

Seeking authenticity in diverse contexts: How identities and environments constrain “free” choice

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Abstract

Diversity and inclusion are a key goal in 21st century society, but people continue to self-segregate in occupations, communities, and everyday interactions. Are people's choices to separate by groups into these different spaces truly “free?” In this paper, we review and extend a new framework for understanding how social identities contextually and automatically constrain the choices people make. We consider how situations subtly cue a sense of fit to one's identity, automatically eliciting state authenticity and a desire to return to those settings that afford authenticity and avoid those that do not. Actors and observers alike often explain these behaviors after the fact as freely chosen. We discuss how the SAFE model can clarify and expand what it means to feel a sense of belonging and explain why those who are advantaged in a setting are often less aware of the way in which their identity advantages them. We end by highlighting how environments can be shaped to foster fit and authenticity among members of underrepresented groups as a means to facilitate diversity.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Modern democracies pride themselves on creating equal opportunities for people regardless of race, ethnicity, and gender. Yet these same societies still show evidence of segregation in occupations, housing, and schools. For example, Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in education (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), but women remain severely underrepresented across several fields (Corbett & Hill, 2015). The Fair Housing Act of 1968 prohibits racial discrimination in housing (Massey, 2015), yet

U.S. neighborhoods remain segregated along racial and ethnic dimensions (Rugh & Massey, 2014). Why do these patterns of segregation persist even after policies have attempted to dismantle structural barriers?

Some perspectives contend that self-segregation can reflect personal choices, under an assumption that choice reflects deliberate actions that are freely and fully endorsed by the actor (for a review, see Ryan & Deci, 2006). For example, occupational segregation by gender is posited to reflect intrinsic (and some argue innate) differences in vocational interests (Block, Croft, De Souza, & Schmader, 2018; Ceci, Williams, & Barnett, 2009; Lippa, 1998). Even acknowledging that structural barriers continue to promote housing segregation in America (Rothstein, 2015), preferences for homophily are also likely to play a role in where people choose to live (Clark, 1991). We question the degree to which these patterns of self-segregation are “freely and fully endorsed.”

In this paper, we review and extend the state authenticity as fit to environment (SAFE) model (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018), a new framework for understanding how social identities constrain the choices people make. We consider how situations subtly cue a sense of fit to one's identity, eliciting state authenticity. The choice to return to those settings that afford authenticity and avoid those that do not provides a compelling explanation for patterns of self-segregation. As we will discuss, the SAFE model can clarify and expand what it means to feel a sense of belonging and explain why those who are in the majority in a setting are often less aware of the way in which their identity advantages them. We end by highlighting how environments can be shaped to foster fit and authenticity for diverse groups.

2 | STATE AUTHENTICITY AS FIT TO ENVIRONMENT

Since its conception, social psychology has sought to address how people interact with the environment around them. Kurt Lewin's field theory, first published in 1939, proposed that human behavior could ultimately be understood as a function of the person and their environment. Armed with this starting assumption, social psychological research has considered ways in which both internal and external factors influence human behavior. In the language of contemporary dual process accounts, people's choices to enter some environments and not others is a function of conscious, internally motivated choices as well as automatically activated, externally constrained preferences (Alósferrer & Strack, 2014). We argue that individuals' implicit preferences for environments are likely to be shaped by their social identities and stereotypic beliefs attached to them. Because these stereotypes are themselves culturally constructed, these processes represent extrinsic factors that constrain people's ability to make decisions based solely on intrinsic motivations. And yet, people have an ability to justify their decisions and preferences after the fact (Cooper, 2007; Elster, 1983; Festinger, 1957; Kay, Jimenez, & Jost, 2002) that might convince them and others that such actions are the result of free choice.

A central assertion of the SAFE model is that people are automatically attracted to environments where they experience fit. Prior work has often observed positive cognitive (Markus, 1977), affective (Swann, 2011), and/or motivational consequences (Higgins, 2005) when the environment fits the person. While organizational theorists have considered the importance of person-environment fit at work (Edwards, Cable, Williamson, Lambert, & Shipp, 2006), there has not been an overarching theoretical frame on how person-environment influences extends to behavioral choices more generally.

In the SAFE model, state authenticity is a subjective signal of fit to one's environment. Similar to other humanistic theories (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Maslow, 1943), the SAFE model assumes that people have a fundamental motivation to feel authentic. Regardless of cultural variation in how the self is defined (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), people are automatically drawn to environments where they expect to feel authentic and repelled from those where they do not (for a review of cultural variation on state authenticity, see Slabu, Lenton, Sedikides, & Bruder, 2014). This is not to say that other motivations cannot overwhelm the tendency to seek authenticity. However, we believe that many of the choices people make are automatically guided by an implicit desire to feel authentic, but authenticity is itself constrained by membership in a socially devalued, lower status, or marginalized group.

Unlike *trait* authenticity (Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Kernis, 2003; Kernis & Goldman, 2006), *state* authenticity fluctuates depending on the situation and the context (Heppner et al., 2008; Lenton, Slabu, & Sedikides, 2016). In fact, evidence suggests that authenticity is more often experienced as a state of mind rather than a trait of the person (Lenton et al., 2016). Thus, authenticity does not describe the person (*she is authentic*) or one's volitional actions (*just be yourself*). Rather, authentic is what one feels when the environment is a good fit to salient or important aspects of one's identity (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). Once in a setting, individuals might have little control over how authentic they feel or can choose to be, and yet these feelings of authenticity guide their approach and avoidance of some contexts over others.

The SAFE model outlines a conceptual framework for three different ways in which the environment can fit the person: (1) self-concept fit, (2) goal fit, and (3) social fit. *Self-concept fit* is the extent to which features in an environment activate central attributes of a person's core self-concept. These core attributes are the most self-defining or "default" features in the complex and multifaceted cognitive structure of the self (Sedikides & Spencer, 2007). This default self-concept might be activated by some environments and not others (Markus & Wurf, 1987). A scientifically minded student might feel self-concept fit in a laboratory, yet the same student could feel a lack of fit in an arts studio.

Goal fit is the degree to which the motivational structures within the environment fit or afford an individual's own internalized goals and values. Whereas self-concept fit is cued by simply spending time in a space without doing anything, goal fit requires that individuals be actively engaged in a goal-oriented task (as is often the case; Guillaume et al., 2016). The same scientifically minded student might feel goal fit in a science class that requires analytic thought, but a lack of goal fit if the class instead preferences rote memorization over analytic reasoning.

Finally, *social fit* is the extent to which other people within the environment actively accept and validate one's true sense of self. As we will discuss in the next section, the construct of social fit is most closely related to what most psychological scholars might call belonging. The scientifically minded student will feel social fit among peers who validate her passion for science, but a lack of social fit among family who lack an understanding of this aspect of her identity.

Each type of fit cues a corresponding state of fluency. Cognitive fluency is the ease of processing self-relevant information when the environment cues a self-concept in alignment with one's true self. Motivational fluency is the ease of goal pursuit that occurs when the environment's goal structures are aligned with one's motivational orientation. Finally, interpersonal fluency is the lack of restraint experienced in social interactions when other people in the environment accept and validate a person's sense of self (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). Together, the presence of fit and fluency will lead to a sense of authenticity, or the ability to be oneself in that context. A lack of fit will lead to the presence of cognitive, motivational, and/or interpersonal *disfluency*, and each type of disfluency can disrupt feelings of authenticity.

Because fluency is optimal, people become more consciously aware of disfluencies and inauthenticity than when they feel authentic—an *asymmetry of awareness hypothesis* that we discuss more below. And although a lack of fit can automatically cue disfluencies that lead one to exit an identity incongruent context, the motivation for control can lead individuals to interpret their behaviors as free chosen (Wegner & Wheatley, 1999). Importantly, because members of socially devalued groups more often find themselves in situations that do not fit their identity, they can feel that they have freely chosen to self-segregate from domains dominated by more advantaged groups.

3 | WHY FOCUS ON STATE AUTHENTICITY AS THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING PATTERNS OF SELF-SEGREGATION?

Scholars familiar with the current literature might reasonably ask why we would focus on the construct of authenticity to explain patterns of self-segregation, when research on similar topics has often focused on people's sense of belonging (e.g., Good, Rattan, & Dweck, 2012; Leary & Kelly, 2009; Walton & Brady, 2017; Walton & Cohen, 2011). We do not dispute that a fundamental motivation for belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) plays a role in the choices people make. However, there are several good reasons to distinguish between belonging and authenticity.

First, other theoretical perspectives have isolated belonging and authenticity as distinct motivations. Maslow's (1954) made a clear distinction between the motivation to feel connected to others and the motivation to fulfill one's true potential. For Maslow, the need for belonging is an "unsatisfied hunger for contact, for intimacy, for belongingness" (Maslow, 1954, p. 44), whereas self-actualization is characterized by being "true to [one's] own nature" (Maslow, 1954, p. 46). More recently, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) makes distinctions between relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Similar to these perspectives, we emphasize the ways in which environments afford these distinct motives.

Second, the SAFE model suggests that the social validation one gets from others (i.e., satisfying the need for belonging) is only one of three distinct routes to feeling authentic. Social fit, or belonging, might be the most powerful pathway to authenticity. And indeed, existing theory and a research on stigma and belonging often focus primarily on the implied, expected, or actual cues to social fit (e.g., Good et al., 2012; Walton & Brady, 2017). Yet experience sampling studies of authenticity suggest that people report feeling like their true self in situations that do not necessarily involve other people (Lenton et al., 2016). Such findings imply that a broader intrapersonal construct might explain what motivates the desire to seek out situations where one can feel like their true self.

Finally, by parsing the construct of fit into these three distinct categories, we maximize explanatory power. In some situations, the effects of goal fit might be divergent from those of social fit. First-generation college students might feel that other people at their university accept them (high social fit) but might still find that the university embraces culturally independent learning practices and values that are misaligned with their own more interdependent values (low goal fit; Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012). The ability to distinguish between these sometimes competing concerns is a key contribution of the SAFE framework but requires a distinction between state authenticity and belonging.

Based on these observations, state authenticity and its component processes provide a new lens through which to understand self-segregation. To illustrate, consider the evidence that people seek out communities comprised of ideologically like-minded individuals (Bishop, 2009 I; Motyl, Iyer, Oishi, Trawalter, & Nosek, 2014). Motyl and colleagues argue that this ideological self-segregation is, in part, motivated by a psychological need for belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Motyl et al., 2014), but the items used to measure belonging in this research include both social acceptance (i.e., belonging) as well as a more general sense of feeling comfortable and at home (i.e., authenticity). We suspect that individuals who migrate on the basis of ideological similarity seek a place where the surrounding environment activates self-defining attributes (self-concept fit), institutional structures afford their values and goals (goal fit), and other people will accept them and validate their views (social fit). Below, we review how the SAFE model provides an overarching account for patterns of self-segregation that maintain the social hierarchy by subtly constraining the contexts where socially devalued individuals can feel authentic, while convincing them and others that their selection of identity-congruent environments and roles are freely chosen.

4 | THE ROLE OF SOCIAL IDENTITY IN SELF-SEGREGATION AND AN ASYMMETRY OF AWARENESS

Returning to the notion of choice as meaningfully constrained by identity, the processes described above can be extended to understand how social groups self-segregate into different environments, roles, and occupations.

4.1 | Majority status facilitates fluency, authenticity, and identity unawareness

For members of the advantaged majority, the environments they encounter on a daily basis are more likely to be constructed for and by members of their own social group. Although majority group members can experience a lack of fit in environments not constructed for them (i.e., a White man occupying a space for Black women), this is likely to be a relatively rare occurrence. Most environments will afford a greater degree of authenticity and fluency to advantaged

group members than to those who are socially devalued. For members of the majority group, these advantaged environments automatically activate core aspects of self-definition (Markus & Wurf, 1987), cuing self-concept fit and cognitive fluency. Members of advantaged social groups will also enjoy greater motivational fluency to the degree that environments contain motivational structures congruent with their own goal orientation (Higgins, 2005). Finally, members of advantaged groups can more easily assume that others in the environment will accept and validate them for who they are and not judge them based on preconceived notions or stereotypes, facilitating smooth interactions (Brewer, 1999; Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Dittmann, & Crosby, 2008).

Central to the experience of state authenticity is the lack of awareness that characterizes fluency, flow states, and “being cognition” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Maslow, 1999). In environments where authenticity is afforded, individuals feel unaware of how their self and identity are advantaged in the environment. For example, successful individuals (i.e., those in a position of power) use fewer first-person pronouns (Pennebaker, 2011), suggesting that, paradoxically, those who are the most empowered to be themselves are the least aware of themselves. For these individuals, the choice to approach those environments where they feel authentic is unconstrained and automatic.

In the context of race in America, this model can explain why White Americans are often rather blind to their own racial advantages. Writes Peggy McIntosh about White privilege, “I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks” (McIntosh, 1988, p. 2). This excerpt highlights how having an advantaged identity can engender a lack of awareness of one's identity, which we suggest is a consequence of the fluencies cued by fit and authenticity. But the lack of identity awareness also means that those who are advantaged have difficulty recognizing that devalued identities create invisible barriers and disfluencies that constrain the choices available to underrepresented groups.

4.2 | Devalued group status erodes authenticity, cues identity salience, and motivates self-segregation

As described by Schmader and Sedikides (2018), members of devalued social groups are prone to experiencing inauthenticity and disfluency in environments created primarily for and by the advantaged majority group. Research on social identity threat illuminates how members of stigmatized social groups are more likely to engage in effortful processing of self-relevant information (Johns & Schmader, 2010; Schmader & Beilock, 2012; Schmader, Forbes, Zhang, & Mendes, 2009; Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008), which directly impedes a sense of cognitive fluency and increases the salience of one's own identity. Motivational structures in majority group-constructed environments can also be incongruent with marginalized social groups' own goal orientation (Diekmann, Steinberg, Brown, Belanger, & Clark, 2017; Stephens et al., 2012), cueing motivational disfluency. Similarly, by virtue of their underrepresentation, members of marginalized social groups can experience decreased identity safety and belonging (Murphy, Steele, & Gross, 2007; Walton & Cohen, 2007), eroding interpersonal fluency.

Whereas authenticity is marked by fluency and a lack of awareness, inauthenticity is marked by the salience and acute awareness of one's self and identity. Objective self-awareness theory (Duval & Wicklund, 1972; Wicklund & Duval, 1971) demonstrates how features of the situation can activate and make salient the most stigmatizing aspects of one's identity (Pinel & Bosson, 2013). Other work finds that social rejection is marked by an acute sense of self-awareness (Baumeister, 1990, 1991) that is enhanced if rejection is based on some stigmatizing characteristic (Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2003). These examples highlight how a lack of fit to the environment incites identity salience for members of marginalized groups, in contrast to the majority's lack of awareness. This asymmetry in awareness provides a meaningful account for how members of the majority group come to overlook issues of bias and discrimination faced by members of marginalized groups (which can ultimately perpetuate social inequalities;

Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Forman, 2004; Fryberg & Stephens, 2010; Tarca, 2005). Yet these asymmetries in awareness might also lead members of devalued social groups themselves to perceive their exit from domains as freely chosen and not constrained by their identity.

4.3 | When majority status shifts: A case study of demographic changes in the United States

We have discussed the effects of identity on state authenticity assuming a stable social hierarchy where valued environments are dominated by members of the advantaged group. But hierarchies can change as environments become more integrated as a result of policies and interventions. When members of disadvantaged groups gain protection and even power in spaces previously dominated only by the majority, members of the majority group might themselves begin to feel marginalized when they encounter situations where they experience disfluencies that they have little practice at managing.

One salient example of this phenomena arises from the changing demographic makeup of the United States (Craig, Rucker, & Richeson, 2018). By 2050, non-Hispanic White Americans will become a numerical minority in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). As a result, White Americans are increasingly experiencing episodes and encounters where their identity becomes salient along with resulting disfluencies and an experience of inauthenticity. When reminded of an increasingly diverse society, White Americans report threat to their sense of being a prototypical American (cueing low self-concept fit; Danbold & Huo, 2015) and to their social inclusion (cueing low social fit; Plaut, Garnett, Buffardi, & Sanchez-Burks, 2011). In other work, bolstering valued goals (which we argue might increase goal fit) can mitigate Whites' opposition to diversity (Burrow, Stanley, Sumner, & Hill, 2014).

Evidence from implicit reaction time tasks finds that Whites are slower than minority groups to associate multiculturalism concepts with the self (Plaut et al., 2011), suggesting that for White Americans, multicultural environments are misaligned with a "true self." Through all of these paths, White Americans on average might come to feel a sense of disfluency and identity salience as the racial/ethnic status hierarchy begins to flatten. Recent polling data show nearly a quarter of White Americans report explicit concern about the United States becoming a majority non-White nation (Jones et al., 2016), and over half of White Americans express concern about "reverse discrimination" (Jones et al., 2016).

Critically, a lack of authenticity and fluency could lead many White Americans to avoid diverse environments where they experience a lack of fit and authenticity. When primed with the impending demographic shift, Whites are more likely to seek contact from their own ethnic group over other groups (Craig & Richeson, 2014). Recent housing data similarly find that even Whites who say they prefer diversity end up living in majority White neighborhoods (Krysan, 2015). Over time, such patterns of self-segregation will lead to homogeneity and a lack of diversity. This is a critical problem, given that diversity facilitates several key material and societal benefits (for a review, see Galinsky et al., 2015). Thus, one key question for psychological science is how environments might be shaped to foster a greater sense of state authenticity equitably across different social groups to facilitate diversity.

5 | SHAPING ENVIRONMENTS TO FOSTER AUTHENTICITY

Just as an architect designs structures to ensure physical safety, leaders can structure environments to afford a sense of psychological safety and authenticity for diverse people. Many of these suggested approaches heavily draw on past interventions developed to target each type of fit in isolation. But given that each type of fit contributes to authenticity, we propose that authenticity will optimally be facilitated by targeting all three types of fit in tandem.

5.1 | Targeting self-concept fit and cognitive fluency

Environments contain a rich source of identity-relevant information, including their organization, features, and physical characteristics (Murphy et al., 2007; Murphy & Taylor, 2012). Self-concept fit and cognitive fluency are afforded when features of the environment cue a working self that is congruent with one's most accessible self-schemas. Simply changing objects within a room impacts how strongly individuals feel a sense of fit to the academic domain represented by the environment (Cheryan, Plaut, Davies, & Steele, 2009). When in a computer science classroom featuring stereotypically masculine objects (e.g., Star Trek posters and videogames), women reported less interest in computer science than did their male peers. Yet when the same classroom featured gender stereotype-neutral objects (e.g., nature posters and phonebooks), there was no measurable difference between women and men's interest in computer science.

Other work shows that the mere underrepresentation of similar individuals in the context can trigger expectations of devaluation and a lack of fit for members of underrepresented groups, even in the absence of clear discrimination or prejudice (Murphy et al., 2007). Marketing research finds that the physical structure of store environments is a key predictor of customers' approach intentions, over and above social cues (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, & Voss, 2002; Turley & Milliman, 2000). These findings indicate the ways in which physical features within the context powerfully communicate information to individuals regarding the status of their fit to, and willingness to engage with, the environment.

5.2 | Targeting goal fit and motivational fluency

People avoid environments that are misaligned with their own values and goals, even when it means bypassing opportunities for success (McCarty, Monteith, & Kaiser, 2014). Goal fit and motivational fluency can be facilitated by strategically shaping the goals and values afforded within the environment. For example, people often perceive careers in science and politics to afford agentic, rather than communal, goals (Diekman, Brown, Johnston, & Clark, 2010; Schneider, Holman, Diekman, & McAndrew, 2016). Because women often endorse communal values more strongly than do men (Croft, Schmader, & Block, 2015; Diekman & Eagly, 2008), goal affordances offer an explanation for why fewer women are attracted to these careers. Yet when these careers are reframed as affording communal goals, women express greater interest and motivation to pursue them (Clark, Fuesting, & Diekman, 2016; Diekman, Clark, Johnston, Brown, & Steinberg, 2011; Schneider et al., 2016).

As another example, research in the classroom context finds that think-out-loud procedures that are incongruent with Asian American students' motivational orientation cue poor performance in Western classrooms, but these same students are likely to perform better on tasks that require quiet reflection (Kim, 2002). These studies provide clear examples of how increasing alignment between individual goals and those afforded by the environment can boost engagement and performance for those who might otherwise feel marginalized.

5.3 | Targeting social fit and interpersonal fluency

Finally, social fit and interpersonal fluency can be facilitated by creating spaces that are socially inclusive and create positive connections between people with diverse identities. The presence of accepting social interactions from members of the advantaged group, in particular, can be a powerful signal of fit for members of marginalized groups (Hall, Schmader, Aday, & Croft, 2018; Hall, Schmader, & Croft, 2015).

Among disadvantaged university students, incorporating cues of belonging into the environment boosts their academic performance, health, and well-being (Walton & Brady, 2017; Walton & Cohen, 2011; Yeager et al., 2016). Even the slightest cues to social connection (e.g., sharing a birthday with someone else in the domain) have been shown to boost motivation in context (Walton, Cohen, Cwir, & Spencer, 2012). Reinforcing more meaningful cues through

affirmation of personal values (Sherman & Cohen, 2006) may also present a promising strategy for bolstering social fit, given that this exercise has been shown to cue a sense of belonging and connectedness to others (Cook, Purdie-Vaughns, Garcia, & Cohen, 2012; Crocker, Niiya, & Mischkowski, 2008). Environments can directly implement structures and practices designed to facilitate these positive social connections (e.g., Allport, 1954; Aronson, 1978).

5.4 | The importance of considering all three types of fit together

No work has systematically tested the ways in which these factors can be addressed within a single framework to facilitate authenticity. We argue that authenticity will be achieved when environments (1) are physically structured in ways that foster identity safety (cueing self-concept fit and cognitive fluency), (2) facilitate congruity between values endorsed by diverse groups and goals afforded by the environment (cueing goal fit and motivational fluency), and (3) create spaces that are socially inclusive of diverse identities (cueing social fit and interpersonal fluency). Testing these points of intervention in tandem (as opposed to in isolation, which may even perpetuate identity threat, e.g., Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008) will be an important endeavor for diversity initiatives and other interventions seeking to facilitate a sense of authenticity.

Identifying which type of fit is most diagnostic of authenticity in the context is critical for developing interventions tailored to fit the environment. In some situations, one type of fit will need to be targeted more heavily than another. Consider a school that effectively fosters a positive social environment and creates inclusive goal structures among its students yet has on display photos of thought leaders who are exclusively White men. In this situation, changing the physical structure and organization of the environment (i.e., targeting self-concept fit) might be necessary to foster fit for young women and minority students. The opposite may be true in another school, which may be physically structured in an inclusive manner and contain opportunities for goal advancement among its students, yet its social environment is particularly ostracizing toward women in leadership or science. In this case, creating a social space that is inclusive (i.e., targeting social fit) would be the priority.

Indeed, it is not the goal of this perspective to maintain that all three types of fit must be targeted to an equal degree in all cases. Environments should adapt and tailor interventions to suit the specific needs of the context. Such flexibility to fit the context is a unique benefit of the SAFE model. It is also a key aim of this perspective to acknowledge that structural barriers and institutional discrimination can present clear obstacles to all three types of fit and fluency. However, the goal of this work is to shed light on the invisible barriers (situationally cued lack of authenticity) that systematically but subtly draw people toward some and away from other environments, in addition to clear external barriers like discrimination.

6 | IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR UNDERSTANDING OF CHOICE

Social psychological theories have long suggested that people rationalize and at times fail to reliably detect the true cause of their behavior (e.g., Cooper, 2007; Elster, 1983; Festinger, 1957; Kay, Jimenez, & Jost, 2002; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). As we have argued here, situational selection can be reflective of an individual's deliberate volition and free will. However, it is often likely to be informed—and at times constrained—by one's identity and its fit to the environment. The decision to exit or enter different spaces or roles on the basis of automatically activated feelings of (in)authenticity could be rationalized after the fact. As a result, individuals and observers alike can view these behaviors as freely chosen. Critically, this can lead members of underrepresented groups to conclude that their decision to exit majority group settings is freely chosen. This process might, over time, lead to dynamic changes in self-definition (Caspi & Roberts, 2001; Markus & Nurius, 1986). An initially science-minded student who finds herself repeatedly avoiding her lab classes because she does not feel authentic in those settings might over time cease to see scientist as a defining self-attribute.

7 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

Diversity is a key goal for modern societies in the 21st century. Patterns of self-segregation along dimensions of social identity present a key barrier to this goal by perpetuating and maintaining homogeneity in social groups. Even when external barriers in the environment are removed, internal barriers such as lack of fit and inauthenticity can deter individuals from entering these environments altogether. Critically, environments afford fit and authenticity to members of the majority and minority group differently, creating asymmetries in fluency and identity salience. Understanding these identity-based constraints on the choices people feel they can make is critical for creating identity safe spaces and embracing the benefits of diversity. By zeroing in on the role of state authenticity in processes of self-segregation, we may begin to understand the invisible force that pushes and pulls people toward and away from social environments in meaningful ways.

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