

Felt understanding as a bridge between social identity and wellbeing among international university students



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Introduction

- Mental health and wellbeing** difficulties among international university students who can experience social isolation have been recognised as a crisis.
- Previous research shows that **social identity** and **felt understanding** (the belief that others understand oneself; Oishi et al., 2010) each has a positive effect on wellbeing (Jetten et al., 2017). However, these two approaches have not been integrated.
- The present study tested the **mediating effect of felt understanding**. Specifically, social identity should predict a greater sense of being understood by others, which should in turn predict better wellbeing
- Social support, life meaning, and personal control** are also tested as mediators.

Method

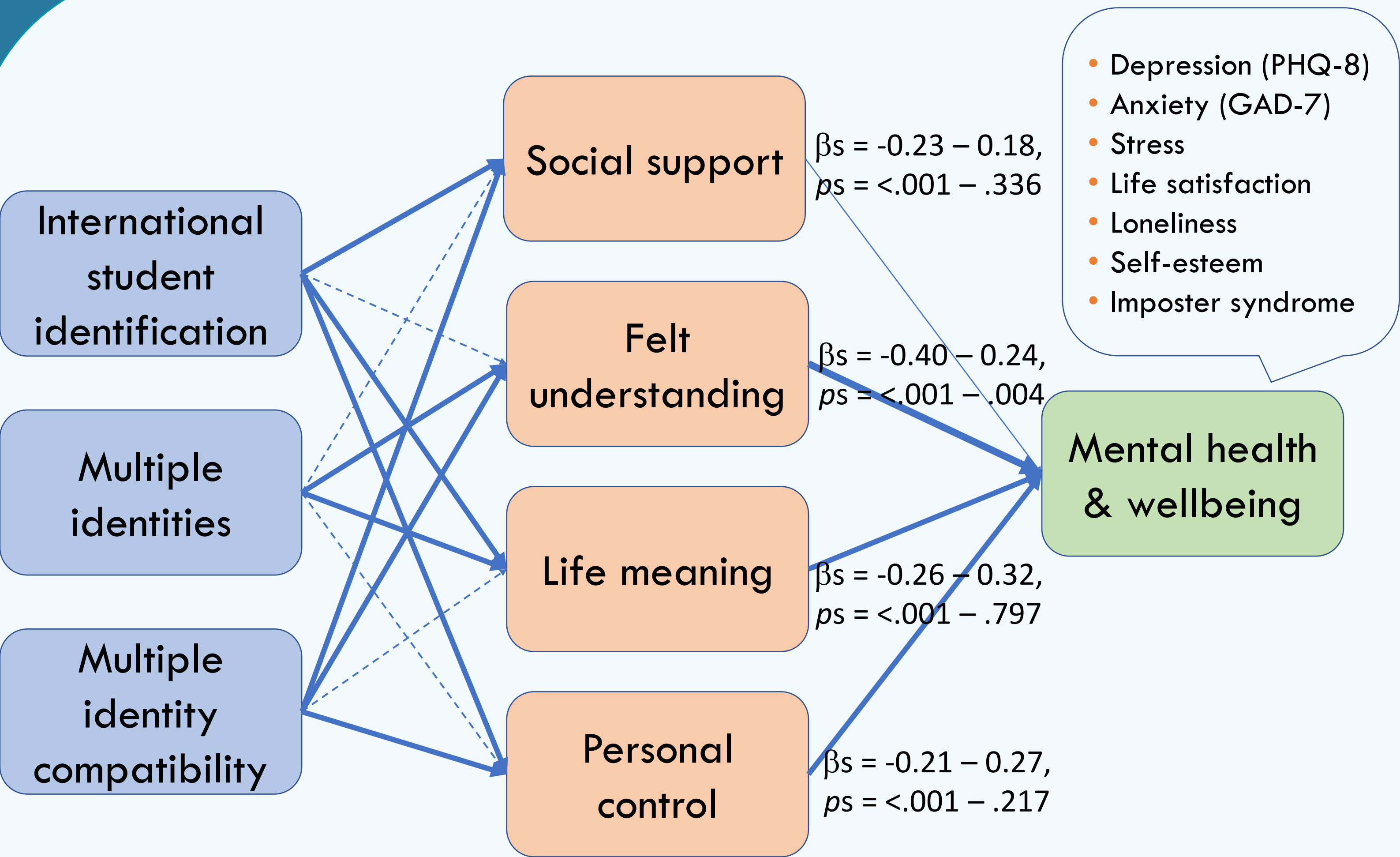
301 international students (77% female; $M_{age} = 23.3$; range 17-69) completed an online questionnaire including the following measures:

Social identity variables: international student identification, multiple identities, multiple identity compatibility

Process variables: social support, felt understanding, life meaning, personal control

Wellbeing outcomes: 7 measures, including depression, anxiety, stress, life satisfaction, loneliness, self-esteem, and imposter syndrome

Results



Mediator	Predictor	Indirect effect Bs (range)	Indirect effect ps (range)
Social support	IS	-0.10 - 0.04	.053 - .479
	MI	-0.05 - 0.02	.196 - .533
	MIC	-0.16 - 0.08	.016 - .454
Felt understanding	IS	-0.07 - 0.02	.402 - .447
	MI	-0.26 - 0.02	.002 - .038
	MIC	-0.34 - 0.09	.006 - .051
Life meaning	IS	-0.16 - 0.03	.035 - .267
	MI	-0.16 - 0.04	.030 - .286
	MIC	-0.14 - 0.04	.136 - .363
Personal control	IS	-0.14 - 0.06	.015 - .302
	MI	-0.06 - 0.03	.296 - .526
	MIC	-0.17 - 0.08	.023 - .341

* 7 separate models were run; one for each wellbeing outcome.

Indirect effects of social identity variables on most of the mental health & wellbeing outcomes were **highly-significant via felt understanding, life meaning and personal control**.

** IS - International Student Identification, MI - Multiple Identities, MIC - Multiple Identity Compatibility

Conclusion

- Social identity can provide a sense of being understood by others, and **felt understanding** is in turn an important, but under-acknowledged **bridge between social identities and wellbeing**.
- Felt understanding** is crucial because it reflects our concerns for how others understand and evaluate our own inner world, and is thus an important platform for fulfilling interactions.
- Personal control and life meaning** mediates the relationship between social identity and wellbeing concurrently. There is less evidence for the unique mediating roles of social support.
- Nevertheless, these findings are based on cross-sectional data. Future research could extend this further by testing the **causal relationship** between these variables.