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INTEGRATOR OR GREMLIN? IDENTITY PARTNERSHIPS AND TEAM NEWCOMER SOCIALIZATION

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When newcomers enter teams, they seek out identity resources from team incumbents to help their socialization. In turn, team incumbents offer identity resources to newcomers to support incumbents' existing held team identities. Based on theories of identity and socialization, we make a case for the *identity partnership,* a relationship in which identity resources are exchanged between an incumbent team member and a team newcomer. We first explore the identity needs of both team newcomers and team incumbents and how such needs drive proactivity. We then examine the initial selection of possible others for identity partnerships and the evaluation of initial exchanges between parties once initial selections have been made. Finally, we discuss partnership formation and shared identification as dyadic outcomes. We conclude with a discussion of how the dyadic identity partnership relationalizes our understanding of newcomer socialization.

Organizational teamwork has proliferated, with modern employees spending an increasing amount of time working within teams (Kozlowski & Bell, 2003). However, it is rare for team membership to remain unchanged throughout the team lifecycle. As teams are influenced by the actions of the team members therein (e.g., team departures) and changing task environments (e.g., the need for new skills), teams must concurrently socialize newcomers and perform. For the newcomer, joining a team can be a piecemeal, clunky, disorganized process, where the newcomer is bombarded with significant amounts of information about the team and incumbent team members (hereafter referred to as incumbents) through interactions both within and outside of official team meetings. Indeed, newcomers to teams, who often start as intragroup outsiders (Moreland, 1985), struggle to be accepted (Rink, Kane, Ellemers, & Van der Vegt, 2013). Thus, while we know that organizations employ a large number of teams, with shifting membership and a need to socialize newcomers quickly and effectively, our understanding of how newcomers come to define their own identity vis-à-vis the team is still relatively unknown.

Identification, or a sense of "oneness" or belonging, with a particular collective target such as a team or organization, is seen as a critical indicator of successful newcomer socialization (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Ashforth, Sluss, & Harrison, 2007). This importance is due to the relationship between identification and individuals' team contributions and team performance (Riketta & Van Dick, 2005; Van Vugt & Hart, 2004). For example, newcomers who quickly identify with the team perform well, as they take on the team's attitudes and goals (Mael & Ashforth, 1995). In contrast, the lack of strong identification with the team, or self-definition as a team member (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010), is one key reason that teams fail or underperform (Bezrukova, Jehn, Zanutto, & Thatcher, 2009; Kane, Argote, & Levine, 2005; Tyler & Blader, 2000; Van Vugt & Hart, 2004). While the existing literature has largely focused

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on team-level characteristics such as prestige and distinctiveness in determining identification (e.g., Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Smidts, Pruyn, & Van Riel, 2001), we argue that socialization experiences at the *dyad* level shape newcomer identification vis-à-vis the team.

When individuals face uncertain or insecure situations, such as when entering a new team, they often seek relationships with others to aid in uncertainty reduction (Krackhardt, 1992). Newcomers might proactively seek out coworkers, supervisors, and mentors (Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007; Kram, 1985; Morrison, 1993a, 1993b), as these various individuals help newcomers develop accounts for the surprises they encounter in the new context (Louis, 1980). Social interaction is also critical to identity formation (Hogg & Reid, 2006; Postmes, Haslam, & Swaab, 2005), partly because of the role others play in shaping identities for newcomers (Pratt, 2000). While much of the existing work on newcomers has focused on their overall relationship-building efforts in a new organizational context or team (e.g., Ashford & Black, 1996; Levine & Moreland, 1994), understanding the choice of specific relationship partners and their inputs into these processes might help to better explain newcomers' eventual identification outcomes.

Given the nature of organization life, not all incumbents are equally available or attractive (Borgatti & Cross, 2003; Louis, Posner, & Powell, 1983). Thus, as newcomers seek to understand their identity in the new team, they might be attracted to certain incumbents more than others. To capture how these dyadic relationships with incumbents influence identity formation, we develop and theorize the concept of the *identity partnership*—a relationship within the team in which resources are exchanged to address the identity needs of an incumbent and a team newcomer.

In this paper, we explain the selection of incumbents (by newcomers) and newcomers (by incumbents) as identity partners and the role that the identity partnership plays in the newcomer's identification with the team and team subgroups. We build a model on the premise that identity partnerships can be triggered by proactive newcomers *or* proactive incumbents, each with unique identity needs, the motivational states underlying identification processes (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). The partnership is evaluated as identity resources are exchanged, and solidified if needs across the dyad are met. When an identity partnership is established, the resources transferred to newcomers within the partnership influence their identification targets in the team. This process is depicted in Figure 1.

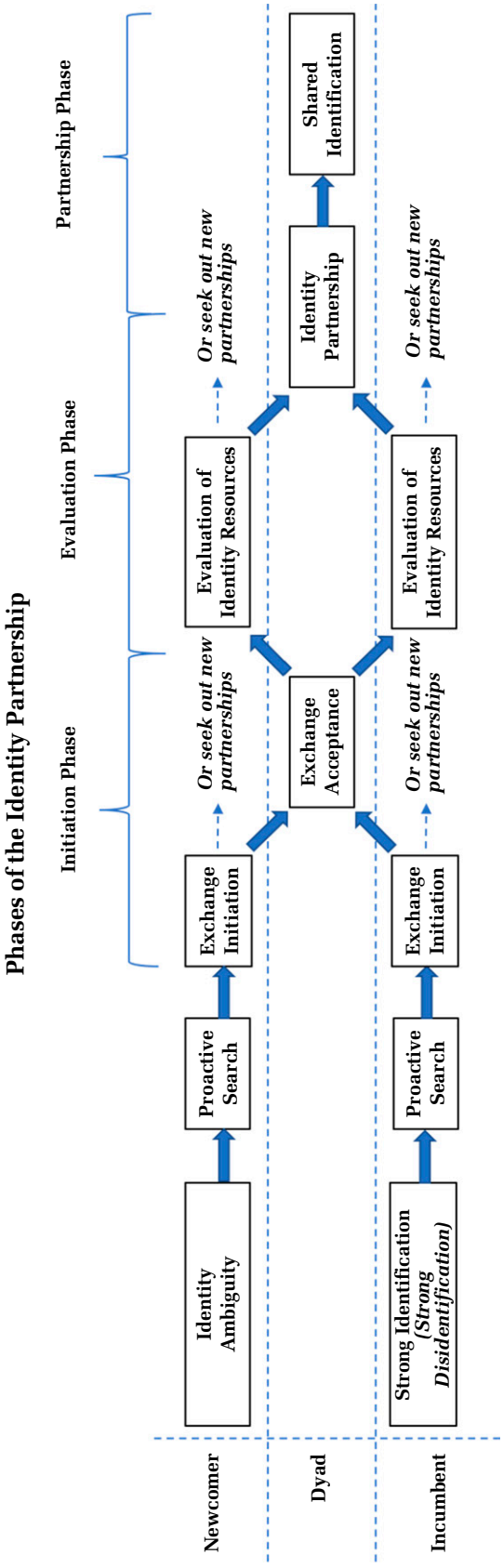
This research contributes to the literature in a number of ways. First, by uncovering dyadic social processes that influence how judgments about identity targets develop, we extend work rooted in social identity theory on why individuals identify with organizational targets (e.g., Dukerich, Golden, & Shortell, 2002; George & Chattopadhyay, 2005). Second, we provide insight as to why individuals in the same team select different identity partners and, consequently, identify with different targets within the team. Third, we contribute to socialization theory by exploring variation in proactivity toward newcomers by incumbents and by explaining the dyadic processes of exchange that can result in varying socialization outcomes for newcomers. Finally, we contribute to our understanding of team functioning, effectiveness, and evolution by describing how the actions and characteristics of incumbents serve to socialize team newcomers in distinct ways.

TEAM NEWCOMER ENTRY

When a newcomer enters a team, as when a newcomer enters an organization, they must learn how to become a member of that team. This process includes learning about the team, such as the team's goals and values (Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994), routines (Gersick & Hackman, 1990), and rituals (Vaught & Smith, 1980), so as to fit in with the culture of the team as quickly as possible. More immediately pertinent to the work of the team, the newcomer must learn about the tasks to be performed (Levine & Moreland, 1991). This process is referred to as team socialization: the acquisition of knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes needed to participate fully as a member of the team (Picherit-Duthler, Long, & Kohut, 2004). For the team, transmitting such knowledge to the newcomer during socialization should lead to positive effects such as increased retention, commitment, and performance (Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998; Levine & Moreland, 1999; Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). This time is also critical for newcomers, as work attitudes soon after entry have been found to be highly correlated with attitudes much later on (Adkins, 1995; Morrison, 1993a).

In line with previous work on newcomers in teams (e.g., Jackson, Stone, & Alvarez, 1993), we focus on teams that are relatively enduring, rather than temporary, and those that include at least two existing members besides the newcomer. We define teams as task-focused groups nested in organizations, with shared goals and task interdependencies (Kozlowski

FIGURE 1
Phases of the Identity Partnership



& Bell, 2003). The dynamics of interest occur during the socialization phase described in Levine and Moreland's (1994) group socialization model, during which existing members have an opportunity to indoctrinate the newcomer and the newcomer has an opportunity to explore how to meet their individual needs within the team.

Identification and Socialization

As newcomers are learning about the team's routines, roles, and tasks, newcomers are also evaluating how they see themselves vis-à-vis the team. As such, identification is one of the most important outcomes of the socialization process (Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007). This process of developing identification indicates how strongly (or not) the newcomer has accepted the goals and values of the team, and their intent to become a full member of the team (Van Knippenberg, 2000). This process of identification not only supports the ability of newcomers to perform in the new team but also positively impacts how incumbents respond to them (Kane & Rink, 2016; Rink et al., 2013). Thus, teams have a vested interest in securing such attachments from newcomers as quickly as possible.

While effective socialization into the team results in *team* identification, we consider the potential for two alternative identification outcomes for the newcomer: team subgroup identification and team ambivalent identification. Rather than being socialized into the dominant team identity, newcomers may instead adopt the viewpoints of a subset of team members and define themselves in terms of this subgroup (Gibson & Vermeulen, 2003). By aligning themselves with this subgroup, newcomers take on values and meanings that are unique to the subgroup, differentiating them from the larger team (Carton & Cummings, 2012). This subgroup identification, while helpful in that it provides a "home" for the newcomer in the team, is potentially detrimental to overall team performance as it can disrupt communication across the full team and increase the likelihood of conflict (Lau & Murnighan, 1998; Thatcher & Patel, 2012).

Newcomers may also internalize inconsistent or conflicting socialization messages—some of which are aligned with the larger team identity and others with a subgroup identity—when they have more than one strong source of influence from the team. In these circumstances, they may experience an uncomfortable state in which they are both drawn toward and away from team and subgroup identities (Wang & Pratt, 2008). In this situation, newcomers may develop ambivalent identification, in which they are torn between multiple targets for identification in the team (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). The strain of ambivalent identification can lead to inconsistent and dysfunctional behavior as newcomers attempt to manage their internal conflicts and resolve their ambivalence (Pratt, 2000; Vadera & Pratt, 2013).

The Role of Incumbents

Existing research has suggested that effective socialization is dependent, in part, on the efforts of incumbents, as such members are in an ideal position to provide newcomers with assistance in adjusting to the demands of their new role (Feldman, 1981; Korte, 2009; Moreland, Levine, & McMinn, 2001; Ramarajan & Reid, 2019). More specifically, there is evidence to suggest that it is the interactions between newcomers and incumbents during socialization that help newcomers establish their sense of identity in the new setting (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ashforth, Sluss, & Harrison, 2007; Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Fang, Duffy, & Shaw, 2011). Reflecting on the social aspects of a new context, Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg, Rubenstein, and Song (2013: 1109) noted that "insiders, who are more comfortable with the social milieu, are in an excellent position to take the first steps to approach a newcomer and invite him/her in." Newcomers are, thus, reliant in part on willing incumbents to convey to them information about the team so that the newcomer can adjust to the new role. If an incumbent rejects a newcomer, the newcomer stops asking questions out of fear they might be "bugging" the incumbent (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013; Miller & Jablin, 1991).

Thus, incumbents possess needed resources for newcomers to establish their identity in the new setting. These *identity resources* comprise both team identity cues, which include descriptive and normative information about the team's identity (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008), and acceptance cues, which communicate a sense of relational inclusion or belonging (Ståhl, Van Laar, Ellemers, & Derks, 2012). Team identity cues communicate the purpose of the team, including team goals, values, and purpose, and information about the social dynamics of the team (Miller & Jablin, 1991). Acceptance cues send verbal and nonverbal messages to newcomers that communicate interpersonal acceptance (such as positive emotional displays, indications of respect, and invitations to engage) or interpersonal rejection (such as negative emotional displays,

indications of disrespect, and exclusion from activities) (DeCremer & Tyler, 2005; Farmer & Aguinis, 2005; Ståhl et al., 2012). For example, a team incumbent may signal acceptance by asking a newcomer to share thoughts on an important team issue or provide identity cues by taking a newcomer aside after a meeting to help the newcomer interpret an observed tense interpersonal exchange.

However, the needs of the incumbents have often been ignored in the socialization literature. A team newcomer represents an opportunity for change in the team—change in which incumbents may have a vested interest (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). Teams, like any social entity, are constantly evolving; thus, introduction of the newcomer incites uncertainty for incumbents, just as being introduced to the team incites uncertainty for the newcomer. While perhaps not as immediate as for the newcomer, this suggests that incumbents will also have motives regarding how to interact with the newcomer during the critical time of the newcomer's introduction to the team.

Overall, prior work has suggested the importance of incumbents during team newcomer socialization; specifically, that incumbents may be motivated to engage with newcomers and may play a significant role in the team newcomer's identification processes via the transmission of identity resources. We build on this literature by exploring the dynamics of the dyadic newcomer–incumbent relationship, including how and under what circumstances such an identity partnership forms, and what identification outcomes result.

SEEKING IDENTITY PARTNERSHIPS

The identity partnership is a dyadic construct describing a mutual yet informal relationship consisting of both a team newcomer and incumbent. Identity partnerships involve ongoing, interdependent exchanges (e.g., Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Ferris, Liden, Munyon, Summers, Basik, & Buckley, 2009), and are defined by the exchange of resources to address the identity needs of the newcomer and the incumbent. As described below, newcomers and incumbents seek out these exchanges to fulfill their identity needs within the team. Although a single partner is sometimes able to fulfill all these needs, newcomers and incumbents may also fulfill different identity needs through different partners. Thus, newcomers can partner with multiple incumbents, and incumbents can partner with multiple newcomers; each dyad is a separate partnership.

Newcomer as Proactive Identity Partnership Seeker

When newcomers enter a team, they often lack a team-based identity or sense of who they are in the team. This absence of self-definition within the new team can cause newcomers to experience identity ambiguity, a perceptual state in which their team membership feels vague or weak (Bartel & Dutton, 2001). Identity ambiguity varies by context (Bartel & Dutton, 2001); thus, individuals may experience identity ambiguity within the new team setting even when they have other established identities within an organization. For example, individuals may have worked in a different division or organizational location or may have been promoted into the new team from another related team. In such cases, individuals may have organizational identification or other prior team identifications, but they have not yet established who they are in their new team environment.

While individuals have a number of identity needs (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2008), identity ambiguity in a new team is likely to trigger two specific identity needs—uncertainty reduction and belonging. First, newcomers seek information as they have a strong need to reduce uncertainty about their place in their social environment (Hogg & Terry, 2000). They need to understand the meanings associated with their team, such as what the team stands for and what the core purpose of the team is (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). Second, individuals have a fundamental need to feel a sense of interpersonal belonging with others around them, and they meet this need by expanding their self-concept to include connections with others (Ashforth et al., 2008; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In sum, newcomers seek to avoid the discomfort associated with outsider status (Bartel & Dutton, 2001).

As shown in Figure 1, the newcomer's desire to reduce ambiguity about the team identity (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007) and increase feelings of belonging (Rink et al., 2013) trigger proactive behaviors. Indeed, research on newcomer proactivity has suggested that newcomers are not passive participants in their adaptation to new organizational settings but rather play an active role in the process (e.g., Chan & Schmitt, 2000; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Such proactivity among newcomers is critical to "become fully adjusted insiders" (Fisher, 1985: 39), as the organization cannot provide all of the information the newcomer needs (Ashford & Black, 1996; Morrison, 1993a; Schein, 1968). Newcomers seek to fulfill their identity needs by actively seeking resources from incumbents (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993a,

1993b)—in particular, the identity resources of team identity cues and acceptance cues. These proactive behaviors help newcomers not only acquire information about their new environment but also build relationships with incumbents (Ashford & Black, 1996).

Identity ambiguity varies across newcomers. For example, different levels of prior experience with the team's members will impact the extent of the newcomer's identity ambiguity. Even if the newcomer's prior assignments were not in the same team, having experience with members of the new team provides the newcomer with knowledge about team members' expectations and skills, and the norms of the team (e.g., Burgoon, 1993; Liang, Moreland, & Argote, 1995; Wegner, 1987). Newcomers will use this information about incumbents to develop their perceptions of the new team and their place in it (Cable & Turban, 2001), lowering their identity ambiguity and need for team identity cues upon entry. Furthermore, prior contacts with team members allow for relationship-building opportunities before the newcomer enters the team (Reagans, 2011). Newcomers with prior relationships with team members likely experience greater social acceptance in the team compared to those who are lacking these relationships (Rink et al., 2013), and are less likely to actively seek acceptance cues. This suggests that factors such as inexperience with the team and its incumbents raise identity ambiguity, which will in turn motivate the newcomer to be proactive in seeking out identity resources from incumbents.

Proposition 1. Newcomers' identity ambiguity within the team will be positively related to proactivity in seeking identity partnerships.

Incumbents as Proactive Identity Partnership Seekers

Central to our argument is that the identity partnership is defined by unique types of incumbents, each of whom have different identity resources to offer newcomers.[1] In contrast to newcomers, who lack a developed identity in the new setting, incumbents have experiences in the team that have shaped their team-based identification. We focus on two types of incumbents—those with strong team identification and those with strong team disidentification—because their strong attachment to the team, whether positive or negative, will drive proactivity and, thus, make these individuals the most likely identity partners. This is shown in Figure 1.

When an incumbent strongly identifies with a team, they perceive that the team is part of the self, and they experience the successes and losses of the team as their own (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Just as identity ambiguity can trigger identity needs to reduce uncertainty and seek belonging within newcomers, strongly identifying with the team can stimulate identity needs for incumbents. Because strong identifiers value their connection to the team, they feel that they belong to that team and will seek out positive interpersonal relationships with team members—including the newcomer—to maintain that feeling of belonging within the team (De Cremer & Tyler, 2005). Furthermore, individuals have a need to control processes and outcomes within their valued identity groups, and strong identifiers seek to influence the welfare of their groups (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Brewer & Silver, 2000). Thus, identification with a team motivates incumbents to work for the success of the team (Fishbach, Henderson, & Koo, 2011), such as engaging in prosocial behaviors and aiding in the socialization process of newcomers (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Incumbents with strong team identification will seek to behave proactively toward newcomers to engage them in furthering team goals and supporting team values. We term these types of incumbents with strong team identification *integrators*. The integrator reflects a team member who strongly believes in the team and its mission and seeks to bring newcomers on board to be part of the team's efforts.

While having a team of integrators might be ideal, organizational teams will not all have that luxury. Some incumbents may have strong team disidentification—a state in which an incumbent defines themselves in opposition to the characteristics that define a team (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Team disidentification is not merely weak team identification; rather, it is an active disassociation of one's self from the perceived attributes of the team (Elsbach, 1999). Individuals who actively disidentify with a team are motivated to find their sense of belonging with others who share their negative view of the team (Pratt, 2000), and may seek this in a newcomer, who has not yet been socialized

[1]As the influence of the incumbent as identity partner is narrowly focused on the team context, this role differs from that of a mentor, who might share broad experience and knowledge to support a protégé's career development (Humberd & Rouse, 2016; Kram, 1985; Ragins, 1997; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000). The key information an incumbent identity partner provides is on team members' habits, strengths, weaknesses, and idiosyncrasies, whereas the key information a mentor provides is on career coaching and psychosocial support (Kram & Isabella, 1985).

into the team. Furthermore, strong disidentifiers seek to influence team actions in line with their own views to reduce their experience of dissonance arising from their membership in the team (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). This desire to control the team may result in proactive engagement with newcomers to gain support for alternative agendas regarding the team. We term these types of incumbents with strong disidentification *gremlins*. The gremlin reflects a team member who does not believe in the mission of the team, and who has possibly made unsuccessful attempts to change the team. The gremlin hopes the uninitiated newcomer might provide an opportunity to finally gain validation and support for the gremlin's alternatives view of the team.

Thus, while newcomers proactively seek incumbents to address their own identity needs, incumbents also proactively engage with newcomers to address belonging needs and to attempt to control team dynamics (Bauer & Green, 1998). It is this proactivity that separates incumbents who are engaged identity partners from those who are passive incumbents, such as those serving as identity prototypes (Ibarra, 1999). Such incumbent proactivity, specifically in the context of the identity partnership, describes the extent to which an incumbent takes initiative to provide identity resources to a newcomer. Both incumbents with strong team identification (integrators) and those with strong disidentification (gremlins) will be actively motivated to seek out newcomers as potential identity partners, in contrast to those with weak levels of identification or disidentification. Newcomers are valuable to integrators and gremlins because they come into the team *unclaimed*, and yet in many teams will have an equal vote. By influencing the newcomer to accept identity resources, the incumbent gains an ally in team discussions and decision-making activities that benefit the team (integrators) or benefit the incumbent's alternative agenda (gremlin).

Proposition 2. Both team identification strength and team disidentification strength will be positively related to incumbent proactivity to seek out identity partnerships.

THE IDENTITY PARTNERSHIP

We propose that newcomers and incumbents go through three phases during the formation of the identity partnership. The first phase, *initiation,* involves newcomers and incumbents initiating interaction and accepting the offer to engage. In the second phase, *evaluation*, newcomers and incumbents evaluate the resources they are receiving and decide whether to engage in an ongoing partnership. In the third phase, *partnership*, incumbents' transmission of identity resources influences newcomers' identification vis-à-vis the team through the newcomers' acceptance of identity resources. While we describe the process in terms of the idealized case between one newcomer and one incumbent, newcomers and incumbents may go through this process with multiple partners as they seek to meet their various identity needs in the team.

Initiation Phase

Exchange relationships, such as the identity partnership, begin when one individual initiates interaction with another individual—for example, by offering or seeking advice—and that offer to engage is accepted (Molm, 2006). Thus, in the initiation phase proactive newcomers begin the process of assessing the incumbents with whom they will attempt interactions. Similarly, proactive incumbents will evaluate newcomers to determine whether to offer identity resources. In this phase, incumbents and newcomers will also determine whether to accept offers to engage from the other party.

The literature on interpersonal relationships has suggested that individuals' goals and interests guide their attraction to and behavioral engagement with others (Montoya & Horton, 2014). In the case of proactive newcomers, identity needs for uncertainty reduction and belongingness drive their search for incumbent partners. They will seek incumbent partners who appear likely to provide the team identity cues or acceptance cues that will help them establish their identity in the team. Similarly, the goals of proactive incumbents in evaluating newcomers emerge from their strong identification or disidentification vis-à-vis the team. Specifically, integrator and gremlin incumbents will assess whether a newcomer will be useful to them in furthering their identity needs in the team.

Thus, incumbents and newcomers will each make an initial assessment of the likelihood of the other's usefulness in fulfilling their identity needs. Like most decisions, these assessments are relatively quick and not fully rational or deliberate (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992). Furthermore, incumbents and newcomers make these assessments with little information about the other party. From a cognitive perspective, individuals satisfice when making sense in such novel situations (Louis, 1980; Weick, 1995). We argue that

this applies both to proactive newcomers as they seek to identify incumbents who allow them to act and help them define their place in the team, and to proactive incumbents when they respond to a novel team member. Specifically, newcomers and incumbents satisfice by relying on surface-level characteristics to guide their judgments about the utility of one another in fulfilling their identity needs (e.g., Bunderson, 2003). Building on decades of past research suggesting that both social similarity and proximity drive interpersonal attraction (Byrne, 1971; Nahemow & Lawton, 1975, Segal, 1974) and relationship formation (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), we suggest that each of these surface-level characteristics contributes to newcomer and incumbent beliefs that the other party will be useful in fulfilling their identity needs.

Similarity. Drawing from the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), individuals are more attracted to, and consequently influenced by, similar others (George & Chattopadhyay, 2002). Newcomers anticipate that similar incumbents will be more likely to provide acceptance cues because similarity increases the perception that others are willing and able to provide support (Montoya & Horton, 2014). Similarity is particularly attractive when individuals are in uncertain contexts and lack prior experience with team members because individuals believe they can predict the behaviors and values of similar others (Hinds, Carley, Krackhardt, & Wholey, 2000). Individuals are also more likely to trust similar others than those who are dissimilar (Creed & Miles, 1996), and thus perceive similar others as more helpful in addressing identity needs.

Given their lack of knowledge about the team and its members, newcomers use surface-level characteristics to assess social similarity with incumbents, relying on demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and race. Research has suggested that newcomers in the demographic minority are more likely to create ties with demographically similar organizational members (Mollica, Gray, & Trevino, 2003), as assumed similarities in norms and values reduce uncertainty (Goldberg, Riordan, & Schaffer, 2010). Jackson and colleagues (1993) similarly suggested that newcomers seek information and acceptance from similar team members, especially when in diverse contexts.

Similarly, incumbents rely on similarity to evaluate newcomers' willingness to facilitate their goals and to develop perceptions of newcomer trustworthiness and cooperativeness (Cottrell, Neuberg, & Li, 2007; Montoya & Horton, 2014). Incumbents trust similar newcomers more to support their viewpoints and believe similar newcomers will be able to work more effectively with them in furthering their agenda (e.g., Schaubroeck & Lam, 2002). Incumbents are also more likely to be attracted to and seek interpersonal acceptance from similar newcomers (Wanberg, Kammeyer-Mueller, & Marchese, 2006).

Proximity. In addition to social similarity, proximity resulting from physical location or task interdependence can also increase newcomers' perceptions that incumbents will be useful in meeting identity needs. Following findings that task interdependence and physical proximity increase the likelihood of information seeking (Borgatti & Cross, 2003; Major & Koslowski, 1997), these factors influence who newcomers identify as a potential source of identity resources. Physical proximity increases the perception that someone will be available to provide information (Borgatti & Cross, 2003; Monge, Rothman, Eisenberg, Miller, & Kirste, 1985); this helps to reduce the uncertainty of newcomers who may not know when they will need team identity cues. Additionally, proximity allows for more opportunities to interact, strengthening interpersonal bonds such as trust (e.g., de Jong, Van der Vegt, & Molleman, 2007; Rockmann & Northcraft, 2008) and thus increasing the likelihood of receiving acceptance cues.

Overall, newcomers and incumbents will use similarity and proximity as early indicators that the other will be a useful identity partner. Research on social ties has suggested that both social similarity and proximity independently increase the likelihood of relationships forming and that proximity amplifies the effects of social similarity (Reagans, 2011). Thus, newcomers will seek potential identity partners among proximally closer and similar incumbents before they attempt interactions with dissimilar or distal team members. Similarly, incumbents are more likely to reach out to similar and proximal newcomers with initial offers of identity resources, such as advice about the team, than dissimilar or distal team members.

Proposition 3. Proactive newcomers (incumbents) are more likely to initiate interactions with similar and proximal incumbents (newcomers) than dissimilar and distal incumbents (newcomers).

Relationships are more likely to form when each party can offer something that the other person needs (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Newcomers and incumbents who are not proactive (i.e., who have little identity ambiguity and weak [dis]identification) have weak identity needs and are not seeking to develop identity partnerships. Thus, these individuals are less likely to accept offers to interact.

Similarly, when considering whether to accept initiations to interact, both newcomers and incumbents will use surface-level information to assess the likelihood that the other person will be a useful identity partner. As argued above, the readily available cues of similarity and proximity help newcomers and incumbents make this assessment. Thus, we propose:

Proposition 4a. Newcomers and incumbents who are proactive are more likely to accept offers to interact than are newcomers and incumbents who are not proactive.

Proposition 4b. Proactive newcomers (incumbents) are more likely to accept offers to interact with similar and proximal incumbents (newcomers) than with dissimilar and nonproximal incumbents (newcomers).

Evaluation Phase

By this stage in the process, either the newcomer or the incumbent has made an initial selection of a possible identity partner, which has been reciprocated by the other, resulting in initial exchanges of identity resources. Those exchanges must now be evaluated. At this next stage—evaluation—newcomers and incumbents engage in a type of identity negotiation, a back and forth process where perceivers (incumbents) and targets (newcomers) actively negotiate the eventual identity of the newcomer (Swann, 1987, 2005). As Swann (2005: 69) noted, this is an "interactive and dynamic process in which both perceivers and targets actively [influence] one another." For this negotiation to result in agreement, to use negotiation parlance, two criteria must be met. First, identity resources must be provided that address the specific identity needs of the other, and second, those identity resources, once known, must be accepted.

For example, assume that the newcomer has an uncertainty-reduction need; the newcomer seeking knowledge about the team identity to understand whether the team is going to be a meaningful social group. In order for the identity partnership to form, the incumbent has to provide two things. First, the incumbent has to provide the correct cues; in this case, cues about the team identity. If the incumbent provides acceptance cues ("you belong") but not team identity cues ("this is who we are"), the newcomer is not able to fully resolve uncertainty about the identity of the team. Second, once learned, the identity of the team has to be seen as consistent with who the newcomer is or would like to be. Thus, just because the incumbent provides information about the identity of the team does not mean the newcomer automatically accepts and assimilates that information. The newcomer must evaluate the team identity cues to judge whether such cues are worthy of acceptance.

The underlying theories for this acceptance are self-verification (Swann, 1987; Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989) and self-enhancement (Swann, Griffin, Predmore, & Gaines, 1987). Self-verification is centered on the notion that individuals pay attention to information from others that confirm self-views (Snyder & Swann, 1978; Wason & Johnson-Laird, 1972), and will be more attentive to others who provide them with accurate, confirmatory information (Swann & Read, 1981). Self-enhancement states that individuals want to increase feelings of self-worth (e.g., Epstein, 1973), and will respond to others who provide positive feedback, regardless of accuracy. In this way, newcomers and incumbents are both using the other as opportunity structures (McCall & Simmons, 1966)—others who can help "foster the survival of their self-views" (Swann, 1987: 1039) while also providing greater self-worth. Both newcomers and incumbents have a motive to be recognized as they believe themselves to be or as they wish themselves to be (Swann et al., 1987; Swann, Polzer, Seyle, & Ko, 2004; Thatcher & Greer, 2008).

Self-verification and self-enhancement are especially strong motives for the newcomer, as joining a team is an event that is likely to cause the newcomer to question themselves (Swann, 1987). Newcomers experiencing identity ambiguity want a sense of who they are vis-à-vis the team that is also consistent with current or future views of the self (Swann et al., 1989). Self-verification (e.g., does this team understand me?) and self-enhancement (e.g., does this team view me positively?) become the criteria by which identity resources provided by the incumbent are judged. Newcomers, thus, are likely to form identity partnerships with incumbents who provide identity resources about the team that are consistent either with whom the newcomer believes they already are or whom they would like to become. For the incumbent, the motives are similar. Self-verification is fulfilled as the newcomer shows that they accurately understand the views the incumbent professes—this verifies the values and beliefs of the incumbent. Self-enhancement is fulfilled as the newcomer provides positive feedback to the incumbent during exchanges (Swann et al., 1989)—this enhances the incumbent's view of themselves. These motives are fulfilled as the incumbent seeks support from the newcomer to align with the incumbent's

views—strong attachment to the team (integrator) or opposition to the team (gremlin).

An *integrator* incumbent will be successful in forming a partnership with the newcomer to the degree that identity resources communicating the identity of the team and acceptance into the team support the newcomer's values and beliefs about what the team should be and how members should be valued. For example, an integrator incumbent could provide acceptance into the team along with a message of team inclusivity and valuing of diversity, a characteristic that is central to the values of the newcomer. A *gremlin* incumbent, conversely, will be successful in forming a partnership to the degree that identity resources communicating the identity in opposition to the team and acceptance into that subgroup resonate with the newcomer and the newcomer's existing identity. For example, perhaps the gremlin sees an ethical concern in the team that resonates with the newcomer, or is able to convince the newcomer that the underlying rationale for the team is flawed and that team members are wasting their time.

Proposition 5. An identity partnership will form to the degree that provided identity resources address at least one identity need of the other party and are consistent with existing and desired self-views.

If either of these criteria is not met, the identity partnership will not form. Because this is a dyad, however, there are multiple ways in which the evaluation of resources could fail. In the most obvious case neither the newcomer nor the incumbent decides to accept the identity resources provided by the other. This situation is marked by a relatively easy process of mutual exit, as neither individual is satisfied with the resources being provided. As shown in Figure 1, both parties are then free to return to the initiation phase and seek out other incumbents and newcomers, respectively, as possible identity partners.

Proposition 6. When neither party evaluates provided identity resources positively, both parties are likely to begin a search for other identity partners to fulfill unmet identity needs.

Another possibility, though, is that only one person has a positive evaluation of the identity resources provided in the dyad. For example, if the identity resources provided by the incumbent do not address the identity needs of the newcomer or are inconsistent with how the newcomer sees themselves, the newcomer begins the search process anew, looking for another incumbent that can better address those identity needs. In this situation, though, the incumbent misses cues indicating the newcomer is not interested in the partnership, perhaps because those cues are threatening to the identity of the incumbent, or perhaps because the newcomer is fearful in providing such cues to the incumbent. As a result, the incumbent continues to persist in efforts to coopt the newcomer. This is a less productive outcome than that indicated by Proposition 6, where neither party is evaluating identity resources positively. While in that case exchange ends quickly and resolutely, in this case there is a misalignment resulting in the persistence of one party and the attempted exit by the other. This is an awkward situation, where one person is actively seeking out someone else while the current partner acts as if there is nothing amiss.

Proposition 7. When only one party in the dyad evaluates identity resources positively, only that party will believe an identity partnership exists, delaying the search for new identity partners to meet unmet identity needs.

Partnership Phase

If the identity partnership forms, the resource exchange between newcomers and incumbents stabilizes into an ongoing relationship. In this relationship at least one identity need of both the incumbent or newcomer is being met by the other, and the partnership will persist as long as that need is fulfilled. As integrators and gremlins vary in their own identifications with the team, however, they will provide different identity resources to the newcomer. The outcome of this process, if successful, is shared identification between the newcomer and incumbent, as seen in Figure 1.

Integrators want to provide identity resources that best align the newcomer with the existing team identity. These exchanges involve the integrator providing the newcomer with affirmative team identity cues signaling that this is a positive place to be. Similar to an identity custodian (Howard-Grenville, Metzger, & Meyer, 2013), integrators are those incumbents that most desire to sustain the collective team identity. An integrator's ability to transmit the team's knowledge is in part a function of their internal knowledge of the team and the team's shared mental model (Levine & Moreland, 1999). When integrators share their pro-team views with newcomers, newcomers are able to assimilate the team identity seamlessly into their own self-conceptions (Bauer et al., 2007; Hogg & Terry, 2000). The team benefits as the newcomer observes the integrator and imitates the integrator's

positive attitudes and behaviors toward the team (cf. Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992).

In addition to providing team identity cues, integrators influence the newcomer's team identification through cues regarding the newcomer's acceptance as a member of the team. Individuals who receive such indications of respect and acceptance by team members are more likely to identify with the team (Ellemers, Sleebos, Stam, & de Gilder, 2013). By providing such acceptance cues to the newcomer, the integrator is able to grant membership into the team (Bartel & Dutton, 2001), increasing the likelihood of newcomer team identification. For the incumbent, the newcomer's acceptance of the team category strengthens the integrator's belief in and attachment to the team.

In contrast to the integrator, the gremlin holds negative attitudes about the team, which they then share with the newcomer (Eby & Allen, 2002). In their search to reduce identity ambiguity, the newcomer will be susceptible to such negative team appraisals provided by a gremlin, given that uncertainty reduction emphasizes plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick, 1995). Further, the acceptance cues the gremlin provides convey interpersonal acceptance rather than acceptance into the team. As such, the gremlin is unlikely to be useful in helping the newcomer socialize into the team's existing goals and processes. This will weaken the chances that the newcomer will come to develop a strong sense of team identification.

Gremlins are representative of the beliefs of a subset of team members (or just of the gremlin alone), and, as such, what the gremlin provides is an alternative vision for the team. Partnering with a gremlin influences the newcomer to identify with a subgroup within the team, which will consist of the gremlin, the gremlin's allies in the team (if any), and eventually the newcomer. Identity-based subgroups within teams, which can fragment a team and distract from the overall team identity, are often based around a sense of shared attitudes and beliefs among two or more team members (Carton & Cummings, 2012). For example, in a team that is geographically dispersed, subgroup prototypes may be shared by team members who are collocated (O'Leary & Mortensen, 2010). Just as mentors seek protégés to build a base of allies (Ragins & Scandura, 1994), the gremlin influences the newcomer to focus on the shared norms and values of the subgroup to increase support for their views. These actions resolve the newcomer's identity ambiguity by emphasizing that the newcomer belongs with the subgroup, rather than the overall team. Similarly, acceptance by the newcomer solidifies the gremlin's belief in the subgroup.

Proposition 8. An identity partnership will lead to shared team (subgroup) identification between the newcomer and integrator (gremlin) incumbent.

Multiple Identity Partnerships

While we have argued that newcomers and incumbents are both discerning regarding possible identity partners, it is possible that newcomers go through the process described above with more than one incumbent, and incumbents with more than one newcomer. This might occur when incumbents or newcomers are similarly attractive during the initiation phase or when different incumbents or newcomers provide different or complementary identity resources to address various identity needs (e.g., Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). While there are an infinite number of incumbent–newcomer distributions given the complexity of teams, we demonstrate the impact of having multiple identity partnerships by focusing on two broadly applicable examples of one newcomer with multiple incumbents. To illustrate these possibilities, we examine whether the multiple incumbents are either aligned or misaligned in terms of their preexisting identification with the team.

Aligned partners. Newcomers who form identity partnerships with integrators or gremlins may also form partnerships with other incumbents of the same type, as there may be more than one incumbent who strongly identifies or strongly disidentifies with the team. For alignment to exist for gremlins, it is important that the source of disidentification is similar. Without a similar reason for disidentification, the two gremlin identity partnerships could be pulling the newcomer in opposite directions, as we discuss next. In situations in which incumbents are *aligned* in their dominant strong identification (at least two integrators) or strong disidentification for similar reasons (at least two gremlins), incumbents will provide similar identity resources that reinforce one another and strengthen one another's effect on the newcomer's identification. The magnitude of this effect will be muted to the degree that alignment fades. For example, if two integrators are providing complementary, but inconsistent, views of the team, it will make the newcomer question the true nature of the team identity.

Proposition 9. Newcomers who have multiple identity partnerships with aligned integrators (gremlins) will have stronger team (subgroup) identification compared to those with only one identity partnership.

Misaligned partners. If their multiple identity partnerships are not aligned, newcomers will be torn in multiple directions. Identity researchers have referred to the state in which individuals have opposing inclinations toward identification and disidentification with a collective as ambivalent identification (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Newcomers having partnerships with a gremlin and integrator or partnerships with two nonaligned gremlins will experience a tension between two identities. On the one side is the strong subgroup identification because of the partnership with the first gremlin; on the other side is identification with the team (if the other partnership is with an integrator) or another team subgroup (if the other partnership is with a nonaligned gremlin). As newcomers, they will not yet have their own experiences to draw from in discerning which direction to follow in order to resolve this ambivalence.

Proposition 10. Newcomers who have multiple identity partnerships with a gremlin and a misaligned partner (integrator or gremlin from another subgroup) will experience ambivalent identification in the team.

DISCUSSION

We have shown in this paper the critical importance of incumbent–newcomer identity partner dyads during team socialization. The dynamics of such dyadic construction are based on addressing not only newcomer but also incumbent identity needs, as the two sides negotiate identity during this critical time. As such, we seek not to replace models of team socialization but rather to further *relationalize* team socialization. Understanding socialization outcomes, such as identification, relies on taking this relational perspective and acknowledging that both parties in the relationship must participate for identity resources to be transferred and accepted. It is via these dyads that such identity needs can be met; thus, it is through these dyads that we can understand how newcomers come to see themselves in the context of their new teams.

Theoretical Contributions

This research makes several contributions to our understanding of team social structure and socialization. First, we have given the incumbent motive. This builds from Kammeyer-Mueller et al. (2013), who noted the possibility that incumbents will engage in social undermining of newcomers in order to prevent them from being socialized in a nonpreferred manner. While proactivity has often been thought of as a personality characteristic (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant, 2000; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003), we suggest that incumbents, like newcomers, have agendas and goals specific to the team that drive proactivity. For teams looking to socialize newcomers, we should not assume that each incumbent will equally help the newcomer or that each incumbent will equally value the team. Each incumbent has their own idiosyncratic experiences in the team that shape why they might want to engage newcomers (or not), and, further, how they might shape newcomers. By linking incumbent identification to proactivity, we also suggest who might be active identity partners. A team could have many members who share an understanding of the team identity, but with no one who *strongly* identifies with the team. In this case, proactivity will be absent and the newcomer will have to work more extensively to address identity needs.

Second, we provide further explanation for the failure of teams to successfully socialize new members (Rink et al., 2013). As seen in Figure 1, our model identifies many critical junctures with the potential to disrupt dyad formation and, thus, the socialization process. Upon newcomers' entry, newcomers and incumbents may lack proactivity to seek out identity partnerships, possibly because the newcomer is overconfident based on prior experiences with team members or because incumbents are disengaged, lacking strong team identification or disidentification. Even if the newcomer and incumbent are proactive, they may fail to find each other due to a lack of similarity or proximity, perhaps because of the virtual nature of the team. Then, even if they begin the exchange, there is no guarantee that identity resources will be accepted and adopted. The added downside for teams is that these evaluative processes take time—time that, in a team context, may be short at hand given the need for the team to quickly develop strong working relationships to enable performance.

Third, it has long been acknowledged that faultlines, which separate teams into subgroups based on aligned characteristics, have potential negative effects on teams (e.g., Jehn & Bezrukova, 2010). What this literature has been largely silent on, though, is how certain characteristics become salient in the team or what specifically happens as a team is formed or evolves that causes such perceptions to persist (Thatcher & Patel, 2012). We offer one potential explanation; we propose that the formation of identity partnerships can represent a step toward or away from a more unified and cohesive team. It is possible, based on the theory presented here, that the presence of a

gremlin incumbent(s) is a possible gateway toward fractured teams. If the gremlin gets "ahold" of the identity-formation process of the newcomer, the result will be the development or reinforcement of subgroups and a reduction in the unification of the team. However, while we generally assume that team unification is positive for the team and for the organization, the disruption provoked by the gremlin may not always have negative implications. If the shared team identity is dysfunctional and does not serve the team in meeting its larger goals, a gremlin adopting a newcomer could be a force for positive change over time.

This idea about promulgating team subgroups raises some interesting possibilities, however, that we have not explored at length here. For example, there could be a team *without* a core identity, but rather made up of multiple subgroups. In this case, the entire team could be seen as integrators in the sense that each (motivated) incumbent is trying to coalesce their vision of the team by coopting newcomers. Alternatively, the entire team could be seen as gremlins, in the sense that each subgroup is distinct from the rest of the team. While the labels integrator and gremlin work nicely when the team has a defined core, when the team is highly fractured these labels do not represent the full range of possible incumbent identity partners.

Another question is *who* gets to decide whether an incumbent is an integrator or a gremlin. Or, to put this another way, what happens if the self-perception of the incumbent differs from how they are perceived by the newcomer? If an incumbent is pushing the team identity (what we would call an integrator), but the newcomer views the incumbent as deviant, the newcomer might believe the incumbent to be a gremlin. While we have not proposed that identity partnerships with gremlins are less likely than with integrators, from the perspective of the general newcomer desiring to be a productive member of the team there is clearly more risk in following someone who is perceived to be a gremlin than someone who is perceived to be an integrator. In this way, the importance of the newcomer's perception outweighs that of the incumbent's.

While we have focused on identity needs to resolve identity ambiguity for the newcomer and to further strong identification for the incumbent, these are by no means the only needs that newcomers and incumbents may have. While outside the scope of the theory presented here, these dyads provide a roadmap for other dyads in teams, units, or organizations that could address myriad needs on both sides. As such, it is possible to question how needs drive proactivity, how initial searches for partners ensue, how those initial searches are reciprocated, how exchanges are evaluated, and, finally, how dyads either dissolve or coalesce into high-functioning relationships.

Future Research

While we have focused primarily on how incumbents influence newcomers' socialization, newcomers may also influence their incumbent identity partners over time. A key reason that newcomers are brought into teams is to provide different perspectives (Kane & Rink, 2016). As newcomers and incumbents deepen their relationships, incumbents will be exposed to newcomers' viewpoints on the team's processes and goals. It may be that identity partnerships become a conduit through which newcomers' perspectives enter the team. Incumbent partners may be more willing to listen to newcomers than they would be to other team members, particularly if newcomers' ideas align well with incumbents' existing views. Future research could explore identity partnerships as a means through which newcomers influence incumbent partners and, possibly, their teams.

Additionally, we suggest that strength of incumbent identification or disidentification with a team or subgroup primarily drives their proactivity in seeking identity partnerships with newcomers. However, team context, such as the degree of complexity of team identity, might also influence an incumbent's proactivity (Bodenhausen, 2010). If a team has a dominant team identity, then incumbents, specifically integrators, might be less motivated to reach out to newcomers and influence them, as the team identity is well-established and not under threat. In contrast, gremlins might be more motivated to influence newcomers in such an environment because they seek additional allies against the dominant identity. On the other hand, if the team is already fragmented and there is tension or competition over the team identity, then all types of incumbents, including integrators, will be highly motivated to coopt newcomers, as each newcomer could change the balance in support of different identification targets in the team.

Other team contextual features, such as team size, might also influence identity partnership-formation patterns. Larger teams are more likely to have a complex and pluralistic identity, so multiple partnerships that result in ambivalent identification are more probable. Additionally, in larger teams newcomers have a wider range of partners to choose from and may be more selective in their identification of

initial partners and their self-verification tests for partners. In smaller teams the team identity may be clearer and easier to understand, such that newcomers experience less identity ambiguity and are less motivated to form identity partnerships. Future research could integrate such contextual factors into the identity partnership-formation process.

Practical Implications

In this paper, we have cast socialization not in terms of the collective indoctrination of an individual but rather as a stepwise progression in which newcomers build solidarity with the team via one or more dyadic partnerships. While we have focused on identity resources in our model, this dyadic model of socialization could easily extend to functional resources as well. Organizations, and teams within them, would do well to think about which partnerships newcomers need, which incumbents will be proactive, and how to facilitate the effective matching of incumbents with newcomers.

As organizations frequently utilize diverse and distributed teams (Martins, Gilson, & Maynard, 2004), they may inadvertently lay the foundation for team problems by creating team environments, via similarity and proximity, that push newcomers to engage with incumbents who may not be integrators. This raises the question of whether organizations could interrupt the identity partnership process with formal "team mentors," even if the assigned partner was not colocated with the newcomer, and if such formal interventions would be effective. However, one problem a team leader faces is in knowing, and potentially choosing, which incumbent would be the best identity partner for the newcomer. The leader could be faced with a difficult choice—that is, choose a less proactive but more integrative incumbent versus a more proactive incumbent who has gremlin tendencies.

CONCLUSION

While we are aware of many of the antecedents of identification in teams (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010), as well as the need for newcomers to engage in proactive search during socialization (Bauer et al., 2007), we lack insight into how newcomers acquire identity resources in team environments. We propose the identity partnership as one of the missing pieces to this process, whereby the eager newcomer relies on the incumbent to reduce identity ambiguity in the new context, and the eager incumbent seeks to influence the newcomer to support the incumbent's strong identification or disidentification vis-à-vis the team. Our arguments begin to explore many of the questions around incumbents and their role in newcomer socialization, as well as provide a roadmap for research studying these dynamics in teams. In doing so, this model contributes to our understanding of newcomer socialization in teams, identification processes, and the evolution of team identification over time.

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