

# Calling in Black: a dynamic model of racially traumatic events, resourcing, and safety

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Black

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Courtney L. McCluney

*Department of Psychology, University of Michigan,  
Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA, and*

Courtney M. Bryant, Danielle D. King and Abdifatah A. Ali

*Department of Psychology, Michigan State University,  
East Lansing, Michigan, USA*

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Racially traumatic events – such as police violence and brutality toward Blacks – affect individuals in and outside of work. Black employees may “call in Black” to avoid interacting with coworkers in organizations that lack resources and perceived identity and psychological safety. The paper aims to discuss this issue.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper integrates event system theory (EST), resourcing, and psychological safety frameworks to understand how external, racially traumatic events impact Black employees and organizations. As racially traumatic events are linked to experienced racial identity threat, the authors discuss the importance of both the availability and creation of resources to help employees to maintain effective workplace functioning, despite such difficult circumstances.

**Findings** – Organizational and social-identity resourcing may cultivate social, material, and cognitive resources for black employees to cope with threats to their racial identity after racially traumatic events occur. The integration of organizational and social-identity resourcing may foster identity and psychologically safe workplaces where black employees may feel valued and reduce feelings of racial identity threats.

**Research limitations/implications** – Implications for both employees’ social-identity resourcing practice and organizational resource readiness and response options are discussed.

**Originality/value** – The authors present a novel perspective for managing diversity and inclusion through EST. Further, the authors identify the interaction of individual agency and organizational resources to support Black employees.

**Keywords** Resourcing, Black Lives Matter, Black employees, Event system theory, Racial trauma

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

“Have you ever just wanted to call in Black? You realize something [...] another unarmed Black person was assaulted and or murdered. As I was driving into work with water pouring from my eyes, I realized something: I was grieving [...] Sometimes I need a minute! And that’s where calling in Black (would be so clutch[1]. Oh no, it’s not contagious, I just need a solid day to reaffirm my humanity to myself, so, see you tomorrow.” Evelyn from the Internets, 2015).

“Calling in Black,” as the quote implies, reflects a desire for Black employees to take a day “off” from work due to the debilitating grief, hopelessness, or fear caused by witnessing or experiencing racially motivated violence toward Black people. Despite these consistent but unpredictable occurrences, Black employees may feel pressure to maintain a professional demeanor and carry out their regular work routines (Roberts, 2005). Further, the ease of access to news stories through social media could expose Black employees to violent encounters between police and Black people during work hours, possibly reducing their ability to focus on tasks and increasing feelings of emotional distress. As such, inequality and discrimination originating outside the workplace may spillover to effect organizational functioning (Humberd *et al.*, 2015). In this paper, we explore how violent events that originate external to the workplace impact Black employees’ experiences, and propose how organizations may cultivate psychologically safe workplaces to lessen employees’ desire to call in Black.



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At first glance, calling in Black may seem similar to other workplace deviant behaviors. For example, taking a “mental health day” from work (Holmes, 2016) is a voluntary behavior where employees avoid the stressors generating from their workplace including burnout (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2009), or a reflection of their low levels of affective commitment to their organization (Somers, 1995). We assert that Black employees are motivated to call in Black from witnessing racially traumatic events that may occur inside or outside of their workplace, despite their feelings of commitment to their companies. We focus specifically on employees’ reactions to external events given that blatant racism is less likely to occur in modern organizations (Cortina, 2008). Further, the outcome for taking a mental health day is restricted to feeling replenished and revitalized (Hobfoll, 1989; Westman and Etzion, 2001), whereas calling in Black is aimed at feeling reaffirmed in ones worth and dignity. Some examples of ways that Black employees may reaffirm their humanity include mourning the death of a Black person at the hands of officers, joining social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter to protest the unfair treatment of Blacks, or engaging in discussions about police brutality with their community through social media. Some scholars conceptualize taking time off work as a signal of organizational dysfunction (Dilts *et al.*, 1985), particularly in managing stress. We consider calling in Black as a behavioral manifestation for Black employees who feel that their workplace does not affirm their humanity nor present a safe space to heal from racial trauma. Because of these differences, we restrict our focus to the specific concept of calling in Black to fully immerse our theorizing into the experiences of Black employees in the wake of racially traumatic events. Calling in Black is therefore a unique perspective because it is not widely understood that racial identity trauma (e.g. witnessing the killing of a Black person by a police officer in the media) presents the need to for organizations to create resources that helps Black employees reaffirm their sense of personhood in the workplace.

The desire to call in Black therefore is not simply a withdrawal or deviant behavior that employees turn to when stressed. Rather, it is a signal of a greater, systemic issue that is affecting every part of society, including the workplace. In particular, Black people are consistently exposed to videos of violence against their social group, which contributes to a form of trauma. Racial trauma refers to psychological injury caused by the experience of a racially motivated incident that overwhelms a person’s capacity to cope, causes bodily harm, or threatens one’s life integrity (Bryant-Davis, 2007). A racially traumatic event – such as police brutality toward Blacks – may be experienced firsthand or vicariously through observation, in which a person identifies with the victim because of their shared identity (Kira *et al.*, 2008), triggering post-traumatic stress symptoms for other Black people (e.g. feelings of hopelessness and fear; Kira, 2010). Experiencing racial trauma results in poorer health outcomes such as increased hypertension (Sewell and Jefferson, 2016), increased vigilance and sensitivity to threat, and increased depressive symptoms and anxiety (Smith, 2010).

Black employees may find that their workdays are difficult and unproductive following the occurrence of police brutality directed toward members of their social group because they feel that their own lives are threatened. Instead, they may seek to expend energy toward cultivating social and psychological resources (Hobfoll, 1989) to cope with feelings of threat to their racial identity (Petrigleri, 2011). Black employees may evaluate their organizations as lacking adequate resources to create an identity safe environment and effectively address threats to their racial identity, hence their desire to call in Black. Insufficient resources may incur multiple consequences for organizations at individual (e.g. absenteeism), organizational (e.g. turnover), and environmental (e.g. boycotts) levels. Therefore, we provide insight for ways that organizations and Black employees may generate trauma relieving resources through engaging in resourcing – an effortful process that creates new assets for use by taking action on previously established routines and practices (Feldman, 2004; Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). We identify

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social-identity resourcing (Creary, 2016), quality of relationships with coworkers (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003), and explicit communication from senior leaders (Nishii and Mayer, 2009) as effective resourcing to reduce Black employees' experiences of racial trauma.

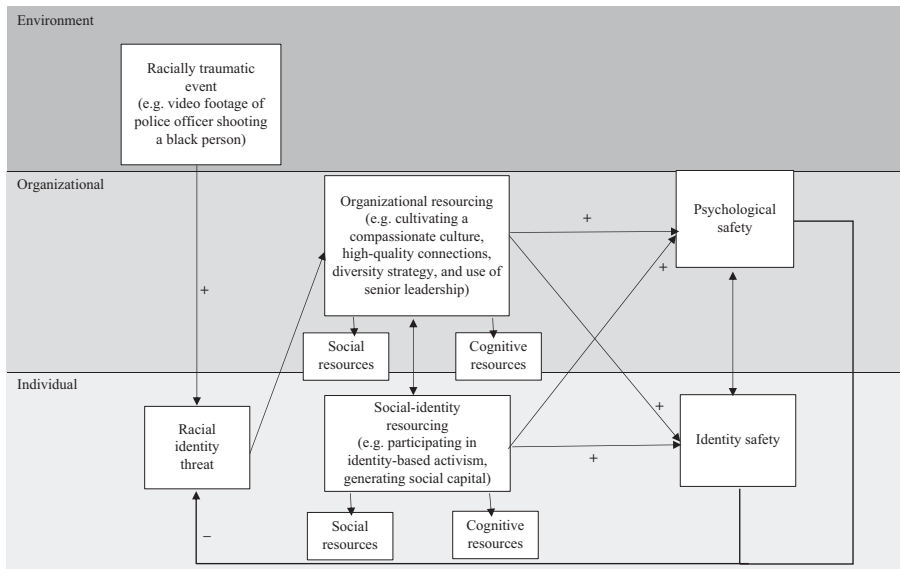
This paper seeks to integrate the goals of Black Lives Matter social movement into academic scholarship by informing scholars and practitioners of the consequences of police brutality on employees and organizations. The Black Lives Matter movement and its policy group, the Movement for Black Lives, call for social institutions to publicly disparage police brutality and racial violence. We assess how organizations' stance on issues of police brutality may either continue the systematic marginalization of Black lives by ignoring their experiences of racial trauma and their need to affirm their humanity, or encourage the cultivation of identity safe workplaces for Black employees to heal. As suggested by the goals of the Black Lives Matter movement, our theoretical endeavor presents tools to create compassionate organizations and the protection of Black employees as important avenues to justice for all. By offering both individual- and organizational-level solutions, we contribute to the building of a restorative, rather than depleting, experience at work for all employees, especially those dealing with racial trauma.

We propose a conceptual model to understand the multi-layered impact of racially traumatic events on Black employees and organizations using event system theory (EST; Morgeson *et al.*, 2015). Our multi-level model explores how external events affect Black employees through racial identity threat, and proposes resourcing tactics that enable employers to foster and experience identity affirming, identity safe, and compassionate workplaces. Rather than focusing on the debilitating outcomes of racial trauma, we contribute a strength-based perspective that organizations and employees may implement to cultivate inclusive workplaces through resourcing behaviors (Roberts *et al.*, 2016). An additional contribution of this work is the coalescing of multiple bodies of literature to advance our understanding and applicability of theory for addressing racially traumatic events that impact organizational functioning. Our conceptual model encourages investigating organizations as open systems that affect and are affected by their local environment (Humberd *et al.*, 2015; Marquis *et al.*, 2011), including police violence toward Blacks (Hall *et al.*, 2016; Ruggs *et al.*, 2016). We integrate existing theories to extend previous research that could not independently capture the complexity of this phenomenon.

Finally, our paper focuses intentionally on Black employees' workplace experiences following instances of police-related violence toward Blacks. Blacks continue to have distinct experiences in the USA compared to other groups (Hacker, 1992), particularly in the workplace (Davis and Watson, 1982; Maume, 1999). Although we acknowledge that non-Black employees may also be affected by such events, the scope of our paper is limited to Black employees' experience because Blacks and whites tend to hold differing perspectives of racial inequality in the USA. Indeed, 84 percent of Blacks – compared to 50 percent of whites – believe that Blacks are treated unfairly when interacting with the police. In contrast, 75 percent of whites believe that police officers treat racial and ethnic groups equally compared to 30 percent of Blacks (Morin and Stepler, 2016). Therefore, we consider Black employees' unique personal or vicarious experiences of racial trauma through police violence, and identify resourcing tactics to remedy the trauma on work-related outcomes.

Our paper is organized as follows. First, we define racial trauma within the context of EST as a catalyzing event that affects Black employees by triggering racial identity threat in the workplace. We then consider how organizational and individual social-identity resourcing create an ethics of care and identity-enhancing tools for Black employees to navigate their workplaces. Taken together, we propose a comprehensive model that identifies the creation of psychologically safe workplaces for Blacks to cope with their experiences of racial trauma in Figure 1. We conclude by posing future research questions

**Figure 1.** Conceptual model of racially traumatic events on individual and organizational behavior



to elaborate EST and resourcing theories within diversity and inclusion research, and offer practical recommendations for employees, as well as employers looking to support their Black employees experiencing racial trauma.

### Defining racial trauma through EST

Diamond Reynolds live streamed the shooting death of her fiancé Philando Castile via Facebook Live on July 6, 2016. Castile, a 32-year-old Black man, was shot seven times by police officer Jeronimo Yanez after he was pulled over in a suburban neighborhood in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In the video, Castile lay bleeding in the car as Reynolds and their four-year-old daughter watched from the passenger seats. Within 24 hours, the video had 3.2 million views and was a top news story of every media outlet (Stelter, 2016). This video surfaced only one day after police footage showed several officers shooting Alton Sterling as he lay face down and handcuffed in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Both videos were featured on national news sites and social media applications across the nation.

Witnessing these shootings can trigger racial trauma for Black people who identify with, or are personally connected, to someone that resembles Castile and Sterling; that is, a Black man. Police brutality toward Black women and men may trigger post-traumatic stress symptoms for Black employees because of their shared identity with the victims. According to Petrigleri's (2011) identity threat model, police shootings may decrease Blacks' feelings that their racial identity is valued and increase perceptions that an entity (in this instance, policing and the justice system) is threatening the value or worth Blacks may place on their social identity (Steele *et al.*, 2002). Feeling that one's identity is devalued may reduce Black employees' ability to cope with threats to their humanity by depleting their social and psychological resources (Dutton *et al.*, 2010). Black employees who strongly identify with their racial group and feel targeted may feel unable to cope with these threats to their humanity (Sellers *et al.*, 1998), creating a negative spiral of individual well-being and organizational disengagement (Cohen and Garcia, 2008).

Because organizations operate as an open-system, external events can influence processes and resources within workplaces. We use EST to capture the complex and

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dynamic nature of racially traumatic events' effect on employee and organizational behavior. According to the EST framework, we consider violent police encounters toward Blacks as discrete, observable events or circumstances uncharacteristic of normal functioning (Morgeson *et al.*, 2015). Although racially traumatic events may occur within organizations (e.g. Goldman *et al.*, 2006), we focus on external events because it is unclear whether employers perceive police brutality as an event that they should address or have the capacity to address. To explain this phenomenon, we briefly describe the hierarchical (event strength), spatial (event space), and temporal (event time) effects of police brutality toward Blacks as racially traumatic events.

Event strength refers to the event's novelty, ability to disrupt routines, and criticality for organizational entities (e.g. people, processes, and functions). The documentation and spreading of police violence via social media in technology-driven workplaces creates a "novel" environmental event that is likely to disrupt employees' work (Valdez *et al.*, 2013). We acknowledge that police violence and racial trauma in the Black community is not a new phenomenon *per se*. Rather, it is the accessibility and viral spreading of these videos that increases the novel experience of Blacks' addressing racially traumatic events in the workplace (Pratt-Harris *et al.*, 2016; Harris, 2015). Developing post-traumatic stress symptoms or feeling pressure to discuss racially traumatic events with coworkers may disrupt the work flow due to Black employees' depleted physiological and psychological resources, especially when Blacks are underrepresented (Purdie-Vaughns *et al.*, 2008) or their work-related goals are contingent on their relationship with potentially non-Black coworkers (Swann *et al.*, 2004). Racially traumatic events may be critical for the entire organization if Black employees choose to call in Black, or if internal (i.e. employees) and external (i.e. customers) stakeholders perceive that the company is not demonstrating care and concern for issues of race relations.

Event space considers where an event originates, and how its effects disperse throughout the organization. There are multiple avenues in which these events may enter the workplace. The ubiquity of social media use at work (Vitak *et al.*, 2011) increases the likelihood for Black employees to witness violent police encounters in real time. Additionally, coworkers may discuss these events in casual conversation as with other news stories. Employees may also bring attention to these events by publicly acknowledging them in communication with employees (Schultz, 2014; McCluney *et al.*, 2017). Centering on Black employees' experiences demonstrates how events that originate external to organizations do not remain external. In this instance, the external event may enter organizations through Blacks' felt trauma and subsequent decline in engagement. Organizational leaders also have the power and influence to shed light on these events. We later assess leaders' communication practices as a mechanism that can promote psychological safety at work. Spatially, we find that the boundaries between organizations and external events become blurred through focusing on Black employees' experiences, and through organizational leaders' unprecedented commentary on police violence toward Black people.

Event time refers to when an event occurs, how long an event remains impactful, and the evolution of event strength over time. Because events of police brutality are unpredictable, it is unclear when the event would impact a typical organization. Further, the length of time that an external racially traumatic event remains impactful varies depending on the focal entity. For instance, Black employees may feel symptoms of post-traumatic stress for several weeks following vicarious exposure to police violence (Kira, 2010), yet their employers and coworkers may not feel affected beyond the initial event. This may be especially true in organizations that do not adopt practices of inclusion and learning from such events to better integrate their Black employees' experiences as part of their organizational strategy (Ely and Thomas, 2001). The trigger for racial trauma may also remain active in the environment, causing a prolonged reaction. Most shootings or unexplained deaths of Black women and men

are followed by months before criminal indictment hearings are held for the officers, and the resulting decision from the judicial system may cause feelings of trauma to resurface. For example, federal prosecutors announced they would not be pressing charges against the officers involved in the shooting of Alton Sterling or Philando Castile almost one year after the catalyzing event. Learning of this outcome may not align with one's perceptions of justice, reigniting feelings of hopelessness and danger for Blacks. The novel, disruptive, and critical nature of an event is likely to change over the event duration and ultimately shape the kind of lasting impact it has on the organization.

We build on EST by conceptualizing a racially traumatic event as a catalyst that triggers several subsequent events, behaviors, and changes in the environment at multiple levels of the organization. The racially traumatic event occurs in the external environment and creates feelings of racial trauma for the individual. The direct psychological consequences of racial trauma culminate as racial identity threat in the work environment. Threat implies that an entity (physical, psychological, and ideological) is in some way impacting the value or worth individuals may place on their social identity (Steele *et al.*, 2002). Racial identity threat may include perceptions that a threat exceeds one's resources to cope (Major and O'Brien, 2005), social cues indicating that one's race does not belong (Purdie-Vaughns *et al.*, 2008), or anticipation of unfair judgment and treatment based on stereotypes (Roberson, and Kulik, 2007). Petrigleri's (2011) conceptualization of identity threat mostly closely aligns with feelings of racial identity threat emerging from experiences of racial trauma. Given that racial trauma is defined as an event that is "threatening to one's life integrity" (Bryant-Davis, 2007), we may perceive threat as resulting from "[racial] experiences appraised as [traumatic] that threaten the value, meaning, or enactment of one's [racial] identity" (Petrigleri, 2011, p. 644). It is plausible that racially traumatic events may affect Black employees by increasing their likelihood for experiencing racial identity threat at work. Because of these stated reasons, we propose the following:

- P1.* Witnessing a racially traumatic event toward a member of your racial group (e.g. police violence toward Blacks) increases feelings of racial identity threat.

When faced with racial identity threat through exposure to racial trauma, Black employees may cope with these threats by utilizing their social, psychological, and material resources to meet the demands of the threat. Petrigleri (2011) proposed that threats to ascribed identities lead to identity-protection responses such as derogation, concealment, and positive distinctiveness. Prior to enacting these behaviors, individuals must decide if they have the necessary resources. Black Americans' identity-based resources may derive from racial socialization messages that instill a sense of racial pride (Henderson and Bell, 2016), resilience, and counter-cultural norms that enhance their positive distinctiveness from society (Constantine and Sue, 2006). These components have been considered in studies of Blacks' leadership strategy (Parker and Ogilvie, 1996; Bell, 1990) and construction of positive work identities (Roberts, 2005). Thus, we propose the following:

- P2.* Black employees experiencing racial identity threat seek resources to cope with their threatened identity.

Relatively little scholarship has considered how Black employees may seek resources from their organizations to cope with racial identity threat. We next describe how organizations may cultivate resources necessary to ameliorate feelings of threat at work.

### **Resourcing to reduce feelings of threat**

Organizational entities – including employers and employees – may counteract the negative effect of racially traumatic events through generating resources. Resourcing refers to the

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creation in practice of assets and qualities of relationships (Feldman, 2004, p. 296). Essentially, social (e.g. people), cognitive (e.g. knowledge), and material (e.g. money) resources and generative aspects of relationships (e.g. complementarity) are made into resources when they are being used (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). Furthermore, the way that resources are used can change the type of resource that exists (Sonenshein, 2014). We identify organizational and social-identity resourcing that may generate support for alleviating racial trauma.

### *Organizational resources*

Organizational resources may be particularly useful for Black employees seeking support for racial trauma. Workplace cultures characterized as inclusive, caring, and safe may decrease Black employees' sense of racial identity threat. On the other hand, Blacks working in organizations that fail to recognize their need to reaffirm their humanity following a racially traumatic event may be more likely to call in Black as a viable coping strategy. Organizations may examine the routines and practices in place that generate resources for Black employees. We describe four resources that organizations may cultivate to alleviate Blacks' feelings of threat from racially traumatic events: creating a culture of compassion, cultivating high-quality connections, integrating diversity into business strategy, and utilizing senior leadership.

Black employees may suffer in silence at work after witnessing violence enacted toward Black people. To counteract this debilitating behavior, organizations could socialize their employees to deliver compassion by noticing, interpreting, feeling, and responding to the suffering of their coworkers in the workplace (Kanov *et al.*, 2004; Worline and Dutton, 2017). Compassionate organizing must be an intentional, top-down strategy so that the collective enactment of compassion alleviates suffering on a large scale (Dutton *et al.*, 2006; Worline and Dutton, 2017). A resourcing perspective of compassionate organizing suggests that organizations could create an ethics of care through practice (Lawrence and Maitlis, 2012; Gilligan, 1982); that is, coworkers' interactions with others may proliferate compassion. Noticing Black employees' suffering may be difficult if they are concealing their emotional reaction to police violence. Thus, organizations must create a workplace culture that welcomes the expression of negative emotions. In this context, we suggest that organizations capitalize on their current practices – such as employee onboarding and training – to promote concern for Black lives through exhibiting compassion toward Black employees:

*P3a.* Organizations may resource their onboarding and socialization practices to imbue employees with compassion, which increases social resources for Black employees suffering from racial trauma.

Increasing the generative aspects of relationships (Feldman, 2004) may also take shape through organizational strategy. Employers could examine their practices around diversity and inclusion at work to support Black employees' experiencing racial trauma. Black employees are particularly sensitive to organizational diversity climates, or the extent to which employers demonstrate that they value diversity (Singh *et al.*, 2013; Purdie-Vaughns *et al.*, 2008). Police brutality toward Blacks in the environment could prompt discussions of race as part of an organizations' diversity and inclusion strategy. Employers may feel ill-prepared to engage in meaningful conversations on race, discrimination, and difference at work, yet practitioner-oriented tools developed by diversity and inclusion firms (e.g. Catalyst, 2016) may improve communication of care in practice. Although discussing inequality in one's workplace is uncomfortable (Ferdman, 2016), minority employees feel more included when employers have genuine interests in their unique, distinctive identities (Shore *et al.*, 2010). Thus, cultivating high-quality relationships across differences may foster positive work conditions that encourage employees to heal from their trauma (Ragins, 1997; Creary *et al.*, 2015).

Organizations may also cultivate cognitive resources through integrating diverse perspectives into the strategic thinking and planning for addressing ways to ameliorate Black employees' trauma (Ely and Thomas, 2001; Stavros and Cole, 2016). Companies that acknowledge that their Black employees may identify with victims of police violence and the subsequent impact on their well-being may adjust their work processes to accommodate times when employees may desire to call in Black, similar to other flexible work arrangements (e.g. Hewlett, 2007). Further, Blacks working in inclusive organizations feel engaged and committed to share their knowledge for collaborative strategies (Roberson, 2006). Therefore, Black employees may share how they would best like to receive compassion and care from their employer when experiencing racial trauma:

*P3b.* Organizations may resource diversity and inclusion programs through intentionally integrating the perspectives and experiences of their Black employees into the business strategy, which enhances relationships and increases cognitive resources to cope with racial trauma.

Many of these resourcing behaviors are most effective if they are carried about by senior leaders (Nishii and Mayer, 2009; Cox, 1994). The CEOs of Starbucks and PriceWaterhouseCooper demonstrate the impact of organizing on Black employees' well-being. McCluney *et al.* (2017) developed a case study chronicling Starbucks' CEO Howard Schultz expressing grief and resolve following the shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in August 2014. Schultz publicly expressed his anguish to the Starbucks' partners, which led to company-wide discussions of race relations, emotional distress, and collective healing (McCluney *et al.*, 2017). These conversations unearthed many Black employees' beliefs and practices that enable them to function "normally" in the workplace, such as "leaving part of themselves at home" and "working twice as hard to get half as far as their White coworkers" (Roberts *et al.*, 2009; Travis *et al.*, 2016). Schultz committed material resources to help make each Starbucks coffee shop a safe haven for Black Lives Matter activists. His actions increased Black employees' sense of belonging and commitment to the company (McCluney *et al.*, 2017):

*P3c.* Organizations may resource the status and power of the senior leaders to explicitly communicate their support for Black employees experiencing racial trauma.

Organizational resourcing removes Black employees' perceived inability to express themselves openly at work in response to racially traumatic events. In turn, Black employees may feel empowered to cultivate their own resources through taking action on their racial identity or may seek to do this first. We next discuss individual social-identity resourcing to reduce feelings of trauma from witnessing police brutality toward Blacks.

#### *Social-identity resourcing*

Given the novelty and uncertainty of when and how police shootings will occur, it is imperative that Black employees are able to cultivate resources when needed. Creary and colleagues suggested that employees may engage in social-identity resourcing, or "generative mechanisms whereby individuals' social identities are engaged as organizational assets to create new resources" (Creary, 2016, p. 25) to accrue social, symbolic, and psychological capital (Creary *et al.*, 2015; Roberts and Cha, 2016). We assert that resourcing one's racial identity may generate knowledge and insight for navigating racial trauma at work. For instance, engaging in activist movements protesting the violent encounters between Blacks and police may equip Black employees with a social support network, information on trauma and healing, and language to communicate their feelings toward racially traumatic events with coworkers. As such, witnessing violence toward



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Blacks may enable Black employees to enact schemas that draw upon their social identities as generative resources rather than threats. We describe two ways that Blacks may resource their racial identity to generate cognitive and social resources.

First, Blacks may generate internal knowledge through resourcing their identities as guides for behavior. For instance, Black employees who perceive their race as politicized or part of a larger collective (Ospina and Foldy, 2009) may uncover strengths and practices that enable them to work effectively and creatively with their colleagues. Part of holding a politicized identity may involve engaging in political movements or activism that are directly tied to one's identity group (Stewart *et al.*, 2015). Longitudinal studies of college graduates indicate that Black women who perceive their fate as tied to other Black women and are attuned to institutional discrimination develop a personal, political salience that draws them to engage in identity-based activism (Duncan and Stewart, 2007; Cole and Stewart, 1996). Additionally, Black college students' feelings of attachment to their race strongly predicted their involvement in Black Lives Matter activism over several years (Hope *et al.*, 2016). Involvement in these movements can provide critical information for navigating life as a person of color. Thus, one response to racial trauma may be equipping oneself with knowledge and bolstering one's sense of racial/ethnic pride (Phinney, 1992) via involvement in identity-based activism:

*P4a.* Black employees may resource their racial identity by seeking and participating in movements that directly target their race, increasing their cognitive resources to cope with racial trauma.

Black employees may generate social resources through social-identity resourcing by building connections with other Black employees (Roberts and Cha, 2016). Fostering a cohesive group identity helps facilitate the development of cultural competencies that promote relationship building across differences (Ely and Roberts, 2008). Black employee resource groups or affinity networks that extend beyond one company may collectively express their sense of trauma to their employers. Within these groups, Blacks may experience healing and support from likeminded persons. As Black employees ascend to leadership positions, they may further call attention to issues affecting Blacks in and outside of organizations (Roberts and Cha, 2016):

*P4b.* Black employees may resource their racial identity to generate social capital, which increases social resources to cope with racial trauma.

Although we discussed organizational and individual resourcing separately, it is plausible that both approaches influence each other, making resourcing a dynamic process for addressing racial trauma. For instance, Black employees who are empowered by their activist involvement may bring discussions to the workplace that connect their individual experiences to broader, structural issues. In turn, organizational leaders can practice cultural humility, transparency, and humble listening to Black employees' needs. This would create a mutually reinforcing model of organizational support toward Black employees who may feel more at ease expressing their vulnerability to coworkers in safe environments, and in turn create more practices for organizations to address external events that impact their employees:

*P5.* Organizational and social-identity resourcing mutually reinforce each other such that the behaviors in each combine to generate new resources for Black employees to cope with racial trauma.

Collectively, Black employees' and their organization's resources and resourcing could impact the safety of work environments. We explore two levels of safety that could affect Black employees' coping responses to identity threat.

### **Cultivating identity and psychologically safe workplaces**

Organizations that seek to support their Black employees experiencing racial trauma must foster workplaces that affirm Blacks' sense of humanity. Black employees working in companies where they feel safe being Black, and potentially expressing their feelings regarding police violence toward Blacks, may suppress desires to call in Black. Thus, in the following section, we discuss how organizational and social-identity resourcing contribute to a sense of identity and psychological safety at work for Black employees.

Identity safety refers to the belief that an individual can function in a particular context without fear that her or his race, gender, or other social identity will evoke a threat (Purdie-Vaughns and Walton, 2011). As we described earlier, police violence toward Blacks could increase their feelings of threat by challenging the value placed on their identities. Working in an identity safe company may buffer Black employees' feelings of threat and enhance positive work outcomes. Indeed, underrepresented groups feel less vigilant in organizations that signal identity safety as opposed to threat (Cohen and Garcia, 2008; Murphy *et al.*, 2007; Emerson and Murphy, 2014). Decreased threat vigilance leads to sustained and improved work performance (Cohen and Garcia, 2008), which is particularly valuable in the workplace. Additionally, identification with and expression of one's social-identity group also increases individual self-esteem and promotes positive associations with that group (Stets and Burke, 2000; Hogg and Terry, 2000; Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Thus, employers should encourage Black employees to embrace their racial identity to promote positive work and personal outcomes, especially in the aftermath of racially traumatic events.

Psychological safety indicates that an employee can safely engage in interpersonal risks in the workplace and in their work team (e.g. Edmondson, 1999). This framework helps explain why employees share knowledge and voice their issues of concern at work (Morrison, 2011). Psychologically safe work environments increase an individual's sense of belonging, assuring people feel "welcomed, supported, and valued" (Davies *et al.*, 2005, p. 278). Several of the resourcing practices we describe in the previous section may enable Black employees to determine if they work in an identity and psychologically safe organization. Integrating diversity and inclusion into business strategy – which we conceptualized as an organizational resourcing tactic – may signal that the company values Black employees' opinions, experiences, and feelings. Social-identity resourcing may also enhance Black employees' functioning at work by equipping them with knowledge, resilience, and strength (Henderson and Bell, 2016). Further, the social capital generated through identity resourcing could increase Black employees' sense of belonging. Thus, it is possible for organizations to cultivate a sense of identity and psychological safety through resourcing organizational routines and practices:

- P6.* Organizations can create identity and psychologically safe workplaces by demonstrating the value and worth of Black employees' racial identity through organizational and social-identity resourcing.

Together, identity safety beliefs and psychological safety are important work conditions that influence Black employees' experiences, perceptions, and behavior. Employees who perceive that their racial identity group is welcomed and valued may perceive more safety in work teams (Foldy *et al.*, 2009). In the case of Black employees experiencing racial trauma, diverse and inclusive workplaces signal safety to express one's true, distinctive self, regardless of their social identity (Purdie-Vaughns and Walton, 2011). These features of the organization may serve as buffers against racial trauma that help employees capitalize on organizational and individual resources to reach desired work outcomes and exhibit effective work behaviors. In particular, we suspect that creating psychologically and

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identity safe workplaces (Edmonson, 1999) affirms Black employees and reduces their feelings of racial identity threat:

*P7.* Identity safety and psychological safety mutually reinforce each other to reduce feelings of racial identity threat.

### **Implications and future research directions**

In this paper, we consider resources that may enable Black employees to feel safe at work after witnessing police violence against Blacks. Specifically, we propose that these external events negatively impact Black employees, particularly those who perceive that their organizations lack resources to reduce their feelings of racial identity threat. Using EST allows us to explore how racially traumatic events enter organizations, and the impact and duration of the event through the experiences of Black employees. We identified calling in Black as a signal of an organization that lacks safety for Black employees to cope with threats to their racial identity. One mechanism that may buffer the impact of racial trauma on Black employee's well-being is resourcing current organizational and individual practices to alleviate feelings of identity threat. Our model proposes a dynamic model of organizational and social-identity resourcing facilitating identity and psychologically safe workplaces through fostering a compassionate, diversity-focused company culture and Black employees equipping themselves with knowledge from participation in social movements like Black Lives Matter. Collectively, Black employees may be less likely to call in Black or suffer other negative consequences of trauma when their workplaces affirm their racial identity through reinforcing identity safety in their organizational culture.

We consider organizations as dynamic, open systems that are affected by external, social events (Morgan, 1986). Therefore, we perceive employers as having a role to effect change in society by demonstrating their valuing of Black lives in their organization. To develop this conceptual model, we integrate macro, sociological perspectives (e.g. EST, resourcing) with positive organizational scholarship (e.g. compassionate organizing) within a diversity and inclusion framework, which is typically understudied in both of the aforementioned domains. Given the novelty of police violence toward events, it is imperative that our scholarship reflects reality by crossing levels of analyses and disciplinary boundaries to better understand complex phenomena.

Our current model presents a diagnosis for organizations to assess how their resources to address unpredictable, racially traumatic events impact Black employees, and contributes to growing bodies of literature. We identify several theoretical and practical implications from this model, and propose future research directions that may enable us to further understand this complex, multi-leveled phenomenon.

#### *Theoretical implications*

Calling in Black is a novel concept within organizational behavior literature. This conceptualization has numerous implications for management study. For example, feeling the need to avoid the workplace may indicate that employees do not feel that it is appropriate to bring their whole self to work (Roberts *et al.*, 2009), particularly their non-work identities (Rothbard and Ramarajan, 2009). Further, calling in Black extends critical perspectives on work-life balance by considering the experiences of racial minorities as necessitating explicit organizational support and resources (Özbilgin *et al.*, 2011). Although we framed this as a universal phenomenon impacting Black employees, we acknowledge that certain types of jobs may allow flexible work arrangements, and that some Black workers may feel more empowered calling out of work than others. Future investigations should consider the context and types of employees in which calling in Black emerges.

We positioned our conceptual model as external events having a direct effect on individuals within an organization. However, as articulated in EST, there are multiple levels where events may originate. For instance, Black employees may witness racially traumatic events occurring within their workplace from coworkers or supervisors, which would alter how organizations may respond, and which entities (e.g. human resources) would be tasked to reduce the harm. Further, organizations may engage in behaviors that affect their external environments, such as Ben & Jerry's (2016) publicly advocating Black Lives Matter as part of their company's mission statement. By taking this stance, external stakeholders are aware of Ben & Jerry's beliefs on police brutality, which may sway who consumes their product. Further, publicly discussing racial tensions may invite scrutiny and criticism to the organization, making the pathway for organizational-to-environmental effect risky. Given the increase of CEOs engaging their employees on these issues (McGirt, 2017), identifying the barriers and opportunities to discussing these issues publicly warrants further investigation.

Integrating the EST framework with growing models of compassionate organizing (Dutton *et al.*, 2006; Worline and Dutton, 2017) may also highlight the power of external events for cultivating quality relationships within organizations. National tragedies as well as natural disasters tend to spark feelings of unity and cohesion in companies (Morgeson *et al.*, 2015), thus continued study of racially specific events could promote innovative organizing that seeks to support racial minorities. Our model contributes to the nascent research on underrepresented persons within the positive organizational scholarship literature (Rao and Donaldson, 2015; Roberts *et al.*, 2016; Ramarajan and Thomas, 2010) by considering how organizations could compassionately respond to tragic events that affect their employees or surrounding communities. Emphasizing organizational and Black employees' strengths to racially traumatic events led us to examine their resourcing practices as opposed to their inability to "manage" diversity. This approach shifts diversity scholarship toward a generative enhancing component of organizations and away from its overwhelming focus on conflict and discrimination (Roberts, 2006). Future studies may examine how resourcing help employees and senior leaders co-create a diversity strategy that integrates Black employees' experiences and learn ways to develop work environments that value difference (Ely and Thomas, 2001).

Finally, our study considers identity and psychological safety as the goal for organizations seeking to affirm the value of Black lives. Lacking safety is central to experiencing racial trauma from witnessing police violence toward Blacks; that is, Blacks may lack the comfort of knowing that they are safe from violent encounters with law enforcement. Although organizations may not directly reduce the frequency of police-related shootings, they could take it upon themselves to foster workplaces where Black employees do feel safe. This may include having explicit discussions about events occurring external to the workplace that directly impacts employees based on their social identity (Catalyst, 2016). Previous studies of psychological safety do not consider how external events may challenge the validity and stability of safety (Foldy *et al.*, 2009; Purdie-Vaughns *et al.*, 2008). More research on how minority employees perceive safety, perhaps for their own identities as a precursor to psychologically safety, is necessary to further develop this line of inquiry.

#### *Practical implications*

Our paper considers real-world, unpredictable events that are likely to occur in the future. It would behoove organizational leaders to assess their company's ability to address these events. A first step to this would be seeing external events as impacting their employees (McCluney *et al.*, 2017). CEOs should increase their awareness of such events through broadening their news outlets and following leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement. The viral spreading of police brutality may promote the need for organizational leaders to

devise a plan for addressing crises, especially in the social media age (Gruber *et al.*, 2015). Organizations risk their reputation from external stakeholders by not responding to such events, and reduce their ability give and make sense of events (Weick, 1995). Taking a proactive stance to these potential crises could increase organizational leaders' effectiveness (James and Wooten, 2006) particularly when employees feel threat and uncertainty (Waldman *et al.*, 2001). Organizational leaders may consider how their current crisis management plans accounts for racially traumatic events, and whether they have the resources to engage in this type of dialogue with their employees.

We considered organizational resourcing practices to cultivate material, cognitive, and social resources for Black employees experiencing racial trauma. Employers should first assess the accessibility, availability, and application of their resources. It is possible that Black employees perceive that these resources are unattainable, which may be a function of their position or status within the organization. In the instance that these resources are not well established, particularly to address unpredictable racially traumatic events, organizations may develop strategies for engaging in impromptu discussions that recognize and value the experiences of their marginalized employees. Engaging in regular conversation could also inform employers how they may better support their Black employees, and specify which resources would be beneficial. Senior leaders could also evaluate their own stance on issues of racially traumatic events. It is plausible that senior leaders who perceive non-work events as inconsequential to business functions exacerbate feelings of trauma for Black employees witnessing police violence. We recommend that senior leaders consider the consequences of their own beliefs on creating psychologically and identity safe workplaces.

We do not intend for our focus on Black employee resourcing to suggest that they should only develop individual resilience to racially traumatic events. Instead, we recommend that Black employees evaluate features of their workplace that contribute to their sense of safety, trust, and ability to receive compassion when experiencing racial trauma. Black employees presumably evaluate their work environments as safe or unsafe, which would prompt their desire to call in Black. Developing a critical stance for one's organization, possibly as an outsider-within (Collins, 2000; Proudford and Thomas, 1999) could enable employees to assess the likelihood of their workplace as reducing or enhancing feelings of threat. Even though Blacks may work in psychologically safe workplaces, some Black employees may find that they still desire to call in Black. We recommend that those who do call in Black spend that time engaging in generative, identity-enhancing behaviors. Additionally, employees must find ways to work in the midst of events that threaten their identities. For example, scholars of color, perhaps in efforts to affirm their own humanity, recently published papers that call for their disciplines and academic institutions to address and work toward reducing events of racial trauma (e.g. Pratt-Harris *et al.*, 2016; Ruggs *et al.*, 2016; Hall *et al.*, 2016). It may be beneficial to our own well-being if we find that our work in some way reinforces the value and worth of our identities.

### *Limitations*

Our model in its full complexity contains some boundary conditions that warrant further explanation for diversity and inclusion scholarship. The era of Black Lives Matter is not novel compared to previous decades of social justice movements. However, the increased utility of technology and social media creates different mediums through which information and trauma may spread into work environments. Communication and information management theories may inform future research that seeks to understand the role of technology in the working lives of otherwise disenfranchised minority workers.

Although our model focuses on racially traumatic events impacting Black employees, we acknowledge that these processes may manifest among members of other social identities. Recent immigration raids at organizations may bring external racially

traumatic events to the workplace for immigrants, which negatively impacts their health and well-being (Novak *et al.*, 2017). Future studies should consider other marginalized groups that may be impacted by such events. Rather than treating Black employees as a monolithic group, we may also capture unique experiences of threat and trauma within this racial group through an intersectional lens. For instance, the destruction of primarily Muslim communities around the globe that are experienced in real time through social media could affect the lives and well-being of Muslim employees, some of whom may also identify as Black. Additionally, although Black women are also targeted with police violence – especially Black transwomen – their experiences are less prominent than those of Black men (Bowleg, 2017; Brown *et al.*, 2017). Using an intersectional approach may enable us to understand how events trigger single or multiple identity-related reactions, and how legal, cultural, and political factors influence organizational response.

### Conclusion

Ultimately, using a resourcing perspective, organizations may become spaces that integrate learning about Black employees' experiences into organizational practice by acknowledging the impact of external, racially traumatic events on their well-being. In addition, activist movements such as #BlackLivesMatter offer needed events, information, and opportunities to connect with other members of one's social groups, which may be beneficial for individuals in need of reaffirming their humanity by gaining resources to combat identity threat. In a time when racially motivated violence is consistent, unexpected, and readily shared via social media throughout one's day, resources that create an ethics of care and identity-enhancing tools for Black employees to navigate their workplaces are critical. It is our hope that more organizations will create resources to support employees who face racial identity trauma, ameliorating the need to call in Black.

### Note

1. "Clutch" is slang for helpful.

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**About the authors**

Courtney L. McCluney is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Leadership and Organizational Behavior in the Darden School of Business and the Center for ASPIRE in the School of Nursing at the University of Virginia. She earned her PhD Degree in Psychology from the University of Michigan and BA Degree in Psychology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her research focuses on diversity and inclusion, marginality, and well-being at work. Courtney L. McCluney is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: [mcccluneyc@darden.virginia.edu](mailto:mcccluneyc@darden.virginia.edu)

Courtney M. Bryant is a PhD Student in Organizational Psychology at Michigan State University. She earned her Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from Tuskegee University. Her research focuses on diversity in the workplace, particularly identity, forms of discrimination, and interpersonal relationships.

Danielle D. King is a PhD Student in Organizational Psychology from Michigan State University. She received her BA Degree in Psychology from Spelman College and her MA Degree in Organizational Psychology from Michigan State. Her research focuses primarily on workplace resilience, social identity, and employee voice.

Abdifatah A. Ali is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Department of Work and Organizations, Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota. He earned his PhD Degree in Organizational Psychology from Michigan State University and BA Degree in Psychology from San Diego State University. His research focuses on stigma and identity, workplace diversity and inclusion, and motivation and emotions.