

BREAKING CORPORATE PROMISES: Mega-Threats, Tokenistic Solidarity, and the Psychological Implications on Minority Employees

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INTRODUCTION

THE PROMINENCE OF MEGA-THREATS

Mega-threats—defined as **large-scale, publicized, negative events targeting a specific minority group**—include events such as police shootings targeting Black Americans, anti-Asian violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, and violence against women (e.g., Sarah Everard). **The rise in coverage of these events possibly worsens the effects on the specific minority targeted by the mega-threat.** The mega-threat that I focused on was George Floyd's police killing on May 25, 2020.

HYPOCRISY & TOKENISTIC SOLIDARITY

In addition to affecting individuals, **mega-threats also pressure organizations to respond with solidarity statements.** Following George Floyd's police killing, corporations poured out their sentiments via solidarity statements and donations. Unfortunately, many of these statements were **inauthentic, hypocritical,** and forms of **corporate tokenistic solidarity.**

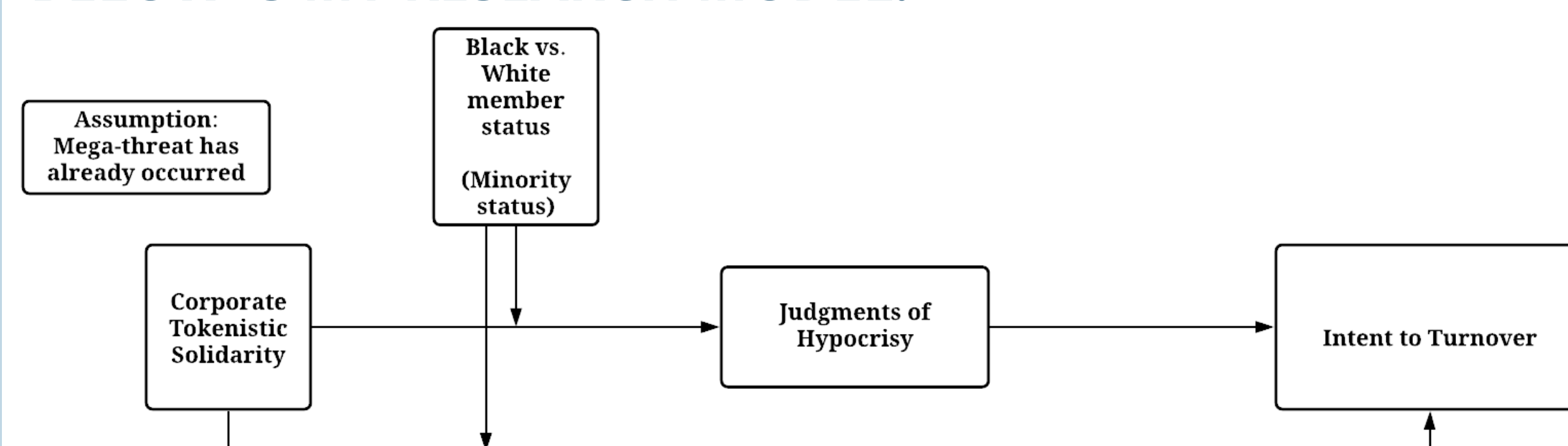
I define corporate tokenistic solidarity with three characteristics:

1. It involves **activist messaging** and **performative exhibitions** of support for socio-political causes.
2. The corporate messaging and internal practices are misaligned—a form of **organizational hypocrisy.**
3. These messages are **reactive in nature** in response to mega-threats.

IMPORTANCE OF THE MINORITY LENS

Organizational research tends to be race-neutral despite the fact that universal theories do not exist. Race is an important factor in how corporate tokenistic solidarity is received since **these messages are targeted towards the particular racial minority** that is affected by the mega-threat at hand.

BELOW IS MY RESEARCH MODEL:



HYPOTHESES

H1: In the wake of a mega-threat, **minority employees** will be more likely to have **higher intent to turnover** compared to majority employees **when organizations make tokenistic statements.**

H2: In the wake of a mega-threat, **minority employees** will be more likely to **see their organizations' tokenistic statements as hypocritical** compared to majority employees.

H3: The indirect effect between tokenistic solidarity and intent to turnover through judgments of hypocrisy will be moderated by minority status such that **minority employees will make more judgments of hypocrisy** than their majority counterparts, which in turn, will lead to **higher intent to turnover.**

METHOD



I USED A VIGNETTE SCENARIO EXPERIMENT...

361 participants (151 Black participants and 210 White participants) randomly read a scenario depicting an **authentic brand (Ben & Jerry's)** or a **tokenistic brand (Häagen-Dazs)** without knowing the brand name. **The scenarios described how these two brands reacted to George Floyd's police killing on May 25, 2020.** Ben and Jerry's published many Tweets regarding inequality in the United States a year after Floyd's police killing, while Häagen-Dazs stopped addressing sociopolitical issues after June 4, 2020.

...FOLLOWED BY A QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

Participants took a 58-item questionnaire measuring work behaviors and organizational perceptions:

- Authenticity** ("My company's response highlights that they care about racial minorities' experiences")
- Organizational Hypocrisy** ("The leaders of my organization are hypocrites")
- Intent to Turnover** ("If faced with this situation, I would plan on leaving my job very soon")
- Organizational Identification** ("When someone criticizes [company], it will feel like a personal insult")
- Organizational Internalization** ("The reason I prefer this organization to others is because of what it stands for, its values")

RESULTS

$$1 \quad \text{Tokenistic Condition} + \text{Race} = \uparrow \text{Turnover Intent}$$

Black employees who underwent the tokenistic condition noted higher levels of turnover intent.

$$2 \quad \text{Tokenistic Condition} + \text{Race} = \uparrow \text{Hypocrisy Judgments}$$

Black employees who underwent the tokenistic condition noted higher levels of hypocrisy judgments.

$$3 \quad \text{Race} \rightarrow \uparrow \text{Hypocrisy Judgments} \rightarrow \uparrow \text{Turnover Intent}$$

Hypocrisy judgments acted as a mediator variable, increasing intent to turnover for employees who underwent the tokenistic condition, especially for Black employees.

IMPLICATIONS

My study provides evidence that when confronted by mega-threats, **the interaction of race and tokenistic solidarity predicts judgments of organizational hypocrisy, which then predicts higher levels of turnover.** Through my analyses, I show that the minority status of an employee significantly affects an employee's response to corporate tokenistic solidarity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Organizations need to issue **genuine apologies** and **form long-term partnerships** with organizations dedicated to minority-related socio-political causes.

Organizations should implement **research-based blind hiring** to reduce unconscious bias, which may surface through **ingroup bias** and **stereotype threat.**

Instead of numerical diversity reports, organizations should disseminate annual **perception-focused surveys** to minority employees.

Immediately following mega-threats, managers should keep **checking in, speaking up,** and **giving time** to employees inflicted by the mega-threat.

LIMITATIONS

Vignette experiments are subject to validity concerns. If the gap between the participant and the vignette character is too large, the participant will not adopt the vignette character fully and may render the experiment invalid.

Additionally, **purposive sampling's** main limitation is that **excluded subjects may differ from those included.**

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