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Kim Clark

Saint Mary's College of California, kjc6@stmarys-ca.edu

Yuan Li

Saint Mary's College of California, yl4@stmarys-ca.edu

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Organizational Event Stigma: Typology, Processes, and Stickiness

Kim Clark & Yuan Li

Abstract

What do events such as scandals, industrial accidents, activist threats, and mass shootings have in common? They can all trigger an audience's stigma judgment about the organization involved in the event. Despite the prevalence of these stigma-triggering events, management research has provided little conceptual work to characterize the dimensions and processes of organizational event stigma. This article takes the perspective of the evaluating audience to unpack the stigma judgment process, identify critical dimensions for categorizing types of event stigma, and explore the role of the stigmatizers' aesthetic, emotional, and cognitive reactions as well as their practical considerations in producing what we call "sticky stigmas." Our event stigma typology provides clarity regarding how stigmas differ based on the types of events and audiences' reactions and why some event stigmas are stronger and more long-lasting than others. We highlight the role of emotions and aesthetics in stigma formation and the various ethical dilemmas that influence stigma stickiness.

Introduction

Stigma has received increasing attention in organization studies. As a negative social evaluation, stigma captures an important aspect of organizational reality. Following Goffman's (1963) pioneering research on the experience of the stigmatized, most research to date has focused on how organizations manage core stigmas, or stigmas that are central to the organization's identity (Devers et al., 2009; Hudson, 2008). These studies take the perspective of the stigmatized and seek to understand their conditions and strategies (Hampel & Tracey, 2017; Helms & Patterson, 2014; Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009; Vergne, 2012). In contrast, little conceptual work has been devoted to understanding the related phenomenon of event stigma, or stigma caused by an episodic event (Hudson, 2008).

This lack of conceptualization of organizational event stigma may impede theoretical development and practical understanding of a widespread empirical phenomenon. Organizational stigma is often conflated with organizational illegitimacy, which has

raised doubts about the utility of this organization-level construct (Helms et al., 2019). There is also a lack of understanding of the relationship between core stigma and event stigma, and this makes it difficult to connect the two distinct streams of research. Qualitative case studies on stigma tend to focus on how organizations deal with stigmas at the expense of how stigmas are formed in the first place, thus limiting the construct to a static property instead of a dynamic, variable process. Without construct clarity, organizational stigma research may remain fragmented and underdeveloped, which not only hinders knowledge integration and advancement, but also deters practitioners from contributing to and making use of this research. Organizations are stigmatized by a wide range of events, and some events have only fleeting effects on the organization while others leave a permanent mark. Without a systematic mapping of stigma-triggering events and an examination of the event stigmatization process, we would know little about how events create and perpetuate organizational stigma.

In this article, we take the perspective of the evaluating audience to unpack the event stigmatization process and present a typology for organizational event stigma. Specifically, we examine three phases of the stigma judgment process. The first phase involves the evaluators' aesthetic (Creed et al., 2020; Taylor, 2014; Taylor & Hansen, 2005), emotional (Creed et al., 2014; Sadeh & Zilber, 2019; Toubiana & Zietsma, 2017; Voronov & Weber, 2016; Zietsma et al., 2019), and intuitive (Zollo et al., 2017) evaluations. The aesthetic evaluation refers to people's visceral experiences, while the emotional and intuitive evaluations highlight the immediate, holistic, and unconscious ways in which people respond to events. Together these evaluations generate an initial stigma judgment. In the second phase, cognitive attributions (Kelley, 1971; Weiner, 1985) can identify four types of events that are characterized by different sets of sensory and evaluative reactions as well as more complex emotions. The stigma judgments generated during this phase can increase or reduce the strength of the initial stigma judgment. In the third phase, practical considerations based on structural and cultural conditions shape the stickiness of the organizational stigma. Stigma stickiness refers to the extent to which the stigmatization of an organization triggered by an event is held by audiences. Stigmas become sticky when they are strong, broadly shared, and long-lasting. However, they may be attenuated by the various ethical dilemmas that the audience can face as they revisit their stigma judgments based on their practical exigencies.

Our research contributes to organizational research in several ways. First, we extend Hudson's (2008) work on organizational stigma by developing a conceptual framework for understanding organizational event stigma. Our typology is arguably the first to bring together a diverse set of events to examine their potential to stigmatize an organization.

Our focus on the organization's evaluating audience (hereafter simply the "audience"), including stigmatizers and bystanders, allows us to demonstrate that audiences react to different types of events with different evaluative dynamics. This strengthens the construct of organizational stigma as a multidimensional construct rather than a binary variable and clarifies the difference between stigma and illegitimacy. Second, we answer the call in recent organization theory research to go beyond the cognitive and moral aspects of social judgments and study the diverse bases for audience evaluations in these judgments (Helms et al., 2019, p. 2; Pollock et al., 2019). We show that aesthetics and emotions are critical in generating stigma judgments. We highlight that some events can affect people in a visceral, embodied way and elicit such strong non-conscious and automatic emotions that the negative judgment persists despite rational analysis that excuses the organization associated with the event from responsibility. This sheds light on the important aesthetic and affective roots of stigma formation. Finally, our proposed construct of stigma stickiness broadens the understanding of event stigmatization as a process of diffusion and institutionalization. Our study highlights the structural and practical conditions that make stigmas sticky and thus helps explain how micro-level stigma judgments spread to bystanders and becomes institutionalized at the macro level. Here we postulate that some core stigmas may have origins in event stigma and that the two organizational stigmas differ along multiple dimensions of stickiness. In our increasingly polarized and tribalized world, almost no stigmas are universal and permanent; instead, stigmas are contested and tied to specific audiences. Our conceptual framework can help practitioners understand how and why event stigmas become sticky and work to prevent an event stigma from becoming a core stigma of the organization.

Organizational Stigma, Event Stigma, and Audience

Organizational Stigma

Organizational stigma is "an evaluation held and often expressed by some social audiences(s) that an organization or set of organizations is discounted, discredited, and/or tainted in some way" (Hudson, 2008, p. 254). It involves labeling and attributing at the individual and collective levels the processes whereby a stakeholder group links the organization to a negatively evaluated category with value incongruence and thus vilifies the organization as a dangerous deviant (Devers et al., 2009). The negative categorization leads the audience to stereotype the organization in such a way that it is defined in terms of the attributes of this category, rather than as a unique entity. A stigmatized organization is viewed as flawed and suffers from a "spoiled image" in the perception of the audience (Goffman, 1963; Hudson, 2008). The stigma is a basis for

the audience to disassociate from (i.e., avoid, exclude, ostracize, or otherwise minimize interaction with) the stigmatized (Leary & Schreindorfer, 1998). Empirical evidence has demonstrated that, because they are collectively held, stigmas can be extremely harmful and can lead to devastating adverse social and economic outcomes for the stigmatized organizations that can ultimately threaten their survival (Devers et al., 2009; Hudson, 2008).

Hudson (2008) distinguished between core stigma and event stigma. Core-stigmatized organizations suffer from extremely negative social evaluations by a broad audience because of core organizational attributes such as core products, customers, and routines. Examples of core-stigmatized organizations include abortion service providers, pornographers, tobacco firms, strip clubs, men's bathhouses, professional wrestling, and so on. Because these organizations are stigmatized for who they are, what they do, and who they serve, their stigmas are relatively permanent and impossible to recover from (Hudson, 2008).

In contrast, organizations may also be stigmatized because of episodic and anomalous events, such as bankruptcies, industrial accidents, and product defects (Hudson, 2008). Although it is possible for a firm to recover from event stigma, audiences' negative reactions to the firm can be severe, including disengagement, a reduction in the quality of participation, bargaining for more favorable exchange relationships, and denigrating the organization and its leaders, which further threatens managerial careers and increases the probability of organizational death (Sutton & Callahan, 1987).

There is a paucity of research on the types of stigma. Goffman (1963, p. 4) outlined three types: abominations of the body, blemishes of individual character, and tribal stigma. Goffman noted that specific stigma terms are used to describe physical deformities: crippled, deaf, blind, or dumb—all of which indicate a belief that “the person with a stigma is not quite human” (p. 5). Similarly, there are specific phrases for the stigmatized, such as “weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty,” which are usually inferred from known conduct: “moron” and “bastard” for the mentally ill, “criminal” for the imprisoned, and derogatory terms for “addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behavior” (p. 4). Finally, tribal stigma such as those based on race, nation, and religion are “transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of a family” (p. 4). Devers et al. (2009) note that only the second and third categories are applicable at the organizational level, since organizations do not have true physical bodies. We introduce a type of organizational stigma that is akin to physical deformity,

which we call “collateral event stigma.” Our typology shows that all three forms of Goffmanian stigma can be found at the organizational level.

Organizational Event Stigma

The lack of understanding of the nature and processes of event stigmas has impeded both theory development and empirical investigation into organizational stigma. There has been a significant debate in organization theory about whether stigma can be subsumed under the construct of legitimacy. While some argue that stigma and legitimacy are on the same moral continuum, with stigma at the extreme negative end of the legitimacy spectrum (Hampel & Tracey, 2019), others propose that stigma should be treated as a separate construct (Devers & Mishina, 2019; Helms et al., 2019). Hudson (2008) points out the lack of clarity in the construct of illegitimacy and the tautology in its operationalization, noting that highly illegitimate organizations can survive and thrive and proposing instead to use stigma to describe organizations that suffer extremely negative evaluations. We believe that further theorization of event stigma can help clarify the similarities and differences between stigma and illegitimacy by examining how the aesthetic, emotional, and cognitive evaluations of events interact to generate stigma judgments.

In addition, the process of stigma emergence has suffered from tautology in the literature. For example, Devers et al.’s (2009) framework of the stigmatization process begins with individual labeling; that is, when an audience perceives illegitimate practices of organizations, they exert social control by labeling such organizations as belonging to the category of dangerous deviants. Here, labeling is a deliberate choice that further vilifies behaviors of which the audience already strongly disapproves. We surmise that stigmatization begins before conscious labeling and linkage to a negative category. To understand the origin of stigmatization, scholars should turn to event stigma because core-stigmatized organizations already carry a label and offer little opportunity to probe how the label came about and how a negative category is constructed in the first place. We contend that a more thorough understanding of the processes of audience evaluation and different types of event stigma can provide scholars with new insights into the origins and the distinct characteristics of organizational stigma, thus validating stigma research as a field with its own unique questions and boundaries.

There are also several empirical questions that warrant attention. First, the characteristics of event stigma can help us identify dimensions of stigma that may have been overlooked in studies of core stigma. For example, if a stigma is triggered by an event instead of emanating from the core attributes of an organization, the evaluating

audience may experience a visceral shock and a range of aesthetic and emotional reactions. This is different from audience reactions to core-stigmatized organizations, where aesthetic and emotional reactions are significantly programmed by institutionalized norms and expectations. By studying the aesthetic and emotional evaluations involved in event stigmatization, we can better understand the role of audiences in the formation of organizational stigma.

Second, organizational event stigma triggers the audience to engage in significant cognitive processing. As an event unfolds, the audience will naturally ask: How did the event originate? Was the event caused by actors and operations inside the organization or was it initiated by actors outside of the organization? This stands in sharp contrast to core stigma insofar as the audiences of core-stigmatized organizations simply assume that the stigma is a fundamental attribute of the organization and thus comes from within. Understanding the cognitive and rational processing of events provides an opportunity to categorize the nature and types of organizational event stigma.

Finally, event stigma provides scholars an opportunity to probe into the potentially long process of event stigmatization. Most organizational research on stigma has focused on how core-stigmatized organizations cope with, manage, reduce, eliminate, or otherwise make use of stigma. However, stigma is first and foremost a socially constructed evaluation that has more to do with the audience's consensus than any "true" or inherent attributes (Link & Phelan, 2001; Pozner, 2008). It is therefore fruitful to examine the process by which organizations become stigmatized in the first place. Event stigma offers such an opportunity because of the transparency of the typical process triggered by abnormal and episodic events. Moreover, tracing the evaluative process of event stigmatization provides clarity about why some stigmas stick while others do not. Power structures, media framing, the frequency of similar events, institutionalization of values and beliefs, and the ethical dilemmas that audiences face can strengthen or weaken a stigma, thus shaping the eventual stigmatization of the focal organization.

Stigmatizers and Bystanders as Evaluators

Research has emphasized that stigma is a distinct category of social identities that are "spoiled," discredited, or discreditable because they deviate from the characteristics that are collectively felt and perceived as normal and natural (Goffman, 1963). What counts as normal or deviant depends on what society collectively acquiesces to and is therefore contextual and mediated by social norms and the power relations between stigmatizers and the stigmatized rather than based on unwavering and universal moral or emotional principles (Durkheim, 1982; Lukes, 1982). Individuals' judgments are rarely

formed in a vacuum but are importantly shaped by their observations of others and their beliefs about the consensus opinion (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Tost, 2011; Zelditch, 2011). Such consensus involves not only collective definitions of what is normal and natural and what is right or wrong, but also of which emotions should be experienced and displayed (Jarvis, 2017; Voronov & Weber, 2016) and which aesthetics are generally accepted as desirable and shared (Creed et al., 2020).

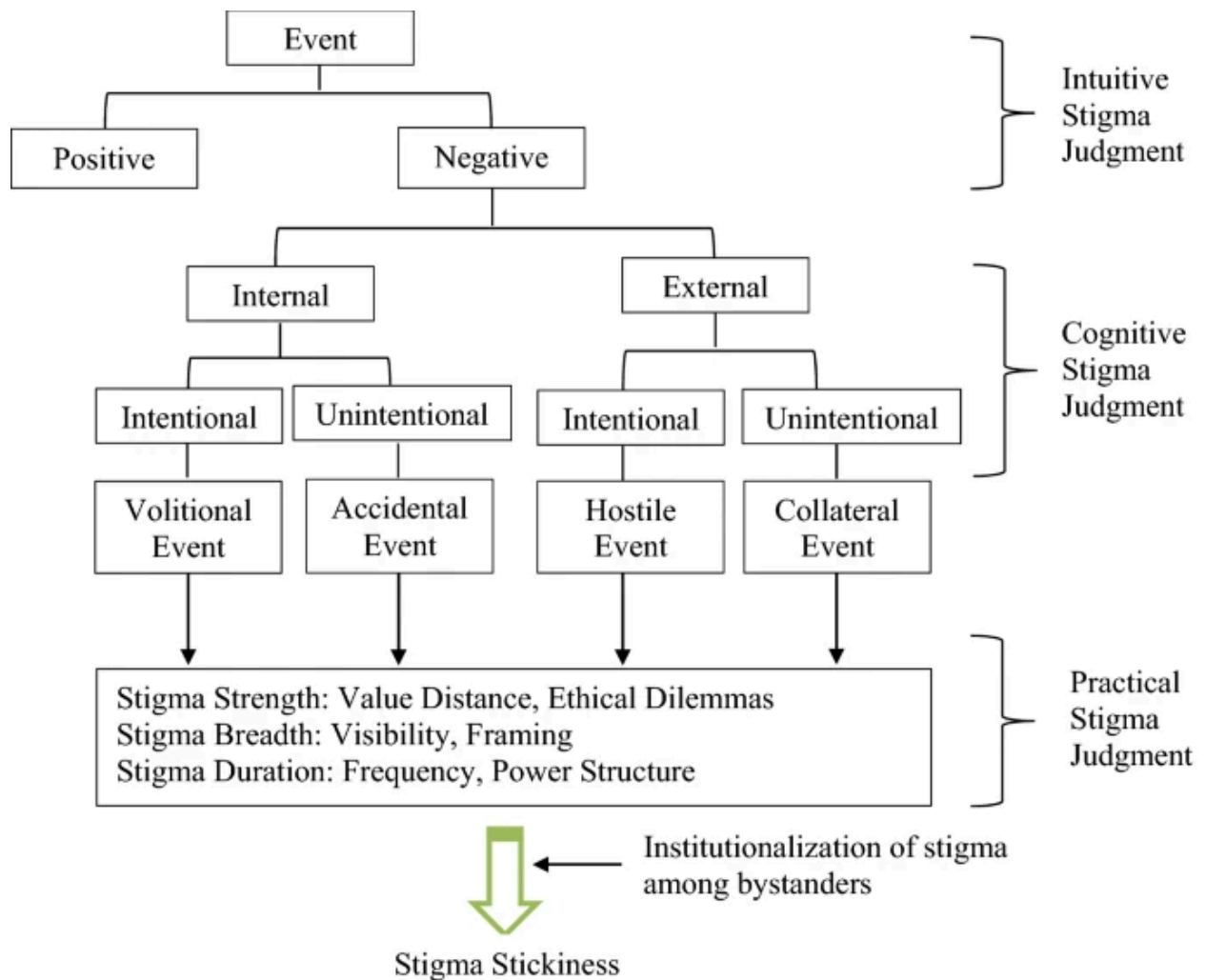
To understand the construction of deviance in event stigmatization, we focus on the audience's evaluations of the organizations involved in the events in question. The role of the audience members as evaluators in rendering different forms of social judgments is important because rather than simply passively receive information, evaluators play an active role in shaping how the social judgments are formed (Bitektine, 2011).

Communication research on stigma proposes three types of actors that are involved in the process of stigmatization: the stigmatized, the stigmatizers, and bystanders (Bresnahan & Zhuang, 2016). Stigmatizers are those who actively, openly, and formally accuse or condemn an organization for violation of widely shared norms and who portray the organization as a threat or a challenge (Bresnahan & Zhuang, 2016). Stigmatizers believe that their attitude is shared by the community and have both the intention and the cognitive resources to stigmatize (Pescosolido & Martin, 2015). Stigmatizers engage in stigmatizing to exclude others, reduce competition, protect their own status, and reinforce their world view (Neuberg et al., 2000), or for altruistic reasons such as concern for others (Jensen et al., 2014).

In contrast to stigmatizers, bystanders are passive members of the audience who may not have a stake in the stigmatization process but may nonetheless render social judgments that can intensify or lessen the stigma. Bystanders may also be passive because they believe they do not have enough information to sufficiently evaluate the event. As bystanders begin to take sides or form opinions, they can become active participants in the stigmatization process. In addition to the stigmatized, stigmatizers, and bystanders, we note that the media and regulators, as well as actors who occupy authority positions such as trade associations, interest groups, watchdogs, and opinion leaders, are important evaluators or "judgment validation institutions" (Bitektine, 2011; Bitektine & Haack, 2015). They are arbitrators who exert significant influence on the stigmatization process when diverse audiences make contrary judgments about an organization.

The Social Evaluation Process Triggered by Events

We distinguish three broad phases in the social evaluation process as an audience responds to, makes sense of, and casts judgments on an organization associated with a stigma-triggering event. We label the initial phase the “intuitive stigma judgment.” It is characterized by embodied, visceral, rapid, and non-conscious processes that reflect the aesthetic, intuitive, and emotional aspects of the lived experience. These processes occur at the micro, individual level, and they are importantly shaped by institutional values and norms. Although the audience is not aware of the processes, they are aware of the moral judgment that results. The second phase, which we label the “cognitive stigma judgment,” involves deliberative and rational reasoning seeking to understand the cause of the event and to attribute blame. The cognitive attribution characterizes four distinct types of event stigma. The attribution interacts with the initial processes of the aesthetic, intuitive, and emotional response to generate more complex emotions and moral judgments about the organization involved in the event. Finally, we conceptualize the last phase as the “practical stigma judgment,” during which several structural conditions may serve to prolong and spread the stigma judgment, which can increase the stickiness of the stigma, while other factors may ameliorate and confine the stigma judgment, decreasing the stigma’s stickiness or even making it disappear. Figure 1 summarizes the three phases of stigma judgment.



The stigma judgement process

In the next subsection, we unpack the initial processes of the audience response triggered by an event, followed by a discussion of the cognitive stigma judgment phase with the specific dimensions of attribution. In the following sections, we outline the typology of event stigma based on the audience's cognitive attributions, and we examine the last, practical stigma judgment phase, where social and cultural factors influence the stigma's stickiness.

The Intuitive Stigma Judgment Phase: Aesthetic, Intuitive, and Emotional Reactions

Events such as crises, scandals, accidents, disasters, and calamities can trigger strong reactions. This is especially true when events are new, disruptive, and critical because they draw attention and become salient (Morgeson et al., 2015). Various studies point

out that the initial reaction to such events involve three types of processes: aesthetic, intuitive, and emotional. These initial processes are visceral, embodied, holistic, unconscious, spontaneous, and autonomous and are different from the cognitive and rational deliberations that occur later (Gagliardi, 2006; Greene & Haidt, 2002; Haidt, 2001). Through these initial processes, the audience can arrive at an intuitive stigma judgment based on what are perceived as the appropriate aesthetic sensibilities, moral principles, and emotional norms for the concrete situation (Creed et al., 2020; Zollo et al., 2017).

Aesthetic Processing

The aesthetic process is arguably the most immediate and fundamental process of the initial experience. It includes the sensory experience, sensibilities, and appreciations that unfold as people respond to a stimulus (Creed et al., 2020). Innate sensory capabilities are “deeply implicated in, yet analytically distinct from, emotional reactions and assessments and rational–analytical cognition” (Creed et al., 2020, p. 416). For example, an audience’s immediate response to seeing gruesome images of birds dying from ingesting plastic debris may be to look away due to their sensory experience of the images as horrific and ugly (Creed et al., 2020). Goffman’s (1963) work on stigma offers numerous examples of people’s experience of physical deformities as abominations.

Scholars argue that aesthetics is a fundamental driver of a person’s ethical actions (Brady, 1986; Taylor, 2014). Many believe that learning about ethical theories or engaging in rational cognitive deliberations does not make people act more ethically (Brady, 1986; Zhong, 2011). Rather, aesthetics captures the tensions between people’s sensing of the material reality and their intellectual representation of it and therefore provides a fuller and richer ground that fosters rather than diminishes ethical concerns (Taylor, 2014).

It is important to note that people’s aesthetic experiences are based on learned aesthetic criteria embedded in institutional aesthetic codes (Creed et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 2013). Just as our cognitive sensemaking is guided by established schemas, our aesthetic assessment is based on culturally resonant and valued constructions of symbolic form, taste, and style. So, for example, the industrial revolution and then the financialization of business shifted people’s appreciation of craft to their appreciation of efficiency and finally to an impoverished aesthetics of abstract models (Taylor, 2014). As environmental concerns have heightened and become widely shared, people are finding electric cars more appealing. As the appreciation of diversity and inclusion has increased, Victoria’s Secret has switched from “fantasy angels” to accomplished women

as their models to redefine what “sexy” means. Sensibilities regarding what is beautiful or ugly shift with society’s changing motifs.

Intuiting

Closely associated with the initial aesthetic experience are the intuitive response. The intuitive response, like the aesthetic response, occurs before the rational cognitive process and involves a sudden sensitivity without intentional and deliberative reasoning (Haidt, 2001). To ethics scholars, the intuiting process is important for forming intuitive moral judgments (Cushman et al., 2006; Dane & Pratt, 2007; Haidt, 2007; Zollo et al., 2017). Intuiting is a non-conscious cognitive process characterized by fast, automatic information processing (Kahneman, 2003). It allows decision makers to initiate an effortless process based on explicitly or implicitly perceived cues and unconsciously re-elaborate them in a holistic way (Zollo et al., 2017). The rapid moral judgments people make in uncertain, dynamic, and equivocal contexts are then re-examined and justified in a later moral reasoning stage (Zollo et al., 2017).

Emotional Processing

Emotional reactions are also central to the initial visceral response to triggering events (Pollock et al., 2019). They comprise the affective component of moral intuition that encapsulates the experiential state of the evaluator and characterizes the rapid and unconscious processes of human cognition (Douglas et al., 2008). Intense emotions can be aroused when an audience perceives an incongruity between their expectation and their experience (Toubiana & Zietsma, 2017; Turner, 1999) or senses threats to the values embedded in their institutions (Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Kraatz & Block, 2008). Since stigma-triggering events are usually surprising and significant, the audience’s initial emotional reactions are likely to be intense. However, the immediate emotions aroused by stigma-triggering events are likely to be simply negative and unspecified because in this initial phase, cognitive and rational deliberations have not yet been activated (Zollo et al., 2017).

Taken together, the aesthetic, moral, and emotional reactions in the initial phase are spontaneous, visceral, varied, and fluid. These reactions are probably absent in audience reactions to core-stigmatized organizations. Norms about what to feel about particular types of core-stigmatized organizations are institutionalized and internalized, and audiences simply follow the prescription in experiencing their feelings. They may believe that their emotional reactions are visceral and spontaneous, but these emotions are largely a result of socialization. This is a key difference between core and event stigmatization. Core stigmatization entails the *maintenance* of stigma by audiences,

whereas event stigmatization involves the *creation* of stigma by audiences. At the initial moment of stigma creation, the reactions, albeit negative, are not yet fixed, unitary, nor widely shared among audiences.

The Cognitive Stigma Judgment Phase: Attribution of Causal Explanations

Stigma-triggering events will likely lead most evaluators to arrive at negative moral judgments at the intuitive level. Events that carry an initial negative evaluation elicit higher arousal compared to positive events and cause heightened causal reasoning (Zuber, 2015). These surprising and unexpected events often receive intense media coverage, and the abundant and readily available information and opinions will lead interested evaluators to engage in more conscious and deliberative sensemaking (Brown et al., 2015; Maitlis et al., 2013). Attempts to assign causality are central to such sensemaking (Kelley, 1971). Causal attributions lead to moral judgment. When evaluators determine that an organization has purposefully engaged in wrongdoing, they will form a negative moral judgment about the organization (Weiner, 1985). Furthermore, causal explorations and attributions influence emotional reactions. They activate more specific and discrete emotions (Weiner, 1985; Zuber, 2015). For example, failure to achieve an expected outcome will trigger anger when individuals blame others for voluntarily and unjustifiably causing such failure (Averill, 1983; Turner & Stets, 2006), and it will trigger sadness when individuals see themselves as responsible for the failure (Weiner, 1985). Anger and sadness here are more specific than just “negative” emotions in the intuitive phase. Cognitive processing of the event also generates more complex emotions which are combinations of multiple primary emotions (Turner & Stets, 2006). When anger is combined with surprise, for example, the audience will experience more complex emotions such as outrage and fury, and when sadness is combined with surprise, the audience will feel complex emotions such as being crestfallen and shaken (Turner & Stets, 2006).

Dimensions of Attribution

Drawing from attribution theory, we identify two dimensions of attribution that are important for evaluating stigma associated with organizational events: locus and intent (Meyer, 1980; Weiner, 1979). Locus refers to whether the causes of an action or event are perceived to be internal or external. Here we use “locus of responsibility” to indicate whether the event is initiated and conducted by actors *internal* or *external* to the organization. An audience will judge the culpability of an organization involved in a negative social event by determining whether responsibility for the event is internal or external to the organization (Lange & Washburn, 2012). For example, a company may

sell a defective product due to a lack of internal quality control, or their product may be tampered with by external malicious actors after the product is placed on store shelves. An audience will find the company to be much more responsible for what happened in the former case than in the latter case.

Intent refers to whether an event that adversely affects the organization is carried out by the actors to *intentionally* harm the organization. Actors are perceived as having more control over their wrongdoing actions if they carry out the wrongdoing with the intention to hide, cheat, lie, ignore, or otherwise cause harm. For example, a company that knowingly sells defective products that harm consumers will be judged as being much more culpable for its actions than a company that unknowingly sells defective products. Between fully intentional and completely innocent actions, there are a range of mental states associated with harmful acts that might be perceived as partially attributable to the actor, such as negligence—i.e., not exercising enough care and caution, willfully turning a blind eye to problematic practices, or creating complexity and ambiguity in the organization to avoid taking direct responsibility.

Events that are caused by actors internal to an organization who intentionally produce the negative outcomes of the event are perceived as more controllable by organizational actors than events that are initiated by actors external to the organization or actors who do not intend the negative outcomes (Weiner, 1985). Higher perceived controllability increases the attribution of blame and leads to stigmatization (Crandall, 2000; Crocker et al., 1998; Park & Rogan, 2019).

Combining the two dimensions of attribution produces four types of event stigma. One axis accounts for the extent to which the event can be attributed to actors and operations inside the stigmatized organization, while the other axis differentiates events based on whether the actors involved in the event acted with an intention to produce adverse effects on the organization. Table 1 summarizes the four different types of event stigma. It is important to note that the attribution process in reaction to stigma-triggering events is fundamentally different from that of core stigmatization. In the case of core-stigmatized organizations, attribution involves automatically blaming the organization, which reinforces the established perception of stigma and facilitates its wide adoption by audiences. In the case of event stigmatization, attribution entails more reasoned fact finding and deliberation about the cause of the event.

Table 1 A typology of organizational event stigma

Intent of Actors in the Event

		Intentional	Unintentional
Locus of Responsibility	Internal	<p>Volitional Event Stigma: people within the organization intentionally engage in unethical behaviors that harm others</p> <p><i>Events:</i> Corruption, misconduct Fraud Deception</p> <p><i>Examples:</i> Wells Fargo phony-account scandal Enron accounting fraud Volkswagen emissions scandal</p>	<p>Accidental Event Stigma: people within the organization engage in behaviors that unintentionally harm others</p> <p><i>Events:</i> Industrial accidents Product recalls Mistreatment of customers</p> <p><i>Examples:</i> United Airlines customer service scandal PG&E Northern California fire in 2018 Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989 Fukushima nuclear power plant accident</p>
	External	<p>Hostile Event Stigma: people outside of the organization intentionally engage in activities to harm the organization</p> <p><i>Events:</i> Ecoterrorism Environmental terrorism</p> <p><i>Examples:</i> Firebombing car dealerships Sinking whaling ships</p>	<p>Collateral Event Stigma: people outside of the organization engage in activities that cause harm, but the activities are not directed at the organization</p> <p><i>Events:</i> Mass shooting Product tampering Accidents caused by natural disasters</p> <p><i>Examples:</i> Mandalay Bay, mass shooting in 2017 Chicago Tylenol murders in 1982 Taco Bell police shooting in 2019 Blue Bell ice cream licking in 2019</p>

Typology of Organizational Event Stigma

In this section, we outline the central tendencies of the four ideal types of organizational event stigma, including examples of the events and the effect of cognitive attribution on the formation of stigma judgments involving more specific and complex emotions. The aim of this exercise in delineating ideal types is not to seek perfect correspondence with reality, but to generate abstractions that aid comparison. There can be considerable variation within a type, as well as similarities between types.

Volitional Event Stigma

Volitional event stigma is stigma attached to companies whose management has intentionally deceived customers, engaged in accounting fraud, encouraged practices that are unethical or criminal, or deliberately made unethical decisions that led to the downfall of the company. This type of event stigma resonates with Goffman's (1963) description of "conduct stigma," that is, blemishes on an individual character caused by acts that fall foul of norms and values. As an example, Wells Fargo's top management was perceived as accountable for a phony-account scandal in 2016. The company was sued, found guilty, and fined hundreds of millions of dollars, indicating a consensus that the company was responsible for the wrongdoing. Other examples include Deutsche Bank's series of scandals, Volkswagen's emission scandal in 2015 and Ford's Pinto scandal in the 1970s, and there exist many other instances of corporate misconduct that can be clearly traced to the company's strategic decisions and deliberate actions.

When volitional events happen, they are often shocking to the audience due to the scale and severity of the negative effects they have on stakeholders or the environment. They elicit strong and negative visceral, intuitive, and emotional reactions, which will likely lead to an initial stigma judgment in the intuitive phase. In the cognitive stigma judgment phase, audiences begin to assemble facts and evaluate whether the harms done are attributable to the organization. Once an audience concludes that these events can be clearly attributed to management operations inside the company and the company willfully engaged in wrongful activities resulting in harm to its stakeholders, the audience tends to be uniform in their extremely negative evaluation of the company. The conduct of the organization deviates from deeply held deontological rules and principles that one should not intentionally harm innocent others (Barrett et al., 2016; Duranti, 2015). The stigmatizers, such as the media, victims, and prosecutors, actively seek to punish the organization because its conduct has violated widely accepted norms of ethical business practices. The event can severely shake the confidence and trust of stakeholders, which leads investors, customers, and other exchange parties to sever ties and withdraw their engagement with the organization. The perception that the company engaged in wrongdoing can be clearly reasoned and communicated to the public at large with frequent and predominantly negative media coverage, which can be effective in persuading bystanders to form negative attitudes toward the company.

The cognitive phase of evaluation strengthens the negative aesthetic, intuitive, and emotional attitudes toward the organization that are formed during the initial phase because the process of attribution allows the audience to clearly assign responsibility for the event to actors internal to the company and to see their actions as intentionally deceiving customers, hiding problems, and/or saving costs at the expense of human

lives. Moreover, although the audience may still experience multiple types of negative emotions during this phase, the cognitive attribution likely leads to a dominant form of complex emotion. For this quadrant, we postulate that moral outrage and indignation are likely dominant among concerned audiences. Whereas the initial aesthetic and emotional reactions are likely to be an unspecified mix of negative emotions such as surprise, concern, and frustration, the attribution phase singles out the organization as being culpable for the event. This cognitive processing will activate the other-condemning emotion—assertion-anger (assertion represents a low intensity and anger a high intensity of the same emotion)—which will be directed at the cause of the negative event. When individuals think that an adverse action has been deliberately carried out by an organization with ill intent, the intensity of anger is likely to be very strong (Weiner, 1985). Anger will reduce cognitive processing and harden the negative attitudes toward the organization (Whitaker & Godwin, 2013). Combined with startlement-surprise (startlement represents a low intensity and surprise a high intensity of the same emotion), the more complex form of emotion will likely be moral outrage and indignation (Turner, 1999) rooted in elaborate moral reasoning that places the organization as the perpetrator of the wrongdoing.

Accidental Event Stigma

Many corporate scandals and industrial accidents are caused by actors within the company who did not willfully intend that these incidents and disasters would occur. Often the internal actors still bear some responsibility for the event, ranging from neglect—an active decision to ignore something, to negligence—a more passive behavior of omission. In this sense, this type of stigma is also akin to Goffman's conduct stigma, because the stigma can be traced to actors' behaviors. For example, in 2017, when a United Airlines passenger was forcefully removed from an airplane because he refused to give up his seat when asked, a video of this event—in which he bled while being dragged down the aisle—went viral on social media and triggered a public outcry. In this incident, although the audience clearly attributed responsibility to the company, they probably determined that the company did not deliberately seek to physically harm the passenger with its policies and actions. Hence, the company's control of the situation was not perceived to be as high as in the case of volitional event stigma. Product recalls can also fall into this category if the company was previously unaware of the defects in their product and therefore did not intentionally sell defective products. Industrial accidents may similarly fall into this category. The Fukushima nuclear accident caused by an earthquake in Japan in 2011 and the 2018 California wildfire caused by PG&E's damaged electric poles and powerlines are examples where different stakeholders held different views about who is to blame (Cohen, 2019). In both cases, the company was blamed for negligence and held responsible. The nuclear plant

operator's top executives were indicted for negligence in the Fukushima accident, and PG&E faces multiple lawsuits and has filed for bankruptcy. Despite the severity of these accidents and their human-caused nature, these events are qualitatively different from events in volitional event stigma because they were not caused by actions that were intended to damage the power plant or produce a wildfire.

Like volitional events, accidental events are often shocking and can elicit strong negative visceral, intuitive, and emotional reactions during the initial stigma judgment phase. However, in the subsequent cognitive stigma judgment phase, the audience's rational assessment of the event will likely involve more extensive moral reasoning to decide who bears responsibility and the degree of the responsible party's moral failing, leading to a conclusion that the company did not have full control over the event and hence does not bear full responsibility. As a result, the initial strong visceral and emotional reactions may be attenuated, and the intensity of stigma judgment likely decreases. Stigmatizers will attribute a higher level of blame to the organization based on a higher perceived controllability because they think the organization could have done more to prevent the negative impact of the event. In contrast, bystanders may develop only a moderate degree of stigma judgment based on their evaluation that there was no malicious intent on the part of the organization.

For an audience that perceives a high level of negligence, anger is likely the dominant emotional response (Harvey et al., 2017). For others, the cognitive attribution may excuse the organization's culpability, hence other-condemning emotions are less likely to be activated. The primary emotion for this audience is likely to be disappointment-sadness (disappointment represents a low intensity and sadness a high intensity of the same emotion) because the attention is on the loss caused by the event. As the audience goes through the cognitive phase of stigma evaluation, the more complex emotion that evolves is likely to be a combination of disappointment-sadness and startlement-surprise, which generates a feeling of being crestfallen, shaken, dejected, and upset (Turner, 1999). These withdrawal-based emotions (Harlé & Sanfey, 2010) will likely make the audience disengage from the organization or at least more thoroughly scrutinize the organization.

Hostile Event Stigma

Events that fall into the hostile event category are most likely driven by changes in societal norms and values, which enables groups of actors to initiate collective actions against certain attributes of their target organizations. This type of event stigma is like Goffman's (1963) "tribal stigma," which is stigma based on group identities such as

race, nation, and religion. It should be noted that many core-stigmatized organizations are stigmatized based on their group identities. Hostile event stigma and core stigma differ in the degree of the stigma and the scope of the stigmatizers. For example, prostitution is more universally perceived as core stigmatized, whereas the church is perceived as inherently good by the public but is stigmatized by activists for its policy regarding same-sex relations. Whereas core-stigmatized organizations are those that have been discredited, any organization may be discreditable or stigmatizable. Hostile events bring attention to the stigmatizable attributes of the organization and can precipitate its stigmatization. Hostile events may turn bystanders into stigmatizers, thus broadening the scope of the stigmatizing audience, and may even transform event stigma into core stigma in the long run.

Organizations that belong to certain industries or adopt certain practices can be targeted by activist groups that employ a wide range of tactics, from violent acts by militant social movement organizations to boycotts and protests by consumers or employees. It is important to note that because stigma concerns socially constructed deviance, practices that were not formerly stigmatized may be currently stigmatized due to changes in social mores. New social and moral consciousness may bring greater attention to attributes of organizations that were previously ignored or unknown, which in turn leads to the stigmatization of the organization (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009). For example, environmental consciousness and concerns about the rights of marginalized groups, including animals, have given rise to social movement organizations such as Greenpeace, PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), Earth First!, and ALF (Animal Liberation Front), which actively stigmatize industries, practices, and products that they deem unacceptable.

Hostile events can elicit strong visceral and emotional reactions due to their theatrical effects. It is unique to hostile events that the audience is fragmented or even divided. While this may to some extent be true of audiences of all stigma-triggering events, the hostile event stands out in having audiences who subscribe to contradictory values, ideologies, or institutional logics. Even before the event, a segment of the audience already holds a hostile perception of the organization's value system and considers the organization's values unacceptable (Hudson, 2008). These values are likely religious, socio-political, or environmental in nature and can become controversial. As previously mentioned, organizations that face hostile events are often already core-stigmatized by a segment of their audience, whose initial response to the event will be positive because the event represents an attack to an organization that they are hostile towards. The bystanders may have moderately negative attitudes toward the organization, not know the organization, or have positive attitudes towards the organization. Bystanders'

initial attitudes toward the organization shape their aesthetic, intuitive, and emotional reactions to the event, which may range from positive to negative in the first phase of the social evaluation process.

In the second phase of the social evaluation process, the cognitive attribution is strongly shaped by how much the bystanders' value systems are aligned with the agitators and their tolerance for violence and civil disobedience. Those who are aligned with the agitators' causes will likely attribute blame to the organization and develop moral outrage toward the organization, whereas those who do not believe in the cause may instead blame the agitators. Institutions that validate judgment, such as the media, law enforcement agencies, and the legal system, may also be divided, with one side accusing and arresting the agitators and the opposite side defending their actions. The resulting audience reactions can be contentious and polarized.

Because of the contentious nature of the cognitive attribution of blames, the complex emotions in this case depend on which group the audience members identify with. The stigmatizers' dominant emotion regarding the organization is likely anger, and their dominant emotion about the event is likely vengeance and delight—a combination of satisfaction-happiness and startlement-surprise. However, those who sympathize with the organization will experience anger toward the agitators and the emotion of being appalled and disgusted—a combination of assertion-anger and startlement-surprise (Turner, 1999). It is interesting to note that cognitive attributions are influenced by and confirm the initial intuitive reactions for both stigmatizers and those who support the organization, and further strengthen the division and fragmentation of the audience's stigma judgments.

Collateral Event Stigma

Sometimes catastrophes like the horrific crime of mass shootings or product tampering happen to a company. They are outside of the control of the company, and the events are not intentionally directed at damaging the company per se. However, when events such as mass shootings take place at the site of a company or cause severe damage to it, the company becomes associated with the event, and this association can become a source of stigma. This category of event stigma is analogous to Goffman's (1963) category of stigma based on viewing various physical deformities as abominations. Goffman provides abundant examples of how the crippled, the blind, and dwarfs endure negative stereotypes due to their appearances. The physical deformities are not of their own doing, yet they are still stigmatized as deviating from the normal. An example of collateral event stigma is the mass shooting that killed 58 concertgoers and wounded

422 in the Mandalay Bay Hotel in Las Vegas in October 2017. After this incident, room prices dropped significantly, as people remembered this incident as the “Mandalay Bay Massacre.” The intention of the mass shooter was to kill many people, irrespective of the venue. However, the hotel itself was stigmatized.

Like other stigma-inducing events, collateral events can trigger strong visceral and emotional reactions. The horrifying images, coupled with the randomness and unexpectedness in how these events happen, contribute to extreme negativity in the initial intuitive stigma judgment. At this stage, the audience does not consciously distinguish between the perpetrator, the event, and the organization associated with it. Everything surrounding the event is tainted by the extreme negativity. In the cognitive attribution phase, the audience begins to separate the actors from the organization and recognize that the organization has little control over the actors and the event and therefore bears little responsibility for what happened—in other words, the organization has become “collateral damage.”

However, the audience may still treat the company as if something is wrong with it, like the way society develops stereotypes of the physically deformed (Goffman, 1963). Mandalay Bay suffered a large drop in its revenue and stock price due to the mass shooting; many consumers shun the hotel simply because of this event. Aversion-fear (aversion represents a low intensity and fear a high intensity of the same emotion) combined with startlement-surprise generate such specific and complex emotions as panic, consternation, and being scared (Turner, 1999).

More importantly, the visceral and emotional bases of stigma judgment overshadow the cognitive attribution, so the stigmatizers continue to treat the organization as fundamentally deficient due to the event. Research shows that when people are faced with scenarios involving disgusting actions or objects, they engage in a process called “moral dumbfounding,” in which they fail to provide sufficient justification for their confidently delivered moral judgments (Haidt, 2001, 2004). Haidt interprets this finding as evidence that emotions are responsible for the judgments. Both neuroimaging and patient studies appear to confirm the importance of the emotional areas of the brain in guiding certain aspects of our moral intuitions (Berthoz et al., 2002; Damasio, 1994; Greene & Haidt, 2002; Greene et al., 2001; Moll et al., 2002). The critical prediction of the intuitionist perspective is a dissociation between judgment and justification regarding certain moral dilemmas (Hauser, 2006; Hauser et al., 2007). Additionally, the concept of emotional memory in cognitive science acknowledges that memories of an event can sediment in emotional experiences which hardens social judgment (Lerner & Keltner,

2000). This explains why the name “Mandalay Bay Hotel” may trigger the audience’s recollection of the mass shooting, leading to a negative emotional experience.

The Typology as Ideal Types

This typology allows researchers to group a diverse set of stigma-triggering events based on how audiences react to and evaluate these events. Although corporate corruption and mass shootings have little in common, they both have the potential to contribute to the stigmatization of the organization that is involved. It is therefore useful to place them in the same typology and understand how different types of events prompt different evaluation processes and evoke distinct emotional and moral responses. The four types of events are ideal types. In reality, audiences may not easily distinguish between volitional and accidental events, or between hostile and collateral events. The emotions we associate with each event are also not exclusive to the event. We provide these ideal typical cases to achieve conceptual clarity and guide practical strategies.

It is also important to note that the four types of event stigma are not mutually exclusive. An organization can be stigmatized in multiple ways. For example, in the case of the Mandalay Bay shooting, the company was not only collaterally stigmatized by the shooting, but was also stigmatized by the company’s intentional action after the shooting. The Mandalay Bay Hotel decided to sue the victims of the shooting in order to prevent massive liability lawsuits. The audience was outraged by this action and condemned the company for harming the shooting victims who had already experienced unthinkable tragedy. The lawsuit against the victims was a deliberate act by the management to protect the company’s wealth, which was legal, but morally culpable.

The Practical Stigma Judgment Phase: Stigma Stickiness

As we have shown in the previous sections, the intuitive stigma judgment following a stigma-triggering event generates the initial stigma, which can be strengthened, ameliorated, or fragmented by cognitive attribution, or sustained despite a lack of cognitive justification. In this section we broaden the time horizon and examine whether and to what extent the organizational event stigma will “stick” with the organization, producing long-lasting stigmatization.

In this phase, the evaluating audience reconciles its stigma judgment and its practical exigencies within the context of framing contests, shifting institutional logics, and power

structures. As we will show, different types of events contain distinct challenges and options for the audience. Depending on the nature of the event, the audience may wrestle with different dilemmas involving aesthetic, emotional, and instrumental preferences, which often shape the stickiness of event stigma.

We employ the concept of “stigma stickiness” as an organizational consequence of the stigmatization process. “Sticky stigma” has been used at the individual level to indicate a variety of phenomena. Some use the term to refer to the transfer of stigma to those associated with the stigmatized (Braman, 2004). Some emphasize that the stickiness of stigma is the taint that is left even after a stigma is removed; for example, when an individual stigmatized by “dirty work” changes his or her occupation, the individual may continue to be perceived as a “dirty person” (Bergman & Chalkley, 2007). Most use stickiness to refer to the strength and endurance of a stigma (Brew et al., 2022; Pinkster et al., 2020; Stodulka, 2017). In the context of organizational event stigma, the stigmas generated by episodic events are presumably temporary and removable, and hence the stickiness occurs when an organization continues to be seen as tainted by audiences long after the event is over. The transfer of stigma from one organization to another after an event is very likely; for example, one oil company’s oil spill may taint the entire industry. However, given that this is an unexplored topic, we limit our use of the construct to the stigma associated with the organization directly involved in the event. We use “stigma stickiness” to indicate the extent to which the negative evaluation of an organization triggered by an event is held by audiences. It includes the strength, breadth, and duration of the negative perception. The strength of the stigma is how intensely the negative attitude is held by individuals. The breadth of the stigma is the scale and scope of the audience that stigmatizes the organization. The duration of the stigma is how persistently the audience holds such views. A highly sticky stigma is one that persists and is deeply ingrained in a broadly shared collective belief system held by audiences despite relatively successful stigma management strategies that the organization employs to reduce or remove much of the ostensibly discredited manifestations of the stigma.

Stigma Strength: Value Distance and Ethical Dilemmas

The strength of an audience’s negative evaluation of an organization is shaped by the value distance between the evaluating audience and the perceived attributes of the organization (Hudson, 2008). This applies to event stigmatization: The values displayed by an organization’s conduct connected with an event can violate the audience’s aesthetic, cultural, and moral values and beliefs, resulting in a negative evaluation. Stronger violation leads to more severe negative evaluation and hence stronger stigma stickiness (Hudson, 2008).

Regarding the stigma strength for the four types of events, we argue that for internal event types, volitional events generate stronger stigmas than accidental events. Since volitional events entail greater controllability by the organization involved and indicate a more severe violation of universal moral values, the cognitive attribution of blame can aggravate the intuitive moral judgment, which will trigger more intense moral condemnation and elicit stronger stigma judgments from the audience. In contrast, the strength of stigmas arising from accidental events is weaker due to the amelioration of blame based on the cognitive attribution. For external event types, collateral events lead to stronger stigmas than hostile events. Collateral events activate intense visceral and emotional responses that are widely shared among diverse audiences and cannot be ameliorated by cognitive reasoning and therefore will induce relatively strong stigma judgments from the audience. In contrast, the stigma strength arising from hostile events is typically weak on average because the audience is heterogeneous or even polarized in the values and beliefs that are held. Furthermore, although hostile events can reveal a stigma of an organization or an industry, they may further legitimize the position of such organizations or industries because they reinforce audiences' expectations of such stigmatized behaviors and thus almost naturalize such behaviors.

Helms and Patterson (2014) and Hudson and Okhuysen (2009) noted that the evaluating audiences are often fragmented and heterogeneous, making broad-based consensus regarding value distance unlikely. We further postulate that the audiences' aesthetic, emotional, and intuitive reactions in the first phase and their cognitive evaluation along with more complex emotions in the second phase can interact with their long-term feelings toward and relations with the organization to pose challenges for a stigma to stick. Several ethical dilemmas can emerge during this third phase of stigma judgment. First, the evaluating audience's instrumental involvement with and dependence on the organization can offset the stigma judgment based on moral evaluations. For example, investors in a company may choose to overlook the company's grave violation of their personal values as long as the company is achieving high returns; suppliers and customers may come up with justifications for a company's misconduct because they find it beneficial to continue doing business with the company or because they are loyal partners; and employees may find excuses for a company's violations of norms or even lie to benefit the company because they identify strongly with it (Baur et al., 2020). Additionally, the evaluating audience's aesthetic and hedonic experiences may run counter to their ethical values. For example, consumers who are addicted to chocolate and experience it as a slight harm combined with a guilty pleasure may be hesitant to stigmatize the chocolate industry for child slavery.¹ Similarly, fast fashion fans who have a strong emotional connection with their brand might turn a blind eye to the fashion industry's precarious workers. The audience's practical deliberations and the emotional experiences associated with these can outweigh their stigma

judgments based on moral principles, resulting in diminished stigma. In other words, an organization's behaviors may be deemed morally abhorrent, but the organization may still be cognitively and practically accepted (Hudson, 2008).

Audiences of collateral events face similar ethical dilemmas; in this case the stakeholders' practical considerations may mitigate their stigma judgment based on strong visceral and emotional responses. As noted earlier, the stigma judgment is largely spontaneous, autonomous, and unconscious, and the negative evaluation tends to hold despite cognitive reasoning that excuses the role of the organization in the event. However, this strong stigma judgment can still be reduced as members of the audience calculate their practical benefits: They may continue to support the organization by buying its products or services, supplying its resources, and being loyal to and identifying with the organization. Returning to the Mandalay Bay example, prices and customers have almost reached pre-mass shooting levels several years after the incident, indicating that many customers are willing to suppress their stigmatizing and choose to stay at the hotel because of its attractive pricing, location, or other practical considerations.

It is important to note that the strength of event stigma is a dynamic variable shaped by all three phases of the stigma judgment process. The value distance measured in terms of violations of institutional aesthetic codes, collectively accepted emotional norms, and moral principles determines the initial stigma strength, which can be lessened during the cognitive and practical phases. However, episodic evidence suggests that although stakeholders can engage or re-engage with the organization due to their practical considerations, this does not mean that the stigma has been eradicated. The stigma is ameliorated or reduced, but it may become more hidden, subtle, or simply silenced.

Stigma Breadth: Visibility and Framing

Little research has been conducted to understand how the perception of stigma spreads among audiences and gets institutionalized at the macro level. The stigma breadth depends on the visibility of the event and its framing. Due to stakeholders' limited fields of vision and cognitive assessment (Barnett, 2014; Lange & Washburn, 2012; Paruchuri & Misangyi, 2015), not all events attract attention. Highly visible events are usually novel, disruptive, and impactful (Morgeson et al., 2015). Such events are often carried out by social movement organizations (SMOs) or involve high-profile actors such as politicians, business elites, and celebrities. They are likely to be reported by the media, shared on social media, or become known through various channels (Carberry et al., 2018; Desai, 2011). Visibility brings awareness to more audience members (Hudson,

2008). Previous bystanders may take an interest in learning about what has occurred and potentially develop stigma judgments about the organization that is involved. Highly visible events may trigger mobilization and serve as an impetus for collective action (Nigam & Ocasio, 2010). For example, a series of high-profile women's allegations of sexual harassment against powerful men in 2017 triggered the #MeToo movement, which brought significant disruption to entrenched values, norms, and institutional aesthetic codes (Creed et al., 2020). Like stigma strength, stigma breadth tends to vary with the nature of events. We suggest that events that elicit either strong moral condemnation (i.e., volitional events) or strong emotional reactions (i.e., collateral events) likely gain more visibility than the other two types of events. This is because audiences tend to pay attention to universally shared moral principles and automatic affective reflexes.

The framing of an event is also critical to the audience's sensemaking and evaluation of the event (Green & Li, 2011; Hiatt & Carlos, 2019). Framing involves crafting "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 1987) to the event. Powerful frames are an important means employed by SMOs to stigmatize their targets and mobilize support. In addition, the mass media often makes and disseminates novel and controversial frames (Fiss & Hirsch, 2005). The media's progressively negative framing of police as a profession has a strong impact on individual attitudes toward police and the public's perception of policing as a "tainted" profession (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2020). Similarly, the media played a crucial role in populating the ideas and arguments that cast the finance industry in a very negative light after the subprime crisis of 2007 (Roulet, 2015).

Several characteristics of the frames shape the spread of stigma judgment. Frames that are aligned with multiple institutional logics are likely to resonate with a broad and diverse audience (Meyer & Hammerschmid, 2006; Meyer & Höllerer, 2010; Purdy & Gray, 2009). Public displays of emotions and moral indignation and shared stories and arguments can act as catalysts for people's affectively motivated moral evaluations. Diagnostic framing is especially important in the spread of stigma as it points to the cause of the problematic event and attributes blame or causality (Snow & Benford, 1988). The framing of blame and causality shapes attitudes and influences collective mobilization (Hervieux & Voltan, 2018). Framing an organization as deliberately corrupt and fraudulent will elicit a very different emotional and visceral response than framing it as negligent or innocent. Through public discussions and interactions between stigmatizers and bystanders, frames about stigma are mobilized, and consequently, a perception of stigma that is confined to a small group of stigmatizers can become contagious, spread to the institutional field and the larger community, and transform into

a collectively shared stigma. Here again, we suspect that volitional and collateral events are more likely to underlie frames that increase the stigma breadth. This is because diverse audiences can still resonate with frames that uphold broad social norms and appeal to deeply shared emotional experiences.

Stigma Duration: Frequency and Power Structures

The duration of a stigma depends on the frequency with which similar events occur. An organization that is found guilty of misconduct can be stigmatized for the short term, while the stigma may wane in the longer term. However, if similar misconduct occurs repeatedly, such as Wells Fargo's series of scandals, the evaluating audience is less likely to ignore, forget, or minimize the wrongdoing. Repeat offenders become more stigmatized over time as audiences treat the problematic practices as a character trait of the organization rather than an isolated incident. For example, repeated negative interactions between police and citizens contributed to the stigmatization of policing (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2020).

Power structures can also play an important role in sustaining a stigma (Hudson, 2008). Hudson compared the stigmatizers of Wal-Mart and those of abortion clinics and noted that the latter consist of far more powerful groups, which explains the relatively long-lasting stigma surrounding abortion clinics. In general, corporations in the US tend to be resilient against severe stigmatization by social groups because of the relative power of corporate America compared to that of the government and civil society. Although consumers, advocates, and activists can try to bring about change by attempting to stigmatize certain organizations and industries, their ability to sustain such stigmatization is weak due to the fragmented nature of these social groups and the consequent difficulty of collective action (Bauman, 2005). Organizations that do not belong to the military-industrial complex or are small and peripheral are less likely to successfully fend off attacks when faced with powerful collective acts of stigmatization.

Taken together, event stigmas that are strong, widespread, and long-lasting may have the potential to become core stigmas. Episodic and anomalous events alone will unlikely propel an organization to be core stigmatized. Even intentional violations of fundamental moral principles may not leave the organization with a stain because audiences may choose not to stigmatize the organization due to dilemmas that they experience. However, when an organization is associated with a wide variety of negative events and is repeatedly vilified by powerful institutions, it can be infused with negative significance beyond the stigma associated with events. For example, to some people, the name Walmart carries a core stigma. Walmart did not start as a

core-stigmatized discount retailer; rather, it had a positive reputation throughout the first few decades of its rapid growth. However, Walmart has been stigmatized for the products it sells, its wage and labor policies, its negative effects on small stores, its role in urban sprawl, its impact on climate change, and even its customers. Once Walmart had become core-stigmatized, audiences simply reacted to Walmart with extremely negative attitudes; they do not recount concrete events because the negative connotation has been generalized and taken for granted. This process may apply to entire industries or fields, like the oil industry or Wall Street. They are core stigmatized to the extent that the stigma is transmitted across organizations within an industry and audiences associate stigma with the identity of the entire group of organizations without having to remember the events associated with the stigma.

The Institutionalization of Stigma Among Bystanders

As a stigma becomes stickier—i.e., a large audience comes to hold a very negative view of an organization—it can continue to convert bystanders to stigmatizers. Early converts may need to be persuaded by reasoning about why the events taint the image of the organization. As a stigma becomes a generalized and shared belief about a certain organization or industry, bystanders will no longer need to know the reasons; they will adopt the negative attitudes due to normative and mimetic processes (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Jepperson, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The institutionalization of stigma involves the internalization of a uniform set of emotional and aesthetic judgments based on universal principles. No explicit language is needed to point out the disgust and disdain that people have for the stigmatized; implicit cues, rituals, and habits place the core stigmatized into a special category. As bystanders become passive stigmatizers who perpetuate the extremely negative emotional, aesthetic, and moral disapproval of the organization, the stigma will be held by a wider population and become taken for granted at the macro level (Li, 2017). Since many of these bystanders simply adopt the stigma judgment without going through the intuitive and cognitive stigma judgment phases, they may not even know why the organization is stigmatized, but only that they have a collective negative attitude toward the organization, seeing it as deviant and fundamentally flawed.

If active stigmatizers are unable to persuade a broader scope of bystanders to shift their attitude toward being negative, the stigma will continue to be temporary and the stigmatized organization may employ strategies to offset the effect of the stigma, reduce the stigma, or eliminate it. In addition, if bystanders normalize the events and organizations that are involved, remain uninterested in the stigmatizers' efforts, are misinformed or confused, or become polarized, then event stigma is unlikely to spread to a broad audience, become deeply held, or persist for a long time.

Discussion and Conclusion

Taking the perspective of the evaluating audience, we have proposed a typology that accounts for a vast and varied set of events that can potentially stigmatize organizations. We have also unpacked the stigma judgment process and outlined three phases in which audience reactions and evaluations can lead to the creation, maintenance, and stickiness of event stigma. Our theorizations of the typology and processes help illuminate why different events stigmatize differently and why some stigmas stick while others do not. Our model has the potential to bring together fragmented research insights, differentiate organizational stigma from related constructs, connect the constructs of organizational event stigma and core stigma, and establish organizational stigma as a field of research.

This paper makes several theoretical contributions. First, our typology of event stigma is arguably the first systematic categorization of a diverse set of events that lead to organizational stigma. Consistent with conceptual work that brings together disparate literatures (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Hamington, 2019), our typology draws from the sociology of emotions and aesthetics as well as the social evaluation and moral reasoning literature to provide a more comprehensive understanding of stigma-triggering events. The categorization goes beyond the typical events such as corporate scandals and misconduct and includes a wide range of stigma-triggering events, such as wildfires and mass shootings. By adopting the evaluators' perspective, we identify two core dimensions along which four different types of event stigma can be distinguished. This allows us to see that not all events have the same potential to stigmatize an organization and that not all stigmas are the same. Based on this perspective, event stigma can no longer be viewed as a binary variable but must rather be understood as a multidimensional construct that elicits complex perceptions and judgments by diverse audiences with varying kinds and degrees of aesthetic, emotional, and moral reactions.

A more sophisticated understanding of event stigma can help researchers distinguish between stigma and illegitimacy, two constructs that are often conflated (Hampel & Tracey, 2019; Hudson, 2008). Across the four categories of event stigma, events can lead to extremely negative evaluations of organizations that are otherwise perceived as perfectly legitimate. The difference between the two constructs is most significant for the stigmatized organizations in collateral event stigma. Companies like Mandalay Bay are stigmatized after mass shootings, yet this stigmatization has nothing to do with illegitimacy. The emotional and visceral reactions can be so strong and their effects so long-lasting that the intuitive moral judgment formed in the initial phase of stigma

judgment persists without sound reasoning or even despite reasoning that contradicts the initial judgment.

The construct of illegitimacy is based on moral, cognitive, and pragmatic concerns (Suchman, 1995). Stigma shares with illegitimacy the involvement of moral evaluation. However, stigma judgment also entails significant emotional and aesthetic evaluations, which are not central to judgments of illegitimacy. Emotional evaluations tend to be instantaneous and operate below conscious awareness (Pollock et al., 2019, p. 449). Similarly, aesthetic evaluations are immediate and sensory and differ from rational and pragmatic calculations. The aesthetic and emotional components fundamentally differentiate stigma judgments from illegitimacy judgments. Although some organizations are both illegitimate and stigmatized, there are legitimate organizations that are stigmatized as well as illegitimate organizations that are non-stigmatized. Our framework for event stigma clearly distinguishes organizational stigma from the closely related construct of illegitimacy.

Our second contribution concerns the role of emotions and aesthetics in event stigmatization. Emotions have been theorized to play a critical role in organizational and institutional change and dynamics (Creed et al., 2010; Voronov & Vince, 2012; Voronov & Weber, 2016). Recently, scholars have begun to theorize the role of specific emotions such as shame (Creed et al., 2014) in maintaining and disrupting institutions. Strong negative emotions lead to emotion-laden activities that pressure organizations to adapt and change (Toubiana & Zietsma, 2017), and aesthetics holds promise for providing deeper insights into institutional work and dynamics (Creed et al., 2020). Our work contributes to this line of research by providing a more fine-grained framework for understanding the formation of different types of negative emotions and their role in producing stigma in reaction to triggering events that violate expectations or threaten established values and aesthetic codes.

Aesthetic and emotional responses are arguably the most immediate modes of responding to stigma-triggering events. We highlight the intuitive stigma judgment phase in which visceral, automatic, and unconscious processing of the event take precedence over deliberate reasoning (Creed et al., 2020; Taylor, 2014). The aesthetic and affective judgments about the event enable evaluators to make quick, negative moral evaluations of the event and the associated organization. In some cases, individuals simply cannot control raw, visceral emotions such as fear and disgust when they react to triggering events, which significantly affects their perceptions of the danger and risk involved and of how much the situation can be controlled, as well as their general pessimism (Lerner & Keltner, 2000; Lerner et al., 2015; Schwarz, 2000). This is

most evident in collateral events where the audience is dumbfounded and continues to stigmatize the organization associated with the event despite a lack of moral justification as they move into the cognitive phase of stigma judgment (Haidt, 2001, 2004).

Aesthetics and emotions also play a role in the second and third phases of stigma judgment. In the cognitive stigma judgment phase, each type of event is likely associated with a set of distinctive audience emotions (Turner, 1999; Turner & Stets, 2006). These emotions are more complex than the immediate emotions that characterize the intuitive judgment phase. As Turner and Stets (2006, pp. 47–48) note, “strong emotional states such as hatred, vengeance, angst, depression, jealousy, love, and joy drive human behavior, and these and other strong emotions need to be part of theories that seek to explain human motivation, behavior, and organization.” Stigma-triggering events provoke strong emotions in the audience, and such emotions can become the very basis for long-lasting organizational stigmas held by audiences. By labeling these emotions and highlighting the differences, our model increases the explanatory power of the concept of event stigmatization. For example, in reaction to volitional events, audiences are outraged, indignant, and furious—emotions that lead to increased action and mobilization of collective action (Jasper, 1997). In reaction to accidental events, audiences are shaken, dejected, stunned, and upset—emotions that lead to withdrawal. These different emotions help explain the extent and type of stigmatization efforts that audiences make in order to strengthen the stigmatization of the organization. In the practical stigma judgment phase, the audience’s emotional identification with an organization or their aesthetic experience with a product can place them in an ethical dilemma. Having to choose between what is right and what is pleasurable, the audience may end up reducing the stigma judgment they had formed in the early phases.

Finally, we contribute to event stigma research by unpacking the black box of event stigmatization. Our process model of the three phases of stigma judgment helps explain the different ways in which the intuitive, cognitive, and practical phases interact to produce organizational stigma. For example, the cognitive attribution aggravates the intuitive stigma judgment for volitional events but alleviates the intuitive stigma judgment for accidental events. The cognitive attribution reverses the intuitive stigma reasoning but does not reduce the stigma associated with collateral events. In the case of hostile events, the cognitive attribution confirms and potentially increases the polarized initial stigma judgments. This has significantly enhanced our ability to explain the variation in stigma judgments as audiences react to different types of events.

The practical stigma judgment phase incorporates contextual factors that shape stigma stickiness. Here, audiences may face multiple ethical dilemmas between their moral convictions formed during the first two phases and their structural positions and practical needs. These dilemmas can reduce the strength of the stigma stickiness. Furthermore, visibility and framing can make a stigma resonate with a broad audience and hence increase its spread, and repeated events and powerful stakeholders can prolong a stigma. Our concept of stigma stickiness highlights stigma as a continuum rather than a binary variable and as a process rather than an innate property of the stigmatized. This opens up the possibility of inquiries into how the heterogeneity of audiences that include stigmatizers and bystanders influences the formation and maintenance of stigma. Stigma stickiness can potentially bridge the theoretical concepts of core stigma and event stigma. Whereas previous research sees core and event stigma as distinct categories, our framework suggests that no group of individuals or organizations is born with core stigmas. We postulate that a distinct set of conditions, including the nature of the events and the dynamics of audience evaluations, in no small measure aided by framing and power structures, can transform event stigmas into core stigmas. As an event stigma becomes sticky, it may become a core stigma, at which point its origins are forgotten or hidden. Like other social evaluative constructs such as legitimacy, stigma is socially constructed (Link & Phelan, 2001; Pozner, 2008). Our research unpacks the process of such construction and potentially reveals the origins of core stigma.

Future Research

Our conceptual model outlines the main processes of event stigmatization, namely, the intuitive, cognitive, and practical phases of audience evaluation. This provides a basis for subsequent research and theory development. One such pursuit would be the empirical testing of the model. For example, an experiment that assigns subjects to one of the four different stigma scenarios and assesses their emotional reactions and their moral reasoning processes would shed light on the key mechanisms through which evaluators' reactions to and evaluations of triggering events produce stigma. Regarding theory development, the construct of stigma stickiness warrants further exploration. We postulate several cultural and structural factors that impact the strength, breadth, and duration of stigma. However, we lack an understanding of the mechanisms by which individual stigma judgments at the micro level become collective stigma judgments at the macro level. Considering the co-existence of multiple and even competing institutional logics (Besharov & Smith, 2014; McPherson & Sauder, 2013; Purdy & Gray, 2009) and the ever-changing societal norms and values (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009), it is even more important to understand which and how stigma judgments spread and persist. This would be a valuable endeavor because we suspect that event stigma is a

precursor to core stigma: A stigma becomes “core” when it spreads and becomes sticky and when the events (imagined or real) that created the original stigma are probably long forgotten.

Another unexplored area for future research is the interaction between stigma and other social judgment constructs such as the organizational reputation, image, status, and celebrity. For example, scholars might postulate that when the evaluation of events is dominated by moral condemnation, the stigma does the most damage to the organization’s reputation, and when the evaluation of events is dominated by emotions and aesthetics, the stigma does the most damage to the organization’s image. The distinction between damage to reputation and damage to image is important because it suggests that stigma can be attached to either the organization’s own conduct or its visual and mental representation. It would also be interesting to understand, when an entire industry or sector goes through an event stigma—such as the financial industry in the 2009 financial crisis—whether companies with higher status are stigmatized more heavily. Finally, celebrity is also relevant for understanding stigma because celebrity evaluation is characterized by a strong emotional component, and such emotions are highly positive (Pollock et al., 2019; Rindova et al., 2006). For this reason, it would be interesting to investigate whether celebrity organizations are more likely to be targets of event stigmatization and how celebrity CEOs might accentuate or alleviate stigmatization.

Practical Implications

Events may lead to organizational stigmas that can have serious consequences for the organization. Faced with event stigmas, organizations may fire their top executives, file for bankruptcy, or close their stores. Our research outlines a comprehensive map for scanning the environment internal and external to the organization for possible stigma-triggering events. We also provide a finer-grained roadmap for organizations faced with event stigmatization to manage the stigma more strategically and effectively. When an extremely negative event happens to an organization, the organization should seek to understand the nature of the event and the stigmatizers’ instruments for stigmatization. The organization’s stigma management strategies should address these important questions to minimize or eliminate the stigma and prevent it from sticking to the organization’s identity, reputation and image over the long term.

For example, when the organization is perceived as having caused the event and having control over the event, its most immediate strategies should be sincere apologies and radical actions to fix the sources of the stigma. Wells Fargo failed to do

this early on. In his congressional testimony in 2016, Wells Fargo CEO John Stumpf was accused by senators of running a “criminal enterprise” and of “gutless leadership,” yet he only gave cursory apologies, stating “I am very sorry that that happened. ... That is not what we wanted to have happened” (Corkery, 2016), and he defended the company’s practice, its culture, and the executive Carrie Tolstedt who ran the community banking operations. The CEO’s statements worsened the company’s reputation, and he was soon forced to retire. Several years after the scandal, Wells Fargo’s new CEO was still harshly grilled by Congress and struggling to regain trust. When reputation is damaged, significant behavioral changes are most needed to repair such damage.

Because stigmatizers condemn the stigmatized based on the latter’s moral failings, we contend that volitional event stigma can be reduced with effective stigma management strategies that appeal to the stigmatizers’ moral reasoning by acknowledging the company’s wrongdoings, apologizing for the harm the company has caused, paying for the damages incurred by the event, and correcting the company’s future behavior in meaningful ways to reduce the stickiness of the stigma.

Collateral event stigma can be more difficult to manage due to its emotional nature and its potential impact on the organization’s image. Consequently, managing collateral event stigma calls for a different strategy. In such a situation, the stigmatized organization should seek to drastically change its image such as by changing its name, logo, architecture, and ambiance to create a different mental representation in the minds of the audience. For example, at a Taco Bell drive-through in the San Francisco Bay area in 2019, police shot and killed an African-American man in his car. The number of customers dropped significantly after the event, and Taco Bell quickly closed the store to minimize the spillover effect of this store’s damaged image to the entire brand. Similarly, to reduce the chance of evoking the mass shooting event in the memories of their customers, Mandalay Bay Hotel decided to seal off the entire 32nd floor and remove any trace of the existence of room 135, which is where the shooter staged the shooting. The stigmatized organization is victimized by such events, and it needs to move quickly to sever the event from the overall public impression of the organization.

In the case of accidental events, the public will likely disengage from and increase scrutiny of the stigmatized organization. Hence, the organization will benefit from educating the public about the concrete steps that have been taken to fix the problem, providing information on the thresholds and standards of acceptable safety and quality, and induce positive emotions to mitigate people’s perception of stigma (Schulze &

Wansink, 2012). Regarding hostile events, an organization may find a straddling strategy beneficial as it communicates with a divided audience, some highly critical of the organization and others sympathetic. The organization may maintain its core images and products while trying to adopt new positions, practices, or strategies to present an image of change and reduce the incongruence seen by the negative evaluators.

In conclusion, our process model of stigma judgment following extremely negative events and our typology of organizational event stigma help make sense of the commonalities and differences in a wide range of stigma-triggering events. This provides a more solid empirical ground for uniting the rather fragmented and underdeveloped field of organizational stigma research. Inquiries into organizational event stigma from the audience's perspective prove to be fruitful in differentiating organizational stigma from closely related constructs, such as illegitimacy, and in bridging two central constructs—core stigma and event stigma. Our hope is that this expanded conception of organizational event stigma will be useful to all stakeholders involved: organizations facing stigma-triggering events, stigmatizers trying to make the stigma stick, bystanders wrestling with dilemmas in making stigma judgements, and institutions providing the validity of such stigma judgments.

Notes

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Author Information

Authors and Affiliations

School of Economics and Business Administration, Saint Mary's College of California, 1928 St Mary's Rd, Moraga, CA, USA
Kim Clark & Yuan Li

Corresponding author

Correspondence to [Yuan Li](#)

Additional Information

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Kim Clark and Yuan Li contributed equally to this work.