Université de Montréal

Writing: A Concrete Strategy to Facilitate

the Integration of Conflicting Identities into the Self

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Résumé

De plus en plus, les gens doivent apprendre à intégrer de nouvelles identités dans leur concept de soi, ce qui est souvent la source de conflits identitaires. Afin de réduire ces conflits identitaires, plusieurs chercheurs proposent que d'avoir des identités bien intégrées augmente le bien-être psychologique (Amiot, de la Sablonnière, Terry & Smith, 2007; Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; de la Sablonnière, Amiot, Sadykova, Cardenas, & Gorborukova, 2010). Jusqu'à ce jour, aucune stratégie favorisant cette intégration identitaire à été suggérée. Parallèlement, diverses études sur l'écriture démontrent qu'écrire aide à organiser et structurer les idées tout en augmentant le bien-être psychologique (Lyubomirsky, Sousa & Dickerhoof, 2006; Pennebaker & Graybeal, 2001; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Smyth, 1998). Notre hypothèse est que l'écriture faciliterait le processus d'intégration identitaire des identités conflictuelles dans le soi. Nos études 1 et 2 démontrent qu'écrire sur les conflits identitaires, comparativement à écrire sur un sujet neutre ou ne pas écrire, est associé à une augmentation de bien-être seulement chez les gens qui rapportent un haut niveau d'intégration identitaire. Nos études 3 et 4 confirment qu'en offrant plusieurs sessions d'écriture tout en adaptant les directives de rédaction, les participants augmentent leur niveau d'intégration identitaire et de bien-être indépendamment de leur niveau initial d'intégration identitaire. Des analyses de contenu sur les textes d'écriture des participants ont été étudiées afin d'approfondir notre compréhension.

Mots-clés: identité, intégration identitaire, résolution de conflit, écriture, processus, bien-être psychologique.

Summary

More and more, people must learn to integrate new identities in their self-concept, which is often the source of identity conflicts. To reduce these identity conflicts, previous research suggests that high levels of identity integration increases psychological well-being (Amiot, de la Sablonnière, Terry & Smith, 2007; Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; de la Sablonnière, Amiot, Sadykova, Cardenas, & Gorborukova, 2010). So far, no strategy to promote identity integration was suggested. In parallel, the action of writing about a negative experience demonstrates that writing helps organize and structure ideas while enhancing psychological well-being (Lyubomirsky, Sousa & Dickerhoof, 2006; Pennebaker & Graybeal, 2001; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Smyth, 1998). Thus, we hypothesize that writing will facilitate the integration of conflicting identities into the self. Studies 1 and 2 reveal that writing about identity conflicts, as compared to writing about a neutral topic or no writing, is associated with superior levels of psychological well-being only for participants scoring high on identity integration. Studies 3 and 4 confirm that several writing sessions using clearer writing instructions helped participants to increase both levels of identity integration and psychological well-being regardless of the initial level of identity integration. Analyses of participants' written content were performed to deepen our understanding.

Key-words: identity, integration, conflict resolution, writing, process, psychological well-being

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List of Symbols and Abbreviations

ANOVA   Analysis of Variance

CAN   Canadian

C/E   Cultural/Ethnic

ID   Identity

M   Mean (average)

p   Probability

SD   Standard Deviation

USSR   Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

9/11   September 11$^{\text{th}}$, 2001

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INTRODUCTION

Whether we want it or not, we are all involved during our daily lives, in a number of identity conflicts. Some are more important to us than others, while some are just there to remind us that we, like everybody else, are not perfect. Because today's society is becoming more culturally open and worldwide diversified, we are all confronted to new identities that may challenge who we already are.

Although identity conflict is usually perceives as being negative, it is nonetheless an inevitable part of our daily lives. In fact, conflict directly confronts individuals to situations that may affect the way they define themselves. Regardless if these situations are positive or negative, they lead individuals to re-evaluate their sense of self and to reorganize their identity. Facing such identity conflicts, people must learn to integrate these new identities in their self-concept.

Integrating new identities into the self is not only crucial in the context of cultural diversity, such as travelling or immigration, but for anyone confronted with profound changes. A few examples would include changes such as the dismantling of the former USSR, the terrorist attacks on 9/11, many major natural disasters or earthquakes like the one in Haiti, or even personal crisis such as divorce or cancer or the death of someone close. Thus, identity integration affects millions of individuals and groups undergoing important changes as they are faced with challenges impacting their identity. New situations bring new identities to which older identities seemed no longer to apply.

Importantly, those who can adapt and change when confronted with new identities will be better off psychologically than those who cannot. Knowing that the integration of conflicting identities is crucial for individuals' psychological well-being, we believe that a concrete strategy to facilitate such integration is fundamentally needed. This paper highlights the benefits of writing as a concrete facilitator to identity integration.

The present thesis is divided into three (3) chapters. The first Chapter – *Theoretical Context*, includes an overall perspective of different theories concerning identity conflict. Drawing from the literature, there is general agreement on four types of identity conflicts. The first type is intrapersonal conflict, which occurs within the individual, for instance an identity conflict. The second type is interpersonal conflict, which happens among two or more individuals, for example a dilemma between two people. The third type is intragroup conflict, which is found within a group, such as problems within an organisation. The last type is intergroup conflict, which refers to conflict between two or more groups, as it would be the case in a war. For the purpose of this thesis, we will focus our work on the intrapersonal type of conflict, what we call **identity conflict**.

The second Chapter – *Article*, presents the article which contains a theoretical context, a method section, as well as result and discussion section. Lastly, the third Chapter – *Discussion*, presents a general discussion where different theories are revised in line with our findings. Suggested solutions for solving identity conflicts using writing as a strategy to increase integration and well-being will be proposed. It is believed that this concluding chapter summarizes relevant information in hope to help individuals to re-evaluate their situations for the better as they will experience higher levels of identity integration and psychological well-being.

First Chapter
Theoretical Context

For a great number of years already, researchers have studied the development of identity as it is considered to be a major topic in social psychology. Research on identity has interested an array of disciplines from social sciences, humanities, and even political sciences. A clearer definition of what we mean by *identity conflict* will be provided.

Defining Identity and Identity Conflict

Identity refers to what people think of who they are, it's the way they think of themselves, of their attributes, of their roles and of their personality on an individual basis (Marcia 1980; Josselson, 1994; Berger, 1997). In fact, identity is considered to be the intersection of both individual and society as its formation combines a commitment to a way of being (individual) while seeking a place within the larger social world (society) (Fearon 1999; Marcia 1980; Josselson, 1994; Berger, 1997). Furthermore, Hogg and Abrams's (1988) definition of identity states that its "people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others" (p. 2). According to Wendt (1992), identities are "relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self" (p. 397). Interestingly, the term identity (by convention) refers to "mutually constructed and evolving images of self and other" (Katzenstein 1996, p. 59). Identity is for Erikson, a subjective sense as well as an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, paired with some belief in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image (Erikson, 1956).

Identity conflict could be defined as incoherence to one's self, i.e. of who they are. The source of this incoherence may be internal, reflecting an intrapsychic conflict (e.g. Festinger, 1954; Higgins, 1987) that the individual experiences within the self, thus reflecting an identity conflict generated inside the self. Such identity conflict may occur when an individual adopts a new identity that may conflict with an old identity, when there are competing demands associated with two identities, or even when two existing and incoherent identities are both activated at the same time in a specific context.

To better illustrate what identity conflict refer to, we will consider the case of Ricardo, a young 22 year old student. Without anyone knowing, Ricardo suffers from an important identity conflict since he experiences incompatibility between his sexual identity, as a gay male, and his religious identity, as a loyal and devoted Catholic. He recently discovered that he was homosexual, and his feelings of confusion lead him to feel misunderstood considering that his identity conflict represents a sin for his religion and his family. How can we explain his situation, and what can he do to solve it?

Although identity conflict can be experienced on an individual level, such as seen with Ricardo, these conflicts can also be observed between social or cultural identities. For instance, it can be the case of a worker who just recently changed status or in the scenario of immigration when countries are very different.

Theoretical Perspectives on Identity Conflict

A large literature supports and highlights psychological outcomes of intrapersonal identity conflicts. The significance of examining such theoretical perspectives will enable us to understand underlying patterns explaining inconsistencies between conflicting identities. Here, we will examine the five (5) most commonly known theories and models in order to seek a solution to reduce such identity conflicts. Such theories/models were chosen to cover a broad perspective in terms of research on identity conflict.

Festinger's Theory of Dissonance. The cognitive dissonance theory is based on the idea of cognitions which are merely bits of knowledge. According to Festinger's Theory of Dissonance, cognitions, which include knowledge, attitude, emotion, belief and behavior, are said to be "dissonant" when disagreeing with each other (Festinger, 1957). They can pertain to any variety of thoughts, values, facts, or emotions. For example, the fact that Ricardo likes men is a cognition in itself, and so is the fact that he is a devoted Catholic. Most cognitions have nothing to do with each other, which means that they are somewhat unrelated. However, in the case of Ricardo, his two here-mentioned cognitions are related to each other even if they do not go together hand in hand. His cognitions relate to the person Ricardo, both Catholic and homosexual at the same time as these identities are not mutually exclusive. It is these types of cognitions

that we referred to as "dissonant." The basic premise behind Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory is that individuals do not like to have dissonant cognitions. As a result, when people experience dissonant cognitions (i.e. conflicting thoughts or identities), they will attempt to restore the conflict to avoid dissonance (Baker, 2003). In line with this theory on intrapersonal identity conflict, this theory has inspired others to also suggest similar frameworks on that topic.

Heider's Model of Cognitive Imbalance Theory. Heider's model of cognitive imbalance theory refers to inconsistency between a person's cognitive network of attitudes towards values and perceived life conditions. According to Heider's model (1946), attitudes refer to a person's approval (or disapproval) of a value, and beliefs refer to a person's perception of whether a value is actually realized in life (or not realized). To predict the outcome of his identity conflict, Ricardo must weigh the effects of all the potential results if he decides to assume his sexual orientation as a gay male or if he believes his faith is of greater importance to him and his family. Based on Heider's model, the result that requires the least amount of effort will probably be the likely outcome (Heider, 1946). In fact, both Festinger's Theory of Dissonance and Heider's Theory of Cognitive Imbalance believed that individuals have a central basic need to achieve consistency and balance in their attitudes. These premises disclose that attitudes are defined as appraisals of values and goals. In fact, while values are stable concepts about primary desirable qualities of life, goals stand for end states of concrete actions (Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1946).

Schelling's Model. Schelling describes intrapersonal conflict as a multiple self problem; mainly he explains that people can behave like two different persons when it comes to their various self. For instance, Ricardo would behave like two people, one who wants to maintain his religious identity as a devoted Catholic and the other who wants to assert his sexual identity by establishing a sinless relationship with his partner (Schelling, 1984; O'Connor *et al.*, 2002).

Once more, the notion of intrapersonal conflicts arise the idea that there are two distinct selves wanting different outcomes which are fighting in order to gain control over individual's behavior (Schelling, 1982, 1984). Futhermore, Schelling believes that his model also has a temporal dimension; precisely one of the selves would focus on the

present which would provide immediate benefits while the other temporal self would be future-oriented which would relate to future long-term benefits (Schelling, 1984; O'Connor *et al.*, 2002). These selves, when solicited, would focus on either the present time and would privilege immediate interests while the other would tend to wait and maximize potential interests (O'Connor *et al.*, 2002). Hence, literature seems to have found that individuals are experiencing dilemmas when the need to take a decision arises, yet this conflicting situation, whether one goes for the immediate gratification or the delayed one, does not explain intrapersonal conflicts any further.

Higgins's Self-Discrepancy Theory. With regards to intrapersonal conflict, we know that individuals who have inconsistent beliefs about themselves are more likely to feel uncomfortable than those who hold consistent beliefs. For example, Ricardo who wants to be a devoted Catholic, but who is actually homosexual may experience discomfort arising from the inconsistency between these conflicting attributes; mainly what Ricardo ideally wants (to stay a devoted Catholic) and what the person actually is (a devoted Catholic who believes homosexuality is a sin). This kind of discomfort is based on Higgins's Self-Discrepancy Theory (1987) which states that people have multiple mental representations of the self. According to Higgins, there are three domains of the self: the actual self - refers to real attributes one actually has; the ideal self - represents hopes and wishes one would ideally like to have; and the ought self – represents duty and responsibility one believes he should have (Higgins, 1987).

Second, Higgins described two basic standpoints on the self: *own* - one's own viewpoint; and *others* - the standpoint of significant others. When we combine the domain of the self with the standpoint on the self, we obtain six self-state representations: actual/own, actual/others, ideal/own, ideal/others, ought/own, and ought/others. Higgins believed that the first two (actual/own and actual/others) represent the self-concept, while the remaining four combinations stand for self-guides (Higgins, Strauman & Klein, 1986; see Wylie, 1979). Self-guides are based on both the ideal and ought self as they are not what the person actually is, but rather a guidance model to what they should become. The self-discrepancy theory is based on the idea that people are motivated to find a match between their self-concept and their self-guides (Higgins,

1987). Thus, people are strongly inclined to maintain a sense of consistency among their various beliefs or "identities".

Higgins believes that when undergoing conflict regarding what we *can* achieve, people tend to have feelings of sadness, dissatisfaction and other depressive senses. However, when the conflict concerns what we *should* achieve, people experience fear, worry and other anxieties (Higgins, 1987). For Ricardo, the thought that he should stay a devoted Christian and should not assume his sexual identity which contradicts with his religious beliefs, he will blame himself and feel very uncomfortable as anxieties and worries will reduce his psychological well-being.

Loewenstein's Model. Loewenstein (1996) describes an unusual framework which accounts for what people experience when suffering from an intrapersonal conflict. He believes that internal conflict is characterized by deviations in behaviour between a instinctive response and a cognitive response, more precisely that instinctive response offers a way of understanding differences between self-interest and behaviour (Loewenstein, 1996; O'Connor *et al*., 2002).

In line with what Higgins suggested earlier (1987), researchers proposed that people experience intrapersonal conflict as a tension between what they "want to do" and "what they believe they should do" (Bazerman, Tenbrunsel & Wade-Benzoni, 1998; O'Connor *et al.,* 2002) which would give rise to the "want" self, defined as Loewenstein's instinctive responses, and the "should" self, reflecting self-interest responses. In this want/should division, the "want" self craves the dessert while the "should" self knows not to succumb to temptation (O'Connor *et al.,* 2002). O'Connor et al. (2002) argued that temporal characteristics determine when "want" versus "should" will dominate. In the case of Ricardo, his religious identity represent the values he should follow as a devoted Catholic (i.e. the "should" response); however, once Ricardo is out with friends, his instinctive ("want") response somehow takes over and dominates his devoted Catholic faith to succumb to the urge of asserting his hidden homosexual orientation.

Similar to Schelling's model, Loewenstein (1996) also advocate that the "want" self is more impulsive as it tries satisfy interests on a short-term basis while the "should" self, the more behaved one, is answers to interests on a longer-term basis (O'Connor *et*

al., 2002). This idea of temporal power plays an important role when individuals are confronted to a life situation where a significant decision requires to be taken, especially when facing an intraindividual conflict, as it is the case with Ricardo.

Such internal conflict between inconsistent goals or values, or even identities, may contribute to negative emotional distress, even to the development of psychopathological symptoms as well as to the maintenance of mental disorders, such as depression (Grawe, 2003; Higgins, 1987; Stangier, Ukrow, Schermelleh-Engel, Grabe & Lauterbach, 2007). Moreover, studies have reported positive correlations between identity conflict (i.e. cognitive inconsistencies) and reduced psychological and physical well-being (Emmons & King, 1988; Stangier *et al.*, 2007). In fact, significant correlations between conflicting goals and psychopathological symptoms, including symptoms of depression, have been found in patients (Harmon-Jones, 2004; Lauterbach, 1996; Stangier *et al.*, 2007).

In addition, identity conflicts interfere with effective actions and may result in approach-avoidance conflicts (Higgins, 1987; Miller, 1944), associated with inactivity, loss of energy, withdrawal, as well as subsequent triggering of psychopathological and somatic symptoms typical for depression. Considering that identity conflict entails important consequences on both physical and psychological well-being, we will now examine how to solve them. One important theory which can be used to consolidate identity conflicts is based on ***identity integration***.

Identity Integration

Considering that individuals evolve and change who they are over time, many argue that identities should be seen as dynamic, continuously changing, relational ways of whom they are, rather than static entities that are fixed in time (Amiot, de la Sablonnière, Terry & Smith, 2007; Breakwell, 1986; Condor, 1996; Ethier & Deux, 1994). Because individuals are able to learn and to integrate new information into their self, they therefore need to adopt new identities, to modify existing ones, or even to eliminate some (Jones, 2008).

When individuals reflect on who they are, i.e. answering the question who I am?, they have access to multiple identities that are included into the self. All these identities, which may be defined by their group memberships, their relationships with others, or even the different roles they have, each represent the person they are in relation to a given context (Brewer, 1991; Turner, Oakes, Haslam & McGarty, 1994).

In fact, the term *identity integration* suggests that for the self to avoid feeling fragmented or conflicted due to incompatibilities between different identities, an integration of such identities is required (Amiot et al., 2007; Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; de la Sablonnière, Amiot & Sadykova, 2008). Given multiple identities, *identity integration* refers to the extent to which potentially competing identities are perceived as compatible versus conflicting. In fact, the term *identity integration* itself suggests that for the self to avoid feeling fragmented or conflicted due to incompatibilities between different social or cultural identities, an integration of such identities is required (Amiot *et al*., 2007; Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; de la Sablonnière et al., 2010). Specifically, identity integration involves an increased coherence among conflicting identities over time (Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee & Morris, 2002; Condor, 1996; Lafromboise, Coleman & Gerton, 1993; de la Sablonnière et al., 2010). Coherence between identities implies that levels of identification to the two identities have to be equal in order to be integrated (Amiot *et al*., 2007; de la Sablonnière et al., 2010). The more two identities have in common, the more they are coherent with one another, and in turn, the higher identity integration will be.

Processes of identity integration relate to the establishment of interconnections between conflicting identities occurring through a gradual increase in cognitive overlap. In fact, by finding similarities and accepting differences between conflicting identities, individuals increase the perceived overlap between older and newer identities as this ensures certain degree of shared common overlap (Amiot *et al*., 2007; Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; de la Sablonnière et al., 2010). Because identity integration occurs through finding similarities and also by recognizing differences between conflicting identities, a strategy to facilitate identity integration would have to parallel the exact same processes. Therefore, a concrete strategy that would mirror the processes of identity integration would facilitate such integration.

Finding a concrete strategy to facilitate the integration of conflicting identities would help people, like Ricardo, to better cope with his conflicting sexual vs. religious identities, and would thus achieve higher psychological well-being. Although a few intervention plans such as narrative writing (e.g. McAdams, 1997), written life review (e.g. Bowling, 1995; Butler, 2002) and reminiscence therapy (e.g. Butler, 1963; Erikson, 1950; Hsieh & Wang, 2003) currently exist to increase psychological well-being and conclude in acceptance of the life one has lived; however, no writing strategy directly targets the integration of conflicting identities into the self.

Writing to increase identity integration can provide new insights that result in the resolution of various identity conflicts, in reconciliation with alienated issues, and even in integration of older and newer identities. We believe writing about conflicting identities aiming the search for similarities and acceptance of differences will increase psychological well-being.

Since no concrete therapeutic tool has yet been developed to specifically increase levels of identity integration, we examined a particular strategy to facilitate such process. More precisely, one strategy that parallels processes of identity integration, which require restructuring and reorganizing identities by establishing links to achieve a more coherent sense of self, is *writing.*

Writing

We believe writing represents the best strategy to facilitate identity integration because it mirrors the exact same processes required for identity integration. Because our language is highly structured and syntax allows organization, it has been shown that writing leads to meaningful searching, enhanced understanding and identity formation (Lyubomirsky, Sousa & Dickerhoof, 2006; Singer 2004; Smyth, True & Souto, 2001), which we believe to be an important and concrete process for the integration of conflicting identities.

On the one hand, we argue that writing will increase identity integration since it structures ideas and organizes thoughts into words (Lyubomirsky *et al.,* 2006; Smyth, 1998). Both identity integration and writing share great underlying parallel through which the establishment of links between conflicting identities reduce incompatibilities

in various identities. Because identity integration and writing have such analogous processes, we believe it will diminish incompatibilities while promoting the search for similarities and the acceptance of differences.

On the other hand, we argue that writing will increase psychological well-being since writing alleviates tensions and negative feelings caused by incompatible identities. Specifically, writing offers the opportunity to process negative life situations, clarifies incompatibilities between conflicting identities, and gives the beholder a chance to integrate them and to better cope.

Writing and identity integration go hand in hand when it comes to increasing psychological well-being. However, levels of identity integration can influence the benefits of writing. For instance, someone experiencing high levels of identity integration will benefit more from writing about their conflict in comparison to someone scoring low on identity integration. This can be explained by fact that high levels of identity integration facilitates the search for similarities between conflicting identities and promotes the acceptance of differences as they appear to have more in common. In opposition, low levels of identity integration necessitate more time and conscious efforts to establish cognitive links and similarities between conflicting identities.

Goal and Hypothesis

Examining how individuals write and establish interconnections between different identities by finding similarities and accepting differences, not only informs us about the process of how people create their own identity, but also how they integrate conflicting identities into the self. Thus, our main objective is to understanding if writing about identity conflict will increase identity integration and psychological well-being.

The first objective of the present research is to examine if writing about conflict will increase of psychological well-being. To examine if writing will increase psychological well-being, *we hypothesize that writing about identity conflict, as compared to writing about neutral topic or no writing, will be associated to superior levels of psychological well-being for individuals scoring high on identity integration in opposition to those scoring low on identity integration.*

The second objective is to examine if writing about conflict for a longer period of time and with different writing instructions will increase both identity integration and psychological well-being. To evaluate if several writing sessions using different instructions will increase identity integration and psychological well-being, *we hypothesized that writing about identity conflict will increase both identity integration and psychological well-being levels for those scoring high and low on identity integration from Time 1 to Time 2.*

Because this thesis requires participants to write in a diary, we analysed part of the written content to further explore processes of identity integration as a way to find a concrete strategy to facilitate it. Thus, our last exploratory objective will be to assess the pattern of words usage, both positive and negative words, from the diary content of our participants. For *positive words* we referred to words including positive feelings, constructive actions, optimism and energy such as "joy, happy, love, win", as well as assents (e.g. Yes, OK). For *negative words* we referred to words including anxiety, fear, anger, sadness and depression such as "upset, afraid, hate, kill" and negations such as "never, no, not" (Pennebaker *et al.*, 2003). We expect that participants scoring low on identity integration will use more negative words and less positive words, while those scoring high on identity integration will report more positive words and less negative words. Finally, over several writing sessions, we predict that the usage of positive words will increase while the usage of negative words will decrease over time.

Second Chapter
Article

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Student's Specific Contributions

For studies 1 to 4, I was involved in each steps of the research. Hypotheses were developed, a literature review was conducted, questionnaires and dairies for writing sessions were elaborated, data were collected for the four (4) studies, they were then entered in SPSS, and statistical analyses were finally performed. Everything was achieved under the guidance and collaboration of Prof. Roxane de la Sablonnière.

Although this article includes four (4) studies, only two (2) studies were actually completed during the Master's program itself. As suggested by Prof. Michèle Robert to further improve my research skills and to complement implications of the present thesis, the first two studies (i.e. studies 1 and 2) were completed before the Master's program as academic course projects for the respective classes PSY 6322 and PSY 6855.

The two other studies (i.e. studies 3 and 4) were achieved once the thesis proposal was submitted and accepted. However, we deem it appropriate and very important to include the first two studies that arise from the same idea as they were the pedestal of the upcoming ideas which followed afterwards. Together, these four studies mark an essential and progressive continuation which logically provide as a whole theoretical implications for the literature. All four studies are included in this article as we wish to submit them altogether to the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

Running head: WRITING AND IDENTITY INTEGRATION

**Writing: A Concrete Strategy to Facilitate the Integration
of Conflicting Identities into the Self**

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Authors' Note

When we are no longer able to change a situation,
we are challenged to change ourselves
~ Viktor Frankl.

To change one's situation is to challenge one's identity. When confronted to change, integrating new information into the self represents a significant challenge. Like many who are required to change their situation, Nanako, a 25 year-old Japanese university student is challenged by her immigration status. Nanako has recently immigrated to Canada, and since her arrival, she is greatly aware of her different and visible identity. She not only looks physically different with her small frame and black straight hair, but her attitude also reflects different values, such as family traditions, education choices and food preferences. Nanako constantly feels torn between her traditional Japanese identity and her new Canadian identity. In her eyes, these two identities appear conflicting. Although she has been very open-minded about her new situation and talking about her experience to friends and family, this young woman finds comfort in writing in a personal journal. Writing down thoughts and feelings about her new situation in Canada helps her to achieve higher psychological well-being and to better integrate her new Canadian identity.

Whether changing a situation is chosen or imposed, it directly affects our identity. As seen with Nanako, changing one's situation is to challenge one's identity when faced with new information. Integrating new identities into the self is not only crucial in the context of immigration, but for anyone confronted with dramatic social changes. A few examples would include social changes such as the earthquake tragedy in Haiti or the terrorist attacks on 9/11, or even personal changes such as a heartbreaking divorce or cancer. Thus, identity integration affects millions of individuals and groups undergoing important changes as they are faced with challenges impacting their identity.

Even though individuals all have different ways of coping when faced with new identities, the need to be coherent takes over. This need leads individuals to change who they are over time as new identities have yet to be integrated into the self (Amiot *et al.*, 2007; Breakwell, 1986; Condor, 1996; Ethier & Deux, 1994). New situations bring new

identities to which older identities seemed no longer to apply. Those who can adapt and change when confronted with new identities will be better off psychologically than those who cannot (e.g. Amiot *et al.*, 2007; Benet-Martinez *et al.*, 2002; de la Sablonnière *et al.*, 2008).

This paper significantly highlights the benefits of writing as a concrete facilitator to identity integration. To this day and to our knowledge, processes leading to identity integration are greatly understudied as no work has yet examined a concrete strategy to facilitate such process (e.g., Amiot *et al.*, 2007; Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; de la Sablonnière et al., 2010). Finding a concrete strategy to facilitate identity integration is tremendously important for the literature since research is lacking a great deal of information on such topic. It will not only deepen our understanding of how to increase identity integration over time, but also to expand our knowledge to develop a therapeutic tool in clinical psychology. We theorize that writing represents a concrete and innovating therapeutic tool to increase identity integration and psychological well-being because it mirrors the exact same processes required for identity integration.

Processes of Identity Integration

In the literature, there are numerous models describing how the self is organized and structured. Whether they refer to notions of self-differentiation (Donahue, Robins, Roberts & John, 1993), compartmentalization (Showers, 1992a, 1992b), acculturation (Berry 1997, 2005), biculturalism (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005) or identity integration (Amiot *et al.*, 2007; de la Sablonnière *et al.*, 2010), the main idea is that the self has to be structured and coherently organized.

When individuals are faced with new situations, they need to organize their overall sense of self. More precisely, they have to consider the integration structure, as well as what should be included or excluded. This self-structure, which refers to how individuals organize information within the self (Linville, 1987; Showers, 1992a, 1992b), is constructed by all these different identities that define individuals on a personal basis. Given multiple identities, *identity integration* refers to the extent to which potentially competing identities are perceived as compatible versus conflicting.

In fact, the term *identity integration* suggests that for the self to avoid feeling fragmented or conflicted due to incompatibilities between different identities, an integration of such identities is required (Amiot *et al*., 2007; Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; de la Sablonnière et al., 2010). Specifically, identity integration involves an increased coherence among conflicting identities over time (Benet-Martinez *et al*., 2002; Condor, 1996; Lafromboise *et al*., 1993; de la Sablonnière et al., 2010). Coherence between identities implies that levels of identification to the conflicting identities have to be equal in order to be integrated, i.e., the process by which new identities become as important as pre-existing identities within the self (Amiot *et al*., 2007; de la Sablonnière et al., 2010). The more two identities have in common, the more they are coherent with one another, and in turn, the higher identity integration will be.

When applied to the context of immigration, researchers (e.g. Amiot *et al*., 2007; de la Sablonnière et al., 2010) share one main identity integration process. This identity integration process relates to the establishment of interconnections between different identities occurring through a gradual increase in cognitive overlap. In fact, by finding similarities and recognizing differences between conflicting identities, individuals increase the perceived overlap between older and newer identities as this ensures certain degree of shared common overlap.

Considering the discomfort associated with different identities and the desire to develop a coherent sense of self (Harter, 1999, Mascolo, Fischer & Neimeyer, 1999), individuals rely on certain cognitive strategies to resolve this conflict. In the case of Nanako, she could reduce conflict between her traditional Japanese identity and her new Canadian identity by finding similarities on a common ground and accepting differences by understanding them separately. Although realizing the many ways her two identities are distinct, she may come to find similarities and consistencies among these identities, as well as realize that each identity contributes positively and in a unique way to her self-concept. In fact, finding common ground will lead her to equalize levels of identification to both conflicting identities which have to be equal in order to be integrated into the self (Amiot *et al.,* 2007; de la Sablonnière et al., 2010).

Taking into account that this identity integration process reduces incompatibility between conflicting identities, leading to a more coherent sense of self, it also plays a major role on levels of *psychological well-being* (e.g., Amiot *et al*., 2007; Benet-Martinez *et al*., 2002; de la Sablonnière et al., 2010). Previous research proposes a direct and significant link between identity integration and psychological well-being (e.g., Amiot *et al*., 2007; Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; de la Sablonnière et al., 2010; de la Sablonnière, Aubin & Amiot, 2008; Cameron, 1999; Phinney, 1995; Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebind & Vedder, 2001; Roberts, Phinney, Masse, Chen, Roberts & Romero, 1999). Reaching high levels of identity integration is important because the integration of different beliefs about the self allows individuals to form an overall stable identity, which positively influences well-being.

For instance, it was found that bicultural teenagers (e.g. African Americans) who integrated their two cultures in their self-concept reported being more complete and well-rounded. These results showed evidence for integrating together two distinct cultures (Anderson, 1994; Phinney and Devich-Navarro, 1997). Similarly, a study by Downie, Koestner, ElGeledi and Cree (2004) found that, cultural integration, which was conceptualized as a lack of conflict between cultural identities, also predicted greater psychological well-being in tri-cultural university students who were required to integrate new cultural identities into their self.

Processes of Writing

As seen previously, identity integration occurs through finding similarities between conflicting identities. Because no therapeutic tool has yet been developed as none exists to increase levels of identity integration, we examined a concrete strategy that would facilitate identity integration using the exact same parallel processes. More precisely, one strategy that parallels processes of identity integration, which require restructuring and reorganizing identities by establishing links to achieve a more coherent sense of self, is writing. Therefore, writing would become a facilitator that would mirror the processes of identity integration in order to increase such integration.

Writing represents one of the fundamental model of human thinking that build on expression and communication instead of formal logic and rationality (Burner, 1986; 1990). Because our language is highly structured and syntax allows organization, it has been shown that writing leads to meaningful searching, enhanced understanding and identity formation (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2006; Singer 2004; Smyth, True & Souto, 2001), which we believe to be an important and concrete process for the integration of conflicting identities.

Writing is a strategy that has been demonstrated to improve life satisfaction, enhance mental and physical health (Donnelly & Murray, 1991; Greenberg & Stone, 1992; L'Abate, 1992; L'Abate, Boyce, Fraizer & Russ, 1992; Lange, 1994; Smyth 1998), and structure and organize thoughts and ideas. Experts believe that writing is beneficial since it liberates emotions cramped in people's head as it forces them to reflect on how they feel (e.g. Pennebaker *et al.*, 2003; Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2006; Smyth, 1998). Such strategy helps to put some kind of order in their thoughts/emotions leading them to experience an impression of control. It allows the writer to comprehend the situation with a focus on what actually happened, how it happened, and how it affected them (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2006; Pennebaker & Graybeal, 2001; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). Writing offers a sense of solution seeking and leaves place for understanding or at least acceptance of the facts.

Mechanisms underlying the action of writing, in comparison to those of both talking and thinking, are believed to be the most beneficial way of processing negative life situations because it involves organizing, integrating, analyzing, as it leads to acceptance and solution-seeking (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2006; Smyth, 1998).

Furthermore, studies have shown that benefits of writing are linked to the use of words that are causal and insightful which are related to integration (Esterling *et al.*, 1999; Pennebaker *et al.*, 1997), organization, acceptance (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). Therefore, it appears that people who write about their inconsistencies and/or negative feelings concerning a life experience would be able to integrate them, and to organize and accept them better.

Pennebaker and Graybeal (2001) agree that once the structure and meaning of an experience or trauma is understood, people gain a sense of resolution and a feeling of control that enable them to better cope with the experience or trauma. This understanding may even allow the person to label the emotions, which allow him or her to let go (Esterling *et al.*, 1999).

Because processes of writing mirror those of identity integration, we believe writing to be a concrete strategy to facilitate the establishment of interconnections between different identities occurring through a gradual increase in cognitive overlap. Through this parallel of writing down similarities regarding conflicting identities, individuals should increase the perceived overlap between distinct identities and ensure a certain degree of shared common overlap. Considering both identity integration and writing lead to a sense of coherence and higher psychological well-being, we propose writing as a concrete strategy to facilitate the integration of conflicting identities into the self. Although psychological benefits of writing are well-known, such strategy has never been used in the context of identity integration with the objective of facilitating the integration of conflicting identities.

For Nanako, this identity integration process through writing requires her to first acknowledge the new identity by expressing her thoughts and feelings toward it. By doing so, she will assert her position vis-à-vis that new identity which will help her to find similarities between her old Japanese identity and her new Canadian in order to increase both meaningful searching and coherence. Previous works on the benefits of writing suggest that such action helps to achieve higher psychological well-being, as it allows structuring ideas and organizing thoughts into words (e.g., Murray & Segal, 1994; Dominguez *et al.*, 1995; Smyth 1998; Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2006; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999).

Given that writing portrays parallel processes to those of identity integration, Nanako would first have to acknowledge the new identity by expressing her thoughts and feelings toward it. By doing so, she will assert her position vis-à-vis that new identity which will help her to find similarities between her old Japanese identity and her new Canadian in order to increase both meaningful searching and coherence.

Objective

Examining how individuals write and establish interconnections between conflicting identities by finding similarities, not only informs us about the process of how people create their own identity, but also how they integrate conflicting identities into their self. Thus, **our main objective is to understanding if writing about identity conflict will increase identity integration and psychological well-being.**

On the one hand, we argue that writing will increase identity integration since it structures ideas and organizes thoughts into words (Lyubomirsky et al., 2006; Smyth, 1998). Based on the fact that processes of identity integration and writing share great parallel through which the establishment of links between conflicting identities reduce incompatibilities between different identities, we believe it will promote similarities. On the other hand, we argue that writing will increase psychological well-being since writing alleviates tensions and negative feelings caused by incompatible identities. Specifically, writing offers the opportunity to process negative life situations, clarifies incompatibilities between conflicting identities, and gives the beholder a chance to integrate them and to better cope.

Although they have parallel processes, we believe that *writing* and *identity integration* go hand in hand when it comes to increasing psychological well-being. However, levels of identity integration can influence the benefits of writing, and vice-versa. For instance, someone experiencing high levels of identity integration will benefit more from writing about their conflict in comparison to someone scoring low on identity integration. This can be explained by fact that high levels of identity integration facilitate the search for similarities and the acceptance of differences between conflicting identities as they would already have more in common, i.e. making it easier to find common ground between them. In opposition, low levels of identity integration would necessitate more time and conscious efforts to establish cognitive links and similarities between conflicting identities.

Several studies have shown that writing about a negative experience is linked to health change (e.g. Frisina, Borod, & Lepore, 2004; Pennebaker *et al.*, 1997; Smyth, 1998). Research suggests that the more people use positive words, the more their health improves. For instance, writing about an identity conflict and still use positive words

could imply that the writer is processing the information along a dimension of positivity; however, writing with too many negative words could be linked with no health improvements and could reflect that writer is focusing too much on the pessimistic side of the identity conflict (e.g. Pennebaker *et al.*, 1997; Ramírez-Esparza & Pennebaker, 2006). Implications of our finding will be discussed throughout this article.

STUDIES OVERVIEW

This paper highlights the benefits of writing about identity conflict as a concrete strategy to increase identity integration and psychological well-being. The four studies presented in this article were conducted on groups of students and immigrants at different college and university levels.

Study 1 was designed to explore the role of writing as a facilitator to solve identity conflict. Because it is easier for individuals with high levels of identity integration to establish links, find similarities between their conflicting identities, we expect that writing about conflict will be most beneficial to them in contrast to individuals with low levels of identity integration. Thus, we examine whether writing about identity conflict would increase psychological well-being for individuals experiencing high levels of identity integration, in opposition to those scoring low on identity integration. First, **we hypothesize that writing about identity conflict, as compared to writing about neutral topic or no writing, will be associated to superior levels of psychological well-being for individuals scoring high on identity integration in opposition to those scoring low on identity integration.** The level of identity integration between conflicting identities was examined prior to a 15 minute writing session.

Study 2 was performed to replicate and examine the findings to another context with different types of identity conflicts in order to verify our first hypothesis. Together, studies 1 and 2 were designed to determine if writing had an impact on psychological well-being as compared to writing about a neutral topic or no writing at all.

Study 3 was a longitudinal study which evaluated whether writing about identity conflict for a longer period of time using different writing instructions would further increase levels of identity integration and psychological well-being for both individuals scoring high and low on identity integration. Second, **we hypothesized that writing about identity conflict will increase both identity integration and psychological well-being levels for those scoring high and low on identity integration from Time 1 to Time 2.** The level of identity integration and psychological well-being was examined prior (Time 1) and after (Time 2) writing sessions.

Study 4 was conducted to replicate and further investigate the finding to other types of identity conflicts, mainly a cultural identity conflict, to verify our second hypothesis. Together, studies 3 and 4 were designed to determine if writing time and writing instructions would facilitate identity integration through finding similarities over time.

For all four (4) studies, analysis of participants' written content was examined to further explore how words influence the processes of identity integration. Based on previous studies on writing which revealed that the use of positive words is correlated with fewer physician visits and higher psychological well-being, we expect two things.

First, in studies 1 and 2, **we predict that participants scoring low on identity integration will use more negative words and less positive words, while those scoring high on identity integration will report more positive words and less negative words.**

Second, in studies 3 and 4, **we expect that the usage of positive words will increase while the usage of negative words will decrease over time.** The analysis of content, as an exploratory objective, will allow for future studies to investigate the influence of words on identity integration.

STUDY 1

Based on Higgins's Self-Discrepancy Theory (1987), which states that people have multiple mental representations of the self, we examined whether individuals experiencing identity conflict between their ideal self and their actual self would benefit from writing that aims at increasing psychological well-being. For example, someone who wants to be patient, but who is actually impatient may experience discomfort arising from the inconsistency between these conflicting attributes; mainly what the person ideally wants to be (i.e. patient) and what the person actually is (i.e. impatient). With writing about such identity conflict, we believe it may be possible to resolve this discrepancy between what one actually is and what one ideally wants to be. We hypothesize that writing about identity conflict, as compared to writing about neutral topic or no writing, will be associated to superior levels of psychological well-being for individuals scoring high on identity integration in opposition to those scoring low on identity integration.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 90 pre-university students attending Collège Gérald-Godin in Montréal (Québec) Canada, took part of this study. All students were recruited on a voluntary. After receiving an electronic invitation, the various teachers approached their students with the opportunity to extend research on identity conflicts and to understand the significance of sciences in a different context. Students ranged in age from 16 to 21 years ($M = 17.37$, $SD = 0.88$). The sample was composed of 52.22% women and 47.78% men, which included 87.78% Canadians, 10.00% Europeans, and 2.22% Asians. Most students (62.5%) reported not being affiliated to any religious beliefs; 31.8% reported being catholic while the rest were from different religious background such as Jewish, Buddhist, Protestant and Islamic (5.7%).

Procedure

After signing a consent form, participants were randomly distributed into one of our three (3) writing conditions (i.e. the *conflict writing condition*, the *neutral writing condition*, and the *non-writing condition*). Participants responded in class to a paper-format questionnaire which measured basic information to examine the overall representation of participants. Information such as gender, age, education level, academic program and religion were answered. Then, to measure whether participants were integrated or non-integrated, we evaluated identity integration levels using two distinct attribute lists in which participants wrote eight (8) attributes about their ideal self and eight (8) attributes about their actual self. Identity integration level was evaluated by comparing attributes of each respective list to examine whether attributes overlapped or differed from one another.

Participants were randomly assigned to a writing condition. Finally, in that same questionnaire, participants had to respond to psychological well-being measures right after the writing session. They were informed that their answers would stay anonymous, that results would be kept confidential and that there was a possibility to put an end to their participation at any time.

Writing Condition. A total of three writing conditions was used to test for the role of writing. A period of 15 minutes was attributed to ensure a minimum of one page was written. In the *conflict writing condition*, participants were required to write about their actual and ideal self following these instructions: "Write your life story about your own identity. Write your history by focusing on the 16 attributes mentioned above (i.e. about your actual and ideal self)"; in the *neutral writing condition*, participants had to write about a neutral topic following these instructions "Write a story about a vacations you enjoyed"; and in the *non-writing condition*, participants did not write; they were told to take a two minute break.

Measures

The original questionnaire was in French. Questions which are identified by an asterisk (*) were reverse coded. Our questionnaire included three (3) scales: *Identity Integration, Life Satisfaction* and *Global Self-Esteem* scales.

1. Identity Integration. Identification to each conflicting identity was evaluated using two distinct attribute lists in which participants wrote eight (8) attributes about their ideal self and eight (8) attributes about their actual self. Identity integration was measured by comparing the two attribute lists from which we were able to measure the level of integration between the ideal self and the actual self, using a 8 point scoring system by calculating the number of attributes that overlapped or differed from each list. (*0* = nothing in common and *8* = all in common). To objectively compare both lists, researchers accounted for repetitive/similar attributes or different/opposite attributes using an inter-judge rating. We then recoded each item so that when attributes differed (i.e. nothing in common between both list), it corresponded to low levels of identity integration; when attributes overlapped (i.e. all in common between both list) it corresponded to high levels of identity integration.

2. *Life Satisfaction.* An adaption of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener *et al.*, 1985), translated and validated by Blais et al. (1989) was used to measure satisfaction with life. Using a 7-point Likert-type scale (*1 = strongly disagree* to *7= strongly agree*), participants had to answer these five items: 1) "In most ways my life is close to my ideal", 2) "The conditions of my life are excellent", 3) "I am satisfied with my life", 4) "So far I have gotten the important things I want in life", and 5) "If I could live my life over again, I would change almost nothing" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.83).

3. Global Self-Esteem. The 10 items were an adaptation of the French version of the Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). This version was translated and validated by Vallières and Vallerand (1990). Participants were asked, using a 7-point Likert-type scale (*1 = strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree*), the following statements: 1) "I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others", 2) "I feel that I have a number of good qualities", 3) "All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure"*, 4) "I am able to do things as well as most other people", 5) "I feel I do not have much to be proud of"*, 6) "I take a positive attitude toward myself", 7) "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself", 8) "I wish I could have more respect for myself"*, 9) "I certainly feel useless at times"*, and 10) "At times I think I am no good at all"* (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Preliminary Analyses

Normality indices showed appropriate levels of Skewness and Kurtosis for all variables; for Identity Integration, Life Satisfaction, and Global Self-Esteem. Normality indices respected the standard limits of -1 and 1 which is greatly acceptable (Pallant, 2005; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001; Kline, 1998).

The main variables used in the analyses were examined for accuracy of data entry, missing values, fit between their distributions and assumptions of univariate and multivariate analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Missing data (representing less than 5% of the data file) were replaced using the trend imputation procedure (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Two cases were removed as outliers due to extreme values of Malhanalobis. Eighty-eight participants thus retained for the analyses.

Correlations. The relationship between identity integration, life satisfaction and global self-esteem was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. There was a strong positive correlation between life satisfaction and global self-esteem, r=.52, n=88, p< .01, with high levels of life satisfaction associated to high levels of global self-esteem showing a large effect size (eta squared = .48) (Cohen, 1988). No significant correlation was found with regard to identity integration levels.

Hypothesis Testing

First, in order to examine our hypothesis that writing about identity conflict, as compared to writing about neutral topic or no writing, will be associated to superior psychological well-being for individuals scoring high on identity integration in opposition to those scoring low on identity integration, a two-way between-groups analysis of variances (ANOVA) was performed. Because we are interested to examine who most benefited from writing (i.e. high vs. low), we divided our participants according to their identity integration levels using a median split to create two groups of identity integration: high identity integration (*n*=45) and low identity integration (*n*=43).

T-tests and chi-square analyses. A series of t-tests and chi-square analyses were conducted to compare these two subgroups created from the median split. These two subgroups (i.e. high vs. low identity integration) were found to be similar as no significant difference was found in the proportion of women and men ($\chi^2(1) = 0.16$; p =.69, *ns*), their age [$t(86) = 0.05$, p =.17, *ns*], their religious status ($\chi^2(1) = 1.5$; p =.22, *ns*), and their ethnicity ($\chi^2(1) = 0.33$; p =.56, *ns*).

ANOVA. Analysis from our 2 X 3 model revealed a significant interaction effect between identity integration and writing conditions both for life satisfaction [$F(2,82)=3.39$, $p= 0.04$] and global self-esteem [$F(2,82)=3.03$, $p= 0.05$]. **See Table 1.**

Table 1.

Study 1. Results of ANOVA conducting differences between Identity Integration, Writing Condition and Psychological Well-Being

Variables	Life Satisfaction		Global Self-Esteem	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Low Identity Integration				
Conflict Writing Condition	4.84	1.08	5.39	0.99
Neutral Writing Condition	5.55	0.64	5.93	0.77
Non-Writing Condition	5.14	1.10	5.79	0.43
High Identity Integration				
Conflict Writing Condition	5.60	0.90	5.95	0.60
Neutral Writing Condition	4.95	1.00	5.31	1.04
Non-Writing Condition	5.44	0.94	5.71	0.71

Results confirm that writing about identity conflict was associated to superior levels of psychological well-being for individuals scoring high on identity integration all other writing conditions considered. For instance, in the *conflict writing condition*, levels of life satisfaction were higher for participants scoring high on identity integration

(*M*=5.60, *SD*=0.90) as compared to those scoring low on identity integration (*M*=4.84, *SD*=1.08). Moreover, in that same writing condition, levels of global self-esteem were also higher for participants scoring high on identity integration (*M*=5.95, *SD*=0.60) as compared to those scoring low on identity integration (*M*=5.39, *SD*=0.99).

Thus, results of Study 1 support our hypothesis as the *conflict writing condition* reported superior levels of psychological well-being in comparison to both the *control writing condition* and the *non-writing condition* for those experiencing high identity integration in opposition to those experiencing low identity integration.

Analysis of Written Content

We know that individuals' psychological well-being can be predicted by the words they use (Pennebaker, Francis and Booth, 2003; Gottschalk & Glaser, 1969; Rosenberg & Tucker, 1978; Stiles, 1992). Several studies indicated that writing about strong emotional experiences is associated with improvements in psychological well-being (e.g., Pennebaker, 1997; Smyth, 1998). According to Pennebaker, Francis and Booth (2003), text analyses show that individuals who benefit the most from writing use high rates of positive words but a moderate rate of negative words (e.g., Pennebaker & Francis, 1996; Pennebaker, Mayne & Francis, 1997). Because no studies have yet analysed the impact of writing about identity conflicts, we deem important to verify the usage of positive and negative words as it will further help to find clear writing instructions to facilitate the integration of conflicting identities. As an exploratory goal, we **expect that participants scoring low on identity integration will use more negative words and less positive words, while those scoring high on identity integration will report more positive words and less negative words.**

To understand how writing about conflict was linked to superior levels of psychological well-being, analyses examining the content of participants' essays were performed. Based on Pennebaker's Linguistic Word Count Inquiry (LWCI) program, we evaluated the content of participants' essays by analysing the pattern of positive and negative words. LIWC2001 applications are designed to analyze written text on a word by word basis, calculate the percentage of words in the text that match each of them to a number of language dimensions, such as positive and negative words (Pennebaker *et al*,

2003). To calculate the percentage of relative words (i.e. positive and negative), the total of written words is considered for each participant on an individual basis, and not the number of written pages as it was not a reliable measure. The analysis of psychological written content of positive and negative words is based on dictionaries using different scales, for instance the PANAS (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988). **See Figure 1.**

Figure 1.
Study 1. Analysis of Participants' Written Content: Positive and Negative Words
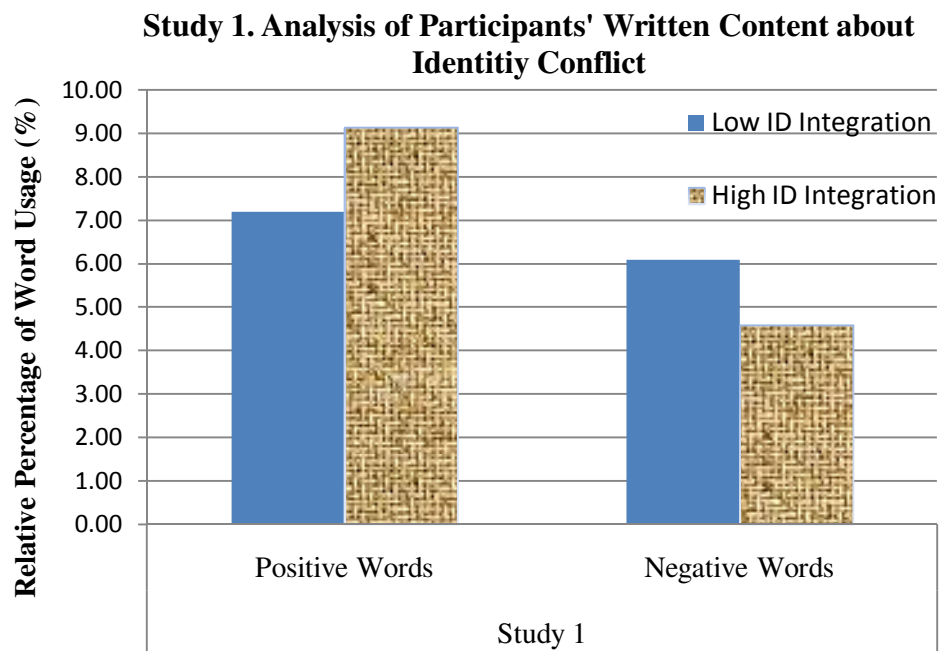
Study 1. Analysis of Participants' Written Content about Identitiy Conflict

Using solely the *writing about conflict* condition, a series of independent T-Tests for each level of identity integration was performed to obtain the percentage of relative word usage. Our preliminary analysis show a pattern of results where the usage of positive words was associated to individuals scoring high on identity integration (*M=9.14, SD=3.92*) as compared to those scoring low on identity integration (*M=7.20, SD=2.35*) [*t*(20)=1.31, *ns*]. As for the usage of negative words, participants experiencing lower identity integration reported a higher usage of these words (*M=6.09, SD=4.37*) in contrast to participants experiencing high identity integration (*M=4.59, SD=2.72*)

[$t(20)=1.05$, *ns*]. Although differences are not significant, our results fit the pattern that psychological processes are reflected by levels of identity integration through writing. Without confirming our hypothesis, results are in line with our predictions that someone experiencing high levels of identity integration will benefit more from writing about their identity conflict in comparison to someone scoring low on identity integration.

STUDY 2

The second study was designed to replicate and extend findings to a social context other than the one observed in study 1. We want to examine if such pattern could apply to different types of identity conflicts other than ideal and actual self-discrepancies. Study 2 focused on different types of identities as we preferred to go more in depth by letting participants choose their own identity conflict instead of imposing one. Based on previous results, writing about a different type of identity conflict should lead to higher psychological well-being. As evaluated in Study 1, here again, we hypothesize that writing about identity conflict, as compared to writing about neutral topic or no writing, will be associated to superior level of psychological well-being for individuals scoring high on identity integration in opposition to those scoring low on identity integration. In Study 2, identity integration was also evaluated differently in order to see if results could as well be replicated.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 86 undergraduates attending the University of Montreal (Québec) took part in this study. Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis through their Social psychology class in which concepts of research methods were covered. The teacher prepared them to the researcher visit by inviting them to participate to a study on identity conflict. A debriefing was then performed right after data the collection to further explain the experiment. Students ranged in age from 19 to 29 years (*M* = 20.71, *SD* = 1.92). The sample was composed of 79.9% women (*n*=68) and 20.1% men (*n*=17), which included 89.4% Canadians, 3.6% Europeans, and 7.1% others. On average, the type of conflicts that participants reported between their *Identity A* and *Identity B* were the following: ideal self vs. actual self = 50.5%; single vs. couple = 25.9%; culture A vs. culture B =10.6%; and education vs. work = 7.1%.

Procedure

With the help of two distinct circles, which we labelled *Identity A* and *Identity B*, we requested that participants indicate in each circle two conflicting identities of their choice. Participants had to choose between various types of suggested conflicts between their *Identity A* and *Identity B*. Suggested conflicts were ideal self vs. real self; single vs. couple; culture A vs. culture B; education vs. work; or a type of conflict they could choose on their own.

Following the same procedure as used in Study 1, participants were randomly distributed into one of our three (3) writing conditions (i.e. the *conflict writing condition*, the *neutral writing condition*, and the *non-writing condition*). Again we assessed for basic information to examine the overall representation of participants. Information such as gender, age, education level, academic program and religion were asked. We then examined the level of identity integration between their chosen *Identity A* and *Identity B* prior to a 15 minute writing session. From that same questionnaire, participants then had to respond to psychological well-being measures right after the writing session.

Writing Condition. As done in Study 1, a total of three writing conditions to test for the role of writing. A period of 15 minutes was attributed to ensure that a minimum of one page was written. In the *conflict writing condition*, participants were required to write about the conflict between their *Identity A* and their *Identity B* following these instructions: "Write a text about yourself, as best as you can, in which you will integrate both your Identity A and your Identity B into your overall self-concept (your global identity). Write your text in a solution-seeking manner so that you find a solution to resolve the identity conflict. Write in order to make links between the characteristics of Identity A and characteristics of Identity B". In the *neutral writing condition*, participants had to write about a neutral topic following these instructions: "Write a text about yourself which explains in details what you have done today ever since you woke up and until the present moment (now that you are in class). Write your text in a story-telling way about your day". The neutral condition differed from the one used in Study 1 which required writing about a summer vacation since we believe it may have activated positive thoughts and joyful memories instead of staying objectively neutral like the

description of a daily routine which focused more on action than emotion. In the *non-writing condition*, participants did not write; they were told to take a two minute break.

Measures

    The original questionnaire was in French. A back translation from French to English was performed for items that were not already translated into French from previous studies (Brislin, 1970). Questions which are identified by an asterisk (*) were reverse coded. In total, our questionnaire included four (4) measures. To measure our independent variable of identity integration, we used the *Pictorial Identity Integration* scale. To measure our dependent variable of psychological well-being we used the *Life Satisfaction* and the *Global Self-Esteem* scales. The *State Self-Esteem* scale was also included because it measured subjective situational well-being which is more accurate when there is an experimental manipulation (Heatherton and Polivy, 1991).

    1. Pictorial Identity Integration. Identity integration was evaluated by an adaptation of the Pictorial Representation of Including Other in the Self which directly measured the importance of both identities in the way that participants represented themselves (i.e. *Identity A* vs. *Identity B*). This was examined with the overlapping circles from Aron et al. (1992) that we modified to created a two-circle diagram scale using a 1 to 7 point system (*1* = not very important, *7* = extremely important). The first two-circle diagram represented *Identity A* and the *self*, while the second two-circle diagram represented *Identity B* and the *self*. When the two circles are not touching (i.e. no overlap), it corresponds to low levels of identification (e.g. de la Sablonnière *et al.*, 2010). However, the more the two circles are touching/overlapping, the higher are levels of identification.

    From this scale, we calculated the difference between *Identity A* and *Identity B* by subtracting the score of question 1) "Please circle the diagram that best represents the importance of your *Identity A* within yourself all proportions considered" from the score of question 2) "Please circle the diagram that best represents the importance of your *Identity B* within yourself all proportions considered" in absolute values, which gave us the level of identity integration on a 7 point scale. We then recoded each item by recoding them so that a high score indicated a high level of identity integration, whereas

a low score indicated a low level of identity integration (*1* = low level of identity integration, *7* = high identity integration).

2. Life Satisfaction. The same five (5) items were used from the Satisfaction with Life scale (Diener *et al.*, 1985) as previously done in Study 1 (Cronbach's alpha is 0.77).

*3. Global S*elf-*Esteem.* The same ten (10) items were used from the Global Self-Esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965) as previously done in Study 1 (Cronbach's alpha is 0.87).

4. State Self-Esteem. The Self-Esteem Scale (SSES) by Heatherton and Polivy (1991) which was translated and validated by Blais et al. (1989) was used to verify the immediate effect of the writing condition on participants. Using a 5-point Likert-type scale (*1* = not at all, *5* = extremely), participants had to answer these twenty items: 1) "I feel confident about my abilities", 2) "I am worried about whether I am regarded as a success or failure*", 3) "I feel satisfied with the way my body looks right now", 4) "I feel frustrated or rattled about my performance*", 5) "I feel that I am having trouble understanding things that I read*", 6) "I feel that others respect and admire me", 7) "I am dissatisfied with my weight*", 8) "I feel self-conscious*", 9) "I feel as smart as others", 10) "I feel displeased with myself*", 11) "I feel good about myself", 12) "I am pleased with my appearance right now", 13) "I am worried about what other people think of me*", 14) "I feel confident that I understand things", 15) "I feel inferior to others at this moment*", 16) "I feel unattractive*", 17) "I feel concerned about the impression I am making*", 18) "I feel that I have less scholastic ability right now than others*", 19) "I feel like I'm not doing well*", 20) "I am worried about looking foolish*" (Cronbach's alpha is 0.90).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Preliminary Analyses

Normality indices showed appropriate levels of Skewness and Kurtosis for all variables; for Identity Integration, State Self-Esteem, Life Satisfaction, and Global Self-Esteem. Normality indices respected the standard limits of -1 and 1 which is greatly acceptable (Pallant, 2005; Tabachonick and Fidell, 2001; Kline, 1998).

The main variables used in the analyses were examined for accuracy of data entry, missing values, and fit between their distributions and the assumptions of multivariate analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Missing data (representing less than 5% of the data file) were replaced using the trend imputation procedure (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). We had to remove one participant due to an excessive amount of missing values. Lastly, we verified the occurrence of any outlier variables. Neither univariate outliers, nor any multivariate outliers were found. Thus, eighty five participants were retained for the analyses.

Correlations. The relationship between identity integration, life satisfaction, global self-esteem and state self-esteem was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. There were two negative correlations involving identity integration: one with state self-esteem (r=-.22, n=85, p< .05, eta squared = .17) and another with global self-esteem (r=-.33, n=85, p< .01, eta squared = .32) (Cohen, 1988). There were also two positive correlations involving state self-esteem; one with life satisfaction (r=.58, n=85, p< .01, eta squared = .76) and another with global self-esteem (r=.81, n=85, p< .01, eta squared =.53).

Hypothesis Testing

As done in Study 1, we wanted to verify our hypothesis that writing about identity conflict, as compared to writing about neutral topic or no writing, would be associated to superior psychological well-being levels for individuals scoring high on identity integration in opposition to those scoring low on identity integration. To do so, a two-way between-groups analysis of variances (ANOVA) was performed for all participants. To validate our previous pattern that writing was associated to higher levels

of psychological well-being for those scoring high on identity integration, we divided our participants according to their identity integration levels using the *pictorial identity integration* calculated between the score of Identity A vs Identity B. Thus, a median split was performed to create two distinct groups of identity integration: high identity integration (*n*=59) and low identity integration (*n*=26).

   T-tests and chi-square analyses. A series of t-tests and chi-square analyses were conducted to compare these two subgroups created from the median split. These two subgroups (i.e. high vs. low identity integration) were found to be similar as no significant difference was found in the proportion of women and men ($\chi^2(1) = 2.56$; *p* =.11, *ns*), their age [$t(83) = 0.90$, *p* =.63, *ns*] , their ethnicity ($\chi^2(1) = 0.44$; *p* =.29, *ns*), and academic program ($\chi^2(1) = 1.16$; *p* =.17, *ns*).

   ANOVA. Analysis from our 2 X 3 model revealed a significant interaction effect between identity integration and writing conditions for life satisfaction [$F(2,84)=3.15$, *p*= 0.05], global self-esteem [$F(2,84)=3.82$, *p*= 0.03] and state self-esteem [$F(2, 84)=3.01$, *p*=0.05]. **See Table 2.**

Table 2.
Study 2. Results of ANOVA conducting differences between Identity Integration, Writing Condition and Psychological Well-Being

Variables	Life Satisfaction		Global Self-Esteem		State Self-Esteem	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Low Identity Integration						
Conflict Writing Condition	4.95	0.24	5.49	0.23	3.54	0.14
Neutral Writing Condition	5.35	0.21	5.84	0.20	3.92	0.12
Non-Writing Condition	4.97	0.19	5.65	0.17	3.66	0.11
High Identity Integration						
Conflict Writing Condition	6.40	0.66	6.70	0.62	4.30	0.38
Neutral Writing Condition	4.82	0.30	5.01	0.28	3.59	0.17
Non-Writing Condition	4.81	0.25	5.29	0.23	3.47	0.14

Our hypothesis that writing about identity conflict will report superior levels of psychological well-being for those scoring high on identity integration was confirmed. Results of Study 2 replicated finding obtained in Study 1 as they supported our hypothesis that the *conflict writing condition* was associated to superior levels of psychological well-being in comparison to both the *control writing condition* and the *non-writing condition* for individuals with high levels of identity integration. In fact, the pattern of results is even clearer here because results are always higher for psychological well-being in favour of those scoring high on identity integration on all three (3) writing conditions. Perhaps when people get to choose their own identity conflict, they are more in tune with the real cognitive discrepancy present at hand when they actually write about it.

Analysis of Written Content

In order to further investigate the pattern of results we obtained between individuals' psychological well-being and their word usage (Pennebaker *et al*., 2003; Gottschalk & Glaser, 1969; Rosenberg & Tucker, 1978; Stiles, 1992), further exploratory analysis examining the content of participants' essays were again performed. Based on Pennebaker's Linguistic Word Count Inquiry (LWCI) program, we predicted that participants scoring low on identity integration will use more negative words and less positive words, while those scoring high on identity integration will report more positive words and less negative words.

Using solely the *writing about conflict* condition, a series of independent T-Tests for each level of identity integration was performed to obtain the percentage of relative word usage. Although differences were not significant, the pattern of results show that the usage of positive words was associated to individuals scoring high on identity integration (M=10.04, SD=3.28) as compared to those scoring low on identity integration (M=7.01, SD=5.48) [t(15)=1.42, *ns*]. However, participants experiencing lower identity integration reported a significantly higher rate of negative words (M=5.75, SD=3.05) in contrast to participants experiencing high identity integration (M=3.31, SD=1.43) [t(15)=2.20, $p < 0.05$]. By partially confirming our hypothesis,

results fit the prediction that someone experiencing high levels of identity integration will make greater usage of positive words than someone experiencing low levels of identity integration. This could in turn explains why those scoring high on identity integration benefit more from writing about their identity conflict in comparison to someone scoring low on identity integration. **See Figure 2.**

Figure 2.
Study 2. Analysis of Participants' Written Content: Positive and Negative Words

Study 2. Analysis of Participants' Written Content about Identitiy Conflict
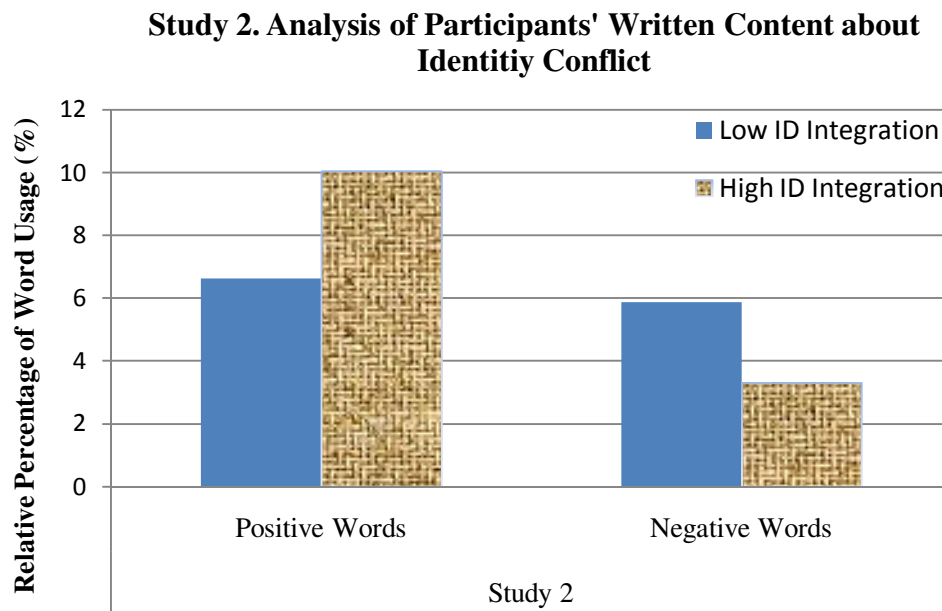
We believe that individuals who wrote about their identity conflict using negative emotions words may have focused too much on differences between conflicting identities, thus insisting on pessimistic aspects of their identity conflict. This could explain why participants experiencing low identity integration obtained low levels of psychological well-being as they were unable to conceive a solution. This 15-minute writing session probably activated negative feelings towards their identity conflict rather than liberating positive emotions. Activating a sense of incoherence probably lead low identity integration writers to relate less to their identity conflict as a coping mechanism

to either avoid or deny the conflict state. We further suggest that they were unable to make abstraction of their conflict; thus, they did not detached themselves from the conflict and required more writing time to establish cognitive links and find common ground. No studies have yet analysed the impact of writing about identity conflicts as a facilitator to identity integration, we now want to look at such consequences over time.

In comparison to our previous study, Study 2 allowed us to use different measures of identity integration (i.e. pictorial identity integration) as well as to add another scale of psychological well-being (i.e. the state self-esteem). Although this study enabled us to confirm our hypothesis in another social context, we had participants choose their own identity conflict which extend the significance of our findings. Now that we know writing about identity conflict also works with different types of conflict, other than solely ideal and actual self-discrepancies, it is tremendously important to comprehend how to help those who need it the most: those scoring low on identity integration. Helping these individuals to achieving higher levels of identity integration would increase their sense of coherence and make them feel better off psychologically.

Studies 1 and 2 were originally performed to analyse the impact of *conflict writing condition* in comparison to control writing and the non-writing. Since both studies confirm that writing about identity conflict is beneficial for individuals scoring high on identity integration, our studies 3 and 4 are based on the fact that writing about identity conflict works better than control writing and the non-writing. Because we want to improve such conflict writing condition in hope to help those with low identity integration, we will focus solely on that particular conflict writing condition and try to show if individuals with low identity integration can also achieve higher levels of psychological well-being and identity integration.

But why would low identity integration individuals benefit less from writing about identity conflict, thus making it harder to integrate the conflicting identities? One explanation could be that low identity integration participants have more difficulties due to the relation to particular identity-relevant contextual stressors (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Berry, 1990; Thoits, 1991). More precisely, difficulties in integrating one's two conflicting identities into a cohesive overall sense of self may be determined

by exterior stressors like cultural/ethnic prejudice, stereotyping (Crocker & Major, 1989), feelings of cultural isolation (Berry, 1990) or even low self-esteem or pessimistic personalities. It is not easy to find similarities between two dissimilar or conflicting identities, thus writing has to account for these encounters when it comes to low identity integration individuals. Perhaps a supplemental cognitive effort is requested when no links can be established: more time and additional instructions to avoid over-thinking the negative aspect of the identity conflict could be beneficial.

STUDY 3

The third study evaluated the impact of several writing sessions as a way to further increase both identity integration and psychological well-being. Both Study 1 (*N*=88) and Study 2 (*N*=85) confirmed our hypothesis that writing about identity conflict was found to be most beneficial than the other two writing conditions, but only for individuals with high levels of identity integration. Now that we have established the potential of writing as a concrete strategy to facilitate identity integration, we yearn for helping those with low identity integration because they are the ones who need it the most. Considering that writing is a facilitator for identity integration, is there a writing strategy to further help those with low identity integration? Thus, our Study 3 included two important changes.

First, we assessed writing on a longer period of time, more precisely writing took place over three (3) weeks, one time every week. Second, we modified our writing instructions based on theoretical models of identity integration which focus on similarities to establish cognitive links between conflicting identities. Hence, participants would focus further on similarities between their conflicting identities.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 90 pre-university students attending Collège Vanier (Québec) took part in this study. Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis through their complementary courses. Teachers were sent an electronic invitation and all accepted to have researchers come during class time to approach interested students with the opportunity to deepen findings on identity conflicts. Students ranged in age from 17 to 23 years (*M* = 18.13, *SD* = 1.29). The sample was composed of 58.1% women (*n*=50) and 41.9% men (*n*=36), which included Canadian (99.2%) that were mainly catholic (39.5 %). Most of them were registered in the Humanity program (80.2%), Administration (8.1%), Secretariship (4.7%) and others (7.0%). About 40% were in their first academic year while the rest were in their second year or more (60%). Students

were recruited on a voluntary basis only and were assured that their data would stay confidential and anonymous; they were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time.

Procedure

We used a longitudinal procedure taking part in three (3) steps, from Time 1 to Time 2. First, at Time 1, participants responded in class to a paper-format initial questionnaire which measured basic information to examine the overall representation of participants. Information such as gender, age, education level, academic program and religion were answered. The rest of the questionnaire evaluated both identity integration and psychological well-being levels.

Second, right after the completion of the initial questionnaire at Time 1, students were given a diary in which they were asked to immediately write about their identity conflict. Diaries were collected and brought back a week later by the researcher for the following supervised writing sessions. Participants were required to write for a total of three (3) times, once every week.

Finally, at Time 2, right after the last writing session (i.e. the 3rd writing session), participants had to complete the final questionnaire (i.e. same questionnaire used in Time 1) which assessed both identity integration and psychological well-being levels after writing. Both final questionnaires and diaries were collected after the last completion. Participants were then debriefed.

Writing Condition. On the day participants sign their consent form and completed the initial questionnaire at Time 1, participants were required to read the set of instructions prior to their first writing session. The instructions, adapted from Pennebaker and Seagal (1999, p. 1244), were as followed:

> "While writing a text on yourself, try to integrate, as best as you can, both your ideal self and your actual self. As you write your text, focus on finding similarities that could solve the identity conflict that you presently experience between your ideal self and actual self. You can write these similarities through expressing different emotions regarding this identity conflict. Write in a way to reconcile, as best as possible, the characteristics of your ideal self and actual self."

Measures

The original questionnaire was in French. Questions which are identified by an asterisk (*) were reverse coded. Our questionnaire included a total of six (6) scales: the *Identification to Self* scale (i.e. Actual Self and Ideal Self), the *Subjective Identity Conflict* scale, the *Life Satisfaction* scale, the *Global Self-Esteem* scale and the *State Self-Esteem* scale. We further added the *Psychophysical Well-being* scale to ensure stability of results.

1. Identification to Self. In order to complete questions concerning levels of identification to the actual and ideal self, participants had to list five (5) characteristics about their actual self and five (5) characteristics about their ideal self. Participants referred to those respective lists to answer the following questions.

Actual Self. Using the list of characteristics from the identification measures about their *actual self*, participants were able to answer the items which were used to assess participants' identification to their actual self (Ellemers et al., 1999; Jackson, 2002). On a 10-point scale (*0* = strongly disagree; *10* = strongly agree), participants completed the following eight (8) adapted items: 1) "I am identifying myself with characteristics of my actual self", 2) "Characteristics of my actual self are an important part of who I am", 3) "I am truly concerned about what others think of my actual self", 4) "I am proud of the characteristics of my actual self"", 5) "In general, the image I have of my actual self is negative*", 6) "My beliefs concerning my actual self appear to change over time*", 7) "When asked to describe my actual self, my description could change from one day to the other*", and 8) "When thinking about my actual self, I feel more defined and complete" (Cronbach's alpha Time 1 = 0.71; Time 2 = 0.67).

Ideal Self. Using the list of characteristics from the identification measures about their *ideal self*, participant had to answer the same eight (8) questions with regard to their ideal self (Cronbach's alpha Time 1 = 0.68; Time 2 = 0.77). For instance, 1) "I am identifying myself with characteristics of my ideal self".

Identity Integration Level. From these two (2) identification scales (i.e. actual self and ideal self), we calculated the difference between the actual self and the ideal self by subtracting one from the other in absolute values, which gave us the level of identity integration on a 10 point scale. We then recoded each item by recoding them so that a

high score indicated a high level of identity integration, whereas a low score indicated a low level of identity integration (*0* = low level of identity integration; *10* = high level of identity integration).

2. *Subjective Identity Conflict*. The level of subjective identity conflict between their ideal self and actual self was measured using one simple question. On a 10-point scale (*0* = not important at all*; 10* = extremely important), participants answered the following: "How important is the conflict between your ideal self and your actual self?"

3. *Life Satisfaction.* The same five (5) items were used from the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) as previously done in studies 1 and 2 (Cronbach's alpha Time 1 = 0.77; Time 2 = 0.78).

4. *Global* S*elf-Esteem.* The same ten (10) items were used from the Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) as previously done in studies 1 and 2 (Cronbach's alpha Time 1 = 0.90; Time 2 = 0.88).

5. *State Self-Esteem.* The same 20 items were used from the Self-Esteem Scale (Heatherton and Polivy, 1991) as previously done in Study 2 (Cronbach's alpha Time 1 = 0.91; Time 2 = 0.87).

6*. Psychophysical Well-Being*. The questionnaire items were selected from the 12-Item Short-Form Health Survey (alpha = 0.89; Ware *et al.*, 1996). The following questions, on a scale from 0 to 10 (*0* = strongly disagree; *10* = strongly agree), were asked: 1) "In general, would you say your health is good"; 2) "Does your health now limit you in moderate activities"; 3) "Does your health now limit you in climbing several flights of stairs"; 4) "During the past 4 weeks, have you as a result of your physical health accomplished less than you would like"; 5) "During the past 4 weeks, were you as a result of your physical health limited in the kind of work or other activities"; 6) "During the past 4 weeks, have you as a result of emotional problems, accomplished less than you would like"; 7) "During the past 4 weeks, have you as a result of emotional problems, not do work or other activities as carefully as usual"; 8) "During the past 4 weeks, has pain interfere with your activities"; 9) "During the past 4 weeks, have you felt calm and peaceful"; 10) "During the past 4 weeks, did you have a lot of energy"; and 11) "During the past 4 weeks, has your physical health or emotional problems interfered with your social activities" (Cronbach's alpha Time 1 = 0.76; Time 2 = 0.79).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Preliminary Analyses

Normality indices showed appropriate levels of Skewness and Kurtosis for all variables; for Identity Integration, Life Satisfaction, Global Self-Esteem, State Self-Esteem and Psychophysical Well-Being. Normality indices respected the standard limits of -1 and 1 which is greatly acceptable (Pallant, 2005; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001; Kline, 1998).

As performed with studies 1 and 2, the main variables used in the analyses were examined for accuracy of data entry, missing values, and fit between their distributions and the assumptions of multivariate analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Missing data (representing less than 5% of the data file) were replaced using the trend imputation procedure (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). We had to remove four participants due to an excessive amount of missing values. Lastly, we verified the occurrence of any outlier variables. Neither univariate outliers, nor any multivariate outliers were found. Eighty-six participants were thus retained for the analyses.

Correlations. The relationship between identity integration, life satisfaction, global self-esteem state self-esteem, psychophysical well-being and subjective identity conflict was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. All five (5) variables were significantly correlated with one another. All correlation with subjective identity conflict and psychological well-being variables were negative while correlations among all four psychological well-being variables were all positive. **See Table 3.**

Moreover, preliminary analysis showed no significant difference for our measure of *identity integration level* when assessed for all participants together from Time 1 (M=8.57, SD=1.04) to Time 2 (M=8.65, SD=1.09) [$t(85)$=0.61, *ns*]. Therefore, we opted for the *subjective identity conflict* measure to perform our analysis as this latter was found significant for all participants (M=4.94, SD=2.36; M=3.71, SD=2.18) [$t(76)$=5.92, p=.00 (two-tailed)].

Table 3.

Study 3.Correlations Between Measures of Psychological Well-Being and ID Integration

Measures	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Life Satisfaction	--				
2. Global Self-Esteem	.64**	--			
3. State Self-Esteem	.70**	.87**	--		
4. Psychophysical W-B	.44**	.59**	.46**	--	
5. Subjective ID Integration	-.55**	-.53**	-.60**	-.38**	--

Notes. * p< 0.05   ** p< 0.01   *** p= 0.00

Hypothesis Testing

To keep with our second hypothesis that writing about identity conflict will increase both identity integration and psychological well-being levels for individuals scoring high and low on identity integration from Time 1 to Time 2, we examined the differences prior and after writing while using distinct identity conflict to further validate and extend our findings. Thus, using the median split from the level of *subjective identity conflict,* two distinct groups were created: high identity integration (*n*=42) and low identity integration (*n*=44).

T-tests and chi-square analyses. A series of t-tests and chi-square analyses were conducted to compare these two subgroups created from the median split. These two subgroups (i.e. high vs. low identity integration) were found to be similar as no significant difference was found in the proportion of women and men ($\chi^2(1) = 1.33$; *p* =.25, *ns*), their age [$t(84) = 0.29$, *p* =.22, *ns*], their religious status ($\chi^2(1) = 0.72$; *p* =.66, *ns*), and their academic session ($\chi^2(1) = 2.98$; *p* =.14, *ns*).

Main Analysis. Analysis from our independent T-Tests revealed an increase in identity integration and psychological well-being for both group respectively from Time 1 to Time 2.

As for individuals scoring low on identity integration, results reveal that writing over several sessions significantly increased psychological well-being from Time 1 to Time 2. When the dependent variables of psychological well-being were considered

separately, the only difference that remained statistically significance, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.013 was state self-esteem and psychophysical well-being. Results show an increase for state self-esteem (*M*=6.53, *SD*=1.20; *M*=7.02, *SD*=1.06) [*t(41)*=4.31, p=.00] and for psychophysical well-being (*M*=8.11, *SD*=1.60; *M*=8.44, *SD*=1.54) [*t(41)*=3.43, p=.00] respectively. Life satisfaction increased over time (*M*=7.37, *SD*=1.06; *M*=7.69, *SD*=1.01) [*t(41)*=1.98, p<.05]; however it is not significant after considering Bonferroni adjusted alpha. Measures of *subjective identity conflict* were not supporting our hypothesis (*M*=2.95, *SD*=0.99; *M*=2.68, *SD*=1.54) [*t(38)*=1.23, *ns*]; however, the observed pattern of results fits our prediction as the level of identity conflict decrease over several writing sessions.

As for individuals scoring high on identity integration, results also reveal that writing over several sessions significantly increased psychological well-being from Time 1 to Time 2, even once variables were corrected using the Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.013. For instance, an increase was found for life satisfaction (*M*=6.16, *SD*=1.67; *M*=7.06, *SD*=1.48) [*t*(43)=3.95, *p*=.00], for global self-esteem (*M*=6.18, *SD*=2.02; *M*=7.14, *SD*=1.55) [*t*(43)=4.62, *p*=.00] and for state self-esteem (*M*=5.62, *SD*=1.68; *M*=6.51, *SD*=1.25) [*t*(42)=5.50, *p*=.00]. Measures of *subjective identity conflict* were significantly supporting our hypothesis (*M*=6.87, *SD*=1.54; *M*=4.71, *SD*=2.25) [*t(39)*=8.29, *p*=.00] which could mean that participants who are already experiencing high levels of identity integration are able to raise integrate their conflicting identities in fewer writing sessions than those who are experiencing lower levels of identity integration.

Although our scores of *identity integration level* between the actual self and the ideal self were not significant, the overall pattern fits our hypothesis. We observe a raise in the levels of identification to both the actual self as well as to the ideal self from Time 1 to time 2 for all participants. Such results are in line with past studies stating that coherence between identities implies that levels of identification to the conflicting identities have to be equal in order to be integrated. Here, we see that the process by which new identities become as important as pre-existing identities within the self (Amiot *et al*., 2007; de la Sablonnière et al., 2010) occur the more two identities have in

common. Thus, finding similarities through writing greatly facilitates such integration processes.

Our hypothesis that writing about identity conflict will increase both identity integration and psychological well-being from Time 1 to Time 2 was partially confirmed for all our participants regardless if they scored high or low on identity integration. Thus, results of Study 3 partially confirmed our hypothesis that writing about a different type of identity conflict over several session (i.e. over a longer period of time) while using a clearer set of instructions which focused on finding similarities were both beneficial for writers to increase identity integration and psychological well-being levels. **See Table 4.**

Table 4.

Study 3. Descriptive Statistics of Identity Integration and Psychological Well-being from Time 1 to Time 2 after Writing about Identity Conflict (low vs high participants).

| Variables	Time 1		Time 2		Mean differences Time 1 vs. Time 2
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*T-test*
Low Identity Integration					
Identification to Self					
Actual Self	7.01	1.17	7.32	0.92	1.24
Ideal Self	6. 23	1.20	6.29	1.53	0.29
Identity Integration Measures					
Identity Integration Level	8.80	0.92	8.64	1.21	0.93
Subjective Identity Conflict	2.95	0.99	2.68	1.54	1.22
Psychological Well-Being					
Life Satisfaction	7.37	1.06	7.69	1.01	1.98*
Global Self-Esteem	7.64	1.14	7.81	1.02	1.34
State Self-Esteem	6.53	1.20	7.02	1.06	4.31***
Psychophysical Well-Being	8.11	1.60	8.44	1.54	3.43**
High Identity Integration					
Identification to Self					
Actual Self	6.35	1.10	6.91	1.22	2.99***
Ideal Self	5.63	1.38	6.56	1.22	4.77***
Identity Integration Measures					
Identity Integration Level	8.35	1.11	8.67	0.99	1.75
Subjective Identity Conflict	6.87	1.54	4.71	2.25	8.29***
Psychological Well-Being					
Life Satisfaction	6.16	1.67	7.06	1.48	3.95***
Global Self-Esteem	6.18	2.02	7.14	1.55	4.62***
State Self-Esteem	5.62	1.68	6.51	1.25	5.50***
Psychophysical Well-Being	7.03	2.29	7.36	2.17	1.79

* p< 0.05   ** p< 0.01   *** p= 0.00

Analysis of Written Content

Here again, we verified participants' written content about the identity conflict experienced between their ideal and actual self using the LWCI 2001 program (Pennebaker *et al.*, 2003). In line with our exploratory objective that the usage of positive words will increase while the usage of negative words will decrease from Time 1 to Time 2, past research has shown links between different aspects of written content and negative life situation. Written content of individuals undergoing psychological tension, such as an identity conflict, were more incoherent (Androutsopoulou, Thanopoulou, Economou & Bafiti, 2004), and had more negative words while fewer positive ones (Eid, Johnson & Saus, 2005).

As expected, writing about identity conflict was acting as a therapeutic facilitator enhancing the integration of conflicting identities into the self. Our longitudinal study here enables us to observe a change in written content over time. For instance, the difference in written content over time supports our hypothesis. For the usage of positive words, we can observe an overall increase from Week 1 (*M*=7.88, *SD*=2.40) to Week 3 (*M*=8.36, *SD*=3.09). For the usage of negative words, we can observe an overall decrease from Week 1 (*M*=5.37, *SD*=1.98) to Week 3 (*M*=4.56, *SD*=1.26) which fits our prediction that from Time 1 to Time 2, participants make greater usage of positive words and fewer of negative words. This pattern of results further investigates that writing about identity conflict is a facilitator to increase levels of identity integration. Thus, it enables us to observe that more writing session were required to increase both identity integration and psychological well-being levels over time. **See Figure 3.**

Figure 3.

Study 3. Analysis of Participants' Written Content: Positive and Negative Words

Study 3. Analysis of Participants' Written Content about Identitiy Conflict Overtime
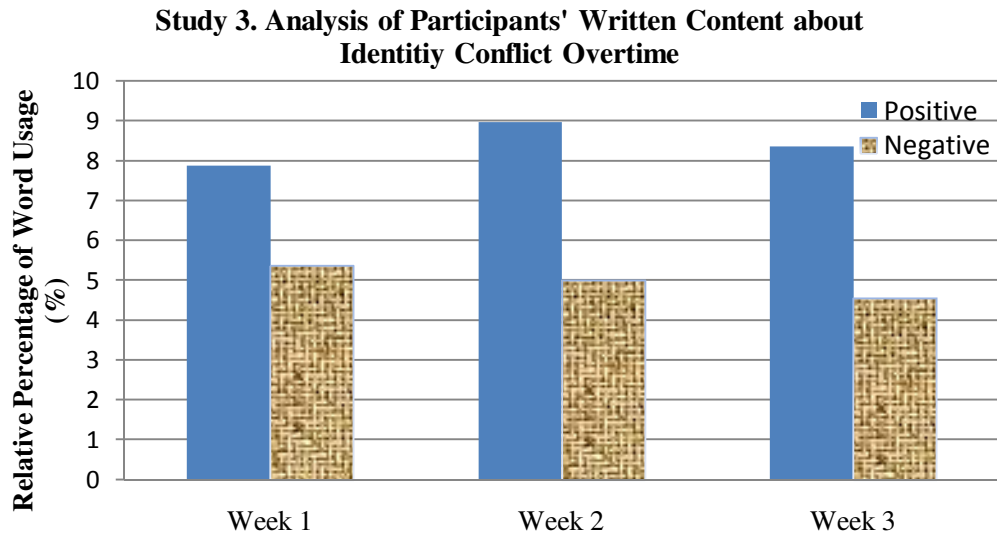
Writing while focusing on similarities affected the resolution of identity conflict through the process of establishing cognitive links which modified the way writers perceived their conflict. For instance, such changes were observed in narrative quality of pre and post emotion focused therapy for childhood trauma where conflict occurred at young age (e.g. Kunzle & Pavio, 2009). Our prediction that the usage of positive words will increase while the usage of negative words will decrease over time seems to be fitting the pattern of expected results. The more individuals increase their level of identity integration over time, the more they use positive words and the less they use negative words from Time 1 to Time 2.

STUDY 4

The fourth study was designed to replicate and extend findings obtained in Study 3 and to examine if such patterns could also apply to different types of identity conflicts such as cultural identity conflict. The same method was used in terms of writing instructions; however, we added an extra writing session to verify our hypothesis that writing about identity conflict will increase both identity integration and psychological well-being levels when both measures are assessed prior and after writing. Thus, an extra day of writing was added to control for numbers of writing sessions and to see if low identity integration participants would require more writing time.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 54 students attending McGill University (Québec) took part in this study. Students ranged in age from 18 to 38 years (*M* = 25.50, *SD* = 8.28). The sample was composed of 64.81% women (*n*=35) and 35.19% men (*n*=19), which included different cultural/ethnic identities (i.e. Brazilian, Chinese, Dominican, Iranian, Japanese, Korean, Lebanese, Mexican, Peruvian, Romanian, Saudi Arabian, South Korean and Taiwanese). Participants' level of education varied between high school diplomas to masters' degrees. For the most part, participants had already travelled in other countries before (81.5%) while a few had never travelled before coming to Montreal, Canada (18.5%). On average, their time spent in Montreal was 2.28 years. Religion varied from Catholic (31.5%), Islamic (11.5%), Muslim (7.4%), Jewish (1.9%), Orthodox (1.9%), Buddhist (9.3%) and none (37%). None of these students were Canadians and none of them had a Canadian Identity.

These students were in this program either through an exchange program in a visit to Canada, or immigrant students wanting to improve their English skills. Previous placement tests conducted by McGill University assured their level of academic English was intermediate-advanced. These participants were enrolled in this eight-week Special Intensive English Program through which they come to improve their English skills in a

new culture. Moreover, research on narratives showed that writing about one's identity using a different language does not change participants writing skills and does not alter results (Baerger & McAdams, 1999). In fact, language is a marker of identity; therefore, being exposed to a new culture highlights the importance of integrating the new Canadian identity for these students (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977), regardless if they are simply visiting or wanting to immigrate.

Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis. They were approached by the program coordinator who was interested in our academic writing experimentation in which students would try to integrate a newer cultural identity using a newer language. Participants were assured that their data would stay confidential and anonymous. After having signed the consent form, they were also informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time.

Procedure

We used the same longitudinal procedure as used in Study 3 which took place in three (3) steps, from Time 1 to Time 2. The only difference was instead of having three (3) writing sessions using a cultural identity conflict; we had four (4) writing sessions evaluating the identity conflict between their cultural/ethnic identity (C/E) and their new Canadian identity (CAN). First, at Time 1, participants responded in class to a paper-format initial questionnaire which measured basic demographic information, and where identification to each the C/E and CAN identity was evaluated. Second, right after the completion of the initial questionnaire at Time 1, students had to immediately write about their identity conflict for a total of four (4) times, once every week. Finally, at Time 2, right after the last writing session (i.e. the 4th writing session), prior to being debriefed, participants completed the final questionnaire (i.e. same as in Time 1).

Writing Condition. On the day participants sign their consent form and completed the initial questionnaire at Time 1, participants were required to read the set of instructions prior to writing. The instructions, adapted from Pennebaker and Seagal (1999, p. 1244), were as followed:

"I would like for you to write about your very deepest thoughts and feelings about your stay in Montreal. In your writing, I would like you to really let go and explore your very deepest emotions and thoughts. You will concentrate on integrating both your old Japanese identity and your new Canadian identity by focusing on similarities between the two identities. You might tie your similarities to any topic you choose as long as you try to find common ground between your old Japanese identity and your new Canadian identity. For each of the 4 writing days, you may write about the same general similarities or different ones each day. All of your writing will be completely confidential."

Measures

The original questionnaire was in English. Questions which are identified by an asterisk (*) were reverse coded. Our questionnaire included a total of ten (10) scales: the *Perceived Conflict* scale, the *Perceive Distance* scale, the *Pictorial Identification* scale, the *Situated Identification* scale, the *Cognitive Identification* scale, the *Life Satisfaction* scale, the *Global Self-Esteem* scale, the *State Self-Esteem* scale and the *Psychophysical Well-being* scale. We further added the *Collective Esteem* scale to ensure stability of results.

1. Perceived Conflict. We adapted the Bicultural Identity Integration scale from Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005) to fit our participants' cultural diversity. This was appropriate to measure the degree to which a bicultural individual perceived their two cultural identities as conflicting. From a scale from 0 to 10 (0 = *completely disagree*; 10 = *completely agree*), participants answered each of the following four (4) items: 1) "I am conflicted between my cultural/ethnic identity and the Canadian ways of doing things", 2) "I feel like someone moving between two identities", 3) "I feel caught between my own cultural/ethnic identity and my new Canadian identity", and 4) "I don't feel trapped between my cultural/ethnic identity and my new Canadian identity*" (Cronbach's alpha Time 1= 0.77; and Time 2 = 0.72). Items were then recoded so that a high score indicated a high level of perceived conflict, whereas a low score indicated a low level of perceived conflict (*1* = low level of perceived conflict, *10* = high level of perceived conflict).

2. Perceived Distance. Using another adaptation of the Bicultural Identity Integration scale from Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005), we assessed the degree to which a bicultural individual perceived their two cultural identities as distant. From a scale from 0 to 10 (0 = *completely disagree*; 10 = *completely agree*), participants answered each of the following four (4) items: 1) "I keep my cultural/ethnic identity and my new Canadian identity separate", 2) "I feel like an Canadian international student*", 3) "I feel part of a combined identity*", and 4) "I am simply an international student visiting Canada" (Cronbach's alpha Time 1= 0.48; Time 2 = 0.62). Alphas are compatible to other studies (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005). Items were then recoded so that a high score indicated a high level of perceived distance, whereas a low score indicated a low level of perceived distance (*1* = low level of perceived distance, *10* = high level of perceived distance).

3. Pictorial Identification. Using the two-circle diagram (Aron *et al.*, 1992; Aron *et al.*, 1991) on a 7 point scale (*1* = not very important, *7* = extremely important), participants had to answer the two (2) following measures:

Pictorial C/E Identity. Participants had to answer this question: "Please circle the diagram that best represents the importance of your C/E identity within yourself all proportions considered".

Pictorial CAN Identity. Participants had to answer this question: "Please circle the diagram that best represents the importance of your new CAN identity within yourself all proportions considered"

Pictorial Identity Integration Level. We calculated the difference between their Pictorial C/E Identity and their Pictorial CAN Identity by subtracting the score of one from the other in absolute values, which gave us the level of identity integration on a 7 point scale. We then recoded each item so that a high score indicated a high level of identity integration, whereas a low score indicated a low level of identity integration (*1* = low level of identity integration, *7* = high level of identity integration). In the case where a participant would indicate low scores for both Pictorial C/E Identity and Pictorial CAN Identity, the difference of importance between these two identities would be "low" which would represent a high level of identity integration since there would be no difference in identification to both conflicting identities.

4. Situated Identification. A shortened version of the Situated Identity Scale (Clément & Noels, 1992) was adapted for the context of our study which involved students from different countries. This scale is relevant since it captures how students feel in concrete situations as it assess cognitive identification toward each of the two cultural identities: their Cultural/Ethnic identity (C/E) vs. their New Canadian identity (CAN). On a scale from 0 to 10 (*0*= never, *10* = very often), participants had to answer the two (2) following measures:

Situated C/E Identity. Participants had to answer these 15 everyday situational questions: 1) "When I am at McGill university, I feel closer to my...", 2) "When I think about where I would want to settle down, I feel closer to my...", 3) "When I write something for myself (not counting school work), I feel closer to my...", 4) "When I think about my life's goals, I feel closer to my...", 5) "When I participate in cultural activities, I feel closer to my...", 6) "When I eat food, I feel closer to my...", 7) "When I think about my significant other, I feel closer to my...", 8) "When I think about politics, I feel closer to my...", 9) "In my social contacts with my classmates, I feel closer to my...", 10) "In my social contacts with Canadians, I feel closer to my...", 11) "When I watch the news on television, I feel closer to my...", 12) "When dealing with university personnel, I feel closer to my...", 13) "When I listen to music, I feel closer to my...", 14) "When dealing with merchants, I feel closer to my...", and 15) "When I read for pleasure, I feel closer to my..." For items related to C/E, Cronbach's alpha at Time 1 was 0.87 and Time 2 was 0.90.

Situated CAN Identity. Participants completed the same five (5) questions with regard to the CAN identity. For all these 15 everyday situational questions, items related to CAN indicate that Cronbach's alpha at Time 1 was 0.94 and Time 2 was 0.93.

Situated Identity Integration Level. We calculated the difference between their Situated C/E Identity and their Situated CAN Identity by subtracting the score of one from the other in absolute values, which gave us the level of Situated Identity Integration on a 7 point scale. We then recoded each item by recoding them so that a high score indicated a high level of identity integration, whereas a low score indicated a low level of Situated Identity Integration (*1* = low level of identity integration, *7* = high identity integration).

5. Cognitive Identification. An adaptation of the Cognitive Identification scale was used to assess individuals' acknowledgment of their belonging to a particular identity (Ellemers *et al.*, 1999; Jackson, 2002). On this 10-point scale (0 = *completely disagree;* 10 = *completely agree*) which corresponds to the cognitive component of social identity, participants had to answer the two (2) following measures:

Cognitive C/E Identity. Participants answered these five (5) questions: 1) "I am identifying myself with my cultural/ethnic identity", 2) "My cultural/ethnic identity is an important characteristic of how I define myself", 3) "It is important for me that others identify me with my cultural/ethnic identity", 4) "I am truly concerned about what others think of my cultural/ethnic identity", and 5) "Members of my cultural/ethnic identity have a number of things in common with each other"(Cronbach's alpha Time 1 = 0.76; Time 2 = 0.77).

Cognitive CAN Identity. Participants answered the same five (5) questions with regard to the CAN identity. For all these five (5) questions, items related to CAN indicate that Cronbach's alpha at Time 1 was 0.85 and at Time 2 was 0.87.

Cognitive Identity Integration Level. We calculated the difference between the Cognitive C/E Identity and the Cognitive CAN Identity by subtracting one from the other in absolute values, which gave us the level of Cognitive Identity Integration on a 7 point scale. We then recoded each item by recoding them so that a high score indicated a high level of identity integration, whereas a low score indicated a low level of identity integration (*1* = low level of identity integration, *7* = high identity integration).

6. Life Satisfaction. The same five (5) items were used from the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener *et al.*, 1985) as previously done in Study 1, 2 and 3 (Cronbach's alpha Time 1 = 0.77; Time 2 = 0.87).

7. Global Self-Esteem. The same ten (10) items were used from the Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) as previously done in Study 1, 2 and 3 (Cronbach's alpha Time 1= 0.79; Time 2 = 0.86).

8. State Self-Esteem. The same 20 items were used from the Self-Esteem Scale (Heatherton and Polivy, 1991) as previously done in Study 2 and 3 (Cronbach's alpha Time 1 = 0.80; Time 2 = 0.90).

9. Psychophysical Well-Being. The same 12 items were used from the Short-Form Health Survey (Ware *et al.*, 1996) as previously done in Study 3 (Cronbach's alpha Time 1 = 0.86; Time 2 = 0.89).

10. Collective Esteem. Using the collective esteem scale (Ellemers *et al.*, 1999; Jackson, 2002), which refers to the feeling of pride attached to one's identity or membership, participants had to answer the two (2) following measures:

Collective C/E Esteem. On a 10-point scale (0 = *completely disagree;* 10 = *completely agree*), participants answered the following five (5) items: 1) "I am glad to define myself based on my cultural/ethnic identity", 2) "I am proud to have my cultural/ethnic identity", 3) "I feel that having my cultural/ethnic identity is not worthwhile*", 4) "My successes can be attributed to my cultural/ethnic identity", and 5) "The image I have of my cultural/ethnic identity is negative*" (Cronbach's alpha Time 1 = 0.67; Time 2 = 0.81).

Collective CAN Esteem. Participants completed the same five (5) questions with regard to the new Canadian identity (Cronbach's alpha Time 1 = 0.70; Time 2 = 0.74).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Preliminary Analyses

Normality indices showed appropriate levels of skewness and kurtosis for all computed variables (Pallant, 2005; Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). Only one outlier that deviated by more than 3 standard deviations from the variable mean, and displayed a Mahanalobis distance greater than the exclusion criterion set at $p < .001$ was present in our sample. Because results were similar with or without excluding these cases, we kept the entire sample (Kline, 1998).

The main variables used in the analyses were examined for accuracy of data entry, missing values, and fit between their distributions and the assumptions of multivariate analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Missing data (representing less than 5% of the data file) were replaced using the trend imputation procedure (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Thus, fifty-four participants were retained for the analyses.

Correlations. The relationship between identity integration, life satisfaction, global self-esteem state self-esteem, psychophysical well-being and pictorial identity integration score was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Psychophysical well-being was positively and significantly correlated with life satisfaction, global self-esteem and state self-esteem. However, pictorial identity integration was not correlated to any other variables. Other measures of identity integration, situated identity integration and cognitive identity integration, were also not significantly correlated. **See Table 5.**

Table 5.
Study 4.Correlations Between Measures of Psychological Well-Being and ID Integration

	Measures	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1.	Life Satisfaction	--				
2.	Global Self-Esteem	.45**	--			
3.	State Self-Esteem	.24	.67**	--		
4.	Psychophysical W-B	.32*	.30*	.29*	--	
5.	Pictorial ID Integration	.07	.13	.21	.26	--

Notes. * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p = 0.00$

Hypothesis Testing

As executed in Study 3, we performed some preliminary analyses to validate the underlying pattern that individuals scoring high and low on identity integration will both benefit from more writing sessions using clearer instructions. Again, using the median, we divided our participants based on the *pictorial identity integration* to create our two distinct groups: high identity integration (*n=36*) and low identity integration (*n=18*).

T-tests and chi-square analyses. A series of t-tests and chi-square analyses were conducted to compare these two subgroups created from the median split. These two subgroups (i.e. high vs. low identity integration) were found to be similar as no significant difference was found in the proportion of women and men ($\chi^2(1) = 1.53$; *p*

=.22, *ns*), their age [*t*(52) = 0.10, *p* =.08, *ns*], their education level [*t*(52) = 0.19, *p* =.15, *ns*], and their religion (χ^2(1) = 1.05; *p* =.44, *ns*).

However, a statistical difference was found in terms of their respective time travelling in Canada [*t*(52) = 4.37, *p* =.00] which indicated that the high identity integration group was mainly composed of participants who had spent more time in Canada (M_{High}=149.17 weeks), in comparison to the low identity integration group who had spent less time in Canada (M_{Low}=57.5 weeks).

Main Analysis. The pictorial identity integration measure was selected among other variable to divide our groups because it was the most direct and unbiased way that participants represented their own identity conflict. Analysis from our independent T-Tests revealed a significant increase between level of identity integration and psychological well-being for both group respectively from Time 1 to Time 2.

As for levels of identity integration, results reveal that participants experiencing high identity integration felt more integrated after writing sessions (*M*=6.17, *SD*=1.28) than before (*M*=5.83, *SD*=0.74) [*t(35)* = 1.36, *ns*] while participants experiencing low identity integration significantly reported feeling more integrated after writing sessions (*M*=5.35, *SD*=1.17) than before (*M*=3,41, *SD*=0.62) [*t*(16)=5.95, *p*=0.00 (two-tailed)].

As for levels of psychological well-being, the same pattern was found. For instance, participants scoring low on identity integration significantly increased their level of life satisfaction from Time1 (*M*=6.56, *SD*=2.10) to Time 2 (*M*=7.50, *SD*=1.97) [*t(17)*=3.31, *p*=0.04 (two-tailed)], while participants scoring high on identity integration also significantly increased their level of life satisfaction from Time 1 (*M*=6.71, *SD*=1.74) to Time 2 (*M*=7.29, *SD*=1.85) [*t*(35)=2.25, *p*=0.03 (two-tailed)].

Because both groups (i.e. high and low) were following the expected pattern of results in their respective increase from Time 1 to Time 2, we thus decided to solely report results for all participants together regardless if they score high or low on identity integration as they were both similar.

In line with our hypothesis that writing about identity conflict will increase both identity integration and psychological well-being levels for individuals scoring high and low on identity integration from Time 1 to Time 2, we examined the differences prior and after writing by comparing mean differences. Again, a series of paired T-Tests were

conducted to further analyse the pattern of change observed between the initial and the final measures of identity integration and psychological well-being. Even after using the correction of Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.017, results show an increasing pattern of change from Time 1 to Time 2 for identity integration and psychological well-being which partially replicated the pattern of results obtain in Study 3. **See Table 6.**

For the identity integration levels, all scores were significantly increasing from Time 1 to Time 2. Such pattern reveals that writing helped students to integrate the new identity into their self as they indicated less identity conflict between the two different identities over time.   Even if the level of pictorial identity integration increased prior ($M=5.06$, $SD=1.34$) and after writing ($M=5.91$, $SD=1.29$), $t(52) = 3.84$, $p < .000$ (two-tailed), no significant results were observed for the way participants represented their pictorial C/E identity from Time 1 to Time 2, as if the representation of their original identity was not affected by the integration of a newer one. In parallel to such finding, for both the situated and the cognitive identity integration scales, we observed that levels of identity integration show an increasing pattern of change over time for the CAN identity.

Nonetheleless, a decrease in the C/E identity is revealed which supports the subtractive processes implying that coherence among conflicting identities become equally important within the self in order for an integration of the two to occur. Such subtractive process refers to the idea that the original (C/E) identity and the new Canadian identity (CAN) become equally important within the self by *decreasing* the importance of one's original identity in order to make room for the integration of the new one, acting as a zero-sum process (Amiot *et al.*, 2007; de la Sablonnière et al., 2010). Thus, one would have to *subtract* the importance of C/E identity to allow the newer CAN identity to fit inside the overall self, and then to be fully integrated.

Table 6.

Study 4. Descriptive Statistics of Identity Integration and Psychological Well-being from Time 1 to Time 2 after Writing about Identity Conflict (all participants).

Variables	Time 1		Time 2		Mean differences Time 1 vs. Time 2
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*T-test*
Identification to Self					
Perceived Conflict	4.52	2.27	3.17	2.09	3.68**
Perceived Distance	4.08	2.31	3.42	2.08	4.50***
Pictorial C/E Identity	4.74	1.82	4.93	1.61	0.75
Pictorial CAN Identity	3.15	1.63	4.15	1.39	3.77***
Situated C/E Identity	5.95	1.78	5.79	1.68	0.85
Situated CAN Identity	5.46	2.25	5.87	1.80	1.64
Cognitive C/E Identity	7.13	1.76	6.82	1.62	2.12*
Cognitive CAN Identity	4.00	2.46	5.46	1.97	4.68***
Identity Integration Measures					
Pictorial ID Integration Level	5.06	1.34	5.91	1.29	3.84***
Situated ID Integration Level	7.31	2.03	8.33	1.78	3.80***
Cognitive ID Integration Level	6.72	2.51	8.23	1.67	5.69***
Psychological Well-Being					
Life Satisfaction	6.66	1.85	7.36	1.88	3.57**
Global Self-Esteem	6.79	1.43	7.48	1.61	3.65**
State Self-Esteem	6.19	1.19	6.83	1.47	4.28**
Psychophysical Well-Being	7.38	1.64	7.73	1.72	1.92
Collective C/E Esteem	7.33	1.77	7.25	2.05	0.56
Collective CAN Esteem	5.79	1.87	6.67	1.69	4.64***

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p = 0.00$

Furthermore, for the psychological well-being scales, all were significantly increasing except two: the psychophysical well-being as well as the collective C/E esteem. Although the decreasing pattern was not found significant for collective C/E esteem, it is in line with our general pattern of results which could support once more the idea of a subtractive process of identity integration with the original identity.

Why do results reveal a pattern of decrease for the original identity (C/E) while showing an increase for the newer identity (CAN)? One explanation, which is supported by previous studies, is in fact in line with the integration process itself suggesting that conflicting identities get integrated together through a subtractive process of identity integration (Amiot *et al.*, 2007; de la Sablonnière et al., 2010). Then, finding coherence among conflicting identities implies that both the original (C/E) identity and the new Canadian identity (CAN) become equally important within the self by giving them the same importance. To do so, one requires decreasing so the importance of the newer identity can be included, and eventually integrated, into the self, again acting as a zero-sum process (Amiot *et al.*, 2007; de la Sablonnière et al., 2010). For instance, if Nanako integrates her new Canadian identity in a subtractive manner, the importance of her original Japanese identity would decrease to allow a proper integration.

Our hypothesis that writing about identity conflict will increase both identity integration and psychological well-being from Time 1 to Time 2 was confirmed regardless if participants scored high or low on identity integration. Thus, results of Study 3 confirmed our hypothesis that writing about identity conflict over several session (i.e. over a longer period of time) while using a clearer set of instructions which focused on finding similarities between conflicting identities were both beneficial to help writers increase identity integration and psychological well-being levels.

Analysis of Written Content

Because our main objective is to understand how to facilitate the integration of conflicting identities using writing, further exploratory analysis using the LWCI (Pennebaker *et al.*, 2003) were performed to examine the written content of participants' essays. Results are in line with the expected pattern that we predicted. In fact, the more participants write about their identity conflict, the less negative words and the more positive words are seen. **See Figure 4.**

Figure 4.

Study 4. Analysis of Participants' Written Content: Positive and Negative Words

Study 4. Analysis of Participants' Written Content about Identitiy Conflict
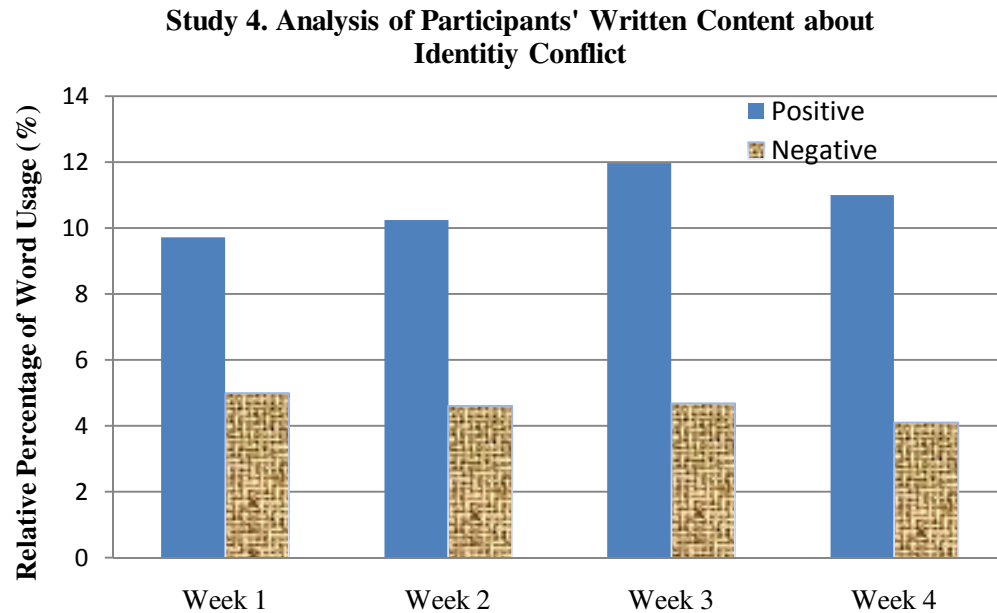
Although differences within the rate of positive and negative words vary over time, our prediction that the usage of positive words will increase while the usage of negative words will decrease over time seems to be supporting a common pattern of results. For the usage of positive words, we can observe an overall increase from Week 1 (*M*=9.72, *SD*=3.98) to Week 4 (*M*=11.01, *SD*=3.44). For the usage of negative words, we can observe an overall decrease from Week 1 (*M*=5.01, *SD*=2.97) to Week 4 (*M*=4.12, *SD*=2.27) which fits the predicted pattern of results stating that from Time 1 to Time 2, participants make greater usage of positive words and fewer of negative words. Thus, this last study further sheds light on writing as a concrete facilitator for identity integration using several writing sessions with clearer set of instructions.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Through the story of Nanako, our young 25 year-old Japanese university student who was challenged with her Japanese identity and her new Canadian identity after immigrating to Canada, we were able to comprehend a way to help her integrate such conflicting identities into herself. Although Nanako made the choice of coming to a new country, being very open-minded and determined was not enough to make her feel integrated.

The point of departure of this article was to provide a concrete strategy to facilitate the integration of conflicting identities into the self. More precisely, our main objective was to determine if writing about identity conflict would increase both identity integration and psychological well-being levels. Examining how individuals write and establish interconnections between conflicting identities by finding similarities, not only informs us about the process of how people create their own identity, but also how they construct their own stories to allow an integration of conflicting identities into their self.

Our four studies were designed to respond to a lack in the literature regarding strategies to facilitate identity integration. For the very first time in the literature, we were able to confirm that writing acts as a concrete facilitator to increase levels of identity integration. As postulated at the beginning of this paper, we strongly believe writing represents the best therapeutic tool to increase identity integration and psychological well-being because it mirrors the exact same processes required for identity integration. Although the literature greatly highlights the benefits of having high levels of identity integration (e.g. Amiot *et al.*, 2007; Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; de la Sablonnière et al., 2010), no research has yet suggested such a concrete strategy to help increase it. In this paper, we supported the idea that writing would represent such strategy.

In line with our first hypothesis, that writing about identity conflict, as compared to writing about neutral topic or no writing, will be associated to superior levels of psychological well-being for individuals scoring high on identity integration in opposition to those scoring low on identity integration, Study 1 and 2 revealed a pattern of results that significantly support such hypothesis (see Table 1 and 2). This also

supports past research in which higher level of identity integration was related to higher level of psychological well-being (e.g. Amiot *et al.*, 2007; Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martinez *et al.*, 2002; de la Sablonnière et al., 2010). In fact, individuals scoring high on identity integration who wrote about their identity conflict, reported superior levels of psychological well-being. One explanation can be attributed to the idea that those individuals already experienced lower levels of identity conflict which made it easier for them to find a solution and common ground between conflicting identities. The inverse pattern was found for those who scored low on identity integration as they experienced higher levels of identity conflict which made it harder to find a sense of coherence using solely a 15-minute writing session. Because not everyone who is confronted to an identity conflict can adequately find a solution to such problem, we examined the role of writing as a concrete strategy to help those who most need it, i.e. individuals scoring low on identity integration.

In line with our second hypothesis, that writing about identity conflict will increase both identity integration and psychological well-being levels for individuals scoring high and low on identity integration from Time 1 to Time 2, we examined the pattern of change over time using several writing sessions with a clearer set of writing instructions. Study 3 and 4 were performed to extend and clarify one important point. How can low identity integration also benefit from writing? We thus explored the role of writing as a facilitator to increase identity integration and psychological well-being over time. Analyses of longitudinal Study 3 and 4 confirmed our hypothesis as both identity integration and psychological well-being levels increased from Time 1 to Time 2 regardless if they scored high or low on identity integration.

Considering that more writing sessions using clearer writing instructions facilitated the identity integration and psychological well-being over time, it was crucial to understand underlying mechanisms of how written content influenced such results.

Benefits of Writing about Identity Conflicts

For all four studies, analysis of participants' written content was examined to further understand how words influence the processes of identity integration. Based on previous studies on writing which revealed that the use of positive words is correlated with higher psychological well-being, we were able to confirm what we expected mainly that participants scoring low on identity integration tend to use more negative words and less positive words, while those scoring high on identity integration tend to use more positive words and less negative words. Furthermore, our results fit the pattern of prediction from Time 1 to Time 2, mainly analysis reveal that over time the usage of positive words increased while the usage of negative words diminished.

On the one hand, the fact that individuals scoring high on identity integration benefited more from writing about their identity conflict is interesting. For example, if Nanako was experiencing high levels of identity integration between her Japanese and Canadian identities, writing about it would have been more beneficial as opposed as if she was experiencing low levels of identity integration. We believe that such a difference is in line with the idea that high levels of identity integration facilitate the search for similarities between conflicting identities, making it easier to establish cognitive links and finding common ground between. It appears that people who scored high on identity integration and who wrote about their identity conflict were able to do so with confidence and ease. This actually led them to reinforce positively their coherence due to the fact that they were already highly integrated, which lead them to score higher on life satisfaction and global self-esteem. Such results are also in line with fact that high identity integration individuals reported more positive word usage and less negative words in their essays.

On the other hand, it seems that when people who score low on identity integration are asked to write about their conflicting attributes, it leads them to feel less integrated as it reinforces the feeling of incoherence between their two identities. According to our results, low levels of identity integration would require more cognitive effort since it appears harder to find similarities between very conflicting identities which do not seem to have any matching characteristics to begin with. Because those scoring low on identity integration reported the highest level of identity conflict, writing

only one time about their conflicting identities could seem like a threat, rather than a solution seeker which could explain why they scored the lowest on life satisfaction and global self-esteem. In other words, they are faced with an identity conflict that can only be reinforced negatively instead of positively, which would also explain why those scoring low on identity integration tend to make greater usage of negative words and weaker usage of positive word in their essays when asked to write over a single session only. The action of writing about a high level conflict seems to aggravate the situation and already existing feelings of incoherence of those scoring low on identity integration, which is exactly what we predicted. Results of our Study 1 and 2 confirmed such pattern.

Writing solely one time without clear instructions may have amplified or even reinforced feelings of incoherence and lead participants to over-think their identity conflict, thus activating random vivid images of intense emotions in their memory, which often results in rumination and dwelling (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2006). As before-mentioned, studies were able to show that thinking, by contract to writing and talking, played the role of an amplifier since it lead individuals to re-experience and maintenance their negative feelings about the experience, which stayed activated in their memory. This could explain why several writing sessions actually facilitated identity integration since it offered more time to reflect on identity conflicts, to organize and integrate their thoughts using similarities, as well as to eventually establish cognitive links and relative correspondence between conflicting identities. In fact, asking a patient to write something that is not even close from being integrated into the self seems to be lowering levels of psychological well-being as compared to those who are already highly integrated. Therefore, the role of writing appears to play as an amplifier which reinforces what is already installed within the individual when writing is performed solely one time without a clear focus on finding similarities between conflicting identities.

More writing sessions were indeed required to ensure that the structure and meaning of the identity conflict was understood so that participants could gain a sense of resolution and a feeling of control (e.g. Pennebaker and Graybeal, 2001) to facilitate the search for similarities between conflicting identities. This understanding through

esthablishing cognitive links between conflicting identities may allow individuals to label emotions which allocate him or her to let go (Esterling *et al.*, 1999).

Underlying Mechanisms of Writing

A study by Pennebaker et al. (1997) has analyzed the use of negative and positive emotion words, and they obtained results that could greatly explain why writing about emotional experiences influence health. In fact, they examined essays of participants who had to write about a traumatic/upsetting life experience for a period of 3 to 5 days, 15 to 30 minutes each day. As they wrote, these researchers examined, among other things, the choice of words and the correlation between them.

First, it was found that the more people used positive-emotion words in their essays, the more they improved their health. In contrast, the use of negative-emotion words predicted health changes in a surprising way. In fact, participants who made use of a moderate number of negative emotion words while writing about a traumatic/upsetting life experience also showed great health improvement, mainly fewer visits to the doctor in the following months. However, results reveal that individuals using a very high number of negative-emotion words as well as individuals using a very low number of negative-emotion words showed more ongoing health problems in comparison to those using a moderate level of these same words (Pennebaker *et al.*, 1997).

Second, results revealed that participants who wrote using many positive-emotion words and a moderate amount of negative-emotion words were the ones who showed greatest health improvements. In fact, those who had a large number of negative-emotion words tended to be associated to a personality style high in neuroticism and/or high in negative affect (Watson & Clark, 1984). They were described as individuals who think about their negative emotions in an intensive manner by focusing on the wrong aspect of their life experiences leading them to feel powerless and complaining without ever understanding why. Indeed, this may be aggravated by their inability to develop a clear story while writing down how they felt. In opposition to these pessimistic individuals, a high rate of positive-emotion word mixed with some negative-emotion words signifies an acknowledgment of problems with an affiliated

sense of optimism (Pennebaker *et al.*, 1997). These findings show that the choice of words has an important impact on how people relate to the life experience and how it influences health.

Through the four studies of our present article, we shed evidence that it is not only the act of writing that has impact of on both identity integration and psychological well-being, but what word they use and how to use them. In their study, Pennebaker, Mayne & Francis (1997) confirmed that the act of constructing a story by building a narrative is associated with both mental and physical health improvement. For these researchers, "a constructed story is a type of knowledge that helps to organize the emotional effects of an experience as well as the experience itself " (McAdams, 1997; Pennebaker *et al.*, 1997; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). This concept of constructing a story could be associated to the notion of identity integration, as well as auto-biographical writing which appears to be understudied with regards to the benefits of writing and its impacts on health.

Conclusion

Individuals constantly change and re-evaluate what they ideally want for themselves in comparison to who they actually are at a specific moment in time. Given that the self is a dynamic, malleable and flexible structure that is constantly evolving, we believe that through the process of writing, individuals can increase their level of identity integration and psychological well-being by integrating conflicting identities into the self. Thus, it is important to understand the role of writing about conflicting identities and to be aware of the impact of such integration.

Understanding how writing can influence the way people integrate conflicting identities and how to deal with such conflict will play a major role in learning how to communicate and to better interact in society. It could change how therapists use the writing tool in a session with patients, as well as alter the way one can relate to another for help, advice or even self-help. In other words, the action of writing provides help to individuals who, for instance, follow a psychotherapeutic treatment in which the professional ask them to keep a diary or a journal entry in which they write how they feel and think regarding a specific issue. This method has been proven to work;

however, we believe a prior assessment of patients' level of *identity integration* should be done before such homework is requested from him/her.

Because identity integration occurs through finding similarities between conflicting identities, a strategy to facilitate identity integration would have to parallel the exact same processes. Therefore, a concrete strategy that would mirror the processes of identity integration would facilitate such integration.

Lastly, past research has shown that there are two distinct identity integration processes (Amiot *et al*, 2008; de la Sablonnière, 2010). The first one focused on the establishment of interconnections between different identities occurring through a gradual increase by finding similarities between different identities. In fact, individuals increased the perceived overlap between conflicting identities as this ensures a certain degree of shared common overlap. The second integration process involves the creation of a superordinate identity that consists of several different subidentities. Such a process implies that conflicting identities can be nested in an abstract and inclusive superior identity that encloses them both.

Writing would allow for such integration by assisting the writer to establish cognitive links between conflicting identities which would then help to reduce differences while increasing coherence between them. A parallel to what writing offers can be found in the literature on bilingualism has researchers labelled this integration of different languages "subtractive bilingualism" (de la Sablonnière et al., 2010; Lambert & Taylor, 1983; Louis & Taylor, 2001; Taylor, Meynard & Rheault, 1977; Wong Fillmore, 1991; Wright, Taylor & Moghaddam, 2000).

As mentioned before, integrating new identities into the self is not only crucial in the context of immigration, but for anyone confronted with profound changes. Identity integration affects millions of individuals and groups undergoing important changes which are faced with challenges impacting their identity.

Third Chapter
Discussion

Coming back to Ricardo's case, our 22 year old student who suffers from an important identity conflict between his sexual identity and his religious identity, we wanted to find a concrete strategy to help this young man integrate such discrepancies and increase his well-being. Although at first Ricardo was not able to anticipate similarities and accept differences between his conflicting identities, we believed that writing would facilitate such integration process by establishing cognitive links between comparable characteristics.

For instance, in Ricardo's case, it is obvious that both identities are associated with being part of greater communities of related people, like the gay or the catholic community; both identities worship similar values, such as honesty and forgiveness; both identities are simultaneously found together in certain countries where gay marriage is now legal, for example Canada. Such cognitive links bring to mind similarities, recognition of differences and solution-oriented perspectives which facilitate the integration of what appeared to be conflicting at first. Thus, writing about it over several sessions can increase Ricardo's level of identity integration and psychological well-being.

In line with our above-mentioned theoretical perspectives on identity conflict, we were able to observe the shared benefits of writing when it comes to solving cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) or cognitive imbalance (Heider, 1946) within individuals. Whether identity conflict leads individuals to behave like two different persons when it comes to their various self (Schelling, 1984) or projects their inconsistent beliefs about themselves which states multiple mental representations of the self (Higgins, 1987), it most likely make the sufferer feel uncomfortable and uneasy psychologically. Because identity conflict is characterized by deviations in behaviour between a instinctive response and a cognitive response (Loewenstein, 1996; O'Connor *et al.*, 2002), it entails important consequences on both physical and psychological well-being.

This present thesis aimed at understanding the benefits of writing about identity conflict as a way to increase identity integration and psychological well-being levels. Through our four (4) studies, we shed light on writing as a facilitator in the process of integrating conflicting identities into the self. More precisely, recognizing how writing can influence the way people integrate conflicting identities and how to deal with such conflict will play a major role in learning how to communicate and to better interact in society. But how is identity integration even happening?

Limits

Although our studies have shown an interesting pattern of results, a few limits are to be mentioned. First, the impact of writing. Studies 1 and 2 have shown that writing about identity conflict was associated to superior levels of psychological well-being when writers experienced high level of identity integration. However, the action of writing only one time appears to play as an amplifier which reinforces what is already installed within the individual when the conflict is too important. We believe a prior assessment of the client's needs – mainly the level of *identity integration* – should be evaluated before such homework is requested from the patient.

Second, the analysis of participants' journal content would have to include statistical information with regard to similarities and differences between the two conflicting identities. Whereas the usage of positive and negative words does not share pertinent information about the process of identity integration, the analysis of how participants recognize and accept similarities and differences would appear more significant. Implications for future studies should consider the focus on similarities which can be linked to cultural stressors such as prejudice and stereotyping. Understanding how individuals create similarities between conflicting identities or even justify differences should not be guided by stereotypes as writers needs to create their own cognitive path to find a sense of coherence.

Another limit has to do with the non-writing control of both studies 3 and 4. Although studies 1 and 2 were originally performed to analyse the impact of *conflict writing condition* in comparison to control writing and the non-writing, the fact that studies 3 and 4 had no control writing conditions could affect how results were

interpreted. Because of our small sample size and since we had to conduct participants over one month period without paying them, we had decided, at the time, to eliminate any control condition. We thus relied on our previous hypothesis confirmation in which we validated that *conflict writing condition* in comparison to control writing and the non-writing. However, further studies should include such control writing condition to validate and extend findings.

Finally, one last limit would be to examine underlying mechanism of identity integration. Is writing required once in a while to reconnect with already existing integration mechanisms or is writing allowing for long-term modification in the way individuals define themselves so to have multiple selves to adapt various context? The topic of multiple selves in identity conflict can explain how one individual can behave like two different persons when it comes to their various self (Schelling, 1984; O'Connor *et al.*, 2002), but how can it justify being coherent or integrated? Bromberg (1998) suggest that multiple selves or identity conflict finds it base in *dissociation.* Such concept refers to the loose configuration of multiple self-states that enables people to feel like oneself while being many (Bromberg, 1998). In this case, would someone who has low level of identity integration, but feels very adapted/integrated in various social contexts necessarily become a decentred person constantly shifting in an illusion of unitary selfhood? Perhaps writing about such identity discrepancies allows individuals to consciously collect personal data and knowledge to accept differences and focus on similarities to construct a concrete coherent integrated sense of self. Thus, eventual studies should analyse the long-term impact of writing about identity conflict, and verify whether similarities and differences are still allowing processes of identity integration to keep conflicting identities coherent in the way that individuals define themselves.

Conclusion

Intrapersonal identity conflicts are taking more importance today; however, more research is needed in order to fully examine this precise topic (Landau-Stanton, 1985; Markstorm-Adams & Soencer, 1994). Even if intrapersonal identity conflicts are studied, they certainly involved crucial transitions in both external and internal changes (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1989). This present thesis on solving identity conflicts highlights

the significance of finding a concrete strategy to help individuals integrate conflicting identities. As seen, social relational perspectives underscore the need for additional research on the consequences of identity conflicts for everyone suffering from such discrepancies.

Similarly, longitudinal studies on identity integration are needed to disentangle different factors of causality as well as adequate consequences for solving them. Although previous identity integration models (e.g. Amiot *et al*., 2008; Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005) only account for theoretical suggestions as none have yet proposed any concrete strategy to increase levels of identity integration, convincing evidences of newer models await. It is thus crucial to resolve identity conflicts, more explicitly by integrating conflicting identities into the self to reduce psychological tensions, which in turn will increase psychological well-being. Still today, problem-solving trainings to clarify and practice new strategies like writing are necessary to facilitate the integration of conflicting identities into the self and to better cope with identity conflicts.

This paper brings a contribution to the literature and answers to a lack with regards to processes facilitating identity integration. we can confirm that writing played the role of a facilitator in the process of integrating conflicting identities into the self. More precisely, recognizing how writing can influence the way people integrate conflicting identities and how to deal with such conflict will play a major role in learning how to communicate and to better interact in society. It could change how therapists use the writing tool in a session with patients, as well as alter the way one can relate to another for help, advice or even self-help. In other words, the action of writing provides help to individuals who, for instance, follow a psychotherapeutic treatment in which the professional ask them to keep a diary or a journal entry in which they write how they feel and think regarding a specific issue. We can now affirm that we are one step closer to finding a solution to help everyone integrate conflicting identities into the self. Whether writing is used in a clinical setting, or on an individual basis, this therapeutic tool was found to be concrete, accessible and free. Writing may just be what we all need to feel better. Who knew it could change so much!

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