# Crossing Ethical Boundaries in the Pursuit of Passion:
# How Passion Gaps Cause Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior

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**Abstract**

Many contemporary organizations encourage their employees' pursuit of passion for work. However, we propose that this strategy may simultaneously increase the likelihood that their employees engage in unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB), immoral acts that benefit the company. Specifically, we suggest that when employees fall short of desired levels of work passion—i.e., when they experience a "passion gap"—their sense of self is threatened. One way employees deal with the self-threat elicited by passion gaps is by engaging in UPB, which gives them the feeling that they are worthy organizational members. Eight studies ($N$ = 2,695)—including two field studies, an experimental-causal-chain analysis, and two intervention studies—provide support for the proposed relationships between passion gaps, self-threat, and the tendency to engage in UPB. Two interventions highlight factors that directly attenuate the self-threat prompted by passion gaps: (1) having employees engage in self-affirmation, and (2) de-emphasizing the role of passion in predicting success. Our results suggest that organizations' increased emphasis on the pursuit of passion may have an unintended consequence: it leads those employees who fall short of desired levels of passion to engage in unethical behavior designed to help the company, which may harm the organization in the long-run.

*Keywords*: passion, unethical pro-organizational behavior, self-threat

Employees engage in unethical behavior for a variety of reasons, such as to benefit themselves, to harm their coworkers, or to retaliate against the organization (Greenberg, 2002; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997; Terpstra, Rozell, & Robinson, 1993; Thau, Aquino, & Poortvliet, 2007). However, in some cases, employees choose to commit unethical acts with the intention of helping the company. Such acts are known as unethical pro-organizational behavior, or "UPB" (Brief, Buttram, & Dukerich, 2001; Umphress & Bingham, 2011; Umphress, Bingham, & Mitchell, 2010; Vadera & Pratt, 2012). Prior research has defined UPB as "actions that are intended to promote the effective functioning of the organization or its members (e.g., leaders) [but also] violate core societal values, mores, laws, or standards of proper conduct" (Umphress & Bingham, 2011: 622). For example, UPB can include acts of commission (e.g., misrepresenting the truth to make the organization look good) as well as acts of omission (e.g., concealing or failing to disclose negative information about the company from the public) (Castille, Buckner, & Thoroughgood, 2016; Effelsberg et al., 2014; Graham et al., 2013; Miao et al., 2013; Umphress et al., 2010).

Although UPB may benefit organizations in the short-run, it can lead to detrimental outcomes in the long-run, especially if detected by others outside the firm (Effelsberg et al., 2014; Graham et al., 2013; Miao et al., 2013). In order to minimize the potential costs of UPB, it is thus necessary to understand what causes them and how these causes can be minimized. Several prior studies demonstrate that employees engage in UPB because they believe doing so will help advance organizational interests (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986; Lee, Schwarz, Newman, & Legood, 2017; Vadera & Pratt, 2012; Warren, 2003). This motivation distinguishes UPB from other, self-interested unethical behavior, in which some employees engage in order to harm their organization (Spector & Fox, 2005). Indeed, prior research shows that employees are more likely to engage in UPB when they identify strongly with the

organization, particularly if they believe that their organization will reward them for engaging in UPB (Umphress et al., 2010).

In the current research, we suggest that although employees engage in UPB because they believe that doing so will help the company succeed, this is not the only driver of UPB. Specifically, we propose that employees may also choose to engage in UPB in order to feel that they are dedicated members of the organization because they interpret UPB as "going the extra mile." Employees may thus seek to engage in UPB to prove to themselves that they are valuable organizational members. In addition to directly advancing the organization, we therefore suggest that employees may also engage in UPB to feel that they deserve to be valued and worthy, particularly when they feel their sense of self is threatened (Thau, Derfler-Rozin, Pitesa, Mitchell, & Pillutla, 2015). Re-casting UPB as a way to resolve a self-threat thus offers a heretofore unexamined antecedent of UPB.

More precisely, we propose that employees engage in UPB as a coping mechanism when their self is threatened, i.e., when employees feel that their self-worth is undermined (see Steele, 1988 on the value of feeling the self is worthy and good). Individuals have a strong desire to see themselves in a positive light and to feel a sense of competence and control in their lives (Brockner, 1988; Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008; Steele, Spencer, & Lynch, 1993). When individuals feel that favorable perceptions of themselves are threatened, they seek to find ways to restore their sense of self-worth (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Sherman & Cohen, 2006a; Steele et al., 1993; White, Stackhouse, & Argo, 2018). Because engaging in UPB allows individuals to feel that they are contributing organizational members, they may engage in such behavior to counteract the experience of self-threat.

Researchers have recently discovered one situation that commonly produces the experience of self-threat for employees: when they have less passion for their work than they desire, an experience that has been called a "passion gap" (Jachimowicz, To, Menges, &

Akinola, 2017; Jachimowicz, Wihler, & Galinsky, 2018a, 2018b). Many organizations list passion for work as a core criterion for potential hires (Wolf, Lee, Sah, & Brooks, 2016), and numerous popular press books espouse the need for individuals to increase and nurture their work passion if they want to become more successful (Bolles, 2009; Branson, 2012; Duckworth, 2016; Isaacson, 2011; Robbins, 2007). However, employees often fall short of desired levels of work passion (Jachimowicz, To, Menges, et al., 2017; Jachimowicz et al., 2018a, 2018b). This experience of not meeting organizational expectations produces a threat to the self (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). As a result, employees experiencing passion gaps will be more likely to take action to resolve this threat to the self. As we predicted earlier, one means that employees can use to reduce self-threat is by engaging in UPB.

Our research offers three key theoretical contributions. First, we address prior calls for a more comprehensive understanding of the antecedents of UPB (Pierce & Aguinis, 2015). Although previous research has highlighted several precursors of UPB, such as increased organizational identification and higher affective commitment (Chen, Chen, & Sheldon, 2016; Matherne & Litchfield, 2012), these studies view engaging in UPB primarily as an employees' effort to advance organizational interests. The current research shifts this prior focus on the organization to a focus on the self by re-conceptualizing the causes of UPBs as grounded in threats to the self. This additional perspective contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the antecedents of UPB.

Our second contribution is to the passion literature. Whereas previous research has focused primarily on the positive consequences of higher levels of passion (Birkeland & Buch, 2015; Duckworth et al., 2007; Ho et al., 2011; Zigarmi et al., 2009), the present research pinpoints one of the unintended consequences of the *pursuit* of passion: risky behavior that employees may engage in when they fall short of desired levels of passion (Jachimowicz, To, Menges, et al., 2017; Jachimowicz et al., 2018a, 2018b). This perspective

adds an important nuance to the academic and popular press discourse by highlighting the tradeoffs involved in emphasizing high levels of passion (Bolles, 2009; Duckworth, 2016; Isaacson, 2011).

Third, our integration of the passion and UPB literatures also offers interventions to decrease employees' engagement in UPB. While beneficial in the short-run, companies whose employees engage in UPB may incur severe costs in the long-term (Chen et al., 2016; Effelsberg et al., 2014; Matherne & Litchfield, 2012; Miao et al., 2013; Sluss & Ashforth, 2008). As a result, researchers and practitioners alike are interested in developing potential interventions that may decrease employees' engagement in UPB (Pierce & Aguinis, 2015). The current research offers a novel perspective to develop interventions at two different points in the process: either by reducing the effect of the self-threatening aspects elicited by passion gaps, or by decreasing the self-threatening effect of falling short of desired levels of passion in the first place.

## THEORY DEVELOPMENT

### Antecedents of Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior

Many cases have been documented of employees engaging in behaviors that, while in violation of ethical codes, contribute to an organization's interests (Effelsberg et al., 2014; Graham et al., 2013; Miao et al., 2013; Umphress et al., 2010). Prior research suggests that this type of pro-organizational workplace ethical violation, referred to as unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB; Umphress et al., 2010), occurs with the purpose of advancing both personal and organizational interests (Vadera & Pratt, 2012). The intent of UPB distinguishes it from other unethical work behaviors, in which employees choose to engage in unethical actions with the intention of harming the organization (Spector & Fox, 2005). While potentially beneficial in the short-run, UPB can cause significant damage in the long-run, particularly if the unethical behavior is detected (Chen et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2017).

Examples of UPB abound in contemporary organizations. On the more extreme end, employees could engage in serious crimes, committing accounting fraud as in the case of Enron (Amernic & Craig, 2010; Ertugrul & Krishnan, 2011; Vadera & Pratt, 2012), using bribes to obtain large-scale contracts as in the case of Siemens, or creating fraudulent software as in the case of Volkswagen. Employees may also conceal serious crimes committed by others, such as Pennsylvania State University officials withholding information about a football coach's inappropriate behavior toward children. In other examples, UPB includes withholding valuable company information from the public, or exaggerating capabilities to clients (Umphress et al., 2010).

The ubiquity of UPB illustrated in these examples highlights the need for a comprehensive understanding of its precursors (Pierce & Aguinis, 2015). Previous research has focused on identifying the motivations employees may have to engage in UPB as a way to benefit the organization. For example, Umphress and colleagues (2010) found that employees are more likely to engage in UPB when they believe they will be rewarded for their unethical behavior. In addition, employees have been found to be more likely to engage in UPB when they have higher levels of organizational concern, for example when they are more affectively committed and identify more with the organization or its leadership (Chen et al., 2016; Effelsberg et al., 2014; Matherne & Litchfield, 2012; Miao et al., 2013; Sluss & Ashforth, 2008).

While previous studies have significantly advanced our understanding of UPB, we suggest that they provide an incomplete picture of why employees choose to engage in UPB. Specifically, we propose that employees may choose to engage in UPB not only for reasons concerning their intention to benefit their organization, but also to feel that they are valuable members of the organization. Whereas employees are more likely to engage in UPB when their organizational concern is high (Effelsberg et al., 2014), we examine a related but

different possibility: employees may engage in UPB to prove to themselves and others that they care about the organization, and thus to be seen as valuable organizational members.

**Self-Threat Leads to Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior**

Research on self-affirmation theory highlights the methods that individuals use to restore a threatened sense of self-worth. Steele (1988) suggested that the goal of the self-system is to attain overall integrity of the self, which includes feeling competent, valued, and in control (see also Steele et al., 1993). While individuals can draw on many different sources to form their self-worth (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001), one primary source is work and organizational affiliation (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). Because individuals derive a large part of their self-identity through their organizational affiliations, they are likely to be particularly sensitive to threats to their sense of organizational membership (Crocker & Park, 2004; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). Threats to an employee's sense of group membership may thus be particularly painful, negatively affecting an employee's sense of self (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010; Petriglieri, 2011).

In response to self-threats, employees frequently engage in coping responses that aim to decrease the severity of potential identity harm (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Major & O'Brien, 2005; Steele, 1988). Identities are often sustained by social interactions and thus require continuous enactment (Fine, 1996; Leifer, 1988). When individuals perceive that a valued aspect of their identity is being threatened, they subsequently alter their behavior (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001). This can include challenging the threat (Dunning & Cohen, 1992; Taylor & Brown, 1988), or affirming the self through another source of self-integrity (Sherman & Cohen, 2006a).

In response to self-threat, individuals thus often engage in behaviors that are primarily aimed at re-asserting a positive self-identity. For example, questioning an individual's membership to a valued social group triggers behaviors designed to resolve that threat, such

as engaging in behaviors that prove one's group membership to others (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). Individuals may also change their interests or their behavior to come closer to the group prototype (Jetten, Branscombe, Spears, & McKimmie, 2003; Michael & Terry, 2000; Tafarodi, Kang, & Milne, 2002; White et al., 2018).

UPB may constitute a similar coping response that employees employ when experiencing self-threat (Lee et al., 2017). This perspective suggests that UPB may also make employees feel that they are particularly committed to the organization, reflecting behavior prototypical of a dedicated organizational member (Effelsberg et al., 2014; Graham et al., 2013; Miao et al., 2013; Umphress et al., 2010). Support for this possibility comes from a recent study which finds that employees who are more psychologically entitled are more likely to engage in UPB (Lee et al., 2017). Individuals with higher psychological entitlement also have a stronger desire to maintain an inflated sense of self-esteem (Rose & Anastasio, 2014); this finding is consistent with our theoretical perspective that people engage in UPB to prove to themselves that they are particularly valuable organizational members.

Rather than selflessly engaging in UPB to advance organizational interests—while disregarding potential ethical violations—we draw on prior research to propose that employees' decision to engage in UPB may also stem from self-serving motives (Bolino, Turnley, & Niehoff, 2004). For example, one prior study finds evidence that individuals engage in unethical behaviors that benefit the group when they believe they have insufficiently contributed to group goals (Thau, Derfler-Rozin, Pitesa, Mitchell, & Pillutla, 2015). Participants in that study were randomly assigned to one of two conditions that manipulated whether others thought they were valuable group members, and they were subsequently given the opportunity to engage in unethical behavior which either only benefitted themselves, or also benefitted the group. Participants engaged in more unethical behavior only when they were not valued as group members and when the unethical behavior

benefitted the group (Thau et al., 2015). Thus, in addition to engaging in UPB to help the organization, employees may also engage in UPB to demonstrate that they are valuable organizational members.

**Passion Gaps Can Elicit Self-Threat**

We have proposed that when employees' self is threatened they will engage in UPB to restore a valued sense of self. One threat to the self occurs when employees feel like they don't have desired levels of passion for their work, given that employees are increasingly faced with the expectation to be passionate for work. Indeed, many organizations list work passion as a core criterion for potential hires (Wolf et al., 2016). Numerous company mission statements reflect this expectation; for example, at Accenture, employees are asked to "[b]ring your passion" (Accenture, 2018) whereas Zappos specifies that its' core values include to "be passionate" (Zappos, 2018). Similarly, at McKinsey, employees are probed to "[l]earn how you can pursue your passion" (McKinsey, 2018), while Capital One focusses its recruitment on individuals who have "a passion for what they do every day" (Capital One, 2018). Numerous books in the popular press also espouse the need for individuals to increase and nurture their passion if they want to be successful (Bolles, 2009; Branson, 2012; Duckworth, 2016; Isaacson, 2011; Robbins, 2007). Academic research has likewise identified the benefits of passion, highlighting that passionate individuals are more proactive (Ho et al., 2011), more perseverant (Duckworth et al., 2007), and more engaged (Birkeland & Buch, 2015; Zigarmi et al., 2009).

However, employees commonly fall short of desired levels of work passion, experiencing passion gaps (Jachimowicz, To, Menges, et al., 2017; Jachimowicz et al., 2018a, 2018b). Thus, rather than investigating the beneficial consequences of higher levels of passion—as prior research has commonly done (e.g., Ho et al., 2011; Zigarmi et al., 2009)—we focus on the gap between how much passion employees experience relative to their

desired levels of passion. We propose that passion gaps are a source of self-threat because contemporary organizations place a strong emphasis on passion, and not feeling sufficiently passionate may lead employees to conclude that they are failing their organization's expectations and norms, in turn leading to higher levels of self-threat (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991; McQueen & Klein, 2006; Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010).

Passion gaps may be especially problematic for employees because passion is readily observed by others. Prior studies have shown that observers can make relatively quick decisions in their judgments of the levels of passion they perceive in others (Cardon, Wincent, Singh, & Drnovsek, 2009; Chen, Yao, & Kotha, 2009; Jachimowicz, To, & Galinsky, 2017). The belief that passion is conspicuous and easily perceived might lead some to feel that their low levels of passion will be detected by others. Employees who are experiencing passion gaps may therefore have concerns that others will find out about their low levels of passion, which may then amplify their levels of self-threat. Based on our earlier reasoning, the self-threat elicited by passion gaps may lead employees to engage in behaviors that help them to reduce or manage their experience of self-threat. One way they may do is by engaging in UPB. The above reasoning leads to our first two hypotheses:

> **Hypothesis 1***:* Higher levels of passion gaps lead to an increased willingness to engage in unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB).
>
> **Hypothesis 2***:* The relationship between passion gaps and UPB is mediated by self-threat.

**Mitigating Factors**

Prior research has shown that the experience of self-threat can be mitigated when individuals are given the opportunity to self-affirm, even in ways that are not directly related to the circumstances that elicited the self-threat (Sherman & Cohen, 2006a). For example, many studies have shown that giving people an opportunity to describe their most important personal values and how these have played a significant role in their lives can serve as an

antidote to self-threat, such as the experience of cognitive dissonance (Galinsky, Stone, & Cooper, 2000; Steele & Liu, 1983), unfair treatment (Wiesenfeld, Brockner, & Martin, 1999) and stereotype threat (Kang, Galinsky, Kray, & Shirako, 2015; Kinias & Sim, 2016). Thus, giving individuals who are experiencing self-threat due to a passion gap the opportunity to self-affirm may counteract self-threat and consequently reduce their likelihood of engaging in UPB. Such reasoning is practically important (it suggests an intervention) and theoretically significant (it provides an additional test of our core mechanism).

> **Hypothesis 3a:** The tendency for high passion gaps to lead to unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB) is reduced when individuals engage in self-affirmation.

Higher levels of passion gaps may also be less self-threatening when the organization places less emphasis on passion as an evaluative aspect for their employees (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991; McQueen & Klein, 2006; Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). Since contemporary organizations often emphasize the importance of their employees' passion, failing to meet this expectation may elicit self-threat in employees (Wolf et al., 2016). However, when an organization places less emphasis on the pursuit of passion, and instead highlights other means through which employees can feel they are worthy members of the organization, passion gaps are less likely to elicit self-threat (Dutton et al., 2010; Petriglieri, 2011). Somewhat ironically, then, when organizations highlight the value of passion, they may be more likely to inadvertently prompt UPB in their employees, in comparison to organizations who de-emphasize the value of work passion:

> **Hypothesis 3b:** The tendency for high passion gaps to lead to unethical pro-organizational behavior is attenuated when organizations place less emphasis on work passion.

Note that our two interventions target different points in the process. Our self-affirmation intervention reduces the effect of the self-threatening aspects elicited by passion

gaps after they have occurred. Our downplaying of passion intervention targets the source of the self-threat and reduces it before it occurs.

## OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENT RESEARCH

The present research investigates the effect of passion gaps on individuals' tendencies to engage in UPB, and tests whether this relationship is mediated by the experience of self-threat. We conducted eight studies to evaluate our hypotheses. The first three studies investigate the direct relationship between passion gaps and UPB (thereby testing Hypothesis 1). In Study 1, we surveyed full-time employees from an online sample, and in Study 2, we collected data from employees at a consulting company. In Study 3, we experimentally manipulated passion gaps to evaluate whether there is a causal relationship between passion gaps and UPB.

Studies 4-6 investigate whether the relationship between passion gaps and UPB is mediated by self-threat (thereby testing Hypothesis 2). In Study 4, we collected data from employees at a technology company, investigating whether passion gaps relate to UPB through increased self-threat. We also test the mediating hypothesis in an experimental-causal-chain analysis: Study 5 experimentally manipulated passion gaps, and measured the effects on self-threat and UPB; Study 6 experimentally manipulated self-threat and measured the effects on UPB.

Studies 7 and 8 further evaluated the self-threat mechanism by examining two conditions under which the tendency for high passion gaps to lead to UPB may be less pronounced (thereby testing Hypotheses 3a and 3b). In Study 7, all participants read a scenario in which they imagined experiencing high passion gaps, and were randomly assigned to self-affirm or not. Self-threat and UPB were then assessed as dependent variables. In Study 8, participants read the same scenario used in Study 7 to induce high levels of passion gaps, and were then randomly assigned to read organizational mission statements that varied in their

emphasis on passion. Once again, self-threat and UPB were assessed as dependent variables. Taken together, our eight studies are designed to test for the relationship between passion gaps and UPB, and delineate why and when the relationship is likely to emerge.

## STUDY 1

Study 1 was designed to provide an initial test of Hypothesis 1, which posits that passion gaps are positively related to the tendency to engage in UPB.

### Method

***Participants and Procedure.*** We surveyed 189 full-time employees recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk ($M_{Age}$ = 36.5, $SD_{Age}$ = 11.5, 50.8% female). A wealth of research has demonstrated the validity of the MTurk platform compared to traditional student samples or other online survey platforms, as its participant pool is more representative of the general U.S. population (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010) and demographically more diverse (Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2013). Participants qualified only if they were full-time employees, located in the United States, had a non-duplicate IP address, and had an approval rate above 95% for their previous HITs on MTurk. These criteria were used in all subsequent studies employing MTurk participants.

***Passion Gaps.*** We measured passion gaps with a three-item measure adapted from prior research (Jachimowicz, To, Menges, et al., 2017; Jachimowicz et al., 2018a, 2018b): "I am less passionate for my work than I should be," "I often feel as if I have to be more passionate for my work," and "I frequently feel obliged to be more passionate for my work than I currently am." Responses were collected on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* = *strongly agree*, $\alpha = 0.82$).

***Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior.*** Next, we measured UPB with the six-item scale used by Umphress et al. (2010). Participants were asked to think of their current organization and indicate the extent to which they agreed with several items that assessed their

willingness to engage in UPB. Example items included: "If it would help my organization, I would misrepresent the truth to make my organization look good," and "If it would help my organization, I would exaggerate the truth about my company's products or services to customers and clients." (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*; α = 0.91).

***Control Variables.*** Finally, we measured demographic control variables (age, sex, education, and race). Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation table.

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Table 1 about here

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**Results**

We conducted a regression analyses with passion gaps as the independent variable and UPB as the dependent variable. In support of Hypothesis 1, passion gaps were positively related to UPB (*B* = .18, *SE* = .06, *p* = .007), such that higher levels of passion gaps were related to increased UPB. This effect remained statistically significant when controlling for the demographic variables (*B* = .14, *SE* = .06, *p* = .026).

## STUDY 2

Study 1 provides initial correlational evidence that passion gaps are related to UPB. Study 2 was a replication using employees from a single company in a non-MTurk sample.

**Method**

***Participants and Procedure.*** We surveyed 192 employees ($M_{Age}$ = 27.40, $SD_{Age}$ = 5.66, 47.79% female) from an international consulting services company headquartered in the United States. Employees did not receive any payment for participation. No participants were excluded from the analysis.

***Passion Gaps.*** We measured passion gaps using the same three-item scale as in Study 1 (α = 0.86).

***Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior.*** To measure UPB, we collaborated with the company's HR department to adapt a previous measure of unethical pro-organizational behavior to ensure the measure fit the organizational context in which the study was conducted. Our final measure had 10 items ($\alpha = 0.85$; 1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). The full list of items is included in the Appendix. Participants were asked to think of their current organization and indicate the extent to which they were willing to engage in several behaviors. Sample items included: "If it would help [company name] win a contract, I might overstate some of [company name]'s past projects and their impact when speaking with future potential clients," "I might support a client in implementing a strategic decision, even if I believed it was not the correct decision for the client to make," and "If it would help [company name], I would price a project to a client to a greater amount than I believed is necessary if I believed I could sell it to the client at that amount."

We pretested this new measure with 90 participants recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk who received both the original six-item scale (Umphress et al., 2010) and the newly devised 10-item scale. Consistent with our prediction that both sets of measures were tapping in to the same underlying construct, the two measures were strongly correlated with each other ($r = .82$).

***Control Variables.*** We also collected several control variables in this survey: age, gender, tenure, and rank in the organization. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation table.

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Table 2 about here

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**Results**

In line with Hypothesis 1, we tested whether employees with higher passion gaps were

more likely to be willing to engage in UPB. We specified a linear regression with passion gaps as the independent variable and UPB as the dependent variable. As predicted, passion gaps were significantly related to UPB ($B$ = .16, $SE$ = .05, $p$ < .001), such that higher levels of passion gaps were associated with higher UPB. This effect remained statistically significant when controlling for age, gender, tenure, and rank ($B$ = .18, $SE$ = .05, $p$ < .001).

Study 2 provides additional support for the hypothesized relationship between passion gaps and UPB in the field. However, because these results are correlational, it is not possible to establish causality, which we turn to next.

## STUDY 3

Studies 1 and 2 provide correlational support for Hypothesis 1, such that higher levels of passion gaps were associated with an increased likelihood of engaging in UPB. Study 3 aimed to provide causal evidence that passion gaps increased UPB. An experimental design was used in which we randomly assigned participants to experience different levels of passion gaps prior to measuring their UPB.

### Method

***Participants and Procedure.*** We surveyed 198 full-time employees recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk ($M_{Age}$ = 38.07, $SD_{Age}$ = 12.44, 46.65% female). We used a scenario paradigm and experimentally manipulated high vs. low levels of passion gaps

We modeled the scenario context to closely resemble the company we surveyed in Study 2. Participants were asked to imagine that they were employed by a consulting company called HSC Associates, and that they frequently work at their client's offices.

***Passion Gaps Manipulation.*** In preparation for an upcoming performance review, participants were told to reflect upon their last few months at the company. We manipulated levels of passion gaps with the following scenario; the high passion gap condition is in brackets: "In preparation for your meeting, you think about your last few months at HSC

Associates. You really did your best to pursue your passion for work. On the projects that you got to work on, you believe that you have [not] been able to obtain the levels of passion for work that you desire. Specifically, you have the feeling that you are [not] experiencing the levels of work passion that you hoped to experience." Participants were then asked to write a few sentences in preparation for their performance review.

***Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior.*** We measured UPB using the same six-item scale as in Study 1 ($\alpha = 0.92$).

***Manipulation Check.*** We measured the effectiveness of the passion gaps manipulation using the same three-item measure of passion gaps used above ($\alpha = 0.90$).

***Control Variables.*** Finally, we measured demographic control variables (age, sex, education, and race). Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation table.

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Table 3 about here

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**Results**

***Manipulation Check.*** We first tested whether the manipulation successfully altered levels of reported passion gaps. Participants in the *High Passion Gaps* condition reported significantly higher levels of passion gaps ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 1.15$) than participants in the *Low Passion Gaps* condition ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.36$; $t(196) = 13.93$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.99$).

***Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior.*** Participants in the *High Passion Gaps* condition reported higher levels of UPB ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.40$) than participants in the *Low Passion Gaps* group ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.38$; $t(196) = 1.99$, $p = .048$, $d = .28$). This effect remained statistically significant when controlling for demographic variables ($B = .44$, $SE = .19$, $p = .023$).

Study 3 provides initial causal evidence for the relationship between passion gaps and UPB. An experimental manipulation that altered levels of passion gaps influenced people's tendencies to engage in UPB.

## STUDY 4

Studies 1-3 provide correlational and experimental evidence that passion gaps increase the tendency to engage in unethical pro-organizational behavior. Studies 4-6 were designed to investigate the mechanism through which passion gaps cause UPB. We have proposed that passion gaps create a self-threat that then motivates people to engage in UPB to decrease that experience of self-threat. In Study 4, we surveyed employees from a technology company to evaluate whether the relationship between passion gaps and UPB is mediated by self-threat.

### Methods

***Participants and Procedure.*** We surveyed 1206 employees from a technology company located in a Spanish-speaking country ($M_{Age}$ = 32.30, $SD_{Age}$ = 7.78, 41% female) who did not receive payment for participation. Upon receiving the invitation to participate in the study, participants were given a link that took them to an online survey hosted on Qualtrics.com. Given the company's location, we used the translation procedure outlined by Schaffer and Riordan (Schaffer & Riordan, 2003) to adapt our measures to Spanish.

***Passion Gaps.*** We measured passion gaps using the same three-item scale as in prior studies ($\alpha = 0.83$).

***Self-Threat.*** We measured self-threat using an eight-item scale developed in prior research (Sherman et al., 2009). Example items were "On the whole, I am a capable person," "I am comfortable with who I am" and "I am a good person" (1 = *strongly disagree,* 7 = *strongly agree*, $\alpha = 0.76$). We reverse-coded responses to this scale such that higher values reflect higher self-threat.

***Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior.*** We measured UPB using five of the six items measured in Study 1 (α = 0.79). The collaborating organization asked us to drop one item as it did not fit the organizational context ("If my organization needed me to, I would withhold issuing a refund to a customer or client accidentally overcharged.").

***Control Variables.*** We also collected several control variables in this survey: age, gender, and tenure. Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation table.

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Table 4 about here

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**Results**

***Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior.*** First, we investigated whether passion gaps were related to UPB. In line with Hypothesis 1 and our previous results, a regression with passion gaps as the independent variable, and UPB as the dependent variable, revealed that passion gaps are positively related to UPB ($B$ = .133, $SE$ = .023, $p$ < .001).

***Self-Threat.*** We next tested whether passion gaps are related to self-threat. In line with Hypothesis 2, regressing passion gaps on self-threat revealed that passion gaps are positively related to self-threat ($B$ = .084, $SE$ = .012, $p$ < .001).

***Mediation through Self-Threat.*** Finally, we examined the indirect effect of passion gaps on UPB through self-threat to test Hypothesis 2. We found evidence for the indirect effect as the confidence interval for the relationship between passion gaps and UPB through self-threat excluded zero ([.0022; .0216]; 5000 bootstrapped iterations). Thus, higher passion gaps are related to UPB through increased self-threat.

Study 4 provides initial correlational evidence of the mechanism through which passion gaps lead to UPB. Higher passion gaps are related to increased self-threat, which in turn makes it more likely individuals engage in UPB.

Because the current study was purely correlation, the next two studies establish a causal link through self-threat by using an experimental-causal-chain method (Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). We first conducted a study in which where we manipulated passion gaps and measured the effect of this manipulation on self-threat and unethical pro-organizational behavior (Study 5). Because the mediation in this study is still correlational evidence, we then conducted another study in which where we manipulated our hypothesized mediator (self-threat) and measured its effect on UPB (Study 6).

## STUDY 5

Study 5 further evaluated the mechanism of self-threat connecting passion gaps and UPB. In this study, we experimentally manipulated passion gaps, and measured self-threat and UPB to test whether passion gaps lead to higher self-threat, in turn increasing individual's likelihood to engage in UPB.

### Method

***Participants and Procedure.*** We surveyed 179 full-time employees recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk ($M_{Age}$ = 33.86, $SD_{Age}$ = 10.32, 44.13% female).

We used a similar procedure as in Study 3. Participants were asked to imagine that they worked for a consulting company called HSC Associates, in which they frequently work at their client's offices.

***Passion Gaps Manipulation.*** We used the same manipulation as in Study 3.

***Self-threat.*** We measured self-threat using the same eight-item scale as in Study 4 ($\alpha$ = 0.92). We again reverse-coded responses to this scale such that higher values reflect higher self-threat.

***Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior.*** We measured UPB using the same six item scale as in prior studies ($\alpha$ = 0.91).

***Manipulation Check.*** We measured the effectiveness of the passion gaps manipulation with the same three-item scale utilized in our earlier studies (α = 0.88).

***Control Variables.*** Finally, we measured demographic control variables (age, sex, education, and race). Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation table.

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Table 5 about here

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**Results**

***Manipulation Check.*** We first tested whether the manipulation successfully altered levels of passion gaps. Participants in the *High Passion Gaps* condition reported significantly higher levels of passion gaps ($M$ = 5.51, $SD$ = 1.10) than participants in the *Low Passion Gaps* condition ($M$ = 3.07, $SD$ = 1.45; $t(177) = 12.61$, $p < .001$, $d$ = 1.89).

***Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior.*** Next, we tested whether the experimental manipulation had an influence on participants' levels of UPB. In line with Hypothesis 1 and the prior studies, participants in the *High Passion Gaps* condition reported higher levels of UPB ($M$ = 3.04, $SD$ = 1.21) than participants in the *Low Passion Gaps* group ($M$ = 2.62, $SD$ = 1.25; $t(177) = 2.26$, $p = .02$, $d = .34$). This effect remained statistically significant when controlling for demographic variables ($B = .45$, $SE = .18$, $p = .01$).

***Self-Threat.*** Next, in line with Hypothesis 2, we tested whether the manipulation led to changes in participants' levels of self-threat. Participants in the *High Passion Gaps* condition reported significantly higher levels of self-threat ($M$ = 2.44, $SD$ = 0.92) than participants in the *Low Passion Gaps* condition ($M$ = 1.98, $SD$ = 0.83; $t(177) = 3.52$, $p < .001$, $d$ = 0.53). This effect remained statistically significant when controlling for demographic variables ($B = .46$, $SE = .13$, $p < .001$).

***Mediation of Condition on UPB through Self-threat.*** Finally, we investigated the

indirect effect of the passion gaps manipulation on UPB through self-threat in further examining Hypothesis 2. Bootstrapping analyses revealed that self-threat mediated the effect of passion gaps on UPB (bias-corrected 95% CI = [.101; .388]). That is, individuals in the *High Passion Gaps* condition indicated a higher willingness to engage in UPB through the indirect effect of self-threat.

Study 5 provides evidence for the first part of the experimental-causal-chain. A manipulation of passion gaps significantly altered self-threat, which in turn was associated with an increased willingness to engage in UPB.

## STUDY 6

Study 6 closed the loop on the experimental causal chain by manipulating our hypothesized mediator of self-threat and measuring its influence on UPB.

### Methods

***Participants and Procedure.*** We surveyed 203 full-time employees recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk ($M_{Age}$ = 34.19, $SD_{Age}$ = 10.47, 49.26% female).

***Self-threat Manipulation.*** Participants were asked to reflect on a personal experience that was designed to either trigger *High Self-threat* or *Low Self-threat*. The text read: "Please take a moment and reflect on a time where you feel like you did [not] do your job well. Please describe how you felt and acted during this time when you [did not] performed well at work. In the following text box, please describe that experience."

***Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior.*** We measured UPB using the same six-item scale as in prior studies (α = 0.92). Participants were asked to think how likely they would be to engage in each UPB with reference to their current job.

***Manipulation Check.*** We measured self-threat using the eight-item scale as in prior studies (α = 0.88). We again reverse-coded responses such that higher values reflect higher self-threat.

***Control Variables.*** Finally, we measured demographic control variables (age, sex, education, and race). Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation table.

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Table 6 about here

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**Results**

***Manipulation Check.*** We first tested whether the manipulation successfully altered levels of reported passion gaps. Participants in the *High Self-threat* condition reported significantly higher levels of self-threat ($M$ = 2.30, $SD$ = 0.70) than participants in the *Low Self-threat* condition ($M$ = 2.06, $SD$ = 0.62; $t(201) = 2.58$, $p = .01$, $d = 0.36$).

***Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior.*** In line with Hypothesis 2, we next tested whether the self-threat manipulation influenced participants' likelihood of engaging in UPB. A *t*-test reveals that participants in the *High Self-threat* condition reported significantly higher levels of UPB ($M$ = 3.49, $SD$ = 1.48) than participants in the *Low Self-threat* condition ($M$ = 2.87, $SD$ = 1.44; $t(201) = 3.00$, $p = .003$, $d = 0.42$). This effect remained statistically significant when controlling for demographic variables ($B = .57$, $SE = .21$, $p = .006$).

Study 6 completes the experimental-causal-chain by experimentally manipulating our hypothesized mediator. As predicted, the manipulation of self-threat increased participants' willingness to engage in UPB.

## STUDY 7

Studies 4-6 provide evidence of the mechanism relating passion gaps to UPB. In Studies 7 and 8, we further tested the mechanism by examining the influence of several factors hypothesized to influence the tendency for high passion gaps to produce self-threat. Study 7 used a self-affirmation manipulation, which dozens of studies have demonstrated reduces the experience of self-threat (e.g., Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Legault, Al-Khindi, & Inzlicht, 2012;

Sherman, 2013; Sherman et al., 2009; Sherman & Cohen, 2006b). In this study, all participants experienced a high level of a passion gap. We then manipulated whether they had an opportunity to engage in a self-affirmation. We predicted that engaging in self-affirmation would reduce the tendency for high passion gaps to lead to an increased willingness to engage in UPB (because self-affirmation reduces self-threat).

**Method**

***Participants and Procedure.*** We surveyed 285 full-time employees recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk ($M_{Age}$ = 34.77, $SD_{Age}$ = 10.07, 53.68% female). Participants were randomly allocated to one of two conditions: self-affirmation vs. baseline.

***Passion Gaps Induction***. All participants were given the *High Passion Gaps* materials from Study 3. That is, participants were asked to imagine that they worked for a company called HSC Associates in which they have not been able to obtain the levels of passion they hoped to attain. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of two conditions.

***Self-Affirmation Manipulation.*** We adapted the self-affirmation manipulation used extensively in prior research (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Sherman & Cohen, 2006a). In both conditions, participants were asked to take part in a "reflection exercise." All participants were first given a list of 11 values (e.g. "Creativity," "Relations with friend/family," or "Business/Money") and were next asked to rank these values in order, with "1" being the most important value, and "11" the least important one.

In the *High Self-Affirmation* condition, participants were reminded what their most important value was, and next asked to "describe why this personal characteristic or life domain is important and meaningful to you. Think about a time in your life that this was particularly important. Write as much or as little as you wish, and don't worry about how well it's written. Just focus on expressing your memory of the event and the feelings that you had at the time. Please do your best to write about this event and your feelings about this value in a few

sentences." Subsequently, participants were asked to list two reasons why this value is important to them, and then answered four items: "This value or personal characteristic has influenced my life," "In general, I try to live up to this value," "This value is an important part of who I am," and "I care about this value."

In the *Low Self-Affirmation* condition, participants were reminded of their least important value, and next asked to "describe why this personal characteristic or life domain might be important to the typical employee at HSC Associates. Describe a time in the typical employee's life when it may have been important. Write as much or as little as you wish, and don't worry about how well it's written. Just focus on expressing your thoughts and feelings. Please do your best to write about this event and your feelings about this value in a few sentences." Subsequently, participants were asked to list two reasons why the typical employee at HSC Associates would pick this value as their most important one, and then answered four items: "This value or personal characteristics influences the typical employee at HSC Associates," "In general, the typical employee at HSC Associates tries to live up to this value," "This value is important to the typical employee at HSC Associates" and "The typical employee at HSC Associates cares about this value."

***Passion Gaps.*** We measured passion gaps using the same three-item scale used in prior studies ($\alpha = 0.88$).

***Self-threat.*** We measured self-threat using the eight-item scale as in prior studies ($\alpha = 0.87$). Same as before, we reverse-coded responses such that higher values reflect higher self-threat.

***Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior.*** We measured UPB using the same six-item scale as in Study 1 ($\alpha = 0.91$).

***Control Variables.*** Finally, we measured demographic control variables (age, sex, education, and race).

**Results**

***Passion Gap Induction Check.*** All participants in this study were asked to imagine they had high levels of passion gaps. As expected, there were no significant differences between the *High Self-Affirmation* ($M$ = 4.50, $SD$ = 1.53) and *Low Self-Affirmation* ($M$ = 4.61, $SD$ = 1.28) condition on passion gaps ($t(283) = .65$, $p = .52$, $d = 0.08$).

***Self-threat.*** Next, in line with Hypothesis 3a, we tested whether the manipulation led to changes in participants' levels of self-threat. Participants in the *High Self-Affirmation* condition reported significantly lower levels of self-threat ($M$ = 2.03, $SD$ = 0.72) than participants in the *Low Self-Affirmation* condition ($M$ = 2.24, $SD$ = 0.75; $t(283) = 2.30$, $p = .02$, $d$ = .27). This effect remained statistically significant when controlling for demographic variables ($B$ = -.18, $SE$ = .09, $p = .03$).

***Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior.*** To provide further support for Hypothesis 3a, we next investigated whether the manipulation altered participants' willingness to engage in UPB. A *t*-test revealed that participants in the *High Self-Affirmation* condition reported significantly lower levels of UPB ($M$ = 2.80, $SD$ = 1.36) than participants in the *Low Self-Affirmation* condition ($M$ = 3.24, $SD$ = 1.37; $t(283) = 2.69$, $p = .008$, $d = 0.32$). This effect remained statistically significant when controlling for demographic variables ($B$ = -.47, $SE$ = .16, $p = .003$).

Our core causal chain is that high passion gaps increase the tendency to engage in UPB by creating self-threat. Study 7 involved a self-affirmation manipulation designed to decrease the experience of self-threat. The results both support our proposed mechanism and offer an intervention to decrease the tendency for high passion gaps to produce UPB: when individuals experiencing high passion gaps are given an opportunity to self-affirm they are less likely to engage in UPB.

## STUDY 8

Study 8 involved a different manipulation designed to lessen self-threat and therefore reduce the tendency for high passion gaps to increase employees' willingness to engage in UPB. We predicted that passion gaps would be less threatening if employees felt their organization was not so focused on having high levels of passion. Therefore, we manipulated the emphasis the organization placed on the pursuit of passion. One reason why passion gaps threaten an individuals' sense of self is because passion is an attribute valued by many contemporary organizations (Wolf et al., 2016). The experience of passion gaps should therefore be especially self-threatening when a company's mission statement strongly emphasizes that the pursuit of passion is an important goal for employees. Conversely, if a company does not emphasize the pursuit of passion in its mission statement, higher levels of passion gaps may be less threatening to employees' sense of self. We predicted that those experiencing a passion gap would be less likely to engage in UPB when the organizational mission statement decreased the self-threat of experiencing a passion gap. As in Study 7, all participants in Study 8 were induced to experience a high passion gap. We then tested the extent to which a company's mission statement emphasized the pursuit of passion would influence individuals' self-threat, and thus their willingness to engage in UPB.

**Method**

***Participants and Design.*** We surveyed 243 full-time employees recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk ($M_{Age}$ = 34.72, $SD_{Age}$ = 10.19, 51.10% female). Participants were randomly allocated to one of three conditions: *Passion Emphasis*, *Passion De-Emphasis*, and a *Control* condition.

***Passion Gaps Induction.*** Similar to Study 7, all participants were given the *High Passion Gaps* materials. That is, participants were asked to imagine that they worked for a company called HSC Associates in which they have not been able to obtain the levels of passion they hoped to attain.

***Mission Statement Manipulation.*** We manipulated the extent to which the company in the scenario emphasized the pursuit of passion in their mission statement. In the *Passion Emphasis* condition, participants were given the following text:

> One of the reasons why you first joined your firm, HSC Associates, is its culture—specifically, the emphasis of the pursuit of passion for work. This sentiment is perhaps best reflected in the company's mission statement, which states: "We want to support our employees to be passionate for what they do. We believe it is extremely important for our employees to be passionate for their work. We hope that our employees have sufficient opportunities to become even more passionate for their work than they currently are. For our employees, pursuing their passion for work means that we view our company's mission as helping our employees find out what matters to them. It means we support them in exploring more opportunities at work to engage in activities that reflect what is significant to them." When you were hired, you briefly met with HSC Associates' CEO who emphasized how important the pursuit of passion for work is at the company: "I value passion probably more than any other attribute. Find your passion. Work at it. Don't give up. Don't ever give up."

In contrast, in the *Passion De-Emphasis* condition, participants read the following text, which also was supportive of employees but not in a way that emphasized passion:

> One of the reasons why you first joined your firm, HSC Associates, is its culture—specifically, the emphasis on many different attributes that are important to you. This sentiment is perhaps best reflected in the company's mission statement, which states: "We want to support our employees in any way we can. We believe it is extremely important to be supportive to our employees. We hope we provide our employees with all the opportunities they need. For our employees, supporting them how we can means that we view our company's mission as helping our employees to the best of our ability. It means we support them in exploring more opportunities they may need." When you were hired, you briefly met with HSC Associates' CEO who emphasized how important being supportive is at the company: "I want to provide you with all of the opportunities you need."

In the *Control* condition, participants did not see a mission statement, and instead proceeded directly to answering the next set of measures.

***Passion Gaps.*** Passion gaps were measured with the same three-item scale as above ($\alpha = 0.77$)

***Self-threat.*** We measured self-threat using the eight-item scale as above (α = 0.91). Same as before, we reverse-coded responses such that higher values reflect higher self-threat.

***Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior.*** We measured UPB using the same six-item scale as before (α = 0.91).

***Control Variables.*** Finally, we measured demographic control variables (age, sex, education, and race).

**Results**

***Passion Gaps Induction Check.*** All participants in this study were asked to imagine they had high levels of passion gaps. As expected, there were no significant differences in passion gaps between the three conditions *Passion Emphasis* (*M* = 5.58, *SD* = 0.90), *Passion De-Emphasis* (*M* = 5.37, *SD* = 1.14) and *Control* (*M* = 5.56, *SD* = 1.09; $F_{(2, 240)}$ = .99, *p* = .37).

***Self-threat.*** Next, in line with Hypothesis 3b, we tested whether the mission statement influenced participants' levels of self-threat. An ANOVA revealed a significant difference between conditions ($F_{(2, 240)}$ = 5.09, *p* = .007). This effect remained statistically significant when controlling for demographic variables ($F_{(2, 236)}$ = 5.16, *p* = .006).

As predicted, follow-up *t*-tests revealed that participants in the *Passion Emphasis* condition had the highest levels of self-threat (*M* = 2.30, *SD* = 0.75), being significantly higher than participants in the *Passion De-Emphasis* (*M* = 2.01, *SD* = 0.70; *t*(159) = 2.53, *p* = .01, *d* = 0.40) and *Control* (*M* = 2.00, *SD* = 0.59; *t*(159) = 2.89, *p* = .004, *d* = 0.46) condition. There was no significant difference between the *Passion De-Emphasis* and *Control* condition (*t*(162) = 0.17, *p* = .87, *d* = 0.03).

***Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior.*** To evaluate Hypothesis 3b, we subsequently tested whether the mission statement manipulation significantly altered participants' levels of UPB. An ANOVA revealed a significant difference between conditions ($F_{(2, 240)}$ = 4.23, *p* =

.016). This effect remained statistically significant when controlling for demographic variables ($F_{(2, 236)} = 4.46$, $p = .013$).

As predicted, follow-up *t*-tests revealed that participants in the *Passion Emphasis* condition were the most willing to engage in UPB ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.17$), being significantly more willing than participants in the *Passion De-Emphasis* ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.52$; $t(159) = 2.06$, $p = .04$, $d = 0.32$) and *Control* conditions ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.12$; $t(159) = 3.10$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.49$; see Figure 1). There was no significant difference between the *Passion De-Emphasis* and *Control* condition ($t(162) = 0.57$, $p = .57$, $d = 0.09$).

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Figure 1 about here

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Study 8 provides additional evidence for the self-threat explanation of why passion gaps lead to UPB. By reducing self-threat in a different way than in Study 7 (an organization's de-emphasis of passion), Study 8 showed that organizations may decrease the tendency for employees experiencing passion gaps to engage in UPB.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Eight studies provide converging support for the notion that employees engage in UPB, not only to advance organizational interests as prior research has found, but also to reduce or manage the discomforting experience of self-threat. We proposed and found that employees are more likely to engage in UPB when they are experiencing less passion than desired—i.e., passion gaps—because this experience increases their self-threat. Moreover, our studies also reveal that factors which make the experience of passion gaps less self-threatening also reduce the likelihood that higher passion gaps lead to UPB. Specifically, we develop two interventions that target two different points in the process: while the self-affirmation intervention reduces the likelihood that the self-threat elicited by passion gaps

leads to UPB, the downplaying of passion intervention targets the source of the self-threat and reduces it before it occurs. Taken together, the current research provides a novel way to understand why employees engage in UPB, and lays the foundation for future research into antecedents of UPB that move beyond employees' advancement of organizational interests.

**Theoretical Contributions**

The current research offers several important contributions by recognizing that engaging in UPBs can be a way for employees to feel that they are valuable organizational members. First, we address prior calls for a more comprehensive understanding of the antecedents of UPB (Pierce & Aguinis, 2015). Prior research has shown that employees engage in UPB to advance organizational interests (Chen et al., 2016; Effelsberg et al., 2014; Umphress & Bingham, 2011), and found that employees are more likely to engage in UPB when they identify with their organization more strongly, are more affectively committed, or when their organizational concern is higher (Chen et al., 2016; Effelsberg et al., 2014; Matherne & Litchfield, 2012). The current research shifts this prior focus on the organization to a focus on the self, and recognizes that antecedents of UPBs are also grounded in threats to the self. This is particularly important because the experience of self-threat is frequently triggered in organizations. The perspective advocated in the current research thus provides an additional lens to understand the widespread occurrence of UPB and thereby contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the antecedents of UPB.

Second, by delineating self-threat as a novel antecedent of engaging in UPB, the present research takes the additional step of demonstrating that passion gaps—falling short of desired levels of passion—are an importance source of self-threat. This finding is noteworthy because previous research has focused primarily on the positive consequences of higher levels of passion (Birkeland & Buch, 2015; Duckworth et al., 2007; Ho et al., 2011; Zigarmi et al., 2009). Whereas high levels of passion may be laudable, the present research pinpoints

an unintended consequences of pursuing passion: risky behavior that employees may engage in when they fall short of desired levels of passion (Jachimowicz, To, Menges, et al., 2017; Jachimowicz et al., 2018a, 2018b). This perspective adds an important nuance to the emphasis placed on the pursuit of passion in academic and popular discourse, and highlights the tradeoffs involved in stressing the importance of attaining high levels of passion (Bolles, 2009; Duckworth, 2016; Isaacson, 2011).

**Practical Implications**

Organizations frequently emphasize the pursuit of passion (Wolf et al., 2016). The current findings highlight that this may be a dangerous practice because organizations may unwittingly make employees' passion gaps more self-threatening, which increases the likelihood that they will engage in UPB. While engaging in UPB may be beneficial to people and organizations in the short-run, it can lead to negative consequences for the organization in the long-run, in particular once detected by others (Effelsberg et al., 2014; Graham et al., 2013; Miao et al., 2013). The current studies reveal several steps organizations can take to attenuate the self-threatening effect of passion gaps on employees' engagement in UPB. Specifically, we find that providing employees with an opportunity to self-affirm, or reducing the emphasis on the pursuit of passion, can make it less likely that high passion gaps will lead to higher UPB. Thus, organizations may be able to have their cake and eat it too: they can reap the benefits of promoting higher levels of passion—such as higher perseverance, engagement, and reduced stress (Duckworth et al., 2007; Ho et al., 2011; Zigarmi et al., 2009)—while also tempering the negative effects for those employees who fall short of desired levels of passion.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

The current research has several limitations that provide opportunities for future research. First, the current research relies on self-reported measures of UPB, rather than a

behavioral measure. Self-report measures are problematic because they may be prone to social desirability, thereby skewing participants' responses (Randall & Fernandes, 1991). While the current studies attempted to limit such influences by guaranteeing employees that their responses would be treated anonymously, the concern remains. Importantly, this concern applies to most prior studies that have attempted to assess UPB (Castille et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2016; Effelsberg et al., 2014; Graham et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2017; Matherne & Litchfield, 2012; Miao et al., 2013; Umphress, Bingham, & Mitchell, 2010). One notable exception is an experimental study conducted by Thau and colleagues (2015), who observed actual engagement in UPB in a laboratory setting. An additional strategy could be to collect other-report measures, such as from employees' coworkers or from their supervisors, as is commonly done in performance reviews (DeNisi & Sonesh, 2011). However, this approach may also be prone to difficulties as coworkers and supervisors may be unaware of a focal employee's unethical behavior (Gino & Bazerman, 2009). A promising area of research may be to collect unobtrusive but widespread information on employees, such as through email data or instant messaging, and train machine learning algorithms to detect a focal employee's engagement in UPB (Doyle, Goldberg, Srivastava, & Frank, 2017; Reyt & Wiesenfeld, 2015; Srivastava & Goldberg, 2017).

A second opportunity for future research is to evaluate employees' levels of passion gaps, self-threat, and engagement in UPB over time. Passion gaps are likely to vary because passion possesses an emotional component, which may fluctuate over time (Chen et al., 2009; Perrewé, Hochwarter, Ferris, Mcallister, & Harris, 2014; Vallerand et al., 2003). Thus, the same employee may be more likely to engage in UPB in a week when their passion gaps are higher than in a subsequent week when their passion gaps are lower, e.g., when they are forced to work on a project that does not reflect a value they care about deeply (Jachimowicz, To, Menges, et al., 2017). A longitudinal perspective, such as through a daily diary or

computation methods, would be able to uncover these temporal variations and provide further evidence on the links between passion gaps, self-threat, and UPB.

Another open question is in whose eyes employees feel threatened when experiencing passion gaps—how they think of themselves ("I am not a valuable organizational member") or how they think they are viewed by others ("I think others believe I am not valuable organizational member"). To investigate this, studies could test whether the relationship between passion gaps and UPB is moderated by how known the passion gap is. For example, if the phenomenon is at least partly due to concern about how one is viewed in the eyes of others, then factors that make employees more focused on the public nature of their passion gap should make the effect even stronger, relative to when they are less focused on the publicity of the act.

**Conclusion**

A wealth of prior research suggests that employees engage in UPB because they want to advance organizational interests. The current research extends this prior work by suggesting that employees may also engage in UPB to deal with self-threat. We tested and found that employees who fell short of desired levels of passion, i.e., who experienced passion gaps, felt self-threatened and were more likely to engage in UPB. Thus, in addition to advancing organizational interests, the current research reveals that employees may also choose to engage in UPB to advance their own personal interests. While being passionate for work may have a wide variety of positive outcomes, it is both theoretically and practically important to consider the tradeoffs and negative fallout that may ensue when people fall short of their desired levels of passion, such as a heightened tendency to engage in UPB.

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**Table 1**

**Study 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations**

| | Variable | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Age | 36.52 | 11.52 | | | | | |
| 2 | Gender (1 = female) | 0.51 | 0.50 | .15* | | | | |
| 3 | Education | 6.90 | 1.78 | -.06 | -.05 | | | |
| 4 | Race | 5.21 | 1.48 | .10 | .03 | -.04 | | |
| 5 | Passion Gap | 3.53 | 1.43 | -.15* | -.04 | .03 | -.06 | |
| 6 | UPB | 2.67 | 1.29 | -.24** | -.16* | .06 | -.06 | .19** |

*Note.* * indicates $p < .05$; ** indicates $p < .01$.

**Table 2**

**Study 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations**

| | Variable | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Age | 27.40 | 5.66 | | | | | |
| 2 | Gender (1 = female) | 0.48 | 0.55 | .04 | | | | |
| 3 | Tenure (in months) | 32.99 | 25.58 | .43** | -.17** | | | |
| 4 | Rank | 2.14 | 1.15 | .77** | .03 | .69** | | |
| 5 | Passion Gap | 3.59 | 1.52 | -.10 | .01 | -.01 | -.07 | |
| 6 | UPB | 3.68 | 1.03 | .14* | -.06 | .12 | .10 | .25** |

*Note.* * indicates $p < .05$; ** indicates $p < .01$.

**Table 3**

**Study 3: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations**

| | Variable | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Age | 38.07 | 12.44 | | | | | | |
| 2 | Gender (1 = female) | 0.47 | 0.51 | .04 | | | | | |
| 3 | Education | 7.28 | 1.65 | -.05 | -.02 | | | | |
| 4 | Race | 2.14 | 2.47 | -.19** | .03 | .08 | | | |
| 5 | Condition | 1.50 | 0.50 | .08 | .05 | .01 | -.04 | | |
| 6 | Measured Passion Gap | 4.08 | 1.77 | .02 | .09 | .05 | .02 | .70** | |
| 7 | UPB | 2.81 | 1.40 | -.20** | .02 | .05 | .06 | .14* | .11 |

*Note.* * indicates $p < .05$; ** indicates $p < .01$.

**Table 4**

**Study 4: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations**

| | Variable | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Age | 32.3 | 7.78 | | | | | |
| 2 | Gender (1 = female) | 0.41 | 0.49 | -.12** | | | | |
| 3 | Tenure | 53.87 | 90.14 | .28** | -.06* | | | |
| 4 | Passion Gap | 2.87 | 1.63 | -.09** | .00 | -.03 | | |
| 5 | Self-Threat | 1.62 | 0.69 | -.03 | .02 | -.03 | .20** | |
| 6 | UPB | 2.57 | 1.33 | -.14** | -.03 | -.04 | .16** | .10** |

*Note.* * indicates $p < .05$; ** indicates $p < .01$.

**Table 5**

**Study 5: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations**

| | Variable | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Age | 33.86 | 10.32 | | | | | | | |
| 2 | Gender (1 = female) | 1.44 | 0.52 | .11 | | | | | | |
| 3 | Education | 7.03 | 1.64 | .19* | .15* | | | | | |
| 4 | Race | 1.93 | 2.18 | -.16* | -.01 | .14 | | | | |
| 5 | Passion Gap Condition | 1.50 | 0.50 | -.01 | .08 | -.01 | -.00 | | | |
| 6 | Measured Passion Gap | 4.28 | 1.77 | .07 | -.04 | .02 | -.08 | .69** | | |
| 7 | Self-threat | 2.21 | 0.91 | -.24** | -.07 | -.17* | .08 | .26** | .17* | |
| 8 | UPB | 2.83 | 1.25 | -.20** | .19* | .12 | -.03 | .17* | .20** | .41** |

*Note.* * indicates $p < .05$; ** indicates $p < .01$.

**Table 6**

**Study 6: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations**

| | Variable | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Age | 34.19 | 10.47 | | | | | | |
| 2 | Gender (1 = female) | 0.49 | 0.50 | .24** | | | | | |
| 3 | Education | 7.23 | 1.61 | .09 | .02 | | | | |
| 4 | Race | 3.00 | 1.07 | .06 | -.17* | -.03 | | | |
| 5 | Self-threat Condition | 1.53 | 0.50 | -.07 | .03 | -.04 | -.06 | | |
| 6 | Measured Self-threat | 2.18 | 0.68 | -.14* | -.07 | -.06 | -.14 | .18* | |
| 7 | UPB | 3.20 | 1.49 | -.18* | -.04 | -.03 | -.10 | .21** | .29** |

*Note.* * indicates $p < .05$; ** indicates $p < .01$.

**Figure 1**

**Study 8: *Passion Emphasis* Increases Willingness to Engage in UPB**