

INTRODUCTION

Enhancing scientific and practical insights into identity safety cues: How and why context matters

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Contemporary U.S. and global sociopolitical climates are imbued with threats to marginalized groups in critical and varied areas of everyday life, including laws and policies against diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in universities and K-12 education spaces in the U.S., Germany, and elsewhere (see Beaudry & Samek, 2023; Hornbeck & Malin, 2023; Russell-Brown, 2024), restrictions on, and conversations about, rights based on gender and sexuality (e.g., Bień-Kacała & Drinóczy, 2023; Cohen et al., 2022; Collins & Rothe, 2023), and interpersonal conversations about equality and politics that create division within families and social networks. As the nature of these systemic threats continue to evolve across history and enter varied everyday spaces, it is imperative that efforts to uplift and promote equitable outcomes for marginalized groups evolve as well. That is, institutional and interpersonal efforts to promote *identity safety*, defined as a feeling that one's identities are valued and respected, must be curated to match the current sociopolitical landscape and needs of marginalized groups.

Identity safety cues (ISCs) are a commonly implemented, and widely studied, effort to counteract social identity threat and promote the psychosocial well-being of marginalized groups. ISCs refer to aspects of a social environment that communicate to marginalized groups that

their identities are valued and the risk of stigma is low (for review, see Kruk & Matsick, 2021). From depicting people of color in workplace promotion materials to inclusive messages found on yard signs and retail stores' windows, ISCs are often an easy-to-implement tactic for displaying support for the representation, inclusion, and equitable treatment of members of marginalized groups.

While marginalized groups have faced threatening macro-level events in the past decade (e.g., high-profile police killings of Black Americans, the COVID-19 pandemic, widespread attacks on DEI, rise in anti-Asian hate crimes, and anti-LGBTQ + attitudes, policies, and legislation), ISCs in everyday life have become a significant source of intel for marginalized groups for determining which contexts (e.g., individuals, settings, interpersonal exchanges) are safe. Indeed, ISCs are often implemented in response to threat, such as the presence of identity-safe information for women in academic STEM domains (Murphy et al., 2007) or the inclusion of personal pronouns to signal inclusivity to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender non-conforming individuals (Johnson et al., 2021; Pereira-Jorge, Chaney et al., 2025). That is, we contend ISCs cannot be clearly understood without recognition of the systemic and interpersonal threats surrounding marginalized group members.

The purpose of this special issue is to highlight emerging social psychological literature that moves beyond the

question, “what works as an identity safety cue?” to consider how social psychological theories can be best integrated to meet the applied needs of marginalized groups during evolving sociopolitical times. That is, this special issue considers the broader context in which ISCs are situated, considering the role of social norms, the (failed) implementation of ISCs, the impact of broader societal threats (e.g., COVID-19, laws and policies), and the current and historical contexts of marginalized social groups (e.g., the history and changing meaning of the cue itself). By advancing beyond examinations of ISCs as one-off efforts implemented in experimental contexts devoid of the broader social and historical context, this special issue aims to advance the translational value of ISCs by considering three parts of the broader context: group status, interpersonal dynamics, and systemic events. In doing so, this special issue offers several advancements in our understanding of ISCs.

First, this special issue aims to answer the question, “when are ISCs perceived as genuine efforts to promote inclusion?” That is, moving beyond understanding what ideologies are inferred from ISCs, section one of this special issue includes research demonstrating that the assumed intentions behind ISCs impact their utility to promote identity safety for marginalized groups. In line with the broader special issue, these articles demonstrate that perceived motives are shaped by the ISC context. In the second section of this special issue, articles tackle the issue of who is included in, and benefits from, organizational ISCs. These articles consider who is represented in ISCs such as diversity statements, how people of varied marginalized and privileged identities perceive the efficacy of these statements, and how people with multiple marginalized identities, specifically Black women, perceive efforts to highlight shared adversity. In doing so, these articles consider how the historical and present-day social realities of various marginalized groups impact the utility of ISCs. Finally, the third section of this special issue considers dominant group members’ (re)actions to ISCs. Articles in this vein highlight the impact of political backlash to ISCs and how context impacts the implementation of interpersonal and institutional ISCs. Across the three sections of the special issue, we provide a collection of articles that utilize diverse methodological approaches (qualitative, experimental) to offer groundbreaking insights into the effects of social, political, and historical contexts on perceptions of, and reactions to, ISCs.

In this introductory article, we first offer an overview of the social psychological literature on ISCs, considering what ideologies are inferred from ISCs and who is represented in ISC research. Throughout, we note the limited consideration of social, political, and historical context on ISC research, and highlight how research from this spe-

cial issue narrows these gaps. In doing so, we argue for the importance of contextualizing ISCs in research, and then review how the three sections of this special issue address this need.

2 | IDENTITY SAFETY CUES

As people from marginalized groups navigate social situations, they monitor their environments for information about how they will be treated (Kaiser et al., 2006; Oyserman et al., 2007; Vorauer, 2006), displaying attentional bias to both threat- and safety-related information (Schmidt et al., 2017). Marginalized group members, for instance, show vigilance to messages of rejection (e.g., Chaney & Sanchez, 2024; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pinel, 1999) as well as belonging (e.g., Matsick et al., 2024).

One way that people formulate their impressions of identity threat and safety is by detecting and interpreting situational cues (Emerson & Murphy, 2014; Inzlicht et al., 2011; Steele, 2010). Situational cues, for the purpose of this issue, refer to features of a situation or setting that instill expectations about what one might experience in terms of stigma (Murphy & Taylor, 2012). As a type of situational cue, ISCs serve a unique purpose of communicating identity-related safety to marginalized group members and lessening the consequences of social identity threat. Social identity threat occurs when people suspect that their group might be devalued or ascribed negative characteristics, which leads to negative psychological and social outcomes, including deleterious impacts on motivation, belonging, and performance (see Branscombe et al., 1999; Ellemers et al., 2002; Major & Schmader, 2018). Although ISCs can reduce identity threat, ISCs also *enhance* identity safety above and beyond the neutralization of threat. Indeed, ISCs generally strengthen positive outcomes among stigmatized groups, such as belonging, performance, trust, and engagement (see Cipollina & Sanchez, 2019; Kruk & Matsick, 2021).

In their review of the scientific literature about ISCs, Kruk and Matsick (2021) identified four classes of ISCs: Minority representation (the presence of people from marginalized groups), diversity philosophies and programming (policies and statements that emphasize respect and appreciation for diversity), environmental features (non-human aspects of a setting that convey norms and values), and identity-safe information (explicit communication about fair and positive expectations). Kruk and Matsick (2021) also observed that nearly all scientific articles about ISCs position gender and race as social categories of interest, with less attention given to how cues signal information about sexual orientation, social class, age, ability, body size, nationality, and more. As research on ISCs

expands to focus on a wider range of marginalized groups who are underrepresented in the literature, novel cues are likely to be detected. For example, extending the theme of environmental features, Oswald et al. (2022) found that fat people identified structural accommodation and inclusion (e.g., physical accessibility) as an effective size-based ISC. Overall, ISCs aim to evoke feelings of identity safety even in otherwise threatening contexts, thereby lessening negative psychosocial outcomes that marginalized groups experience due to social identity threat.

2.1 | Contextualizing identity safety cues

In determining the efficacy of ISCs, researchers must grapple with how ISCs exist in complicated group-based and sociopolitical contexts. Such variability in context can make it challenging to translate and generalize research findings across marginalized groups and situations. Yet, a major goal of the ISC literature is to translate research into practice to promote positive social and political conditions for marginalized groups. We therefore stress the importance of attending to context and showcase research that forwards thinking about how to do ISC research that better works toward creating positive social change. Briefly, we summarize some of the research's contextual considerations. For this special issue, we considered "context" to include a consideration of the sociopolitical and historical context *as well as* the presence or absence of additional identity threat or safety information.

First, at the most basic level, ISCs target groups that inhabit distinct social positions and histories. ISCs that "work" for one group who experiences stigma (e.g., White women) might not work for another (e.g., Black women) (e.g., Johnson & Pietri, 2024; Pietri et al., 2018). It is therefore critical to examine the consequences of ISCs from multiple perspectives, whether that be from the vantage point of dominant groups (Garr-Schultz & Carter, 2026; Hollenbach & Rohmann, 2026; Yantis et al., 2026; Zeng & Kirby, 2026), historically underrepresented and omitted groups (Blanchette et al., 2026), or through the distinct social positions brought about by holding multiple marginalized identities (Pietri et al., 2026; Wilton et al., 2026).

Second, ISCs operate in tandem with other situational information, including large-scale sociopolitical events, that can help or hinder their effects on identity safety. Real-world settings are rarely as orderly as laboratory-based experiments that can isolate ISCs, manipulate their presence or absence, and control for co-occurring stimuli. In reality, people's interpretation of ISCs depends on the other contextual information to which they have access, such as evaluating cues in light of intergroup behavior (Alt

et al., 2026) and the location and context of the interaction (e.g., online contexts; Nihill & Meyers, 2026). In many cases, cultural, social, political, and historical events create the need for ISCs. For example, a mega-threatening situation (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic which disproportionately affected Black Americans and people of color in the U.S.; Pietri et al., 2026) or longstanding history of political threat (e.g., as experienced by LGBTQ + persons; Kruk et al., 2026) serve as critical foreground for identifying the conditions under which ISCs are (in)effective and why.

Articles in this special issue advance the ISC literature by exemplifying how to best contextualize cues and, in turn, how such contextualization produces rich knowledge about marginalized groups' experiences and interpretations of their social worlds. We write and consider this special issue in an international political climate inundated with systemic threatening events, including COVID-19, spikes in anti-Asian racism in the U.S., German states banning the use of gender signs, record numbers of anti-LGBTQ + laws, amidst a backdrop of U.S. Executive Orders and state laws seeking to ban DEI efforts, including ISCs, and especially in U.S. academic contexts. While research questions, findings, and interpretation of results included in this special issue are shaped by systemic events occurring at the time of writing, we consider this special issue as a call for more careful consideration and inclusion of the broader context, including systemic events, in the study of ISCs and psychology broadly, building a base for contextual considerations to be leveraged to address new threats as they arise.

3 | WHAT INFERENCES ARE MADE FROM IDENTITY SAFETY CUES?

Preliminary research on identity threat and safety cues often focused on how marginalized group members expected to be treated and perceived in a given context (i.e., social identity contingencies; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008). As this area of research developed, researchers began to examine the processes by which identity cues impacted social identity contingencies, questioning what specific inferences are being made about an actor or space when an ISC is present. For example, research on social identity threat cues argued that inferences that actors in a space endorsed negative stereotypes about a marginalized group (e.g., Cheryan et al., 2009) or endorsed a racial colorblind ideology (e.g., Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008) facilitated negative social identity contingencies. Yet, if identity safety is not merely the absence of identity threat (e.g., the absence of stereotyping or colorblind ideologies), then what inferences are being made from ISCs?

3.1 | Ideological attributions are shaped by broader contexts

Research on diversity statements as ISCs suggested that multicultural statements signaled endorsement of a multicultural ideology, that is, a belief that group differences should be respected and valued, promoting belonging and identity safety for people of color (e.g., Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008). Research on ISC transfer, or the effect of an outgroup-specific ISC promoting identity safety for a similarly marginalized group, moved beyond this one-to-one inference, suggesting that ISCs such as training programs for marginalized workers or diversity awards at companies led to inferences that people in these spaces endorsed group equality and counter dominance (i.e., low Social Dominance Orientation; Chaney et al., 2016; Chaney & Sanchez, 2018). That is, lay perceivers inferred broader ideologies of equality were endorsed by people in a space from the presence of a singular ISC. Relatedly, the *pathways to identity-safety framework* argues that ISCs can foster identity safety by suggesting that a group's lived experiences, characteristics, goals, or core beliefs are valued (Pietri et al., 2025).

What else might lay perceivers infer from an ISC? Wilton et al. (2020) demonstrated that people also make inferences about how *honest* ideologies inferred from ISCs are. For example, an organization that claims to value racial diversity in a multicultural diversity statement (an ISC), but is not racially diverse, is perceived as dishonest in its commitment to DEI (Wilton et al., 2020). That is, just because an ideology is presented or inferred, does not necessarily mean that people believe that this ideology is endorsed for genuine reasons. These findings offer two critical points of advancement needed for the study and implementation of ISCs. First, by expanding our paradigms beyond the mere presence or absence of an ISC to represent the broader, and often more complicated context (including, the presence or absence of other ISCs), we make critical advances in our understanding of what lay perceivers can infer from actors and social spaces. Second, and perhaps returning to the root of research on lay theories, perceivers make attributions to motivations, and these attributions are composed after considering multiple sources of information (Chaney, Pereira-Jorge, & Blanchette, 2025).

Across this special issue, articles make crucial insights addressing both of these points. First, perceptions of ISC are shaped by the broader social, political, historical, and even local context. Rather than examining the effect of a specific context, Kruk et al. (2026) asked LGBTQ + folks in what contexts they desire to see a Pride flag, returning our study of ISCs to the people that ISCs are meant to benefit. Here, LGBTQ + folks emphasized the desire for Pride flags (an ISC) in public spaces of historical exclusion rather

than commercial spaces and, while reporting skepticism about the popular use of Pride flags, they looked for other behaviors and attitudes to gauge consistency. Considering a specific local context, Blanchette et al. (2026) assessed how marginalized group members perceive diversity statements in educational contexts that include or exclude specific marginalized groups. This research demonstrated that the exclusion of a highly prototypical dimension (e.g., racial identity) but not non-prototypical dimensions (e.g., body size) from a university department's diversity statement is detected and impacts assumptions of identity safety.

Considering broader social climates, Pietri et al. (2026) considered how statements of shared struggles from a White woman work supervisor during the early months of COVID-19 impacted experiences of identity safety for Black women. These researchers found that acknowledgments of the disparate impact of COVID-19 on Black Americans, but not general emphasis on shared struggles, facilitated identity safety for Black women, particularly when Black women were aware of the racial health disparities stemming from COVID-19. That is, while broader statements of shared adversity did not facilitate identity safety, specific statements that acknowledged the current social reality for Black Americans communicated shared core beliefs and promoted identity safety. Next, considering the political and social landscape directly tied to diversity and inclusion, Garr-Schultz and Carter (2026) examined the negative implications of anti-DEI bills on college campuses' removal of ISCs, finding that anti-DEI legislation in U.S. higher education reduced identity safety for prospective students, in part due to attributions of weaker multicultural ideologies. Yet, when the public disapproved of these policies, identity safety was partly restored.

Together, these papers offer unique demonstrations of how the local and broader contexts of ISCs shape experiences of identity safety for marginalized groups, and how these contexts intersect with people's own experiences and understanding of sociopolitical climates. That is, people's understanding of, and response to, ISCs are products of ideological attributions that are informed by the broader sociopolitical climate. First, ISCs were most desired in contexts where marginalized groups have historically (or presently) been excluded and faced inequality (Kruk et al., 2026) and acknowledgment of inequalities, rather than mere attempts at highlighting commonalities, were preferred (Pietri et al., 2026). Second, the absence of prototypical groups from a diversity statement (Blanchette et al., 2026) or removal of DEI efforts entirely (Garr-Schultz & Carter, 2026), even in response to legislation, signaled weakened ideologies of inclusion and mitigated the utility of ISCs.

4 | PERCEIVED MOTIVATIONS OF ISCs ARE SHAPED BY BROADER CONTEXT

The first section of this special issue compiles a growing body of research that examined perceptions of motivations for people or organizations who create and display ISCs. Across two studies, Alt et al. (2026) demonstrated that an ISC (posters signaling equality) was only effective when an actor also confronted prejudice, a behavior aligned with the ISC, in part due to attributions that the actor was merely externally motivated to be egalitarian if they only expressed, but did not behave, in line with the ISC. Indeed, prejudice confrontations can serve as an ISC (Hildebrand et al., 2020). Building on this, Nihill and Meyers (2026) found that prejudice confronters who were perceived as internally motivated to be egalitarian were more positively evaluated than those perceived to be more externally motivated to be egalitarian. Thus, even a strong behavioral ISC such as prejudice confrontation can be differentially understood based on attributions of motivations.

In a mixed-methods paradigm, Laiduc and Covarrubias (2026) found that nuanced features of multicultural ISCs—in particular, the extent to which such cues are critical of systemic oppression—shifted perceptions of diversity dishonesty among college students of color, with more critical ISCs lowering perceptions of diversity dishonesty. Qualitative research in this special issue additionally asked participants when ISCs such as Pride flags (Kruk et al., 2026) and organizational diversity statements (Wilton et al., 2026) were perceived as genuinely motivated.

Together, these papers highlight the richness of lay perceivers' attributions of motivations, with clear demonstrations that perceptions of motivations for ISCs are impacted by the social and historical context. Moreover, these findings consistently demonstrated that marginalized group members prefer, and often experience greater identity safety, when ISCs are assumed to stem from genuine motivations (Alt et al., 2026; Blanchette et al., 2026; Kruk et al., 2026; Laiduc & Covarrubias, 2026; Nihill & Meyers, 2026; Wilton et al., 2026). Notably, these findings and frameworks begin to switch our paradigm away from “is this ISC effective at promoting identity-safety?” to “is this ISC perceived as genuinely motivated *and* effective?” This shift in the aim of ISCs is, perhaps, a product itself of our changing social and political landscape in which expressions of institutional DEI commitments and interpersonal allyship became the social norm before that norm was deteriorated in the U.S. in 2025.

5 | WHO IS REPRESENTED IN ISC RESEARCH?

When considering how ISCs function, it is also imperative to consider for whom those functions are occurring, and whether inferences about ISCs differ by group membership—whether that be membership in a specific marginalized group, membership in multiple marginalized groups, or membership in a dominant group.

Initial research on ISC's focused primarily on the axes of gender and race, typically assessing one or the other as a singular identity, rather than in tandem (see Kruk & Matsick, 2021; Lewis et al., 2023). More recent work has diversified this focus, extending the study of ISCs to groups including fat people (e.g., Oswald & Adams, 2024), people of low socioeconomic status (e.g., Browman & Destin, 2016; Trawalter et al., 2021) and sexual minorities (e.g., Cipollina & Sanchez, 2022; Matsick et al., 2020, 2022, 2024), and beginning to attend to the intersection of multiple identities (typically race and gender; e.g., Johnson & Pietri, 2024; Lewis et al., 2023; Pham & Chaney, 2025; Pietri et al., 2018).

Yet, many groups remain underrepresented in the study of ISCs, and intersectional approaches to ISCs remain noteworthy exceptions rather than the norm in the literature. We theorize two reasons why this remains the case: (1) an overall focus on specific groups in prejudice-related psychological research and, relatedly, diversity efforts; and (2) ongoing resistance to intersectionality within psychology. We outline how contributions to the special issue challenge these norms, extending the study of ISCs to novel groups (and themselves critiquing inclusion practices related to ISCs) and bringing intersectional considerations to bear on understandings of ISCs and their effectiveness.

5.1 | Expanding the groups considered in ISC research

ISC research has its origins in the stereotype threat literature, which also tends toward a focus on race and gender as primary axes of identity; given this lineage, it is perhaps unsurprising that ISC research has followed in this tradition (see also Kruk & Matsick, 2021). Yet, tracing the roots further, a troubling trend demonstrates a long-recognized need for the inclusion of a broader range of groups into the literature on prejudice and social identity. For example, Crandall et al. (2002) noted that social psychologists have tended toward a focus on particular

groups to the exclusion of others, troubling this tendency both on the basis that groups who remain underrepresented might be those whom prejudice towards is more normalized—including groups whom psychologists themselves endorse prejudice toward—and on the basis that a narrow focus on specific groups encourages attending to the idiosyncrasies of specific prejudices rather than more generalized processes and structures of prejudice. More recently, Gaither et al. (2021) troubled the narrow focus of identity research on “mainstream” identities, calling for greater focus on what they describe as “nontraditional” or “unconventional” identities (p. 587) to diversify the literature.

Indeed, groups that are more socially acceptable targets of prejudice (e.g., fat people, people who are or have been incarcerated; see Crandall et al., 2002) appear to be underrepresented in the ISC literature. This absence is one symptom of broader exclusion of these groups from diversity-related discourses, instantiated also in exclusion from DEI initiatives (e.g., Dufur & Okeke, 2024; Ferguson, 2022), and from legislative and policy efforts to prohibit discrimination (e.g., Council of Economic Advisors, 2022; Meadows et al., 2021).

Considering the effectiveness of ISCs among a broader population also necessitates attention to intersectionality, or the multiplicative and interlocking nature of multiple systems of oppression which renders unique constellations of identities (e.g., Black women) as subjects of specific experiences of oppression that are not captured entirely by their constitutive parts (e.g., racism and sexism; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; hooks, 1984). Taking an intersectional approach to ISCs demands consideration of multiple axes of identity in tandem, as well as broader attention to contextual powers that may influence the role and effectiveness of ISCs (Kruk & Matsick, 2021).

Though exceptions exist with increasing prevalence (e.g., Chaney et al., 2021; Johnson & Pietri, 2024; Lewis et al., 2023; Pietri et al., 2018), the ISC literature remains primarily attentive to single axes of identity at a given time. Limited attention to intersectionality maintains ISCs as less effective for people who hold multiple marginalized identities. The current ISC literature often fails to consider how multiple forms of marginalization interact and shape responses to ISCs across contexts, thus failing to intervene upon these multiple forms of marginalization and respond with ISCs that target threat upon multiple dimensions (Pietri et al., 2018). We theorize this limited attention to multiple marginalization in the existing ISC literature as one component of psychology's broader resistance to intersectionality (e.g., Grzanka, 2020; McCormick-Huhn et al., 2019; Settles et al., 2020; Warner et al., 2016), returning to the notion that certain marginalized groups—and in this case, theory emanating from their lived experiences—

remain underrepresented as a result of ongoing oppressive dynamics (Settles et al., 2020). Contributions to this special issue aim to unsettle these dynamics through engagement with intersectional theorizing, allowing for insights into more effective ISCs, particularly for people who hold multiple marginalized identities.

Papers in the second section of the special issue highlight ISCs and attributional processes among groups currently underrepresented in this literature, due to either being “nontraditional” or holding multiple marginalized identities. Nihill & Meyers (2026) examined prejudice confrontations on social media as an ISC for Asian Americans, finding that assertive, as opposed to passive, confrontation styles prompted greater identity safety, and contributing to a growing literature on ISCs for Asian Americans (see also Alt et al., 2026). Blanchette et al. (2026) used a mixed-methods approach to highlight fat people's experiences of diversity statements as an ISC, finding that fatness is often excluded from diversity statements in the context of higher education psychology departments, that there was backlash toward the inclusion of fatness in diversity statements in this context, and that fat people desired greater representation in diversity efforts than they actually experience.

Pietri et al. (2026) highlighted unique contextual effects constraining the efficacy of ISCs for Black women in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which Black women faced heightened stressors. Black women participants in the study felt heightened experiences of belonging and shared reality when Black female managers, relative to White female managers, shared their experiences of stress during the pandemic. Wilton et al. (2026) demonstrated intersectional effects of race and gender in an institutional context, examining how White and Black women and men college students perceived and reflected on institutional diversity efforts. The authors found that students, and particularly Black women, saw efforts that put students in community (e.g., clubs, events) as positive and effective ways to support diversity and inclusion at their institutions, and reported that faculty of color are critical factors supporting diversity and equity at their institutions. Importantly, intersectional considerations within this special issue analyze power inequities and center the needs and interests of Black women (see Cole, 2020). Intersectional perspectives inherently acknowledge the broader context of ISC by recognizing how multiple axes of oppression and privilege shaped the experiences and needs of people.

6 | DEI INITIATIVES AND (Re)ACTIONS OF DOMINANT GROUPS

In addition to seeking a more holistic and general understanding of ISCs that goes beyond the predominant focus

on “mainstream” identities (see Gaither et al., 2021). As suggested by Crandall et al. (2002), we also aim to highlight generalizable principles of ISCs extending beyond specific instantiations of social identity threat, allowing us to avoid drawing conclusions about ISCs that are specific to one particular group or context. In line with this effort toward a more holistic understanding of ISCs, we also highlight dominant group members’ perspectives on, and reactions to, ISCs. Although dominant group members tend not to be the targets of prejudice themselves (depending on their multiple identities), their perspectives can inform broader understandings of ISCs. For example, dominant group backlash to ISCs can have the ironic effect of creating a more negative environment for marginalized group members (see Kruk & Matsick, 2021), rendering dominant group perspectives an important force for considering the broader context in which ISCs are deployed. Existing research demonstrates heterogeneous effects of ISCs for dominant group perceivers, ranging from positive reactions and feelings of heightened inclusion (e.g., Cheryan et al., 2009; Hall et al., 2018) to neutrality or failure to notice cues (see Ballinger & Crocker, 2021; Chaney & Sanchez, 2018) to backlash (e.g., Dover et al., 2016; Pereira-Jorge, Oswald et al., 2025).

Research in the third section of this special issue addresses dominant group perceptions of, and reactions to, ISCs in a variety of contexts. Hollenbach and Rohmann (2026) examined how gendered forms in the German language impact perceptions of job application processes among cisgender participants and participants with marginalized gender identities, finding that gender-inclusive language did not impact the likelihood of cisgender people applying for positions, but did increase application intentions among marginalized participants. This research moves beyond most ISC research that considers gender only within the binary. Zeng and Kirby (2026) highlight how straight cisgender White Americans, conversely to marginalized group members, reported significantly higher inclusion, higher fairness for White employees, and lower reactance to diversity when exposed to broad organizational diversity statements relative to demographic-oriented diversity statements. The authors highlighted the role that colorblind ideologies—which downplay demographic characteristics such as race—play in moderating this preference for broad notions of diversity among White people. Approaching White people’s perceptions of ISCs in another context, Yantis et al. (2026) examined how colorblind versus race-conscious cues impacted White Americans’ interpersonal interactions. While race-conscious cues served as ISCs for Black Americans, these cues seemed not to be preferred among White Americans, who reported greater similarity, identity-safety, and desire

for future interactions with a Black interaction partner who expressed colorblindness versus a Black interaction partner who acknowledged White privilege. Further, DEI initiatives are increasingly being removed. Garr-Schultz and Carter (2026) demonstrate that while anti-DEI legislation in U.S. higher education reduced identity safety for prospective students, public disapproval of these policies can restore identity safety. As backlash to DEI efforts has grown in the U.S. and Europe, it is imperative to continue to understand how advantaged group members interpret and respond to ISCs (and their removal) so that efforts to challenge negative responses can be developed and employed. Indeed, advantaged group reactance to ISCs is part of the context of ISCs both at a broad societal level and within organizations and interpersonal interactions.

7 | CONCLUSION

The study of ISCs has much to gain from an integration of social, political, and historical contextual information. This special issue highlights the importance of context in understanding how marginalized and advantaged group members encounter ISCs, thus strengthening the theoretical and translational breadth of the ISC literature in a step toward ensuring social identity safety among marginalized group members under contemporary conditions of macro-level sociopolitical threat.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Flora Blanchette: Conceptualization; writing - original draft; writing - review and editing. **Kim E. Chaney:** Conceptualization; writing - original draft; writing - review and editing. **Jes L. Matsick:** Conceptualization, writing - original draft, writing - review and editing.

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