INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL TOPIC FORUM

DIVERSITY AT A CRITICAL JUNCTURE: NEW THEORIES FOR A COMPLEX PHENOMENON

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In 2015 we issued a call for papers for a Special Topic Forum (STF) on Diversity at a Critical Juncture in response to contextual shifts that raised questions regarding the assumptions, scope, and implications of prevalent theorizing on diversity in management. Four years later, societal trends have made this call even more urgent and relevant. Although these trends are both ominous and disruptive to the current state of knowledge, they also provide opportunities to pursue new questions and develop new theories on the topic of diversity. The articles published in this STF advance diversity theory by addressing several aspects of our changing context and the complexities associated with it. We begin this introduction to the STF by first tracking the trajectory of diversity theorizing over the past five decades, highlighting various epochal shifts at the societal level as well as within the Academy of Management that marked the ascendancy of the field of diversity. We then describe the current critical juncture, highlighting how the articles address the issues identified in our initial call. We close by offering several pathways for further theorizing that incorporate the complexity, unpredictability, and importance of studying diversity at this current critical juncture.

Diversity theorizing is at a critical juncture in management studies. A critical juncture is a "moment or certain window in time where there is

a significant possibility of a decisive transition" from one state to another (Liu, Onar, & Woodward, 2014: 6). This special topic forum (STF) arose from what we saw as significant changes in national and global contexts for the study of diversity in organizations that required new theorizing. When we issued the call for papers for this STF in July 2015, we identified key contextual shifts that raised questions regarding the assumptions, scope, and implications of popularized theories of diversity in management.

We first noted that paradoxical tensions existed between indications of the acceptance of difference (e.g., same-sex marriage laws, adoption of diversity management policies in organizations, more women in leadership positions) and continuing subtle—and at many times quite overt—discrimination and harassment at work, as well

as a resurgence of extreme resistance to diversity in the larger society. Second, we observed a variety of factors, including immigration, transnationally linked markets, and the growth of emerging markets, that indicated we could no longer remain U.S. centric in our theories or approaches to diversity. Finally, we commented that workplace diversity research had generated relatively more knowledge about the experiences of exclusion than knowledge of the mechanisms, processes, or practices that foster equality and inclusion in the workplace.

The trends we described have intensified since we issued the call. These ominous broader societal trends have been met with increasingly polarizing discourse on the relevance and impact of diversity in the workplace. Such challenging times disrupt existing knowledge, yet they also provide opportunities to pursue new questions and develop new theories. The articles published in this STF advance diversity theory by addressing several aspects of our changing context and the complexities associated with it.

We begin this introduction by revisiting earlier critical junctures for the diversity field that shaped the current state of theorizing. Figure 1 presents a dynamic encapsulation of (a) the interplay among key sociopolitical contextual forces (the outer rim), (b) internal sociopolitical rhetoric and structures for addressing diversity in the Academy of Management (the middle rim), and (c) prominent emergent research themes (the

FIGURE 1
Trajectory of Diversity Field: A Fifty-Year View
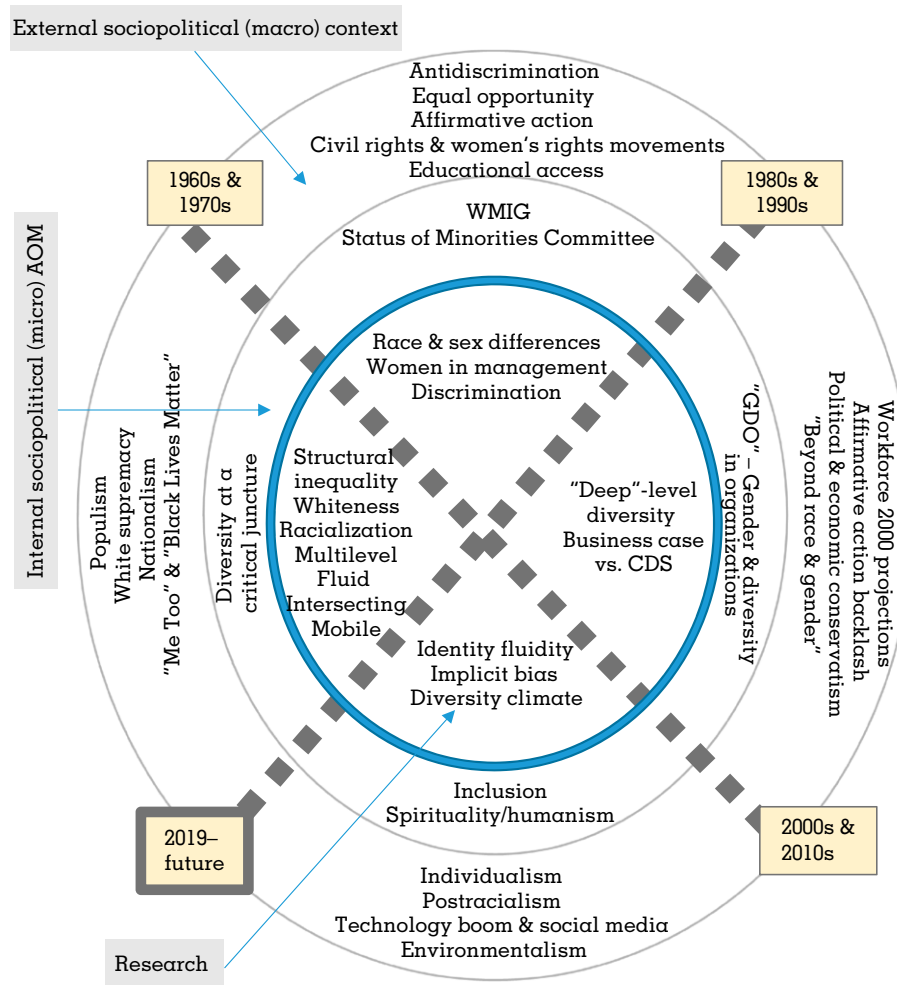
Note: WMIG = Women in Management Interest Group; CDS = critical diversity studies.

inner circle). While certain pressures, structures, and themes span twenty years or more, prominent and disruptive shifts are also apparent.

We assert that the diversity trajectory has shifted over the past fifty years, from an initial antidiscrimination and equality perspective of the underrepresentation of racial minorities and women in management (e.g., Bartol, 1978; Bartol, Evans, & Stith, 1978; Bell, 1990; Brief, van Sell, & Aldag, 1979; Brown & Ford, 1977; Cox & Nkomo, 1986; Dipboye, 1985; Kanter, 1977; Nieva & Gutek, 1980; Powell, 1987; Thomas & Alderfer, 1989) to individualized experiences of belonging to multiplex, fluid categories. In the discussion that follows, we specifically focus on the significant influence the late-twentieth-century epochal shift to "diversity management" had on the trajectory of the field and on the changing sociopolitical context of the present critical juncture. Although the foundations of diversity theory were developed from a U.S.–centric perspective, importantly, the concept of diversity spread to other parts of the globe, influencing scholarship and practice in Europe and other Western countries (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000).

Critically reflecting on the theoretical foundations of the field and the context within which they unfolded can inform our responses to the present critical juncture. Scholars have argued that context influences theory development in an academic field (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Hambrick & Chen, 2008). In writing this introduction, we drew on Hambrick and Chen's (2008) model of the relationship between context and the ascendancy of a new field. Their model provided a lens for discussing how the diversity field developed, the contextual influences on its trajectory, and the struggles for legitimacy in the broader management academy. The authors proposed that a new field must simultaneously demonstrate its distinctiveness, assert its worthiness to be accepted by established domains, and mobilize resources (2008: 37). Achieving these criteria is not simply a matter of the intellectual advances within an academic field, however. The contours and evolution of a field are also greatly influenced by external and internal sociopolitical forces (Hambrick & Chen, 2008).

In the case of diversity, external sociopolitical forces include equality-seeking civil rights social movements for oppressed groups, along with resistance against those movements from those with motivation, power, and resources to limit progress. Other forces include demographic changes, prevailing social and cultural attitudes, and political ideologies, leadership, laws, and social policies that support or curb equality (Healy, 2015; Syed & Özbilgin, 2009). Although all academic fields are influenced by external sociopolitical forces, the effects on diversity as a field of study are extremely powerful; social differences among people have a long history of determining access to power and resources, often fueling faultlines and conflicts within and across nations (Castells, 1997).

Within the management academy, important internal sociopolitical forces also shape diversity scholarship, including researchers' social identities and demographic composition, politics of knowledge production, epistemological preferences, and standards and norms for research quality (Adler & Harzing, 2009; Delbridge & Fiss, 2013; Jané, van Esch, & Bilimoria, 2018). Internal sociopolitical forces impacting the diversity field are themselves influenced by forces in the external sociopolitical context. Views about the need for the diversity field, the ways diversity scholarship is evaluated by gatekeepers, and the characteristics of those who might engage in diversity research are not isolated from forces in the external sociopolitical context (King, Avery, Hebl, & Cortina, 2017).

In the following section we detail the interplay between internal and external sociopolitical forces as they catalyzed the late-twentieth-century epochal shift from antidiscrimination and equal opportunity to diversity management. We follow this with a description of the current critical juncture. We then highlight how the articles in this STF address several of the issues identified in the call for new theory. We conclude by offering suggestions for how the field can forge meaningful paths forward to address the complexity, unpredictability, and immense importance of turning the current critical juncture in a progressive direction.

THE EPOCHAL SHIFT FROM ANTIDISCRIMINATION AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY TO DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

External Sociopolitical Context

Past reviews of the field suggest that two significant interrelated events within the broader U.S. sociopolitical context fueled the shift from a

discourse of compliance with antidiscrimination legislation and affirmative action to the idea of diversity (e.g., Linnehan & Konrad, 1999; Roberson, Ryan, & Ragins, 2017). First, the election of Ronald Reagan as President of the United States in 1980 ushered in a conservative political ideology that advanced color blindness, the dismantling of race-conscious affirmative action in employment, deregulation, and minimal government intervention in social issues (Devins, 1989). Group-based solutions to discrimination and workplace exclusion emanating from the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title VII were viewed as an affront to individual rights, individual freedoms, and individual agency. This was in stark contrast to the earlier era of a strong civil rights doctrine focused on remedying discriminatory practices designed to deny racial minorities (particularly African Americans) and women equal access to opportunities in public and private spaces (Devins, 1989).

Second, the Hudson Institute, a conservative think tank, published *Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the Twenty-First Century* (Johnston & Packer, 1987), which predicted that by the year 2000 racial and ethnic minorities and women would make up a majority of the net new entrants into the U.S. labor force. Practitioners and organizational scholars latched onto these predictions, resulting in changes in practice and research that would have major effects on the trajectory of the field (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000; Nkomo & Cox, 1996; Roberson et al., 2017; Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, & Nkomo, 2010).

Growing political and legal challenges made it difficult for human resource managers to sustain antidiscrimination and equal opportunity justifications for hiring and retaining women and racial/ethnic minorities. Instead, they argued that attracting and managing a diverse workforce would be the key to future business success, using a "bottom-line" approach that many advocates believed would be more palatable than antidiscrimination and would therefore engender voluntary commitment (Edelman, Fuller, & Mara-Drita, 2001; Kelly & Dobbin, 1998). Consultants echoed the need for organizations to move beyond solely focusing on race and gender discrimination to embracing the broader agenda of managing diversity to improve organizational performance (e.g., Thomas, 1992). Much of the discourse contrasted the negative connotations of compliance with antidiscrimination legislation with the positive receptivity toward valuing diversity (Cavanaugh, 1997; Thomas & Ely, 2001). In what would become an influential article, Cox and Blake (1991) reviewed conceptual and empirical work and concluded that managing diversity could create a competitive advantage.

Effects of the Shift on the Trajectory of Diversity Theory

When management researchers turned their attention to diversity, they focused on theorizing about the very ontology of the concept (Milliken & Martins, 1996; Nkomo & Cox, 1996). Consistent with developments in practice, management scholars theorized diversity as a broad binary construct consisting of visible and invisible or surface-level and deep-level categories of difference (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998). This framing amplified the emerging idea that diversity includes any attribute people use to tell themselves that another person is different (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998: 81). Consequently, differences based on values, personality, knowledge, tenure, and skills were featured in empirical studies of diversity and organizational outcomes, alongside (and in many cases more prominently or instead of) race, gender, and other socially marked categories that were historical bases of discrimination and legal protection.

This expansion of the diversity construct led to the differential weighting of "deep-level" differences as more relevant, influential, and generalizable for organizational performance than "surface-level" experiences of marginalization. For example, the incorporation of cognitive differences in the meaning of diversity opened up a path of theory development on the functioning and compositional dynamics of diverse work teams/groups (Jackson, May, & Whitney, 1995; Joshi & Neely, 2018; Lau & Murnighan, 1998). Theoretical attention to other categories of difference, including age, sexual orientation, religion, disability, and all racial and ethnic groups, has lagged behind (Bell, Kwesiga, & Berry, 2010; Colella, Hebl, & King, 2017; Ruggs et al., 2013; Stone & Colella, 1996).

In essence, the shift to diversity management set the foundational path for *what* and *how* management scholars would theorize diversity in organizations (Oswick & Noon, 2014), and it continues to influence the trajectory of the field. *What* to theorize was largely determined by the

ontological positioning of diversity as any attribute people use to tell themselves that another person is different. Although diversity is a group construct and no individual is "diverse," *individuals and their experiences* became the focus of research, with scholars paying less attention to theorizing about the power of dominant groups and systems of domination (Cavanaugh, 1997; Prasad & Mills, 1997). Notably, the term *diverse* is still often used to connote non-Whites, without naming race or gender overtly.

Within categories of difference, scholars assumed that individuals occupied a single category (e.g., women, minorities, LGBTQ individuals, people with disabilities), rather than multiple categories simultaneously (Shore et al., 2009). Hence, theorizing tended to focus on single categories of difference in isolation from others (for an early exception see Elsass & Graves, 1997). Although a number of scholars have subsequently proposed the adoption of multiple demographic characteristics and intersectional lenses (e.g., Creary, Caza, & Roberts, 2015; Holvino, 2010; Lau & Murnighan, 1998; Liu, Park, Hymer, & Thatcher, 2019; Ramarajan, 2014; Thatcher & Patel, 2012), this theme does not feature consistently in diversity theorizing.

The shift also influenced *how* diversity is theorized. Several notable trends emerged, including a predilection for microlevel theorizing using social psychological theories (e.g., social categorization, social identity theory, stereotyping, similarity-attraction hypothesis, stigmatization, and social information processing) and their derivations in diversity theory (e.g., faultlines, diversity climate). Microlevel theorizing has been very important in generating knowledge about the experiences of nondominant groups with respect to individual behavior, group processes, and their relationship to affective and organizational outcomes (Ragins & Gonzalez, 2003; Roberson et al., 2017). However, organizational-level processes of social differentiation and inequality have received less attention in theory development (Joshi & Neely, 2018).

On a macro level, the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991) and competitive advantage became the dominant theoretical lenses for explaining the relationship between diversity and organizational performance (e.g., Cox & Blake, 1991; Richard, 2000). Yet, in general, diversity researchers have been less likely to employ macrolevel theories from sociology, political science, critical theory, and feminist studies. Rarely are theoretical bridges consistently built between macro, micro, and meso levels, despite calls for linkage (Joshi, Liao, & Roh, 2011; Syed & Özbilgin, 2009).

Although societal systems of domination (i.e., racism, sexism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and classism) are particularly relevant to understanding diversity in the workplace, the macro social-historical-political context has been largely neglected within management studies and diversity theorizing (Healy, 2015; Knights & Omanović, 2016). When context has been incorporated into theorizing, it has consisted primarily of elements related to the task environment, diversity climate, or group culture within organizations (Roberson et al., 2017). Explicit incorporation of the macro socialpolitical context is rare (e.g., McCluney, Bryant, King, & Ali, 2017).

Critical diversity studies arose largely in response to the shift to diversity and in opposition to the aforementioned approaches that dominated early theorizing (e.g., Litvin, 1997; Prasad & Mills, 1997). Critical scholars argued that the inherent reductionism of a broad definition of diversity—everyone is diverse—could render the concept meaningless (Konrad, 2003). They also argued that the instrumentality of a value-in-diversity perspective could detract from focusing on the inequality experienced by historically disadvantaged groups embedded within an integrated system of discrimination and exclusion in organizations (e.g., Linnehan & Konrad, 1999; Noon, 2007; Zanoni et al., 2010). Finally, they challenged the U.S.-centric nature of diversity theory and its relevance to countries with different social, cultural, and historical contexts (e.g., Jones, Pringle, & Shepherd, 2000). These and other critiques have created what some reviews refer to as a binary distinction between mainstream and critical approaches to diversity in the workplace and a dichotomy between individual and structural explanations for inequality (e.g., Pringle & Strachan, 2015).

The Internal Sociopolitical Context

The internal sociopolitical context of the management academy also strongly influenced how diversity as a field of study established its identity and became a professional division within the Academy of Management (AOM). To the extent an academic field is a socially constructed entity, its

ontology and boundaries are socially negotiated and only exist when a critical mass of scholars gives it meaning (Hambrick & Chen, 2008). In other words, the theoretical choices we made (and continue to make) as diversity scholars are not isolated from internal sociopolitical forces that include our identities, the pressures emanating from established management fields, and the social identities of scholars outside the new field whose perceptions about diversity help determine its perceived legitimacy (King et al., 2017).

According to Hambrick and Chen, *"Because the substantive correctness of early research in a new field is often difficult to judge, scholars in more established fields will look for indicators that the new area's research resembles a style they hold in high regard, a style that is 'on the right track'"* (2008: 38, emphasis added). Archival material about the initial formalization of a women in management research group and the later establishment of the Gender and Diversity in Organizations Division (GDO) in AOM in 1998 provided insights into the significant challenges management scholars faced in their efforts to establish the theoretical distinctiveness and legitimacy of diversity as a field of study.

After receiving a report on the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles in AOM, the Board of Governors (BOG) established the Ad Hoc Committee on the Status of Women in the Management Profession in 1973 to provide information on the status of women and to assist in increasing participation of qualified women in AOM activities and the management profession (Greenfield & Zacur, 1981). A group of academics composed mainly of White women also formed the Status of Women Interest Group (SWIG). Unlike mainstream fields at the time, SWIG had a dual mission of being a research forum and an advocate for increased participation by women in AOM (Greenfield & Zacur, 1981). The results of a survey of AOM members on the SWIG mailing list indicated concerns about AOM being an "old boy network" and the perception that research on women was not respected by male colleagues, no matter how competent the scholarship (Greenfield & Zacur, 1981: 84).

Obtaining divisional status required two attempts. The first application submitted by SWIG in 1979 to become the Research on Women and Minorities Division was not successful (Inderlied, 1979). The Professional Division Review Committee recommended approval, despite concerns about whether the study of women and minorities could be pursued within the structures of existing divisions and the clarity of the criteria for divisional status (Milkovich, 1980). The BOG did not approve divisional status. SWIG correspondence notes that it became the first and only interest group to be denied divisional status by the BOG (Greenfield & Zacur, 1981). Decision makers were overwhelmingly White men, with women holding only 11 percent of BOG positions for the period 1974–1980 (Greenfield & Zacur, 1981: 92).

Members of SWIG decoupled its dual mission and became the Women in Management Interest Group (WMIG) in 1981, after realizing that gaining legitimacy and attaining divisional status required a research-focused mission (Powell & Tucker, 1983). The second application submitted by WMIG in 1983 was successful in establishing the Women in Management (WIM) division (Powell & Tucker, 1983). However, unlike the first application, this one did not include minorities. In response to concerns among some AOM members that "Women in Management is a *ghetto* [emphasis ours] that keeps them isolated and limits their participation in other parts of the Academy," WMIG leadership pointed to a growing body of research published in top management journals, participation of members in annual AOM programs, the presence of women in AOM leadership roles, and the research on gender by men (Tucker, 1983: 32–33). Attainment of divisional status brought more time on the annual program, as well as resources, but, most important, the possibility of legitimacy within AOM and a social structure to sustain the collective action of members of the field (Hambrick & Chen, 2008).

This was not the case for scholars focused on research on racial and ethnic minorities. The Ad Hoc Committee on the Status of Minorities[1] was established in 1974 by the BOG in response to the low representation of racial and ethnic minorities in AOM (Ford, 1975). Without a critical mass of scholars, as had been the case for WMIG, it was

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[1] The committee eventually lapsed. Since that time there have been intermittent committees focused on the status of minorities in AOM (i.e., Status of Minorities Task Force, People of Color Committee, and Diversity Task Force). A grassroots effort that began in 2005, driven by the Coalition for Faculty Diversity, led to the formation of a standing committee in 2010. The mission of the Diversity and Inclusion Theme Committee is to provide learning and outreach opportunities that foster a more diverse and inclusive Academy of Management community (see https://ditc.aom.org/).

difficult to gain the legitimacy required for divisional status (Hambrick & Chen, 2008). At the time of its successful application, WMIG met the threshold requirement of 3 percent of total membership for divisional status and presented evidence of a body of research on women in management (Powell & Tucker, 1983). The same could not be argued for race and ethnicity, given its general absence and marginalization in management scholarship (Nkomo, 1992).

More than a decade later, racial and ethnic diversity research, as well as that of other categories of difference (e.g., sexual orientation, disability, and age), was folded into the expanded scope of the WIM Division, as cemented in its name change to Gender and Diversity in Organizations in 1998. Discussion questions among the members of the division captured the politics of the name change:

> What role should diversity play in the WIM domain statement? If other diversity groups move to interest group status, and perhaps even divisional status, how will we manage overlapping areas of concern? Would the "diversity" groups define our domain(s) in the Academy as separate groups or should we band together as a single large domain? (Mainiero, 1996: 2).

In the initial voting process, the name "Diversity in Organizations" was ranked #1 by the largest percentage of votes (Konrad, 1997: 46). However, the name that "captured the attention of the executive committee, *Gender and Diversity in Organizations*," was viewed as capturing preferences from the survey and was sent to the membership for the final vote (Mainiero, 1997: 53). The foregrounding of gender while all other diversity categories were subsumed under "diversity" signified the prominence and power of "gender" compared to the remaining areas of the field. We believe this can be explained by the longer history of research on women in management and a relatively higher critical mass of scholars (i.e., White women) who led professionalization of the field. Gender diversity continues to occupy a prominent position in diversity theory and research.

The pursuit of legitimacy within the management academy remains a double-edged sword for diversity scholars. Reliance on theories from adjacent management fields (i.e., organizational behavior and human resources management) facilitated access to scholarly publications in top journals and professional status within

AOM. On the other hand, because diversity as a field was and is substantively different from established management fields, and because diversity scholars (predominantly White women and racial and ethnic minority women and men) were also largely different from established management scholars (predominantly White men), this emulation was and remains a costly requirement (Jané et al., 2018; Settles, Buchanan, & Dotson, in press). The pressures to mainstream theorizing through anchoring diversity dynamics in "generalizable" disciplines and phenomena continue to divert attention from many scholars' motivation for engaging in diversity research—addressing discrimination and inequality in organizations and, ultimately, society (e.g., Bell, 2009; Holmes, in press).

Taken together, external and internal sociopolitical factors have had a significant influence on the early development and trajectory of diversity theorizing and research. In the next section we describe the contours of the current critical juncture that precipitated this STF.

THE CONTOURS OF THE PRESENT CRITICAL JUNCTURE

Today's critical juncture is significantly different from the one in which the field emerged. Overt negative attitudes, hate crimes, and regressive policies toward racial and ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, religious groups, immigrants and immigration, and women and women's rights have resurfaced, particularly in the United States and other Western countries (Konrad, 2018; Ng & Stamper, 2018; Vieten & Poynting, 2016). Racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, and other exclusionary attitudes and behaviors have always been present in the broader social context, but scholars are concerned with their virulent global resurgence (Gusterson, 2017; Kaltwasser, Taggart, Espejo, & Ostiguy, 2017).

At an ideological and political level, these troubling forces are being attributed to a resurgence of right-wing populism, White supremacy, anti-Semitism, antipathy toward immigrants and Muslims, nationalism, and a backlash against reconfigurations of power, wealth, and identity associated with globalization and neoliberalism (Castells, 1997; Gusterson, 2017; Wodak, 2016). The effects of these sociopolitical forces are being seen in the workplace, reminding us of the inextricable link between organizations and the

broader society (McCluney et al., 2017; Opie & Roberts, 2017; Ragins, Gonzalez, Ehrhardt, & Singh, 2012; Richard, Stewart, McKay, & Sackett, 2017; Singh & Selvarajan, 2013), as well as the links between inequality, power, and diversity.

In the United States many scholars and practitioners believed the 2008 election of Barack Obama as the first African American President signaled that the country was now postracial, although his campaign and election were met with thinly veiled and blatant racist rhetoric (Hughey, 2012; Simon & Sidner, 2018; Wingfield & Feagin, 2012). The subsequent 2016 election of Donald Trump as U.S. President, along with his divisive rhetoric and policies toward immigrants, women's rights, and racial, ethnic, religious and sexual minorities, has correlated with a sharp rise in overt racism, sexism, and hate crimes (Bobo, 2017; Crandall, Miller, & White, 2018; Konrad, 2018).

In 2017 there were over 7,000 hate crimes reported to the FBI, and in 2018 hate crimes rose to their highest figure in twenty years (Barrouquere, 2018). As of 2018, there were more than 900 hate groups in the United States (Barrouquere, 2018; Stone-Romero, Stone, Canedo, Ramachandran, & Torres, 2019). Further, confrontational public policing by White Americans of racial and ethnic minorities engaging in everyday activities, from swimming at a community pool to meeting at a coffee shop, is increasingly being reported and broadcast on social media (Patton & Farley, 2018). These acts permeate all spheres of public life, signaling that racial and ethnic minorities do not belong, are not welcome, and will be greeted with potentially life-threatening hostility. This has raised the question of whether implicit, subtle racism is giving way to its old-fashioned blatant form (Bobo, 2017; Brief, 2019).

Racial microaggressions and antagonistic sentiment in society spill over into workplaces (Ragins et al., 2012), affecting customers (e.g., Harris, Henderson, & Williams, 2005; Snider & Meyer, 2018) and employees (McCluney et al., 2017). Although most aggrieved employees do not sue, perceptions of discrimination and harassment are evident by the more than 100,000 discrimination claims filed annually with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; many others are filed with state and local agencies. Nooses, swastikas, sexual harassment, and sexual assault are some of the tools of terror nondominant group members face at work,

sometimes even in organizations purported to be diversity friendly.

Indeed, there are often disconnects between diversity posturing and what happens at work. Large organizations, such as Federal Express, General Motors, Lowe's, United Parcel Service, and Walmart, and smaller organizations have been sued, some repeatedly, for various forms of discrimination (i.e., race, sex, disability, age) during the "valuing diversity" era. Indeed, despite many organizations' claims to the contrary, a meta-analysis of field experiments published between 1989 and 2015, representing more than 55,000 applications for more than 26,000 jobs, indicated that race discrimination in hiring did not decline in that twenty-five-year period (Quillian, Pager, Hexel, & Midtbøen, 2017).

Once hired, employees find that discrimination in ostensibly merit-based compensation, rewards, promotions, terminations, and layoffs persists (Bell, Berry, Marquardt, & Galvin Green, 2013; Briscoe & Joshi, 2017; Elvira & Zatzick, 2002). White men in the United States continue to be overrepresented in high-status, high-paid jobs, while White women and racial and ethnic minorities remain underrepresented in such jobs (Stainback & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012). Disparities exist even when human capital and performance are at least comparable (Castilla & Benard, 2010; Joshi, Son, & Roh, 2015).

Right-wing populist resurgence is present not only in the United States but also in well-established Western European and Nordic democracies, as well as in the new postcommunist democracies of Eastern Europe (Wejnert, 2014: 164). Although not as pronounced or examined, populist sentiments in Africa, Australia, Latin America, the Middle East, New Zealand, South America, and parts of Asia have been noted by researchers (Woods & Wejnert, 2014). The main targets of far-right populism have been religious and ethnic and racial minorities. Expressions of hostility range from subtle forms of discrimination, the banning of symbols of difference (e.g., religious symbols, wearing of hijabs and burqas), and prohibition on the construction of minarets to blatantly articulated xenophobia and hate crimes against Jews, Muslims, the Roma, Turks, and immigrants from Sub-Saharan and North Africa (Helbling, 2014; Rosenfeld, 2013; Wodak, 2016).

Similar to trends in the United States, data sources report a rise in hate crimes in European countries (e.g., O'Neill, 2017; Van Kesteren, 2016).

For instance, the number of recorded hate crimes has more than doubled in the past five years in Great Britain (Weaver, 2018). While some of the increase in hate crimes is attributed to better systems for reporting such crimes, observers note the spike in hate crimes following certain events, such as the Brexit vote and the terrorist attacks in 2017 (Weaver, 2018).

A 2017 European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey of people with different ethnic minority and immigrant backgrounds across all twenty-eight member states showed that many respondents faced high levels of discrimination in all spheres of society, including the workplace, because of their ethnic or immigrant background, skin color, religion, and their names (FRA, 2017: 13). Among all groups surveyed, respondents with North African, Sub-Saharan African, and Roma backgrounds indicated the highest levels of discrimination, harassment, and violence motivated by hatred (FRA, 2017: 14).

In a number of other studies, scholars have also reported on the workplace experiences and challenges faced by racial and ethnic minority immigrants and migrants in Europe (e.g., Al Ariss, Vassilopoulou, Özbilgin, & Game, 2013; Berger, Essers, & Himi, 2017; Forstenlechner & Al-Waqfi, 2010; Mahadevan & Kilian-Yasin, 2017). Collectively, these studies document the persistence of workplace inequality in many European countries, despite years of diversity scholarship and purported organizational efforts to "value diversity."

In sum, discrimination, harassment, inequality, and exclusion remain prevalent in society and organizations, and the sociopolitical trends described above threaten the prospects for achieving equality and inclusion for marginalized groups in the workplace. It is not possible to know whether these trends will continue or dissipate in the presence of counterforces to contain them. However, they do bring to the fore a major paradox for the field. Open expressions of hate in society and from managers, coworkers, peers, and customers in organizations exist concurrently with the business case for diversity, affinity groups, chief diversity officers, and diversity "happy talk" (Bell & Hartmann, 2007: 895). In organizations, this happy talk includes statements about valuing diversity and strength in diversity but encompasses racial and ethnic minorities, women, and LGBTQ individuals, alongside pet owners and birth order affinity groups as part of the

"diversity" that is valued, conflating identity-based differences with those that have little meaning in societal systems of discrimination and oppression (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Embrick, 2011; Kang, DeCelles, Tilcsik, & Jun, 2016; Konrad, 2003). By "appearing to recognize difference, yet failing to appreciate white normativity and systemic inequality," the current diversity discourse impedes meaningful progress, masking persistent discrimination and inequality while doing little to alleviate them (Bell & Hartmann, 2007: 896). These factors have created a new critical juncture for diversity scholarship—one that led us to call for new theorizing. In the next section we describe the articles included in this STF and highlight the contributions they make at this critical juncture.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE STF

The call for submissions resulted in a large number of manuscripts, reflecting remarkable interest and energy around the topic. Through a process of great deliberation among members of the editorial team, often involving tough calls and difficult decisions, the initial set was narrowed to the final set of articles that we now summarize. The call outlined some illustrative themes that could take the *what* and *how* of theorizing about diversity research toward a state more attuned with the changing trajectory of the sociopolitical context over the past few decades. The articles included in this special issue resonate with many of these themes.

In grappling with the complexity of *how* to theorize about diversity research, several of the articles push the frontiers of research beyond a preoccupation with individual difference, toward theorizing about ending persistent and pervasive inequality (Janssens & Steyaert, 2019; Leslie, 2019) and toward using a multilevel focus incorporating levels of analysis beyond the group or even the organization (Leigh & Melwani, 2019). The articles in this issue also highlight many novel theoretical perspectives to further enrich the *what* of diversity research by placing the spotlight on the complexity and fluidity of identity and difference in organizations (Clair, Humberd, Rouse, & Jones, 2019; Hall, Hall, Galinsky, & Phillips, 2019; Martin & Côté, 2019). We next summarize this eclectic and thought-provoking set of articles.

As mentioned, one of the stubborn issues at this current critical juncture is the persistence of

inequality in organizations. Janssens and Steyaert (2019) argue that understanding the persistence of inequality in organizations requires rethinking dominant ontologies of diversity in the field. They begin by questioning the ontological dualism between individualist and societist conceptions of diversity and turn to practice theory to theorize about diversity as an emergent social phenomenon that is relationally constituted. A relational ontology shifts the unit of analysis to connections among agency, body, materiality, and structures that are embedded in social order–producing practices in organizations. Because practice theory is simultaneously theoretical and methodological, the authors develop five processual principles for how diversity and diversity-related phenomena are accomplished through practices. They further demonstrate the value of a practice-based theory of diversity for understanding the production and reproduction of inequality, as well as how equality can be accomplished in organizations.

Janssens and Steyaert's article makes two major contributions. First, it demonstrates how a practice-based theory of diversity can assist in bridging existing dichotomies and tensions between—that is, micro versus macro, objectivity versus subjectivity, mind versus body, cognition versus action, and agency versus structure—that have hampered diversity research. Second, to understand inequality or any diversity-related phenomenon and to theorize equality, researchers need to turn to the accomplishment of real-time practices.

Our call also emphasized the need to move research beyond the causes and consequences of discrimination/diversity to actionable frameworks that identify ways to achieve inclusion and equality in the workplace. Leslie's (2019) theory of unintended consequences offers precisely such an actionable framework. It provides a roadmap for researchers and practitioners to take into account consequences of these diversity initiatives that can undermine the overall mandate for diversity and inclusion in an organization. As Leslie notes, the effectiveness of diversity management practices cannot be conceptualized in a unidimensional manner since these practices can potentially unleash a veritable Pandora's box of wide-ranging unintended consequences. This typological approach offers a nuanced view of four types of unintended consequences that range across positive and negative progress

toward diversity goals as well as across desirable to undesirable effects on beneficiaries and nonbeneficiaries alike. Based on a signaling perspective, the article highlights how the mechanisms underlying these varied consequences are interrelated and multidetermined. As such, Leslie offers a broad and deep conceptualization of the complexities associated with implementing diversity practices, thus offering rich insights for further research and policy.

The STF call highlighted the need for theory recognizing the permeability of societal and organizational boundaries and the implications of this permeability for shaping the form and consequences of diversity at meso and micro levels. Leigh and Melwani (2019) present a compelling, open systems view of how societal events affect diversity dynamics in organizations, built on the fundamental premise that the critical junctures we enumerated in our call have a direct impact on individuals' experiences and actions at work. Focusing particularly on police brutality and violence against Black Americans as a mega-threat under study, the authors then elaborate a theoretical model on how systemic injustice affects the identities of targeted group members and how organizations can positively influence the diversity climate through acknowledging and addressing the harm induced by mega-threats. "A mega-threat occurs when an individual or group is targeted, attacked, or harmed because of their social identity group and that event is then highly publicized" (Leigh & Melwani, 2019: 565), thus activating *vicarious* exposure to the harm among other ingroup members, which they carry into their work organizations and draw on to make sense of intergroup dynamics within those organizations. The authors also highlight a potential generative pathway, whereby mega-threats that spill over into supportive diversity climates may catalyze personally risky progroup behavior in the form of positive deviance, or intentional actions that depart from organizational norms to benefit an individual's group. By focusing particularly on police brutality and violence enacted against Black Americans as a mega-threat under study, the article contributes a unique perspective to the organizational literature.

Our call noted that the meaning of diversity and diverse identities in organizations has become increasingly fluid and complex. Workplace diversity theory would benefit from theories that explain the complexities involved with multiple

fluid identities. Clair, Humberd, Rouse, and Jones (2019) articulate a conceptual framework of four types of demographic identities that deviate from the traditional categorization of social groups dominating organizational policies and societal discourse. *Intracategorical multiplicity* occurs when individuals see themselves as belonging to two or more existing groups within a demographic category (e.g., biracial). Individuals with a fluid identity, such as persons who transition from female to male, move from one social class to another, or have transnational mobile identities, are conceived of as experiencing *intracategorical mobility*. Individuals experiencing *intracategorical uncertainty* do not know how to define themselves, as exemplified by people having multiple ethnic backgrounds or those who do not know their heritage. *Acategorical demographic identities* are reflective of individuals who define the self in a way that actively opposes categorization, such as those who see themselves as agender. This framework is valuable in that it clearly describes the ways that individuals' self-categorizations may be misaligned with the categorizations ascribed to them by society and others. As a result, misalignment causes categorization threat and has harmful effects on individuals in organizations. This article is an excellent example of a novel framework that addresses our call for new theorization around the complexity and fluidity of diverse identities.

Related to a focus on expanding definitions of diversity, another important component of our original call, was a recognition of dominant-subordinate group categorizations that are currently undertheorized. Toward this end, Martin and Côté (2019) examine social class categorization, a topic that is rarely investigated in studies of diversity in organizations. The main premise of their theory of "social class transitioners" is that individuals who travel between social classes develop a cultural toolkit that allows for effective bridging of class-based cultural differences in organizations. The extent to which an individual will develop an effective cultural toolkit depends on a variety of factors: the class distance the individual has traveled, the amount of time spent in each class position, and the direction of the transition. The authors invoke a number of strategies that transitioners use to deploy their cultural toolkit (e.g., targeting strategy, brokering strategy, blending strategy) and explore the tension transitioners experience as they decide whether or not to invoke a particular strategy. When invoking certain strategies, transitioners must weigh the potential benefits and costs to themselves with the potential benefits and costs to the group. To that end, this theoretical contribution addresses our call on two fronts. First, it examines the fluidity associated with a social class transition and provides us with some dimensions for understanding the factors that affect the rate and degree of change (distance, duration, and direction). Second, the theoretical framework in this manuscript is cross-level and explores how transitions within a demographic social group have both individual- and group-level effects.

Finally, Hall, Hall, Galinsky, and Phillips (2019) make three important, interrelated contributions to critical juncture issues. First, they directly theorize about persistent discrimination in the workplace. Despite a wide range of studies documenting discrimination and its impact at work, extant theories have not fully accounted for the complexities introduced by increasing demographic diversity. Hall et al.'s MOSAIC framework sheds light on why categorical disadvantages persist in evaluative processes at work by extending theorizing about cognitive bias and stereotyping. Second, the MOSAIC framework explains how multiple identity intersections affect the evaluations of individuals, highlighting implicit and explicit categorization patterns and subsequent discrimination. Many scholars shy away from the complexity of intersectionality theory, despite calls to incorporate it within diversity scholarship; in contrast, Hall et al.'s article helps to explain how stereotypes associated with multiple demographic categories combine to influence evaluations of employees. The authors delineate how certain characteristics associated with dominant social categories can override the stereotypic characteristics of other categories an individual possesses. This level of theorizing helps to explain disparate outcomes faced by members of the same identity category (e.g., Black women versus Asian women). By extension, a third way this manuscript contributes to critical juncture issues is by helping reconcile patterns of advantage and disadvantage experienced by one particular group, introducing the novel concept of associated categories that dilute and amplify stereotype content, and enabling more nuanced, intracategorical predictions of discrimination. MOSAIC has important implications for research on organizational diversity, demography, bias,

discrimination, impression management, leadership development, and teams.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The articles in this STF begin to address some aspects of the current critical juncture. In this section we build on their contributions to discuss further opportunities to deepen and broaden the *what* and *how* of theorizing about diversity in organizations.

Redirecting the *what* of diversity theory requires us to reconsider the ontology of diversity. We propose that a social difference–blind ontology of organizational life may perpetuate the dehumanizing practices that have been legitimated by desires to reap economic gain (e.g., profits) at the expense of well-being. Theorization should move away from conceptualizing diversity as a broad set of individual differences that can be neatly grouped as surface and deep level, visible and invisible. The very designation of gender, race, and ethnicity as surface-level diversity suggests they only have import as phenotypical or biological differences among individuals. Theorizing about diversity based on race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation must account for power differences between dominant and nondominant groups and the continuing systemic discrimination the latter face in societies and organizations around the globe (Ahonen, Tienari, Meriläinen, & Pullen, 2014; Konrad, 2003).

Clarifying the ontology of diversity requires recognizing that the subjects of diversity are complex and that our approaches to theorizing them have to expand. The concept of identity, which has been core to diversity theorizing, must be reconceptualized. Instead of largely assuming that the identities of the subjects of our research are fixed, singular, and stagnant, future theory building should position them as fluid and intersectional (Liu et al., 2019), as Clair et al., Hall et al., and Martin and Côté do in this volume.

Future theorizing would also benefit from the recent literature on transnational diversity that emphasizes the concept of *mobile subjectivities* (Calás, Ou, & Smircich, 2013). Transnational perspectives start from acknowledging that the centrality of the nation-state as an identity marker for individuals and organizations has become less relevant because of migration, immigration, and multinational organizations (e.g., Özkazanç-Pan

& Calás, 2015). These developments reinforce the difficulty of anchoring the subjects of diversity in a particular time and place within set categories and assuming static experiences of exclusion and marginalization. Transnational perspectives provide a number of opportunities for theorizing about the social and political influences on the formation of subjects, along with the concomitant power relations that shape experiences of marginalization and exclusion within and across national borders. Adopting a transnational lens would also assist in moving beyond categories of social difference rooted in the U.S. context (Jonsen, Maznevski, & Schneider, 2011).

Second, as noted earlier, nondominant group members and their experiences have been the major focus of theorizing about diversity, with less attention to theorizing about the privileges and power of dominant groups (DiTomaso, 2013). Future theorizing should place far greater attention on these groups, rather than treating them as the unnamed normative or the benchmark against which "others" are judged. The article by Janssens and Steyaert points us in this direction by arguing that dominance is a central feature of both inequality and equality. Attending to both sides of equality requires a focus on the underlying processes determining subordination and superordination in organizations (Ray, in press), as well as transforming notions of the normative occupant of positions (Ashcraft, 2013).

In the case of racial inequality, the concept of Whiteness (e.g., Al Ariss, Özbilgin, Tatli, & April 2014; Grimes, 2002) and racialization theory (e.g., Ray, in press) provide opportunities to theorize about dominance and to further our understanding of subordination and disadvantage within organizations. Whiteness is more than an identity marker. It is a location of structural advantage, a standpoint from which White people view themselves, others, and society, as well as a set of normalized cultural practices (Frankenberg, 1993: 1). However, not all White people benefit equally from racial advantage within organizational spaces that are simultaneously gendered, heteronormative, and classed (Holvino, 2010; Leonardo, 2004).

Whiteness is deeply rooted in the ideology of White supremacy (Leonardo, 2004). In his theory of racialized organizations, Ray (in press: 16) argues that Whiteness is a credential providing access to organizational resources, legitimizing work hierarchies, and helping organizations appear

racially neutral in principle, while in practice institutionalizing racial inequality. Racialized organizations as mesolevel social structures limit the individual agency and collective efficacy of subordinate racial groups, while magnifying the agency and power of the dominant racial group (Ray, in press: 11).

Incorporating both the marginalized and advantaged in theorizing diversity would require us to think carefully about dominance in theorizing inclusion (Dwertmann, Nishii, & van Knippenberg, 2016; Ferdman & Davidson, 2002; Shore, Cleveland, & Sanchez, 2018). Can inclusion and equality be achieved without loss of power for those who have been long positioned as the norm of the ideal employee, leader, and manager? Can inclusion be achieved without naming and transforming historically embedded racialized and gendered processes and practices in the workplace?

Redirecting *what* we theorize should be complemented by expanding how we build theory, particularly in moving from individual-level to multilevel theorizing and expanding the disciplines from which we theorize about diversity and its effects in organizations. Although scholars have begun to address context in diversity research, cross-level and multilevel theorizing have not been widely adopted. Tensions remain between microlevel and mesolevel theorizing. This tension is also evident in the divide between mainstream/functionalist approaches that rely heavily on microlevel framing and critical diversity studies that focus at the meso level (Zanoni et al., 2010). Leigh and Melwani demonstrate the benefits of cross-level and multilevel framing of diversity phenomena in organizations. Such a framing can inform empirical research on the linkages between the influence of macro contexts (e.g., national, community), organizational approaches, and individual experiences and the perceptions of diversity among various stakeholders (e.g., employees, applicants, potential applicants who decide not to apply, customers, and community members). It can also help clarify ways organizational diversity can influence macrolevel contexts. Cross-level and multilevel approaches move context from being a background variable to being a central component of what happens in organizations.

Multilevel approaches can also advance theorizing about the interaction between individual agency (subjectivity) and structure in the production and reproduction of the subjects of

diversity and inequality. This is where we need to emphasize the potential benefits of bridging the divide between functionalist/mainstream (i.e., focus on individual-level theorizing) and critical approaches (i.e., focus on structures and systems) that arose during the shift to diversity management. Bringing the two together can advance multilevel theorizing and the adoption of a broader range of disciplines that address social differences. We do not suggest that bridging will be an easy undertaking, given the ontological and epistemological differences between the two approaches. However, as Pringle and Strachan (2015: 39) have observed, the tensions between the two approaches represent one of the dichotomies that often confine scholars to isolated camps.

Critical diversity studies have gone beyond an initial focus on criticizing functionalist/ mainstream approaches to proposing alternative theoretical perspectives for the study of diversity in organizations drawing from a number of fields (Metcalfe & Woodhams, 2012; Zanoni et al., 2010). For example, scholars have proposed discourse theories as a means for understanding diversity from a discursive perspective to surface the simultaneous connections among diversity, power, and context (e.g., Ahonen et al., 2014). Feminist theories, particularly the work of Joan Acker (1990), have been used to expand thinking beyond gender as a demographic category to the gendering of organizations (e.g., Bell, Meriläinen, Taylor, & Tienari, 2019; Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998; Ely & Padavic, 2007), and scholars have turned to masculinity studies to unmask "men" within gendered power relations in organizations (e.g., Hearn & Collinson, 2006).

Others have employed a postcolonial lens to theorize about the effects of the colonial encounter on Western perceptions of other races, cultures, and ethnicities, as well as the persistence of racialization and gendering in organizations that sustain racial/ethnic binaries and marginalization (e.g., Leonard, 2010; Prasad, 2006). More recently, Jack (2015: 170) suggested that engagement with psychoanalytic and discursive variants of the field may provide opportunities to understand the complex relationship between psychological dimensions of post(colonial) subjectivities and the persistence of racism in organizations. Intersectionality has been proposed as a means to understand the simultaneity of race, gender, and class in structuring inequality in organizations

(e.g., Holvino, 2010). The concept of inequality regimes provides an approach that is both multilevel and relational, allowing for theorizing about the dynamic, constitutive interplay between intersectionality and the structures of inequality in the workplace (Acker, 2006; Holvino, 2010). Similarly, a Bourdieuan lens has been advanced as a means to explore the processes of access to and ownership of power and different forms of capital (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic) that create and sustain privilege and disadvantage within particular historical and geographical contexts (e.g., Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012). Queer theory assists in moving past binary conceptions of gender and allows theorizing on the constitutive connection between and among sex, gender, and sexuality in manifesting heteronormativity in the workplace (Bendl & Hofman, 2015).

Diversity theorizing can be enriched by adopting an historical lens, opening up the opportunity for theorizing about how historical exclusionary practices connect to contemporary manifestations. A reflection of the field's ahistorical tendency is the idea that diversity became an issue for organizations with the release of the *Workforce 2000* report. Racial and ethnic minority men and women, White women, and immigrants have always been present as exploited labor, dating back to colonialism and industrialization (Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014). Patriarchy and racism also determined the type of work assigned to men and women and to racial and ethnic minorities. The disparate experiences, advancement, and access to resources of workers from different racial backgrounds today are rooted in such history (Opie & Roberts, 2017). Likewise, the presence of and backlash toward immigrants in many European countries today are related to their colonial histories (Jack, 2015). The histories of colonialism and imperialism in countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East are also relevant to the diversity issues and experiences of marginalized groups within their organizations (e.g., Klarsfeld, Booysen, Ng, Roper, & Tatli, 2014).

CONCLUSION

We began this introduction by revisiting the trajectory of past theorizing and the sociopolitical forces influencing the diversity field as a prelude to understanding the present critical juncture and the compelling need for new theories. Since the emergence of the field, diversity scholars have accomplished a tremendous amount in studying the predictors, dynamics, and effects of diversity in organizations. Diversity research is conducted by scholars across the globe with a number of specific dissemination forums, including conferences, handbooks, edited volumes, and a domain-specific journal (i.e., *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*), as well as other diversity-related journals.

Yet, at this critical juncture, we must face the inconvenient truth that despite decades of anti-discrimination legislation in many countries and despite the adoption of valuing diversity and inclusion perspectives in the field, discrimination, harassment, exclusion, and inequality in organizations persist. The turn from efforts to reduce discrimination to the business case, a more palatable approach, focusing on bottom-line profits and on pacifying the resistance against equality and inclusion has been costly. It has left the field underprepared and ill-equipped to theorize about the proliferation of categorical exclusion, dehumanizing biases and discrimination, and retrenchment of status-leveling policies. These developments emanate from the rise in nationalism and White supremacy, wherein people who are positioned as the "other" are targeted, threatened, and, at times, killed. We must recognize that these sociopolitical forces are not "out there" but threaten the attainment of equality not only in the workplace but also in the management academy and the institutions in which we work.

Our earlier discussion of the struggle for legitimacy of the WIM and GDO divisions in AOM demonstrates that the management academy has not been and is not immune from the forces unfolding in the sociopolitical context. Although no longer a new field, diversity is still in many ways marginalized and seeking full admittance to the academy. For many management scholars, the requirements for gaining legitimacy are particularly constraining, affected by our backgrounds, identities, and research interests, and still marginalized spaces in society, in the academy, and sometimes in our academic institutions (Jané et al., 2018; Minefee, Rabelo, Stewart, & Young, 2018; Settles et al., in press). At this critical juncture we must also turn the lenses inward as management scholars occupying multiple roles (e.g., editors, reviewers, educators, colleagues, and leaders) to acknowledge and address the disparate challenges faced by underrepresented groups in the academy and the institutions in which we work. Doing so will engender reflexivity

about our complicity in contributing to the current state and how we might foster change.

We hope the thought-provoking articles and recommendations for future theorizing will provide a foundation for moving diversity theorizing and practice forward at a time when the stakes are particularly high across the globe. Our distinctiveness can lie in being unapologetic about generating theory and research for attaining fairness, equality, and social justice for marginalized social groups.

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