

Does religion matter? Italians' responses towards Muslim and Christian Arab immigrants as a function of their acculturation preferences

Abstract

A 2 x 2 x 2 experiment examined the role of immigrants' religion and perceived acculturation strategy on majority members' attitudes. Acculturation strategies were manipulated along the two dimensions of contact and culture maintenance. Italian majority members ($N = 247$) read fictitious but seemingly real interviews with Arab immigrants, in which the immigrants' religion (Muslim vs. Christian) and acculturation preferences (desire for contact and for culture maintenance) were manipulated. MANOVA showed a main effect of contact: majority members associated immigrants who were perceived to favour contact with more positive attitudes, empathy, trust, positive stereotypes and metastereotypes, and lower levels of threat. MANOVA also showed a main effect of culture maintenance: when immigrants were perceived to abandon their culture, majority members reported lower levels of symbolic threat and greater empathy towards them. A significant Religion x Culture maintenance interaction effect emerged on majority members' stereotypes and contact intentions: Muslim immigrants who were perceived to abandon their heritage culture elicited more favourable responses than Muslim immigrants who were perceived to maintain their heritage culture. Taken together, these findings suggest that desire for intergroup contact amongst immigrants, independently of their religion, can promote harmonious intergroup relations with the majority group.

Keyword: intergroup attitudes, acculturation, contact, culture maintenance, religion

Introduction

Immigration in Europe and elsewhere is a phenomenon with many political and social implications. A recent survey (EU-MIDIS II) conducted in Europe that included more than 25,500 people with immigrant or ethnic minority background showed that 24% of immigrants and ethnic minorities across the EU felt discriminated against in the 12 months preceding the survey because of their ethnic or immigrant background (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017). In fact, immigrants or ethnic minorities reported experiencing discrimination on average 5 times a year. Reports of racism and discrimination are also prevalent in Italy. In 2016, the Italian National Office of Racial Anti-Discrimination opened 2,939 inquiries for reported cases of discrimination, of which 69% concerned ethnic-racial reasons. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which collects data on hate crimes in Italy each year, reported that out of 555 hate crimes detected by law enforcement agencies in 2015, 369 were related to incidents of racism and xenophobia (Dossier Statistico Immigrazione, 2018).

The acculturation strategy immigrants are perceived to adopt seems to play a major role in shaping intergroup attitudes (Kosic, Mannetti, & Sam, 2005; van Oudenhoven, Prins, & Buunk, 1998; Zagefka & Brown, 2002). Experimental evidence has shown that majority members' attitudes are more influenced by immigrants' desire for intergroup contact than culture maintenance (Matera, Stefanile, & Brown, 2011; Olsson, Matera, Tip, & Brown, 2019). Immigrants who are perceived to desire contact with members of the receiving society are perceived as less threatening to majority members' traditional way of life, which leads to more favourable intergroup attitudes (Matera et al., 2011; Olsson et al., 2019). Immigrants' desire for cultural maintenance, which has been found to have only a minor impact on intergroup attitudes, might pose an obstacle to multiculturalism in the receiving country when

higher cultural distance is perceived between the minority and the majority group (Van Osch & Breugelmans, 2012).

Recently, Olsson et al. (2019) considered the role of immigrants' religion in shaping majority members' intergroup attitudes in Sweden. Majority members reported greater support for multiculturalism when Muslim immigrants were shown to desire high levels of contact. In contrast, the effect of Christian immigrants' desire for contact on majority support for multiculturalism was negligible. Their findings suggest that whether the minority religion corresponds with the religion of the majority (or not) can make the minority be perceived as more or less culturally similar, and the majority may thus encourage contact in order to alleviate cultural threat. However, Muslims' perceived desire for culture maintenance did not affect perceptions of threat or attitudes. In the present research, we extended previous findings by exploring the role of minorities' religion in another cultural context (i.e., Italy) and on a range of cognitive, affective and behavioural responses among the majority.

Cognitive factors. Research has investigated the relationship between the minority's perceived acculturation strategy and the majority's stereotypes about immigrants and metastereotypes - the stereotypic beliefs that group members think other outgroups hold about their ingroup (Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998). It seems that when majority members perceive the minority to adopt customs and habits of the majority, the majority expresses more positive stereotypes about the minority (López-Rodríguez, Zagefka, Navas, & Cuadrado, 2014; Maisonneuve & Testé, 2007). In addition, when majority members perceive immigrants to desire intergroup contact, they assume that the minority view them as tolerant and sensitive. Such positive metastereotypes may in turn facilitate favourable attitudes towards the minority (Matera, Stefanile, & Brown, 2015). Although immigrants' religious background could activate different metastereotypes, the role of religion has not been examined in these studies.

Affective factors. Previous research has demonstrated that majority members express positive attitudes toward immigrants who are perceived to desire contact with majority members and maintain their heritage culture (e.g., Celeste, Brown, Tip, & Matera, 2014). To the best of our knowledge, however, no study has examined the relationship between acculturation preferences and specific emotions. In the present research, we focus on two positive emotions - trust and empathy - that have been shown to foster favourable intergroup attitudes (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Trust arises in the absence of threat and can be defined as a social bond that is characterized by feelings of security and confidence in others' good intentions (Tropp, 2008). Empathy involves taking the perspective of another person to understand their situation and being concerned with the perceived welfare of others (Batson et al., 1991).

Behavioural factors. Acculturation researchers have typically examined whether majority members' acculturation preferences are associated with their attitudes towards immigrants. However, attitudes do not necessarily determine *actual* behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In order to make inferences about intergroup behaviour, it is thus important to examine majority members' behavioural intentions, especially in relation to having more (or less) contact with immigrants. Celeste and colleagues (2014) found evidence of the role of immigrants' perceived acculturation preferences on majority members' behavioural involvement in acculturation.

Research overview and hypotheses

In the present research, we aim to extend previous research from Sweden (Olsson et al., 2019) to a new sociocultural context, Italy. We expect the cultural context to influence intergroup relations. The Eurobarometer 2015 survey indicated that Swedish majority members display considerably higher acceptance of Muslims than Italian majority members.

Consistent with this, 25% of Italian Muslims mentioned their religious belief as the main reason for encountering discrimination; this percentage was lower in Sweden (16%; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017). Previous experiments carried out in Italy have revealed that Italian majority members favour immigrants who desire both contact with members of the majority and host culture adoption, irrespective of their ethnic background (Matera, Stefanile, & Brown, 2012). However, the religion of immigrants was not made salient in these studies. When the minority's religion is made salient, it may activate a series of beliefs about what desire for culture maintenance entails, with consequences for majority members' perception of conflict between cultures and security threat (Spruyt & van der Noll, 2017). With respect to Muslims, culture maintenance might be associated with various practices or symbols, such as women's headscarves or men's turbans, the building of mosques, the observance of specific religious festivals, or the status and rights of women. Such practices may be viewed less favourably within some Western societies (Fernandez, 2009; Saroglou, Lamkaddem, Pachterbeke, & Buxant, 2009; Statham, 2015; Unkelbach, Schneider, Gode, & Senft, 2010; Van der Noll, 2010). Islamic religious symbols might be disliked, not only by highly religious (Christian) majority members, but also by individuals who endorse a secular and laic ideology (Saroglou et al., 2009; Van der Noll, 2014). Previous research suggests that Muslim immigrants are sometimes perceived as posing a threat to European majority members' values and identities (McLaren & Johnson, 2007; Van der Noll, Saroglou, Latour, & Doleza, 2018). Thus, culture maintenance, when chosen by Muslim immigrants, could be perceived as being incompatible with the culture and values of majority members, which may give rise to hostile intergroup relations (Ginges & Cairns, 2000; Verkuyten & Yogeeswaran, 2017).

Based on previous evidence, we predicted that Italian majority members will be more

favourable toward immigrants who are perceived to desire rather than reject intergroup contact (**H1**). Specifically, we expect majority members to report more positive attitudes, stereotypes and metastereotypes, lower perception of threat, and higher levels of trust, empathy, and contact intentions towards immigrants who desire contact. Given that majority members may perceive Muslim culture as less compatible with their own culture than Christian culture, we predict that majority members will be less favourable towards Muslim immigrants who are perceived to desire culture maintenance, but indifferent towards Christian immigrants' desire for culture maintenance (**H2**). Culture maintenance among Muslim minorities may activate less positive attitudes and stereotypes, and higher perceptions of threat; it might generate feelings of suspicion and greater difficulties in taking the perspective of the other, which may reduce majority members' trust and empathy. Culture relinquishment among Muslim minorities, on the other hand, could be interpreted by majority members as an attempt by the minority to become similar to them, which may increase positive metastereotypes and contact intentions.

Method

Participants

Two hundred and forty-seven Italian majority members volunteered to take part in the study (mean age = 41.5, *SD* = 16.9, 57.5% women, 78.5% reported they were Christian, 21.5% reported they were atheist).

A power analysis using the G*Power computer program (Erdfelder, Faul, & Buchner, 1996) indicated that a minimum sample of 228 would be needed to detect small to medium effects (Cohen's $f = .2$; based on results by Matera et al., 2011, 2012, 2015; Olsson et al.,

2019) with 90% power using a multivariate ANOVA (8 groups, 10 variables) with alpha at .05

Design

Participants were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions, resulting in a 2 (contact, low versus high) x 2 (culture maintenance, low versus high) x 2 (religion, Christian versus Muslim) between-participants design. This built upon procedures previously used by Olsson et al., 2019.

Procedure and measures

Data was collected in 2017. Participants were approached on university campus, in libraries, leisure centres and reading rooms, or online, and asked to if they were willing to complete a 15-20 min long questionnaire on social attitudes (no incentive was provided). Participants were asked to confirm that they were Italian and over 18 years of age. Participants read one of eight fictitious but seemingly real articles (adapted from Olsson et al., 2019), formed by combining levels of desire for contact (High vs Low) and desire for culture maintenance (High vs Low) as expressed by Muslim or Christian Arabs (see Appendix). The article started with a brief summary in which the respondents were informed about some research findings obtained by a credible source concerning the lifestyle of Arab immigrants in Italy (e.g., “Muslim Arabs in Italy want to have contact with Italian people; they also desire to maintain their original culture”). Subsequently, the transcript of an interview conducted with two Arab immigrants (one male and one female) in Italy was presented, in which their ideas concerning both contact with Italians and culture maintenance were clearly expressed (e.g., “As for cultural customs, in my family we celebrate Eid al-Adha - which is a Muslim celebration - and keep some other Iraqi traditions too”). Participants completed the paper-and-pencil questionnaire in the presence of the researcher who carefully debriefed them afterwards. The questionnaire included the following measures.

Manipulation checks

Perceived contact manipulation check. The first manipulation check assessed the underlying dimensions of perceived outgroup acculturation preferences: “I believe that the persons presented in the vignette want to have contacts with Italians” (desire for contact), and “I believe that the persons presented in the vignette want to maintain their heritage culture” (desire for culture maintenance). The second manipulation check assessed the perceived similarity between the participants own group and the other group: “I believe that the persons in the vignette hold similar beliefs to the majority of Italians” (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*).

Dependent variables

Intergroup attitudes. In line with previous research (Matera et al., 2011, 2012, 2015; Matera, Dalla Verde, & Meringolo, 2015; Matera, Imai, & Pinzi, 2018), attitudes were assessed in terms of both intergroup evaluations and emotions. Participants were asked to indicate their evaluative reactions towards immigrants similar to the ones in the article. These evaluations were assessed with eight semantic differentials (i.e., nice–awful, pleasant–unpleasant, enjoyable–unenjoyable, useful–useless, positive–negative, beneficial–harmful, desirable–undesirable, wise–foolish, and appreciable–unappreciable; 7-point scale; $\alpha = .96$). To assess intergroup emotions, participants were asked to report to what degree eight positive emotionally laden terms (e.g., sympathy) represented their feelings towards people similar to the ones in the article. Responses were measured on a scale which ran from 1 to 7 (*not at all* to *very much*; $\alpha = .95$). An overall index of intergroup attitudes was created by averaging the scores on the two scales. Higher scores reflect more positive intergroup attitudes.

Perceptions of symbolic threat. Symbolic threat was measured with three items (Matera et al., 2011). Sample item: “Values of people similar to those in the article are *too*

different from the ones of Italians” (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*; $\alpha = .90$).

Stereotypes. Participants were asked to what extent they associated nine traits (e.g., honest, friendly, intelligent; Brambilla, Hewstone, & Colucci, 2013) with people similar to those described in the article (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*; $\alpha = .96$).

Metastereotypes. Participants were told that an Arab immigrant called Hassan, who had only been in Italy for a short time, had read the same article (Matera et al., 2011, 2015). Participants were asked to estimate how Hassan would view Italian people after reading the article (on four semantic differentials: intolerant–tolerant, arrogant–kind, closed–open mind, and insensitive–sensitive; 7-point scale). Higher scores reflect more positive metastereotypes ($\alpha = .89$).

Trust. Seven items (adapted from Capozza, Falvo, Trifiletti, & Pagani, 2014; Pagotto, Visitin, De Iorio, & Voci, 2012) assessed trust towards immigrants. Sample item: “I do not trust people like the ones in the vignette” (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*; $\alpha = .83$).

Empathy. Four items adapted from Capozza, Trifiletti, Vezzali and Favara (2013) assessed empathy towards immigrants (e.g., “When you think about people like the ones presented in the vignette, to what extent do you feel in harmony with them?”). Responses were measured on a scale which ran from 1 to 5 (*not at all* to *very much*; $\alpha = .91$).

Contact intentions. Four items assessed whether participants were interested (= 1) or not (= 0) in participating in an event that would involve interacting with Arab immigrants (e.g., “Would you like to participate in a seminar on interculturality in which some Arab immigrants will share their life story?”). Total scores were calculated by adding the assigned codes across the four items (scores could range from 0-4; $\alpha = .73$).

Data analyses

Three 2 x 2 x 2 analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed to test if the vignettes

successfully manipulated immigrants' desire for contact, culture maintenance, and religion. A 2 x 2 x 2 multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was subsequently performed to examine mean differences in intergroup attitudes, symbolic threat, stereotypes, metastereotypes, trust, empathy, and contact intentions (DVs) as a function of immigrants' desire for contact, culture maintenance, and religion (IVs).

Results

Manipulation checks

Contact was successfully manipulated: a main effect of desire for contact was found on perceived contact ($F_{(1, 239)} = 616.30, p < .001, \eta^2 = .72; M_{low_contact} = 1.98, M_{high_contact} = 6.30$). Although there was also a significant religion x culture maintenance interaction effect on perceived contact ($F_{(1, 239)} = 6.08, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$), the size of this effect was small compared to that for desire for contact. Muslim immigrants were perceived to have more contacts with Italians when they were perceived to refuse ($M = 4.37$) rather than maintain their heritage culture ($M = 3.86$), while no difference emerged with regard to Christian immigrants ($M_{low_maintenance} = 3.98, M_{high_maintenance} = 4.33$).

Culture maintenance was also successfully manipulated: a main effect of desire for culture maintenance was found on perceived culture maintenance ($F_{(1,239)} = 227.51, p < .001, \eta^2 = .49, M_{low_maintenance} = 2.59, M_{high_maintenance} = 5.97$). As predicted, participants reported higher levels of religious similarity with Christian ($M = 4.03$) than Muslim ($M = 3.36$) immigrants, $F_{(1, 239)} = 7.68, p = .006, \eta^2 = .03$. There was, however, a significant main effect of maintenance on perceived religious similarity: immigrants low in culture maintenance were perceived as more religiously similar ($M = 4.18$) than immigrants high in culture maintenance ($M = 3.21$), $F_{(1, 239)} = 15.81, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$. There was also a significant religion x culture maintenance interaction on perceived religious similarity, $F_{(1, 239)} = 5.38, p = .021, \eta^2 = .02$.

Simple effect analyses revealed that in the high culture maintenance condition, Christian immigrants were perceived as more similar ($M = 3.83$) than Muslim immigrants ($M = 2.59$) with respect to religion, while this difference was not significant in the low culture maintenance condition ($M_{Christian} = 4.23$, $M_{Muslim} = 4.13$). Moreover, Muslim immigrants were perceived as more religiously similar when they were perceived as abandoning rather than maintaining their culture.

Dependent variables

The intercorrelations between the DVs are displayed in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 here

A MANOVA was run to examine associations between the DVs and IVs. It showed a significant multivariate effect for contact (Wilks $\lambda = .50$, $F_{(7, 233)} = 32.73$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .50$), culture maintenance (Wilks $\lambda = .94$, $F_{(7, 233)} = 2.15$, $p = .040$, $\eta^2 = .06$), and religion x culture maintenance (Wilks $\lambda = .94$, $F_{(7, 233)} = 2.00$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$). However, the interaction between contact x religion (Wilks $\lambda = .97$, $F_{(7, 233)} = 1.02$, $p = .42$), contact x maintenance (Wilks $\lambda = .98$, $F_{(7, 233)} = .80$, $p = .59$), and contact x religion x maintenance (Wilks $\lambda = .99$, $F_{(7, 233)} = .42$, $p = .89$) was not significant.

Immigrants' desire for contact. Univariate analyses of variance indicated that there were significant effects of immigrants' perceived desire for contact on majority members' responses related to intergroup attitudes ($F_{(1, 239)} = 147.04$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .38$), symbolic threat ($F_{(1, 239)} = 45.53$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$), stereotypes ($F_{(1, 239)} = 55.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .19$), metastereotypes ($F_{(1, 239)} = 104.57$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .30$), trust ($F_{(1, 239)} = 39.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .14$), and empathy ($F_{(1, 239)} = 35.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .13$). When immigrants were perceived as desiring rather than rejecting intergroup contact, majority members reported less symbolic threat ($M_{low_contact} = 4.44$, $M_{high_contact} = 3.07$), more trust ($M_{low_contact} = 2.91$, $M_{high_contact} =$

3.79), empathy ($M_{low_contact} = 2.41$, $M_{high_contact} = 3.09$), positive attitudes ($M_{low_contact} = 3.27$, $M_{high_contact} = 4.91$), positive stereotypes ($M_{low_contact} = 3.68$, $M_{high_contact} = 4.74$), and positive metastereotypes ($M_{low_contact} = 3.46$, $M_{high_contact} = 5.19$). Immigrants' desire for contact did not significantly predict majority members contact intentions ($F_{(1, 239)} = .40$, $p = .53$).

Immigrants' desire for culture maintenance. Univariate analyses for the effect of immigrants' perceived desire for culture maintenance significantly predicted majority members' responses related to symbolic threat ($F_{(1, 239)} = 7.44$, $p = .007$, $\eta^2 = .03$) and empathy ($F_{(1, 239)} = 5.98$, $p = .015$, $\eta^2 = .02$). When immigrants were perceived to abandon rather than maintain their heritage culture, majority members reported higher levels of empathy ($M_{low_maintenance} = 2.89$, $M_{high_maintenance} = 2.61$) and lower levels of threat ($M_{low_maintenance} = 3.48$, $M_{high_maintenance} = 4.03$). Immigrants' desire for culture maintenance did not significantly predict majority members' attitudes ($F_{(1, 239)} = 2.17$, $p = .14$), stereotypes ($F_{(1, 239)} = 2.47$, $p = .12$), metastereotypes ($F_{(1, 239)} = .41$, $p = .52$), trust ($F_{(1, 239)} = .91$, $p = .34$), and contact intentions ($F_{(1, 239)} = .51$, $p = .47$).

Immigrants' religion x desire for culture maintenance. Univariate analyses for the interaction effect of immigrants' religion x perceived desire for culture maintenance significantly predicted stereotypes ($F_{(1, 239)} = 5.02$, $p = .026$, $\eta^2 = .02$) and contact intentions ($F_{(1, 239)} = 4.41$, $p = .037$, $\eta^2 = .02$). The interaction between immigrants religion and perceived desire for culture maintenance was not significantly associated with majority members attitudes ($F_{(1, 239)} = 1.10$, $p = .29$), perceptions of symbolic threat ($F_{(1, 239)} = .52$, $p = .47$), metastereotypes ($F_{(1, 239)} = 2.41$, $p = .12$), trust ($F_{(1, 239)} = .22$, $p = .64$), and empathy ($F_{(1, 239)} = 2.24$, $p = .14$).

Insert Figure 1 here

Simple main effects analysis (Figure 1) showed that majority members reported more

positive stereotypes when Muslim immigrants were shown to reject their heritage culture ($M = 4.57$) than when Christian immigrants were shown to reject their heritage culture ($M = 4.07$). In contrast, the effects of Muslim ($M = 4.03$) and Christian ($M = 4.17$) immigrants' desire for culture maintenance on majority members' stereotypes were negligible.

Insert Figure 2 here

Simple main effects analysis also showed that majority members reported greater contact intentions when Muslim immigrants were perceived to abandon ($M = 1.61$) rather than maintain their culture of origin ($M = 1.47$). No significant differences with respect to majority members' contact intentions were observed for Christian immigrants' rejection ($M = 1.49$) or maintenance of their heritage culture ($M = 1.55$).

Discussion

The present research compared Italian majority members' reactions towards Muslim and Christian Arab immigrants' preference for contact and culture maintenance. The results showed that immigrants who were perceived to desire contact with members of the receiving society were viewed more favourably by members of the majority (**H1**, see also Celeste et al., 2014; Kosic et al., 2005; Matera et al., 2011; Olsson et al., 2019; Van Oudenhoven et al., 1998; Zagefka & Brown, 2002). In line with previous research, the effect size of immigrants' perceived desire for intergroup contact was much higher than the one of perceived desire for culture maintenance (Matera et al., 2011; Celeste et al., 2014; Olsson et al., 2019). That being said, immigrants' perceived desire for culture maintenance also influenced majority perceptions: immigrants elicited lower perception of threat and higher empathy when they were perceived to abandon rather than maintain their heritage culture. Thus, contrary to previous research conducted in Italy (Matera et al., 2011, 2012, 2015), the present findings suggest that assimilation is the acculturation strategy that Italians prefer immigrants to adopt.

The significant association that emerged between culture maintenance and symbolic threat, which was not observed in previous studies in Italy, could be due to the political climate surrounding immigration, that has changed over the last few years, with a growing closure of borders to immigrants (Villa, 2018).

As expected, culture relinquishment among Muslim Arab immigrants generated more favourable reactions than culture relinquishment among Christian Arab immigrants (**H2**), which suggests that assimilation is especially appreciated for Muslim immigrants. We know from the acculturation literature that members of the receiving society might endorse specific acculturation preferences with respect to different life domains (Arends-Toth & Van de Vijver, 2003). The present results suggest that majority members' attitudes towards immigrants might change once the minority's religion is made salient, especially in sociocultural contexts characterized by considerable levels of prejudice and discrimination towards Muslim immigrants, as is the case in Italy. As a matter of fact, it seems that the minority's religion activates beliefs about what culture maintenance entails. Practices or symbols which are considered typical of Muslim culture might be not valued in host-societies founded on Christian values (Saroglou et al., 2009; Statham, 2015; Unkelbach et al., 2010; Van der Noll, 2010). Indeed, Muslim immigrants who wanted to maintain their culture were associated with less positive stereotypic beliefs. Notably, behavioural intentions, which have been theorised as the strongest predictor of actual behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), were lowest for Muslims who wanted to maintain their heritage culture. This suggests that the presence of Muslims within the receiving society in Italy might be seen as a source of potential conflict between ethnic groups, rather than a means to facilitate consensual relations.

Such an attitude of the majority members could make immigrants feel pressured to abandon their heritage culture, which could have deleterious outcomes on their psychological

well-being and intercultural adjustment. In fact, much research has shown that a strong, secure ethnic identity makes a positive contribution to psychological well-being among members of acculturating groups (Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006; Liebkind, Mähönen, Varjonen, & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2016; Nguyen & Benet-Martin, 2013). Integration, which implies both intergroup contact and culture maintenance, seems to be the most adaptive acculturation strategy and the most conducive to immigrants' well-being (Berry, 2005).

Limitations and future directions

Some limitations should be acknowledged. First, the present sample may not have been representative of Italians since it was a convenience sample. It is possible that different intergroup relations would emerge in other parts of Italy. Future studies should thus replicate this study with a national representative sample. Second, the present findings may not generalise to all Muslim minorities. The heritage culture of Arab Muslims may be seen as less compatible with Italian culture than for example the heritage culture of Albanian Muslims. This might occur because Muslim Arab immigrants might be associated with traits that are not associated with immigrants from other cultures. Indeed, it is well-established that people from different countries are the object of specific stereotypes (e.g., Poppe & Linssen, 1999; Matera, Giannini, Blanco, & Smith, 2005). Future studies should thus extend this research by comparing majority acculturation expectations of Muslim minorities from different national contexts. Third, we should notice that although religious similarity was successfully manipulated, religion and culture maintenance were somewhat confounded: immigrants who wanted to maintain their heritage culture were also perceived to be less religiously similar. It is therefore not easy to perfectly disentangle the effects of the two variables, which can be conceptually interrelated, especially if religion is understood to be part of cultural maintenance, and the religion of the outgroup is different from that of the ingroup.

These findings suggest that perceived support for intergroup contact amongst immigrants may reduce majority prejudice towards them. Interventions that emphasise minorities desire for intergroup contact may thus facilitate consensual intergroup relations with the majority group. In addition, given that cultural maintenance positively contributes to psychological well-being among immigrants (Berry et al., 2006; Liebkind et al., 2016; Nguyen & Benet-Martin, 2013), interventions should aim to promote majority support for culture maintenance, especially for Muslim minorities. Interventions may benefit from showing that culture adoption and culture maintenance are not the opposite poles of a continuum, but are orthogonal dimensions, and thereby reduce perceptions of threat. Given that the ability to take the perspective of others could be important to foster tolerance, individuals could be educated to improve such an ability even when Muslim immigrants are perceived to maintain their cultural background. Media could potentially play a role in showcasing Muslim immigrants who successfully maintain their culture whilst simultaneously having contact with majority members, in order to increase positive stereotypes.

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Appendix

An example vignette: high contact, high culture maintenance

ANALISI “messa in onda” il 10 dicembre 2016

GLI ARABI IN ITALIA E LE LORO PREFERENZE: UN EQUILIBRIO TRA DUE CULTURE

RIASSUNTO

Di seguito vengono brevemente presentati i risultati di uno studio recente sugli immigrati arabi di religione cristiana residenti in Italia e sul loro interesse o meno ad adattarsi ad uno stile di vita italiano e a conservare la propria cultura di origine. Le ricerche attuali, basate su studi recenti condotti dalla Commissione Immigrazione, dimostrano che gli immigrati arabi di religione cristiana residenti in Italia desiderano mantenere la loro cultura di appartenenza. Ulteriori risultati indicano che molti arabi di religione cristiana desiderano intrecciare relazioni con persone italiane. Sulla scia di quanto già sostenuto dai ricercatori dell'Università di Padova in materia di immigrazione, quella precedentemente esposta coincide con l'opinione della maggioranza degli arabi di religione cristiana residenti in Italia. Resta però ancora poco chiara la ragione per cui queste persone decidano di vivere così la loro vita. Radio2 ha intervistato due arabi di religione cristiana residenti in Italia nel tentativo di comprendere le ragioni di questa scelta.

TRASCRIZIONE

Intervistatore: Dunque, Fatima e Omar, entrambi siete immigrati arabi di religione cristiana originari del Marocco e vivete in un paese straniero con una cultura differente dalla vostra. Vorremmo capire cosa significa per voi vivere in Italia. Innanzitutto, cosa pensate della vostra cultura di origine?

Omar: Da un punto di vista culturale, nella mia famiglia si festeggia l'anniversario della rivoluzione del re e del popolo (una ricorrenza marocchina) e abbiamo mantenuto anche altre tradizioni arabe. Io ascolto musica araba e a volte guardo anche programmi tv arabi.

Intervistatore: Quindi desideri mantenere le tue tradizioni e la tua cultura. Come vedi il fatto di avere amici italiani? Che tipo di persone frequenti?

Omar: Ho stretto amicizia con molte persone italiane. Trascorro molto tempo con loro. Mi piace molto passare il tempo giocando a calcio con alcuni amici italiani.

Intervistatore: Sei della stessa opinione Fatima? Cosa pensi a proposito di avere amicizie appartenenti a culture diverse dalla tua?

Fatima: Sono d'accordo. Anche io ho molti amici italiani. Frequento un corso di teatro con un insegnante italiana, tutti i miei compagni di teatro sono italiani, mi diverto e passo molto tempo con loro.

Intervistatore: Quindi anche tu vuoi avere contatti con persone italiane. E cosa pensi della tua cultura?

Fatima: Mi piace mantenere vive le tradizioni e la cultura del mio paese; come ad esempio una fortissima unità familiare. La mia è una famiglia molto numerosa e non perdiamo occasione per trascorrere le vacanze, festeggiare occasioni come matrimoni o altre ricorrenze arabe insieme.

Intervistatore: Quindi anche tu desideri mantenere costumi e tradizioni del tuo paese di origine.

Fatima: Sì, infatti.

Radio2 ringrazia Omar e Fatima per la loro collaborazione nella realizzazione di questa intervista.