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# When Ethnic Identities Vary: Cross-Situation and Within-Situation Variation, Authenticity, and Well-Being

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## Abstract

The current research investigated situational variations in ethnic identity and the relations between identity variations and psychological well-being. In a sample of first- ( $n = 47$ ) and second-generation ( $n = 82$ ) immigrants to Canada who completed a questionnaire survey, it was found that Canadian and heritage identity variation showed the hypothesized situational and generational differences. Furthermore, heritage affect and heritage ties buttressed the second-generation group from experiencing negative well-being as a result of differences in heritage identity across private and public domains (i.e., cross-situation variation). Finally, the relations between situated Canadian or heritage identity (i.e., within-situation variation) and well-being in both generations depended on the felt authenticity associated with the given identity. In general, our results showed positive effects of feeling true to a counternormative (vs. normative) identity on well-being. These patterns were interpreted in terms of the normative implications of the situated identity choices. Overall, the results underscore the importance of examining when and how identity variation is psychologically adaptive or maladaptive in multicultural contexts.

## Keywords

ethnic identity, situational variation, authenticity, psychological well-being, acculturation

Ethnic identity refers to the subjective sense of belonging to an ethnic reference group (Clément & Noels, 1992; Phinney, 1990). Like many other social identities (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004), ethnic identity can be said to comprise both stable and dynamic aspects (Yip, 2008). Ethnic minorities can develop a relatively stable appreciation for their heritage culture yet accentuate or downplay heritage identity momentarily as required by the immediate social situation. The overarching goal of this study is to assess the situated aspect of ethnic identities among first- and second-generation immigrants to Canada. Extending this general premise, we then consider how identity choices on a situation-to-situation basis have cumulative consequences for psychological well-being. Consider a recent immigrant who shifts her heritage

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identity between interacting with people of host culture and people of her heritage community. An important empirical question is whether such a (sometimes drastic) shift of identity salience between situational domains affects this person's overall well-being. To what extent does this relation also depend on the stable components of her heritage identity? We address this question in the second part of the present research. Finally, we introduce the notion of situated authentic self that may be either consistent or inconsistent with the normative response in a given situation. Because immigrants may face the challenge of balancing the need to be true to themselves and the need to accommodate to mixed cultural groups, we examine whether situated identity choices interact with situated authenticity to predict well-being.

### *Ethnic Identity: A Situated Perspective*

We take a situated approach to ethnic identity, which was developed with a view to integrating concepts of acculturation in (cross-)cultural psychology with notions of ethnolinguistic identity in the social psychology of language and sociolinguistics (Clément & Noels, 1992; Noels, Clément, & Gaudet, 2004; Noels, in press). In line with the bidimensional model of acculturation (Berry, 1997), we maintain that both the group of origin and the majority group in the receiving society are relevant to the ethnic self-definition of immigrants. In addition, our interest in the processes of identity negotiation distinguishes a situated approach from the general models of acculturation. While the latter is useful in assessing one's overall acculturation modes (e.g., Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000), our perspective emphasizes the patterns of actual feelings of identification that vary as a function of situations. They may or may not correspond with more general measures of acculturation (Clément, Gauthier, & Noels, 1993; Clément, Sylvestre, & Noels, 1991). Thus, similar to an array of theoretical traditions that describe identity as a context-bound experience (Deaux, 2006; Schlenker & Weigold, 1989; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), our position holds that people navigate in and out of ethnic memberships as required by the immediate situational demands (Clément & Noels, 1992; see also Okamura, 1981; Rosenthal, Whittle, & Bell, 1989).

Closely related to this situated perspective on ethnic identity is the body of bicultural research on bicultural identity negotiation (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; No, Wan, Chao, Rosner, & Hong, 2011). For example, bicultural and multicultural persons are capable of alternating between cultural frames depending on the salience of cultural cues (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000; Tadmor, Hong, Chiu, & No, 2010). Crucially, this cultural frame switching was found to be mediated by changes in ethnic identification affected by the cultural primes (Verkuyten & Pouliasi, 2006), suggesting the important role of situationally activated ethnic identity in affecting behavioral shifts. Those studies thus provide evidence for the existence of behavioral shifting that is coordinated with the fluctuation of putative identities.

While there is not yet consensus on how to conceptualize situations (for a recent review, see Reis, 2008), we follow the work of researchers interested in the social foundations of language use (e.g., Brown & Fraser, 1979; Hymes, 1972) in defining situations as consensual expectations characterized in terms of three key characteristics: the settings, the relationship between interlocutors, and the purpose of the activity. Our present focus lies in the immediate social interactions, which complements the concern, among social identity and acculturation researchers, with the macrolevel, sociostructural features of context (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002; Mistry & Wu, 2010; Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010; see Clément & Noels, 1992, or Noels, in press, for a discussion of the interaction between micro- and macrolevels of context). It has been found that, although many situational domains can be distinguished, they generally vary in their level of intimacy (Côté & Clément, 1994; Noels, Saumure, Clément, & MacIntyre, 2012). An important implication of this variation is that relatively private domains (e.g., with

family and friends) provide fewer opportunities for intercultural interaction than relatively public domains (e.g., work and school). These features can include ethnic composition in the immediate context, language used, engagement of heritage activity, and presence of family members (Perunovic, Heller, & Rafaeli, 2007; Ross, Xun, & Wilson, 2002; Yip, 2005; Yip & Fuligni, 2002). As a result, acculturative pressures on identity are less evident in private than in public domains (Noels, Leavitt, & Clément, 2010).

Thus, the first goal of this research is to replicate the pattern of situational variations in identification demonstrated in previous research (e.g., Noels et al., 2004; Noels et al., 2010). In other words, because of fewer opportunities for intercultural interaction in private domains, we predicted that, on average, immigrants should evidence stronger feelings of belonging to their heritage group and weaker feelings of belonging to the mainstream group. However, this tendency should be reversed in public domains as a result of more contact with members of the receiving society.

### *The Normativity of Situated Identities and Individual Deviations*

Our next goal is to link situational variations of identity with psychological well-being. Although the cognitive and behavioral consequences of identity shifting are well documented, only recently have the links between identity shifting and well-being in everyday life been examined (e.g., Yip, 2008). In particular, even though cultural frame-switching has been assumed to be adaptive in terms of meeting shifting and sometimes conflicting cultural standards, research has only begun to investigate empirically whether or not it is conducive to immigrants' well-being in their everyday life. Consistent with recent findings along similar lines (Kramer, Lau-Gesk, & Chiu, 2009; Sanchez, Shih, & Garcia, 2009), we argue that the relations between identity variation and well-being are indirect and are probably moderated by other factors. Before elaborating on our position, we first make a distinction between identity variation that is normative and individual deviations from such normative pattern.

It is reasonable to conceive of a situation as affording normatively shared reality from which identification can be consensually coordinated (cf., Baerveldt & Voestermans, 2005; Hardin & Higgins, 1996). Thus, the average pattern of identification in a situation among a group of people can reflect the normative reaction to that situation in the sense that it describes the typical identity pattern for members of that group. And to the extent that situational requirements vary from one situation to another, at least a portion of people's identity variation can be construed as implicit adaptations to different situational norms.

However, not everyone conforms to norms to the same degree; in fact, individuals can deviate substantially (Leung & Cohen, 2011). The reasons for departure from situational norms may follow the broad Person  $\times$  Situation interactionism principles (Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Reynolds et al., 2010), in that situation norms contain psychological features that interact with the perceiver's construal to generate distinctive behavior. For example, some biculturals show reactance against cultural cues by contrasting their behavior away from instead of assimilating into them (Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002). This norm-defying tendency has been attributed to the fact that some biculturals experience difficulty integrating their cultural identities. In a nutshell, whether people conform to or depart from the normative features of a situation depends on the situation-specific sense-making that varies from person to person.

Because people interpret situations and hence plan their subsequent course of action differently, the implications of identity variation for well-being may vary as well. We maintain that some personal characteristics might moderate the relations between identity variation and well-being. In the following, we distinguish between two types of identity variation: cross-situation variation and within-situation variation. We then propose a moderator for each type and offer a rationale for why the moderation may occur.

### *Cross-Situation Variation, Global Heritage Identity, and Well-Being*

Our situated perspective suggests that, because situations offer different affordances and constraints, variation of identity across situations (i.e., cross-situation variation) is often necessary. Hence, for immigrants or minority groups, a discrepancy in identity across situations might be regularly experienced (e.g., feeling strongly Chinese but not Canadian at home with family members, but feeling strongly Canadian and not Chinese at work with colleagues and bosses). Given the attention drawn to heritage identity in acculturation and developmental psychology (Phinney, 1990, 2003), in this study we will focus on heritage identity gaps between the private and public domains. Because we predicted stronger heritage identity in the private (vs. public) domains on average, we expected individual scores on heritage identity gap to be distributed around this central tendency.

For heritage identity gap to affect well-being, we reasoned that it depends on how variation is given meaning by the perceiver (cf., Damji, Clément, & Noels, 1996). People who can discriminate the subtle psychological features of social situations respond appropriately to each situation and hence are more socially competent (Chiu, Hong, Mischel, & Shoda, 1995). By extension, if variation is perceived as functional and meaningful, one is more likely to perceive the identity gap as an adaptive response. On the contrary, if variation lacks a sense of apparent purpose, it is more likely to be experienced as maladaptive.

We think that a global sense of heritage identity, characterized here as a relatively stable component of heritage identity, plays a role in determining when heritage identity gap affects well-being. In a multitude of research that examines the relations between global heritage identity and well-being, pertinent to the present study are the findings that global heritage identity buffers ethnic minorities from the negative impact of daily aversive experiences such as discrimination and stress on mental health (Kiang et al., 2006; Shelton et al., 2005; Torres & Ong, 2010). It is possible that it serves a similar function with regards to experiencing situated identity gap. In one of the few studies that tested how global and situated identity interact, Yip and colleagues showed that on days or in situations when heritage identity became salient, its level of salience was associated with positive well-being among those high on global heritage identity (Yip, 2005; Yip & Fuligni, 2002). Our study seeks to extend their research by focusing on the *cumulative* well-being consequence of experiencing identity disparity across situational domains. For the second goal of this study, we thus propose a positive global sense of heritage identity as functioning to protect immigrants from experiencing negative consequences of a sharp identity gap.

It should be noted that a tripartite model has proven useful for illuminating the multidimensional nature of global heritage identity (Cameron, 2004; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1998). Of particular interest is the fact that membership evaluation and emotional involvement or attachment, but not membership importance, have consistently shown salubrious effects (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010; Yip & Fuligni, 2002). Accordingly, we expected that only the evaluative and emotional components of global heritage identity would buffer the negative impact of identity gap on well-being.

### *Within-Situation Variation, Authenticity, and Psychological Well-Being*

A second source of variation is individual variation around the normative response within a situation (“within-situation variation”). In situations involving one’s heritage culture, for example, people can experience a relatively strong feeling of belonging to their heritage group relative to the mainstream group or conversely feel a weaker sense of heritage belonging and/or feeling more attached to the mainstream group. In private domains, the former pattern is expected to be more typically experienced by immigrant groups (i.e., the normative identity

pattern) than the latter pattern (i.e., the counter-normative pattern). Similar to the view regarding cross-situation variation, we reasoned that whether a normative or counternormative response to a given situation enhances or undermines well-being depends on the reflection brought to bear on the experience.

One such reflection concerns felt authenticity. Research on authenticity has shown that people differ in the extent to which their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are experienced as an expression of one's core or true self (Kernis, 2003; Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Considerable evidence supports the role of authenticity in facilitating positive well-being (see Kernis & Goldman, 2006, for a review). Furthermore, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000) holds that people are fully functioning when they feel autonomous or self-governed—that is, when their actions are congruent with their core selfhood. As such, authentic and autonomous functioning are closely linked (Heppner et al., 2008). In the context of situated identities, this is akin to the phenomenon that although people can and do oftentimes adopt identities appropriate to the situation at hand, upon reflection some identities feel congruent with whom they think they should be given the situation, while others feel pressed by the situational forces.

We seek to extend authenticity research to the immigrant experience in two important ways. First, while authenticity has mostly been conceptualized as a stable trait (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997), we tackle it at the same level as situated identities. Although the idea of an authentic self often connotes consistency, that is, the opposite of variability, research has shown that among people with a more malleable self-construal, authenticity is less tethered to behavioral consistency in terms of a core set of traits that permeate across situations (Boucher, 2011; S. E. Cross, Gore, & Morris, 2003; English & Chen, 2011). Thus, it makes better sense to construe authenticity at the situated level for acculturating individuals, given the complexity of being accountable to mixed cultural groups (No et al., 2011; Tadmor & Tetlock, 2006). Similar to the distinction drawn above, we focus on authenticity felt in the private and public domains, respectively.

Second, we think it is important to examine authenticity beyond its demonstrated overall effect on well-being. Specifically, we aim to investigate the interactive effects of felt authenticity in conjunction with the substantive content that constitutes the feeling. Based on cross-cultural evidence that authenticity was less strongly associated with well-being in those with a more dialectical self-concept (Boucher, 2011), we infer that the positive effect of situated authenticity on immigrants' well-being may not be uniform across all their situated identities. For example, two acculturating individuals could feel equally authentic in expressing an identity that conforms to the situational norm and an identity that departs from it. However, the second individual could be at psychological risk when expressing a counternormative identity. So the question is whether authenticity might play a positive role when an expressed identity makes immigrants stand out from the situational identity norm. As a third goal, we explore whether situated authenticity affects the relations between normative or counternormative situated identities and well-being.

### *Generational Status*

For the final goal, we consider possible generational differences in all the processes described above. Generation is the most frequently used marker of acculturation (Phinney, 2003). Some studies showed generational differences in the degree of global identification with the heritage and dominant group (e.g., Lay & Verkuyten, 1999). Others focused on the meanings attached to the two cultural groups. Tsai, Ying, and Lee (2000) demonstrated that "being Chinese" and "being American" were inversely associated among recent Chinese immigrants but were independent among U.S.-born Chinese Americans. Moreover, Hong and No (2005) postulated

different developmental trajectories of acculturation facing first-generation (G1) and later generation (including G2) immigrants.

Generational differences have also been observed at the situational level. In line with Clément, Noels, and colleagues (e.g., Clément, Singh, & Gaudet, 2006; Noels et al., 2010), we expected that the general patterns of identification across situations would be qualified by generational status. Although heritage identity is expected to be relatively sheltered from acculturative pressure in private domains for both generational groups, the sheltering effect should be attenuated among G2 relative to G1. This is presumably because the offspring of immigrants may have cultivated more outgroup contact even in higher intimacy situations. With regards to other questions, given the wide interest in generational differences, we examined them in the G1 and G2 group separately for exploratory purpose.

## Method

### Participants

The sample consisted of 129 introductory psychology students at the University of Alberta (86 females, 41 males, 2 did not indicate their gender) who completed a survey on ethnic identity and psychological well-being for course credit. They ranged in age from 17 to 35, with a mean age of 18.94. Forty-seven were born outside of Canada (G1) and 82 were Canadian-born with at least one foreign-born parent (G2). One did not indicate the country of birth and was hence removed from analyses. The majority (78%) of the sample self-identified as Asian, followed by European, Middle Eastern, African, Hispanic, and Other. Among the G1, their length of time lived in Canada ranged from approximately 3 to 25 years ( $M = 11.07$ ,  $SD = 5.20$ ). Approximately 11% of the G1 group spoke English as their native language and 66% spoke a non-English language as their native language. The remainder (23.4%) spoke English and another language(s) as native languages. In comparison, 41.5% of the G2 group spoke English as their native language, with 37.8% reporting a non-English native language and 19.5% reporting both English and at least one other native language. Although the G1 group was on average 1 year older than the G2 group ( $t = 3.00$ ,  $p = .004$ ), there were no differences in the gender distribution across the groups.

### Measures

*Situated Ethnic Identity Scale (SEIS)*. This 16-item scale was developed to assess patterns of identification with regards to one's culture of origin and the dominant culture (in this case, Anglo-Canadian)<sup>1</sup> in domains that differ in interpersonal intimacy (Noels et al., 2012). The private domain is indexed by eight scenarios referring to interaction with family and friends (e.g., "I am at home talking with my mother about family affairs"; "I am at my close friend's home and we are talking about our dreams and plans for the future") and the public domain by eight scenarios referring to interaction at university and community ("I am talking with my instructor in his/her office about an upcoming test"; "I am in a store talking with a salesclerk about the merchandise"). Noels et al. (2012) confirmed two higher-order factors that can be interpreted as private and public domains. Moreover, the domains differed as expected in ratings of intimacy.<sup>2</sup> For each scenario, participants rated their subjective feeling toward two reference groups on two separate 7-point scales, with 1 being *not at all* (*my ethnic group / Anglo-Canadian*) and 7 being *very strongly* (*my ethnic group / Anglo-Canadian*). Such repeated assessment made it possible to assess the two reference groups independently across the private and public domains. Mean scores were calculated separately for the heritage and Canadian

**Table 1.** Means, Standard Deviations, and Alphas as a Function of Identity Type, Domains, and Generational Status

	G1 (n = 47)			G2 (n = 82)		
	$\alpha$	M	SD	$\alpha$	M	SD
Private domain						
Heritage identity	.82	5.13	1.21	.83	4.62	1.07
Canadian identity	.89	3.85	1.25	.81	4.00	1.03
Public domain						
Heritage identity	.93	3.27	1.41	.91	3.02	1.24
Canadian identity	.93	4.81	1.21	.93	4.49	1.39

Note: The scale ranges theoretically from 1 to 7.

identities across the private and public domains (see Table 1 for respective means, standard deviations, and alphas). The average pattern of identification in a given domain served as an index for the normative tendency in that domain.

**Global heritage identification.** Cameron's (2004) Social Identification Scale, which measures a tripartite model of social identity—centrality, affect, and ties—was adapted to the present context. The scale consists of 12 items and the participants were asked to rate how much they agree with each statement on a 6-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Centrality refers to the importance of one's heritage identity and was assessed by four items ( $\alpha = .74$ ; e.g., "I often think about the fact that I am a member of my heritage group"). Affect reflects one's evaluation associated with being the member of one's heritage group and was also measured by four items ( $\alpha = .84$ ; e.g., "Generally, I feel good when I think about myself as a member of my heritage group"). For the Ties subscale, it refers to the sense of connectedness to one's heritage group ( $\alpha = .84$ ; e.g., "I have a lot in common with other members of my heritage group").

**Situated authenticity.** We adapted Sheldon et al.'s (1997) five-item scale to measure felt authenticity regarding situated feelings of identification with two reference groups. Specifically, after completing the SEIS, the participants were instructed to reflect upon the responses they had just provided and indicate how true or authentic those feelings of identification were by rating the same set of items in varied orders (e.g., "I feel tense and pressured about my identity in this part of my life"; reverse worded). Responses were recorded on a 9-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*) in family, friend, university, and community settings, respectively. For each setting, participants were asked to think of the overall feelings of identification rather than heritage and Canadian identity separately. The  $\alpha$ s ranged from .63 to .80. A high score on authenticity indicates that the expression of the situated identities (heritage and Canadian considered together) was enacted volitionally and was experienced as a true aspect of the self. We then averaged the scores from family and friend settings to create situated authenticity for the private domain; similarly, situated authenticity for the public domains was computed by averaging the university and community authenticity scores.

**Psychological well-being.** To assess global psychological well-being, we used Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) and Perceived Stress Inventory (PSI; Cohen, Kamarack, & Mermelstein, 1983). SWLS comprises five items that measure global evaluation of life (e.g., "In most ways, my life is close to ideal"). It was anchored on a 7-point scale, with 0 indicating *strongly disagree* and 6 *strongly agree*. The  $\alpha$  for SWLS was .87. The PSI is a 14-question inventory that retrospectively assesses the frequency of stress in the last month (e.g., "In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important



thing in your life?"). The items ( $\alpha = .82$ ) were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*very often*). Because the two well-being measures were correlated negatively with each other ( $r = -.53, p < .001$ ), we created a well-being composite in each generation group by subtracting the standardized PSI scores from the standardized SWLS scores.

## Results

### *Situated Identities Among G1 and G2: Similarities and Differences*

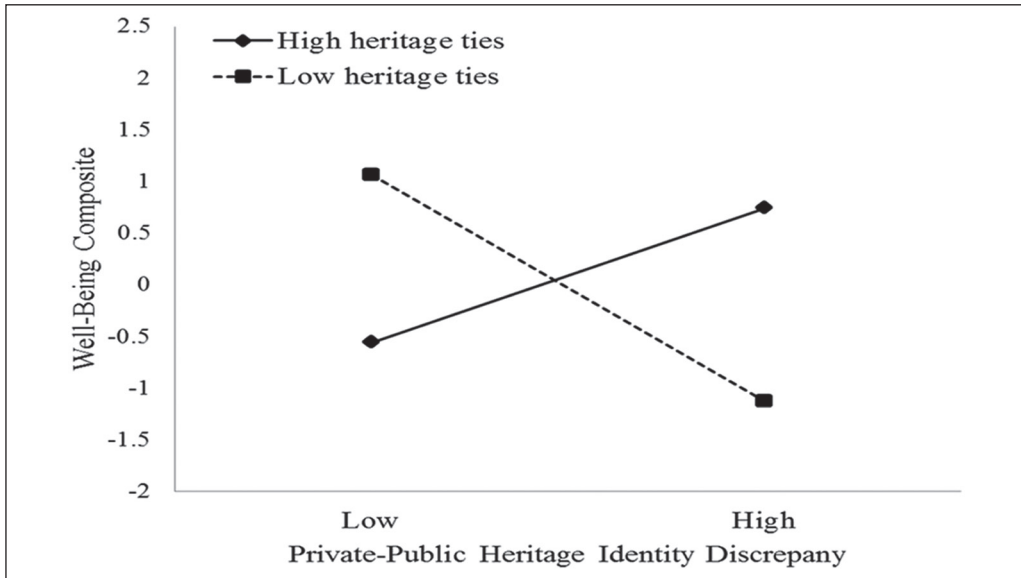
To test our hypothesis regarding identity variation across the private and public domains, we conducted a 2 (Domain: Private vs. Public)  $\times$  2 (Identity: Heritage vs. Canadian)  $\times$  2 (Generation: G1 vs. G2) mixed-model ANOVA, with the first two variables as within-subjects factors and the last one as a between-subjects factor. Wilk's Lambda indicated that there was a statistically significant main effect of domain,  $F(1, 120)^3 = 66.42, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .36$ , meaning that participants reported stronger identity in the private domain compared with the public domain. There was also a marginally significant main effect of identity,  $F(1, 120) = 3.68, p = .06, \eta_p^2 = .03$ , showing marginally stronger overall Canadian identity relative to heritage identity. These main effects were qualified by the Domain  $\times$  Identity two-way interaction,  $F(1, 120) = 188.79, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .61$ , indicating that the identification patterns differed significantly across the situational domains. Canadian identity was stronger in the public settings compared with the private settings. The opposite was true of heritage identity.

Last, the Domain  $\times$  Identity  $\times$  Generation three-way interaction was also significant,  $F(1, 120) = 4.21, p = .04, \eta_p^2 = .03$ , suggesting that the foregoing identification patterns further vary as a function of generational status (see Table 1).<sup>4</sup> To further understand where the generational differences lie, we conducted 2  $\times$  3 (Identity  $\times$  Generation) mixed ANOVAs in the private and public domains, respectively. For the public domain, the identity main effects were significant,  $F(1, 122) = 69.76, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .36$ , showing higher Canadian identity relative to heritage identity. Generational status did not interact with identity ( $F < 1$ ). In other words, both G1 and G2 displayed the same acculturation pattern, such that they felt a stronger Canadian than heritage identity in the public domain. In the private domain, there was also a main effect of identity,  $F(1, 121) = 36.64, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .23$ , which was qualified by the two-way interaction,  $F(1, 121) = 4.32, p = .04, \eta_p^2 = .03$ . Whereas heritage identity was stronger than Canadian identity for both groups, such difference was larger for G1 ( $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .31$ ) compared with G2 ( $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$ ). This smaller difference among G2 was driven by the weaker heritage identity.

Taken together, these results are consistent with our hypothesis that identity patterns would correspond with patterns of intercultural contact and acculturation pressures that differ across domains. Public domains are more susceptible to the acculturative pressure of intercultural contact. We also found that compared to G1, G2 exhibited more acculturation in the private domain. This is consistent with the interpretation that relative to G1, the G2 group has greater intercultural contact and experiences greater acculturation pressure in private domains.

### *Global Heritage Identity, Private-Public Identity Gap, and Well-Being*

While the identification patterns above showed fluctuation of identity across situations *on average*, there were differences in the extent to which individuals conformed to the average patterns. In this section, we examine individual differences in the heritage identity gap between the private and public domains and how the three facets of global heritage identity moderate the relation between this identity gap and well-being. To reiterate, we hypothesized that global heritage affect and ties would buffer the negative effect of identity gap on well-being.



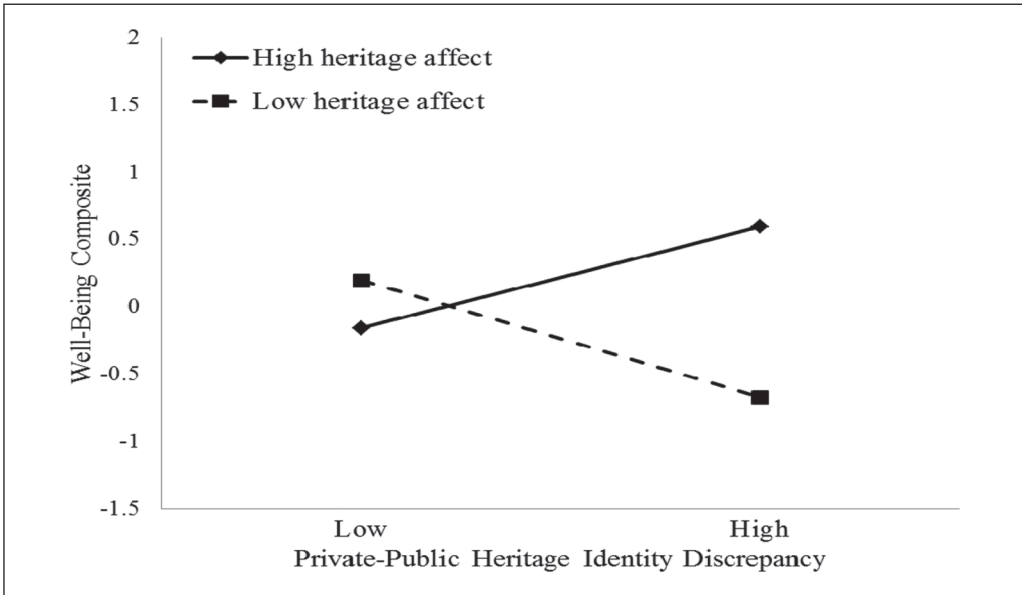
**Figure 1.** Well-Being Composite Predicted by Heritage Ties and Private-Public Heritage Identity Gap for G2  
 Note: Heritage ties scores were plotted  $\pm 1$  SD from the heritage ties mean.

To compute an index of heritage identity gap, we subtracted heritage public domain scores from heritage private domain scores. The mean of this difference score was positive (1.72; 1.87 in G1 and 1.63 in G2) and significantly above zero ( $ps < .001$ ), which was consistent with the pattern shown above that heritage identity was more salient in the private (vs. public) domain. However, there was also substantial individual variation ( $SD = 1.17$ ; 1.31 in G1 and 1.08 in G2), ranging from -1.13 to 5.00. To test moderation effects, we regressed the well-being composite onto heritage identity gap (centered), one of the global heritage facets (centered; heritage centrality, affect, or ties), and their interaction. We repeated the same analyses in G1 and G2 separately.

For the G1 group, there was no evidence that any global heritage identification facets moderated the relation between identity gap and well-being (all  $ps > .17$ ).

For the G2 group, centrality did not interact with identity gap in predicting well-being ( $p = .36$ ). However, there was a significant interaction between heritage ties and identity gap ( $\beta = .40$ ),  $t(78) = 3.48$ ,  $p = .001$ .<sup>5</sup> As plotted in Figure 1, simple slopes analyses probed the interaction (Aiken & West, 1991) and showed that whereas identity gap was associated positively with well-being at high levels of heritage ties,  $t(78) = 2.48$ ,  $p = .02$ , they were associated negatively at low levels of heritage ties,  $t(78) = -3.09$ ,  $p = .003$ . Viewed differently, while heritage ties were correlated negatively with well-being at low levels of identity gap,  $t(78) = -2.23$ ,  $p = .03$ , they were correlated positively with well-being at high levels of identity gap,  $t(78) = 3.66$ ,  $p < .001$ . Thus, the shift in heritage identity from the public to private domains seems adaptive to those G2 who feel strongly connected to their heritage groups. On the contrary, it is maladaptive to those G2 who feel weakly connected, especially when the identity disparity is large.

The analyses also revealed a marginal Identity Gap  $\times$  Heritage Affect interaction on the well-being composite,  $\beta = .23$ ,  $t(78) = 1.81$ ,  $p = .07$ . The interaction was explored at  $\pm 1$  SD from the mean of heritage affect (see Figure 2). Whereas identity gap tended to be positively associated positively with well-being at high levels of heritage affect,  $t(78) = 1.29$ ,  $p = .20$ , it tended to be negatively associated at low levels of heritage affect,  $t(78) = -1.51$ ,  $p = .13$ . Viewed differently,



**Figure 2.** Well-Being Composite Predicted by Heritage Affect and Private-Public Heritage Identity Gap for G2

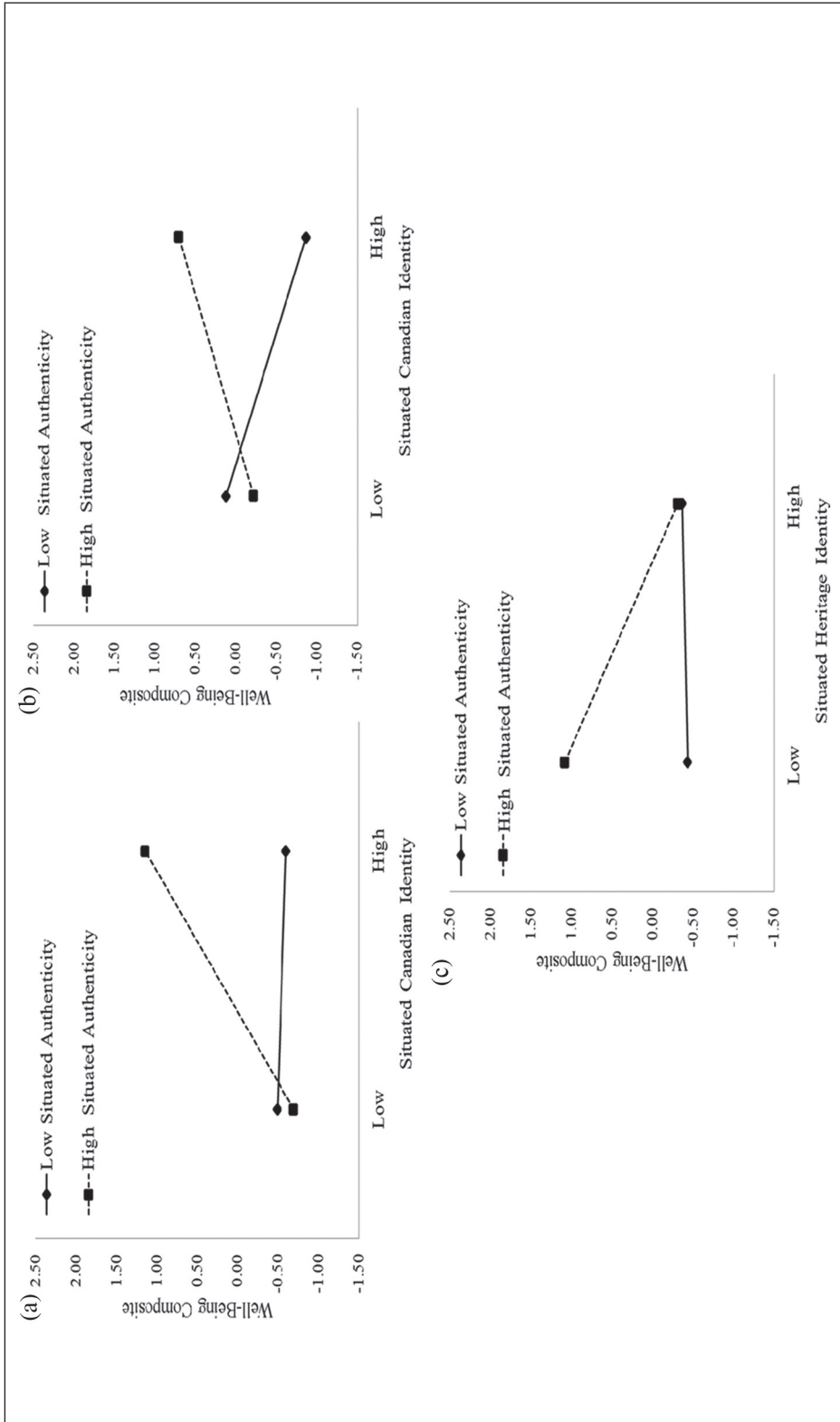
Note: Heritage affect scores were plotted  $\pm 1$  SD from the heritage affect mean.

whereas heritage affect was correlated positively with well-being at high levels of identity gap,  $t(78) = 2.34, p = .03$ , it was unrelated to well-being at low levels ( $p = .57$ ). These tendencies are similar to the results found with regard to heritage ties, such that those G2 who hold their heritage groups in positive regard were better adjusted when heritage identity shifting was substantial across domains.

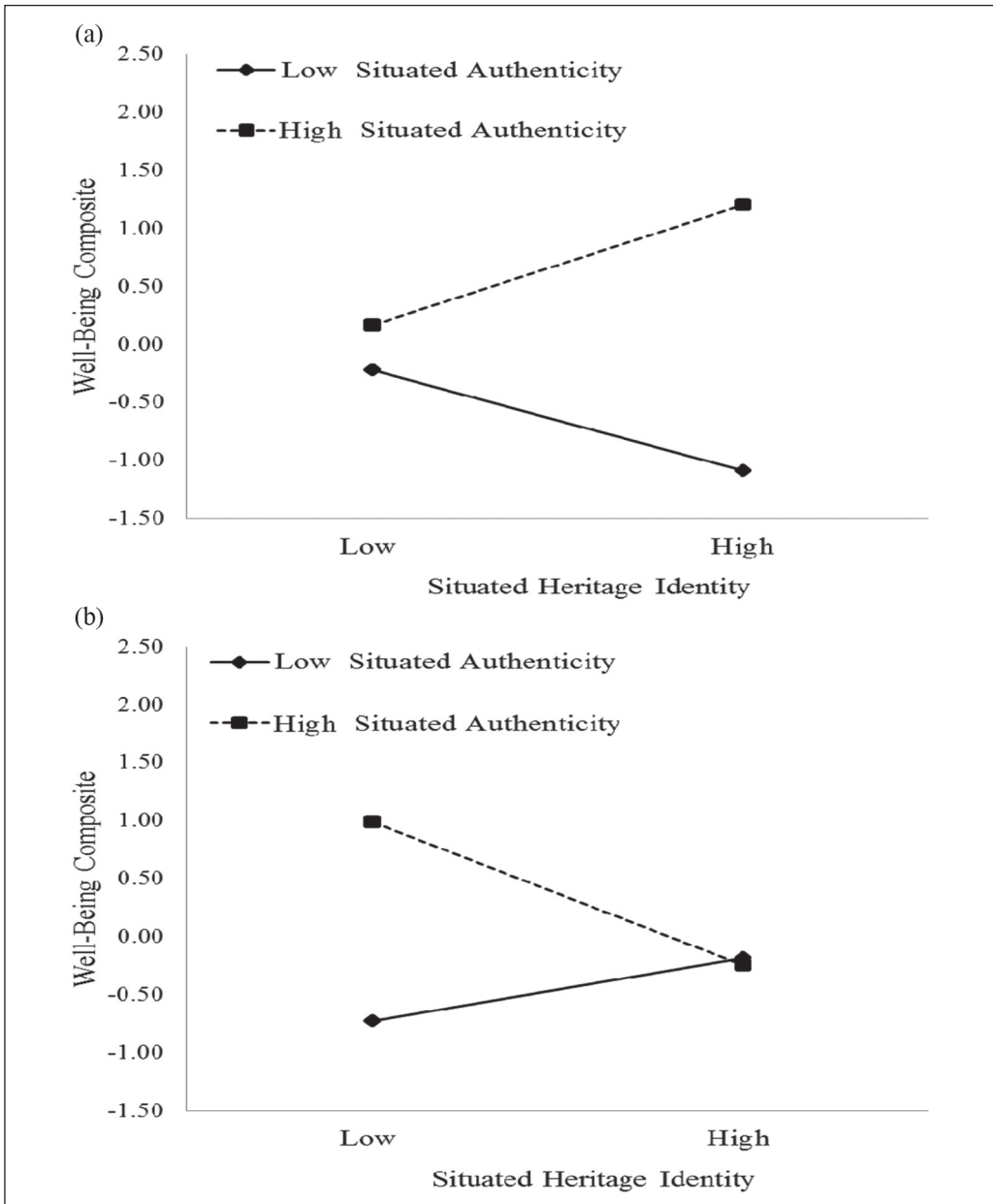
### *Within-Situation Identity Variation, Situated Authenticity, and Well-Being*

Our final question concerns whether feeling true to a norm-conforming or norm-deviant identity would be related to well-being. While the situated identities denote identity salience in each domain, situated authenticity indicates whether those identities were experienced as a meaningful aspect of the self. As mentioned above, the mean identification for the group served as a normative basis to judge whether an identity expression was conforming or deviant in a given domain. We conducted separate regressions in which one situated identity (centered; Canadian or heritage in private or public domain), the corresponding situated authenticity (centered), and their interaction were entered to predict well-being; we also controlled for the second identity in the same domain (centered) to partial out the potential main effect of that variable. For example, if situated Canadian identity was taken from the private domain, the authenticity variable from the same domain would be used and we controlled for the heritage identity in that domain. We repeated the same analyses in each generation group. The results are discussed by domain below.

In the private domain among G1, regression analyses revealed a significant Authenticity  $\times$  Canadian Identity interaction,  $\beta = .30, t(40) = 2.12, p = .04$ . The effects of Canadian identity were probed at  $\pm 1$  SD from the mean of authenticity (see Panel A of Figure 3). Canadian identity was associated positively with well-being at high levels of authenticity,  $t(41) = 2.82, p = .007$ , but it was unrelated to well-being at low levels of authenticity ( $p = .88$ ). Alternatively,



**Figure 3.** Well-Being Composite Predicted by Sited Authenticity and Identity in the Private Domain: (a) Canadian Identity for G1, (b) Canadian Identity for G2, and (c) Heritage Identity for G3  
 Note: Identity scores were plotted  $\pm 1$  SD from their respective group means.



**Figure 4.** Well-Being Composite Predicted by Sited Authenticity and Identity in the Public Domain: (a) Heritage Identity for G1 and (b) Heritage Identity for G2. Note: Identity scores were plotted  $\pm 1$  SD from their respective group means.

authenticity was associated positively with well-being at high levels of Canadian identity,  $t(41) = 2.60, p = .01$ , but it was unrelated to well-being at low levels ( $p = .78$ ). Because the normative response in the private domain was a relatively low level of Canadian identity, feeling strongly Canadian was counternormative. Thus, the results suggested that if a G1 individual adopts a counternormative identity in the private domain, this identity is associated with better well-being to the extent that it is felt to be authentic.

In the private domain among G2, authenticity was also found to interact with Canadian identity in predicting well-being,  $\beta = .26$ ,  $t(73) = 2.30$ ,  $p = .02$ . Consistent with what was found among G1, Canadian identity tended to be associated positively with well-being at high levels of authenticity,  $t(74) = 1.80$ ,  $p = .08$ , but it tended to be negatively correlated with well-being at low levels of authenticity,  $p = .10$  (see Panel B of Figure 3). Viewed differently, authenticity was correlated positively with well-being at high levels of Canadian identity,  $t(74) = 3.22$ ,  $p = .002$ , but it was unrelated to well-being at low levels ( $p = .58$ ). A complementary pattern was evident for heritage identity in the private domain, such that authenticity also interacted with heritage identity,  $\beta = -.24$ ,  $t(73) = -2.17$ ,  $p = .03$ . Simple slopes analyses further clarified that heritage identity was correlated negatively with well-being at high levels of authenticity,  $t(74) = -2.89$ ,  $p = .005$ , but it was unrelated to well-being at low levels ( $p = .88$ ) (see Panel C of Figure 3). Alternatively, authenticity was correlated positively with well-being at low levels of heritage identity,  $t(74) = 3.09$ ,  $p = .003$ , but it was unrelated to well-being at high levels ( $p = .93$ ). Because the normative response in the private domain is a relatively high level of heritage identity (along with a relatively low level of Canadian identity) even among G2, the results showed once again the positive effect of feeling authentic when adopting a counternormative identity in the private domain.<sup>6</sup>

In the public domain for the G1, the Authenticity  $\times$  Heritage Identity interaction emerged,  $\beta = .30$ ,  $t(40) = 2.15$ ,  $p = .04$ . Heritage identity was associated positively with well-being at high levels of authenticity,  $t(41) = 1.78$ ,  $p = .08$ , but it was unrelated to well-being at low levels ( $p = .25$ ) (see Panel A of Figure 4). Alternatively, authenticity was associated positively with well-being at high levels of heritage identity,  $t(41) = 3.88$ ,  $p < .001$ , whereas they were unrelated at low levels ( $p = .60$ ). Because a relatively low level of heritage identity presented a normative reaction in the public domain, a stronger feeling of heritage identity was again counternormative. These results thus complemented those from the private domain in showing the salubrious effect of feeling authentic about a counternormative identity (in this case, stronger heritage identity) in public.

Finally in the public domain for the G2, the Authenticity  $\times$  Heritage Identity interaction also emerged,  $\beta = -.28$ ,  $t(73) = -2.63$ ,  $p = .01$ . Heritage identity was correlated negatively with well-being at high levels of authenticity,  $t(74) = -2.52$ ,  $p = .01$ , but it was unrelated to well-being at low levels ( $p = .27$ ) (see Panel B of Figure 4). Probed differently, authenticity was correlated positively with well-being at low levels of heritage identity,  $t(74) = 3.75$ ,  $p < .001$ , whereas they were unrelated at high levels ( $p = .91$ ). In contrast to the findings above, this interaction pattern supported the positive effect of feeling authentic about observing the public norm of downplaying one's heritage identity. It also indicates a generational difference in that, compared with G1, the G2 group benefited from the authentic experience of conforming to the public norm.

## Discussion

The present study investigated the situated identity profiles in an ethnically diverse sample of G1 and G2 immigrants and the implications of identity variation to psychological well-being. We distinguished two types of identity variation: cross-situation and within-situation variation. We then tested how two proposed identity-related factors (global heritage identity and situated authenticity, respectively) interacted with each of these identity variations to predict well-being. Below, each set of findings is discussed separately before a final integration.

### *Situated Identities Across Situations*

Largely replicating previous research that took a situated approach (Clément et al., 2006; Noels et al., 2010), we found that immigrants tend to adopt identities consistent with those of others around them. In both generation groups, while heritage identity was stronger in the

private (vs. public) situations, the opposite was true of Canadian identity. The findings from our scenario-based method thus dovetail with those of studies that deployed experimental and experience-sampling methods on the responsiveness of cultural identities to the normative psychological characteristics in the immediate environment (Ross et al., 2002; Yip, 2005; Yip & Fuligni, 2002).

Some generational differences were also noted. Although heritage identity was stronger than Canadian identity in the private domain in both groups, the difference was smaller among the G2. This finding is consistent with the idea that the G2 exhibited a spillover of acculturation from public to private domains, similar to the results reported by Noels et al.'s (2010), where, although the G2's heritage identity was distinctly stronger than Canadian identity in the family domain, in the friendship domain the difference between the identities was attenuated and slightly reversed, suggesting that identity profile in this domain was becoming more similar to the profiles evident in more public domains. While it is beyond the scope of this article to examine how far this acculturative penetration can go over the course of time, it is important to point out that we are not suggesting acculturation is solely a straightforward, linear progression from public to private domains over generations. Rather, the retention of heritage culture across domains is a complex issue; the degree of heritage cultural maintenance and integration into the receiving society is likely determined by a host of factors such as intergroup contact, cultural encapsulation, immigration policy, and specific intergroup histories (Bourhis, Montreuil, Barrette, & Montaruli, 2009; Kim, Atkinson, & Yang, 1999; Phinney, Madden, & Ong, 2000). However, to understand the acculturation processes, a situated perspective must also be taken into account.

### *The Protective Function of Heritage Affect and Heritage Ties*

We found some evidence for the protective effects of generalized feelings of positive affect and, to a lesser extent, feelings of connection with the heritage group members on experiencing heritage identity discrepancy between private and public domains in the G2 group. Especially when a large discrepancy was experienced, those who held their heritage group in high regard and derived a strong sense of affiliation from it reported they were better adjusted. This is the first attempt to broaden understanding of the buffering effects of heritage identity to the experience of cross-situation variation of identity. While previous research demonstrated how a global sense of heritage identity helps mitigate the deleterious consequences of discrimination and stressful demands (Kiang et al., 2006; Shelton et al., 2005; Torres & Ong, 2010), we observed a parallel effect on immigrants' proclivity to manage diverse cultural demands by shifting heritage identity.

Such finding, however, also raises a number of questions. Our interpretation for the buffering effects is that a strong affective or relational orientation to the heritage group provides immigrants with a broad basis of meaning on which to construe heritage identity gaps as appropriate and adaptive. In contrast, when heritage affect and ties are low, people would be less capable of making sense out of what may appear as aimless identity shifting and consequently find it troublesome. This reasoning implies that an adaptive understanding of heritage identity may not entail holding onto it all the time but acknowledging its fluid and complex nature. This might also explain why the cognitive component (i.e., centrality) that highlights chronic importance failed to show such moderation effect. To the extent that our explanation is correct, future research needs to further investigate processes that possibly mediate the effects and rely on alternative measures associated with development of a complex and secure heritage identity over time (e.g., W. E. Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Phinney, 1990).

The fact that heritage identity as a protective resource was not found among G1 is more difficult to explain. Although similar null finding is not new (Yip, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2008; see also Noels et al., 2010), it remains unclear what drives the absence of such moderation effect. It is possible that heritage identity disparity is less problematic to new immigrants, because it is a given and relatively unquestioned (Phinney, 2003). Conversely, acculturating to a new culture may make one's culture of origin prone to being challenged and such vulnerability exacerbates the negative impact of identity gap. These possibilities await further research.

The results concerning the buffering effects of heritage identity also complement those of experience-sampling and diary studies. While the latter revealed global heritage regard to be beneficial in that it increases momentary positive affect each time heritage identity is salient (Yip, 2005; Yip & Fuligni, 2002), we extended its positive effect to the cumulative outcome of heritage identity fluctuation across situations and possibly over time. Global heritage identity at least in the form of heritage pride and positive regard may have both short-term and long-term benefits. Thus, G2 individuals with high heritage regard seem to be capable of reaping double psychological benefits.

### *Situated Authenticity and the (Counter)Normative Pull*

Our study is also the first to explore the effects of normative (vs. counternormative) identity at the situated level that differs in felt authenticity on immigrants' well-being. With one exception (i.e., G2 in the public domain), our results showed positive effects of feeling true to a counternormative (relative to normative) identity on well-being. In other words, when a counternormative identity reflects closely what one's true self is in a given situation, it tended to be associated positively with well-being.

One theoretical implication of these results lies in a further understanding of the psychological benefits of authenticity through the normative lens. As noted above, previous research has focused on the overall positive effects of authenticity without much attention to its potential interaction with the normative implications of the substance behind such feeling (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; see also Chirkov, Ryan, Kim, & Kaplan, 2003). Even within the context of acculturation, the theoretical interest was limited to demonstrating how integration of normative host and heritage culture into one's self-concept promotes well-being (Downie, Koestner, ElGeledi, & Cree, 2004) rather than addressing explicitly the impact of feeling a true identity that conforms to or goes against the relevant norm. The general findings that a counternormative (vs. normative) identity was associated positively with well-being to the extent that it is authentic are hence novel; more importantly, they highlight the theoretical importance of considering that identity is situated and negotiated in the context of a descriptive or injunctive norm (Noels, in press; Noels et al., 2012).

The psychological functions of norms are well-documented (Asch, 1956; Sherif, 1936). It is not surprising that people tend to pattern their behavior after norms (that exist at least in their minds) and have their intrapersonal or interpersonal needs satisfied by following them (e.g., Chiu, Gelfand, Yamagishi, Shteynberg, & Wan, 2010). Seen in this light, our findings suggest that authentic feeling is generally more instrumental in counteracting the potential risks associated with identity norm defiance among immigrants than in rewarding norm compliance.

On a more practical note, authentic feeling might help promote healthy adaptation among immigrants who feel or even express an identity counter to the situational norm. Since immigrants often need to accommodate to mixed cultural groups (Tadmor & Tetlock, 2006), it is difficult, at least sometimes, for their self-views to be perfectly in line with how they are perceived



or think they are perceived by others (Clément, Noels, & Deneault, 2001; Noels et al., 2010). Such perceptual discrepancy may partially explain the existence of counternormative identities in the present study. Regardless of their origin, however, encouraging immigrants to construe those identities as authentic self-expressions could yield positive psychological outcomes. Conversely, if counternormative identities are experienced as inauthentic, our results show that this combination may deal a double blow to one's well-being.

In contrast to the general pattern discussed above, we observed among G2 the positive effect of authenticity associated with assimilating into the public norm of relatively low heritage identity. Speculatively as our explanations are, this apparent contradiction seems to suggest that compared with G1, the public sphere is quite distinctive for G2 in that the benefits of downplaying one's heritage identity (as most do) to the extent it is experienced as authentic outweigh those of playing it up. Given that later-generation minorities still face potential exclusion from the mainstream society (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Hong & No, 2005) and are sensitive to subtle cues of racism (Wang, Leu, & Shoda, 2011), this rewarding effect of following the norm of appearing less ethnic if it feels true might reflect one of the affirmative resources necessary to maintaining a superordinate identity despite obstacles. Similarly, it is plausible that public adjustment for G2 hinges more heavily on the quality of contact with other Canadians (cf., Clément et al., 2006). An authentic, normative identity in this case may confer more benefits than an authentic, counternormative identity. Thus, a cautionary note is in order. Although it can be generally true that authentic feeling nurtures the healthy expression of a counternormative identity, the delicate balance between standing out and fitting in is, at the very least, resolved in a fairly contextualized way.

### *Future Directions and Conclusion*

The examination of identity variations in acculturating individuals can be extended in several ways. First, future research could benefit from different operationalizations of identity disparity across situations and different theoretical models of global heritage identity. We chose the fairly broad distinction between private and public domains, and in doing so, the more nuanced differences within the same domain may have been lost. As mentioned above, measures of global heritage identity with a developmental perspective may clarify the exact nature of the buffering effect we found (e.g., Phinney et al., 2000). More research is certainly needed to elucidate how first-generation immigrants handle fluctuations of their heritage identity and potential differences with later generations. Second, given our scenario-based, cross-sectional design, we lack direct temporal evidence for the supposedly cumulative effect of identity variation. Future research thus needs to employ longitudinal designs to corroborate our findings.

Third, it is equally important to investigate how cross-situational variation in mainstream identity relates to well-being. Our results are not meant to imply that mainstream identity disparity is not relevant to G1 and G2 groups; in fact, our sample showed Canadian identity shift from private to public domains to a similar degree. It would be worthwhile to examine whether situational variations in mainstream identity impact immigrants' well-being and whether this effect would be similarly moderated. Fourth, finer distinctions between immigrant generations could be made. Given the small sample size, we did not consider, for example, the 1.5 generation as a separate group (e.g., Tsai et al., 2000), which could be another avenue for future research. Fifth, we operationalized identity norms in terms of mean patterns averaged across participants. Because such descriptive cultural norms based on statistical aggregation of individual responses do not necessarily correspond with perceived cultural norms (Chiu et al., 2010), it would be interesting to measure perceived identity norms (e.g., How would an average

immigrant feel in this situation?) as an indication of norm conformity or deviance. Finally, in examining the relations between situated authenticity and well-being, future research could utilize situated well-being measures such as role satisfaction to address the immediate impact of situated authenticity. In addition, markers of well-being could be expanded to include eudaimonic well-being that concerns meaning and optimal functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989). Including different well-being measures may help clarify which aspects of well-being are more closely associated with situated authenticity.

In conclusion, a situated approach opens up new possibilities to the study of the dynamic components of ethnic identity. By drawing on the experience of immigrants who navigate between cultural boundaries, our study is consistent with the broad perspective on behavioral variability, that variability per se is not indicative of psychological (mal)adjustment (Baird, Le, & Lucas, 2006; La Guardia & Ryan, 2007; Paulhus & Martin, 1988; Shih, Sanchez, & Ho, 2010). Like many researchers who have noted that behavioral variability can be adaptive if it is anchored to a secure and multifaceted self-representation (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Paulhus & Martin, 1988), we maintain that immigrants do exhibit identity variation and it can be adaptive if they are capable of interpreting it as functional (in the case of cross-situation variation) or if a counternormative identity reflects an authentic self-image (in the case of within-situation variation).

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### Notes

1. To ensure that Canadian identity for the purposes of the present study referred to an identity associated with the majority ethnic group instead of a national identity, we provided instructions that specified Anglo-Canadian to be "people whose families have lived in Canada for several generations and who speak English as a native language."
2. We tested whether our private-public distinction was justifiable in this sample. For both generation groups, correlations between any settings within the same domain ( $r$ s from .49 to .85) were typically larger than correlations between any settings across the domains ( $r$ s from .17 to .69). This was true of both heritage and Canadian identity. However, there was one exception; the friend setting was correlated substantially with all the remaining settings. This suggests the friend setting may be judged less private than the family setting in this sample. For the sake of simplicity and consistency with previous studies (e.g., Noels et al., 2012), we retained the friend setting in the private domain.
3. The different degrees of freedom throughout the analysis reflect missing data because a few participants did not complete some sections of the survey.
4. A previous study done in an Indo-Guyanese sample showed that the identification profiles were further qualified by gender (Clément et al., 2006). However, the four-way interaction involving gender was not significant in the present sample ( $p = .33$ ).

5. One participant scored 3.28 *SDs* below the mean on heritage ties. Its Mahalanobis distance score (20.85) exceeded the critical chi-square value that is significant at the  $p = .001$  level (16.27), suggesting that it was a multivariate outlier (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Excluding this outlier, however, did not alter the significance level of the interaction effect ( $\beta = .40$ ,  $t = 3.40$ ,  $p = .001$ ).
6. Because authenticity interacted with both Canadian and heritage identity in the private domain, we also tested the three-way interaction, but it was not statistically significant ( $p = .13$ ).

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