






An Experimental Study of Cultural Identity Goal Striving in German–Turkish Biculturals

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Abstract: We explore motivational processes stemming from bicultural identity goals of being Turkish and being German by investigating the effect of identity goal incompleteness versus completeness in the two identity goals on the use of multifinal means to self-symbolize German–Turkish cultural identity goals. Individuals incomplete in either or both identity goals were more likely than individuals complete in both identity goals to engage in multifinal self-symbolizing via social media activity (Experiment 1) and helping (Experiment 2). Incompleteness regarding the two identity goals had an additive effect on effort and elicited distinct patterns of subjectively experienced incompleteness for German and Turkish cultural identity goals (Experiment 2). These findings offer new insights relevant for symbolic self-completion theory and goal systems theory.

Keywords: symbolic self-completion theory, goal systems, bicultural identity, multifinality

Cultural identity is an important part of people’s self-identity (Huynh et al., 2011). Yet the answer to the question “Who do I want to become?” is not self-evident for many immigrants or individuals from migrant families. Sometimes they engage in efforts to become closer to the new home and neglect the old one, sometimes vice versa. Individuals may also seize opportunities that help them identify with more than one cultural background (Berry, 1997). We conceptualize these strivings and efforts as striving for cultural identity goals (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). Such identity goals constitute a motivational and volitional aspect of the broader cultural identity self-concept of people. Commitment and a focus on future states characterize and distinguish self-identity goals from self-concepts (Gollwitzer & Kirchhof, 1998).

Past research has shown that individuals committed to a given identity goal when disrupted in their striving experience the state of self-incompleteness and increase their efforts toward that very goal by engaging in various activities that serve as means to symbolize possessing the aspired-to identity (e.g., Gollwitzer et al., 2013). Such means are referred to as identity symbols, and the process is labeled self-symbolizing (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). However, research on self-symbolizing has thus far only investigated single identity goals in isolation. However, individuals typically hold multiple goals

at the same time, and goals are connected in network-like structures (Shah & Kruglanski, 2000). In the present research, we explore motivational processes stemming from aspired-to selves of being Turkish and being German.

The central research question in the present work is, how is multifinal self-symbolizing behavior affected by the experience of self-completeness and self-incompleteness within two identity domains to which a bicultural individual is committed to? We propose that simultaneous incompleteness in two identity goals will promote self-symbolizing that serves both aspired-to identity goals (i.e., multifinal self-symbolizing). We investigate the joint effect of incompleteness regarding the cultural identity goals of being German and being Turkish on the decision to self-symbolize or not (Experiments 1 and 2), on self-symbolizing effort (Experiment 2) and on the subjective experience of incompleteness (Experiment 2).

Bicultural Identity Goals

Huynh et al. (2011) define bicultural individuals as “those who have been exposed to and have internalized two

cultures” (p. 828). These can be immigrants, refugees, ethnic minorities, or simply individuals who had extensive contact with two cultures and have adopted two cultural identity goals. People with roots in two cultures often have to orchestrate both identities at the same time (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). In some situations, the cultural identity goals are in conflict, while in others they may be symbolized with the same means (e.g., visiting bicultural events).

Identity Goals

Goals allow individuals to exert control over their actions, direct mental processes, and interact with the environment in an instrumental way (Moskowitz & Grant, 2009). A goal can be thought of as a mental representation of a desired future state that the individual intends to attain (Gollwitzer, 2018; Oettingen et al., 2001). This mental representation is stored in memory as an organized knowledge structure connecting the desired outcome, the means and opportunities to act toward it, and other goal-relevant information (Kruglanski & Köpetz, 2009). Having a goal means that the individual is committed to working toward that goal, which in turn directs and energizes the individual to engage in goal-directed action (Locke & Latham, 2013). Goals related to an aspired-to identity of the individual are labeled identity goals (see Gollwitzer, 2018).

Symbolic Self-Completion Theory

Individuals committed to an identity goal who experience the state of identity goals incompleteness seek out indicators of possessing the identity (i.e., symbols). Symbols can be physical objects associated with the aspired-to identity goals (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982), self-presentation in social networks (Toma & Hancock, 2013), self-descriptions as possessing the identity (Gollwitzer et al., 1982), efforts to acquire goal-relevant skills (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982), or publicly stating the intention to behave as someone possessing the aspired-to identity (Gollwitzer et al., 2009).

If individuals acquire an identity-relevant symbol, they enter a temporal state of identity goal completeness. Feeling complete in one’s identity lessens the symbolizing efforts (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). Losing or failing to acquire identity-relevant symbols leads to a state of incompleteness (Gollwitzer et al., 1982), which triggers self-symbolizing efforts. Importantly, self-symbolizing efforts are more likely and more intensive if individuals believe that the symbols will be noticed by others. This is referred to as the social reality principle (Gollwitzer, 1986; Gollwitzer et al., 2009).

Symbols of an identity are interchangeable and compensatory in nature. An individual could thus use any indicator of possessing the incomplete identity to

self-symbolize. For example, a bicultural person with the identity goal of being a true Turkish person who is referred to as a foreigner in Turkey should feel incomplete. He could, however, reduce this feeling on the spot by engaging in self-symbolizing such as talking about Turkish customs or supporting the national football team. A recent study (Albuja et al., 2019) has indeed found that bicultural individuals are more likely to reassert their cultural identity after others deny it.

Whenever individuals lose a symbol of an identity goal (e.g., one’s cultural identity is denied, after a cultural faux pas, or experiencing difficulties navigating one’s own culture), they feel incomplete regarding this identity goal. Individuals experiencing incompleteness may compensatorily choose alternative symbols that serve the same identity goal (Gollwitzer et al., 1999). Self-symbolizing is effective only when it pertains to the domain of the identity goal in question, and not on the global level of self-esteem restoration (Doerflinger et al., 2021; Gollwitzer et al., 2013; Steele, 1988). Thus, symbols must be relevant to the identity goal at hand to minimize the state of identity-incompleteness.

Goal Systems

If multiple goals are taken into account, it is important to consider how these goals relate to available means and to each other. According to goal systems theory (Kruglanski et al., 2018), goals are represented as associative cognitive networks (i.e., goal systems). The core feature of a goal system is that goals are interconnected with other goals and with relevant means.

Multifinality

Means (in terminology of symbolic self-completion theory: symbols) may serve multiple goals (i.e., multifinality). For example, attending a bicultural event may serve both the identity goal of being Turkish and the identity goal of being German. Importantly, when associated goals are simultaneously active, they affect each other’s pursuit. Chun et al. (2011) have shown that simultaneous activation of goals leads to a preference for multifinal means related to the active goals. Individuals prefer means to a focal goal that also facilitate additional background goals, even if these background goals are implicit. They also showed (Study 4) that the preference for multifinal goals disappears after relevant background goals have been satisfied by alternative means. As the preference for multifinal means is stronger when multiple goals connected to these means are active, we expect that multifinal self-symbolizing should be higher when multiple related goals are active.

Those means serving only one goal are referred to as unifinal (Kruglanski et al., 2018), and unifinal self-symbolizing

has been studied extensively in the past (e.g., Doerflinger et al., 2021; Gollwitzer et al., 2013; Longoni et al., 2014; Toma & Hancock, 2013). We chose to study only multifinal self-symbolizing in the current studies because, when two goals are active, this should particularly affect behavior that allows to realize both goals at the same time. Our focus is on the question of whether multifinal self-symbolizing is differently affected by multiple and single identity goal incompleteness.

Self-Symbolizing Decision Versus Self-Symbolizing Effort

In the present paper, we distinguish between the decision to engage in self-symbolizing or not and the extent to which self-symbolizing is engaged in. One could argue that having two identity goals incomplete as compared to only one should make it even more likely that self-symbolizing with multifinal means would occur. It also seems possible, however, that one incomplete identity goal will already suffice to trigger self-symbolizing. If that is the case, being incomplete in both identity goals should not further increase the probability to self-symbolize but only increase the effort invested by those individuals who have started to engage in self-symbolizing.

So far it has been documented extensively that individuals experiencing identity goal incompleteness engage in compensatory self-symbolizing. An experience of an unpleasant psychological state specifically related to the incomplete goal is hypothesized to be the trigger (Gollwitzer et al., 2013; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). The self-symbolizing process is impulsive and spontaneous. We expect that individuals opt for the available means at hand that is good enough to minimize the state of identity goal incompleteness. Accordingly, in situations where bicultural individuals have multifinal means available for self-symbolizing their two identity goals, incompleteness of either identity goal should make it more likely that these individuals will use these multifinal symbols. Compared to individuals in a state of identity goal completeness, individuals who are incomplete regarding one identity goal, the other identity goal, or both should more readily engage in self-symbolizing with multifinal means.

As one of the primary functions of goals is to energize the individual for goal-directed behavior (Locke & Latham, 2002), having multiple goals active should energize the individual even more to engage in self-symbolizing. A pursuit of multiple goals requires more energy and capacity both mental and physical than a pursuit of a single goal. Engagement in multifinal means also requires more effort than unifinal means. For example, a bicultural person engaged in multifinal self-

symbolization will have to read both in German and in Turkish or search a bilingual school for their children. Effort is defined as intensification of mental or physical activity in the pursuit of a goal (Inzlicht et al., 2018). The theory of motivation intensity (Brehm & Self, 1989) posits in turn that the amount of effort invested in an activity serving some goal should be proportionate to the demands of this activity, but the threshold of maximum effort expended depends on the importance of success (see also Wright, 2008). Accordingly, engagement in multifinal self-symbolizing should be characterized by higher effort expenditure when a person is committed to both goals, and both goals are incomplete – since, in such cases, the importance of success is highest (Kruglanski et al., 2013).

Incompleteness Experience

Identity goal incompleteness is assumed to be experienced as an unpleasant psychological state specifically related to the incomplete goal (Gollwitzer et al., 2013; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). If this assumption is true, then an incompleteness induction targeting a specific identity goal should only affect the negative experience related to the incomplete identity goal – it should not carry over to other identity goals.

Therefore, the experience of incompleteness in the two identity domains should nonetheless be mutually independent. We expect main effects of identity goal incompleteness on the subjective experience only regarding the very identity for which incompleteness has been induced and no spillover to the other identity domain. For example, the experience of incompleteness regarding a bicultural individual's identity goal of being Turkish should be unaffected by this individual's completeness or incompleteness regarding the identity goal of being German and vice versa.

Present Research

In the present work, we investigate the effect of incompleteness versus completeness of two identity goals on self-symbolizing via multifinal means. The experiments should be informative for the integration of symbolic self-completion theory and goal systems theory. We tackle three research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Are individuals committed to two identity goals more likely to use multifinal means for both goals to self-symbolize if they are in a state of incompleteness regarding one or both of the tested identity goals?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Does double identity goal incompleteness (i.e., incompleteness in both identity goals) further increase efforts expended on multifinal means compared to single identity goal incompleteness (i.e., incompleteness in only one of the identity goals)?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): Is the subjective experience of incompleteness for each of the two investigated goals uniquely dependent on an incompleteness induction regarding the respective goal?

To address these questions, we investigated in experiments the self-symbolizing process of German-Turkish bicultural individuals regarding their cultural identity goals of being German and being Turkish. In both experiments, we manipulate identity goal completeness versus incompleteness for the two cultural identity goals. In Experiment 1, we measure the participants' decision whether to self-symbolize via social media activity in an online experiment. In Experiment 2, the self-symbolizing decision is measured in the form of helping a bicultural student by answering voluntary questions. The number of voluntarily answered questions in Experiment 2 is a measure of the invested self-symbolizing effort. Additionally, we measure the subjective experience of incompleteness in Study 2.

The studies reported in the present work were conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the APA and reviewed and approved by the local ethics committee. The data sets are available on the Open Science Framework (Doerflinger et al., 2022).

Experiment 1: Self-Symbolizing on Facebook

Experiment 1 was conducted to test whether bicultural (German-Turkish) individuals would seize multifinal means to self-symbolize. Hönisch and Strack (2012) argued that individuals can use social media for self-completion. As social media activity has high social reality, assessing social media activity is a well-suited measure for self-symbolizing.

Methods

Participants and Design

In line with prior research on symbolic self-completion (e.g., Longoni et al., 2014), commitment was used as an inclusion criterion; 213 participants who were committed to both identity goals took part (131 females, age $M = 27$,

$SD = 7.6$, range: 18–45). More details about the sample can be found in Electronic Supplementary Material 1 (ESM 1). The participants received 7 Euros as a compensation for their time spent in the study. The study had a 2 (German identity: complete vs. incomplete) by 2 (Turkish identity: complete vs. incomplete) between-participants design. A power analysis with G*Power (Faul et al., 2007) showed that with this sample size, medium-sized effects (Cohen's $f = .25$) can be detected in analysis of variance with a probability greater than .95. A sensitivity analysis for a logistic regression based on our study shows that our sample size is sufficient to detect medium-sized and larger effects ($OR \geq 2.93$) at a power of $1 - \beta = .95$. We based the power analysis on ANOVA because before running the study we planned to also analyze the number of self-symbolizing actions the participants took as a measure of self-symbolizing effort. However, as almost all participants who self-symbolized only performed one self-symbolizing action, our data are not suitable for such an analysis. We therefore only report the analysis of the self-symbolizing decision in Study 1, but since it was our original reasoning that determined the chosen sample size, the power analysis is based on ANOVA.

Procedure

The participants could decide at the very beginning whether they wanted to take part in the study in the German or Turkish language (see ESM 1 for more information). After giving informed consent, the participants were asked to indicate their commitment toward the German and Turkish cultural identity goals, respectively. The experiment was conducted as part of a larger online study aiming to develop a new measure of identity goal overlap. For this purpose, a battery of personality questionnaires and items for the new measure of identity goal overlap were assessed. The scales were belongingness to the respective cultures, the bicultural identity integration scale (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005), the meaning in life questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006), the 18-item psychological well-being scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995), and the riverside acculturation stress scale (Miller et al., 2011). All scales were completed before the experiment, except for the riverside acculturation stress scale that was given afterward. Demographic variables were assessed after the experiment. The participants received a written debriefing, explaining the purpose of the study and the procedures used; contact information was given in case participants had follow-up questions.

Identity Goal Incompleteness Versus Completeness Manipulation

As an incompleteness induction, participants had to write a short text about a personal experience in which they felt like they did not belong to the respective culture. The

participants were asked to be as detailed in their descriptions as possible and describe the location and events of the experience as well as their feelings and thoughts in the situation. Short vignettes of typical experiences of bicultural individuals were provided as examples to help participants come up with their own experiences (e.g., being stressed while shopping in German-Turkish markets, dealing with German-Turkish bureaucracy, having one's cultural identity denied). The same procedure was used to induce identity goal completeness, except that the participants were asked to write about a situation where they felt like they did belong to the respective culture. Each participant had to write one text about an experience with the German culture and one text about an experience with the Turkish culture. The order of the texts was counterbalanced.

Commitment

Commitment was measured on 6-point scales ranging from 6 = *strongly agree* to 1 = *strongly disagree*. Two parallel items were provided for both cultures. The items were “I have put a lot of effort into being German (Turkish).” and “I would feel bad, if I was not German (Turkish).”

Self-Symbolizing Decision

Directly after the incompleteness manipulation, self-symbolizing with multifinal means was measured. The participants were given a short description of biculturalism and informed that they could learn more about it on a Facebook page titled “Interesting Advantages of Bicultural German Turks,” which was created for this experiment. See Figure 1 for screenshots of the page. The participants were given a link with which they could visit the Facebook page. They were also informed that they could share, like, or comment on this Facebook page if they wanted to. On

the Facebook page, scientific findings about biculturalism, current news about German Turks, and short profiles of successful prominent German Turks were presented. Whether they visited the Facebook page and whether they interacted with, it was up to the participants. On the next page of the experiment, the participants were asked whether they pressed the like button on Facebook for the page, whether they commented on it, or whether they shared it. We code any form of social media interaction as self-symbolizing. If participants indicated that they did not press the like button, share the page, or comment on it, the response was coded as no self-symbolizing.

Results

Self-Symbolizing Decision

In a logistic regression analysis with self-symbolizing as the dependent variable and the experimental conditions and their interaction as the predictors, significant main effects emerged for incompleteness regarding the German identity goal, $\beta = 1.49$, $z = 2.906$, $p = .004$, $OR = 4.44$, $CI_{OR} [1.70, 13.19]$, and incompleteness regarding the Turkish identity goal, $\beta = 1.20$, $z = 2.27$, $p = .023$, $OR = 3.33$, $CI_{OR} [1.23, 10.13]$. These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction, $\beta = -1.82$, $z = -2.66$, $p = .007$, $OR = 0.16$, $CI_{OR} [0.04, 0.60]$. The pattern of results is visualized in Figure 2. The probability of self-symbolizing on social media was lowest in the condition where completeness was induced for both identity goals. The probability was higher in all three conditions that involved incompleteness but did not differ significantly between these three conditions. This pattern was confirmed in follow-up contrast analyses (see ESM 1).

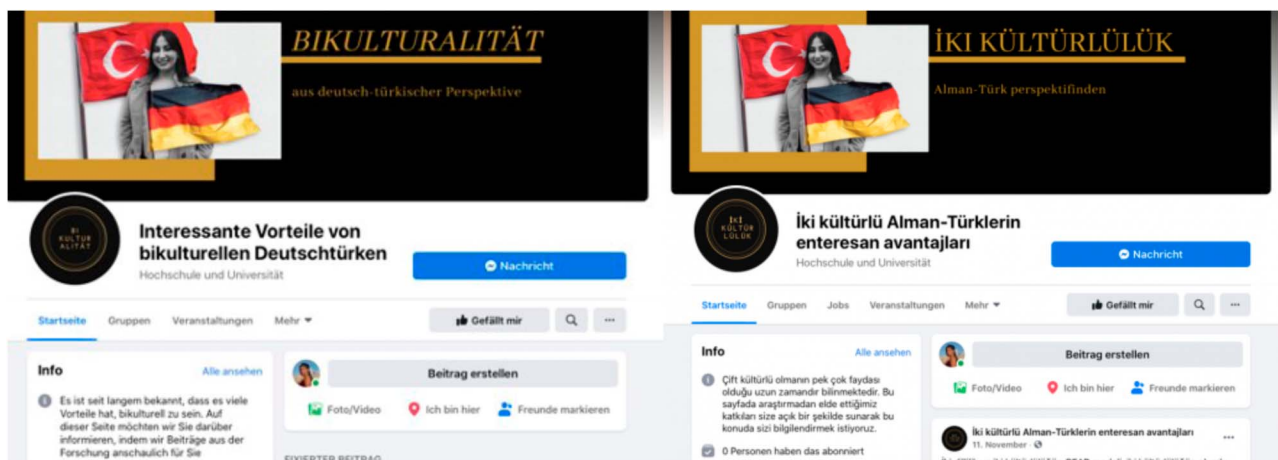


Figure 1. Screenshots of the Facebook page (German and Turkish version) used in Experiment 1.

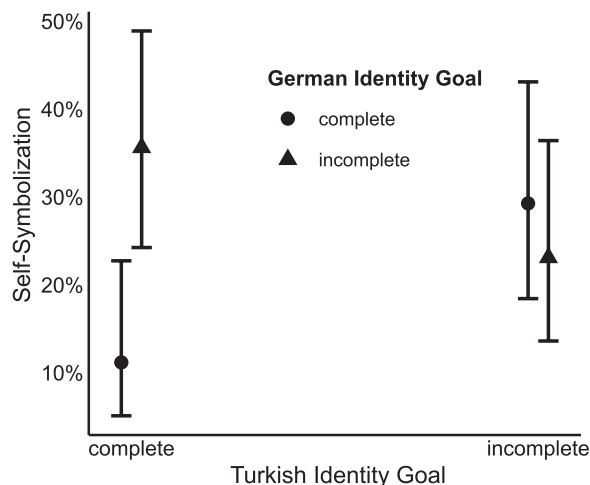


Figure 2. Probability to self-symbolize via social media in Experiment 1. 95% confidence intervals are displayed.

Discussion

The participants in all three conditions where incompleteness had been induced were more likely to self-symbolize than the participants for whom completeness had been induced regarding both identity goals. This demonstrates that individuals use available multifinal means for self-symbolizing. They do so even if only one of the identity goals associated with said means is currently incomplete. It is likely that goal-directed behavior – in the present case self-symbolizing with social media activity – is triggered as long as any goal served by this activity is active (i.e., incomplete).

This finding raises the question whether a second incomplete identity goal will impact multifinal symbolizing behavior at all. According to goal systems theory, individuals should prefer multifinal means if multiple goals are active (Kruglanski et al., 2018). But how does the presence of multiple active goals affect goal-directed efforts, once a multifinal means has been selected? Brunstein and Gollwitzer (1996) found that individuals reported being more motivationally involved with a concentration task, after a task-related incompleteness induction. Motivational involvement with regard to two incomplete goals may increase goal-directed effort beyond the effect of a single incomplete goal.

One could argue that Experiment 1 has the following limitations: *First*, sharing the Facebook page and commenting on it might be more effortful than just using the like option. In other words, different types of social media activity and the number of activities could be interpreted in terms of the degree of effort invested by the participants. In principle, we agree with this idea, but in our sample, in total, only five participants used the share or comment option and only one participant performed more than one action. *Second*, we did not measure the subjective

experience of incompleteness in Experiment 1. Experiment 2 accounts for these shortcomings by assessing both the self-symbolizing decision and the self-symbolizing effort. In addition, in Experiment 2, the subjective incompleteness experience is assessed.

Experiment 2: Self-Symbolizing by Prosocial Helping

Experiment 2 was conducted as a field experiment to test whether German-Turkish bicultural individuals would use multifinal means for self-symbolizing their two cultural identities. Self-symbolizing was operationalized as optionally answering questions presented at the end of the experiment to help a German-Turkish bicultural student. In addition to a dichotomous measure of whether participants engaged in self-symbolizing or not, the number of optional questions answered serves as a measure of self-symbolizing effort. We also measured the subjective incompleteness experience separately for the identity goals of being German and being Turkish.

Methods

Participants and Design

One hundred and fourteen individuals with a German-Turkish bicultural background participated in the experiment. Of these participants, six indicated to have no subjective belongingness to either the German or the Turkish culture, or both. Being committed to the identity goals of interest was an inclusion criterion; we used the baseline belongingness as a proxy for commitment. The remaining sample size of committed participants was 108 (34 females, age $M = 30$ years, $SD = 10.3$, range: 15–60). More details about the sample can be found in ESM 1. The compensation we provided was 5 Euros. The experiment had a 2 (German identity: complete vs. incomplete) by 2 (Turkish identity: complete vs. incomplete) between-participants design. A power analysis showed that with this sample size, medium to large effects (Cohen's $f = .30$) can be detected with a probability greater than .85.

Procedure

The experiment was presented to participants on tablet computers. At the beginning of the experiment, the participants were randomly assigned to the four experimental conditions. Then, they could select whether they wanted to perform the experiment in German or Turkish. We first measured baseline belongingness. Then,

incompleteness versus completeness in the two identity goals was manipulated the same way as in Experiment 1. Directly after the incompleteness manipulation, the subjective experience of incompleteness was measured. Then, the participants were given a list of private preferences related to the two identity goals (see ESM 1 for more information). Finally, the participants had the opportunity to self-symbolize by optionally answering additional questions before giving demographic information, the payment, and a thorough debriefing to ensure that the participants understood the research question and how it was tested in the present study. The participants were given contact information in case they had follow-up questions.

Baseline Belongingness

After giving informed consent, the participants were asked to indicate their feeling of belongingness to the German and the Turkish culture (“I feel like I belong to the German [Turkish] culture.”) on two visual analog scales with end points 0 = *not at all* and 100 = *very much*. The order of these two questions was randomized. This measure served as a baseline for cultural belongingness and allowed us to test whether experimental groups differed systematically in their sense of belonging before receiving the incompleteness induction.

Incompleteness Experience

Directly after the incompleteness and completeness induction procedure, participants were asked to what degree they felt at the very moment, whether they belonged to the respective cultures (“I feel right now as if I belong to the German [Turkish] culture.”), and how much they currently aspired-to belong to them (“I would like to belong to the German [Turkish] culture.”). The responses could be given on two visual analog scales with end points 0 = *not at all* and 100 = *very much*. Both items serve as indicators of subjectively experienced incompleteness.

Self-Symbolizing Decision

The participants were presented with the opportunity to symbolize their cultural identity with a multifinal means. At the end of the experiment, the participants were told they could additionally answer optional questions on a voluntary basis. Answering these questions had no benefits for the participants beyond self-symbolizing. It was emphasized that answering any of these questions was voluntary, but it would help the German-Turkish bicultural student conducting the experiment if they did so. The dichotomous variable whether participants answered any voluntary question served as an indicator of the self-symbolizing decision.

Self-Symbolizing Effort

Questions were presented in blocks of four per page with six blocks of questions in total. The questions were general statements based on the cultural dimensions differentiated by Hofstede (2011) such as “Children should be taught that their opinion is as important as their parents” that could be responded to on a five-point scale ranging from *I agree* to *I disagree*. The participants could choose to skip to the end of the experiment before they answered any questions or whenever a block of questions had been finished. If they wanted to answer more blocks of questions than the block they had been working on, they had to actively select this option before proceeding to the next block. This was intended to make the task more tedious and increase the incentive to skip to the end. We took the number of completed blocks as the indicator of the participants’ symbolizing efforts.

Results

Self-Symbolizing Decision

We also calculated a logistic regression to estimate whether participants would self-symbolize depending on the experimental conditions. If participants answered on at least one block of voluntary questions, this response was coded as self-symbolizing. The main effects of incompleteness for being Turkish, $\beta = 2.09$, $z = 3.06$, $p = .002$, $OR = 8.05$, $CI_{OR} [2.27, 34.39]$, incompleteness for being German, $\beta = 1.95$, $z = 3.03$, $p = .002$, $OR = 7.00$, $CI_{OR} [2.10, 26.78]$, and the interaction effect, $\beta = -2.44$, $z = -2.55$, $p = .011$, $OR = 0.09$, $CI_{OR} [0.01, 0.55]$, were significant. As shown in Figure 3, the probability to self-symbolize was

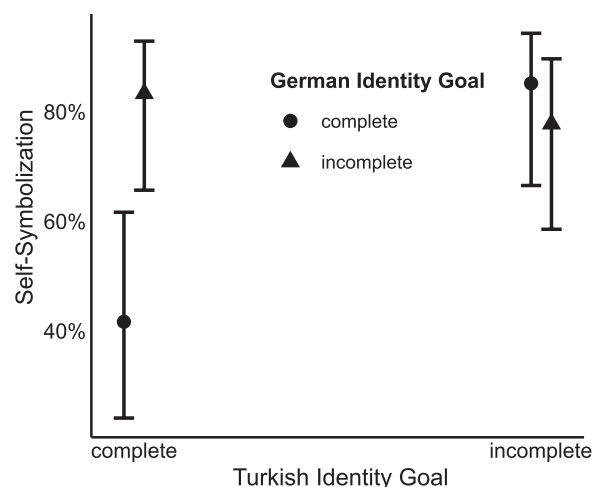


Figure 3. Probability to self-symbolize via helping in Experiment 2. 95% confidence intervals are displayed.

lowest when no incompleteness had been induced for either identity goal (i.e., completeness-completeness condition). The probability to self-symbolize was higher in the other three conditions, but it did not differ significantly between them.

A follow-up contrast analysis confirmed that the probability to self-symbolize did not significantly differ between the *German complete/Turkish incomplete* and the *German incomplete/Turkish complete* conditions, $\beta = 0.17$, $z = 0.62$, $p = .536$, $OR = 1.18$, $CI_{OR} [0.70, 2.01]$, nor between these two conditions and the *German incomplete/Turkish incomplete* condition, $\beta = 0.24$, $z = 1.51$, $p = .133$, $OR = 1.27$, $CI_{OR} [0.93, 1.74]$. However, the probability to self-symbolize in the three conditions in which single or double incompleteness had been induced was significantly higher than in the *complete/complete* condition, $\beta = 0.42$, $z = 3.57$, $p < .001$, $OR = 1.52$, $CI_{OR} [1.21, 1.93]$.

Self-Symbolizing Effort

To disentangle self-symbolizing effort and the self-symbolizing decision, we conducted a contrast test based only on those participants who decided to self-symbolize ($N = 79$), comparing the participants who were incomplete regarding both the German and Turkish identity goals against those who were incomplete only with respect to one of the two identity goals. The contrast was significant, $b = 1.22$, $CI_b (0.43-2.02)$, $t(78) = 3.01$, $p = .003$, $R^2 = .112$, indicating that participants who were incomplete regarding both identity goals did indeed symbolize to a greater extent than those who were incomplete regarding only one identity goal. Figure 4 depicts the self-symbolizing effort in the respective experimental conditions.

Incompleteness Experience

The currently perceived belongingness and the explicit desire to belong to the respective cultures were indicators of the subjective incompleteness experience. These pairs of variables correlated significantly for both the German,

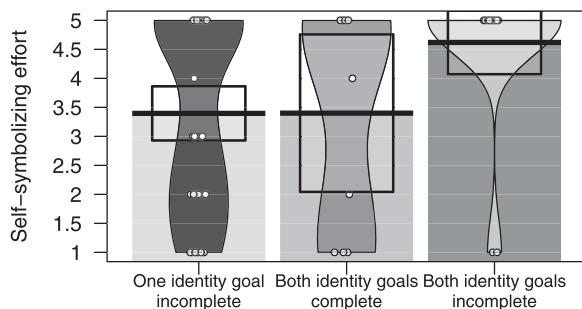


Figure 4. Self-symbolizing effort indicated by the number of voluntarily worked on questionnaire items in Experiment 2. Means, density, 95% confidence intervals, and raw data are displayed.

$r = .64$, $t(106) = 8.63$, $p < .001$, and the Turkish, $r = .86$, $t(106) = 17.71$, $p < .001$, cultural identity goals. A single indicator of the incompleteness experience was calculated as an average of the two items for each cultural identity goal.

We calculated a 2×2 ANOVA with the subjective incompleteness experience regarding the Turkish culture as the dependent variable and the experimental factors as the predictors. As shown in Figure 5, subjective incompleteness in the Turkish cultural identity goal was higher in the Turkish identity goal incomplete condition compared to the Turkish identity goal complete condition, $F(1,104) = 2.94$, $p = .004$, $f_{\text{partial}} = .28$, $CI_f [.11, .44]$. The German incompleteness condition, the interaction, and baseline belongingness to the German culture had no significant effects, $F_s < 1.36$, $p_s > .177$.

For the subjective incompleteness experience regarding the German culture, a model with the same predictors was calculated. As visualized in Figure 6, subjective incompleteness in the German cultural identity goal was higher in the German incomplete conditions compared to the German complete conditions, $F(1,104) = 5.35$, $p < .001$, $f_{\text{partial}} = .68$, $CI_f [.50, .86]$. Neither the Turkish incompleteness factor nor its interaction with the German incompleteness factor were significant predictors, $F_s < 1.40$, $p_s > .167$.

Discussion

Self-Symbolizing Decision

As shown in Figure 3, the probability to engage in self-symbolizing was higher in all three conditions involving incompleteness than in the condition where no incompleteness was induced for either identity goal. However, participants for whom incompleteness was induced regarding both identity goals were no more likely to start self-symbolizing than participants for whom incompleteness was only induced in one of the two identity goals. These results conceptually replicate the findings of Experiment 1.

Self-Symbolizing Effort

Significant main effects of identity goal incompleteness emerged for both the German and Turkish cultural identity goals. As shown in Figure 4, individuals who were incomplete in both identity goals answered the highest number of voluntary questions, followed by individuals who were incomplete in only one identity goal (Turkish or German). Those with identity goal completeness for both goals did the least amount of voluntary work.

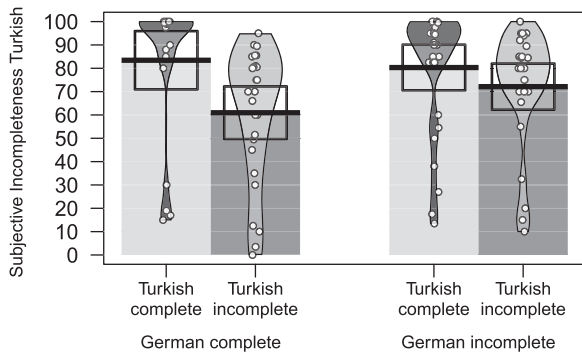


Figure 5. Subjective incompleteness experience regarding the *Turkish* culture in Experiment 2. Means, density, 95% confidence intervals, and raw data are displayed.

Incompleteness Experience

Individuals who were incomplete in their Turkish identity goal felt as if they did not belong to the Turkish culture and explicitly stated a lower desire to belong to the Turkish culture. Individuals who were incomplete in their German identity goal felt less belongingness and indicated a lower desire to belong to the German culture (see Figures 5 and 6). According to symbolic self-completion theory, these processes should be specific to the incomplete identity goals only. The distinct patterns found for German and Turkish cultural identity support this assumption, which suggests that for our participants the German identity and the Turkish identity were indeed separate goals. While the identity goals had an additive effect on the self-symbolizing effort, their effect on subjective incompleteness experiences was identity-specific.

Limitations

Belongingness to the two cultures was used as a proxy for commitment. In a follow-up pilot study, we found that the

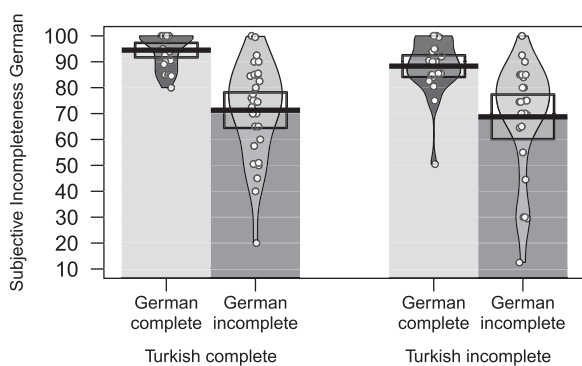


Figure 6. Subjective incompleteness experience regarding the *German* culture in Experiment 2. Means, density, 95% confidence intervals, and raw data are displayed.

belongingness to the German and Turkish cultures was strongly correlated with commitment to the respective identity goals ($r = .50$ for being German and $r = .51$ for being Turkish). While individuals committed to a cultural identity goal should generally experience more belongingness, the constructs are theoretically distinct. Commitment encompasses effort and investment into a goal and is comparatively more stable (see Gollwitzer, 2018). In contrast, belongingness is more prone to situational influences and does not necessarily lead to goal-directed efforts (Knowles et al., 2010). In fact, in addition to the baseline measure at the beginning of the experiment, we used the belongingness assessed after the incompleteness manipulation as a further component of the measure of the subjective incompleteness experience (i.e., as a manipulation check) and found that it was affected by the experimental manipulation. From a social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 2004), people might experience belongingness to a group even when they are not committed to any identity goal related to that group. Accordingly, future studies should systematically investigate the relation of commitment and belongingness to a cultural identity.

General Discussion

Implications for Symbolic Self-Completion Theory

Prior work on self-completion theory has not considered how multiple identity goals are interconnected. Goal systems theory (Kruglanski et al., 2018) provides a classification of the goal-means relations of multiple goals (i.e., a goal system). One such relation relevant to the present work is multifinality. It describes a configuration of two (or more) goals and a means. Means are multifinal if they support striving for all of the goals within the configuration. In the symbolic self-completion framework, goal-directed means can be thought of as the identity-relevant symbols. They can be multifinal, just as goal-directed means in goal systems that are not related to a person’s self-identity. Three important observations in the present studies map possible mechanisms in an *identity goal system*.

Engaging in Multifinal Symbolizing

In the present research, the same means were used to symbolize both identity goals. Participants incomplete in either identity goal (or both) were more likely to interact with the bicultural Facebook page (Experiment 1) or help a bicultural student (Experiment 2). This is initial evidence

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supporting a goal systems perspective on symbolic self-completion theory. Thinking of identity goals as parts of a goal system allows further predictions. Chun et al. (2011), for instance, have found that individuals with an active focal goal and an active background goal prefer multifinal means of goal pursuit that serve both of their active goals. Accordingly, we propose a similar dynamic for the pursuit of identity goals. Additionally, making a choice between different available options could in itself influence self-symbolizing behavior. In the present studies, we tested whether, after an incompleteness versus completeness manipulation, participants would use provided multifinal means or not. Note that we did not offer a choice between unifinal and multifinal means. Future studies should test whether single versus double identity goal incompleteness affects the choice of unifinal versus multifinal symbols and whether the consequences of such choices on symbolizing behavior do differ.

Effortful Engagement in Self-Symbolizing

The decision to self-symbolize (Experiments 1 and 2) and the efforts invested into self-symbolizing (Experiment 2) were differently affected by the incompleteness induction. While individuals were equally likely to self-symbolize after incompleteness was induced for their Turkish identity goal, their German identity goal, or both, expended effort was highest after incompleteness was induced for both identity goals. Apparently, the decision and effort to self-symbolize need to be distinguished when discussing symbolic self-completion theory. Previous related research (e.g., Gollwitzer et al., 2013) suggests that when single identity goals are considered, individuals are more likely to self-symbolize and increase their effort. Our data are consistent with these findings, but in addition they show that being incomplete in two identity goals instead of only one increases efforts expended on multifinal means, and not the probability to decide using these means in the first place.

Self-symbolizing can take many forms, some of them more effortful than others. In the present experiments, helping out a fellow bicultural by answering many questions is certainly more effortful than answering only few or a single one. Goal activation should energize the individual's self-symbolizing. Accordingly, double incompleteness should lead to more energization and thus to more invested effort. Not surprisingly then, we observed that participants in Experiment 2 answered more questions in the double incompleteness condition than in the single incompleteness conditions.

However, note that increased goal-directed activity can also stem from an ease in performing relevant behavior. The goal-directed activity would in this case be relatively effortless. Whether the behavior itself is

effortful could be tested in future research complementing behavioral measures with physiological ones, such as the cardiovascular response (PEP; see Gendolla & Richter, 2010).

The Incompleteness Experience

The subjective incompleteness experienced in the two identity goals was only significantly affected by the recall of negative (vs. positive) experiences related to that very goal. In other words, subjective incompleteness regarding the German identity was unaffected by a negative experience related to being Turkish and vice versa. Future studies should investigate the specific affective, motivational, and cognitive processes associated with this experience. Such studies could draw on related research concerning bicultural identity denial. Albuja et al. (2019) have observed that bicultural individuals exhibit an increased physiological stress response and experience more subjective stress after others denied their cultural identity. In addition, these participants were more likely to verbally reassert their cultural identity compared to a control group. Identity denial likely induces identity goal incompleteness. In line with the findings of the present study, Albuja et al.'s results provide evidence that cultural identity incompleteness indeed produces the unpleasant psychological tension state predicted by symbolic self-completion theory.

Implications for Bicultural Identity Research

As proposed by the multiple perspectives theory, individuals who have contact with various cultures should more readily internalize the perspectives of multiple groups (see, e.g., Pantaleo & Wicklund, 2000). Such internalization may in turn contribute to the integration of two cultural identities. Bicultural identity integration captures the degree to which biculturals perceive their cultural identities as blended versus distinct and harmonious versus conflicting (Haritatos & Benet-Martinez, 2002). Individuals high in bicultural identity integration may have a single bicultural identity goal instead of two distinct ones, or their identity goals should at least be more overlapping. If this is the case, affective, cognitive, and motivational consequences of incompleteness but also completeness will likely spill over from one cultural identity goal to the other as a function of overlap (and bicultural identity integration). Some identity goals could also be negatively interdependent or seen as mutually exclusive; in such cases, increased completeness of one goal might detract from the completeness of the other goal. Negative interdependence should be more likely when the overlap of reasons for pursuing an identity goal is

low – for cultural identity goals when bicultural identity integration is low. Future research should test these assumptions.

Bicultural identity integration is higher and an integrative strategy is more likely, if individuals have frequent positive bicultural experiences (Lilgendahl et al., 2018). However, biculturals usually have both positive and negative experiences related to their cultural identities. Recalling positive experiences increases bicultural identity integration, and recalling negative experiences decreases it (Cheng & Lee, 2013). Therefore, bicultural identity integration should be lower when individuals are in a state of identity goal incompleteness regarding their cultural identity. Our study suggests that even when individuals encounter incompleteness inducing situations, multifinal means can be used to self-symbolize cultural identity. This was the case when participants were incomplete regarding one of their cultural identity goals or both. Based on our findings and the existing literature, we propose that having multifinal (i.e., bicultural) means for symbolizing cultural identity chronically available is beneficial for well-being and will foster bicultural identity integration in the long run. This highlights the importance of an inclusive and multicultural environment.

Limitations

There may be additional reasons why an individual might choose to engage in any given behavior. Considering two (or more) identity goals, it would be interesting to compare those individuals who are highly committed to both goals, those who are committed to one goal, but not the other, and those who are uncommitted to both goals. Self-symbolizing should only occur with regard to identity goals to which an individual is committed. Thus, incompleteness in a goal for which the individual is not committed should have no effect. Similarly, additional effort invested in multifinal means in case of double incompleteness should depend on commitment to both goals.

Conclusion

We observed that bicultural (German–Turkish) individuals use multifinal means to self-symbolize their cultural identity. Our findings demonstrate that identity goals can function within a goal system consisting of multiple goals. New findings regarding self-symbolizing effort, the self-symbolizing decision, and the subjective experience of identity goal completeness versus incompleteness offer a more nuanced understanding of symbolic self-completion processes.

Electronic Supplementary Material

The electronic supplementary material is available with the online version of the article at <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335/a000486>

ESM 1. Sample characteristics for both studies, information about language versions, contrast analyses for the symbolization decisions, and information on privately stated preferences assessed in Experiment 2.

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Publication Ethics

The studies reported in the present work were conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the APA and reviewed and approved by the local ethics committee.

Open Data


Data sets are available on the Open Science Framework at https://osf.io/gxr4a/?view_only=04f9db9e273c4d14bd70db9c9506e422 (Doerflinger et al., 2022).

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