied threat suggests that suppressing this threat requires additional effort above and beyond what is typically expended in work interactions. Thus, in an effort to protect against further resource depletion, which will likely occur in coworker interactions (Roberts, 2005), employees will instead decrease their social engagement with their work colleagues.

Consequently, we argue that the resource-consuming nature of threat suppression prompts individuals to protect against future resource loss by withdrawing from work tasks and decreasing their engagement with work colleagues. Based on these arguments, we hypothesize the following:

Hypotheses 3a. When a mega-threat occurs, being a member of the harmed identity group has a positive indirect effect on work withdrawal, which is mediated first by embodied threat and second by threat suppression.

Hypotheses 3b. When a mega-threat occurs, being a member of the harmed identity group has a negative indirect effect on social engagement, which is mediated first by embodied threat and second by threat suppression.

The Moderating Role of the Safety of Identity Discussions in the Workplace

With the theory of racialized organizations as the foundation of our model, it becomes clear that the organizational context may provide an important boundary condition for the association between embodied threat and its suppression at work. Importantly, our theory rests on the notion that individuals engage in suppression because organizational racialization constrains the expression of embodied threat. We posit that threat suppression is especially likely when individuals deem that sharing their reactions to mega-threats in the workplace is unwise or interpersonally risky (Morrison & Milliken, 2000), or when there is a lack of psychological safety of identity-based discussions. Thus, we introduce psychological safety of identity-based discussions as a contextual moderator.

"Psychological safety" is the extent to which an individual believes that they will not be punished for taking interpersonal risks within their team or organization (Detert & Burris, 2007; Edmondson, 1999). Research has found that, when psychological safety is high, fears and concerns related to speaking up and taking risks are minimized. Thus, high levels of psychological safety are associated with increased voice (Detert & Burris, 2007; Liang et al., 2012) and enhanced team learning and efficacy (Edmondson, 1999). While definitions of psychological safety tend to refer to any type of interpersonal risk-taking in organizations, empirical investigations of this construct typically center upon interpersonal risk-taking related to work tasks or procedures. For example, Edmondson's (1999) investigation of psychological safety focused on team members' perceptions of their teams as safe places for members to make mistakes and ask for help. Similarly, Liang and colleagues' (2012) investigation of psychological safety centered upon the perception that individuals felt safe to express authentic cognitions and emotions related to their work role.

However, theories of diversity, voice, and silence (Bell et al., 2011; Gonzalez, Tillman, & Holmes, 2020; McCluney et al., 2017; Purdie-Vaughns & Walton, 2011) highlight the possibility that patterns of psychological safety may differ depending on the type of interpersonal risk. For instance, when organizations ignore the experiences of employees from different social groups, it can lead to reduced identity safety for Black employees (McCluney et al., 2017; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Similarly, the combination of high levels of heterosexism and a lack of legal protections for LGBTQ+ individuals creates a climate of peril, where LGBTQ+ employees lack the psychological safety necessary to reveal aspects of their identity (Bell et al., 2011; Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007). Such research suggests that psychological safety is not a monolithic construct. Employees may have different levels of psychological safety for expressing different types of opinions, like those associated with experiences related to being a member of a racial minority group versus those related to work tasks. Building on this, we assert that the absence of open discussions about race and other stigmatized identities within organizations leads employees to infer that it is risky to engage in discussions about their identity. This, in turn, reduces the psychological safety of these discussions.

Accordingly, we propose that the psychological safety of identity-based discussions has an important effect on the relationship between experiencing embodied threat and suppressing this threat. We posit that, when conversations about social identities are deemed unsafe—that is, when employees believe that identity-based discussions will lead to reduced interpersonal support or other negative organizational consequences (Detert & Burris, 2007)—employees experiencing embodied threat will more likely feel compelled to remain silent (Sherf et al., 2021) or suppress their experience of embodied threat at work. However, when individuals deem that it is safe to have conversations about social identities in organizations, it leads employees to have the freedom, autonomy, and opportunity to express their experience of embodied threat (Holmes et al., 2016), reducing the likelihood of threat

suppression. Therefore, we argue that the psychological safety of identity-based discussions acts as a moderator for embodied threat's effect on threat suppression.

Hypothesis 4. When a mega-threat occurs, if the psychological safety of identity-based discussions is high, then the effect of embodied threat on threat suppression will be smaller, reducing the positive indirect effect of being a member of the harmed identity group on work withdrawal.

Hypothesis 4. When a mega-threat occurs, if the psychological safety of identity-based discussions is high, then the effect of embodied threat on threat suppression is smaller, reducing the negative indirect effect of being a member of the harmed identity group on social engagement.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

We conducted two studies to test our model. In Study 1, we conducted a cross-sectional online field study that centered upon the 2021 Atlanta-area spa shootings[1] (the mega-threat), in which individuals of Asian descent were tragically targeted and killed. Our first study establishes support for the differential effects of mega-threats on avoidant work behaviors for employees who share versus do not share the harmed identity with mega-threat victims. In Study 2, we established baseline levels of employee threat suppression, work withdrawal, and social engagement (Phase 1); examined how Black versus White employees responded to the police killings of Botham Jean and Atatiana Jefferson, both Black civilians (Phase 2); and again examined how Black versus White employees responded to the murder of another Black civilian, George Floyd (Phase 3). Our second, study extends our findings from Study 1 by examining the moderating role of the psychological safety of identity-based discussions. We also developed and validated scales for embodied threat and threat suppression in a series of measurement development studies (see Appendix A).[2] Table 1 provides a summary of the new items.

STUDY 1: ATLANTA SPA SHOOTINGS MEGA-THREAT STUDY

Study 1, a pre-registered,[3] cross-sectional online field study with 332 Asian and White employees, centered upon a mega-threat that occurred in March 2021 when a gunman killed eight people, including six Asian women, in a string of shootings at Atlanta-area spas (Knowles, Thebault, Peiser, Armus, & Elfrink, 2021). This event met the three defining features of a mega-threat: (1) the event was overwhelmingly negative, as eight people tragically lost their lives and others were wounded; (2) it was identity related as the majority of the shooting victims were of Asian descent, and observers perceived that these victims were targeted because of their race (Knowles et al., 2021); and (3) the event received significant media attention.

Method: Participants and Procedure

We recruited a total of 332 participants through Cloud Research and Prolific (online websites designed for survey research). To qualify, participants had to live in the United States and be employed at least part-time. Additionally, we used quota-sampling

[1] To corroborate that all the mega-threats in our paper received significant media attention, we examined normalized Google Trends data. To assess search popularity in Google Trends, each data point is divided by the total searches of the geography and time range it represents, to compare relative popularity. The resulting numbers are then scaled on a range of 0 to 100 where 100 is a measure of the fact that the particular search string received the highest share of all Google searches in that particular week. All the mega-threats in our paper, including those utilized in the EFA and CFA analyses, received a score of 100. The murder of George Floyd received the highest relative search volume.

[2] Study materials for our studies, data, and R scripts can be found in our paper repository at: https://osf.io/wdy78/?view_only=57eff47dd0e34ba08bbed54a77b4aaf4

[3] The preregistration document can be found in our paper repository, and here: https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=re6by2. Note that, as we refined our theory during the revision process, the names (or labels) of our constructs were revised. The correspondence between the constructs in the preregistration and the current paper is as follows: embodied threat (identity threat), threat suppression (identity labor), task withdrawal (work withdrawal), and interpersonal withdrawal (social engagement; note that interpersonal withdrawal was originally reverse-coded). Additionally, given that this was Study 1 in our paper, we did not seek to examine our fourth hypothesis, nor did we collect data related to our moderator variable (the psychological safety of identity-based discussions). We did, however, collect data related to general task-related psychological safety in this study, using a previously validated measure (Liang et al., 2012). Our analysis confirmed that task-related psychological safety does not moderate the effect of embodied threat on threat suppression. This analysis can be found in our paper supplement on page 11.

TABLE 1
Summary of Content Validation, Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFAs), and Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFAs) for New Study Measures

Scale/Item	Content validation mean rating	Final EFA loading		Final CFA loadings	
Embodied threat items					
I worry about the safety of people in my racial group in this country.[b]	6.43	0.48			
I've been concerned that I could become the target of discrimination.	6.07	0.92		0.83	
I worry that someone may treat me differently because of my race.	6.37	0.90		0.75	
I worry about my personal safety because of my race.	6.51	0.82		0.89	
I worry about the safety of my family and others around me.[a]	3.93				
I've been concerned about the safety of my community.	6.10	0.65		0.63	
Threat suppression items					
Resist expressing my true emotions with my work colleagues	6.42		0.77		0.76
Hide my true feelings from others	5.38		0.98		0.81
Mask my negative emotions	5.80		0.82		0.82
Avoid displaying my true emotions	5.54		0.77		0.87
Hide how I feel from my coworkers	6.37		0.84		0.84
Put on a "show" or "performance" when interacting with coworkers[b]	5.79		0.53		
Pretend I have emotions I don't have[a]	4.65				
Resist expressing my true thoughts with my work colleagues	6.54			0.91	0.93
Hide my thoughts from my coworkers	6.32			0.97	0.96
Mask my negative thoughts	5.36			0.90	0.94
Avoid discussing my true thoughts	5.32			0.97	0.95
Hide my thoughts from my coworkers	6.31			0.95	0.96
Steer clear of discussing an event with my coworkers	5.00			0.79	0.85
Pretend I don't have strong opinions[a]	4.53				

Notes: Content validation, $n = 115$; EFA, $n = 151$; CFA, $n = 400$. CFA model fit statistics: $\chi^2(87) = 204.81$, $p < .001$; CFI = .98, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .03. Full details regarding measurement development studies can be found in the Appendix.

[a] Item removed due to low content validity.

[b] Item removed due to low EFA factor loading.

techniques (Singleton, Straits, & Straits, 1993) to recruit a relatively equal number of participants who self-identified as Asian ($N = 187$; 64% East Asian, 20% South Asian, 16% South East Asian) or White ($N = 145$). The average age of the sample was 37.3 years ($SD = 10.43$), 58% self-identified as men, 41% self-identified as women, 1% self-identified as non-binary, and 87% held an associate degree or higher.

After consenting to participate in our study, participants viewed a short excerpt from a news report about the mega-threat[4] (Knowles et al., 2021). As the potency of the mega-threat lies in its vicarious exposure, we also ensured that the participants had been exposed to the mega-threat before our study. Accordingly, we asked participants if they were aware of the event before reading the article we presented. Ninety-seven percent of the sample reported that they were aware of the event prior to participating in our study. All participants then responded to survey items designed to assess their reaction to the mega-threat, their experiences at work after the mega-threat, and their demographics. In our analyses, we dropped the 11 participants who had not heard of the event before starting the study, leading to a final sample of 321 participants (181 Asian and 140 White participants).

Measures

Race. We captured participant race using a dummy variable (0 = White, 1 = Asian).

Embodied threat. We measured embodied threat using the 4-item scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) that we developed in our measurement development studies ($\alpha = .96$; see Table 1 and Appendix A).

[4] In an effort to ensure that we were not inadvertently leading participants to report experiencing embodied threat by showing them a short article about the event, we collected a separate sample of 100 (50 Asian and 50 White) employees to participate in a similar study, except they were not shown an article snapshot. There were no differences between this sample and our Study 1 sample with respect to our hypotheses of interest. Additional details about this study and analysis of the results can be found in our paper supplement on page 11.

Threat-suppression processes. We measured cognitive and emotional threat suppression using the 11-item scale (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *a great deal*) we developed in our measurement development studies ($\alpha = .92$; see Table 1 and Appendix A).

Work withdrawal. We measured work withdrawal using a 3-item scale adapted from Lehman and Simpson's (1992) 8-item work withdrawal scale (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *a great deal*). To keep the survey brief, we a priori eliminated survey items that were related to other constructs (e.g., turnover) and that were not general enough to apply to a range of occupations (e.g., leaving one's workstation). The three items we utilized were, "I let my mind wander while at work," "I let others do my work," and "I spent time working on personal matters" ($\alpha = .73$).

Social engagement. We measured social engagement using a 3-item scale adapted from Soane and colleagues' (2012) social engagement scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). In adapting this scale, we focused on items related to our conception of social engagement as purposeful interpersonal connection behaviors. The three items we utilized were "I sought out connections with my work colleagues," "I enjoyed spending time with my work colleagues," and "I sought out opportunities to work on tasks with others" ($\alpha = .91$).

Results

Table 2 includes the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables. Comparing embodied threat experienced by Asian versus White participants, we found that, consistent with Hypothesis 1, Asian participants experienced significantly higher levels of embodied threat following the mega-threat, $F(1, 319) = 405.0$, $p < .001$, $t(319) = 20.13$, Cohen's $d = -2.28$ ($M = 5.53$, $SD = 1.55$) than White participants ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 1.45$).

Then, to test Hypothesis 2 (whether Asian participants felt compelled to suppress their experience of embodied threat in the workplace), we conducted a bootstrapped mediation analysis with 1,000 resamples. Consistent with this hypothesis, we found that the indirect effect of race on threat suppression through embodied threat was positive and significant (indirect effect = 0.83, $SE = 0.14$, 95% CI [0.56, 1.11]). Using bootstrapped structural equation modeling (SEM) path analysis, with 1,000 resamples conducted in R using the lavaan package (Hayes, Montoya, & Rockwood, 2017), we next examined the indirect effect of the mega-threat on work withdrawal and social engagement and found that the hypothesized model fit the data relatively well per the model fit statistics, $\chi^2(5) = 17.23$, $p = .004$; CFI = .97, RMSEA = .087, SRMR = .04 (see Table 3).

Consistent with Hypotheses 3a and 3b, we found that the mega-threat led Asian employees to engage in higher levels of work withdrawal (overall indirect effect = 0.18, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.29]) and lower levels of social engagement (overall indirect effect = −0.14, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [−0.26, −0.05]) in the days following the event.

Discussion

Study 1 provided initial evidence for our proposed theory that explains the effects of identity-relevant mega-threats on racial minorities at work. In the days following a mega-threat in which individuals of Asian descent were targeted and harmed, we found that Asian employees experienced higher levels of embodied threat. We also found that this threat experience spilled over into the workplace, leading Asian employees to engage in higher levels of threat suppression, which ultimately led to heightened work withdrawal and lower social engagement. However, given the cross-sectional design

TABLE 2
Study 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

	Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4
1	Race[a]	0.56	0.50				
2	Embodied threat	4.04	2.27	.75***			
3	Threat suppression	2.83	1.61	.28***	.34***		
4	Work withdrawal	3.00	1.40	.15***	.18***	.24***	
5	Social engagement	4.30	1.55	−.11***	.01***	−.17***	−.18***

Note: $n = 321$.
[a] 0 = White, 1 = Asian.
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

TABLE 3
Study 1: SEM Results

Variable	Mediator 1 Embodied threat	Mediator 2 Threat suppression	Dependent variables	
			Work withdrawal	Social engagement
Independent variables				
Race[a]	3.42***			
	(0.16)			
Mediators				
Embodied threat		0.24***		
		(0.04)		
Threat suppression			0.21***	−0.17**
			(0.05)	(0.06)
R^2	.56	.12	.06	.03

Notes: $n = 321$. Unstandardized regression coefficients reported. Standard errors are in parentheses.
[a] 0 = White, 1 = Asian.
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

of Study 1, we were unable to rule out the possibility that there may have been baseline differences between racial groups in our work variables (threat suppression, work withdrawal, and social engagement). Study 2 addressed this limitation and assessed whether the safety of identity-based discussions in the workplace moderated the effects in our theoretical model.

STUDY 2: PRE- AND POST-MEGA-THREATS STUDY

In Study 2, we sought to further investigate our hypotheses by surveying employees before and after mega-threats. This study design allowed us to assess baseline differences between racial groups in our work variables and further allowed us to rule out the possibility that these baseline differences were responsible for the effects we found in Study 1. In this study, we also examined the moderating effects of the psychological safety of identity-based discussions.

Given that mega-threats are non-routine and unpredictable in their occurrence, we started by surveying a diverse sample of employees who belonged to several identity groups. In Phase 1, in May 2019, we measured "resting" baseline levels of threat suppression, work withdrawal, and social engagement. In Phase 2, during the week after two mega-threats involving police shootings of unarmed Black civilians in October of 2019, we followed up with Phase 1 participants who shared racial identity with the victims harmed in the mega-threats (Black participants) and a matched sample of participants who did not belong to this racial identity group (White participants). Finally, given the consequential influence that the murder of George Floyd at the hands of police in May 2020 had on societal attention and discourse regarding the deadly consequences of racism (Roberson, 2020), we determined that it was important to examine our hypotheses within the context of this mega-threat. Therefore, in Phase 3, we again followed up with participants from our Phase 1 survey to assess whether the effects of this mega-threat were like those from the mega-threats in our previous studies.

Phase 1: Baseline Survey

Participants and procedure. We recruited 710 employees through Cloud Research to participate in a multi-time point study in May of 2019 during a relatively quiet news cycle in the United States. Participants qualified for our study if they lived in the United States, worked at least 20 hours per week, and self-identified as members of a specific identity group. Given that we could not predict the mega-threats that would occur in future time points or the identity groups that would be implicated in these events, we first recruited participants based on their membership in one of three marginalized identity groups in the United States: U.S. immigrants, Black individuals, and women. Next, we recruited a sample of White males as a comparison identity group. Our final sample ($N = 710$) included 201 Black participants, 109 U.S. immigrants, 191 White women, and 209 White men. For the total sample, 51% identified as women, 49% identified as men, the mean

age was 37 years old ($SD = 10.68$), and 69% held an associate degree or higher.

Measures. In addition to the demographic variables reported above, in this baseline survey, we measured participants' "resting" levels of threat suppression ($\alpha = .98$), work withdrawal ($\alpha = .70$),[5] and social engagement ($\alpha = .91$) utilizing the same items and Likert scales as in Study 1. In our subsequent studies (Study 2, Phases 2 and 3), we used these baseline measures to assess whether there was evidence to suggest that mega-threats led to changes in these work variables.

Phase 2: October 2019 Mega-Threats

Participants and procedure. In October 2019, we followed up with 201 Black participants and 200 White participants (both men and women) from our Phase 1 sample following two mega-threats that occurred within the same week in Texas. The first mega-threat involved the publicized trial of former Dallas police officer Amber Guyger, who was charged with fatally shooting Botham Jean, an unarmed Black man, in his home (McLaughlin, 2019). The second mega-threat occurred a few days later when a Black woman, Atatiana Jefferson, was shot and killed by a police officer in her Fort Worth, Texas, home (CNN, 2019). We determined that both events met the three defining criteria of mega-threats as they were (1) negative, both involving the death of a Black person at the hands of police; (2) identity related, because the victims' shootings were attributed to their Black identity; and (3) covered extensively, often together in the news. The response rate for our survey in Phase 2 was 51%, with 102 Black participants and 101 White participants. Fifty-one percent self-identified as women, 49% self-identified as men, and the mean age was 37.8 years old ($SD = 11.28$).

After participants consented to participate in our study, they read short excerpts of news articles about the two mega-threats (CNN, 2019; McLaughlin, 2019). Next, we asked a screening question ("Have you heard of this event before you began this survey?"), requiring a "yes" or "no" response. Eighty-three percent of the sample responded "yes." After reading the excerpt, participants responded to survey items about their reactions to the mega-threats and their work experiences in the days after the events. We also collected open-ended responses from participants about how safe they felt discussing the mega-threat at work. All participants completed the entire survey, but, because we were asking about work behaviors in response to the mega-threat, our analysis excludes participants who were not aware of the mega-threats before beginning our study. Thus, our final sample for Phase 2 comprised 170 participants (88 Black participants and 82 White participants).

Measures. We utilized the same measures and Likert scales from Study 1 to measure our variables of interest: embodied threat (four items, $\alpha = .92$), threat suppression (11 items, $\alpha = .98$), work withdrawal (three items, $\alpha = .67$), and social engagement (three items, $\alpha = .91$).

To assess the perceived psychological safety of identity discussions in the workplace, we included an open response item that asked, "Have you felt comfortable discussing the event with your coworkers? Why or why not?" An initial read of the responses indicated that many respondents avoided discussing the mega-threats because they believed these discussions were risky or would result in negative organizational consequences. Thus, participants determined that these discussions were unsafe (Morrison & Milliken, 2000), or the psychological safety for these conversations was low. The authors developed a coding scale from 1 (*extremely* safe *for mega-threat discussions*) to 5 (*extremely* unsafe *for mega-threat discussions*) and trained three student coders using 15 exemplar responses. Sample responses that scored at the lower end of this scale include, "We had an open and honest conversation, we express[ed] how we feel and everyone feels open with it," and "I don't shy away from having discussions about current events. This is okay, the debates might be contentious, but usually okay in the end." Sample responses at the midpoint of the scale include, "I don't usually discuss controversial topics with my coworkers. I don't want to rock any boats or ignite any fires in my department," and "We don't generally talk about this kind of thing at work … People who are various sorts of ethnic and cultural minorities tend to not bring up these issues, so I think many White people at work don't feel it's their place to start a conversation." Lastly, sample responses that scored at the highest point of the scale include, "It's not worth risking my job to express

[5] Given the low coefficient alpha obtained for our measure of work withdrawal in this study, we also calculated the coefficient omega (Study 2, Phase 1: 0.72; Study 2, Phase 2: 0.71; Study 2, Phase 3: 0.70). Omega relaxes the assumption of tau equivalence, which is beneficial for assessing the reliability of a scale like work withdrawal, wherein the items represent different facets of a construct (Edwards, 2003).

feelings towards a touchy subject," and "I haven't discussed this at work because it is never a good idea to start a political conversation in the workplace. I don't want to cause a problem for myself down the road." The interrater reliability for the coding was strong, ICC(2) = .89, indicating sufficient rater agreement (Hallgren, 2012).

Results. Table 4 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations between Study 2 variables in each phase.

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, we found that Black participants had higher levels of embodied threat after the mega-threats involving two police shooting deaths of Black civilians, $F(1,168) = 100.2$, $p < .001$, $t(168) = 10.01$, Cohen's $d = -1.54$ ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.73$), compared to White participants ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.36$). Next, in support of Hypothesis 2, the indirect effect of race on threat suppression through embodied threat was positive and significant (indirect effect = 0.84, $SE = 0.17$, 95% CI [0.50, 1.18]). Critically, regression analysis in Phase 2 revealed that, while Black employees engaged in significantly higher levels of threat suppression than White employees, $t(168) = 2.57$, $p = .01$, Cohen's $d = -0.40$, there were not significant differences in threat suppression between Black and White employees in the Phase 1 survey, $t(168) = 1.62$, $p = .11$, Cohen's $d = -0.25$. Additionally, the indirect effect of race on threat suppression measured in Phase 2 remained significant even after controlling for Phase 1 threat suppression (indirect effect = 0.62, $SE = 0.14$, 95% CI [0.35, 0.89]; see Table 5).

Next, we conducted an SEM bootstrapped path analysis in R using the lavaan package with 1,000 resamples (Hayes et al., 2017, Rosseel, 2012). These results showed that our hypothesized model fit the data relatively well, $\chi^2(5) = 3.55$, $p = 0.62$; CFI = 1.0, RMSEA = .00, SRMR = .02. Consistent with Hypothesis 3a, we found that the serial mediated indirect effect of race on work withdrawal through embodied threat and threat suppression was positive and significant (indirect effect = 0.17, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.30]). Consistent with Hypothesis 3b, the serial mediated indirect effect of race on social engagement through embodied threat and threat suppression was negative and significant (indirect effect = −0.16, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI [−0.37, −0.03]). These indirect effects remained significant, even after controlling for Phase 1 threat suppression, work withdrawal, and social engagement (work withdrawal indirect effect = 0.07, $SE = 0.4$, 95% CI [0.001, 0.16]; social engagement indirect effect = −0.13, $SE = 0.5$, 95% CI [−0.25, −0.03]; see Table 5).

Finally, we assessed the moderating role of the safety of identity discussions (Hypothesis 4) by first conducting a moderated regression analysis. In line with Hypothesis 4, we found a positive interaction effect between embodied threat and the safety of identity discussions on threat suppression ($b = 0.10$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .04$). A simple slopes analysis revealed that this relationship remained significant at every observed value of our moderator, yet the slope became steeper as mega-threat discussions became more unsafe[6] (see Figure 2).

We also conducted bootstrapped SEM path analysis, including our moderated mediation hypothesis, and found that, consistent with Hypothesis 4 when discussions related to identity were deemed unsafe (+1 *SD*), the positive indirect effect of race on work withdrawal (indirect effect = 0.11, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.25]) and the negative indirect effect of race on social engagement (indirect effect = −0.12, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI [−0.31, −0.03]) remained significant. However, when these discussions were deemed safe (−1 *SD*), the overall indirect effect of race on work withdrawal (0.01, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI [−0.15, 0.17]) and social engagement (−0.01, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [−0.21, 0.16]) was not significant (see Table 6).

Phase 3: May 2020 Police Killing of George Floyd

Participants and procedure. In May 2020, we again followed up with the 203 Black participants and 201 White participants from our Phase 1 survey after another mega-threat. This event occurred on May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, when White police officers arrested and murdered a Black man named George Floyd. During the arrest, a police officer pressed his knee to the back of Mr. Floyd's neck for over nine minutes, leading to his death (Maxouris, Hanna, & Almasy, 2020). In a video, which was watched by millions of people across the world in the days following his death (Hassan &

[6] We further probed this interaction utilizing the Johnson–Neyman technique and found that, when the safety of mega-threat discussions was *outside* of the interval [−48.19, 0.54], the slope of the relationship between embodied threat and threat suppression was significant. Given that the observed values for the safety of mega-threat discussions ranged from 1 (*extremely safe for discussions*) to 5 (*extremely unsafe for mega-threat discussions*), this analysis confirmed that our data was completely within the region of significance.

TABLE 4
Study 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

		M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Phase 1 survey variables															
1	Race	0.52	0.50												
2	Threat suppression	3.43	1.70	.12											
3	Work withdrawal	2.08	0.73	.03	.33***										
4	Social engagement	2.94	0.85	−.03	−.30***	−.03									
Phase 2 survey variables															
5	Embodied threat	3.60	1.96	.61***	.24**	.06	.09								
6	Threat suppression	3.00	1.66	.19*	.52***	.23**	.03	.41***							
7	Work withdrawal	2.99	1.31	.12	.33***	.56***	−.13	.10	.25**						
8	Social engagement	3.98	1.68	−.07	−.48***	−.11	.52***	−.05	−.19*	−.13					
9	Safety of mega-threat discussions	1.96	1.20	.02	.25**	−.05	−.08	.02	.33***	.04	−.34***				
Phase 3 survey variables															
10	Embodied threat	3.40	2.11	.61***	.18	.15	−.07	.58***	.42**	.36**	−.10	−.09			
11	Threat suppression	2.56	1.95	.11	.43***	.20*	−.13	.32*	.66***	.23	−.23	.29*	.27**		
12	Work withdrawal	2.85	1.35	.02	.38***	.55***	−.14	−.02	.16	.40**	−.05	.21	.11	.28***	
13	Social engagement	3.81	1.56	−.01	−.37***	−.22*	.53***	−.02	−.10	−.03	.57***	−.17	−.05	−.20*	−.13

Notes: Race (0 = White, 1 = Black). Phase 1 = May 2019, Phase 2 = October 2019, and Phase 3 = May 2020. Phase 1, $n = 403$; Phase 2, $n = 170$; Phase 3, $n = 112$ (9 participants were unemployed due to the COVID pandemic during Phase 3 and thus were not presented survey items for the work variables).

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

TABLE 5
Study 2, Phase 2: SEM Results

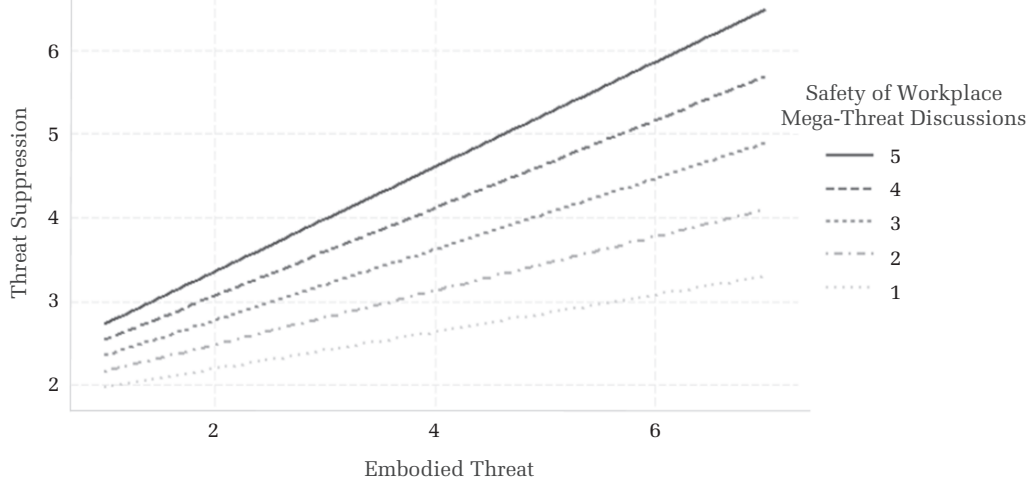
	Mediator 1 = Embodied threat Phase 2		Mediator 2 = Threat suppression Phase 2		DV = Work withdrawal Phase 2		DV = Social engagement Phase 2	
Variable	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 1**	**Model 2**
Independent variable								
Race	2.42*** (0.24)	2.42*** (0.24)						
Mediators—Phase 2								
Embodied threat			0.35*** (0.06)	0.26*** (0.06)				
Threat suppression					0.20** (0.06)	0.11* (0.05)	−0.19* (0.08)	−0.21** (0.07)
Controls—Phase 1								
Threat suppression				0.44*** (0.07)				
Work withdrawal						0.96*** (0.12)		
Social engagement								1.04*** (0.13)
R^2	.38	.38	.17	.33	.06	.33	.04	.34

Notes: Model 1 is a sequential mediation model with two dependent variables (without Phase 1 control variables). Model 2 is Model 1 with the Phase 1 control variables. Race (0 = White, Black = 1). Unstandardized regression coefficients reported. Standard errors are in parentheses. Phase 1, $n = 403$; Phase 2, $n = 170$ observations.

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

O'Grady, 2020), Mr. Floyd can be heard saying several times, "I can't breathe." We determined that this was a mega-threat because the event was (1) especially negative, as Mr. Floyd was killed; (2) identity related, because his death was attributed to Mr. Floyd's Black identity; and (3) broadcast widely through traditional news and social media. In Study 2, Phase 3, 64 Black participants and 57 White participants responded to the survey from Phase 1, representing a 30% response rate from the baseline

FIGURE 2
Study 2, Phase 2: Interactive Effects of Embodied Threat and Psychological Safety of Identity Discussions on Threat Suppression with Plot of the Simple Slopes



Note: All variables in Figure 2 are from Phase 2 survey.

TABLE 6
Study 2, Phase 2: SEM Results with the Interaction of the Psychological Safety of Identity Discussion in the Workplace

	Mediator 1 = Embodied threat		Mediator 2 = Threat suppression		DV = Work withdrawal		DV = Social engagement	
Variable	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 1**	**Model 2**
Independent variables								
Race	2.53*** (0.24)	2.53*** (0.24)						
Mediators—Phase 2								
Embodied threat			0.13 (0.11)	0.10 (0.10)				
Threat suppression					0.19** (0.06)	0.11* (0.05)	−0.22** (0.08)	−0.23*** (0.07)
Safety of identity discussions			0.08 (0.20)	0.02 (0.17)				
Embodied threat × Safety of identity discussions			0.10* (0.04)	0.08* (0.03)				
Controls—Phase 1								
Threat suppression				0.37*** (0.07)				
Work withdrawal						0.96*** (0.13)		
Social engagement								1.08*** (0.12)
R^2	.40	.40	.26	.40	.06	.32	.05	.38

Notes: Model 1 is a sequential mediation model with two dependent variables (without Phase 1 control variables). Model 2 is Model 1 with the Phase 1 control variables. Race (0 = White, Black = 1). Unstandardized regression coefficients reported. Standard errors are in parentheses. Phase 1, $n = 403$; Phase 2, $n = 170$ observations.

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

survey (the time difference between Phase 1 and Phase 3 was over one year, which may have contributed to this lower-than-average response rate). Sixty-two percent of the sample self-identified as women, 38% self-identified as men, and the mean age was 39 years old ($SD = 11.19$). In this survey, we again presented participants with a news excerpt about the mega-threat and asked them if they heard about this event before they began the survey. Ninety-three percent of the participants responded "yes," and our final sample was 112 participants (61 Black participants and 51 White participants).

Measures. Like in Phase 2, we utilized the same measures to assess our variables of interest. Therefore, we measured embodied threat with the 4-item scale ($\alpha = .94$), threat suppression processes with the 11-item scale ($\alpha = .99$), work withdrawal with the 3-item scale ($\alpha = .64$), and social engagement with the 3-item scale ($\alpha = .86$). Given that this study was conducted at the height of the COVID pandemic, which led to a drastic change in workplace interactions (Yang et al., 2022), we did not assess the safety of identity discussions in this study.

Results. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, we found that Black participants experienced higher levels of embodied threat following the Phase 3 mega-threat, $F(1,110) = 65.74$, $p < .001$, $t(110) = 8.11$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = -1.57$ ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 1.98$) than White participants ($M = 1.99$, $SD = 1.21$). Next, consistent with Hypothesis 2, we found that the indirect effect of race on threat suppression through embodied threat, all measured in Phase 3, was positive and significant (indirect effect = 0.63, $SE = 0.24$, 95% CI [0.18, 1.10]). Finally, we found that our SEM model fit the data relatively well: Hypotheses 1–3; $\chi^2(5) = 0.94$, $p = 0.96$; CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .0, SRMR = .02. Consistent with Hypothesis 3a, we found that the serial mediated indirect effect of race on work withdrawal through embodied threat and threat suppression measured in Phase 3 was positive and significant (indirect effect = 0.12, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.32]). Consistent with Hypothesis 3b, we

TABLE 7
Study 2, Phase 3: SEM Results

	Mediator 1 = Embodied threat Phase 3		Mediator 2 = Threat suppression Phase 3		DV = Work withdrawal Phase 3		DV = Social engagement Phase 3	
Variable	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 1**	**Model 2**
Independent variable								
Race	2.57*** (0.32)	2.57*** (0.31)						
Mediators—Phase 3								
Embodied threat			0.25** (0.09)	0.18* (0.09)				
Threat suppression					0.19* (0.08)	0.12 (0.06)	−0.16* (0.07)	−0.11 (0.07)
Controls—Phase 1 variables								
Threat suppression				0.44*** (0.11)				
Work withdrawal						0.98*** (0.13)		
Social engagement								0.90*** (0.15)
R^2	.37	.37	.07	.20	.04	.34	.08	.32

Notes: Model 1 is a sequential mediation model with two dependent variables (without Phase 1 control variables). Model 2 is Model 1 with the Phase 1 control variables. Unstandardized regression coefficients reported. Standard errors are in parentheses. Phase 1, $n = 403$; Phase 2, $n = 112$.

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

found that the serial mediated indirect effect of race on social engagement through embodied threat and threat suppression measured in Phase 3 was negative and significant (indirect effect = −0.10, SE = 0.06, 95% CI [−0.28, −0.01]). We also found that the indirect effect of race on work withdrawal remained significant after controlling for Phase 1 levels of threat suppression and work withdrawal. However, the indirect effect of race on social engagement after controlling for baseline levels of threat suppression and social engagement was not significant at the 95% CI level. This non-significant finding may be due to the COVID pandemic, which limited workers' ability to socially connect with their colleagues (see Table 7).

Discussion

Overall, the results of Study 2 demonstrate the important effects of mega-threats on individuals at work. First, replicating Study 1 results, we found that, in the wake of mega-threats involving the death of Black people, Black employees experienced embodied threat that spilled over into the workplace. Suppressing this embodied threat led to increased work withdrawal and decreased social engagement. Importantly, we also found that the effects of mega-threats on threat suppression, work withdrawal, and social engagement remained significant, even after accounting for baseline levels of these variables. Furthermore, in Study 2, Phase 2, we also found that the psychological safety of mega-threat discussions had an attenuating effect such that, when mega-threat conversations were deemed safe, the effect of mega-threats on avoidance behaviors lessened.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Organizational scholars have long recognized that the boundaries between organizations and the communities they are nested within are permeable (Katz & Kahn, 1978). By building and testing a model that explains the deleterious spillover effects of mega-threats on racial minorities in the workplace, we contribute to organizational research on this topic and ongoing societal discourse that has brought the effects of racism and other forms of inequality to the fore (Nkomo, 2021; Ray, 2019; Roberson, 2020). Results from our two studies demonstrate that racial

minority employees' exposure to mega-threats leads them to engage in heightened avoidant work behaviors (decreased social engagement and increased work withdrawal) through a multistep process of embodied threat and threat suppression. Our results also demonstrate that, when discussions about social identities are deemed psychologically safe within the work context, this feeling of safety effectively buffers employees from the otherwise negative effects of mega-threats. Below, we start by offering theoretical and practical insights and then conclude with an agenda for future research.

Theoretical Contributions

Overall, our research makes four important contributions to organizational scholarship. First, we address calls for scholarship that considers the centrality of race in understanding the experiences of individuals in organizations (Nkomo, 1992, 2021; Opie & Roberts, 2017). Nkomo (1992) asserted that, although race represents a major basis of power in society and organizations, the influence of race is rarely considered when developing management theories (also see Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Indeed, Nkomo (2021: 212) recently noted that "there is still much to do to elevate race to a significant analytical concept in MOS [management organizational scholarship]." Our research answers this call by building upon and extending Ray's (2019) work and explicating the deleterious process through which racialized organizational structures (i.e., White organizational norms and racialized feeling rules; Ray, 2019; Wingfield, 2010) compel racial minority employees to suppress their authentic reactions to mega-threats, ultimately prompting increased avoidance at work.

Second, in explicating the process through which mega-threats traverse organizational boundaries and influence individuals within the workplace, we add to a growing body of research on the effect of societal events on individuals (Bor et al., 2018; Curtis et al., 2021; Leigh & Melwani, 2019; McCluney et al., 2017); and, in doing so, we address calls for research on the impact of macro sociopolitical context on behaviors at work (Nkomo et al., 2019). Indeed, we are at a critical juncture where there is heightened attention both in academic fields (Boykin et al., 2020) and in society more generally (Roberson, 2020) to the fact that racism and other systems of oppression make individuals who belong to historically stigmatized identity groups (e.g., racial minorities, religious minorities, LGBTQ+ people) vulnerable to discrimination, harassment, brutality, and even death (Paterson et al., 2019). By creating and empirically testing a model that explains how mega-threats impact individuals in the workplace, our work lays the foundation for future research in diversity theorizing that more explicitly considers the far-reaching impact of larger societal forces, such as social movements and traumatic events, on organizations and the people within them.

Third, we contribute to research on identity and forms of identity threat by developing the construct of embodied threat. Unlike current conceptions of "identity threat" (an experience that indicates potential harm to the value, meaning, or enactment of an identity; Petriglieri, 2011) or "stereotype threat" (a specific form of identity threat that refers to the risk of confirming or being judged by negative stereotypes; Steele et al., 2002), we assert that embodied threat arises when individuals perceive that they have an increased likelihood of encountering physical harm because of their social identity. Critically, we highlight that this experience of threat is embodied because heightened attention to the possibility of harm not only makes this threat personal, causing it to appear closer (Cole et al., 2013; Xiao & Van Bavel, 2012), but it also raises individuals' consciousness to their own prior experiences of identity-based harm (Barsalou, 1999; Freeman, 2017). We theorize and find evidence that suggests that embodied threat is especially insidious and remains active even as an individual enters the workplace. The construct of embodied threat may be particularly relevant for scholars who are examining situations where the threat of physical harm because of one's identity becomes salient, like when individuals encounter symbols associated with historical identity group-based violence (e.g., Nazi symbols or noose-like ropes) within workplaces, schools, and other types of organizations.

Last, our theory and findings extend research at the intersection of diversity and psychological safety. While research on psychological safety finds that individuals engage in interpersonal risk-taking when psychological safety is high (Liang et al., 2012), researchers have not integrated these findings with diversity research. Research on diversity consistently shows that members of stigmatized identity groups are especially likely to stay silent (Bell et al., 2011), particularly when discussing aspects of their identity, as they fear appearing "different" (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003) or expect organizational sanctions (Bell et al., 2011; Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). Thus, we proposed and found evidence that suggests that the psychological safety of identity-

based discussions is a particular type of psychological safety that is especially relevant for employees who are members of stigmatized groups.

Furthermore, these findings also contribute to research on identity segmentation and boundary work (e.g., Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006; Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). This research suggests that individuals differ in their preference for segmenting their work and non-work identities, and that those with high segmentation preferences tend to avoid discussing their non-work identities with work colleagues (Kreiner et al., 2006; Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). This strategy can be functional, as it mitigates negative spillover or cross-role interruptions that can occur when the boundaries between identities are more permeable (Ashforth et al., 2000). However, our work highlights an important downside of segmentation: namely, that, when segmentation is high, individuals tend to avoid discussing their identities in the work context, and this increases the likelihood that individuals will suppress their experience of embodied threat and engage in increased avoidant work behaviors in the wake of a mega-threat.

Practical Implications

Even though mega-threats occur frequently in society, they are typically overlooked or ignored by organizations because they occur outside of organizational bounds (Leigh & Melwani, 2019). However, our process model offers practical insight into the negative consequences of these events on employee behaviors, as well as guidance to help reduce these negative consequences. We focus on how individuals, managers, and organizations can start to address the effects of mega-threats in organizational contexts.

To begin, our theoretical model starts with the incidence of a mega-threat. As we highlight, mega-threats are particularly injurious for the multitudes of employees who share a social identity with the victim(s) of the event. Even in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, which was a mega-threat that sparked weeks of social justice protests across the globe and increased societal and organizational discourse regarding racism (Roberson, 2020), we found that the experience of embodied threat triggered by this event was unique for Black employees. For identity group members who are attempting to manage their reactions to mega-threats, it may be important to recognize that constantly checking the news may keep the threat activated (Heid, 2020; Johnston & Davey, 1997). Thus, individuals may be able to diffuse their threat by disengaging from social media (Park, 2015) or engaging in activities that reaffirm their threatened identities (Shnabel, Purdie-Vaughns, Cook, Garcia, & Cohen, 2013). Another implication of this finding is that individuals who are members of stigmatized identity groups may grapple with the experience of reactivated embodied threat during events associated with mega-threats, including court cases or event commemorations.

We also found that embodied threat is difficult to turn off or ignore when an employee enters the workplace, which leads employees to suppress this threat experience and ultimately withdraw from their work tasks and colleagues. An important implication of this finding is that, when a mega-threat occurs, multitudes of employees across industries and professions may be experiencing threat and withdrawing from their work tasks and their coworkers in the days following the event. Given the significant costs of having multitudes of employees withdrawing at once (Birati & Tziner, 1996; Sagie, Birati, & Tziner, 2002), organizations must be prepared to help their employees manage their psychological responses to mega-threats while at work. This is especially critical as organizations aim to increase their representation and retention of racial minority employees who will likely be more affected by mega-threats.

Organizational cultures are also critical to this process given that White Eurocentric organizational norms constrain or prevent members of stigmatized identity groups from authentically expressing their reactions to mega-threats. As workplace norms and cultures send messages about desired behavior, and as employees from diverse backgrounds are particularly attuned to impression management in workplace contexts (Roberts, 2005; Roberts et al., 2014), organizations need to acknowledge and diagnose the particular features of their context that quash authentic expressions from members of stigmatized groups and identify routines that uphold these majority norms. Research shows that simply espousing values of diversity is not enough, as many individuals and organizations who consider themselves progressive, and perhaps even antiracist, continue to enact practices and policies that perpetuate systemic inequality and whiteness (Bell & Hartmann, 2007; Nkomo, 2021; Ray, 2019; Roberson, 2020). The findings of our work serve as a call to action for organizations to begin to look at their practices, routines, and culture with a critical lens to root out racialized norms and embark on a process of deep change to foster climates that provide individuals from all

identity groups with the freedom and autonomy to fully express themselves within the organization.

Our research also highlights an important feature that organizations can specifically focus on to reduce the adverse consequences of mega-threats: increasing the psychological safety of identity-based discussions. As culture change is slow and difficult (Schein, 1990), creating high levels of this type of psychological safety may be especially challenging, particularly since conversations that center upon the negative aspects of social group membership, such as discussions about discrimination and injustice, may be emotional (Major et al., 2002). However, one potential path toward increasing the psychological safety of identity-based discussions may be for managers to proactively build open and honest relationships with their subordinates. The honesty of such relationships can make managers aware of their subordinates' visible and invisible identities (e.g., immigration status or sexual orientation), which can then enable them to openly address identity-based experiences with their subordinates, including the experience of embodied threat. Relatedly, it is important for managers to also recognize that only discussing racism and other forms of inequality in the wake of a mega-threat can be viewed as reactionary, as was the case with the many organizational statements that were released in the wake of the murder of George Floyd (Roberson, 2020). Accordingly, it becomes critical for organizations to continuously "walk the talk" of diversity and inclusion (Roberson, 2020). They can achieve this by ensuring that employees from both majority and minority identity groups are aware of the various identity contingencies that lead individuals from different social backgrounds to experience organizations differently, such as numeric underrepresentation, social hierarchies, and overt and subtle discrimination (Purdie-Vaughns & Walton, 2011; Roberson, 2020). Organizations can also amplify minority voices (Bell et al., 2011), empower employees to have vulnerable conversations (Leigh & Melwani, 2019), and create cultures of compassion (McCluney et al., 2017), which, in turn, may promote identity safety that can be leveraged to help employees cope with mega-threats.

Last, we can also glean practical insight from the link between threat suppression and avoidance. As we highlight, the suppression of one's emotions and cognitions is a resource-consuming process that results in avoidance behaviors as individuals protect or conserve their remaining resources. These findings provide empirical evidence for why individuals may feel compelled to "call in Black" (McCluney et al., 2017), or avoid their workplace entirely, in the wake of a mega-threat. Given this insight, it might actually be productive for individuals to take time away from work tasks in the wake of a mega-threat as this rest may allow individuals to replenish their depleted resources (Hobfoll, 1989). From an organizational standpoint, providing employees with the flexibility to separate from work in the wake of a group-relevant mega-threat may be low-hanging fruit as this action not only helps employees recover from their experiences of threat but can also provide an opportunity to signal care and understanding of the experiences of stigmatized employees.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations to our studies that highlight opportunities for future research on mega-threats. First, while our studies investigate the effects of multiple types of mega-threats, including police shootings of Black Americans, a mass shooting that targeted Asian Americans, and highly publicized attacks of prominent racial minorities/immigrants (see Appendix A), we rely on online research samples and self-reported measures that could raise concerns about common method variance (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) and the validity of our findings. In addition, given our focus on examining the experiences of racial minorities in organizations, which is still a nascent body of research in organizational studies, we needed to develop new scales to match our predictions. However, we believe that the multi-study approach we pursued to create our measures should increase confidence in our findings. Yet, there is still a need for research to further examine the constructs we develop in this paper.

Scholars could utilize other methods, such as experience sampling methodology to provide a finer-grained examination of the duration of the adverse effects of mega-threats (Beal, 2015) or experimental methodologies to further examine the causal effects of mega-threats. Our studies were also constrained by the mega-threats that occurred over the course of our research. Thus, all of our studies centered upon mega-threats involving victims that are members of racial minority groups in the United States. Research should investigate the effects of mega-threats on different types of social identities, such as religious identities and organizational identities, and investigate mega-threats that occur outside of the United States. Finally, although we show that the negative outcomes of mega-threats are dampened when individuals feel that the workplace

is a safe place for identity-based discussions, we also acknowledge the need for further research to understand how individuals come to make these inferences about their workplaces. Additional research on conversations about topics like race and politics, which are often viewed as off limits in the workplace, may help uncover where implicit beliefs about the safety of identity-based discussions originate.

Another important avenue for future research is to further clarify the construct of mega-threats by examining the effects of different types of mega-threats. For instance, mega-threats may vary in the severity of harm inflicted on the victims, their societal reach, their cumulative effects that arise as a result of numerous mega-threats occurring over a period of time, and the identity that is implicated in the event. In terms of severity, the harm that was inflicted upon the victims that we examined in Study 1 and Study 2 was extremely severe and relatively consistent as these studies centered upon mega-threats in which the victims of the events were killed. However, in our measurement development studies, we surveyed individuals after relatively less severe mega-threats. Although individuals who are members of stigmatized identity groups were targeted and/or harmed within all of these events, it is possible that events involving death have more severe effects on event observers than those where the harm is less severe.

Furthermore, while our paper focuses specifically on mega-threats that involve victims from historically stigmatized identity groups, we recognize that the mega-threat construct is broadly defined as negative, identity-relevant occurrences that receive significant media attention (Leigh & Melwani, 2019). As such, any negative occurrence that receives media attention and prompts the attribution that an individual or group was harmed because of their identity can be considered a mega-threat, even when this event does not involve a historically stigmatized identity. For instance, in the aftermath of the 2020 U.S. presidential election, numerous right-wing media outlets referred to the election as a "stolen election," leading some individuals to feel under attack for their conservative ideologies (Farivar, 2021). Given the negativity and identity relevance of this event and its coverage in the media, it is possible that individuals in this group perceived this event as a mega-threat and thus experienced threat as a result of this event. However, given that the mainstream culture within organizations conforms to those of the identity group implicated in this event, it follows that the effects of this mega-threat for majority group members in organizations are different from the effects that we explicate in our paper. Thus, investigating the perceptions of different types of mega-threats that involve majority/dominant group identities is an important avenue for future research.

CONCLUSION

In sum, this paper advances our understanding of the often-overlooked impact that mega-threats have on individuals at work. Across two studies, we show that mega-threats lead identity group members to experience embodied threat that spills over into the workplace. We further show that racialized organizational structures compel the suppression of this threat, prompting two avoidance behaviors: increased work withdrawal and decreased social engagement. We also demonstrate the potential utility of increasing the psychological safety of identity-based discussions in reducing these negative effects. In doing so, we highlight the negative influence that racialized organizational structures can have on racial minority employees and we join a growing body of literature that has demonstrated the important influence that external societal events have on employees at work.

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APPENDIX A MEASUREMENT DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

We followed a multistep process to develop and validate measures of embodied threat and threat suppression. Given that our constructs had a sufficient theoretical foundation to draw upon, we started with a deductive approach to item generation (Hinkin, 1998). Survey items for embodied threat were generated based on our conceptual definition and established measures of "terroristic threat," or threat that arises from a perception that an individual will be personally impacted by terrorist events (Onraet, Van Hiel, Dhont, & Pattyn, 2013). Similarly, survey items for cognitive and emotional suppression were generated based on our conceptual definition and established measures of "surface acting," which measures masking authentic emotions in order to meet work demands (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Grandey, 2003). We edited and reviewed the generated items to ensure they represented the domain of each construct and conducted four of studies to assess the content, internal, and external validity of our new measures.

First, we started by assessing content validity (Colquitt, Sabey, Rodell, & Hill, 2019; Hinkin & Tracey, 1999). To do so, we recruited 151 participants from Cloud Research; 36 participants were removed because they failed attention checks (Meade & Craig, 2012), leaving 115 participants, of which 55% identified as men, 45% identified as women, the average age was 38.1 years ($SD = 10.96$), 76% self-identified as White, 10% self-identified as Asian, and the rest of the sample self-identified as either Black, Hispanic, or bi-racial. In this survey, we first presented participants with the name and definition of a construct and the set of survey items. Participants were then asked to rate how well each survey item reflected the conceptual definition using

a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *extremely bad job of measuring the concept* to 7 = *extremely good job of measuring the concept*). Table 1 shows the mean ratings of each item. Three items had mean ratings below 5.0, indicating weak definitional correspondence (Colquitt et al., 2019), and thus were deleted from the scales utilized in our subsequent studies. For our embodied threat scale, the data yielded a Hinkin Tracey correspondence statistic that ranged from .87 to .93 with an average of .90, which corresponds to strong definitional correspondence. For our threat suppression scale, the Hinkin Tracey correspondence statistic ranged from .73 to .93 with an average of .84, which corresponds to moderate definitional correspondence (Colquitt et al., 2019).

Second, as part of the next phase, we conducted a study to evaluate the factor structure of our new measures using an EFA (Hinkin, 1998). For this, we recruited a separate sample of 151 employees—54% men, 46% women, with a mean age of 38 years old ($SD = 10.58$)—through Cloud Research. We conducted this study in the aftermath of a mega-threat that affected U.S. immigrants. In June 2019, a group of U.S.-based doctors published a report describing the inhumane conditions at U.S.–Mexico border facilities, comparing the conditions to torture (Marshall, Zak, & Metz, 2019). As our theory predicts that immigrants would be more likely to be affected by these reports, we employed quota-sampling techniques (Singleton et al., 1993) to recruit a sample that was composed of 64 self-identified U.S. immigrants and 87 self-identified White non-immigrants (individuals who identified as White and were born in the United States). All participants in our study were presented with an excerpt from a news article that briefly described the mega-threat (Marshall et al., 2019), then completed a survey reporting their experiences of embodied threat[7] and their engagement in threat suppression at work in the days following the event. We conducted an EFA using principal axis factoring and oblique rotation (Kim & Mueller, 1984). The EFA extracted three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, accounting for 71% of the variance. All of the items relating to embodied threat loaded onto one factor (18% of the variance); the items relating to suppression loaded onto two factors: one containing all of the items for masking authentic cognitions (30% of the variance) and the other containing all of the items relating to masking authentic emotions (23% of the variance). We dropped two items that loaded poorly onto their factor (< 0.60). The final factor structure is shown in Table 1.

In the third phase of our scale development, we recruited a new sample to conduct a CFA. This study was conducted in July 2019 in the days after then U.S. President Trump tweeted disparaging remarks targeted toward four Democratic Congresswomen, including suggesting that they should go back to the "crime-infested" countries they came from. We determined that this mega-threat was specifically relevant for individuals of Hispanic and Asian descent because individuals who are members of these racial minority groups are frequently thought of as foreign within the United States, regardless of their actual immigration status (Armenta et al., 2013; Cheryan & Monin, 2005). We employed quota-sampling techniques (Singleton et al., 1993) to recruit participants who were employed at least part-time through Cloud Research and who identified as either Hispanic, Asian, or White. Our final sample included 400 participants: 195 Asian or Hispanic participants and 205 White participants; 53% men and 47% self-identified women; and their mean age was 36.5 years old ($SD = 23.03$). We conducted a CFA analysis with our 4-item embodied threat measure and our 11-item threat suppression measure. Following Hu and Bentler's (1999) recommendations, we determined that the proposed three-factor structure fit the data well: $\chi^2(87) = 204.81$, $p < .001$; CFI = .98, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .03. The standardized item loadings are shown in Table 1.

However, given our theory that threat suppression is an integrated and reciprocal process of cognitive and emotional suppression, we explored whether it was appropriate to combine the two threat suppression factors into a single higher-order measurement model. We conducted a second-order factor analysis of our threat suppression [8] We found that the fit indices between the first- and second-order models containing *only* the suppression items were identical: $\chi^2(128) = 128.92$, $p < .001$; CFI = .98, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .03. The two dimensions were moderately correlated ($r = .46$), and there was a high proportion of variance explained in the first-order dimensions by the second-order factor: 75% for cognitive suppression and 71% for emotional suppression. These were all indicators that the second-order factor

[7] The reference for the embodied threat items in the EFA and CFA study matched the identity that was relevant for the mega-threats (immigrants/immigrant status instead of race).

[8] Given that threat suppression has two lower-level indicators (cognitive and emotional suppression) we constrained the factor loadings in order to conduct the second-order factor analysis.

model fit the data relatively well (Brown, 2006), and, thus, all subsequent analyses were conducted using the total mean of our 11-item measure of threat suppression ($\alpha = .93$).

Last, using a fourth sample, we conducted another study to examine the convergent and discriminant validity of our two measures. Given our hypotheses that embodied threat is specifically relevant for employees who are members of stigmatized identity groups, we recruited a sample of 142 Black employees through Cloud Research and Prolific to complete our validity study. Their average age was 34.4 years ($SD = 9.81$), 51% identified as women, 48% identified as men, and 1% identified as non-binary. This study centered upon the murder of George Floyd. Participants were presented with a short description of the mega-threat and asked to respond to various survey items designed to assess their experiences of embodied threat and threat suppression at work after this event. We assessed convergent validity by exploring the correlation between embodied threat and two related constructs: identity threat (Lyons, Lynch, & Johnson, 2020; $\alpha = .91$) and threat appraisals (Rowley, Roesch, Jurica, & Vaughn, 2005; Tomaka, Blascovich, Kelsey, & Leitten, 1993; $\alpha = .92$). While both of these constructs assess threat, neither is specifically related to threat that arises due to the perception that one may encounter harm because of one's identity. Similarly, we also examined the correlation between threat suppression and two related constructs: identity suppression (Madera, King, & Hebl, 2012; $\alpha = .87$) and facades of conformity (Hewlin, 2009; $\alpha = .84$).[9] While these constructs refer to behaviors through which individuals hide aspects of their authentic selves in the workplace, they are not specifically related to suppressing threat-based cognitions and emotions in the workplace. As expected, embodied threat was positively and significantly correlated with identity threat ($r = .41$, $p < .001$) and threat appraisals ($r = .71$, $p < .001$). Similarly, threat suppression was positively and significantly correlated with identity suppression ($r = .78$, $p < .001$) and facades of conformity ($r = .72$, $p < .001$). Given these high correlations, we confirmed discriminant validity between these measures by conducting a series of CFA analyses. First, a CFA involving the embodied threat, identity threat, and threat appraisals measures established that a three-factor solution fit the data well, $\chi^2(74) = 153.21$, $p < .001$; CFI = .95, RMSEA = .09, SRMR = .08, and significantly better than a model with all the items loaded onto one factor, $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 577.63$, $p < .001$. Similarly, a first-order CFA analysis involving the threat suppression, facades of conformity, and identity threat measures revealed that a four-factor solution (with threat suppression loaded onto two factors and identity suppression and facades of conformity loaded onto separated factors) fit the data relatively well, $\chi^2(183) = 425.31$, $p < .001$; CFI = .93, RMSEA = .09, SRMR = .05, and significantly better than a model with all the items loaded onto one factor, $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 324.25$, $p < .001$.

[9] The complete scales that we used in this study can be found in our paper supplement posted in our online repository.