Identity Threats in Everyday Life: Distinguishing Belonging From Inclusion

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Abstract

Four studies present the first broad investigation into identity threats experienced in everyday life. Capturing more than 17,000 instances of identity threat experienced by more than 1,500 participants, we demonstrate that *a lack of felt belonging* and *exclusion* are distinct aspects of identity threats. Experiences of reduced belonging most strongly relate to feelings of inauthenticity, whereas experiences of exclusion most strongly relate to negative affect (sadness and anger). Furthermore, experiences with identity threats were related to loneliness, lower life satisfaction, and worse self-reported physical health (with reduced belonging and exclusion predicting distinct measures of well-being), and both aspects predict lower workplace satisfaction, identification and commitment when experienced in professional settings. By distinguishing feelings of reduced belonging from exclusion, we provide unique insights into affective and cognitive outcomes of identity threats experienced in everyday life across diverse marginalized identities.

A large body of work demonstrates that individuals with marginalized identities can experience a host of negative outcomes, ranging from diminished performance (e.g., African Americans in academic environments), reduced commitment to the domain (e.g., women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics [STEM] positions), and reduced health and well-being (e.g., Destin, 2018; Dovidio et al., 2008; Major, 2003; Major et al., 2013; Mendoza-Denton & Page-Gould, 2008; Page-Gould et al., 2008). The pathway from holding a marginalized identity to these harmful outcomes is complex and multifaceted, and studies often focus on one particular group at a time (e.g., a particular racial minority, women in the workplace, sexual orientation, religion, country of birth, age, etc.). In the current work, we take a new approach to this important question by examining identity threats experienced in everyday life across diverse marginalized identities.

We operationalize *identity threats* as situations that make salient a conflict between one's current context and a marginalized identity one has (see Branscombe et al., 1999; Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes, & Garcia, 2014; Steele et al., 2002). Drawing upon literatures on belongingness, rejection sensitivity, authenticity, and social identification and fit, we propose a model outlining two psychological experiences that likely follow from such identity threats. Specifically, we propose that identity threats will be related to feelings of (1) *exclusion* and (2) *a lack of belonging* and that these two experiences, in turn, are related to distinct affective and cognitive outcomes.

Feelings of Belonging and Inclusion

Whereas prior intergroup research has often treated feelings of exclusion as the inverse of feelings of belonging, we propose the two are separable constructs that operate in tandem. Indeed, prior work on interpersonal relationships suggests an important distinction. Feelings of rejection and exclusion are tied to whether one feels that another person values a relationship with oneself (Leary, 2010). If one perceives a slight of some kind, whether being excluded from a conversation, ignored, disrespected, or simply not considered, a feeling of rejection can follow (Leary, 2001). In contrast, one does not need to perceive any negative behavior from others to feel that they do not belong. Rather, a felt lack of belonging can follow from broader environmental cues that indicate one's identity is not compatible with, or appropriate in, a given context (Walton & Cohen, 2007).

We propose that to the extent an identity threat evokes the feeling that one does not belong, people will feel less able to be their authentic selves. This prediction has been made by a recent theory of authenticity, which suggests that feelings of fit

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to the environment promote feelings of authenticity (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). This theory draws on a range of evidence demonstrating the inverse relationship. For example, feeling that one does not belong may lead one toward increased self-consciousness, heightened self-monitoring, and behavioral adjustments that may stray from how one normally behaves, all of which might reduce feelings of authenticity. Scant work has connected these processes to a broad diversity of marginalized identities. A finding on concealable stigma points to a potential link. Specifically, attempts to hide one's concealable stigma (one's college major not well suited to a task, as instructed by experimental condition) tend to undermine feelings of belonging and personal authenticity (Newheiser & Barreto, 2014; see also McDonald, Salerno, Greenaway, & Slepian, 2020). Together, these findings suggest that feeling a lack of belonging should be linked to feeling that one cannot be oneself, and we predict that this relationship will transcend diverse marginalized identities.

We propose a different pattern of results for feeling excluded. To the extent that an identity threat evokes feelings of exclusion, we predict that people will experience negative affective states like anger and sadness. Indeed, anger and sadness are common outcomes of feeling ostracized (Chow et al., 2008; Richman & Leary, 2009), and they serve distinct (e.g., Bodenhausen et al., 1994; Posner et al., 2005; Russell, 1980) and fundamental interpersonal functions (e.g., Blair et al., 1999; Leary, 2000). Similarly, those who are rejection sensitive, and thus more likely to perceive exclusion, are more likely to experience negative affect in response to perceived discrimination (see Crocker et al., 1998; Henson et al., 2013; Leary, 2015).

Importantly, we do not mean to suggest that felt lack of belonging will relate solely to feelings of inauthenticity or that exclusion will relate solely to negative affect. Rather, we propose a dissociation in the strength of these relationships. We suggest that when examining felt exclusion and lack of belonging as simultaneous predictors, a lack of belonging will be most strongly linked to feelings of inauthenticity, whereas feelings of exclusion will be most strongly linked to negative affective responses. In turn, we explore how these variables relate to different indicators of well-being, and in our final study, we explore identity threats experienced in the workplace, and downstream satisfaction, identification, and commitment to one's workplace.

The Current Approach and the Identity Threats Questionnaire

The goal of the current work—as reflected by our methods, recruitment, and analyses—is to estimate the strength of these relationships as they generalize across diverse contexts and identities. We ask: Do there exist reliable relationships (between a lack of felt belonging and exclusion, and felt authenticity and negative affective responses) that transcend specific situations and identities? To examine this question, we introduce a new instrument, the *Identity Threats Questionnaire*. Across four studies, we measure responses to more than

17,000 instances of identity threat experienced by more than 1,500 participants across a wide and diverse set of marginalized identities, in everyday life, and also in the workplace.

As we will show, across these 30 categories of identity threat situations, our diverse sample of participants experience an average of 11 of these situations in a week. Given that our participants commonly experience multiple identity threats, we analyze our data with multilevel modeling. Specifically, we implement cross-classified models as each identity threat is *not* bound to one specific identity (compared to classic multilevel examples such as how a student is only in one school and hence nested within it).

Accordingly, we treat identity threat and participant as cross-classified random factors and hence estimate the strength of the relationships between variables of interest that are not attributable to any participant nor identity threat. An advantage of this approach is that our model estimates therefore generalize across the large diversity of identities and identity threats we capture, and these estimates should thereby also generalize to unsampled identities and identity threats (see Judd et al., 2012). This approach moves beyond the limitations of studying only a single marginalized identity (e.g., race, gender, socioeconomic status [SES], sexual orientation) or studying a single context (e.g., academics, STEM, organizational culture).

Study 1

Study 1 examined participants' experiences with social interactions and situations that recently threatened their identities. We first ran a large-scale study with 1,000 participants across a diverse spectrum of marginalized identities. These participants had experienced, in total, more than 10,000 recent identity threats. We then conducted three preregistered replications (the first an exact replication, the second and third, extensions and replications).

Method

Participant Diversity

Participants (455 men, 553 women, 8 other; $M_{age} = 34.91$, *SD* $= 11.31$, 95% CI $= [33.32, 36.51]$, range $= 18–73$) were recruited from Mechanical Turk (four individuals who did not take the study entered a code on Mechanical Turk, thus yielding 996 participants who actually took the study). The advertisement read, "Have you ever felt like you don't belong because of your social group? (e.g., race, gender, SES, sexual orientation, religion, and culture). If so, we would like to hear about your experience to help people cope with these kinds of challenges."

As can be seen in Figure 1, this led to a diverse set of participants recruited. More than 75% of our participants were of a clear stigmatized identity, including women (such as in male-dominated fields), multiple racial groups, diverse sexual orientations, religions, regions, countries of birth, education, primary language spoken, and so on. Even among the 24%
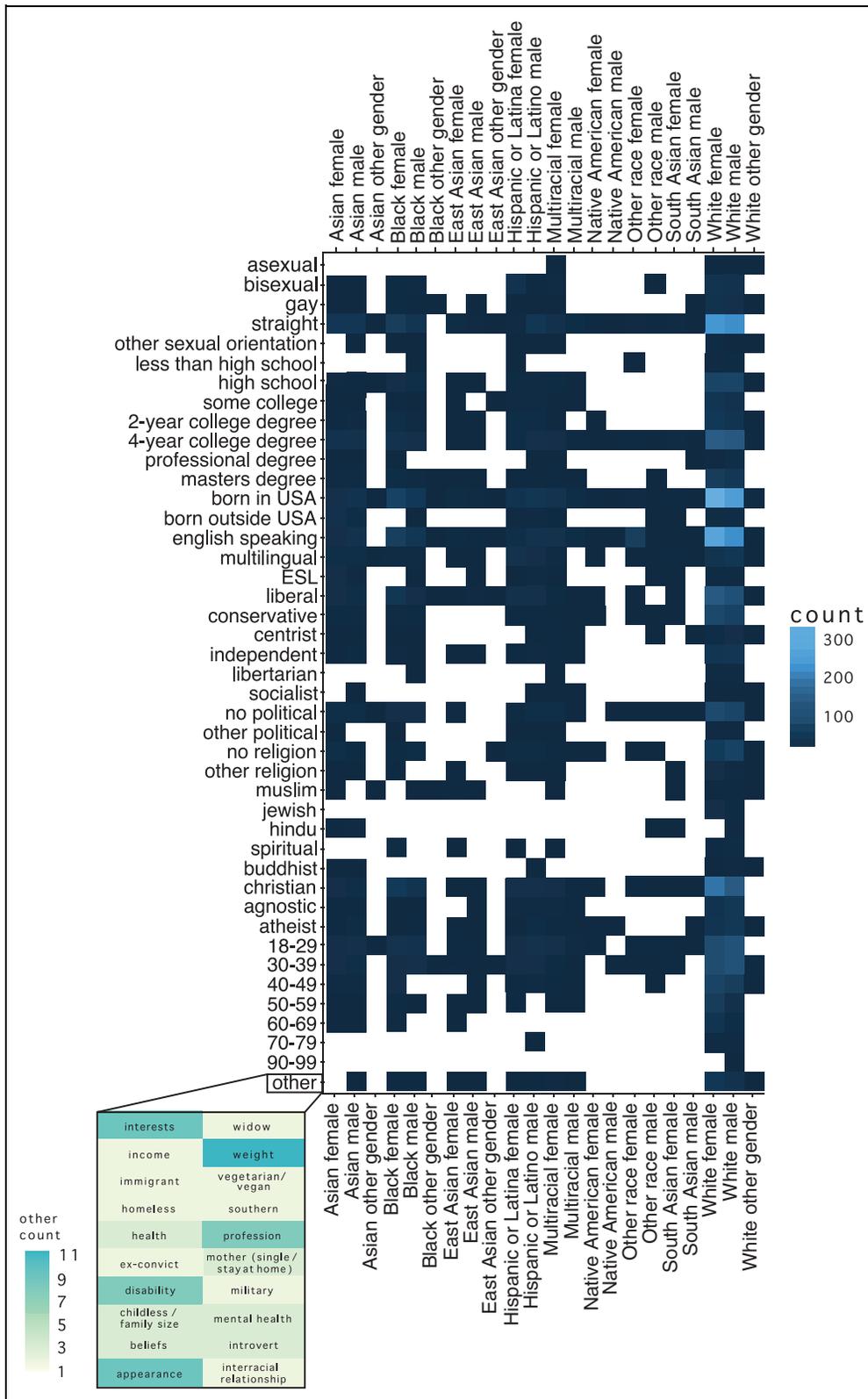
Figure 1. A visualization of the broad diversity of Study 1 participants (*N* = 996). Please see online version for color.

Table 1. Identity Threats Questionnaire.

We want to know about what was happening when you felt like you didn't fit in.

In the past week...

Have you been in a situation where people were talking about hobbies, travel, summer plans, upbringing, or music/tv/movies/books...		
and, this made you feel like you didn't fit in...	Yes, I was recently in this situation	No

- people were talking about their hobbies
- people were talking about travel, summer plans
- people were talking about their upbringing
- people were talking about music, television, movies, or books you are not familiar with

In the past week...	Yes, I was recently in this situation	No

Have you been in a situation where...

- people made assumptions about which identity group you belong to
- people asked, "Where are you from?"
- someone asked a question about, or commented on your appearance
- you were the only person in the room from your group (racial, gender, SES, sexual orientation, etc.)
- you were the only person in the room with your accent
- you spoke a different language from everyone else
- you did not feel like-minded to everyone else in the group
- you were code-switching to fit in with different groups (i.e., altering your behavior to fit in with people who are different from you)

In the past week...	Yes, I was recently in this situation	No

Have you been in a situation where...

- someone assumed you know or were friends with someone else from your group (racial, gender, SES, sexual orientation, etc.)
- someone asked you a question on behalf of your whole identity / group (e.g., "what do people like you think of...")
- someone assumed a stereotype applies to you
- someone expressed surprise that you counter a stereotype / are not like other members of your group

In the past week...	Yes, I was recently in this situation	No

Have you been in a situation where...

- that situation counters stereotypes of you (e.g., woman in a physics class, low SES person in a fancy restaurant)
- someone questioned the legitimacy of your identity, or minimized it based on stereotypes
- you were seen as a "token" minority or there to meet a quota
- you were seen as owing your success to affirmative action

Finally...

In the past week...	Yes, I was recently in this situation	No

Have you been in a situation where...

- someone was talking about their beliefs about your group
- someone was making jokes about your identity group
- someone was pretending to TALK like a member of your identity group
- someone was pretending to ACT like a member of your identity group
- someone was trying too hard to act like an "ally"/support your identity group
- someone was NOT acting like an "ally"/not supporting your identity group
- someone was not confronting questionable / rude / insulting behavior toward your group by other people
- someone avoided you because you're different
- you were being discriminated against

of our sample who were straight White males, participants reported a diverse set of identities, for example, being an immigrant, Jewish, non-native English speaker as well identities listed by participants in the "other" category (e.g., having a disability, being overweight, issues of health and mental health, being an ex-convict). In sum, our recruitment ad attracted diverse participants.

Identity Threats Questionnaire

Participants were next exposed to 30 identity threat situations, which form the basis of the Identity Threats Questionnaire (see Table 1 and Figure 2). The set of 30 situations was developed through an iterative process. First, multiple members of a diverse research lab were asked to generate a list of experiences, wherein one's minority membership was made salient and/or delegitimized. An initial longer set of categories was refined to arrive at a nonoverlapping list of 30 situations that would fit a range of social identities. These range from more minorly threatening (e.g., a social situation where people are talking about their summer travel plans and one cannot afford to travel) to more major threats (someone assuming the target owes their success to affirmative action). Participants indicated whether they had that experience in the *past week*.

Per each identity threat participants reported experiencing in the past week, we measured participants' feelings of a *lack of*
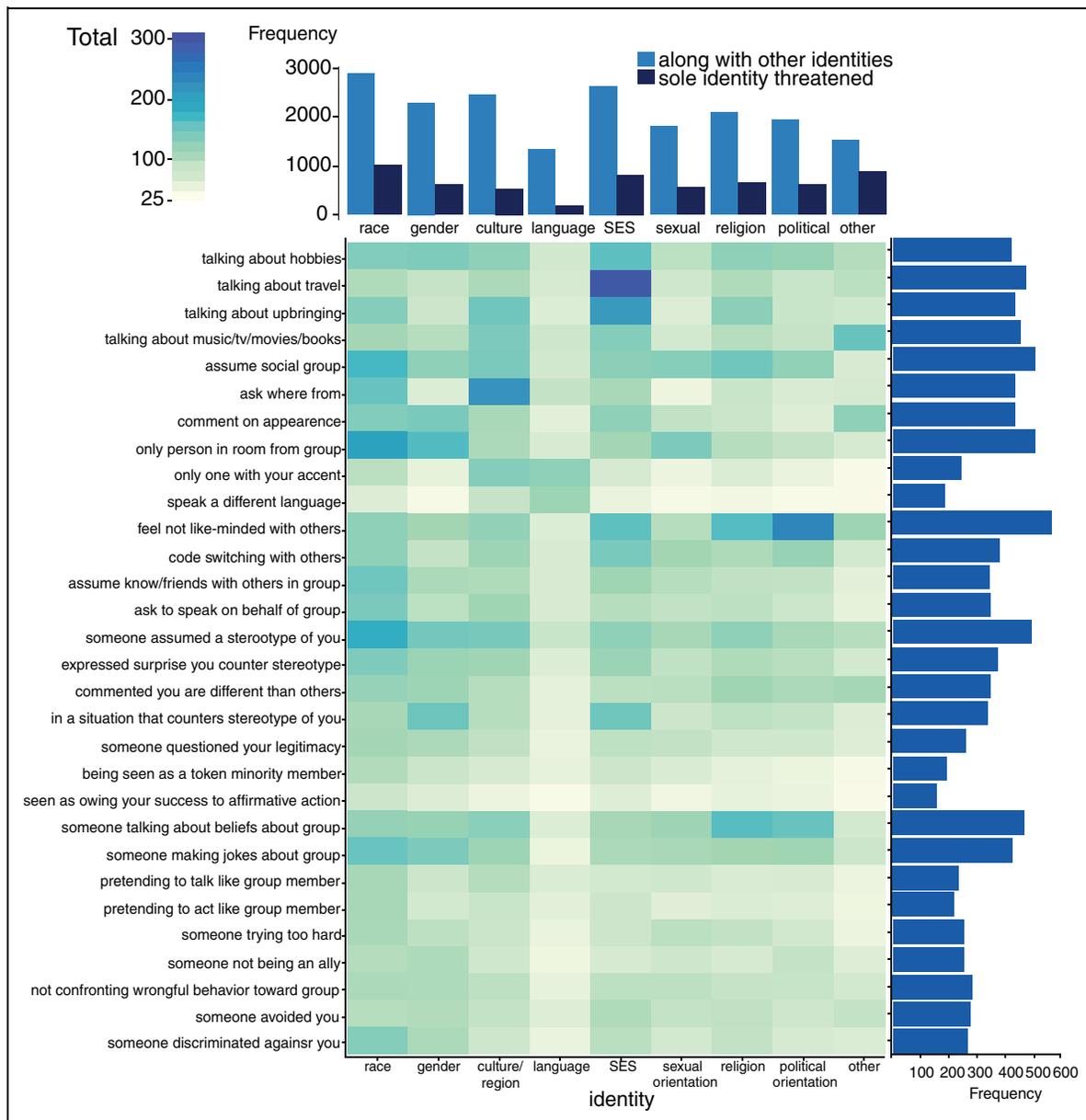
Figure 2. Per each recent identity threat faced in the past week by Study 1 participants, frequencies of the social identity that was threatened, and the category of the identity threat situation. Please see online version for color.

belonging ("I felt like I didn't belong," "I felt like I didn't fit in," "I felt like I really 'stuck out'"), *inauthenticity* ("I felt like I could NOT be the 'real me'", "I felt like I was NOT being authentic," "I felt like I was NOT able to be completely myself"), *exclusion* ("Others did things to reject me," "Others did things to ignore me," "Others did things to exclude me"), and *negative affect*, in the form of anger ("I felt angry," "I felt frustrated,") and sadness ("I felt sad," "I felt hurt"; all from 1 [*not at all*] to 7 [*very much*]).

Factor analyses confirmed our predicted factors (see Supplemental Materials [SOM]), indicating that each should be treated separately in our analyses, rather than combined. For instance, while anger and sadness both capture negative

affect, anger is high in motivational intensity and approach-oriented, whereas sadness is low in motivational intensity and avoidance-oriented (Adams & Kleck, 2005; Gable & Harmon-Jones, 2010). Thus, by entering anger and sadness into models simultaneously, we identify the effects of each that exist beyond any general tendency toward negative affect. By the same token, in all analyses, we also enter both a lack of belonging and exclusion simultaneously. In so doing, we identify the effects of each that exist beyond any general tendency toward feeling isolated. For these reasons, each analysis we conducted simultaneously entered all variables so as to parse out the variance shared between them.

Per each recent identity threat, participants were asked to indicate which identity was threatened (race, gender, culture/region, language, SES, sexual orientation, religion, political orientation, other). In Figure 2, we plot the social identities that felt threatened by each situation (across 40% of our observations, participants felt threatened on a single identity, and 60% represent perceiving a threat on multiple identities).

At the end of the study, participants completed an honesty check asking whether their responses were honest (we signaled understanding of why one might not provide truthful answers, and compensation was promised no matter their answer). Twenty-nine participants indicated that they fabricated their responses, and thus their data were excluded (3% of the data).

Results

Threatened Identities and Identity Threats

Across the 30 categories of identity threat situations, the remaining 967 participants in the past week had experienced 10,956 identity threats in total (with only 1% of participants not recently having experienced any of the identity threat situations). Participants on average had experienced 11.38 identity threats (from the set of 30) in the past week ($SD = 7.83$, 95% CI = [10.28, 12.48]).

Analysis Plan

Given multiple observations per participant, we analyzed the data via multilevel modeling, using the R package lme4. We calculated p values using the R package lmerTest, which uses a Satterthwaite approximation test to approximate the F distribution to calculate degrees of freedom (which are thus non-whole numbers differing by predictor; Kuznetsova, et al., 2013). We included identity threat situation as a random factor (along with participant) in these cross-classified multilevel models—as is the case in the studies that follow. Accordingly, we estimate our effects of interest that are not attributable to any identity threat situation (or participant). Thus, our effects should generalize to other types of identity threats unsampled in these studies (see Judd, et al., 2012).

Predicting Feelings of Inauthenticity

As predicted, above and beyond negative affect, a lack of felt belonging most strongly predicted feelings of inauthenticity (i.e., significantly more than did feeling excluded as indicated by nonoverlapping confidence intervals; Table 2).

Predicting Negative Affect

Aside from covariance between anger and sadness (see italics, Table 2), feelings of exclusion most strongly predicted sadness and anger (i.e., significantly more than did a lack of felt belonging as indicated by nonoverlapping confidence intervals; Table 2).

Table 2. Study 1 Results.

	b	95% CI	SE	df	t	p
Inauthenticity						
Lack of belonging	.36	**[.34, .37]**	.01	10,537.11	41.83	<.0001
Excluded	.12	[.10, .14]	.01	10,612.52	12.61	<.0001
Anger	.10	[.08, .12]	.01	10,505.97	10.26	<.0001
Sadness	.07	[.05, .09]	.01	10,592.70	7.12	<.0001
Sadness						
Lack of belonging	.12	[.11, .14]	.01	10,522.30	13.48	<.0001
Excluded	.21	**[.19, .23]**	.01	10,445.03	22.01	<.0001
Inauthentic	.07	[.05, .09]	.01	10,559.34	7.19	<.0001
Anger	.45	*[.43, .47]*	.01	10,579.95	50.68	<.0001
Anger						
Lack of belonging	.11	[.10, .13]	.01	10,598.73	12.67	<.0001
Excluded	.19	**[.17, .21]**	.01	10,234.34	20.81	<.0001
Inauthentic	.10	[.08, .11]	.01	10,407.48	10.09	<.0001
Sadness	.43	*[.42, .45]*	.01	10,457.55	51.08	<.0001

Note. Per each analysis, all variables are entered simultaneously. Covariance between negative affective states is given in italics, and of remaining variables, strongest predictor (as indicated by nonoverlapping 95% CIs) is given in bold.

Studies 2 and 3

Study 1 found that when a situation threatens one's identity, feeling a lack of belonging strongly predicted feeling inauthentic (i.e., not being able to express one's true self), whereas resulting feelings of exclusion strongly predicted feelings of sadness and anger. To test the robustness of these results, Study 2 replicated Study 1's design, as did Study 3, which also measured identity centrality (Sellers et al., 1997).

Identity centrality has been shown to positively correlate with psychological distress in the face of discrimination (Sellers & Shelton, 2003), and thus, greater identity centrality may predict a lack of felt belonging and exclusion experienced in response to perceived identity threats.

Method

Study 2 was identical to Study 1, as was Study 3, with the exception of the latter also measuring identity centrality. In Study 3, after selecting which of their identities had been previously marginalized and indicating the specific identity in a free-response box, participants also answered per each "In general, this identity is an important part of my self-image" for each selected identity (1 [*not at all*] to 7 [*very much*]). Subsequently, they completed the Identity Threats Questionnaire, and the follow-up measures per each recently experience identity threat (from the past week).

Per each study, we recruited 200 participants with the same ad from Study 1 (Study 2: $N = 82$ men, 116 women, 2 other; $M_{age} = 37.08$, $SD = 11.10$, 95% CI = [35.53, 38.62], range = 18–71; Study 3: $N = 83$ men, 114 women, 3 other; $M_{age} = 37.51$, $SD = 13.41$, 95% CI = [35.64, 39.38], range = 18–96).

Study 1 demonstrated that on average our participants recently experienced approximately 11 identity threat situations (of the 30). Thus, recruiting 200 participants yields a

Table 3. Study 2 Results.

	b	95% CI	SE	df	t	p
Inauthenticity						
Lack of belonging	.37	**[.34, .41]**	.02	2,124.30	18.57	<.0001
Excluded	.18	[.14, .22]	.02	2,180.92	8.20	<.0001
Anger	.10	[.05, .14]	.02	2,141.31	4.19	<.0001
Sadness	.15	[.10, .19]	.02	2,177.33	6.37	<.0001
Sadness						
Lack of belonging	.09	[.05, .13]	.02	2,116.94	4.68	<.0001
Excluded	.22	**[.18, .26]**	.02	2,110.34	11.36	<.0001
Inauthentic	.13	[.09, .17]	.02	2,155.60	6.66	<.0001
Anger	.45	*[.41, .49]*	.02	2,182.37	23.12	<.0001
Anger						
Lack of belonging	.18	[.14, .21]	.02	2,106.27	9.13	<.0001
Excluded	.19	**[.15, .23]**	.02	2,008.26	10.04	<.0001
Inauthentic	.08	[.04, .12]	.02	2,081.26	4.18	<.0001
Sadness	.44	*[.40, .48]*	.02	2,091.98	23.61	<.0001

Note. Per each analysis, all variables are entered simultaneously. Covariance between negative affective states is given in italics, and of remaining variables, strongest predictor (as indicated by nonoverlapping 95% CIs) is given in bold.

Table 4. Study 3 Results.

	b	95% CI	SE	df	t	p
Inauthenticity						
Lack of belonging	.36	**[.33, .40]**	.02	2,106.20	18.45	<.0001
Excluded	.14	[.10, .19]	.02	2,108.60	6.26	<.0001
Anger	.15	[.10, .19]	.02	2,097.42	6.57	<.0001
Sadness	.15	[.10, .19]	.02	2,100.23	6.58	<.0001
Sadness						
Lack of belonging	.11	[.07, .15]	.02	2,105.26	5.40	<.0001
Excluded	.23	**[.19, .27]**	.02	2,085.21	10.62	<.0001
Inauthentic	.14	[.10, .18]	.02	2,079.97	6.68	<.0001
Anger	.36	*[.32, .40]*	.02	2,107.89	17.40	<.0001
Anger						
Lack of belonging	.10	[.06, .14]	.02	2,106.92	4.97	<.0001
Excluded	.20	**[.16, .24]**	.02	2,084.47	9.38	<.0001
Inauthentic	.14	[.10, .18]	.02	2,082.16	6.61	<.0001
Sadness	.35	*[.31, .39]*	.02	2,104.10	17.44	<.0001

Note. Per each analysis, all variables are entered simultaneously. Covariance between negative affective states is given in italics, and of remaining variables, strongest predictor (as indicated by nonoverlapping 95% CIs) is given in bold.

sample size of over 2,000 observations of identity threats and thus highly powerful analyses. We thus recruit for this sample size for the remainder of the studies (using the same sample size as prior studies with this kind of design; see Slepian et al., 2017; Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019).

All elements of both studies were preregistered, including methods, sample size, analysis plan, and rules for data exclusions (Study 2: osf.io/b2ejw/; Study 3: osf.io/tucdf). Five Study 2 and six Study 3 participants indicated that they fabricated their responses, and thus their data were excluded.

Results

Study 2 participants recently experienced 2,191 identity threats ($M = 11.24$, $SD = 7.06$, 95% CI = [10.24, 12.23]). Study 3 participants recently experienced 2,118 identity threats ($M = 10.92$, $SD = 7.11$, 95% CI = [9.91, 11.92]).

As in Study 1, we entered all variables simultaneously to isolate unique and independent relationships. Again aside from the other variables, (1) a lack of felt belonging more strongly predicted feelings of inauthenticity (than did exclusion) and (2) feelings of exclusion more strongly predicted negative affect (than did a lack of belonging); see Tables 3 and 4. In Study 2, the notably strong link between feelings of exclusion and negative affect seemed specific to sadness, whereas in Studies 1 and 3, feelings of exclusion were strongly associated with both sadness and anger.

Study 3 also measured identity centrality, which did not moderate the relationship between a lack of felt belonging nor exclusion on our dependent measures (see SOM). We consequently, as specified by our preregistered analysis plan, then examined identity centrality as an antecedent to feelings of a lack of belonging and exclusion.

Identity centrality predicted a lack of felt belonging, $b = 0.19$, 95% CI = [0.13, 0.25], $SE = 0.03$, $t(1,803.18) = 6.68$, $p < .00001$, as well as feelings of exclusion, $b = 0.18$, 95% CI = [0.12, 0.23], $SE = 0.03$, $t(1,848.59) = 6.59$, $p < .00001$. Hence, the more central the identity that was threatened by the experience, the more individuals felt both excluded and that they did not belong.

Study 4

In Studies 1–3, we found that that when a social situation threatened one's identity, a lack of felt belonging strongly predicted feeling unable to be one's true self, whereas resulting feelings of being excluded strongly predicted negative affect (sadness in Study 2 and sadness and anger in Studies 1 and 3). To clarify the different patterns of negative affect across the two studies, we sought to examine these relationships again in Study 4.

In Study 4, we also sought to examine a new context and new outcome. Unlike at home or when with friends, when people are in the workplace, those with marginalized identities may be especially likely to feel that they do not belong. This is highly problematic given that feelings of belonging foster increased commitment to the workplace (Cole & Bruch, 2006; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Wiener, 1982). Study 4 thus examined whether these results would hold for identity threats faced in the workplace.

We again examined whether a lack of felt belonging would be particularly linked to feeling that one cannot be oneself, whereas feelings of exclusion would be particularly linked to negative affect. Additionally, we also examined whether these variables predicted reduced commitment to one's workplace.

Table 5. Changes to Procedure to Capture Workplace Context.

	Studies 1–3	Study 4
Advertisement	Have you ever felt like you don't belong because of your social group? (e.g., race, gender, SES, sexual orientation, religion, culture, etc.). If so, we would like to hear about your experience to help people cope with these kinds of challenges.	Have you ever felt like you don't belong AT WORK because of your social group? (e.g., race, gender, SES, sexual orientation, religion, culture, etc.). If so, we would like to hear about your experience to help people cope with these kinds of challenges.
Identity Threats Questionnaire	Have you been in a situation where . . .	Have you been in a situation AT WORK where . . .
Additional measurement (Study 4)		Per each identity threat experienced at work, we measured the extent to which it reduced workplace commitment: • This experience made me feel less identified with my workplace • This experience made me feel less committed to my workplace • This experience made me feel less satisfied in working at my workplace from 1 [*not at all*] to 7 [*very much*] Scored, such that increasing numbers indicate increasing workplace commitment.
Additional descriptive measures (Study 4)		Tenure at workplace (*M* = 5.63 years, *SD* = 5.82); management level (5% top management, 25% middle management, 18.5% lower management, 51.5% nonmanagement), and industry.[a]

[a]Study 4 participants came from diverse industries: consumer goods (25), finance (22), service (20), education (18), technology (16), medical (15), manufacturing (15), arts (8), government (7), transportation (6), nonprofit (5), recreation (5), construction (4), corporate (4), media (4), legal (3), and agriculture (2).

Method

The procedure was identical to Study 3 (79 men, 120 women, 1 other; $M_{age} = 37.46$, $SD = 11.05$, 95% CI = [35.92, 39.00], range = 19–66), with the exception that we now asked participants about identity threats recently experienced specifically at work and also measured workplace commitment (see Table 5). All elements of this study were preregistered, including methods, sample size, analysis plan, and rules for data exclusions (osf.io/63qmf). Five participants indicated that they fabricated their responses, and thus their data were excluded. An additional 15 participants indicated that they were not currently employed and were thus also excluded.

Results

Across the 30 categories of identity threat situations, our participants in the past week had experienced 2,107 identity threats at work, in total. Participants on average had experienced 11.77 identity threats in the past week ($SD = 7.31$, 95% CI = [10.69, 12.85]).

Predicting Feelings of Inauthenticity

We conducted the same analyses as in the prior studies, entering each measured experience as simultaneous predictors of our outcome variables. Again, a lack of felt belonging most strongly predicted feelings of inauthenticity (as indicated by nonoverlapping confidence intervals; Table 6).

Table 6. Study 4 Results.

	b	95% CI	SE	df	t	p
Inauthenticity						
Lack of belonging	.40	**[.36, .44]**	.02	2,068.68	18.17	<.001
Excluded	.17	[.12, .22]	.03	2,072.89	6.55	<.001
Anger	.10	[.05, .15]	.03	2,094.09	3.78	<.001
Sadness	.09	[.04, .14]	.03	2,089.29	3.57	<.001
Sadness						
Lack of belonging	.14	[.11, .18]	.02	2,083.13	7.19	<.001
Excluded	.22	**[.18, .27]**	.02	1,898.33	10.18	<.001
Inauthentic	.07	[.03, .10]	.02	2,074.12	3.62	<.001
Anger	.48	*[.44, .52]*	.02	2,055.70	23.98	<.001
Anger						
Lack of belonging	.10	[.06, .14]	.02	2,101.63	5.05	<.00001
Excluded	.21	**[.17, .25]**	.02	2,026.94	9.94	<.00001
Inauthentic	.07	[.03, .10]	.02	2,093.19	3.78	<.001
Sadness	.44	*[.41, .48]*	.02	2,099.56	23.75	<.00001

Note. Per each analysis, all variables are entered simultaneously. Covariance between negative affective states is given in italics, and of remaining variables, strongest predictor (as indicated by nonoverlapping 95% CIs) is given in bold.

Predicting Negative Affect

As in Studies 1 and 3, aside from covariance between anger and sadness (see italics, Table 6), feelings of exclusion most strongly predicted sadness and anger (i.e., significantly more than did feeling a lack of belonging as indicated by nonoverlapping confidence intervals; Table 6).

Table 7. Predicting Work Commitment (Study 4).

	b	95% CI	SE	df	t	p
Inauthentic	−.12	[−.16, −.09]	.02	2,080.68	−7.52	<.0001
Anger	−.19	[−.23, −.15]	.02	2,047.34	−9.47	<.0001
Sadness	−.14	[−.17, −.10]	.02	2,068.62	−7.16	<.0001
Lack of belonging	−.16	[−.20, −.13]	.02	1,996.51	−9.06	<.0001
Excluded	−.24	[−.28, −.20]	.02	2,060.42	−12.20	<.0001

Identity Centrality

Given the lack of a moderation by identity centrality in Study 2, we did not predict it to moderate effects on inauthenticity or negative affect (SOM). We thus again examined identity centrality as a predictor of feeling a lack of belonging and exclusion. Indeed, identity centrality predicted a lack of felt belonging, $b = 0.10$, 95% CI = [0.03, 0.17], $SE = 0.03$, $t(1,490.56) = 2.92$, $p = .004$, as well as feelings of exclusion, $b = 0.12$, 95% CI = [0.06, 0.18], $SE = 0.03$, $t(1,839.85) = 3.75$, $p < .001$.

Workplace Commitment

We next examined all variables as simultaneous predictors of workplace commitment. Indeed, as can be seen in Table 7, each independently predicted lower workplace commitment.

In sum, it seems that feeling a lack of belonging/inauthenticity and exclusion/negative affect from identity threats faced in professional settings each relate to lower commitment to the workplace.

Studies 2–4: Well-Being

For ease of presentation, we finally report here that in each of these preregistered studies, we also collected three indicators of well-being: loneliness, life satisfaction, and global physical health. Given that the number of participants (and hence the number of observations for these person-level outcome measures) is far smaller than the number of identity threats experienced, our preregistered analysis plan was to analyze a pooled data set on these measures (yielding ∼600 observations across the three studies, per well-being measure) to achieve statistical power that approaches the other analyses from these same studies (∼2,000 observations per each analysis).

We measured loneliness with the 3-item Loneliness Scale (which performs as well as the longer UCLA Loneliness Scale; see Hughes et al., 2004; example item, "How often do you feel isolated from others?" from 1 [hardly ever] to 7 [often]). Participants also completed the Satisfaction With Life Scale (e.g., "In most ways my life is close to my ideal," from 1 [not at all] to 7 [very much]; Diener et al., 1985) as well as the often used General Health subscale from the RAND 36-Item Health Survey (Hays et al., 1993; from 0 to 100, e.g., "I seem to get sick a little

Table 8. Pooled Analyses (Studies 2–4).

	b	95% CI	SE	df	t	p
Inauthenticity						
Lack of belonging	.38	**[.35, .40]**	.01	6,417.67	31.75	<.00001
Excluded	.17	[.14, .19]	.01	6,435.82	12.47	<.00001
Anger	.11	[.09, .14]	.01	6,399.93	8.25	<.00001
Sadness	.13	[.10, .15]	.01	6,422.01	9.44	<.00001
Sadness						
Lack of belonging	.12	[.09, .14]	.01	6,384.34	10.01	<.00001
Excluded	.22	**[.20, .25]**	.01	6,208.17	18.49	<.00001
Inauthentic	.11	[.09, .13]	.01	6,374.08	9.68	<.00001
Anger	.43	[.41, .45]	.01	6,419.61	37.33	<.00001
Anger						
Lack of belonging	.13	[.11, .15]	.01	6,421.40	11.26	<.00001
Excluded	.20	**[.18, .22]**	.01	6,232.65	16.73	<.00001
Inauthentic	.09	[.07, .11]	.01	6,346.76	8.33	<.00001
Sadness	.41	[.39, .43]	.01	6,395.67	37.47	<.00001

Note. Per analysis, strongest predictor is given in bold (as indicated by nonoverlapping 95% CIs), aside from covariation of negative affective states.

easier than other people" [rev], z-scored for ease of interpretation; see Slepian et al., 2017; Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019).

First, to fully present this pooled data from Studies 2 to 4, we conduct the prior analyses on the pooled data set. These pooled analyses replicate the prior effects: a lack of felt belonging more strongly predicting feelings of inauthenticity and exclusion more strongly predicting anger and sadness (Table 8).

Figures 3 and 4 present the demographics of the pooled Study 2–4 participants as well as how these varied by identity threat situations experienced.

As can be seen in Table 9, from an experienced identity threat, (1) sadness and anger were each associated with lower self-reported physical health and higher loneliness, (2) feelings of exclusion and inauthenticity were associated with higher loneliness, and (3) sadness was also associated with lower life satisfaction.

Loneliness

Note that a lack of felt belonging did not have an independent direct relationship with loneliness. Thus, feeling that one does not belong during an identity threat is not the same as feeling lonely in general (see also Slepian, Halevy, & Galinsky, 2019). However, there was a relationship between feelings of inauthenticity and loneliness, suggesting an indirect effect of reduced belonging on loneliness via inauthenticity.[1] Given that there exists no current standard practice on how to bootstrap cross-classified multilevel models for indirect effect tests, we turn to a recently introduced formula for calculating an indirect effect that circumvents this issue, the $Z_{Mediation}$ statistic (Iacobucci, 2012). The logic of the standard indirect effect test is maintained in this method. By taking the product of the a and b coefficients divided by their standard errors, and dividing by the pooled standard error, this approach produces a $Z_{Mediation}$ statistic, a standardized representation of the strength of the
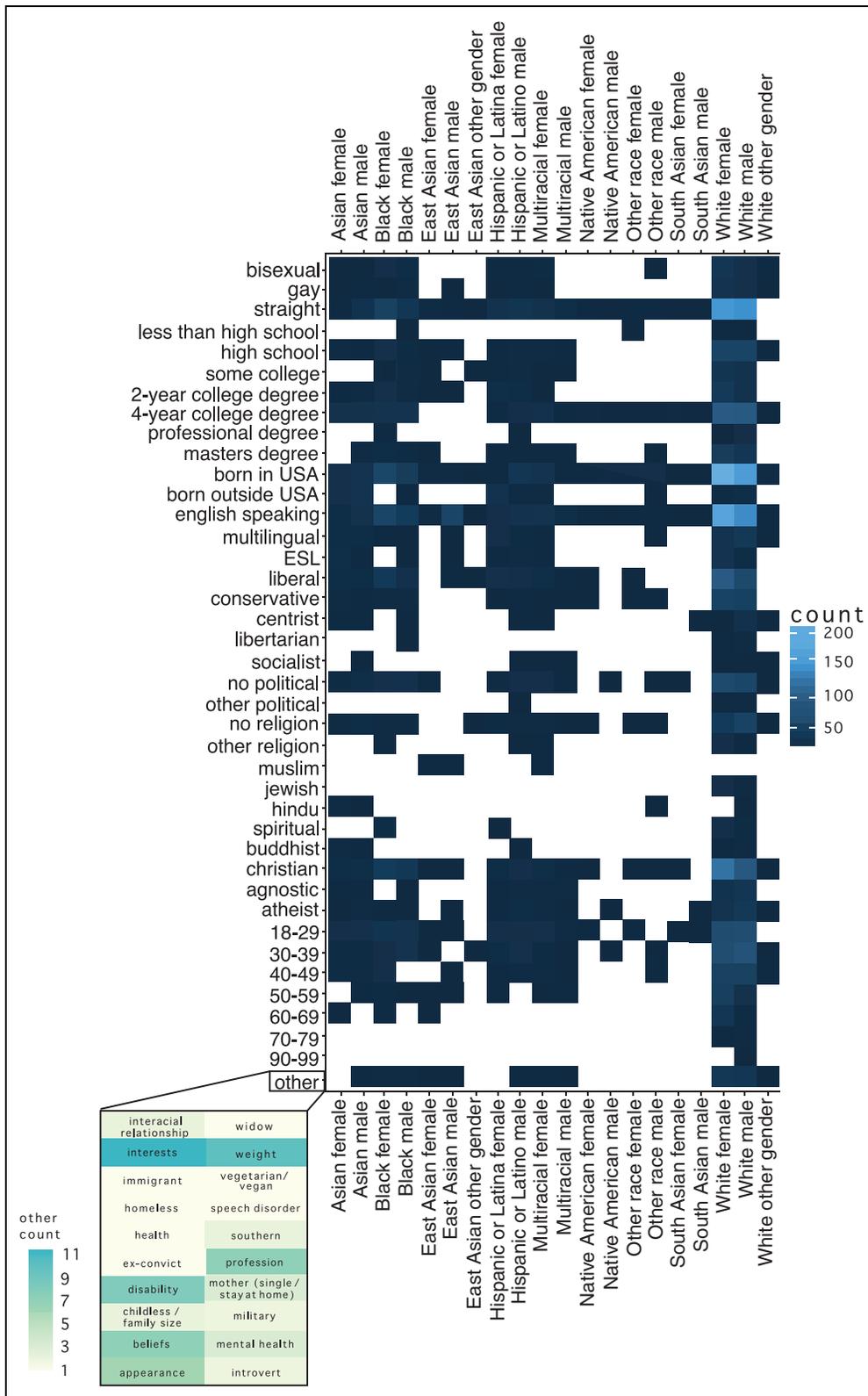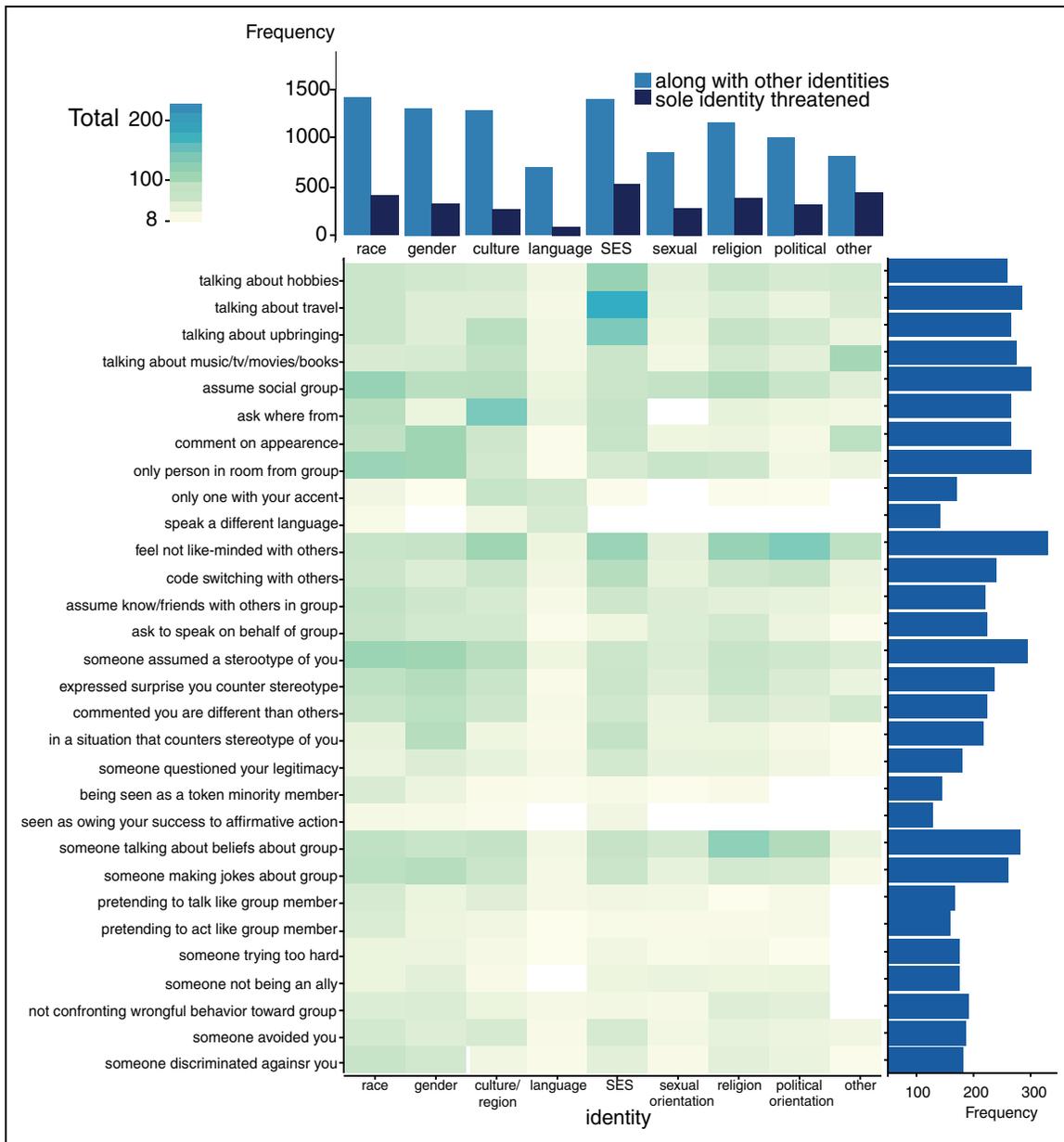
Figure 3. A visualization of the broad diversity of Studies 2–4 participants. Please see online version for color.

Figure 4. Per each recent identity threat (*N* = 6,416) faced in the past week by Studies 2–4 participants, frequencies of the social identity that was threatened, and the category of the identity threat situation. Please see online version for color.

indirect effect, whereby its significance can be tested via a *z*-test.

Indeed, as can be seen in Table 10, feeling a lack of belonging predicted loneliness through feelings of inauthenticity (independent of feelings of exclusion, anger, and sadness). In contrast, swapping the proposed IV and mediator did not yield a significant indirect effect (Table 10).

Self-Reported Physical Health

Negative affective experiences were the only variables that had independent relationships with self-reported physical health (Table 9). Exclusion was the strongest predictor of negative affect, aside from covariance between anger and sadness (Table

8). This pattern of results suggests an indirect effect of exclusion on lower global physical health through anger and sadness.

Indeed, as can be seen in Table 10, feeling excluded from an identity threat predicted lower global physical health through anger and through sadness (independent of feelings of a lack of belonging, inauthenticity, and the other type of negative affect). In contrast to these significant indirect effects predicting self-reported physical health, swapping the proposed IV and mediator did not yield significant indirect effects (Table 10).

Life Satisfaction

Only sadness from an identity threat had an independent direct relationship with life satisfaction (Table 9). Given the strong

Table 9. Predicting Well-Being Measures (Studies 2–4 Pooled Data).

	b	95% CI	SE	df	t	p
Loneliness						
Inauthentic	.11	[.06, .16]	.03	586.52	4.52	<.0001
Anger	.05	[.02, .09]	.02	592.41	2.82	.005
Sadness	.09	[.05, .13]	.02	594.30	4.41	<.001
Lack of belonging	.02	[−.03, .06]	.02	587.58	0.81	.42
Excluded	.12	[.07, .17]	.02	586.82	4.86	<.0001
Physical health						
Inauthentic	−.07	[−.16, .02]	.04	533.65	−1.59	.11
Anger	−.10	[−.17, −.04]	.03	528.00	−3.17	.002
Sadness	−.12	[−.19, −.05]	.04	531.11	−3.31	.001
Lack of belonging	.02	[−.05, .10]	.04	532.54	0.62	.53
Excluded	−.004	[−.09, .08]	.04	537.92	−0.09	.93
Life satisfaction						
Inauthentic	−.03	[−.08, .02]	.03	528.44	−1.10	.27
Anger	.02	[−.02, .06]	.02	520.22	1.15	.25
Sadness	−.05	[−.10, −.01]	.02	521.42	−2.58	.01
Lack of belonging	−.02	[−.07, .03]	.02	525.52	−0.88	.38
Excluded	.04	[−.01, .09]	.03	531.94	1.56	.12

Table 10. Indirect Effect Tests (Studies 2–4).

IV	Mediator	DV	$Z_{Mediation}$	p
Lack of belonging	Inauthenticity	Loneliness	3.65	<.001
Inauthenticity	Lack of belonging	Loneliness	0.997	.32
Excluded	Anger	Health	−3.28	.001
Anger	Excluded	Health	−0.0996	.92
Excluded	Sadness	Health	−2.97	.003
Sadness	Excluded	Health	−0.0995	.92
Excluded	Sadness	Life satisfaction	−2.48	.01
Sadness	Excluded	Life satisfaction	1.31	.19

relationship between feeling excluded and sadness (Table 8), we tested the indirect effect of exclusion on life satisfaction via sadness (Table 10).

Indeed, feeling excluded from an identity threat predicted lower life satisfaction through sadness (independent of feelings of a lack of belonging, inauthenticity, and anger). As with the other analyses, swapping the proposed IV with the mediator did not yield an indirect effect (Table 10).

While the present results are correlational and therefore preclude causal claims, these findings on well-being outcomes (which fit models *only* where a lack of belonging and exclusion are IVs, and inauthenticity and anger/sadness are mediators, and not the reverse) are consistent with our broader conceptualization that feeling a lack of belonging promotes feelings of inauthenticity (as also predicted by Schmader & Sedikides, 2018) and that feeling excluded promotes negative affect (also consistent with prior experiments; see Leary, 2001, 2010).

Discussion

Several different research traditions have focused on feelings of belonging (e.g., the literatures on belongingness, role congruity, identity compatibility; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Lee & Robbins, 1995; Sani et al., 2008), whereas a separate set of research traditions have examined feelings of inclusion/exclusion (e.g., ostracism, social exclusion, relational value, rejection sensitivity; Byrne, 2005; Downey & Feldman, 1995; Leary, 2015; Williams, 2007). Moreover, within a single empirical setting, different research traditions have often focused on a single distinct group and context (e.g., African Americans and education, women in STEM, bias against those who have less education, low SES, those who speak a different language, are elderly, are nonheterosexual, are overweight, have a mental illness). In the current work, we sought to bridge these separate research traditions by examining in the same empirical setting a highly diverse set of marginalized identities (i.e., all those in the preceding parenthetical and more; see Figures 1–4) while also simultaneously examining and distinguishing feeling a lack of belonging and feeling excluded.

This work clarifies that belonging and inclusion are distinct and separable constructs. A lack of felt belonging was most strongly related to feeling unable to be one's true self (i.e., feeling inauthentic), whereas feelings of exclusion were most strongly related to negative affect (i.e., sadness and anger). In turn, feelings of inauthenticity and negative affect were more proximally associated with well-being than a lack of belonging and exclusion.

These findings were consistent with an indirect effect model, whereby a lack of belonging was linked to lower well-being through feeling unable to be one's true self, and exclusion was linked to lower well-being through negative affect. That we did not find indirect effects on well-being when swapping our proposed IV and mediator points to a process model: (1) feeling unable to be one's true self most strongly follows from a lack of felt belonging and (2) negative affect most strongly follows from exclusion, and both pathways, in turn, independently relate to an aspect of well-being. Importantly, the present results are correlational, and thus, no causal claims can be made. Future work could measure affect and state authenticity in paradigms that manipulate experiences of belonging and inclusion.

This research extends prominent theoretical perspectives that speak to the possible experiences tied to identity threats. For one, our results are consistent with the State Authenticity as Fit to the Environment model (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). This model suggests that when an environment leads someone to feel that they do not fit in, the individual will experience reduced feelings of authenticity. In such situations, it has been theorized that subsequent feelings of self-consciousness, self-monitoring, and self-presentation may lead one to feel they are unable to be their true self. The present findings are consistent with this model. Similarly, our results are consistent with work on discrimination, whereby the degree to which one's stigmatized identity is tied to one's self-concept (i.e., identity

centrality) predicts increased experiences of discrimination and the negative psychological ramifications thereof (Sellers & Shelton, 2003). As a whole, our findings bring these literatures into dialogue by clarifying that feeling unable to be one's true self is central to the marginalization experienced by those holding stigmatized identities.

As a benefit of our analytical methods, we estimate relationships between our variables of interest as they generalize across diverse identities and identity threats. Our findings cannot be attributed to any particular identity threat situation and hence must reflect more general processes that transcend the different identity threats. For instance, across diverse identities and circumstances, feeling excluded might correspond with perceiving others as having some personal bias against oneself, or other interpersonal dynamics (e.g., Chow et al., 2008; Henson et al., 2013; Richman & Leary, 2009), which result in negative affect. In contrast, across diverse identities and circumstances, feeling a lack of belonging might correspond with judging an environment as not being welcoming, explaining the feeling of not being able to be one's authentic self in that environment (e.g., Walton & Cohen, 2007).

Finally, we encourage future implementation of the new Identity Threats Questionnaire introduced here. Our results are not specific to any social group or kind of identity threat. Rather, within the same empirical setting, our results span diverse marginalized identities and threats to those identities (see Figures 1 and 2 and 1-4). Across our 30 categories of identity threat situations, we found that participants with a marginalized identity, on average, had experienced 11 of these identity threats in the past week. Thus, an advantage of the Identity Threats Questionnaire is that it enables collecting large data sets from underrepresented groups and allows for testing specific theoretical hypotheses across a breadth of experience types.

While this article sought to estimate relationships that generalize across the diversity of marginalized identities that people can hold, future work could make more focused comparisons. For example, if a study aimed to compare gender discrimination to race discrimination, a researcher could specifically recruit individuals with experiences of gender identity threat or race identity threat. By examining responses to common identity threats that can be experienced across different social groups, the methods that we introduce might make such comparisons more tractable as well as examinations of intersectionality. Future research could also seek to experimentally reframe identity threats that have been experienced in order to identify means of mitigating the identified harms. Lastly, future work could more closely examine the role of identity centrality, in particular when it makes an identity threat more harmful, and when it provides a buffer.

In the current work, we treated the identity threat faced by participants as a random factor and also recruited a highly diverse set of participants with a broad array of marginalized identities. Our results thus not only generalize across the wide diversity of our participants but also should generalize to other unsampled identity threats and contexts (see Judd et al., 2012).

Through these novel sampling techniques, we hope future work can gain better insight into downstream consequences of having a marginalized identity and how to intervene.

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Supplemental Material

The supplemental material is available in the online version of the article.

Notes

1. Note that these specific indirect effects were not preregistered. Rather, we preregistered that we would enter all variables simultaneously when examining well-being outcomes. From this analysis, it was the dissociation that emerged (between our proposed IVs and meditators) on these well-being outcomes that suggested we conduct the specific indirect effect tests reported.

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