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What is This?
The Many Ways to Be Marginal in a Group

Naomi Ellemers¹ and Jolanda Jetten²

Abstract

Previous theory and research primarily address marginal group members on the path to achieve core membership status. The authors argue that these only represent one form of marginality and that there are many other ways to be marginal within the group. The authors develop a dynamic model in which marginality is conceptualized as resulting from group and individual negotiation about inclusion (the Marginality as Resulting From Group and Individual Negotiation About Inclusion [MARGINI] model), and where individual and group inclusion goals can converge (resulting in relatively stable forms of marginality) or diverge (resulting in less stable forms of marginality). When the marginal position is unstable, individuals can either be motivated to move toward or move further away from the group, and such changing inclusion goals are associated with different emotions and behaviors. The authors argue that one needs to understand the interplay between individual and group inclusion goals to predict and explain the full complexity and diversity of the behavior of marginal group members.

Keywords

marginal group membership, prototypicality, identification, social inclusion, social exclusion, newcomer socialization

We develop a model that conceptualizes Marginality as Resulting From Group and Individual Negotiation About Inclusion (MARGINI model) to capture the different ways in which people may take a marginal position in the group. The value of developing such a model lies not just in the importance of integrating and bringing together different, often disjointed, strands of research examining marginality. Our model provides a more comprehensive account of marginality by systematically considering the dynamic interplay between individual and group inclusion goals that determines the way marginality takes shape, in each case specifying the costs and benefits of marginality for the individual as well as the group.

The Focus on Core Members (But Core Is a Bore?)

Research has shown that differences in the degree to which individual group members match the defining features of a group relate in meaningful ways to intragroup and intergroup behavior and to the way people experience their group membership (e.g., Jetten, Branscombe, & Spears, 2002; Jetten, Branscombe, Spears, & McKimme, 2003; Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1997; Noel, Wann, & Branscombe, 2002).

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We define a social group as existing when “two or more individuals...perceive themselves to be members of the same social category” (Turner, 1982, p. 15), but we focus our analysis mainly on face-to-face and small groups, in which members often know each other and are aware of the extent to which each individual can be considered a core or marginal group member. Obviously, such groups consist of multiple individuals whose personal judgments and actions do not necessarily align. In our current analysis, we address the goals, values, or norms that are shared by individual group members as relevant to the group as a whole. We focus on situations in which group-level preferences are collectively enacted based on consensual decision making or are communicated on behalf of the group by representatives relying on informal guidelines or legal regulations (Ellemers, 2012; Ellemers & Haslam, 2011; Ellemers & Van den Bos, in press).

So far, researchers have been most interested in the motivations and behaviors of core members. In itself, this is not surprising. Compared with more peripheral members, prototypical group members are more likely to be group leaders (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonski, 1992; Fielding & Hogg, 1997; Hains, Hogg, & Duck, 1997; Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984), are more successful in eliciting attitude change in others (van Knippenberg, Lossie, & Wilke, 1994; van Knippenberg & Wilke, 1992), are evaluated more positively (Hogg, Cooper-Shaw, & Holzworth, 1993; Hogg & Hardie, 1991), and are more likely to define group norms (Oakes et al., 1999; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). In this view, those who are more marginal are seen as less “groupy”. They less easily exert influence, are more disengaged from the group, and are less inclined to defend the group against threats than core members. It thus appears that in our theorizing so far, we have portrayed prototypical group members as the actors in groups and marginal members as the rather passive onlookers, followers, or even free riders. This explains why we have focused on core members to understand group action and behavior and why we have paid less attention to marginal group members—those who in this line of reasoning appear to have less of an impact on the fate of the group.

In addition, prior research (including our own) has often been inspired by the conviction that individual-level motives and goals (e.g., the maximization of individual profit or the achievement of high personal self-esteem) do not provide a complete explanation of group behavior (see also Tajfel, 1978; Turner et al., 1987). To show that group-level processes need to be taken into account, and that group-level concerns can overrule the importance of individual-level concerns, researchers typically focused on those who are core members in the group and are highly committed to group goals. In this view, core members epitomize the importance of examining the way group processes affect behavior of individual members: We would not understand core members’ behavior if we would not take account of the fact that core members care for the group just as they care for the self. Indeed, core members display group loyalty and altruistic behavior in the service of achieving group goals, sometimes even at great personal costs (for overviews, see Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999, 2002).

If researchers did show an interest in marginals, it has mostly been in terms of their journey toward core membership (Moreland & Levine, 1982). However, if we conceptualize marginals merely as “core members in waiting,” a few problems arise. In particular, when considering the empirical results, it is clear that it is much more difficult to predict marginal group members’ behavior than the behavior of core members. This makes it harder to draw clear conclusions about motives underlying behavior of the former compared with the latter. Whereas motivational considerations based on true internalization of group goals have been found to underlie the behavior of those that behave as core members (see Barreto & Ellemers, 2000), much previous work has shown that a marginal position is characterized by less consistency in affective and behavioral responses. For instance, marginal members’ loyalty to the group has been found to be less reliable over time, there is a greater discrepancy between their individual goals and the group’s goals, and their behavior is contingent on the demands of the specific social context (e.g., Barreto & Ellemers, 2000; Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1999; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999. As a result, people holding a marginal position have on one hand been found to be more likely than core members to deviate from group norms (Lewin, 1948), less motivated to act for the benefit of the group (Jackson & Saltzstein, 1958), and less likely to show ingroup bias in the face of threats to the distinctiveness of their group (Jetten et al., 1997; see also Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989). However, other work has demonstrated that the story is not so simple and that there are times when marginals might demonstrate as much loyalty to the group as core members, if not more (see Allan & Sienko, 1998; Jetten, Postmes et al., 2002, Jetten et al., 2003; Jetten, Hornsey, & Adarves-Yorno, 2006; Noel et al., 1995; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001).

The sheer number of variables that have been found to affect marginal members’ behavior might partly explain why it is so difficult to predict their behavior. Indeed, many more factors have been found to determine the responses of those that hold a marginal position than of those at the core of the group. In the current review, we focus on marginal members as being of interest in their own right. To allow for a comprehensive analysis, we argue that we should depart from the notion that marginals are all motivated by the desire to become core group members. As we will outline further below, some marginals will indeed strive for greater group inclusion—backed up by the group—but others might be perfectly content with their marginal position and will not be motivated to undertake the journey to achieve core group membership.
Defining Marginal Group Membership

The concept of prototypicality is central to self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987; see also Oakes, 1996) and stems from the work by Rosch (1978), who highlighted the importance of intracategory differentiation (what she termed the graded structure of categories). She proposed that the prototype of a category represents the best and most typical example of a category and argued that all members of a category are judged relative to the group prototype. Although a limited number of members display all defining features of the group prototype, certain members of a category (i.e., prototypical members) more closely match the prototype than others (peripheral or marginal members). For example, an associate professor is a prototypical example of the category academics because associate professors match many of the defining features of the superordinate category of academics (e.g., they teach, supervise students, and conduct research). In contrast, research fellows are more peripheral to the category academics because they only fulfill the criteria of group membership to a certain degree (i.e., they conduct research, but typically do not teach).

It is more likely that someone is perceived to be marginal when they match some defining group characteristics but not others (e.g., immigrants with permanent residency but not the host country’s nationality), or when they only possess the group’s defining characteristics to a certain degree (e.g., paramedics who are allowed to perform far fewer medical treatments than medical doctors). Because very few individuals in a group will be perceived as true core members, perfectly matching the salient defining features of the group, most of the members in the group can, in one way or another, be classified as marginals. Therefore, to understand group dynamics in their full complexity, it seems important to explain marginality (perhaps more so than core group membership).

We consider marginal and core group membership not as a feature inherent to specific individuals but as a context-dependent state. The prototypicality or marginality of specific group members can manifest itself differently at different points in time due to situational variations. That is, different characteristics tend to emerge as prototypical group features, depending on how these help define the group as distinct from other salient groups in that context (see Barsalou, 1989; Doosje, Haslam, Spears, Oakes, & Koomen, 1998; Oakes et al., 1999; Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997). As a result, individuals who are considered peripheral in some contexts may be perceived closer to the core of the group in other contexts. Furthermore, because shared group membership leads people to perceive the immediate context and the world at large in a similar way, we predict that in any given situation, there will be a high degree of consensus among group members on who is prototypical within the group and who is not.

This conceptualization also makes clear that perceived centrality versus marginality is different from other related constructs such as group identification. Specifically, compared with group identification, we consider marginality as a more cognitive concept, defined by the degree of centrality and group prototype match in a specific situation (Oakes et al., 1999; Turner et al., 1987). In contrast, level of group identification primarily refers to a motivational process, reflecting the affective ties of the individual to the group (see also Ellemers, De Gilder, & Haslam, 2004; Ellemers, Kortekaas & Ouwerkerk, 1999; Jetten et al., 1997; Leach et al., 2008; Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, Halevy, & Eidelson, 2008). Although these constructs often covary, at times they can also be distinct. Treating prototypicality and identification as separate concepts is key to understanding the motivation of those at the periphery of the group and helps to understand why marginals might either be the “best” group members (e.g., when group identification is high) or the “worst” group members (e.g., when group identification is low).

A further difference between the prototypicality and identification constructs is that the extent to which an individual identifies with a group is largely under their own control and reflects an individual’s wish to be associated with the group (e.g., Ellemers, Kortekaas & Ouwerkerk, 1999; Leach et al., 2008). In contrast, prototypicality or perceived centrality within a group is jointly determined by the nature and presence of other individuals and groups, and is a reflection of the extent to which the individual fits the group in that comparative context. Although individuals may have some leeway in the extent to which they can position themselves as core members (Reicher & Haslam, 2006; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996), there are often reality constraints in the extent to which this is possible. Moreover, as we will argue below, groups may also determine in important ways whether an individual is allowed to take on the position in the group that he or she most desires.

Reconsidering Our Assumptions About Core and Marginal Group Membership

Although the greater research attention for core members has proved to be valuable to enhance our understanding of, for instance, social influence processes, loyalty to the group, and the emergence of leadership, it has unfortunately also led to a neglect of the study of the behavior of marginal group members. What is more, the one-sided research focus has led to some implicit assumptions about marginal group
membership that have so far stood in the way of exploring marginality in its full complexity. There are at least four misconceptions that have crept into our theorizing, and we will discuss these in turn.

Core members are not necessarily more groupy than marginal members. Reasoning based on self-categorization theory has led to the prediction that the most prototypical position is associated with more groupy behavior (Hogg & Turner, 1987). However, this does not mean that those who hold more marginal positions are not affected by group processes or group norms. There are a number of reasons why that would be the wrong conclusion to draw. First, as outlined above, prototypicality should not be equated with subjective importance of the group for self. Even those who are marginal to the group can perceive the group as central to self, or look to the group for guidance. This reiterates our previous point that prototypicality and identification are two separate dimensions that operate relatively independent of each other. Indeed, in the model we present below, we outline different conditions for marginality working from the assumption that different types of marginal group members can be highly identified with the group.

Second, marginal group members’ behavior should still be understood as a function of their position in relation to the group, and we argue that we do need a “group psychology” to understand and predict their responses. Marginal group members are not just driven by individualistic motives, nor do they merely use the group to their own personal advantage. It is true, though, that for marginal members, proximity to the boundary, and choices associated with whether boundary crossing is possible, desirable, or perhaps unavoidable are more likely to affect their behavior than that of core members. In that sense, it appears that their behavior is just determined by other factors than the behavior of core members—not that it is necessarily less related to the group.

Core membership is not always the most desired end-state. So far, researchers have primarily examined group contexts where peripherals are highly motivated to become more prototypical, and the group expects them to acquire full membership (Levine & Moreland, 1994; Moreland, 1985; Noel et al., 1995; Worchel, Coutant-Sassic, & Grossman, 1992). However, this ignores the fact that the marginal to core trajectory is just one of many possible paths marginals can take. Indeed, being different from others or separating the self from the group can represent an important route to self-actualization, identity, and value, whereas being too close to others in the group (i.e., approaching the prototype for the group) can be perceived as an undesirable state (Baumeister, 1991; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Brewer, 1991; Jung, 1928/1971; Maslow, 1968; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980).

Why then has the core position been presented as the most desirable position in the group? One reason could be that we have assumed that our need for belongingness is best satisfied if we are more typical in a group because a core position is associated with greater acceptance and inclusion than a marginal position (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Pickett & Brewer, 2005). However, although we tend to focus on one particular group when we examine these processes, it is important to keep in mind that people are likely to hold multiple group memberships simultaneously. Thus, taking a core position in one group (e.g., in a friendship group) may be sufficient to satisfy individual belongingness needs and allows individuals the liberty to remain in a marginal position in relation to another group (e.g., at work; see also Ethier & Deaux, 1994). Furthermore, it is important to distinguish the effect of intragroup position per se from other benefits that a core position may bring (e.g., greater status, power, and respect). When we make this distinction, it is not so obvious why a core position in itself would better satisfy the individual’s need for belonging than a marginal position.

Groups need marginal members just as much as they need core members. Even if we accept that individuals may not always emphasize their core position in the group, there is still an implicit assumption that groups prefer core over marginal group members. For example, if core membership is characterized by acting in accordance with group norms, and making sacrifices for the group, it appears obvious why groups would prefer core over marginal members. Nevertheless, it has also been noted that deviance can either be negative (going against group norms or interests) or positive (serving group norms or interests; Abrams, Randsley de Moura, Hutchison, & Tendahy, 2005; Hogg, Fielding, & Darley, 2005), and those who deviate in ways that can be seen to benefit the group are more likely to be supported or followed by other group members than those who conform (Reicher & Haslam, 2006). This also makes clear that there is no one-to-one relation between leadership and prototypicality, as nonprototypical leaders are best able to lead the group into change, which is generally considered an important goal of leadership (Abrams, Randsley de Moura, Marques, & Hutchison, 2008; Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011).

Again, because marginality as defined here only refers to the degree to which the individual is seen to embody characteristic group traits or behaviors, this leaves open the possibility that such deviance can be associated with either positive or negative outcomes for the group, in that it can either be in line with what the group needs or countering the achievement of group goals (see also Jetten & Hornsey, 2011; Packer, 2008). Indeed, marginal members can contribute in a different way to the group. For example, it has been found that newcomers offer the opportunity to connect to and exchange information with members of other groups and can thus stimulate creativity and innovation (Granovetter, 1973; Nemeth, 1985, 1986; Rink & Ellemers, 2009). They are also better able to stand back from group and blow the whistle in case the group violates important norms (Near & Miceli, 1995).

Marginality is not just the opposite of core group membership. A final point worth making is that while the definition we
propose labels those group members who are considered nonprototypical for the group in a given situation as marginals, we cannot say that marginality is simply “the opposite” of prototypicality. There are a number of reasons for this. First, even if we limit ourselves to a definition of marginals as “core members in waiting,” marginal group membership is often a necessary precondition for core membership to occur, and it would be more accurate to talk of a trajectory from marginal to core membership. If this is the case, these two positions in the group are better conceptualized as related stages that reflect different points in the trajectory of an individual group member rather than being opposites that mutually exclude each other. Second, and more importantly for the present analysis, when placing marginals and core group members on a single bipolar continuum, we cannot explore the many different forms that marginality can take. In particular, if marginality is simply defined as distance to the core position, we cannot explain the different responses of marginals who find themselves in a similar distance from the core position but for very different reasons. For example, a marginal group member who wants to be further included but meets resistance from the group is likely to behave very differently compared with a marginal group member who perceives that the group is trying to include the individual, while the individual does not share that wish to achieve a core position. Whereas the former marginal might engage in strategic behavior and display their loyalty in the hope the group will allow for greater inclusion, the latter marginal might differentiate and emphasize individual features and goals when dealing with the group. In sum, categorizing people simply as core versus marginal group members not only raises a false distinction but is also an unhelpful distinction because it does not allow us to capture the multiple ways in which group members can be marginal.

In sum, if we accept that (a) marginal group members can be just as much affected by group processes as core members, (b) marginality may be a desired end-state, (c) there are important merits to marginality for the group, and (d) marginality is not simply the opposite of core membership, we can further explore the different ways in which group members can be marginal in the group and develop a model that better captures the full complexity of marginals’ experiences and behaviors.

**The Interplay Between Individual and Group Inclusion Goals**

So far, those who have examined positive aspects of marginal group membership have mostly focused on the ways in which marginality can benefit the individual self—for instance, by considering it as a liberating force that allows people to seek out alternative and more rewarding relationships (see McLaughlin-Volpe, Aron, Wright, & Lewandowski, 2005). Thus, current models tend to assume that the behavior of group members who take a marginal position is mostly driven by individual needs and goals, while group motivations, needs, and values are typically not taken into account. For instance, it has been argued that individuals use the group as a source of inclusion and point of reference, in particular when they are insecure about their own position or self-worth (Hogg & Abrams, 1993). Others have focused on how marginal group members hope to benefit and draw from their association with the group. For instance, the group is perceived as a source for self-esteem (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992), satisfies belongingness needs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), or provides a way to fulfill individual assimilation and distinctiveness needs (Brewer, 1991; Pickett & Brewer, 2005). The common assumption (implicitly) underlying this work, thus, is that individuals tend to be highly strategic in how and when they use their group membership, and that their behavior is aimed at maximizing personal gain through the group and the resources it offers. However, how the group responds to these individual-level needs, goals, and motivations remains unclear in these approaches.

In contrast to this, other lines of research have focused on the group’s (collective) perceptions and evaluations of individuals without taking much notice of the way these individuals respond to such treatment. For example, research on the so-called “black sheep effect” (e.g., Marques, Abrams, & Serôdio, 2001; Marques & Paez, 1994) examining when and why group members evaluate some individuals in the group more positively than others has primarily addressed this issue from the perspective of the group. This research has shown that devaluing or excluding individuals whose behavior reflects negatively on the group can help other group members to maintain a sense of positive group identity. However, this work has not considered why “black sheep” may display such behavior, nor has it addressed the consequences for the individual who is devalued or excluded from the group. Nevertheless, we argue that it is crucial to take into account the perspective of these marginalized individuals to be able to fully understand the process through which other members aim to retain their positive identity and integrity by excluding those who do not fit the mold. Whether the “black sheep” accepts such exclusion, has a legitimate reason to be deviant (see Hornsey, 2005), or promises to do better in the future are all likely to affect the impact of the group’s decision to actually exclude the “black sheep.” Here too, we argue that it is important to address both individual- and group-level perspectives and actions. This enables us to consider the ways in which inclusion goals at these two levels converge or diverge, as well as the likely consequences this has for both the individuals and groups concerned.

This proposal resonates well with work arguing that it is the combination of self-perceptions and group processes—and the way these two processes are negotiated—that is needed to gain a full understanding of the identity dynamics that are involved (see Postmes & Jetten, 2006). This interactive
process becomes clear when self-perceptions about group membership and group perceptions or the way one is defined by others do not match (Barreto & Ellemers, 2003, 2009; Barreto, Ellemers, Scholten, & Smith, 2010; Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Ellemers & Barreto, 2006; Huo & Molina, 2006). For example, others may treat someone as representing a group (e.g., women) that does not reflect this person’s preferred self-definition in a particular context (i.e., when at work). Likewise, the group may treat some individuals as “outsiders,” while membership in this group is important to the individual’s subjective sense of self (as may be the case with immigrants; Barreto, Spears, Ellemers, & Shahinper, 2003; see also Barreto, Ellemers, & Banal, 2006; Ellemers & Rink, 2005; Hornsey & Jetten, 2011). These examples illustrate that it is important to take into account that the group interacts with the individual as much as the individual interacts with the group, and insight into the psychology of groups and individuals is needed to understand this process of negotiation about individual and group inclusion goals (see Postmes & Jetten, 2006, for a similar point).

The MARGINI Model

We distinguish two dimensions that are important in determining different conditions for marginality. The first dimension reflects the extent to which the group’s goal (e.g., because of interpersonal consensus between group members, or because this reflects relevant group guidelines) is for the individual to become more central in the group (group inclusion goal is high) or rejects or cuts off opportunities for further inclusion to those at the edge of the group (group inclusion goal is low). Indeed, previous research has shown that groups may even actively seek to expel those at their fringes (Marques et al., 2001). The second dimension captures the extent to which those currently at the edge seek inclusion in the group. Behavior of marginals may sometimes communicate their desire for inclusion and acceptance in the group (individual inclusion goal is high), but at other times, they may behave in ways that set them apart from the group prototype (individual inclusion goal is low).

We argue that most research so far has (albeit rather implicitly) assumed that group-level inclusion goals and individual-level inclusion goals align and tend to converge toward greater inclusion. In particular, in the socialization literature, it is assumed that over time, individual and group inclusion goals become stronger and that this marks the path from marginal to core group membership. Marginal group members expect to be included by the group, and the group has every intention of including them down the track (see dotted line in Figure 1 from marginal to core membership, marking the path of the “socializing marginal”).

By considering the different ways in which group inclusion goals and individual-level inclusion goals may combine, we are also able to identify forms of marginality that have received less research attention. For example, there has been less consideration of group members for whom individual and group-level goals for inclusion converge in another way: when marginal members do not seek further inclusion in the group and the group also does not wish them to move to a more central position (labeled here as the independent marginal; Figure 1). In addition, individual and group inclusion goals can also diverge whereby the individual seeks group inclusion while the group either does not allow them to advance further into the group or even actively rejects them (labeled as the rejected marginal; Figure 1). A similar tension may arise when the group intends to advance someone to a more central position in the group, while the individual does not share this wish for greater inclusion or even intends to move further away from the group (labeled as the admired marginal; Figure 1).

We argue that forms of marginality whereby group and individual inclusion goals converge are likely to be relatively stable, and responses of individuals and groups under these conditions will tend to be relatively straightforward. Convergence between individual and group inclusion goals is likely to be self-verifying for the individual because the group perceives them and their future in the group in the same way as the individual perceives the self (Swann, 1983; Swann, Polzer, Seyle, & Ko, 2004). However, we predict that the forms of marginality emerging when individual versus group inclusion goals diverge are less self-verifying and hence more unstable. We predict that, when individuals realize that the group’s goals for inclusion do not match their own inclusion goals, they will be inclined to reconsider their inclusion goals in relation to the group, as a way to resolve this divergence. As a result, they may either strategically adapt their behavior to the group’s inclusion goals or hold on to their own inclusion goals (perhaps even further contrasting their own inclusion goals away from group inclusion goals). In the case of divergence between individual and group inclusion goals, emotions and behaviors of marginal group members will be a function of how inclusion goals are negotiated (see Figure 2).

In sum, different conditions for marginality can be considered in terms of convergence versus divergence between individual-level and group-level inclusion goals. In the following sections, we will examine these dynamics more closely for each of the combinations of individual and group inclusion goals outlined in Figure 1. We first consider different cases of convergence before we discuss forms of marginality in which individual and group inclusion goals diverge.

On the way to core membership: The socializing marginal.

The dashed line in Figure 1 represents marginal group members under conditions most studied in previous research—in the role of apprentice, newcomer, or pledge, on their way to core group membership (see Figure 1, Quadrant (a): the “socializing marginal”). Under these conditions, marginals strive for greater inclusion in the group, and this matches the group’s intention and behavior toward the individual. Because individual and group inclusion goals are aligned,
marginal group membership is typically a transitory stage in an ongoing process of group socialization and inclusion on the way to full group membership (Moreland, 1985; Moreland & Levine, 1982; Noel et al., 1995). Examples of marginals in these roles are those who enter the military, schools, organizations, universities, religious groups, cults, gangs, or friendship groups.

It is possible that under these conditions, the marginal individual, the group, or both reconsider their goals for inclusion over time. Individuals might start doubting their inclusion goals when they feel they have to work too hard to obtain a core position, when they become frustrated that the group does not accept their dissent or independent thinking (Hornsey, Grice, Jetten, Paulsen, & Callan, 2007; Rink & Ellemers, 2009), or when their marginal position makes them anxious and uncertain about how to behave (Breakwell, 1979; Kramer, 1998; Louis, 1980; Moreland, 1985; Schuetz, 1944; Van Maanen, 1977). The group might become less willing to include marginals when they express dissent with the group’s set ways, before being fully socialized (Hornsey et al., 2007), or when they are seen to be lacking in their contribution to the group (Rink & Ellemers, 2011). Ironically, the very tendency of marginals to defer to more senior group members can also limit the likelihood that they make such contributions or challenge existing practices, for fear of jeopardizing their acceptance as core members. For instance, it has been found that junior medical students were less likely to blow the whistle on behavioral transgressions of others than more senior students because they felt more afraid of irritating senior members of staff who might block their career progress (Goldie, Schwartz, McConnachie, & Morrison, 2003; see also Jetten, Hornsey, Spears, Haslam, & Cowell, 2010).

We argue, however, that the convergence between individual and group inclusion goals implies that these marginals more often than not are on a steady road toward full inclusion in the group. As long as core membership has not been achieved, the position of the marginal under these conditions is relatively stable, in that the individual and the group are likely to remain committed to the goal of working toward core membership. There are a number of reasons why we think this is the case. First, the individual is likely to experience marginal group membership as rewarding because the group invests in the individuals’ future—Socializing marginals are typically provided with opportunities for growth and personal development (e.g., learning new skills and being exposed to new ideas and values). Second, by taking them in and accepting them, the group provides the individual with grounding. This provides these marginals with a sense of identity and security, and satisfies their belongingness needs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Lewin, 1948; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This in itself can be a source of enhanced well-being and can buffer against the uncertainty of marginality. In particular, when the selection process is competitive and when groups are exclusive, those who are allowed in will feel they are special and derive esteem from being admitted.

When the individual and the group seek further inclusion, the group also benefits from the presence of such marginals. Specifically, the individual’s willingness to secure a more central position in the future and to be socialized as the group sees fit provides the group with considerable leeway in taking advantage from the input and efforts of socializing marginals, even before they become core members of the group (Guimond, 2000; Moreland, Levine, & Cini, 1993). Indeed, marginals who aim for further inclusion in the group have been found to be the most loyal group members and they often define themselves more in line with stereotypical group traits (Pickett, Bonner, & Coleman, 2002), are more likely to derogate out-group members (Jetten, Branscombe, & Spears, 2002; Noel et al., 1995), are more critical of other marginal group members (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001), and emphasize group boundaries more than core members (Pickett & Brewer, 2001). Thus, groups can benefit from marginals who are willing to “give everything they’ve got.” Indeed, marginals who hope to be included in the group have been found to engage in considerable organizational citizenship behavior and typically go far beyond the call of duty (Breakwell, 1979; Jackson & Saltzstein, 1958; Van Kleef, Steinel, van Knippenberg, Hogg, & Svensson, 2007). Furthermore, these marginals validate group norms, and this increases group stability and cohesion. In this way, socializing marginals provide groups with a sense of continuity because values, norms, and beliefs are visibly handed over to the next generation (Sani, 2008).

Happy at the periphery: The independent marginal. If both parties’ inclusion goals converge in the sense that the group and the individual perceive that there are more benefits associated with remaining marginal than with moving away from that marginal position, individuals might well decide to remain in the group as a marginal with the group consenting to this (see Figure 1, Quadrant (b): the “independent marginal”). The very fact that there is convergence between the individual and the group that “staying put” at the periphery is the preferred goal provides stability both for the individual and the group. The marginal under these conditions will find himself or herself in a unique position that is associated with security: They do not need to be concerned about their position in the group and about how they can improve their prototypicality. Moreover, the alignment between individual and group inclusion goals will be perceived as self-verifying for the individual and the group (Swann, 1983).

These marginals take, for example, the position of lone rangers as they are (self-) assigned in roles that require them to stand back and monitor the group and its activities (e.g., as compliance monitors, detectives, experts, or innovators). This implies that they do not need to comply with group rules and are free to criticize existing practices, point to new directions, or blow the whistle when things go wrong (see Wilson, 1956). The independence these marginals experience may be perceived as liberating. Indeed, this position at
the fringe of the group that is chosen by the individual and authorized by the group offers autonomy and opportunities for individual growth and self-actualization, which can be an important source of mental health and emotional well-being (Cozzarelli & Karafa, 1998; Maslow, 1968; see also Bettencourt & Sheldon, 2001).

When marginals do not seem to care about the fate of the group, this can be perceived as disruptive. As a result, when such marginals resist group pressure instead of giving in, they are disliked (see also Schachter, 1951). Moreover, there is evidence that in the zeal of their attempts to improve the group, marginals might present themselves as morally superior and provide particularly a negative comparison for those who do not feel at liberty to challenge norms and values (Monin & Miller, 2001; Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005; Skitka & Mullen, 2003; Wright, Cullum, & Schwab, 2008).

However, to the extent that such marginals identify with the group and its cause, they may well use their independent position to further the goals and achievements of the group. Being alleviated from conformity pressures and having more freedom to speak their mind allow these group members to be critical and offer dissenting views without disrupting the unity of the group. In this way, marginals can have considerable voice and influence—even as they remain at the margins of the group. As long as they are seen to care for the group, their marginal position makes it easier for them to express dissent (Hornsey, 2005; Packer, 2008) and maintain their distance from other group members to resist being compromised, which allows them to enact their moral mandates and ideals. Disengagement from the desire to achieve core membership in this case is by mutual consent, instead of resulting from tension between group and individual goals, and it is therefore not associated with destructive behavior or norm violations.

Groups are likely to benefit from having someone in their midst who cares about the group but whose independence allows them to speak their mind. Under these conditions, criticism is most likely to be effective in bringing about change because it is accepted, attended to, and appreciated by other group members (Hornsey & Imani, 2004; Hornsey, Oppes, & Svensson, 2002). The independent’s status as a legitimate ingroup member enhances the likelihood that criticism is seen as motivated by a genuine desire to help the group improve (see Ellemers, Van Dyck, Hinkle, & Jacobs, 2000; Hornsey et al., 2005). This form of marginality is probably the least studied out of the different forms that we distinguish here.

**Seeking inclusion without being accepted:** The rejected marginal. There is a range of situations in which marginal individuals who seek further inclusion are not willingly included by the group, or are even actively rejected (see Figure 1, Quadrant (c): the “rejected marginal”). Indeed, core members may perceive it as perfectly legitimate to refuse to accept in their midst individuals who do not live up to group expectations (e.g., underperformers), are perceived as violating key group norms, or reflect otherwise badly on the group (so-called “black sheep”; see Marques & Paez, 1994). Alternatively, the unwillingness to accommodate marginals who seek core group membership may stem from (valid or imaginary) concerns about the extent to which the individual meets key criteria for group membership (suspicions of impostorism; see Burton, 2000; Hornsey & Jetten, 2011). More extreme rejection such as scapegoating and bullying occurs when the marginal is seen as directly responsible for the lack of success of the group and the group’s failure to meet target goals. The disapproval and rejection of marginals brings group members together and makes their bonds tighter. Selectively excluding those who do not seem to meet the group’s standards enhances an understanding of the collective consciousness of a community, demarcates group boundaries, provides structure to groups, and clarifies important rules and norms that guide collective behavior (Doosje, Spears, Ellemers, & Koomen, 1999; Marques et al., 2001).

Even in the absence of discrediting information, groups may have a number of reasons to defer marginals who desire future inclusion. First, there is evidence that rejected individuals will work harder for the group (Williams & Sommer, 1997; see also Gómez, Morales, Hart, Vázquez, & Swann, in press), in particular when they are hopeful that the group will include them in the future (Jetten et al., 2003) and when loyalty expressions are public (Jetten et al., 2010; Noel et al., 1995; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001). Despite the fact that these rejected marginals’ loyalty is strategically motivated (i.e., showing the group they are worthy members; Ellemers, Barreto, & Spears, 1999), their efforts on behalf of the group may nevertheless enhance the group’s performance. When groups are happy to enjoy marginal’s eagerness to show their loyalty and commitment, this can easily turn into exploitation of the individual (see Veenstra & Haslam, 2000). For

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**Figure 1. Marginality as Resulting From Group and Individual Negotiation About Inclusion (the MARGINI model)**

![Figure 1](link)
instance, a workforce of casual workers with few future prospects is unlikely to respond to conflict with collective protest against unfavorable employment practices (Haslam, 2004; Smith & Ewer, 1999). However, by failing to fully include and listen to rejected members, the group runs the risk of losing out on the opportunity to introduce other perspectives or new insights to the group. Over time, this will undermine the ability of the group to adapt to change, or to develop new skills or insights that are important for long-term survival (see Morton, Postmes, & Jetten, 2007).

Rejected marginals in this analysis are individuals whose desire for further inclusion in the group exceeds the group’s willingness to include them. We propose that the position of marginals under these conditions is relatively unstable, as we argue that the divergence between individual and group inclusion goals is a source of tension and negative emotions, which can be resolved in different ways. Depending on whether these marginals continue to seek inclusion (despite the reluctance of the group to include them), they will either display strategic adaptation behavior toward the group or they will “give up” on the group, and their behavior toward the group will become more destructive and hostile (see Figure 2).

We first consider those who remain hopeful that the group will be inclined to include them in the future, provided they show they are worthy of membership. The initial rejection and fear that the group might further lower their inclusion goals motivate these individuals and keeps them sharp and on their toes. Concerns related to fears of jeopardizing their precarious position and losing the opportunity to be accepted as a core member are associated with a focus on prevention, and foster tension as well as anxiety emotions (Higgins, 1997; Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997). Initially, there may seem to be benefits to this form of marginality, as rejected marginals who continue to seek inclusion in the group are likely to experience increased mindfulness in social interactions and improved perspective-taking ability (seeing the self through the eyes of others; Frable, Blackstone, & Scherbaum, 1990). However, the chronic effort required to monitor one’s responses and guard against any behaviors that may disqualify them from further inclusion in the group is likely to take its toll, and may actually reduce the ability to display the required behaviors (Frable, 1993; Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998; Smart & Wegner, 1999, 2000). As a result, over time, we predict these marginals to suffer from mental distraction, self-depletion, and impairment of their cognitive ability more generally (see also Ståhl, Van Laar, & Ellemers, 2012). If the group does not adapt its response, and the continued efforts of the rejected marginal to prove worthy of further inclusion do not pay off, individuals might experience stress and stereotype threat (Barreto et al., 2006; Inzlicht & Gutsell, 2007; Inzlicht, McKay, & Aronson, 2006; Twenge & Baumeister, 2005). This further undermines the individual’s ability to perform optimally (see also Barreto, Ellemers, Cihangir, & Stroebe, 2008; Cihangir, Barreto, & Ellemers, 2010).

When the individual’s continued efforts to be accepted are not rewarded, they may eventually let go of the goal of being included in the group. Although this results in greater convergence between individual and group-level goals, this situation is more likely to raise problems, as the thwarted individual is likely to experience aggression and display hostility at the treatment received from the group. Indeed, there is evidence that when marginals perceive that the group will not include them further in the future, they may become hostile toward those who reject them (Twenge, Cantanese, & Baumeister, 2002; Warburton, Williams, & Cairns, 2006; Williams & Sommer, 1997). Such marginals who lost hope of future inclusion by the group are likely to experience a loss of self-respect (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Tajfel, 1975), which easily results in self-destructive behavior (Twenge et al., 2002), frustration, anger, and resentment (Twenge & Baumeister, 2005). We predict that marginals who lose their confidence in ever being able to become accepted will psychologically withdraw from the group and cease to care about the well-being of its members. For instance, research has shown that individuals who feel disrespected by other members of their group are less inclined to consider the fairness and legitimacy of their actions, as they are no longer concerned about their relationships with other group members (Sleebos, Ellemers, & De Gelder, 2006a, 2006b; Skitka, 2003). Former loyalty may easily turn into hate for the group, causing marginals who feel frustrated in their attempts to achieve further inclusion to engage in aggression and extreme behavior, when they try to get even or purposely damage the group. For instance, research on organizational justice has shown that employees who feel unfairly treated by others at work are prone to engage in retaliation behavior against the organization (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Another
example of the way that continued rejection by the group can seriously backfire and may even induce violent behavior directed at the group is provided by a meta-analysis of the causes of school shootings by Leary, Kowalski, Smith, and Philips (2003), which suggests that in 13 of the 15 school shootings that were examined, the shooters had faced social rejection at school.

**Being included while seeking distinction: The admired marginal.** Finally, we consider marginals who have low inclusion goals relative to the group’s goal to include them (see Figure 1, Quadrant (d): the “admired marginal”). This can be the case, for instance, for group members who derive self-confidence and admiration from the group for some exceptional skill, long-standing experience, or crucial expertise (e.g., mavericks or devil’s advocates). This is why we predict that this form of divergence between individual and group inclusion goals does not raise the uncertainty and tension typical of rejected marginals, but instead is associated with promotion emotions and confidence about own choices and preferences (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Florack & Hartmann, 2007; Higgins, 1997; Higgins et al., 1997), which may increase the willingness to take risks and to deviate from norms of the group (see also Faddegon, Scheepers, & Ellemers, 2008; Levine, Higgins, & Choi, 2000).

Marginals under these conditions do not adapt their behavior to communicate ingroup inclusion or to fit in, but take the freedom to display their unique abilities and to pursue their personal visions and ideals. In extreme cases, they will only exert effort on behalf of the group when this is likely to be personally beneficial, and this might lead to free-riding and social loafing (Darley & Latane, 1968; Jackson & Williams, 1985; Olson, 1965) whereby the individual’s awareness that the group wants them more than they want the group leads to exploitation of the group. This awareness also allows admired marginals to display counternormative behavior because the group will tend to see this as a form of “positive deviance,” or as indicating vision and leadership in going first where the group does well to follow (Abrams “positive deviance,” or as indicating vision and leadership in behavior because the group will tend to see this as a form of the group leads to exploitation of the group. This awareness that the group wants them more than they want riding and social loafing (Darley & Latane, 1968; Jackson & & Latane, 1992; Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999) as well as the need to be unique and distinct from others (Codol, 1975; Hornsey & Jetten, 2004; Kim & Markus, 1999; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980; Suls & Wan, 1987).

Thus, at first sight, it may seem that there are clear benefits of having marginal group members who are admired by others in the group’s midst. Nevertheless, to the extent that the group’s desire to include the individual diverges from the individual’s goal to distinguish the self from the group, we predict this to be a relatively unstable state. Indeed, having such marginals in their midst can also be costly for the group. This is particularly the case when the admiration for their achievements and reluctance to fit in undermine group unity and cohesiveness. For example, these marginals may convey the impression that being different is normative and that individualism is preferred over group support and conformity (Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002). These marginals may turn into “prima donnas,” whose success makes them demanding and causes them to prioritize the pursuit of their own personal goals over group goals (e.g., Queen Bee syndrome, Derks, Ellemers, Van Laar, & De Groot, 2011; Ellemers, Van den Heuvel, De Gilder, Maass, & Bonvini, 2004; or Tall Poppies, Feather, 1994).

Over time, the discrepancy between individual and group inclusion goals is likely to be resolved either because the group lets go of the individual, because the individual breaks free from the group, or because the individual reconsiders the value of group inclusion over individual distinctiveness and comes back into the fold. Although this type of marginality has not been systematically addressed in the literature, we propose that admired marginals are of interest as it is not self-evident that their efforts and abilities will benefit the group, and further insight into the conditions under which they are likely either to serve the group or break free and pursue their own agenda is of considerable theoretical and practical interest.

**Different Trajectories Have Different Implications**

The MARGINI model offers a new way to clarify and structure the literature, and provides a clear research agenda as it allows for a more systematic investigation of diverging responses and behavior observed among marginal group members. The model proposes a dynamic process of identity negotiation, in which inclusion preferences may be compatible and pull in converging directions, or are incompatible.
Intragroup Versus Intergroup Dynamics

Our analysis has primarily addressed the way in which individuals in a marginal position relate to the group as a whole—be this conceived as indicating consensual agreement, or as stemming from guidelines or regulations that may be communicated by a single representative. Future research could expand this aspect of our model by examining how the implications of different marginal roles and transitions between them also depend on intragroup dynamics. The extent to which converging or diverging inclusion preferences are beneficial or harmful to the individual and the group will also depend on the preferences and behaviors of others in the group. While marginals are more likely to be conspicuous and stand out when others in the group are highly similar and have converging views, this might also make the group more aware of the added value of allowing for dissent. Indeed, the group might be more open to criticism voiced by independent marginals if others at the margins want to belong and validate the attractiveness and viability of the group. Their presence allows the group not to feel threatened by the lone individual with an independent voice. This suggests that there is likely to be value in considering the simultaneous presence of marginals in different roles, and the number of marginals in each role (see Moreland, 1985, for a similar point), to specify the conditions under which each type of marginal group members is most likely to thrive and be beneficial to the group. Through their connection to the group, marginals can complement each other and learn from each others’ experiences in ways that would not have been possible if they were not connected to the same group. More generally, there is added value in examining whether having marginals in different roles increases intragroup diversity in such a way that all group members benefit. At the same time, it would be important to assess whether high levels of diversity and the acknowledgment that individuals may serve the group in different roles help group members in a marginal role, as this sends out the message that “being different” is not the exception but the rule or even normative for the group (Jetten, Postmes, et al., 2002; Rink & Ellemers, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c).

When examining shifts in individual and group inclusion preferences, there is also added value in taking into account the nature of intergroup relations and how this affects individual and group implications of inclusion versus exclusion. We propose that the salience of other groups is likely to be important here. When another group represents a source of external threat, this will tend to make the group draw together and reaffirm group boundaries in an attempt to guard against such threat (e.g., Greenberg, Simon, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Chatel, 1992; Jetten, Summerville, Hornsey, & Mewse, 2005; Rabbie & Bekkers, 1978). While in times of crisis, socializing marginals may experience an increased rate of acceptance into the group, or admired marginals are called on to display their loyalty to the group, for others, external threat increases the risk that they raise distrust or are cast out as scapegoats (independent or rejected marginals; see Schmitt, Silvia, & Branscombe, 2000). In a similar vein, perceived stability of status relations between different groups, or the perceived permeability of group boundaries and the way this impacts on people’s awareness of alternatives to the current situation should lead individuals as well as groups to adapt their inclusion preferences (see also Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002; Ellemers & Van Laar, 2010; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Such alternatives are particularly important for those who find themselves in a precarious position because individual and group preferences do not converge or shift toward greater incompatibility. In particular, when individual and group goals diverge, marginals might be sensitive to opportunities to join alternative groups.

Finally, dynamics and change are the rule and not the exception because we all define ourselves in relation to multiple different groups. Rather than conceptualizing this simply as a source of role ambiguity or role conflict, we think it
is important to consider the ability to perform in different roles across multiple groups as a potential resource that marginal group members can draw on. That is, the emotional and interpersonal costs of specific types of marginality might more easily be borne by individuals who are resilient to such costs due to their firm inclusion in other groups (Ellemers & Rink, 2005; Iyer, Jetten, Tsivrikos, Haslam, & Postmes, 2009; Jetten, Haslam, & Haslam, 2011; Jones & Jetten, 2011; Linville, 1987; Van Steenbergen & Ellemers, 2009; Van Steenbergen, Ellemers, & Mooijaart, 2007).

**Examining the Negotiation of Marginality**

Although some of the processes outlined in our model already have been noted or were even examined in prior research, these conditions for marginality have rarely been described, let alone investigated in an integrated way. The underexamination of these processes is perhaps not surprising, as the dynamic nature of these processes and temporal changes are hard to capture in controlled studies. Notwithstanding the complexity of a research agenda that aims to do justice to the dynamic nature of these processes, our model generates some concrete questions that might inspire future research.

*When are marginals groupy?* In our model, marginals are key players in the group. Their behavior is consequential and affects group functioning, either in a positive or negative way. If we accept that marginal group members are just as important for understanding group processes (and can be just as groupy) as core members, it becomes apparent that we should further examine the psychology of marginal group members. What is clear from previous research, however, is that marginals’ behavior is much more variable than the behavior of more core members. The model helps us to predict when marginals will be most loyal and defend the group and when they are most likely to be disengaged from it or even turn against the group. We argue that variability in marginals’ behavior can be understood by examining the dynamics between individual versus group inclusion goals instead of focusing only on the individual wish for inclusion or exclusion (peripheral group membership) or the group’s goal of inclusion or exclusion (e.g., Marques et al., 2001; Noel et al., 1995; Twenge & Baumeister, 2005; Williams & Sommer, 1997). Our model offers a clear guideline for doing this, as it specifies that individuals and groups negotiate their inclusion goals and predicts how they deal with specific discrepancies in such goals that may come to the fore.

*When is there merit in marginality?* Second, there has been considerable emphasis so far on the costs for the marginalized individual as well as the negative consequences for the group to have marginals in their midst. Our model helps predict when and how groups might benefit from marginals, in addition to specifying when marginality is associated with costs for the group. Even if many groups realize the value and merit of having marginals in their midst (see Jetten & Hornsey, 2011, for an overview), no systematic attention has been devoted to specifying or examining the benefits of having marginals in the group. As a result, the literature pointing to the merits of marginality is often disjointed and not integrated—although research on creativity and innovation, and on group decision making is clearly relevant here. Because our model identifies different conditions for marginality and outlines how emotional and behavioral responses are determined by the combination of individual and group inclusion goals, it allows future researchers to predict more systematically when specific types of benefits can be expected and why this would be the case.

*How do forms of marginality differ?* The MARGINI model makes clear that there is more to understanding marginal group members behavior than is possible by just perceiving these group members as nonprototypical group members, “prototypical group members in waiting” or even as controls when studying core group members’ behavior. Studying the many ways in which group members can be marginal is important to understand intragroup dynamics in their full complexity. For instance, although individual and group inclusion goals converge and will tend to be relatively stable for socializing marginals and independent marginals, we predict the nature of the responses observed to be quite different, as these reflect the goal of further inclusion in the case of socializing marginals and the goal of remaining at the fringes of the group in the case of independent marginals. Future research might further examine differences between these two types of marginality, for instance, by assessing whether the group is more accepting of criticism or dissent voiced by an independent marginal than of similar behavior displayed by a socializing marginal. We predict that whereas group members might resent the socializing marginal who displays moral superiority or an independent stance (Monin, Sawyer, & Marquez, 2008), they should be much more accepting of independent marginals expressing similar views. In addition, independent marginals are more likely to exert overt and direct influence on the group, while any influence of socializing marginals is likely to be more indirect and may remain unacknowledged (De Dreu & De Vries, 1993; De Dreu, De Vries, Gordijn, & Schuerman, 1999; Nemeth, 1985, 1986; Postmes, Spears, Lee, & Novak, 2005). Systematically examining support for these hypotheses can shed light on the variability in marginals’ group behavior that has been observed in previous work.

**Practical Implications**

At a more general level, the added value of studying the many forms of marginality is not just to satisfy our own curiosity as researchers. It is also of practical importance to understand cost versus benefit processes relating to marginalization, alienation, and isolation in modern society. Indeed, like traditional models of marginality, the media and the general public also seem to subscribe to the view that marginality is associated
with group-level costs such as social isolation or the fragment-
tation of society, and with individual costs such as depression
(see Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Putnam, 2000). Marginalization
is seen as a direct consequence of groups losing their power
to provide a sense of belonging. Even extreme events such as
school shootings that are observed more frequently in Western
societies are seen to result from individual alienation and
marginalization (Aronson, 2000). Although it is indisputable
that extreme marginalization may promote callousness, insen-
sitivity, disloyalty, and increased competition—all of which
harm individual well-being as well as group functioning—the
current analysis helps understand the relationship between
marginality and group belonging, and the benefits accruing
from this in contemporary society, in which there is increased
diversity between individuals and the multiple groups they
belong to. Such an approach has the potential to provide a
more balanced, theory-driven account of marginality and
group belonging that does more justice to societal problems
we are facing in practice.

By starting with the assumption that groups may need
their marginal members as much as they need core group
members, we can come to understand the type of groups a
modern society needs to promote to enhance solidarity and
cohesion while also nurturing individual initiative, indepen-
dence, and diversity. We propose that even when marginality
is associated with self-reliance, individuality, independence,
and personal initiative, these behaviors are not necessarily
destructive forces to groups such as families, workgroups,
organizations, and nations. Instead, groups can benefit from
them, just as much as the individual can benefit from being
at a marginalized position within a group.

Concluding Thoughts

Our analysis proposes a reconceptualization of marginality
that opens up new ways of thinking about marginality, and
offers concrete avenues for future research. The model
shows how we can move away from simplistic and uni-
dimensional notions about marginality in groups, to under-
stand that although different forms of marginality may look
the same, they feel very different. We offer the MARGINI
model as a tool to detect and understand differences between
individuals taking a marginal role, as revealed by emotions
and behaviors characteristic for a particular form of margin-
ality. The added value of our model is that it spells out the
dynamics of marginality and thereby helps to understand when
and why marginals will strive for greater group accept-
tance. It explains when marginals are satisfied with their
marginal position, when they are likely to strive for greater
inclusion in the group, or when they will attempt to leave
the group. In offering this framework, we hope to have clarified
the many forms of marginality, by demonstrating that indi-
viduals may have good reasons to seek out a marginal iden-
tity, and showing that groups and individuals alike sometimes
benefit most when members are least included in the group.

Authors’ note

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