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Co-creating Relationship Repair: Pathways to Reconstructing Destabilized Organizational Identification

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Abstract

Through a qualitative study of BP executives during and after the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil rig explosion and spill, I examine whether and how the relationship between an organization and its members can be repaired once damaged. I found that the incident destabilized executives' organizational identification, leading them to doubt the alignment between their own identity and BP's, and generated feelings of ambivalence toward the organization and their role in it. This marked the onset of a process through which members reassessed their identification, leading them either to reidentify and repair their relationship with BP or to deidentify and sever that relationship. Executives resolved their ambivalence and strongly reidentified only when they had organizationally sanctioned opportunities, through working on BPs' response to the incident, to enact the identity attributes of technical excellence and environmental consciousness that were threatened by the Gulf events, suggesting that full relationship repair requires active co-creation by the member and the organization. Absent co-created repair, social information that supported or undermined executives' identification with BP was key to resolving ambivalence and destabilized identification. Building on these findings, I develop a model of repairing damaged relationships after a transgression, with the concepts of destabilized identification and co-created repair, and the mechanism of ambivalence resolution at its center.

Keywords: organizational identification, organizational identity, BP Gulf incident, relationship repair, ambivalence resolution, reidentification

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The formation, maintenance, erosion, breakdown, and repair of relationships are defining features of human social life within and outside of organizations. Building on extant work on how and with what consequences relationships are damaged (Komorita and Mechling, 1967; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Bies and Tripp, 1996), a growing stream of research has begun to address how damaged relationships can be repaired. With high-profile examples of blatant breakdowns in the relationship between organizations and their constituents becoming commonplace—for example, large-scale job losses (e.g., car manufacturing in Europe), accounting fraud (e.g., Enron in the United States), and organizational collapse (e.g., Lehman Brothers worldwide)—this question is timely and consequential. Thus far, however, research on relationship repair has focused on relationships between individuals and between organizations (Dirks, Lewicki, and Zaheer, 2009), investigating, for example, how corporate reputations are repaired (Sutton and Callahan, 1987; Rhee and Valdez, 2009), how trust between individuals is rebuilt (Nakayachi and Watabe, 2005; Kim, Dirks, and Cooper, 2009), and how cooperation is restored between exchange partners (Bradfield and Aquino, 1999; Bottom et al., 2002). Much less attention has been paid to when and how the relationship between an organization and its employees can be repaired once it is damaged (for reviews, see Pratt and Dirks, 2007; Gillespie and Dietz, 2009). This is a significant gap, given the unique nature and importance of the relationship between employees and their organizations.

A well-established body of scholarship has noted that the relationship between many employees and their organizations is unique because it is based on identification—the process by which the attributes people perceive to constitute their organization's identity become self-referential (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail, 1994; Pratt, 1998). By definition, this makes it a self-defining relationship for organizational members while they are identified and implies that if the relationship is damaged, a part of the individual's self-definition is at stake, not just the material benefits associated with employment. This relationship is also important to organizational functioning: identification has been shown to enhance performance (van Knippenberg, 2000; Yurchisin, 2007), decrease attrition rates (Mael and Ashforth, 1995), and increase employee loyalty (Adler and Adler, 1988). While scholars have investigated the nature, importance, and necessity of organizational identification, research has thus far privileged understanding the process of identification at organizational entry and exit. We still know little about ''how identification waxes and wanes as individuals and their contexts evolve'' (Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep, 2006a: 1032).

The purpose of this paper is to elucidate the processes set in motion when organizational identification is damaged, whether and how damaged organizational identification can be repaired, and how these processes affect members' relationship with an organization. Through a field study of BP executives during and shortly after the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill, I examine why organizational members respond in different ways when their identification is destabilized.

ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

A person is identified with an organization when his or her ''self-concept contains the same attributes as those in the perceived organizational identity'' (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail, 1994: 239). How a person perceives his or her

organization's identity—what he or she views as the central, distinctive, and more or less enduring attributes of the organization (Albert and Whetten, 1985; Gioia, Schultz, and Corley, 2000)—thus provides at least a partial self-definition. A Facebook employee, for example, who views the organization's core identity attributes as dynamic and entrepreneurial and identifies with the organization would likely also define himself or herself as dynamic and entrepreneurial. Organizational identification involves both cognitive and affective ties. When identified members believe that their organization is highly regarded by outsiders, their self-esteem is enhanced and they feel proud (Cialdini et al., 1976). When the converse is true, their self-esteem wanes, and they experience shame, embarrassment, and even disgrace (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). In addition to being positively identified with an organization, members can be ambivalently identified, which occurs when they have ''contradictory thoughts and feelings towards an organization'' (Pratt, 2000), or they could have schizoid identification, which occurs when they identify with some organizational attributes and disidentify with others (Dukerich, Kramer, and McLean Parks, 1998; Elsbach, 1999).

Various factors help to sustain or undermine the identification bond between an organization and its members (Cardador and Pratt, 2006). Strong interpersonal relationships with other organizational members such as coworkers, mentors, and role models, for example, foster identification because they create a sense of affiliation with the collective (Brewer and Gardner, 1996). Relationships with organizational outsiders also matter because they provide social reinforcement that affirms or disaffirms the value and validity of a person's organizational identification and can reinforce or undermine it (Lofland and Stark, 1965; Greil and Rudy, 1984; Pratt, 2000). Because we come to know who we are through interpreting what we do, behaviors can also reinforce or undermine identification (Bem, 1972; Stryker and Serpe, 1982; Markus and Wurf, 1987). Thus a member's role can affect his or her identification. If the role enables a person to enact the identity attributes he or she perceives to constitute the organization's identity, then stronger identification will result, and vice versa.

Unlike other entities with which individuals may identify—such as institutions (Gutierrez, Howard-Grenville, and Scully, 2010), demographic-based groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), and dyadic role relationships (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007)—organizations require members to become agents of the collective, enacting a role on behalf of and in service of the organization's identity-derived goals (Brickson, 2012). Although identified members are driven to behave in ways that are congruent with what they believe to be the organization's goals (Tompkins and Cheney, 1985; Barker, 1993), they are also motivated to enact roles that are self-consistent (Vignoles et al., 2006). This makes them sensitive to the coherence between their own self-definition and the actions they take as an organizational agent and how they perceive their organization's identity.

Organizational identification is distinct from employee engagement and organizational commitment. Employee engagement is a motivational concept that describes the ''simultaneous investment of an individual's physical, cognitive, and emotional energy in active, full work performance'' (Rich, Lepine, and Crawford, 2010: 619). It relates to job performance at work and occurs when people focus wholeheartedly on the task at hand. Engagement ebbs and flows

over the course of a day and relates primarily to work tasks rather than to the organization in which one works (Kahn, 1990). The construct of organizational commitment is closer to organizational identification because it concerns employees' relationship with their organization. The difference is that while organizational commitment concerns how happy or satisfied people are with their organization, organizational identification concerns how ''people perceive and position themselves in relation to an organization'' (Pratt, 1998: 178). Commitment can exist even if the organization and the self are experienced as separate. Employees who are committed to the organization, but not identified, are likely to be ''insulated from the organization's fate'' (Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley, 2008: 333). Conversely, when people identify with and define themselves in terms of their organization, they partially tie their own fate to that of their organization.

Identification is most often discussed as a state of being, yet it is also a process of becoming. The ''social, retrospective and ongoing'' (Pratt, 1998: 180) process of organizational identification is characterized by episodes in which people consciously negotiate their identification with an organization in order to build, transform, or stabilize their identity as a member of it (Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley, 2008). One of the most salient, intense, and predictable—hence most studied and best understood—of these episodes occurs when a person joins and is socialized into an organization (Van Mannen and Schein, 1979; Pratt, 2000). Another occurs as members exit the organization, a circumstance that scholars have also investigated thoroughly (Ebaugh, 1988; Ibarra, 2003) with a focus on deidentification—the severing of their cognitive and affective ties with the organization (Pratt, 2000).

Common across much of the work on organizational identification is an emphasis on the episodes of identification and deidentification that occur at organizational entry and exit. We know much less about episodes in which established organizational members reassess their identification with their organization during their tenure within it. Conceptual work suggests that such periods of reassessment punctuate periods of stability in which identity and identification are primarily sustained unconsciously (Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley, 2008) and that they are equally important, if less predictable, in shaping organizational members' identification. Although these episodes are less well studied, their existence is implied by research that shows how major organizational events—such as change programs, mergers, crises, and organizational actions that violate beliefs about organizations—can trigger changes in employees' identification (van Knippenberg and van Leeuwen, 2001; Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley, 2008; Gleibs, Mummendey, and Noack, 2008; Bartels, Pruyn, and de Jong, 2009). These events are significant because they threaten the organization's identity and cause members to question their beliefs about its central and distinctive attributes (Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). A burgeoning body of research on organizational identity threat shows that members question their organization's identity when such events create discrepancies between what members expect it to be (Ashforth and Mael, 1996; Foreman and Whetten, 2002; Hsu and Hannan, 2005) and what the event implies about what the organization currently may be (Reger et al., 1994; Foreman and Whetten, 2002). For example, if an organization whose core identity attributes in the minds of its members include high ethical standards is involved in an ethical scandal, a discrepancy would open up between what members expect

of the organization and what the event implies about it. These discrepancies between expected and current organizational identity (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Elsbach and Kramer, 1996) can drive a wedge between members' own sense of self and their sense of what the organization is, thus damaging members' organizational identification (Brickson, 2012).

Theoretical work has proposed that situations in which members' identification is damaged can lead them to deidentify with their organization (Fiol, 2002) or move to a state of schizo-identification (Dukerich, Kramer, and McLean Parks, 1998; Elsbach, 1999). We understand less about how and when damaged identifications can be repaired. A notable exception is a study by Gutierrez, Howard-Grenville, and Scully (2010) that found that members of the Catholic Church coped with the church's sex scandals by crafting a split institutional identification that let them retain identification with the foundational teachings of the church while deidentifying with, and seeking to change, its institutional practices. But splitting identification is only one possible way to cope with damaged identification. For a broader understanding of how damaged identification might be repaired, I turn to the literature on relationship breakdown and repair.

Relationship Breakdown and Repair

Relationships between social actors break down when ''a transgression causes the positive state(s) that constitute(s) the relationship to disappear and/or negative states to arise'' (Dirks, Lewicki, and Zaheer, 2009: 69). The change in the nature of the relationship following a transgression typically involves a breakdown of trust (Elsbach, 1994), a decrease in cooperation between parties (Bottom et al., 2002), and the experience of negative affect, particularly on the part of the violated party toward whom the transgression was directed (Bies and Tripp, 1996). Relationship breakdown and repair is predicated on there being a violator—the party who committed the transgression—and a violated party. Theory has focused on a wide range of violators and violated parties, from individuals (Nakayachi and Watabe, 2005; Kim, Dirks, and Cooper, 2009) to organizations (see Dirks, Lewicki, and Zaheer, 2009).

Traditionally, empirical and theoretical work has represented relationships on a continuum from a positive (trust, positive affect, exchange) to a negative (distrust, negative affect, non-exchange) valence (Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). In this conceptualization, when a relationship is in a positive state, any negative components are, by definition, not present, and a relationship break is understood as a movement from a positive to a negative valence. Consequently, the pathways to relationship repair are the addition of positive elements and/or the elimination of negative elements from the relationship equation with the aim of moving it back to a positive valence. A violator may repair trust, for example, by expressing regret, apologizing for the transgression, and/or taking actions that prevent future transgressions (Sitkin and Roth, 1993).

A more recent conceptualization, in contrast, proposes that both positive and negative elements coexist and are ongoing in a relationship (Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies, 1998; Pratt and Dirks, 2007). This idea is based on the notion of ambivalence—a common experience that involves the coexistence of positive and negative feelings and/or thoughts toward the other (Weigert and

Franks, 1989; Meyerson and Scully, 1995). In this conceptualization, a relationship continues as long as each party chooses to accept the negative elements as a price worth paying for the positive ones. The negative elements remain part of the relationship, but the ambivalence is resolved through active choice. For example, when a person commits to a marriage, he or she chooses, more or less consciously, to accept the risk of betrayal in the expectation of a fulfilling relationship. If the marriage is in a positive state, the negative element of fear of betrayal is neither constantly experienced by the spouses nor does it disappear altogether. Instead, it lingers as an integral, if not always salient, feature of the relationship (Brickman, 1987). When a transgression damages the relationship, this resolution is undone and the experience of ambivalence returns to the relationship.

Ambivalence is often aversive, and people resolve it via defense and coping mechanisms (Cramer, 1998; Weick, 1998). These intrapsychic processes are influenced by the actions of the other party in the relationship and are thus well suited to understanding the dynamic interactions of violator and violated in relationship repair. Scholars have identified a large number of defense and coping mechanisms (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Cramer, 1998). I consider two here—ambivalence amplification and conscious domination—because research has highlighted the implications of their use in resolving ambivalence in relationships (Ashforth et al., 2014). These mechanisms do not resolve all conflicting emotions and cognitions, but they enable people to override either the positive or negative pole of their ambivalence and thus decrease their conscious experience of it.

Ambivalence amplification is an unconscious defense mechanism through which people relieve their ambivalence by denying either negative or positive feelings toward a target and accepting only the other orientation (Katz and Glass, 1979). When people override and deny one side of their ambivalence, they respond to the relationship target either in an exaggerated positive way, if they deny the negative pole of their ambivalence, or an exaggerated negative way if they deny the positive pole. Which pole of our ambivalence we deny depends on whether we perceive the target of ambivalence acting in a positive or a negative way. For example, Gergen and Jones (1963) demonstrated that people denied any positive thoughts and feelings and responded in an amplified negative way to mental health patients—a group toward which they felt ambivalent—when they perceived patients' behaviors to be unfavorable. Katz and Glass (1979) further showed that a person experiencing ambivalence can also resolve it through his or her own actions. Acting favorably toward a target invokes a positive response amplification, and vice versa.

Conscious domination is a coping mechanism through which people relieve their ambivalence by deliberately ignoring, and thus suppressing, the significance of one orientation toward the target of ambivalence (Ashforth et al., 2014). Like all coping mechanisms, it is a conscious process used to resolve, or at least mitigate, the ambivalence. Unlike ambivalence amplification, in which the person denies that one orientation exists, in conscious domination the person is aware of the existence of the other orientation but severely downplays its importance. By rationalizing and deciding to commit to one side of the ambivalence, the person can build or break the relationship with a target. When individuals use this mechanism to cope with ambivalence, they process information related to their relationship with the target in a biased way, privileging

evidence that aligns with whichever orientation is more salient (Clark, Wegener, and Fabrigar, 2008). For example, Margolis and Molinsky (2008: 857) described how managers who were ambivalent about firing underperforming employees remained focused on those employees' ''lack of service and commitment'' to rationalize their actions and override feelings of pity.

Conceptualizing ambivalence as integral to relationship breakdown and repair provides a helpful theoretical window because it describes a locus for repair and hints at a mechanism for achieving it. This conceptualization of relationship repair, however, has not been investigated empirically. Scholars to date have focused on the violator as the party who must take action to repair trust and treated the violated party as a somewhat passive recipient of the violator's actions. But a relationship is based on a set of agreements to which both parties consent (Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies, 1998), and repairing it necessitates actions by both violator and violated (Wilson, 1988). At a minimum, the violated party must be open and willing to respond to the violator's attempts to repair the relationship (Driver et al., 2003; Tomlinson, Dineen, and Lewicki, 2004). Because of idiosyncratic features of the relationship—for example, its length (Schilkea, Reimann, and Cook, 2013)—violated parties may vary in their willingness to respond to such attempts at repair.

Things are even more complicated when the relationship in question is between an organization and its members. First, there are likely to be multiple violated parties who may not uniformly interpret an organizational action or event as a violation, view it as equally severe, or respond uniformly to attempts at relationship repair. Second, a relationship based on identification, by definition, involves members internalizing the organization's identity to some degree, which blurs the line between the parties. Any organizational action or event that threatens the organization's identity can then be interpreted as a violation of the foundation on which the relationship rests. It also potentially implicates its identified members as violators—not just violated parties. Hence, to build a full picture of relationship repair in these settings, both parties, and the self-defining nature of the relationship, must be taken into account.

METHODS

Research Context and Data

BP, the setting for this study, was at the time of data collection the third largest oil and gas supermajor, employing more than 80,000 people in operations spanning six continents.[1] On April 20, 2010, an explosion on BP's Deepwater Horizon offshore oil rig killed 11 workers and resulted in the sinking of the rig and the exposure of an ocean-floor oil gusher. The leak from the gusher caused the largest accidental oil spill in history. After multiple failed attempts, BP succeeded in stopping the leak on July 15, 2010, and permanently capped the well on September 19, 2010, 152 days after the initial explosion (for a detailed description and analysis of the incident, see Hoffman and Jennings, 2011).

This paper is based on an inductive study involving 36 senior leaders in BP (referred to henceforth as executives) who all held equivalently ranked formal leadership positions in the organization. Participants were recruited for the

[1] The six supermajors at the time of data collection were ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell, BP, Total, Chevron, and Conoco Philips.

study via an e-mail sent to 66 executives, selected by BP's organizational development group as a representative population of executives at that level of the business. The purpose of the study was phrased broadly as to understand how the Gulf of Mexico incident was affecting individuals within BP as well as the company as a whole. The e-mail made clear that the research did not aim to assess or judge any individuals or the organization's handling of the incident. All participants who signaled their interest were included in the study. The 36 people who participated had an average tenure of 17 years with BP (ranging from 2 to 32 years); 50 percent were based in the United Kingdom, 40 percent in the United States, and 10 percent in the rest of the world. In terms of business area, roughly 45 percent worked in exploration and production, 30 percent in refining and marketing, and 25 percent in support functions and special project roles. Almost all had direct experience of at least one other business area. Participants' roles included managing operational units, heading critical infrastructure projects, leading geographical regions, and running specialist functional teams. BP's organizational development group confirmed that the sample of 36 was representative of the 66 executives in terms of length of tenure, location and business area, breadth of experience with BP, age, and gender.

The selection of this context and sample followed a theoretical logic (Miles and Huberman, 1994). First, the incident was perceived to threaten the core of BP's organizational identity and was also ongoing and building in intensity, two attributes that amplified the threat. These features made the incident an extreme case (Eisenhardt, 1989) of organizational identity threat, one that was likely to damage members' organizational identification and hence affect the relationship between the organization and its members. It was thus an ideal context for studying how and when repair can occur. Second, research participants occupied formal leadership roles and had long tenure in the company, two attributes that made them likely to have had strong and stable identification with BP prior to the incident (Kramer, 1991). Third, I sampled executives from a range of geographical and functional areas who, given their responsibilities for large parts of the business, could all have potentially been brought into play in responding to the incident. This enabled me to perform a cross-case comparison to investigate potential variations related to geographical and/or functional proximity to the incident within the sample.

The primary data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted between August and late November 2010, during the tail end of the incident and its immediate aftermath. Using semi-structured interviews as a primary data source in identity research is a well-established methodology (Beyer and Hannah, 2002). Given that my sample was dispersed around the globe, I conducted interviews over the telephone—a communication medium that has been used in other qualitative identity studies (e.g., Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep, 2006b). Interviews lasted between 45 and 95 minutes. All were tape recorded with permission and professionally transcribed. The interview protocol, shown in the Online Appendix (http://asq.sagepub.com/supplemental), was refined through informant interviews with seven oil and gas executives: three from BP (not included in the primary sample) and four from two other oil and gas supermajors. The first half of the interview focused on understanding the executives' career history within and prior to their time at BP and their relationship to and experience of the organization; the second half focused on the

impact of the incident on them, their role, their business area, and BP as a whole. After the interviews I had e-mail exchanges with some executives to follow up on specific points of interest that emerged during the interviews, for example, to determine whether an individual considering organizational exit was following through on his or her plan to leave. Secondary data sources included corporate reports (43 documents: all annual statements and published speeches by executives in the five years prior to the incident) and press articles, and governmental reports on the incident. Given that the incident was 2010's most reported media story in the U.S. (Associated Press, 2010), I could not follow every press article, but I followed those in the *Financial Times* and the *New York Times* from April 2010 to December 2010. I did not formally analyze the press and governmental reports but rather used them to understand the context and unfolding of the incident. I did analyze the corporate reports for data on BP's stated organizational identity before the incident. I used ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data management software, to organize my primary data and documents used as secondary sources as well as to record my coding structure and store quotes extracted from the interviews.

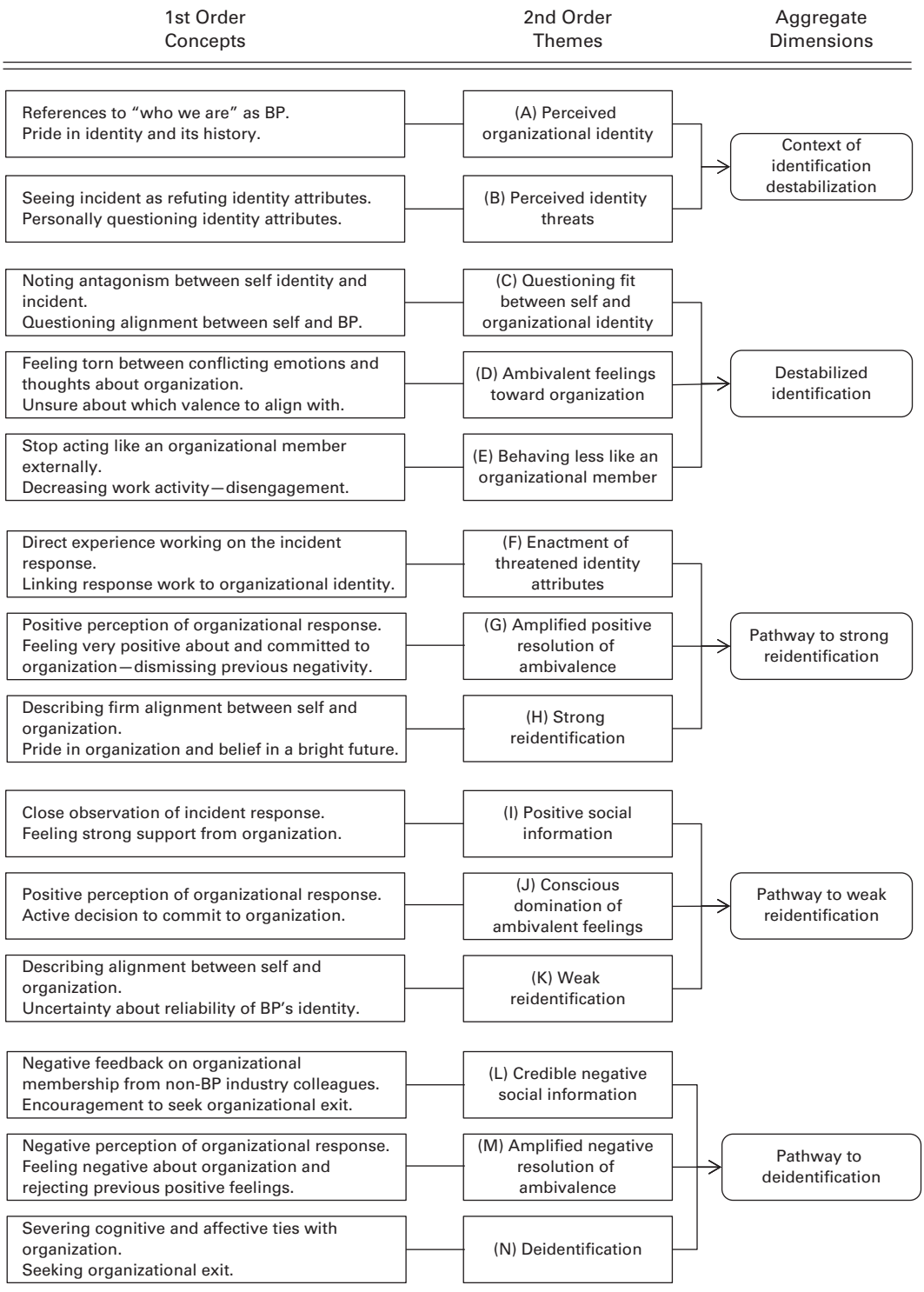
Data Analysis

I inductively analyzed the data as I collected it, moving back and forth iteratively among the data, relevant literature, and my emerging theoretical framework. I used the constant comparison method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) to compare newly and previously coded passages, which helped me identify both patterns in the data and variations among them.

My analysis began with in-depth open coding of interview transcripts (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Working through the transcripts one by one, I conducted line-by-line analysis to identify common statements and group them into first-order codes (Locke, 2001). At this stage I used in vivo codes (i.e., terms and descriptions used by participants) when possible and descriptive codes when in vivo codes were not available. I elaborated my coding scheme as I progressed through the transcripts and at multiple points recoded previously coded transcripts in light of insights gained from reading relevant literatures. For example, toward the end of the first round of coding all the transcripts, it became clear that statements I had grouped under the second-order theme ''questioning fit between self and organizational identity'' could more usefully be divided into those that had an emotional component, the emotion here being ambivalence, and those that were more cognitive. I thus divided this theme into two, questioning fit between self and organizational identity and ambivalent feelings toward the organization. This led to a more nuanced view of the data and triggered a recoding of this set of statements. Within each round of coding, I conducted multiple smaller iterations of naming and grouping codes, testing them to ensure their fit against the data and recoding or regrouping codes when necessary. After a full second round of coding, I arrived at a list of first-order codes. I then went back through each transcript and documented the codes in the data, recording them on a summary sheet for each participant.

In the second phase of my analysis, I moved to axial coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). There I consolidated first-order codes into categories that became increasingly abstract and theoretical as that analytic phase progressed. I repeatedly grouped and regrouped codes found in the data of each

Figure 1. Data structure.



participant's interview to search for variations and/or relationships among codes. For example, I conducted a comparative analysis of the group of participants who strongly reidentified with BP after the incident and the group who weakly reidentified to find the underlying reasons for differences in the reported solidity of reidentification. This analysis, in turn, led me to examine the function of working directly on the incident response and revealed that only participants who had opportunities to work on the response personally were able to reidentify strongly with BP. This analytic phase resulted in a set of theoretical categories encompassing my first-order codes.

I distilled the overarching theoretical framework presented in this article during the final stage of the analytic process. I repeatedly returned to the interview transcripts to ensure that my developing sense of how the theoretical categories aggregated accurately represented the data (Locke, 2001). Figure 1 summarizes my data analysis and depicts the structure of first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregate theoretical dimensions. I concluded the analysis by constructing a model of repairing broken organizational identification.

FINDINGS

Overview

The first and least surprising insight was that most executives I interviewed perceived that the Gulf of Mexico incident threatened how they perceived BP's organizational identity. The event created a major discrepancy between the perceived identity of BP as a beacon of technical excellence and environmental consciousness in the industry and the identity implied by the incident: that of an organization whose technical incompetence had provoked and failed to contain an environmental disaster. This perception of identity threat damaged the relationship between executives and BP because it destabilized their identification. The more doubts they experienced about the alignment between their identity and BP's, the more ambivalent they felt toward the organization.

All research participants reported being identified with BP prior to the incident. Their membership in the organization at least partially defined who they were. The incident therefore did more than dissolve—and reverse—the attributes on which their identification rested. Should they remain identified, it implicated them as potential violators. This put them in a predicament. Distancing themselves from the organization meant facing the loss of a significant and established part of their self-definition. Remaining close to it meant facing negative implications for their self-definition. From an identity perspective, then, research participants were caught between a rock and a hard place. Their prior identification and visible position as agents—indeed, as leaders of the organization—made it impossible to frame their relationship with BP in a straightforward manner with the company in the role of the violator and the self in the role of the violated party. They were left feeling ambivalent toward BP and toward themselves as members of BP, and uncertain about the fate of their relationship with it. Individuals resolved their destabilized identification along three pathways leading to three distinct outcomes. Two of these outcomes—strongly reidentifying and weakly reidentifying with BP—led to the repair of their relationship with the organization. The third—deidentifying with

BP—led to severance of the relationship. The mechanism underpinning each of the three pathways involved the resolution of their ambivalence.

As I analyzed the data, it became evident that two key factors—identity enactment and credible social information—helped resolve the ambivalence that executives felt toward BP. Those who had opportunities to enact the organization's threatened identity attributes by working directly on the incident response took the first pathway. They amplified the positive side of their ambivalence and strongly reidentified with BP. Participating in the organization's response affirmed that BP, and they, remained technically savvy and environmentally conscious. Thus full repair of the relationship was co-created by the organization and its members and occurred when executives participated in redeeming the original violation. Executives who did not have opportunities to personally enact the threatened identity attributes ended up taking either the second or third pathway. Which one they took depended on the source and valence of their exposure to social information—what others thought about the incident and BP's role in it. Though all executives received positive social information within BP that sought to reassure people of BP's value and integrity, some also received negative social information from credible outsiders that devalued BP and their membership in the organization. People who received only internal positive social information took the second pathway and resolved their ambivalence through conscious domination. Their positive feelings toward the company overrode, but did not dissipate, their negative ones, and they weakly reidentified with BP. People who received negative social information from credible external sources amplified the negative side of their ambivalence, deidentified with BP, and sought organizational exit. Below, I present evidence for perceived organizational identity threat and individuals' destabilized identification, focusing on the three pathways, the mechanisms underpinning them, and how identity enactment and social reinforcement drove the resolution of ambivalence and destabilized identification, leading to relationship repair or severance. Table 1 provides sample quotations from my informants supporting the second-order themes I identified in my analysis. The participant number is noted in parentheses after all the quotations I use in the table and in the findings.

The Gulf Incident as a Perceived Organizational Identity Threat

The two most common attributes that executives I interviewed associated with BP's organizational identity were environmental consciousness and technical excellence.[2] Most oil and gas companies share a focus on technical excellence. It reflects the competence required to operate in the industry. One executive with an engineering background noted with pride that ''we spend a lot of time doing really good engineering, really difficult projects, we always push the industry forward on that front'' (18). Another echoed this view, explaining how ''BP is not afraid to get involved, not afraid to actually lead. They're the ones

[2] The next most frequently mentioned identity attributes were entrepreneurial spirit and caring for employees, both of which were noted by less than half of the research participants, who did not experience either as threatened by the incident. Unlike the attributes of environmental consciousness and technical excellence, those of entrepreneurial spirit and caring for employees were rarely represented in other BP documentation sources before the incident, such as annual reports, press releases, and published speeches by BP executives.

who usually step up and drive a lot of the [technical] issues'' (26). Before the incident this identity attribute was often referred to in BP documents—such as press releases, annual reports, and published speeches by executives—by the tag line ''operating at the frontiers.'' For example, the cover of the 2008 *BP Annual Review* was entitled ''100 years of operating at the frontiers'' and featured a picture of a giant rig on the company's Thunder Horse oil field, described as ''the most technologically-advanced offshore project ever undertaken by the industry'' (Eyton, 2009).[3]

The second identity attribute, environmental consciousness, was more distinctive for BP. The head of an engineering function, for example, described ''jumping'' at the chance to work for BP ''because they had a very good reputation in the industry for being a caring kind of business . . . in terms of the environment'' (1). Another executive, who had worked there for more than 20 years, described how prior to the incident, ''of all the oil companies, it was easy for me to genuinely say that BP had a better environmental record and took the potential damage to the environment much more seriously than any other oil company; that was very important for me'' (4). The identity attribute of environmental consciousness—which may seem incongruous with the oil and gas industry—originated during the tenure of Lord Brown, CEO of BP from 1995 to 2007. Lord Brown was the first oil and gas industry CEO to publicly acknowledge the oil and gas industry's role in and the global risks of climate change in a speech at Stanford University in 1997 (Bradley, 2010). At the time, BP became a ''prominent company that had a strong public reputation for environmental sustainability'' (Hoffman and Jennings, 2011). BP's yellow and green logo, launched in 2000 in conjunction with the tag line ''better people, better products, beyond petroleum,'' was used to communicate the company's environmental consciousness externally and to reinforce this identity claim internally (Bader, 2014). In the next decade BP took actions to align its business operations with this attribute, for example, launching an Alternative Energy division in 2005 that focused on power generation through solar power, wind, gas, and hydrogen. When Tony Hayward took over from Lord Brown as CEO of BP in 2007 he reinforced this attribute of BP by stating that safety of the people and the environment was BP's number one priority. In line with this, the title of that year's *Annual Review* was ''Our key priorities: Safety, people, performance'' (BP, 2007).[4]

In the eyes of executives I interviewed, the Gulf incident severely threatened these two identity attributes. Observing how his beliefs in BP's environmental consciousness had suddenly become untenable in the face of the

[3] An analysis of BP's *Annual Reviews* from 2005 to 2009 (the five years prior to the incident) revealed that the technical excellence attribute was consistently mentioned each year in the chairman's and/or the CEO's opening statements (BP, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009). This was typically done through mentions of how BP had worked on goals that aligned with it or achieved feats of engineering that lived up to it. The technical excellence attribute was also in 83 percent of the published speeches of executives in the same period (BP, 2014).

[4] An analysis of BP's *Annual Reviews* from 2005 to 2009 (the five years prior to the incident) revealed that the environmental consciousness attribute was consistently mentioned each year in the chairman's and/or the CEO's opening statements (BP, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009). This was typically done through mentions of BP's commitment to environmental sustainability and protection, to investments in its Alternative Energy area, and to projects that focused on minimizing BP's environmental impact. The environmental consciousness attribute was also in 72 percent of the published speeches of executives in the same period (BP, 2014).

damage caused, one participant noted that the incident had ''pulled out the foundation of our core thinking that we care deeply about the environment'' (19). Another explained how the incident had challenged his perceptions of the company's technical excellence: ''Above all, I'm an engineer, it's in my blood, working on difficult projects, things that it seems can't be done. I thought BP was too, but can we be after this?'' (12). Not only did these executives see the incident as incongruous with two major attributes that they had long perceived to characterize BP's identity, they also experienced the incongruence as so large that it impinged on the organization's ability to claim them in the future. As one study participant put it, ''I was proud to work for BP because we were regarded as a very successful and dynamic company with good environmental credentials. Those two things disappeared in front of our eyes'' (33). Instead, the incident projected an organizational identity as a technically incompetent environmental destroyer. For these people, being a member of BP no longer meant what it used to, and it would not for a long time.

Organizational Identity Threat Destabilizes Members' Identification

Most study participants reported that their identification with BP had been destabilized following the incident. Describing the unmooring of her identification, one executive explained,

> It actually shattered me to some extent. It called me to question some of the beliefs that I had about the company, the way I saw the company, the priorities I believe the company had and the priorities I thought I was standing for as a leader in the organization. I used to feel there was good alignment between how I felt about the company and what the company was. (15)

Doubts about alignment between self and organization were also conveyed in questions that people asked themselves, which took the form of ''Who are we now?'' and, therefore, ''Who am I now?'' These questions revealed a loss of the cognitive anchors that had tied individuals to the organization, as illustrated in the following quote:

> It was a phrase used a lot, but I really did used to have green blood running through my veins, and now, well, I feel that everything is shattered. It's not just that my pride, or loyalty, to the company is different, diminished; it's more that I'm not sure what it means any more, working at BP, being a BPer. (35)[5]

Whereas being a member of BP used to provide executives with opportunities to be self-consistent, it created incongruence between their own identity and what was, in their eyes, now a discredited organizational identity. The severity of this state was captured by an executive who explained, ''We caused something that's terrible, and I am quite an environmentalist. To me it was something so dreadful that it went to the core of my beliefs. We were damaging the environment'' (16).

Alongside these doubts, executives reported developing ambivalent feelings toward BP and their membership in the organization. One explained his

[5] The analogy of green blood to represent identification was used repeatedly by research participants and referred to BP's corporate color, green.

Table 1. Representative Supporting Interview Data for Each Second-order Theme

Second-order themes	Representative first-order data
(A) Perceived organizational identity	''We have a great pride in doing things the right way, in being a company that does things in an environmentally better way, actually leading the industry on that front.'' (30) ''Our exploration success is unparalleled around the world. We're the number one producer in the Gulf of Mexico. We actually push the technological boundaries to make some really good things happen.'' (11)
(B) Perceived identity threat	''It's a huge impact on the environment for a company that prides itself on operating with a code of no harm to people, no harm to the environment, and suddenly it's taken away that foundation, that piece of us.'' (9) ''Deep-water drilling is really our specialty, we lead the industry in deep water, then suddenly not only does the deep-water rig explode, but we are seen to be struggling to plug the well. It made me think, how can this actually happen? What does it mean for us now?'' (32)
(C) Questioning fit between self and organizational identity	''We had a phenomenal attitude toward the environment. That was always important to me because I support green issues myself. Then we have a significant incident as we've just had, it starts to challenge your beliefs and the foundations you've been on, maybe I'm not so close to BP after all.'' (19) ''Before, I always felt a good fit between what I stood for, felt, I guess who I was, and what the company stood for. After the Gulf of Mexico, I started to question, really question if that is the case now.'' (13)
(D) Ambivalent feelings toward organization	''I went into a period of doubting the organization. I feel very proud of BP, but at the same time there was a catalogue of failures and I didn't know what to think or feel.'' (29) ''It made me incredibly angry with the company, from the stance that 11 people lost their lives. I am very angry about the environmental impact, it was horrible. . . . I felt caught between loyalty and anger.'' (36)
(E) Behaving less like an organizational member	''There was just less emphasis on work because we had less energy, bandwidth, enthusiasm for everything.'' (4) ''I would go home in the evenings and think, my goodness, how can I keep sustaining this activity with this backdrop? It was emotionally exhausting actually at times. I am trying to drive change in an organization that suddenly has this major crisis happening, and [my work felt] completely superfluous.'' (16)
(F) Enactment of threatened identity attributes	''I worked in deep water for 6 years in [country name], and normally it takes four to five years to get anything done in deep water, and we were coming up with ideas in five to six weeks, which was just extraordinary. It proved to me that we are really technically competent.'' (12) ''I was there [Gulf of Mexico] for nearly the whole time, and I know that we took responsibility for cleaning up and minimizing environmental damage; we put our money where our mouth was. That made me feel good, not to downplay mistakes, but it confirmed that we do care about the environment.'' (34)
(G) Amplified positive resolution of ambivalence	''If anything, I feel more passionate now and prouder to be working for the firm than perhaps I did before. That seems very counterintuitive, but I felt the way we responded to the incident is exemplary. I don't think anyone else would have done that.'' (20) ''I couldn't be prouder of the way we responded, and personally I feel just very committed to, very very good about being at BP. It's true that I went through a period of doubting things, but that's all gone now.'' (31)
(H) Strong reidentification	''Things are back on track, I feel close to the organization. I did doubt if we stood for the same things, but now I know we do. I feel very committed to helping us bounce back from this and come out stronger.'' (1) ''There is just a strong fit between what's important to me, particularly on the environmental front, and what's important to us at BP. It maybe sounds a bit bad, but this has really proven that to me.'' (26)

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Second-order themes	Representative first-order data
(I) Positive social information	''It was very difficult reconciling the official line with what was in the media. The only time I saw that really addressed was in a town hall meeting when he [the CEO] put both sides out there in the same conversation and that was very very good. I felt supported by that.'' (29) ''I wanted to track it from a bit of detail. I actually signed up so there was a Twitter account and a Facebook on it, so I actually signed up for these and actually just really kept up to speed. . . . I still do it on a day-to-day basis to see where are we with the cleanups, where are we with the demobilization of vessels, where are we with the claims that are coming in.'' (28)
(J) Conscious domination of ambivalent feelings	''It was really driving me to distraction, I was properly losing sleep over it, going through everything in my mind. I reached the point where I had to do something, had to decide. Once I had done, it was a lot easier to say yes I'm part of BP, and I could let go of many of the bad feelings.'' (7) ''I thought during the crisis the company was pretty spectacular, and I am very proud of the way the company responded. It was spectacular. This was one of the most amazing mobilizations of resources to fix something in peacetime. It made me feel this is the right place for me to be, even though I doubted it at the beginning. I am hoping in the passage of time people will recognize it as being a pretty incredible piece of engineering and a very socially responsible thing to do.'' (16)
(K) Weak reidentification	''I feel committed to making things work, I do feel that this is the right place for me to be, that I fit, and that my values are still the same as, or similar to those of BP.'' (10) ''The questioning is there, but it is buried in the back of my own mind and I actually never voiced that. . . . So there is that bit of conflict inside, wanting to make sure that we are carrying on and doing the right thing. Nonetheless, there was a voice of doubt in the back of my mind that actually was saying, are we who we say we are?''(16)
(L) Credible negative social information	''I've done lots of different [specialist function] roles before joining BP 11 years ago. [After the incident] I was ashamed; seeing the things I have been working toward over the past 4–5 years unravel before my eyes. I felt uncomfortable talking to people in my [specialist function] network, they were very negative about everything.'' (5) ''The other people [this executive worked with an industry group] saw my status as a lot lower, people thought it's not so special after all and actually encouraged me to leave. In their eyes we had failed.'' (3)
(M) Amplified negative resolution of ambivalence	''I don't think we handled the response very well. We were spending money hand over fist, almost giving it away. I think a lot of people were making a good living from us, we know that we have been taken advantage of in a big way. And for what, the reputation was still in tatters and the incident had undone everything we had worked hard for.'' (15) ''I feel bad, quite betrayed actually, let down. People want to go back to what we were, but we kind of know we can't go back to that.'' (14)
(N) Deidentification	''Frankly, the organization started to lose integrity with its people. I lost confidence that we were who we said we were. I used to feel that I stood for what the company is. I don't feel that anymore. It's difficult to explain, but I feel that I've somehow drifted or been pushed away by what's happened. I just don't see a fit anymore between me and BP.'' (5) ''Well, it did get me to this point, where there's no point, and I might just as well do other things with my life.'' (8)

contradictory negative and positive feelings, indicative of ambivalence toward the organization, as follows: ''I was angry that it had been allowed to happen. You didn't feel good about the fact that the company had let you down personally. But there was still a lot of resilience. . . . I felt torn between the two sides''

(28). Another executive echoed this sense of being torn between opposing forces, as he described shifting from having primarily positive feelings toward BP to an ambivalent state: ''I used to feel good, excited about BP, it was a great company. After this, part of me also felt angry, let down . . . shame and embarrassment for being part of it. It was distressing, a whole gamut of emotions'' (21). Because executives identified with BP prior to the incident, they had internalized the organization. Their actions as agents of it were also feats of self-expression. While the mention of anger, of being let down, implies being violated by the new developments, the mentions of embarrassment and shame suggest that they were also implicated as violators. Because of their identification with BP, executives' ambivalence extended to themselves and their own role in it. As one explained, ''I felt quite guilty or embarrassed on behalf of the [name of function], like I had joint responsibility for what happened,'' a few moments later adding, ''It might not be our fault that all this happened but we are going to deal with it, for that I am proud'' (33). The incident was not only something that BP had potentially caused and/or that reflected negatively on it. It was also something that they, as organizational members and leaders, were potentially implicated in. The sentiment of ''being part of it'' was also made salient by the commentary of organizational outsiders. One executive recalled his feelings when the media were ''attacking BP. I felt like, I am BP personified here, I felt it was personal'' (11).

Ambivalent emotions can paralyze individuals or change the ways they act (Wang and Pratt, 2008). This was evident among executives whose identification had been destabilized. They reported behaving ''less like a BPer'' within and outside the organization. Feelings that one's contribution was futile in the face of the instability in the organization were common and could be heard in expressions such as the following:

> I found it stunningly difficult to maintain enthusiasm and energy, and that's pretty unusual for me. You're completely impotent, absolutely nothing you can do, so it was like, why on earth should I put lots of effort into something which is basically going down the tubes? That's how it felt. I felt like I had no impact on this whatsoever. (8)

This disengagement at work was accompanied by changes in behavior outside the organization. One executive described a profound shift from being ''a passionate believer that if I work for BP I will support the brand, and I will go out of my way to support the brand, and that includes obviously only using BP fuels,'' to finding herself ''at [an alternative petrol station] sitting in my car [to refuel]. That for me is absolute heresy. These weren't planned events but, for me, evidence or examples that something had changed'' (15). This executive's use of the word ''heresy'' reflects both the strength of her previous identification and the degree of its destabilization.

The four executives in my sample who did not report any destabilization of their identification were industry veterans, each of whom had more than 25 years of industry experience. All had witnessed prior industrial accidents and described the present one as indicative of the general danger inherent in the oil and gas industry. One, who had worked on an oil rig that exploded in the 1980s, killing a number of workers, reflected that this experience ''teaches you that actually these things can happen anywhere'' (18). The other 32 executives,

however, reported some degree of destabilized identification that required resolution.

Resolving Destabilized Identification

Three distinct resolutions of broken organizational identification emerged from my findings: strong reidentification, weak reidentification, and deidentification. The first two led to a repair of the relationship with BP, the third to its severance. Of the 32 executives who reported destabilized identification, 11 strongly reidentified, 14 weakly reidentified, and 7 deidentified with BP. I define reidentification as the reestablishment of identification with an organization following its destabilization, and it accompanied relationship repair.

Pathway to strong reidentification. BP executives reidentified strongly with the company only if they were directly involved in the organization's response to the incident. BP mobilized a large team of people who were charged with providing technical solutions for plugging the gushing well, cleaning up the spilled oil, and assessing and monitoring the environmental impact of the disaster. When working on the response, executives enacted one (or both) of BP's threatened identity attributes: technical excellence and environmental consciousness. An engineering executive who worked on the effort to plug the well said that ''going out [to the Gulf] felt encouraging because you were taking responsibility, you knew that what you were doing would work. It made you feel, OK, we still are at the cutting edge [of engineering], even after all that has happened'' (22). Working on the response gave executives a strong, direct, tangible reconnection to the threatened organizational identity attributes and made them believe that these attributes could still be associated with BP and, by extension, to them. ''It really strengthened my belief in the company,'' explained one, ''because I knew more of the real story behind what was going on, and I believe we really did a very moral and good thing. This is not to say that we didn't make serious mistakes, but we didn't walk away from what happened. We made claims about our values, our beliefs. I believe we've shown them'' (13).

While acknowledging the seriousness of the incident and the personal uncertainty that had followed the destabilization of their identification, these executives explained that the organization's response—which they had not just heard about or witnessed but enacted—had rebuilt and strengthened their identification with BP. ''If the incident response did anything,'' explained one, ''it reinforced my opinion that BP is a good company, because at the end of the day, a measure of a good company is not what it does, but what it can do'' (27). These sentiments were echoed by another, who explained, ''I felt further drawn toward the company emotionally, because the company acted with integrity and did the right thing. That has deepened my sense of loyalty'' (13). Many overtly attributed their strong reidentification to working on the response. ''I was lucky enough to be part of a team that was developing solutions,'' one executive remarked. ''It galvanized me into the belief that I was working for the right organization. That sounds corny, but it's absolutely true'' (1). Others compared their involvement before and after the response effort to highlight the impact of participating in it: ''There was a huge tension in the team, as there

was in all teams,'' noted one functional specialist talking about his teams' atmosphere before being tasked to work on the response, ''and what I noticed was that when we started working on transactions around [the incident], people started to feel that they were actually doing something to help, and you started to feel the tension wear off. You felt like you were making a difference'' (24). All executives in my sample who were involved in responding to the incident strongly reidentified with BP.

The mechanism underlying this pathway—identity enactment leading to strong reidentification—is captured in the insight found in the following paraphrase of a quote from Weick (1979: 134): ''I know who I am because I saw what I did.'' People came to understand who they were through observing their personal actions (Bem, 1972). What is important is that the opportunity for individual action was provided by the organization. People were asked to try to fix the consequences of the incident by, with the resources of, and on behalf of BP. By taking up the invitation, they became organizational agents of the very identity attributes they perceived to be threatened (Brickson, 2012). Being an organizational agent expanded people's interpretation of their actions from expressing ''who I am'' to expressing ''who we are as an organization'' and who we can be. Thus executives saw working on the response as evidence that both they and the organization were technically competent and environmentally conscious. Working on the response also relieved executives' feelings of embarrassment about the incident and generated feelings of pride, as noted in earlier quotes. This turned them from potential transgressors, as agents of the organization, into active redeemers. This collective interpretation of their action restored their faith in BP's expected identity attributes, led them to strongly reidentify with the organization, and resolved their ambivalent feelings toward it and their own membership in it. Repair was thus co-created by members and BP.

My analysis suggests that these executives resolved their ambivalence toward BP through positive response amplification (Katz and Glass, 1979). They overrode their negative feelings toward the organization with strong positive ones. As one executive said, ''I felt quite negative, bad towards BP, a bit betrayed almost. Then I went out [to the Gulf, and] I turned the corner, I felt better, more upbeat, back to how I was before, proud and feeling good about BP'' (34). These executives talked about the organization in very positive terms and became strong advocates of it. One argued that the incident had highlighted the organization's positive distinctiveness:

> One comment I always make to people is that we would really be in a jam if this were another company. Because I think that BP stood up and admitted what they needed to admit and they're standing behind it, spending a lot of money [and] a lot of time. There are a lot of companies out there that would have just gone bankrupt and left it over to the government. You know, what Exxon did with the Exxon Valdez. They never admitted that they did anything wrong. (26)

Moreover, many framed BP's response to the incident as indicative of a positive future for the organization. The incident, one executive suggested, ''opened up the eyes of the organization to its capability. I think it has given a kind of injection to people's belief systems as to what's possible'' (1). The

incident had threatened the valued identity attributes but had not altogether extinguished BP's ability to provide opportunities to revive them.

Pathway to weak reidentification. In contrast to the first pathway, executives who weakly reidentified with BP had no direct involvement in the organizational response, observing it from the sidelines instead. Like executives who strongly reidentified with BP, those who did so weakly interpreted the organization's response to the incident positively. One, for example, highlighted BP's positive actions by comparing them with the response of governments to recent natural disasters: ''We've put more money in the Gulf of Mexico than what was pledged into Haiti. . . . Just in the first four weeks of the incident we spent more than was spent in total for Hurricane Katrina'' (2). Another interpreted the organizational response as proof that BP had ''lived up to its core values. Exxon would have done [things] very differently, acted very differently under these circumstances. I think we have, we sort of stood up there and said, 'Yes, it's our responsibility, we're going to make it right'' (19).

Like all executives, those who weakly reidentified noted receiving a lot of information from the organization about the incident and BP's response. This information, disseminated through regular communication, sought to reassure people of BP's positive value and was reinforced by conversations among colleagues who affirmed the value of their continued membership in BP. This formal and informal social information provided reinforcement for people's continued membership in BP. As one executive explained,

> What really helped was [name] the head of [division name], every week had a teleconference with senior-level leaders and it was all about what was happening, both the technical response and stopping the spill as well as the clean up, and it really helped just to listen. Then, afterwards, we would talk among ourselves, support each other. You know, it was very reassuring. (35).

Ambivalence-amplification theory would predict that executives who had ambivalent feelings toward BP and subsequently perceived the organization to act in a positive way would resolve their ambivalence by overriding negative feelings with strong positive ones (Katz and Glass, 1979). My data, however, indicate that both observing positive action by the target of ambivalence and receiving positive social information from the same target were not in themselves sufficient to invoke an amplified positive response. Instead, executives who observed rather than participated in the organization's response felt mildly positive toward BP and weakly reidentified with it. Weak reidentification was characterized by a conscious decision to align self and organization, a commitment to positive feelings toward it, and conscious attempts to ignore both negative feelings and lingering uncertainty about how reliable BP's claims to threatened identity attributes were. People experienced positive feelings about how BP was in the present and negative ones about how BP could potentially be in the future.

Executives on this pathway stabilized their identification with BP and resolved their ambivalence by consciously emphasizing positive feelings toward the organization over negative ones (Ashforth et al., 2014). This sustained the decision to remain a member of the organization. None, however, expressed the enthusiasm about BP's value and future of those who had been

working on the response in the Gulf. Many executives who weakly reidentified with BP considered leaving, and all described making a conscious decision to stay. One explained that receiving an external offer was the trigger that ''makes you start having these detailed conversations with yourself about what it is you really want . . . actually it forces the conversation to reach a closure'' (17). Another described reaching a stage at which ''I just had to decide, am I in or out? I did a lot of thinking, and, well, I decided that this is where I should be. I'm proud of the way we responded. Yes, I have some doubts but I have to put them to rest'' (6). As these quotes illustrate, people who weakly reidentified with BP positively resolved their ambivalence toward the organization, though their resolution was a tentative, tempered one that pushed the negative elements of their ambivalence to the future where they threatened to unravel identification at a later date.

While the commitment of these executives to remain members of the organization may appear similar to that made by those who strongly reidentified with BP, what set this group apart was the tenuousness of their reidentification and their uncertainty about how reliable BP's expected identity attributes were. One executive in this group, for example, when describing his insecurity about the company's technical excellence, noted,

> I have been working from the hypothesis that we will turn out to be relatively blameless, in the sense that I don't think we will be found to have been systematically incompetent. However, if it turns out that wasn't right, and that we were rotten to the core, and I didn't realize it—that would be a real blow. Then I would really feel differently about BP. (7)

Among executives in this group, doubts lingered close to the surface of their renewed identification. As one put it, ''I feel determination and pride about the way the company is showing up to deal with it, but this is coupled with this deep question of whether the wheels are really broken'' (4). As evidence of the discomfort that weak reidentification caused, some executives described avoiding questions about what BP could be like in the future and mentioned their frustrated desire for certainty: ''All those sorts of questions and doubts, they're private things. Just a deep desire to understand, and a deep desire to believe, that BP did the right thing'' (30).

Taken together, these first two pathways suggest that when ambivalence erupts in a relationship that is based on identification, observing positive action by the target of the ambivalence is not enough. To transform the ambivalence into strong positive feelings, which leads to strong reidentification and a solid repair of the relationship, the perception of positive action needs to be coupled with personal action that reconnects the person to the identity attributes that informed the initial identification with the target. Executives who weakly reidentified with BP appeared to recognize the importance of identity enactment, as almost all of them reported wishing to work on the response team. One executive who did not have the opportunity to work on the incident response reflected on the benefits that she missed in not being a responder, saying, ''[I feel] guilty that I can't be there to work on the response. I really did want to go down to help and also see firsthand what was happening. I could see those who did felt better, they were living what it means to be a BPer'' (35).

Pathway to deidentification. Deidentification and group exit are well-reported outcomes for members whose group suffers a major failure (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Fiol, 2002), yet relatively few executives in my sample followed this third route. My analysis suggests that for those executives who did not have the opportunity to participate in response activities, the main reason they deidentified with BP was that they received negative social information about BP and their membership in the organization from outsiders whom they deemed credible sources of feedback. Executives who received credible negative social information but were involved in responding to the incident remained on the first pathway and strongly reidentified with BP. Almost everyone I interviewed for the study reported receiving derogatory comments about BP from friends, family, acquaintances, and strangers, which is not surprising given the dramatic and public nature of the incident (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Associated Press, 2010), but they were generally able to dismiss these comments as irrelevant by classifying the feedback givers as noncredible retellers of general media messages. ''The vast majority of people that criticize BP,'' one executive remarked, ''I can usually pretty well establish fairly quickly that they have picked up on media hype and do not have the facts. My dad used to say they are talking through a hole in their head.[6] Therefore, I dismiss it'' (4).

Executives who deidentified differed in that they also received negative social information from feedback givers whom they deemed credible and well informed. These credible sources were either industry colleagues from other organizations with whom executives interacted through various associations and professional groups or peers with whom executives interacted in voluntary associations. After the incident, some executives found themselves under attack from these credible outsiders. One executive who was also a board member of an environmental advocacy organization recounted,

> After the incident I lost my legitimacy in the group. It really impacted my ability to hold my head high and still say I work for BP and it's a damn good company. . . . The chairman of the board even said, ''I will never understand why some of the most environmentally conscious people work in the oil industry.'' (8)

Rather than simply relaying the general negative media message, such comments were versions of it personalized by a credible source, that is, someone who understood the industry and was savvy about technical or environmental matters. This made the message difficult to shake off. One executive, for example, explained receiving an e-mail from an industry colleague:

> She said that ''you guys surely must have seen that even though there was a miniscule risk of this happening, the fact that you have not prepared for it means that you are criminally negligible,'' and as I said before, she's an extraordinarily smart woman and she's usually right, and it really hit me, I just didn't know how to respond. (14)

This additional source of social information, being both credible and strong, amplified the negative side of executives' ambivalence toward BP. This negative amplification was evident in interviews dominated by reports of strong

[6] ''Talking through a hole in one's head'' is a British expression that means someone is offering a factually incorrect viewpoint concerning something they know nothing about.

negative feelings toward the company, such as ''I feel angry and let down by the company, my pride has gone'' (36).

Unlike executives on the first two pathways, those who deidentified with BP had negative interpretations of the organization's response to the incident. One described being frustrated:

> We were starting to respond and once it hit two weeks we started continually, death by one thousand cuts, we're going to get it fixed next week, we're not going to get it fixed, next week we're going to get it fixed, oops, it's going to be next month, now it's going to be three months. Frankly, the organization started to lose its integrity. (14)

These executives were also dismissive of the positive social information inside BP: ''They really put a lot of effort into giving us almost too much information. That focused very much on the technical [side], who's right and who's wrong . . . but it would have been helpful to have more acknowledgment of the human aspect'' (15).

The majority of executives who received negative social information from credible sources moved from destabilized identification to deidentifying with BP. They amplified their negative response to ambivalence, overriding their positive feelings toward the organization with strong negative ones. One executive, who had joined BP 15 years before the incident, drew on the analogy of green blood to describe severing her identification with BP: ''Until very recently, I had green blood running through my veins. Now I do not have green blood running through my veins'' (36). This breaking of identification was emotionally taxing, and many executives who deidentified described feelings akin to mourning toward the organization: ''I have experienced all of the emotions, from the shock and the horror to the fear of what is wrong about BP. I feel that I've lost the company I worked for'' (5). While BP still existed, what was lost for these executives was its organizational identity. As one put it, ''We've lost what BP was, a damn good company at the cutting edge of exploration and production that also cared about the environment'' (33). Distancing themselves from BP cast these executives in the role of the violated party.

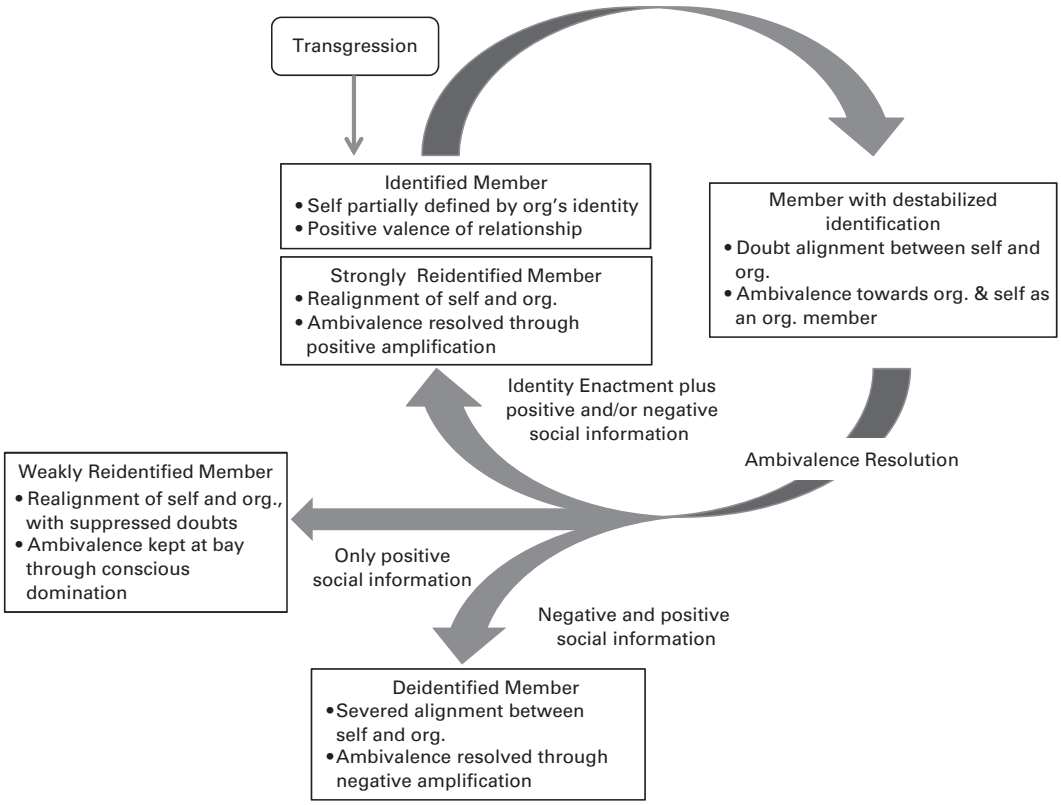
Deidentification was more than a cognitive and affective state. It also led to action: severing one's relationship with BP and seeking employment elsewhere, an outcome that would have been difficult for many to imagine before the incident. One executive remarked, ''I always said I would never go and work for a direct competitor. If I want to work in the oil and gas industry, then I want to work in BP. I relaxed those boundaries I placed in my mind previously, so now I'm looking elsewhere'' (15). All executives who deidentified with BP described organizational exit as an imperative. The few who intended to stay described their decision as instrumental and time bound. One veteran of the 1998 merger between AMOCO and British Petroleum explained, ''In two years I get a certain amount of retirement benefit. That makes it worthwhile for me to stay another two years and so it's worth fighting for. But quite honestly, beyond that, I'm out of here'' (14). These executives remained warm bodies in the organization but had psychologically checked out.

DISCUSSION

Building on these findings I offer a model in figure 2 of repairing damaged relationships based on identification, with the concepts of destabilized identification and co-created repair, and the mechanisms of ambivalence resolution at its center. The model depicts a cycle of the destabilization and reconstruction of organizational identification following a transgression, with the different identification outcomes that can result. When people are identified with an organization, their self and the organization's identity share identity attributes, and they have predominantly positive thoughts and feelings toward the organization and their membership in it. When organizational identification is destabilized, a transgression invokes new negative elements, and they enter a state of ambivalence, consciously experiencing both negative and positive feelings toward the organization and their roles as organizational members. In this state people doubt the alignment between their own and their organization's identity. My findings indicate that resolving ambivalence is the mechanism underpinning the restabilization or severing of identification.

When people feel ambivalent, they are uncertain about the future of their relationship with their organization. Uncertainty makes them highly receptive to influence from others and to information gathered from their own behavior

Figure 2. Model of the pathways for repairing organizational identification following a transgression.



(Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978; Thomas and Griffin, 1983; Zalesny and Ford, 1990). In my study, the factors that most influenced people in this state fell into three categories: their actions, their organization, and credible outsiders. These factors exerted their influence simultaneously, engaging in a metaphorical tug of war. The strongest one determined how individuals resolved their ambivalence and how their identification was reconstructed. Because people in my study were exposed to different combinations of factors, they reconstructed their identification in different ways. I used these varying combinations to parse out the factors' relative strengths.

The factor that has the strongest influence on the resolution of ambivalence is people's own behavior, in this case behavior that reconnected members to their organization's identity. That people rely most on information gathered by extracting meaning from their own behaviors is a central tenet of sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking is the ''process through which people work to understand novel, ambiguous, or confusing events'' (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014: 58). More than a process of interpretation, sensemaking involves people actively shaping the situations they are trying to understand. Enactment—by which people's actions affect their environment and thus partially construct their own reality (Weick, 1977, 1995)—is central to interpretation, and vice versa, and both the interpretations and enactments that allow us to make sense are closely tied to identity. Identity is both a lens that colors how people make sense of events and, in part, a product of enactment—through enactment we come to understand who we are by observing what we do (Bem, 1972; Weick, 1995; Ibarra, 1999; Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann, 2006). At BP, working on the response enabled people to enact technical competence and environmental consciousness. Their personal enactment of these threatened identity attributes amplified the positive side of their ambivalence, drew them back into alignment with the organization, and led them to strongly reidentify with it. That personal enactment was the strongest factor suggests that the social information people trust or are more attentive to involves their selves.

What appeared to make identity enactment so powerful in the case I studied was that it was enabled by organizational action. Both parties of the relationship were acting to resolve the ambivalence. In this case the organizational action was the mobilization of a large team whose goal was to plug the well and clean up the spilt oil. BP thus enabled employees to become organizational agents in the domain of the threatened identity attributes. This meant that individuals' actions were taken on behalf of the collective; thus rather than deducing only their own views from their behavior (Bem, 1972), they seemed to expand their interpretations to deduce the views of the collective. This was evident in statements that could be summarized as ''I know who we are because I saw what I did as an agent of the organization.'' My findings therefore suggest that full repair of destabilized identification is actively co-created. For relationships based on identification, on the sharing of definitions, transgressions generate ambivalence toward both parties—the organization and oneself—and both parties must act to resolve this two-sided ambivalence.

In the absence of co-created repair, social information determined how a person moved out of ambivalence. According to social information processing theory, people form and develop their attitudes based on a combination of their own (past and current) behavior and information from their social world, such

as direct statements from others that evaluate a situation and general communications about a situation (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978). These sources vary in their relative influence (Rice and Aydin, 1991), and to fully understand a person's attitudes one needs to consider information the person receives from all ''salient, relevant and credible'' sources (Zalesny and Ford, 1990: 207).

Two forms of social information predominated in my study: positive social information from within BP and negative social information from credible outsiders. Of these, negative social information from credible outsiders exerted the strongest influence. Executives exposed to negative social information who did not have an opportunity to co-create repair deidentified with and severed their relationship to BP. Two facets of this social information—valence and source—explain why it has a greater influence than positive information from within the organization.

That negative social information had more influence than positive social information mirrors the finding that people attend to negative information more readily than positive information, as captured in the statement, ''Bad is stronger than good'' (Rozin and Royzman, 2001; Baumeister et al., 2001). Research on trust repair, for example, shows that following a breach of trust, the violated party tends to privilege negative over positive information about the violator (Kim et al., 2004; Kim, Dirks, and Cooper, 2009). Attending more to negative social information amplifies the negative side of a person's ambivalence (Katz and Glass, 1979), and this negative amplification pushes one further away from the organization and into a state of deidentification.

Prior research has established that social information from credible outsiders can influence the likelihood of a person trusting another (Burt and Knez, 1995; Ferrin, Dirks, and Shah, 2006) and his or her likelihood of identifying with an organization (Pratt, 2000). Equally, prior research has established that because identified members believe in their organization, they are likely to give their organization the benefit of the doubt after a transgression that threatens the organization's identity and turn against it only after sustained bad news (Harrison, Ashforth, and Corley, 2009). Such was the condition in the current study, and my findings suggest that when a transgression occurs, followed by sustained bad news, the violated party (in this case the organizational member) places more weight on information from credible outsiders than from the violator. Therefore, although the credible outsider was not a direct party in the relationship, he or she became more trusted and hence relatively more influential than the violator, who is a direct party in the relationship (Goldberg and Shaw, 2007; Poitras, 2009). This suggestion is supported by the finding that positive social information from within the organization had a relatively weak effect on resolving ambivalence—and only among those who didn't receive negative external information—sparking a process of conscious domination leading to weak reidentification, not through the mechanism of ambivalence amplification leading to deidentification (or in the case of identity enactment, strong reidentification). The model suggests that it is not amidst but because of the pushes and pulls of these factors—the challenges and opportunities presented by parties internal and external to the organization—that relationship repair is co-created or that the relationship is severed.

Theoretical Implications

The majority of existing conceptualizations of relationship repair take a social exchange perspective whereby relationships move from positive to negative valence, calculated by subtracting the negative from the positive components (Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, 1995; Bottom et al., 2002; Schweitzer, Hershey, and Bradlow, 2006). My study, in contrast, emphasizes the presence of ambivalence at the heart of most relationships, its salience when relationships are in question, and its importance in relationship repair. It provides evidence for a more recent conceptualization of relationship repair that is based on understanding the ubiquity of ambivalence in relationships. It supports the proposition that both positive and negative elements coexist and are ongoing in relationships (Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies, 1998; Pratt and Dirks, 2007).

By conceptualizing a transgression as a force that moves one party into an ambivalent relationship with the other, this model highlights the resolution of ambivalence as the mechanism that underpins relationship repair. Although the factors influencing how ambivalence is resolved are likely to vary depending on the type of relationship, I propose that they will emanate from the actions of the violated party themselves and social information that that party receives. In highlighting the role of credible relevant outsiders in contributing to the repair or severance of a relationship, this paper goes beyond the role of outsiders as arbitrators or mediators (Ross and Conlon, 2000) and instead views them as a source of social information (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978) that people rely on to make sense of the damaged relationship and influence its potential repair.

While existing relationship-repair research has focused on what the violator must do to repair the relationship, the model in this paper highlights that both violator and violated have important roles to play in relationship repair. Perhaps the most significant finding is that the actions of the violated party (the executives with destabilized identification) had the heaviest weight in resolving their ambivalence toward the violator (BP) and repairing the relationship. This extends the proposition that for relationship repair to be successful, violated parties need to be willing to respond to repair attempts by the violator (Driver et al., 2003; Tomlinson, Dineen, and Lewicki, 2004) by showing that they themselves can undertake concrete actions to address the destabilizing event. Both violator and violated can significantly influence relationship repair.

The findings in this paper also extend theories of ambivalence resolution. Ambivalence-amplification theory is one of the foundational theories of ambivalence resolution and one that organizational scholars draw on extensively (Ashforth, et al., 2014). But the empirical studies that lend support to this theory were not conducted in relationships based on identification. Results have shown that observing the actions of the target of ambivalence is sufficient to resolve ambivalence in relation to strong positive views, if positive actions are observed, or strong negative views, if negative actions are observed (Katz and Glass, 1979). In a relationship based on identification, however, the self is partially defined by the other party. In consequence, when these relationships are transgressed and identification is destabilized, the ambivalence generated has two sides—it invests the other as much as the self. To resolve this ambivalence in a positive way thus requires actions by both parties. As researchers of organizations increasingly integrate theories of ambivalence into their studies, understanding and applying this modification to ambivalence amplification will

be important for studying and predicting the relationship between an organization and its members.

In addition, the study provides important extensions to theories of organizational identification. First, I identify and describe the state of destabilized identification, which marks the start of episodes in which people already identified with an organization reassess and potentially change that identification. Destabilization is a form of unfreezing, a state that existing theories have identified as marking the beginning of transitions in general and identity transitions specifically (Lewin, 1951; Ebaugh, 1988; Gioia, Schultz, and Corley, 2000; Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 2003). When people are in this unfrozen state they are described as being in a liminal, or transitional, space in which they are betwixt and between established positions or identities (Van Gennep, 1960; Clark et al., 2010). In the context of identity, the liminal space can be between a former identity, such as an alcoholic or a medical student, and one that a person aspires or expects to achieve, such as a sober person or a surgeon. Alternatively, the liminal space can be between a former identity that is no longer tenable and a future one that is not yet clear. In the latter case—which destabilized identification is a type of—identity and identification are in limbo and open to change in multiple directions. When people occupy this form of liminal space they are sometimes described as being in a state of identity ambiguity in which they are ''without a good sense of who they [are] . . . or a sense of what the future holds for them'' (Corley and Gioia, 2004: 178). Although being in a liminal space with no clear future identity can be rich ground for people to work on crafting or changing their identity and identification (Ibarra and Petriglieri, 2010), the state is traditionally associated with aversive experiences and is most often accompanied by ''doubt, uncertainty, confusion, conflict, and ambivalence'' (Ibarra, 2007: 22). In line with this, I found evidence that ambivalence accompanied destabilized identification, which lends empirical support to Pratt and Barnett's (1997) suggestion that there is a strong link between ambivalence and the state of unfreezing. It is theoretically important because it suggests that how people refreeze—what they transition to—depends on how their ambivalence is resolved.

The ambivalence that occurs when identification is destabilized does not need to be new; it may also be latent. In the case of BP, one could speculate that prior to the Gulf incident, the organization's claim of being environmentally conscious provided a social defense—a collective arrangement that protects members from disturbing affect stemming from the nature of their work (Petriglieri and Petriglieri, 2010)—that enabled members to keep at bay their ambivalence about working in the oil and gas industry, even though the industry is often accused of being unkind to the environment. After the incident, this social defense was no longer available, and thus the ambivalence returned.

As a second contribution, I introduce the construct of reidentification, which complements previously described states of disidentification and deidentification. Reidentification is theoretically interesting because it is born out of an ordeal that involves the revisiting and renewal of a previous identification. Prior theorizing has suggested that such ordeals may lead to a stronger identity (Ashforth, 1998), just like a healed broken bone may be stronger than the original unbroken one, albeit perhaps less flexible. Although I did not find evidence that executives reidentified more strongly with BP than before the incident, the fact that veterans who had previously experienced a similar ordeal did not have

their identification destabilized further suggests that going through one episode in which identification is reassessed and confirmed may buffer against future ones. But the results also show that such ordeals can sometimes lead to weak reidentification in which individuals become more conscious of their ambivalence toward the organization. This finding is also a useful addition to the relationship repair literature and one worth further investigation. One could predict, for example, that other forms of relationships, such as those between organizations in joint ventures, may be more robust following a transgression that is successfully repaired than before the transgression. The very fact that a relationship can be repaired may prove its value and solidity to both parties.

It is important to note the distinction between weak reidentification as described here and ambivalent identification. People who are ambivalently identified with an organization have ''contradictory thoughts, feelings and behaviors'' toward it (Pratt, 2000: 479). Pratt (2000), for example, described how salespeople who were ambivalently identified with the direct marketing company Amway engaged in approach–avoidance behaviors by renewing their membership in the organization but not engaging in selling activities. There are two key differences between this ambivalent identification and the weak identification I report in this paper. First, while in ambivalent identification opposing positive and negative elements are experienced simultaneously and concern the organization in the present, in weak reidentification the positive elements were experienced about the organization in the present, but the negative elements concerned the organization as it could potentially be in the future. Thus the opposing elements had targets that differed in temporality—BP as it is today and how it could be in the future. Second, weakly reidentified members did not engage in any approach–avoidance behaviors as is characteristic of ambivalently identified members. Weakly reidentified members of BP had positive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward the organization in the present and engaged in being an organizational member. Their identification was tempered, however, as they remained unsure of how reliable BP's expected identity attributes might be in the future, and these negative thoughts and feelings were thus shunted into the future. The tentativeness of the state of weak identification is similar to that of anticipatory identification. Both represent circumstances in which people have thought and felt but not yet acted their way into identification (Harquail, 1998).

The finding that identity enactment is the crucial factor in fully repairing destabilized identification and bringing about strong reidentification is the third contribution to this literature. In the case described here, that involved enacting the threatened organizational identity attributes through a role in the organization's response to the Gulf incident and thus working as an organizational agent in the domain of the threatened identity attributes. Past theories of identification have acknowledged that the role a member enacts is vital to maintaining consistency between self and organization—the higher this consistency, the more identified the member will be (Brickson, 2012). My findings complement this idea by showing that a role can also be vital for returning consistency once identification has been destabilized. This affirms that without action, identification tends to remain tentative (Harquail, 1998).

This finding raises the question of why only those actively involved in the response effort strongly reidentified, given that all the executives were agents of the organization through their membership. Although all of them were still

agents of BP, there were different pieces of the organizational identity available to enact. My data suggest that observing others doing response-related work while being an agent oneself in other areas was not enough because it left room to doubt whether BP was competent in the areas of technical excellence and environmental consciousness and whether the work was done with sincerity. Actively doing response work and bringing one's own heart into it, however, seemed to restore executives' belief that the identity attributes were real and true. Thus the organization gave individuals an opportunity to enact the organizational identity, and the executives, in turn, anthropomorphized the organization through knowing themselves and through being given an opportunity to bring this self to their role as organizational agents. It also gave them an opportunity to resolve the two-sided ambivalence. By working themselves with the organization, they directed repair at both sides of the ambivalence.

A fourth contribution of this study is to provide empirical evidence that shifts the ''focus in organization identification from a self-in-isolation to a self-in-relation perspective'' (Bartel and Dutton, 2001: 116). While theories of self and identification note that other people can grant the status of organizational membership, shape what it means to be an organizational member, and identify what value membership holds (Bartel and Dutton, 2001), existing studies have privileged the influence of organizational insiders in this process. Building on Pratt's (2000) finding that sensemaking with organizational outsiders can inhibit the identification of new organizational members, my study shows the role of organizational outsiders in shaping the identification of established organizational members. While organizational members may come under attack from outsiders following organizational failure (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Gutierrez, Howard-Grenville, and Scully, 2010), my results suggest that not all negative social information is considered credible. This is an important filter. Only when the source of social information is considered credible does it influence identification.

Limitations and Future Research

As is the case with all attempts to build theory inductively from accounts gathered within a single organization, this study is vulnerable to generalizability challenges. The dramatic and public nature of BP's 2010 Gulf incident made it an extreme case of organizational identity threat. While few instances of organizational identity threat are likely to be so severe, the extreme nature of this case meant that it had an impact on the identification of a large number of research participants. It also helped that BP was a company with which, prior to the incident, people identified strongly and in clearly delineated domains. In an ideal world, exploring the destabilization of identification would begin with a round of data collection prior to the identity-threatening event. This approach would allow the researcher to quantify the strength and texture of prior identification rather than extrapolate it from retrospective accounts. In practice, given the unpredictable nature of organizational identity threat, this approach is rarely possible.

A related issue is that, although I identified the population within BP that was best suited theoretically to answer my research question, BP chose the specific people within that group, and, as is usual in qualitative studies, not everyone agreed to be interviewed. Initially, I was concerned that the people who volunteered to speak to me would be those with strong views that they wanted to

proffer, either very positive toward the company or very negative, but this was not a concern, as executives had a range of responses. This method of recruiting participants does mean that I cannot predict the proportions of organizational members who would follow each of the pathways in other situations. Ideally, future research would be able to capture the responses of whole populations of organizational members to address this limitation.

As with most research, this study raises at least as many questions as it answers. One topic for future investigation is whether strong and weak reidentification are temporary equilibria or end states. Viewing organizational identification as a process of becoming implies that all identification states are provisional. One question this insight raises is how frequently episodes occur in which established members reevaluate their identification and thus how long lasting these equilibria are. Equally important to understand is the impact on organizational members' future identification of having experienced one of these states in the past.

My research documented the dynamics of an episode in which members reassessed their identification after a particularly severe incident. I believe that my window into this context revealed helpful insights that can be applied to a wider range of situations. A fruitful line of research could be examining less severe events that trigger episodes of identity reassessment. Researchers tend to focus on negative or disruptive events when researching identity dynamics in organizations, perhaps reflecting the human tendency to attend to bad rather than good situations (Baumeister, et al., 2001). Investigating whether identity destabilization can also arise from events that appear beneficial, such as rapid organizational growth or unexpected success, would be a helpful extension in this area. Rapid growth, for example, might challenge an organization's ability to retain its identity attributes because of an influx of new recruits, which could destabilize the identification of existing members. This problem has been suggested in anecdotes about fast-growing technology companies such as Google.

My study revealed three factors—personal enactment, positive social information from within the organization, and negative social information from credible outsiders—that influenced how people resolved their ambivalence. It is likely that research in this area could unearth more factors that play into these dynamics. The organizational response, for example, could affect these dynamics. If the organizational response were widely perceived to be negative, or even if the organization did nothing, it might add negative weight that would push more employees toward deidentification. In fact, the study of identification among members of the Catholic Church following the sex abuse scandals has suggested that the church's combative stance against members' attempts to change the institution pushed those members into a permanent state of split identification (Gutierrez, Howard-Grenville, and Scully, 2010). Equally credible outsiders could provide positive social information that reinforces the relationship and aids its repair. One or two of my participants reported receiving encouragement and support from credible outsiders, and this bolstered their intent to repair the relationship with BP. For the current study, I chose executives as the research population because they were likely to have had strong and stable identification with BP prior to the incident, and all could have potentially been brought into play in responding to the incident. Future work could usefully examine cross sections of employees from various organizational

levels. In addition to testing the generalizability of my findings, this work would likely uncover more factors to explain the resolution of ambivalence.

Further exploring the link between ambivalence and the processes by which identification is repaired or broken may be another exciting avenue for future research. Historically, ambivalence has been viewed as dysfunctional. For example, it has been seen as underpinning the tendency of neurotic people to oscillate between moving toward and moving away from others (Horney, 1945). More recent work has suggested that ambivalence is central to and may even fuel commitment, which has been conceptualized as occurring when an individual chooses to accept both the positive and negative elements of a relationship (Brickman, 1987). In studies of identification, ambivalence has primarily been treated as an outcome of identification processes. In contrast, this study uncovers how the emergence and resolution of ambivalence underlies identification processes. Two immediate questions arise from the current research in light of past theories: Is ambivalence a necessary condition for identification, and can identification be conceptualized as the resolution of ambivalence between the desire to belong to a collective and the desire to keep oneself separate from it? In a day and age when change may be the only constant, ambivalence about our institutions, their leaders, and our selves may never be far from the surface. The ability to learn from it, if not entirely keep it at bay, may then be one of the most valuable management skills of all, whether we are managing organizations or our selves.

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