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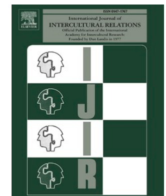

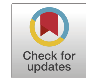

# Canadian identity attenuates the negative impact of familial rejection on psychological distress

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A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

Bicultural individuals generally maintain their heritage cultures and live in accordance with mainstream culture with relative ease. However, when the two cultures hold incompatible values, beliefs, and social norms over what is considered appropriate, bicultural individuals may face unique challenges. One such challenge is potentially experiencing rejection from their families for transgressing their heritage cultural norms, which can cause psychological distress. The present study explored the association of familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress in situations where those norms are incompatible with mainstream Canadian norms, and the role that Canadian group identification plays. Results revealed that familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms may be associated with psychological distress; however, that association can be attenuated for those who strongly identify as Canadian. Results of the present study provide empirical support for the widely held but untested assumption that bicultural individuals' experiences of familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms is associated with psychological distress. Additionally, results of the present study suggest that Canadian group identification can assist bicultural Canadians to better cope when their familial relationships are threatened as a result of their heritage cultural norm transgressions.

## Introduction

With increased global mobilization and migration some individuals may identify both as members of their ancestors' heritage cultures as well as members of the mainstream society they reside in (i.e., as *bicultural*; Birman, 1994; LaFramboise et al., 1993; Phinney & Devich-Navarros, 1997). For instance, a Canadian who has immigrated from South Asia, or whose ancestors have, may identify as South Asian Canadian. Such bicultural identification has been associated with positive psychological outcomes including greater well-being and better psychosocial adaptation (e.g., Berry & Hou, 2016; Berry & Sabatier, 2011; Chia & Costigan, 2006; Stroink & Lalonde, 2009). However, bicultural identification can also pose certain challenges. One such challenge emerges when bicultural individuals' two cultures support incompatible values, beliefs, and social norms. In such situations aligning with one culture is done at the expense of aligning with the other culture, creating conflict. For some bicultural individuals (e.g., those who live in Western individualistic societies but whose families originate from Eastern collectivistic cultures) the prospect of transgressing their heritage

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cultural norms by aligning with mainstream cultural norms can be very concerning. These bicultural individuals could experience rejection from their families for transgressing their heritage cultural norms which could cause them significant psychological distress (see Giguère et al., 2010).

Accordingly, one goal of the present study was to examine the association of familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress in situations where bicultural individuals' two cultures support incompatible social norms. Although bicultural individuals can be negatively impacted by familial rejection for transgressing their heritage cultural norms, we suggest that culturally plural mainstream identities, such as the Canadian identity, can help curtail that negative impact by providing a sense of inclusion with mainstream society. Therefore, a second goal of the present study was to examine the moderating role of Canadian group identification on the association between familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress.

### *Managing incompatible cultures*

Generally, bicultural individuals manage their two cultures with ease by accessing the values, beliefs, and social norms of one culture over the other depending on the social context they are in, a cognitive process known as *cultural frame switching* (see Hong, 1999; Hong et al., 2000). For instance, in private settings bicultural individuals' heritage cultures may be more relevant than mainstream culture; however, in public settings mainstream culture would be more relevant (e.g., Noels & Clément, 2015; Noels et al., 2010; Zhang & Noels, 2012). The different contextual cues prompt one cultural identity to be more salient than the other, thereby making the values, beliefs, and social norms of the relevant culture accessible (see Hong, 1999; Hong et al., 2000). In this way, when it comes to day-to-day matters bicultural individuals manage their two cultures with ease (see Giguère et al., 2010).

When it comes to making major life decisions, however, bicultural individuals' two cultures may not be as easily manageable. Managing their two cultures may be particularly difficult for those who live in Western individualistic countries and whose families originate from Eastern collectivistic cultures (e.g., Canadians whose families originate from South Asia; see Giguère et al., 2010). For these bicultural individuals, the social norms of their two cultures tend to be incompatible when it comes to making major life decisions such as where to live, who to marry, and what career path to follow (see Giguère et al., 2010; Lalonde & Giguère, 2008; e.g., Lalonde et al., 2004; Lou et al., 2012; Uskul et al., 2007, 2011). For instance, moving out of one's parents' home before marriage is more acceptable in mainstream Canadian culture; however, it is less acceptable in South Asian cultures (e.g., Lou et al., 2012). When making such decisions whichever culture's social norm is chosen will be done at the expense of the other culture's social norm creating a *bicultural normative conflict* (Giguère et al., 2010).

Bicultural individuals living in Western societies may want to make major decisions that will impact their lives independently and autonomously, as is promoted in Western individualistic cultures (see Heine, 2012). In doing so, they may be inclined to make major life decisions that align with mainstream norms. However, bicultural individuals whose families originate from Eastern collectivistic cultures can feel immense pressure from their families to align with the social norms of their heritage cultures. These individuals tend to be strongly influenced by their families because people from Eastern collectivistic cultures tend to be very tightly connected to their families (e.g., Lalonde et al., 2004; Lay et al., 1998; Uskul et al., 2007; see Giguère et al., 2010; Lou et al., 2012). Additionally, family members from Eastern collectivistic cultures tend to emphasize interdependence, obligations to one's family, and valuing the greater good of the family unit over one's own personal gains, as core cultural values to younger generations (see Heine, 2012; Kwak, 2003; Stuart & Ward, 2011). The strong familial bonds and obligations result in significant pressure for bicultural individuals from Eastern collectivistic cultures living in Western individualistic societies to adhere to the social norms of their heritage cultures at the expense of mainstream cultural norms (e.g., Das Gupta, 1997, Lou et al., 2012; Mitchell, 2004; Srinivasan, 2001).

### *Familial rejection for heritage cultural norm transgressions and psychological distress*

In bicultural normative conflicts, choosing to align with mainstream norms would necessarily mean transgressing one's heritage cultural norms. Given that transgressing a group's norms can result in rejection by this group (see Turner, 1991), bicultural individuals could experience rejection from their families for transgressing the social norms of their heritage cultures. Such rejection may be a particularly concerning outcome for bicultural individuals living in Western individualistic societies whose families originate from Eastern collectivistic cultures because people from Eastern collectivistic cultures tend to have a low tolerance for transgressions of their very prescriptive social norms (Gelfand et al., 2011; see Triandis, 1995). For instance, if a young South Asian Canadian woman chooses to move out of her parents' home to live on her own, as is typical of young Canadian adults, she would be transgressing her South Asian cultural norm of continuing to live with her parents until marriage. Having transgressed her heritage culture's norm stipulating what her living arrangements should be, she could experience cues of rejection from her family. Therefore, in bicultural normative conflicts transgressing heritage cultural norms, by choosing to align with mainstream norms, could result in bicultural individuals experiencing familial rejection, particularly if they live in Western individualistic cultures and their families originate from Eastern collectivistic cultures.

Being rejected by one's family for heritage cultural norm transgressions in bicultural normative conflicts could result in significant psychological distress. As a social species, humans are motivated to maintain social bonds and have a fundamental human need for belongingness, both of which are threatened by social rejection (see Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary, 2010; Williams, 2007). Consequently, social rejection has been associated with psychological distress (see Leary, 1990). Meaningful interpersonal relationships, such as those with one's family, being threatened by cues of rejection are particularly distressing events that have been linked to depression and anxiety (Rapee, 1997; Rohner & Britner, 2002; Yap & Jorm, 2015; Yap et al., 2014). Furthermore, maintaining familial relationships appears to be a universal human motivation, and has been linked to greater psychological well-being and less

psychological distress including less depression and anxiety (see Ko et al., 2020). Therefore, bicultural individuals' experiences of familial rejection for transgressing their heritage cultural norms in bicultural normative conflicts can result in psychological distress.

While the association between familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress is assumed in multiculturalism research, empirical support for that notion is lacking. Indeed, we were not able to identify any research that directly examines the association between familial rejection and bicultural individuals' psychological distress following heritage cultural norm transgressions. Accordingly, the present study aimed to provide empirical support for the association between familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress. That association was examined for two forms of familial rejection: (a) *anticipated rejection* for possible heritage cultural norm transgressions that one may engage in; and, (b) *actual rejection* for having engaged in heritage cultural norm transgressions. Although related, the two forms of familial rejection are distinct experiences that bicultural individuals may face when making major life decisions. As such, we aimed to assess the associations between both anticipated familial rejection and actual familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms in bicultural normative conflicts, and psychological distress.

### *Canadian identity attenuating the impact of familial rejection on psychological distress*

The association between familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and bicultural individuals' psychological distress may be curtailed if they strongly identify with a culturally plural mainstream social group. Given the culturally plural nature of the Canadian identity, Canadian group identification may serve such a protective function by providing a sense of inclusion, satisfying one's fundamental human need to belong. Canada, primarily through its Multiculturalism Policy (1971), has strived to encourage a culturally diverse society composed of a number of distinct cultural groups with unique values, beliefs, and social norms. Recognizing the contributions and long history of many different cultural groups in Canada, Canada's Multiculturalism Policy describes Canada's cultural diversity as "… the very essence of Canadian Identity" (Government of Canada, 1971, p. 8580; Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, 1970). In line with that description, research supports that Canadians do view cultural diversity as a key feature of the Canadian identity (e.g., Gui et al., 2016; Guimond et al., 2013; Lalonde, 2002; Safdar, 2017).

Being culturally plural, the Canadian identity can provide a sense of inclusion regardless of Canadians' heritage cultural backgrounds, and social inclusion has been found to mitigate the negative impact of social rejection (see Leary, 1990). Accordingly, bicultural Canadians experiencing rejection from their heritage cultural groups (i.e., their families) can still feel a sense of inclusion and belonging by adopting a mainstream cultural identity that represents them regardless of their heritage cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, the Canadian identity could allow bicultural Canadians to balance their needs for inclusion and their needs for distinctiveness, known as *optimal distinctiveness* (Brewer, 1991). Optimal distinctiveness can be achieved by identifying with a social group that makes group members feel simultaneously united with others as well as unique, both at optimal levels. The Canadian identity affords bicultural Canadians an opportunity to achieve optimal distinctiveness by providing a place for them in mainstream society where they can unite with others regardless of their heritage cultural backgrounds while simultaneously maintaining their distinct heritage cultures.

In sum, we suggest that the association between familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress can be curtailed by strongly identifying as a member of a culturally plural mainstream social group, such as Canadian, because doing so satisfies a need for belongingness and allows bicultural Canadians to achieve a state of optimal distinctiveness. Therefore, the present study also aimed to examine the role that Canadian group identification plays in the association between familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress.

## Present study

The aim of the present study was to examine the association between familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress in bicultural normative conflicts. Additionally, the present study aimed to explore the role of Canadian group identification on that association. Hypothesis 1 was that there is a positive association between familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress in bicultural normative conflicts. Hypothesis 2 was that stronger Canadian group identification attenuates the positive association between familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress in bicultural normative conflicts. In order to examine the association of familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress in bicultural normative conflicts we examined the two hypotheses for: (a) anticipated familial rejection resulting from potential heritage cultural norm transgressions depicted in bicultural normative conflict vignettes at Time 1; and, (b) actual familial rejection resulting from having transgressed heritage cultural norms in one's own life, if any, at Time 2.[1]

[1] The same sample was used to examine the association between anticipated familial rejection and actual familial rejection, and psychological distress due to the challenges associated with recruiting very specific community samples. In our case, the specific community sample of interest was South Asian Canadians, being the largest bicultural population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017), who were of the age when they would typically be making major life decisions. As such, including the two time points in the present study allowed us to examine experiences of both anticipated and actual familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms.

## Method

### Participants

South Asian Canadians who self-identified as Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, or Sri Lankan were recruited using convenience and snowball sampling from the Greater Toronto Area at Time 1 ($N = 215$) including through the first author's social network and the assistance of a market research firm. South Asian Canadians were selected as the sample because this group of Canadians is the largest bicultural Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2017). The community sample (114 females, 101 males) ranged in age between 17 and 35 years ($M = 25.74$, $SD = 4.90$), of which half (108) were immigrants to Canada[2]Most participants identified their religion as being Hindu (78), followed by Muslim (67), Sikh (27), Christian (21), Buddhist (2) and Jewish (2), with 17 participants identifying their religion as being "Other" and 1 participant not identifying their religion. At Time 2, approximately one year later, 67 participants (39 females, 28 males) ranging in age between 19 and 37 years ($M = 27.37$, $SD = 5.56$) were retained resulting in an attrition rate of 70%.[3]

### Procedure

#### Time 1

After providing consent, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire which began with demographics questions. Next, participants were asked to complete a measure of Canadian group identification. Participants were then presented with three vignettes, one at a time, depicting different bicultural normative conflicts. The three vignettes presented one conflict each: (a) moving out of one's parental home as a young adult or not; (b) marrying someone without parental approval or not; and, (c) pursuing a career path one is passionate about or a career that is more financially secure – all of which are bicultural normative conflicts South Asian Canadians tend to experience (see Giguère et al., 2010). After reading each vignette participants were asked to complete a measure of anticipated familial rejection for transgressing the South Asian norm in the bicultural normative conflict presented in each vignette. Lastly, participants were asked to complete a measure of depression, anxiety, and stress before being debriefed and dismissed.

#### Time 2

Approximately one year later participants were re-contacted and asked to complete a second questionnaire. After providing consent, participants were asked demographics questions and asked to complete the same measure of Canadian group identification they had completed at Time 1. Next, participants were asked to indicate what major life decisions they had made since Time 1 with regard to where to live, who to marry, and what educational[4] and career path to follow. Participants were then asked to complete a measure of actual familial rejection for the major life decisions they had made. Lastly, participants were asked to complete the same measure of depression, anxiety, and stress they had completed at Time 1 before being debriefed and dismissed.

### Measures

#### Canadian group identification

Canadian group identification was measured using 4 items adapted from Cameron's (2004) social identification measure. Participants were asked to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) how much they identified as a Canadian group member (Cronbach's $\alpha$ T1 = .72, Cronbach's $\alpha$ T2 = .65). A sample item is "I have a lot in common with other Canadians." Ratings were combined to create average scores, with greater values being indicative of greater Canadian group identification.

#### Anticipated familial rejection

Anticipated familial rejection was measured using 4 items per vignette adapted from Giguère et al.'s (2016) group based expected outcomes measure for a total of 12 items. The group based expected outcomes measure captures perceptions of expected acceptance and rejection as a result of one's behaviour (Giguère et al., 2016). In the present study, 4 items measuring expected rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms were used for each of 3 scenarios. Participants were asked to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) how much they anticipated being rejected by their families if they were to transgress the South Asian norm in the bicultural normative conflict presented in each vignette (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$). A sample item is "If I was in Navneeth's place and I chose to move out of my parents' home my immediate family would stop talking to me." Ratings

[2] The variability for degree of acculturation to Canadian society, and therefore the impact of length of time in Canada, was limited by only recruiting immigrant participants who had immigrated prior to turning 15 years old. This is the cut-off age for adept acculturation wherein adolescent immigrants can adopt the norms of and identify with their new host culture (Cheung et al., 2011).

[3] The high attrition rate was likely due to the one-year time period between Time 1 and Time 2, which can make retaining participants in studies using community samples difficult (Hansen et al., 1990). However, the one-year time period was necessary to allow participants sufficient time to actually make the major life decisions that can be sources of bicultural normative conflicts.

[4] What educational path to follow was also included as a major life decision given that some participants would not yet have entered the workforce.

were combined to create average scores, with greater values being indicative of greater anticipated familial rejection.

*Actual familial rejection*

Actual familial rejected was measured using 4 items per major life decision adapted from Giguère et al.'s (2016) group based expected outcomes measure for a total of 16 items. In the present study, 4 items measuring actual rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms were used for each of 4 major life decisions. Participants were asked to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) how much rejection they actually experienced from their families for the major life decisions they had made (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$). A sample item is "Because of my current living arrangement my immediate family stopped talking to me." Ratings were combined to create average scores, with greater values being indicative of greater actual familial rejection.

*Depression*

Depression was measured using the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale – 21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) 7-item depression subscale. Participants were asked to indicate on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*did not apply to me at all*) to 3 (*applied to me very much or most of the time*) how much each item describing depression applied to them over the previous week (Cronbach's $\alpha$ T1 = .91, Cronbach's $\alpha$ T2 = .92). A sample item is "I felt that I had nothing to look forward to." As is typically done in clinical settings, ratings were summed and doubled, creating depression scores that ranged between 0 and 42, with greater values being indicative of greater depression. Such scores are used to determine what clinical range of depression an individual may fall into. Scores of 0–9 are normal, 10–13 are mild, 14–20 are moderate, 21–27 are severe, and 28 and above are extremely severe (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

*Anxiety*

Anxiety was measured using the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale – 21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) 7-item anxiety subscale. Participants were asked to indicate on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*did not apply to me at all*) to 3 (*applied to me very much or most of the time*) how much each item describing anxiety applied to them over the previous week (Cronbach's $\alpha$ T1 = .84, Cronbach's $\alpha$ T2 = .89). A sample item is "I was aware of dryness of my mouth." As with depression, ratings were summed and doubled, creating anxiety scores that ranged between 0 and 42, with greater values being indicative of greater anxiety. As with depression, such scores are used to determine what clinical range of anxiety an individual may fall into. Scores of 0–7 are normal, 8–9 are mild, 10–14 are moderate, 15–19 are severe, and 20 and above are extremely severe (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

*Stress*

Stress was measured using the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale – 21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) 7-item stress subscale. Participants were asked to indicate on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*did not apply to me at all*) to 3 (*applied to me very much or most of the time*) how much each item describing stress applied to them over the previous week (Cronbach's $\alpha$ T1 = .86, Cronbach's $\alpha$ T2 = .89). A sample item is "I found it hard to wind down." Again, ratings were summed and doubled, creating stress scores that ranged between 0 and 42, with greater values being indicative of greater stress. As with depression and anxiety, such scores are used to determine what clinical range of stress an individual may fall into. Scores of 0–14 are normal, 15–18 are mild, 19–25 are moderate, 26–33 are severe, and 34 and above are extremely severe (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

## Results

For statistical completeness Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for anticipated familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms in bicultural normative conflicts, Canadian group identification, depression, anxiety, and stress, at Time 1. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for actual familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms in bicultural normative conflicts, Canadian group identification, depression, anxiety, and stress, at Time 2.[5]

Hypothesis 1, that there is a positive association between familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress in bicultural normative conflicts was supported. Hypothesis 2, that stronger Canadian group identification attenuates the positive association between familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress in bicultural normative conflicts, was also supported. In order to test Hypotheses 1 and 2, two sets of regression analyses were conducted entering familial rejection, Canadian group identification, and their interaction: one set for anticipated familial rejection and each of depression, anxiety, and stress at Time 1, and the other set for actual familial rejection and each of depression, anxiety, and stress at Time 2[6] . All predictor variables were mean centered and all interactions were explored using the Aiken and West (1991) simple slopes analysis procedure.

*Familial rejection and depression*

The regression coefficient representing the association between anticipated familial rejection at Time 1 and depression fell within a

[5] Although the attrition rate at Time 2 was greater than had been expected resulting in a small sample size the hypotheses of the present study were still explored.

[6] Analyses were also run controlling for Canadian-born versus immigrant status. Given the pattern of results of those analyses were the same as those being reported here we chose to omit this variable from the final analyses.

**Table 1**
Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations for anticipated familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms in bicultural normative conflicts at Time 1 (anticipated rejection), Canadian group identification (Canadian identification), depression, anxiety, and stress, with 95 % confidence intervals based on 10,000 bootstrap samples.

| Measure | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Anticipated rejection | – | −.22** [−.35, −.09] | .30** [.17, .43] | .27** [.14, .39] | .32** [.19, .44] |
| 2. Canadian identification | – | – | −.35** [−.48, −.22] | −.26** [−.39, −.12] | −.14* [−.28, −.01] |
| 3. Depression | – | – | – | .78** [.72, .83] | .77** [.70, .83] |
| 4. Anxiety | – | – | – | – | .78** [.73, .83] |
| 5. Stress | – | – | – | – | – |
| *M* | 2.64 [2.53, 2.76] | 4.06 [3.96, 4.15] | 10.49 [9.17, 11.88] | 9.36 [8.20, 10.59] | 13.29 [12.03, 14.60] |
| *SD* | .89 | .70 | 10.32 | 8.90 | 9.71 |

*Note*: $^*p < .05$ $^{**}p < .01$ $^{***}p < .001$.

**Table 2**
Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations for actual familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms in bicultural normative conflicts at Time 2 (actual rejection), Canadian group identification (Canadian identification), depression, anxiety, and stress, with 95 % confidence intervals based on 10,000 bootstrap samples.

| Measure | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Actual rejection | – | −.44* [−.64, −.21] | .45** [.21, .63] | .35** [.06, .57] | .36** [.11, .56] |
| 2. Canadian identification | – | – | −.40** [−.58, −.18] | −.25* [−.47, .00] | −.39** [−.58, −.17] |
| 3. Depression | – | – | – | .76** [.60, .88] | .82** [.70, .89] |
| 4. Anxiety | – | – | – | – | .86** [.77, .92] |
| 5. Stress | – | – | – | – | – |
| *M* | 1.53 [1.40, 1.67] | 4.19 [4.04, 4.34] | 12.36 [9.73, 15.13] | 11.22 [8.75, 13.94] | 14.27 [11.82, 16.84] |
| *SD* | .58 | .63 | 11.46 | 11.01 | 10.81 |

*Note*: $^*p < .05$ $^{**}p < .01$ $^{***}p < .001$.

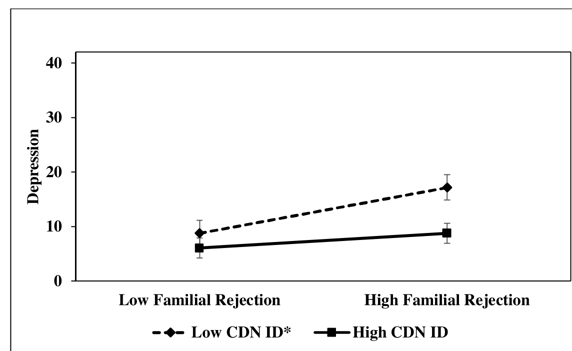
positive confidence interval ($b = 3.13$, $SE = .85$, $p < .001$, 95 % CI [1.56, 4.88]), whereas the regression coefficient representing the association between Canadian group identification and depression fell within a negative confidence interval ($b = -3.96$, $SE = .93$, $p < .001$, 95 % CI [−5.81, −2.15]), $F(3,211) = 17.10$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .20$, with the regression model reflecting a medium effect size, $f^2 = .25$. These results suggest that as anticipated familial rejection increases so may depression providing support for Hypothesis 1, and as Canadian group identification increases depression may decrease. The regression coefficient representing the interaction of anticipated familial rejection and Canadian group identification fell within a negative confidence interval ($b = -2.29$, $SE = 1.35$, $p < .05$, 95 % CI [−5.36, −.01]). As can be seen in Fig. 1a, the interaction suggests that among those who are weaker in Canadian group identification (−1 SD), as anticipated familial rejection increases so may depression ($b = 4.74$, $SE = 1.18$, $p < .001$, 95 % CI [2.41, 7.06]). However, among those who are stronger in Canadian group identification (+1 SD) anticipated familial rejection may not be associated with depression ($b = 1.52$, $SE = .93$, $p = .105$, 95% CI [−.32, 3.36]), providing support for Hypothesis 2.

The regression coefficient representing the association between actual familial rejection at Time 2 and depression fell within a positive confidence interval ($b = 6.32$, $SE = 2.56$, $p < .05$, 95 % CI [.95, 10.86]), whereas the regression coefficient representing the association between Canadian group identification and depression fell within a negative confidence interval ($b = -4.46$, $SE = 1.90$, $p = .049$, 95 % CI [−8.24, −.69]), $F(3,63) = 7.17$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .25$, with the regression model reflecting a medium to large effect size, $f^2 = .33$. These results suggest that as actual familial rejection increases so may depression providing support for Hypothesis 1, and as Canadian group identification increases depression may decrease. The regression coefficient representing the interaction of actual familial rejection and Canadian group identification fell within a confidence interval that was neither positive or negative, crossing over zero ($b = -1.59$, $SE = 4.53$, $p < .635$, 95 % CI [−12.84, 4.46). That result suggests that actual familial rejection and Canadian group identification do not appear to interact in predicting depression; however, the lack of an interaction may be due to the small sample size retained at Time 2. As can be seen in Fig. 1b, when exploring the interaction, it appears as though among those who are weaker in Canadian group identification (−1 SD) as actual familial rejection increases so may depression ($b = 7.33$, $SE = 2.82$, $p < .05$, 95 % CI [1.69, 12.97]). However, among those who are stronger in Canadian group identification (+1 SD) actual familial rejection may not be associated with depression ($b = 5.32$, $SE = 3.63$, $p = .148$, 95 % CI [−1.93, 12.56]), providing some support for Hypothesis 2.

The results of the simple slopes analyses for both interactions suggest that the positive association between familial rejection and depression may be attenuated when Canadian group identification is stronger. Furthermore, when familial rejection was stronger (+1 SD) average depression scores for those weaker in Canadian group identification (−1 SD) appeared to increase from the mild to moderate clinical ranges for both anticipated familial rejection (10.49 to 17.17) and actual familial rejection (12.36 to 19.18). However, average depression scores for those stronger in Canadian group identification (+ 1 SD) appeared to decrease from the mild to normal ranges for anticipated familial rejection (10.49 to 8.74) and to remain in the mild range for actual familial rejection (at 12.37).

*Familial rejection and anxiety*

The regression coefficient representing the association between anticipated familial rejection at Time 1 and anxiety fell within a

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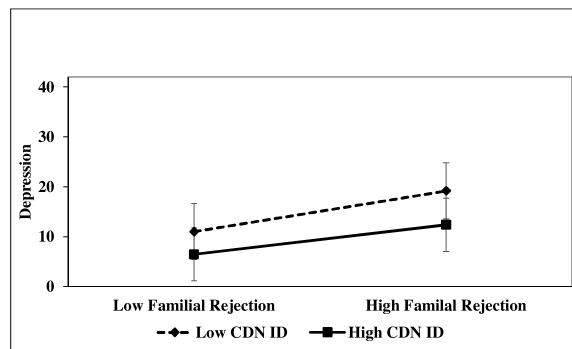


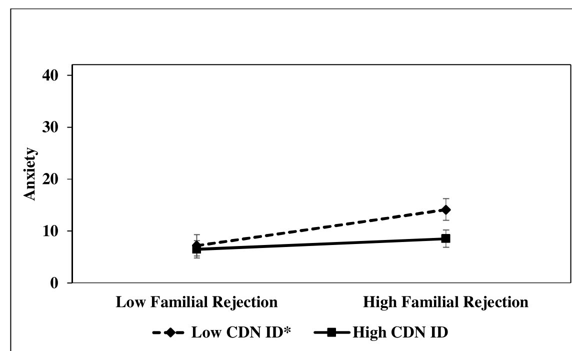

*b*

**Fig. 1.** (a) Anticipated familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms in bicultural normative conflicts at Time 1 and depression, at high and low Canadian group identification (CDN ID), with 95 % confidence intervals. (b) Actual familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms in bicultural normative conflicts at Time 2 and depression, at high and low Canadian group identification (CDN ID), with 95 % confidence intervals.

positive confidence interval ($b = 2.52$, $SE = .73$, $p < .001$, 95 % CI [1.15, 4.00]), whereas the regression coefficient representing the association between Canadian group identification and anxiety fell within a negative confidence interval ($b = -2.28$, $SE = .85$, $p < .01$, 95 % CI [−3.97, −.61]), $F(3,211) = 10.51$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .13$, with the regression model reflecting a small to medium effect size, $f^2 = .15$. These results suggest that as anticipated familial rejection increases so may anxiety providing support for Hypothesis 1, and as Canadian group identification increases anxiety may decrease. The regression coefficient representing the interaction of anticipated familial rejection and Canadian group identification fell within a negative confidence interval ($b = -1.95$, $SE = 1.20$, $p < .05$, 95 % CI [−4.70, −.09]). As can be seen in Fig. 2a, the interaction suggests that among those who are weaker in Canadian group identification (−1 SD), as anticipated familial rejection increases so may anxiety ($b = 3.89$, $SE = 1.06$, $p < .001$, 95 % CI [1.80, 5.98]). However, among those who are stronger in Canadian group identification (+1 SD) anticipated familial rejection may not be associated with anxiety ($b = 1.16$, $SE = .84$, $p = .169$, 95 % CI [−.50, 2.81]), providing support for Hypothesis 2.

The regression coefficient representing the association between actual familial rejection at Time 2 and anxiety fell within a confidence interval that was largely positive ($b = 5.10$, $SE = 3.02$, $p = .049$, 95 % CI [−1.91, 9.94]), whereas the regression coefficient representing the association between Canadian group identification and anxiety fell within a confidence interval that was neither positive or negative, crossing over zero ($b = -1.78$, $SE = 2.18$, $p = .439$, 95 % CI [−6.35, 2.79]), $F(3,63) = 3.60$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .15$, with the regression model reflecting a small to medium effect size, $f^2 = .18$. These results suggest that as actual familial rejection increases so may anxiety providing support for Hypothesis 1, and that Canadian group identification and anxiety may not be associated. The regression coefficient representing the interaction of actual familial rejection and Canadian group identification also fell within a confidence interval that was neither positive or negative, crossing over zero ($b = -3.11$, $SE = 3.98$, $p = .371$, 95 % CI [−12.56, 3.67). That result suggests that actual familial rejection and Canadian group identification do not appear to interact in predicting anxiety; however, and again, the lack of an interaction may be due to the small sample size retained at Time 2. As can be seen in Fig. 2b, when exploring the interaction, it appears as though among those who are weaker in Canadian group identification (−1 SD) as actual familial rejection increases so may anxiety ($b = 7.06$, $SE = 2.90$, $p < .05$, 95 % CI [1.25, 12.86]). However, among those who are stronger in Canadian group identification (+1 SD) actual familial rejection may not be associated with anxiety ($b = 3.14$, $SE = 3.73$, $p = .404$, 95 % CI [−4.32, 10.59]), providing some support for Hypothesis 2.

The results of the simple slopes analyses for both interactions suggest that the positive association between familial rejection and anxiety may be attenuated when Canadian group identification is stronger. Furthermore, when familial rejection was stronger (+1 SD)

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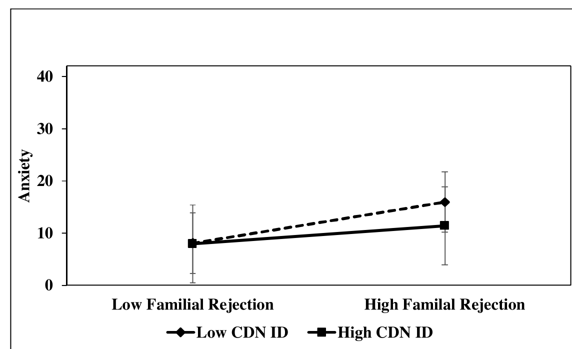


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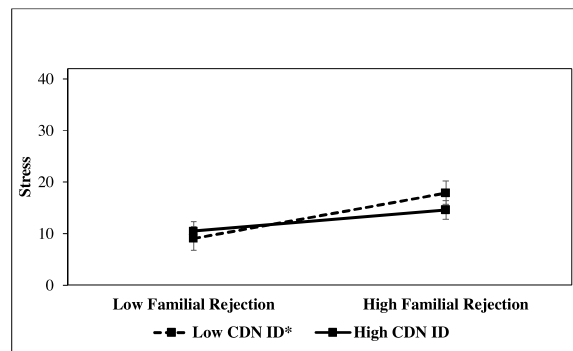
**Fig. 2.** (a) Anticipated familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms in bicultural normative conflicts at Time 1 and anxiety, at high and low Canadian group identification (CDN ID), with 95 % confidence intervals. (b) Actual familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms in bicultural normative conflicts at Time 2 and anxiety, at high and low Canadian group identification (CDN ID), with 95 % confidence intervals.

average anxiety scores for those weaker in Canadian group identification (−1 SD) appeared to increase from the mild to moderate clinical ranges for anticipated familial rejection (9.36 to 14.14) and from the moderate to severe ranges for actual familial rejection (11.22 to 15.95). However, average anxiety scores for those stronger in Canadian group identification (+ 1 SD) appeared to remain in the mild range for anticipated familial rejection (at 8.52) and remain in the moderate range for actual familial rejection (at 11.43).

### *Familial rejection and stress*

The regression coefficient representing the association between anticipated familial rejection at Time 1 and stress fell within a positive confidence interval ($b = 3.65$, $SE = .77$, $p < .001$, 95 % CI [2.14, 5.18]), whereas the regression coefficient representing the association between Canadian group identification and stress fell within a confidence interval that was neither positive or negative, crossing over zero ($b = -.69$, $SE = .92$, $p = .461$, 95 % CI [−2.59, 1.08]), $F(3,211) = 9.85$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .12$, with the regression model reflecting a small to medium effect size, $f^2 = .14$. These results suggest that as anticipated familial rejection increases so may stress providing support for Hypothesis 1; however, Canadian group identification may not be associated with stress. The regression coefficient representing the interaction of anticipated familial rejection and Canadian group identification fell within a confidence interval that was largely negative ($b = -1.88$, $SE = 1.20$, $p = .074$, 95 % CI [−4.68, .07]). As can be seen in Fig. 3a, the interaction suggests that among those who are weaker in Canadian group identification (−1 SD), as anticipated familial rejection increases so may stress ($b = 4.97$, $SE = 1.16$, $p < .001$, 95 % CI [2.68, 7.26]). However, among those who are stronger in Canadian group identification (+1 SD) anticipated familial rejection may not be associated with stress to the same extent ($b = 2.32$, $SE = .92$, $p < .05$, 95 % CI [.51, 4.13]), providing support for Hypothesis 2.

The regression coefficient representing the association between actual familial rejection at Time 2 and stress fell within a confidence interval that was largely positive ($b = 4.27$, $SE = 2.77$, $p = .082$, 95 % CI [−2.07, 8.75]), whereas the regression coefficient representing the association between Canadian group identification and stress fell within a negative confidence interval ($b = -4.90$, $SE = 2.03$, $p < .05$, 95 % CI [−8.71, −.73]), $F(3,63) = 5.22$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .20$, with the regression model reflecting a medium effect size, $f^2 = .25$. These results suggest that as actual familial rejection increases so may stress providing support for Hypothesis 1, and as Canadian group identification increases stress may decrease. The regression coefficient representing the interaction of actual familial

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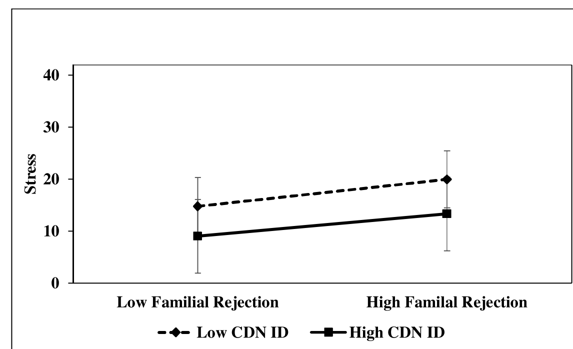


*b*

**Fig. 3.** (a) Anticipated familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms in bicultural normative conflicts at Time 1 and stress, at high and low Canadian group identification (CDN ID), with 95 % confidence intervals. (b) Actual familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms in bicultural normative conflicts at Time 2 and stress, at high and low Canadian group identification (CDN ID), with 95 % confidence intervals.

rejection and Canadian group identification fell within a confidence interval that was neither positive or negative, crossing over zero ($b = -.60$, $SE = 3.92$, $p = .855$, 95 % CI [−10.24, 5.10). That result suggests that actual familial rejection and Canadian group identification do not appear to interact in predicting stress; however, and yet again, the lack of an interaction may be due to the small sample size retained at Time 2. As can be seen in Fig. 3b, when exploring the interaction, it appears as though among those who are weaker in Canadian group identification (−1 SD) as actual familial rejection increases so may stress to some extent ($b = 4.65$, $SE = 2.76$, $p = .097$, 95 % CI [−.87, 10.17]). However, among those who are stronger in Canadian group identification (+1 SD) actual familial rejection may not be associated with stress ($b = 3.89$, $SE = 3.55$, $p = .277$, 95 % CI [−3.20, 10.98]), providing some support for Hypothesis 2.

The results of the simple slopes analyses for both interactions suggest that the positive association between familial rejection and stress may be attenuated when Canadian group identification is stronger. Furthermore, when familial rejection was stronger (+1 SD) average stress scores for those weaker in Canadian group identification (−1 SD) appeared to increase from the normal to mild clinical ranges for anticipated familial rejection (13.29 to 17.93) and from the normal to moderate ranges for actual familial rejection (14.27 to 19.97). However, average stress scores for those stronger in Canadian group identification (+ 1 SD) appeared to remain in the normal range for both anticipated familial rejection (at 14.61) and actual familial rejection (at 13.33).

## Discussion

We examined the association between familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress in bicultural normative conflicts. In addition, we examined whether strongly identifying as a Canadian group member could help bicultural Canadians cope with such rejection. First, results revealed that familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms can be positively associated with psychological distress. Second, results revealed that stronger Canadian group identification can curtail the association between familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress.

Although the positive association between familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress has been assumed in multiculturalism research, as far as we are aware the results of the present study are the first to provide empirical support for this notion. The positive association between familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress found could be because cues of rejection communicate that a relationship is no longer valued (see Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary, 2010; Williams, 2007). The devaluation of a relationship could, consequently, result in the relationship ending. Moreover, the

precarious nature of relationships perceived to be devalued could threaten one's fundamental human need for belongingness (see Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary, 2010; Williams, 2007), which can be especially harmful when the relationship being threatened is a familial relationship.

Rejection from one's family may be particularly harmful to bicultural Canadians whose families originate from Eastern collectivistic cultures because these individuals tend to derive parts their self-concepts from their relationships with close others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Close relationships being threatened or ending could require some people whose families originate from Eastern collectivistic cultures to redefine certain aspects of their self-concepts. For instance, when asked, a young South Asian woman may describe herself as a daughter or a sister. However, if she was shunned by her family as a result of transgressing the norms of her heritage culture, she may no longer see herself as part of a meaningful parent-child or sibling relationship. Therefore, experiencing rejection from family could mean having to change the way that some bicultural Canadians define themselves, and a lack of continuity and instability with which people see themselves is associated with poor psychological well-being (e.g., Campbell, 1990). Furthermore, rejection from family for transgressing heritage cultural norms could make how bicultural Canadians identify with their heritage cultures in the future unclear. They may choose to maintain some aspects of their heritage cultures but reject others, particularly those related to their heritage cultural norm transgressions that resulted in familial rejection. Such a lack of continuity and instability with which people see their cultural identities is also associated with poor psychological well-being (e.g., Vaswani et al., 2020).

The role of Canadian group identification attenuating the positive association between familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress found in the present study could be due to its culturally plural nature. According to Canada's Multiculturalism Policy (1971), the Canadian identity is meant to be a collective identity that represents Canadians regardless of their heritage cultural backgrounds. Such an inclusive representation of Canadians allows bicultural Canadians to derive a sense of belonging, satisfying their fundamental human need for belongingness (see Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and can mitigate the negative impact social rejection can have (see Leary, 1990). Moreover, by being culturally plural the Canadian identity allows bicultural Canadians to feel a sense of inclusion with other Canadians regardless of their heritage cultural backgrounds, and simultaneously feel unique and distinct because of their heritage cultural group membership, satisfying needs for optimal distinctiveness (see Brewer, 1991). Such a sense of inclusion and belonging to mainstream society, and simultaneous sense of being unique and distinct due to one's heritage cultural membership is not only conducive to the well-being of bicultural Canadians but also aligns with the goals of Canada's Multiculturalism Policy (1971).

### *Implications*

The results of the present study suggest that familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms in bicultural normative conflicts can be associated with bicultural individuals experiencing abnormal levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. However, the results of the present study also suggest that strongly identifying as Canadian is one way that bicultural Canadians can protect themselves from such debilitating negative outcomes. Previous research supports that when minority cultural group members feel rejected by majority cultural group members, aspects of their minority cultural identity can serve a protective function (e.g., Branscombe et al., 1999; Greene et al., 2006; Hakim et al., 2018; Romero & Roberts, 2003; Vaswani et al., 2020). The results of the present study parallel such research by suggesting that minority cultural group members' mainstream identity can also serve a protective function when they feel rejected by their minority cultural group. As such, promoting the culturally plural nature of the Canadian identity continues to be an important focus of the Canadian government and public policy, particularly because Canada's bicultural population is projected to continue to grow in the near future (Statistics Canada, 2017).

### *Limitations and future research direction*

One limitation of the present study is the high attrition rate between Time 1 and Time 2, which resulted in a small sample size at Time 2. The small sample size at Time 2 likely resulted in the low reported mean score for actual familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms, the low Cronbach's alpha for Canadian group identification, and the results of the analyses not being statistically significant at Time 2. As such, future studies should re-examine the association between actual familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress, and the role of Canadian group identification with a larger sample.

Given the results are drawn from cross-sectional data another limitation of the present study is that causality cannot be determined. As such, future studies examining the association between familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress, and the role of Canadian group identification should make use of experimental and/or longitudinal study designs, which are better suited to determine causality. Additionally, the results of the present study cannot be generalized to all bicultural Canadians without further examination. Accordingly, future research should focus on examining the association between familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress, and the role of Canadian group identification for bicultural Canadians from different cultural groups.

## Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to examine the association between familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms and psychological distress in bicultural normative conflicts, and the role of Canadian group identification. We found that familial rejection for transgressing heritage cultural norms in bicultural normative conflicts can be positively associated with psychological distress, but that the positive association can be attenuated when Canadian group identification is stronger. Taken together, the results

of the present study suggest that a stronger Canadian identity, which implies a culturally plural identity, can help bicultural Canadians to better cope when their familial relationships are threatened due to their heritage cultural norm transgressions in bicultural normative conflicts.

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