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Highlights

- The relationship between intergroup contact experiences and social distancing of migrant people from majority group
- The poisoning effect of negative on the beneficial effect of positive contact of migrant people
- The stronger mediating role of anxiety compared to symbolic threat and stereotype threat on intergroup contact effects of migrant people
- Positive and negative intergroup contact effects were consistent across two different countries, Italy and Turkey

The Role of Positive and Negative Contact of Migrants with Native People in Affecting their Future Interactions. Evidence from Italy and Turkey

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Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated and/or analyzed in these current studies were derived from the project "Peace Dialogue Campus Network: Fostering Positive Attitudes between Migrants and Youth in Hosting Societies- PEACEMAKERS- 2017-1-TR01-KA203-046676 awarded to the third and last authors.
Data are not publicly accessible. They can be made available, upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

The Role of Positive and Negative Contact of Migrants with Native People in Affecting their Future Interactions. Evidence from Italy and Turkey

Abstract

This research investigates the relationship between different valence contact of migrants with native people and their motivation to avoid further interactions with the majority group, as a preventing factor of adaptation by either side. Specifically, the joint and differential effects of positive and negative contact of migrants with natives on outgroup avoidance were addressed by examining also the mediating role of affective variables such as stereotype threat, symbolic threat and anxiety. Hypotheses were tested on two samples of African immigrants in Italy and Syrian immigrants in Turkey. Positive contact was not associated with outgroup avoidance and anxiety among African respondents who reported higher negative contact with natives. This evidence was not found among Syrian immigrants. In both samples, however, the moderating role of negative contact was found on stereotype threat. Across the two samples, anxiety was the strongest mediator of the relationship between negative contact of migrants on their avoidance of the majority group. Overall, the evidence we gathered furthers knowledge of the impact of negative intergroup contact on preventing migrant social integration.

Word count: 173

Key words: intergroup contact, immigration, social avoidance, intergroup threat, anxiety

Introduction

Increasingly over the last decades, large groups of immigrants and asylum seekers have arrived in and/or transited across many Mediterranean countries (e.g., Italy, Greece, Spain, Turkey). In this vein, in these new multicultural societies, the relationship between locals and immigrants has become an urgent issue for the promotion of social integration (Pew Research Center, 2019). Research has shown that face-to-face contact between majority and ethnic minority group members is one of the most effective strategies to facilitate positive intergroup relationships (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). However, the majority of evidence collected up to now focused on the effects of positive intergroup encounters from the perspective of native people or the majority group (Pettigrew & Hewstone, 2017). Only recently has research examined the impact of negative compared to positive interactions between groups (Graf et al., 2014; Hayward et al., 2017). Intergroup encounters are not always positive, but might be marked by threat and hostility even for just one group, and can in fact lead to increased intergroup discrimination (Barlow et al., 2012). Given that so far scholars have mainly studied the beneficial effects of positive contact for the majority group, research to tackle the outcomes of negative contact and its interaction with positive contact is still needed (e.g., McKeown & Dixon, 2017) especially from the perspective of minority groups. Accordingly, it is urgent that we understand the role of intergroup contact experiences of newly arrived migrants on avoidance of contact with natives as a potential indicator of segregation that prevents minority and majority members from building inclusive societies (e.g., Paolini et al., 2018).

This present research aimed to increase knowledge on intergroup contact by focusing on when and how experiences of immigrants with natives lead the former to distance themselves from the majority group. Specifically, first we examined the role of positive and negative intergroup contact and their strength in affecting different emotions and attitudes

(i.e., anxiety, stereotype threat and symbolic threat, outgroup avoidance) towards the majority group. Second, we investigated the interaction between positive and negative contact to assess their influence on the same factors. Third, we addressed the mediating role of emotions and attitudes in the relationship between contact and outgroup avoidance to establish the possible stronger mediating role of one of these factors over the others. To achieve these aims, we carried out a comparative research in Italy and in Turkey as countries that have recently been and still are destinations of large migrant populations. In so doing, we also extended the literature on intergroup contact by examining nations where greater ethnic diversity is relatively recent and in which increased anti-immigration feelings are widespread (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2017). This focus sheds light on the complexity of intergroup experiences in the process of immigrants' social adaptation and their coexistence with natives in the host contexts.

Intergroup Contact Theory

Based on Allport's work on intergroup contact (1954), decades of research have shown the benefits of repeated positive interactions between groups in order to curb prejudice, reduce social conflict, improve intergroup attitudes and promote social inclusivity (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Lemmer & Wagner, 2015). However, in outlining the optimal conditions of intergroup contact, Allport (1954) underlined the distinct and crucial role of the quantity (i.e., the frequency) and the quality (i.e., the valence) of intergroup contact experiences. In this regard, in establishing that regular contact between majority and minority members contributes to a more harmonious society (Martinovic, 2013; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2011), scholars tended to focus on the effects of positive intergroup contact (Dixon et al., 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Yet, daily encounters among groups are characterised by not only positive but also negative experiences. Positive contact experiences range from friendly smiles in local shops to successful cross-group cooperation in different social

contexts. In contrast, negative contact refers to unpleasant experiences with outgroup members, ranging from verbal or non-verbal misunderstandings to aggressive confrontations (see Stephan et al., 2002).

Recent studies have paid more attention to the effects of negative contact with outgroup members and shown that it increases intergroup prejudice and undermines attitudes towards outgroup members by making group boundaries more salient (Paolini et al., 2010). In this vein, the detrimental effects of negative contact on intergroup attitudes can be even stronger than the beneficial effects of positive contact in shaping intergroup attitudes (Barlow et al., 2012). Nevertheless, positive intergroup experiences tend to be more common than negative ones (e.g., Graf et al., 2014; Hayward et al., 2017), and under some circumstances, positive contact can have a greater effect on intergroup prejudice than negative contact (Barlow et al., 2019; Paolini et al., 2014). Some recent research using data from the 2014–European Social Survey (ESS) including 21 countries highlights the higher frequency of positive compared to negative superficial contact (i.e., not with intimate friends or well-known people). Interestingly, it also shows that the effects of even superficial intergroup contact are influenced by individuals' subjective positive or negative evaluation of such experiences (Thomsen & Rafiqi, 2018): unpleasant intergroup contacts with the majority group are able to obstruct positive outcomes deriving from superficial contact with ethnic minorities, whereas the absence of unpleasant interactions is essential to producing positive outcomes. These findings clearly show that it is of critical importance to examine both positive and negative contact experiences between groups to disentangle when and how these episodes can produce intergroup benefits.

Effects of Positive and Negative Intergroup Contact of Minority Groups

Intergroup contact literature has mainly focused on the perspective of the majority group, although it is important to understand the perspectives of both majority and minority

groups to understand the usefulness of this tool for an inclusive society. In regard to studies on positive contact, although its effects on intergroup relationships are beneficial for both majority and minority group members, outgroup discrimination reduction is weaker for minority rather than for majority groups (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). This difference might be due to a "psychological asymmetry" between the two groups or their different concerns during intergroup interactions. Majority group members are mainly concerned about avoiding discriminative intergroup attitudes, whereas minority group members are mainly concerned about being discriminated against (Crocker et al., 1998).

Studies that have examined the impact of negative contact from minority group perspectives have shown that it is experienced relatively frequently in the form of exposure to prejudice (Swim et al., 2003) and that this can lead minority group members to feel hostile and anxious about future intergroup interactions (Tropp, 2003). Similarly, Stephan et al. (2002) found more negative contact experiences with Whites among African Americans than vice versa. Moreover, negative contact significantly predicts detrimental attitudes toward majority group members (Stephan et al., 2002). For example, Tropp (2007) found that African Americans reported greater perceived discrimination against their group than toward White Americans. In turn the greater amount of perceived discrimination restrained positive contact effects toward the White majority. Using both cross-sectional and experimental designs, another study carried out by Hayward and colleagues (2017) analysed simultaneously positive and negative direct contact of minority with majority group members. Across samples of African and Hispanic Americans, they found evidence that negative direct contact with White Americans predicted an increase in prejudice that was stronger than the decrease in negative attitudes towards White Americans predicted by positive contact.

However, evidence on the part of minority groups is not only adverse. Indeed, interactions between native and immigrant people in the European context showed promising outcomes. Examining the effects of cross-group friendships among ethnic minorities in Denmark (Rafiqi & Thomsen, 2021), scholars showed that perceived group discrimination of minorities enhanced the strength of cross-group friendship in predicting reduction of prejudice toward majority members. Thus, group (compared to personal) discrimination of minorities has the ability to stimulate perceived typicality of the majority group and plays a crucial role in generalizing the beneficial effects of positive intergroup contact to all outgroup members. This is a specific high-quality type of contact, such as cross-group friendship, that has the ability to buffer the destructive influence of intergroup discrimination. Moreover, Árnadóttir and colleagues (2018) showed that for Polish immigrants living in Iceland negative rather than positive contact had no stronger effect on a range of different variables, such as outgroup orientation, outgroup trust and perceived cultural differences. They concluded that no stronger impact of negative compared to positive contact in the minority group was observed, regardless of whether contact was direct or extended. For Polish immigrants who had a greater amount of positive intergroup contact, negative contact more strongly predicted perceived cultural differences (a subtle form of prejudice) compared to those reporting fewer positive interactions (the so-called exacerbation effect). Though, those reporting more negative contact showed a weaker relationship between positive contact and fewer perceived cultural differences. In this vein, effects of positive contact seemed to be ‘cancelled out’ by the presence of negative contact (poisoning effect). Overall, these studies relied on a cross-sectional dataset in specific countries. Thus, more research is needed to understand the roles of positive and negative contact in affecting social adaptation and interactions with local populations for different ethnic minorities living in the host country.

Emotional Experiences and Intergroup Contact

Research on contact theory has established intergroup anxiety as one of the key affective factors that may explain the relationship between intergroup contact and reduced outgroup prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Intergroup anxiety is the negative emotional reaction that occurs at the prospect of having to engage in an intergroup encounter. It is most likely to arise where there has been minimal previous contact, or where previous contact has induced negative feelings. In such cases, intergroup anxiety can result from negative expectations of discrimination during cross-group interactions, or fear that the respondents may behave in an offensive manner that would cause negative psychological, behavioural, and/or evaluative consequences for the self or the group (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). Nevertheless, a strong base of empirical evidence has shown that positive intergroup contact is associated with a reduction of intergroup anxiety that, in turn, is associated with increased positivity towards outgroups (Paolini et al., 2004; Tausch et al., 2009; Turner et al., 2008). In contrast, the available literature points out that negative contact, albeit limited, is also associated with feelings of intergroup anxiety resulting in outgroup avoidance and negative outgroup evaluations (Aberson, 2015; Hayward et al., 2017; Pettigrew et al., 2010; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008).

Furthermore, Aberson (2015) indicated the stronger role of another affective process, i.e. perceived threat, as a mediator of negative contact with the majority group on prejudice towards minority groups. Indeed, one of the propositions of intergroup contact theory is that experiences such as negative contact with outgroup members make people feel threatened. Feelings of threat, in turn, promote prejudice and other negative reactions toward the outgroup (Stephan et al., 2009). In this regard, in a large-scale study examining African Americans' and Whites' attitudes toward each other, intergroup threat mediated the relationship between negative contact and feelings toward the outgroup (Stephan et al., 2002).

Together with anxiety and perceived threat, another less studied factor can help explain the relationship between intergroup contact and social avoidance from the perspective of minority and disadvantaged groups: stereotype threat. In this vein, Plant and Devine (2003) found that the more negative expectations Whites had towards interacting with African Americans, the more they reported avoiding inter-racial encounters. Similarly, Shelton and Richeson (2005) stated that failure to initiate intergroup contact is closely linked to the fear of being stereotyped by the outgroup member. Furthermore, Crisp and Abrams (2008) suggested an integrated contact model based on previous consistent evidence whereby they proposed that intergroup contact effects are explained by reduced stereotype threat of minority groups. Nevertheless, the majority of these studies focused on the mediating role of one of these processes and mainly considered only positive intergroup contact. Therefore, more research is needed to understand which emotional experience is stronger in explaining the associations between different valence contacts and future behavioural intentions.

Intergroup Contact and Outgroup Avoidance: The Minority Perspective

Recent research shows that people will often avoid opportunities to encounter and usually lack motivation to seek intergroup contact or actively choose contact with novel outgroup members in the first place (Paolini et al., 2018). Ethnic minority groups may avoid or escape intergroup interactions when they believe their social identity will be threatened. Research has shown that Latino and Asian American individuals felt less motivated towards possible interactions with outgroup members when they overheard a White American, with whom they were to have interaction, make prejudiced comments (Tropp, 2003). To further support this evidence, Tropp and Bianchi (2006) research also showed that minority group members expressed interest in having intergroup contact only when they believed that diversity was valued by the majority group.

More recently, Hayward et al. (2017) analysed the relation between direct intergroup contact of African and Hispanic Americans and outgroup avoidance, and showed that negative contact had a stronger effect than positive. They also highlighted that three emotions, empathy, anger and anxiety, mediate the relationship between positive and negative contact and outgroup avoidance. Even so, very few studies have considered the role of simultaneous positive and negative contact on avoidance of majority members, especially in the European context. Given that contact between native members and immigrants is often an important driver of intergroup attitudes (Meleady et al., 2017; Pettigrew et al., 2007; Voci & Hewstone, 2003), we investigated how newly arrived migrant people's positive and negative contact might affect their motivation to engage in further interactions with natives. We also examined the possible underlying factors involved in this outcome in two different European countries.

Overview of the Present Study

The present research examined the role and interaction of positive and negative contact of immigrants with native people in Italy and Turkey, which are two different and yet similar countries in terms of the migratory phenomenon. Even if these two countries are characterized by different economic and political conditions, they are both frontline areas in the European migration crisis. These countries have seen increasing immigration in the last few decades from nearby countries (Sub-Saharan African countries with regard to Italy and Syria with regard to Turkey, respectively), where poverty and heinous war-conditions have grown steadily. These countries are also unprepared to handle the migration phenomenon with increased worries and hostility of the population towards the newcomers (Erişen, 2018; Frontex, 2020). Moreover, immigrant people who arrive in these countries do not share the same culture and traditions of the host population. They are all escaping from war and economic difficulties, thus being guided by very similar reasons to migrate (Ambrosini et al.,

2013; Akcapar & Simsek, 2018). Yet, they often face a high risk of alienation, discrimination, social exclusion in the host society. In the light of the similarities in the dynamics between immigrants and host population in these two countries, we did not expect differences in the relationships between intergroup contact of immigrants, their emotions and attitudes towards native people in Italy and Turkey.

In this vein, across the two countries, we tested the following assumptions. First, we expected that positive contact of immigrants with native people would reduce anxiety, perceived threat and outgroup avoidance, whereas negative contact would increase all these outcomes. Based on previous evidence on positive-negative contact asymmetry (Barlow et al., 2012), we expected that negative rather than positive contact of immigrant people would be a stronger predictor of these outcomes. Second, we explored the interaction pattern of positive and negative contact of immigrants with natives in influencing avoidance of future interactions. Building upon preliminary findings of Polish immigrants in Iceland (Árnadóttir et al., 2017), it might be expected that negative contact moderates the effect of positive contact, such that the beneficial effects of positive contact on outgroup orientation is reduced when negative contact is high (poisoning hypothesis). Third, given that past research has focused separately on the mediating role of anxiety, and perceived threat on intergroup contact effects (Aberson, 2015; Hayward et al., 2017), the research aimed to examine the role of these affective factors as mediators of the relationship between positive and negative contact with avoidance of native people. We expected that anxiety and threats from immigrant people (i.e., stereotype threat and symbolic threat) would mediate the relationship between not just positive but also negative contact and social avoidance.

Method

Participants and procedure

A total of 162 African migrants living in the North-centre of Italy and 114 Syrian forced migrants living in Turkey participated in this study. Twenty-four respondents were removed from the African sample since they were not first-generation migrants and three respondents were removed from the Syrian sample, as they did not fully complete the form. Therefore, the final sample comprised 138 African adult migrants (M_{age}= 30.91 years, *SD*= 8.13 and 34.2% women) and 111 Syrian adult migrants (M_{age}= 25.62 years, *SD*= 6.35, and 32.4% women).

African respondents were recruited during their attendance to recreational associations or centres dedicated to minority cultures and tradition' activities (e.g., dance classes, worship of religion) in main cities of the North-centre of Italy (Bologna and Cesena) and of Turkey (Istanbul and Gaziantep). Syrian respondents were recruited through civil society actors working with migrant and refugee populations and/or through a gatekeeper within the same ethnic community. Respondents among the population of Syrians were under temporary protection (SuTP) at the time of the research.

All respondents completed an online survey on the platform Qualtrics on a voluntary basis by providing their email or by completing the questionnaire at the time on a provided laptop. Before starting to fill in the survey, they filled in a consent form, where the study goals were presented. The questionnaire was worded in English and then translated and back-translated from French, Italian and Arabic and Turkish to suit the linguistic competence of each participant. Respondents could therefore choose the language they prefer to fill in the questionnaire. The study was conducted after getting the approval by the University of Bologna's Ethic Research Committee and the Koç University's Ethics Research Committee.

Measures

Positive and negative intergroup contact. Eight items (4 positive: "being treated well", "being friendly with me", "make me feel accepted", "feel respected by them"; 4

negative: “being treated badly”, “being excluded”, “being judged”, “make fun of me”) were adapted from Hayward et al. (2017). For each type of interaction, respondents rated how frequently they had experienced the interaction (1 = *never*, 5 = *extremely frequently*). Positive contact measure had good reliability (African sample: α= .86; Syrian sample: α= .81), as well as negative contact (African sample: α= .87; Syrian sample: α= .74).

Anxiety. Four items adapted from Stephan and Stephan (1985) assessed the extent to which respondents feel each of the following emotional states when they meet with native Italian people: “worried,” “frightened,” “defensive," and “suspicious" (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*; African sample: α= .92; Syrian sample: α= .88).

Stereotype threat. Two items assessed the extent to which respondents perceive the fear of being considered as: "incapable,” "dishonest,” (1 = *not at all*, to 5 = *very much;* African sample: $r(138) = .69$, $p < .001$; Syrian sample: $r(111) = .74$, $p < .001$) when they meet native Italian people.

Symbolic threat. Two items adapted from Schmid et al. (2014) assessed symbolic threat: “People from an Italian background threaten immigrant people’s way of life,” and “People from an Italian background and people of my ethnic background have very different values.” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*; African sample: $r(138) = .84$, $p < .001$; Syrian sample: $r(111) = .64$, $p < .001$).

Social avoidance. Three items adapted from Barlow et al. (2012) assessed immigrants’ motivations to avoid relationships with natives: “I would rather pretend not to see native people rather than a chat with them” “I would be comfortable being asked to work in a group which include native people of this country” and “I would rather spend my free time alone than go out with native people of this country.” (1= *completely disagree*, 5= *completely agree*; African sample: α= .84; Syrian sample: α= .92).

Demographic measures. Respondents reported information about their economic situation, instruction, permanence in the host country, and language proficiency level.

The survey included other measures that we did not used in the present study.

Descriptive analyses

Descriptive analyses showed that respondents were equally distributed in terms of socio-economic situation (see Table 1) in both samples. The majority of respondents in both samples got a degree, revealing high education, and also reported speaking quite well the language of host country. Means and standard deviations and bivariate correlations among variables are reported in Table 2 (see also Appendix for further demographic information). In line with previous research, we found no correlation between positive and negative contact consistently in both samples. Moreover, consistently across samples positive contact was negatively correlated with stereotype threat, anxiety, symbolic threat and social avoidance, whereas negative contact was positively correlated with all these variables.

Analytical strategy

We analysed our data using multi-group models in M*plus* (version 8.1; Muthen & Muthen, 2017). Multi-group analyses enable to examine each of the two samples of African and Syrian immigrants within one analysis. The fit of SEM analyses was evaluated based on Comparative Fit Index (CFI; at least .90 for reasonable fit and .95 for good fit, see Bentler, 1990; Hu & Bentler, 1999) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA; less than .08 for reasonable fit and .05 for very good fit, see Byrne, 2012).

As a preliminary step, we conducted a *sequential multi-group CFA* to test measurement invariance across samples. To examine the positive-negative contact asymmetry, we followed Barlow et al.'s (2012) analytic procedure. To examine the moderation hypotheses, we relied on *multi-group regression models* predicting social

avoidance and affective outcomes separately, with positive, negative contact and their interaction term as main predictors. For our mediation hypotheses, we relied on path analysis using *multi-group structural equation modelling* (SEM), using indirect command. In this SEM, outgroup avoidance was predicted by positive and negative contact (our main predictors) via affective outcomes (our mediators).

Within the multi-group framework, we were able to examine differences between the two immigrant groups' attitudes toward native people on the main parameters by allowing these to freely vary. We tested whether the effects differed for the two groups of immigrants using the Wald-test for parameter constraints. A significant Wald-test suggests that immigrant groups vary on the pathway of interest, whereas a non-significant test suggests that similar parameters are obtained for the groups. In the result section, we reported standardized parameter estimates and their confidence intervals.

Results

Measurement invariance

We tested measurement invariance of all measures across countries by conducting sequential multi-group CFA (e.g., Chen, 2007; van de Schoot et al., 2012). For each construct, we compared the configural model with the metric model in which factor loadings were constrained to be equal across groups. We then compared differences between configural and metric models representing levels of invariance considering changes in fit indices. We followed Chen (2007) and Satorra and Bentler's recommendations (2001) according to which to determine significant differences between models, at least two of these three criteria had to be matched: $\Delta CFI \geq .010$ supplemented by $\Delta RMSEA \geq .015$ and a significant value of $\Delta\chi^2$. We found that the configural model fitted the data well according to the fit criteria suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999), CFI = .981, RMSEA = 0.36 [.011, .052], $\chi^2(274)= 318.308$. Also, the metric model fitted the data well, CFI = .978, RMSEA = 0.38

[.016, .053], $\chi^2(287)= 338.388$, and the model comparison indices ΔCFI = -.003, ΔRMSEA = .002, and $\Delta\chi^2(13)= 19.365$ did not exceed the threshold. In this vein, findings established metric invariance across the countries.

Multi-group regression model

The multi-group regression model with positive and negative contact predicting outgroup avoidance and affective outcomes showed a very good fit (CFI = 1; RMSEA = .00).

For African immigrants in Italy, having more positive contact with natives was related to less outgroup avoidance (b = -0.17, SE = 0.09, p = .051, CI = -0.351, -0.014), less anxiety (b = -0.28, SE = 0.09, p = .001, CI = -0.451, -0.113) and less stereotype threat (b = -0.15, SE = 0.07, p = .027, CI = -0.292, -0.017). However, positive contact with natives was not found to be related to symbolic threat (b = 0.05, SE = 0.08, p = .554, CI = -0.114, 0.212). In contrast, having more negative contact with natives was positively related to all the outcome variables, such as outgroup avoidance (b = 0.25, SE = 0.09, p = .006, CI = 0.073, 0.424), anxiety (b = 0.23, SE = 0.08, p = .005, CI = 0.066, 0.384), stereotype threat (b = 0.32, SE = 0.08, p < .001, CI = 0.174, 0.471), and symbolic threat (b = 0.32, SE = 0.08, p < .001, CI = 0.171, 0.474).

For Syrian immigrants in Turkey, having more positive contact with natives was related to less outgroup avoidance (b = -.20, SE = .09, p = .024, CI = -0.374, -0.026), stereotype threat (b = -0.24, SE = 0.09, p = .008, CI = -0.417, -0.064), anxiety (b = -0.32, SE = 0.08, p < .001, CI = -0.486, -0.159) and symbolic threat (b = -0.20, SE = .09, p = .031, CI = -0.377, -0.018). Moreover, having more negative contact with natives was related to more outgroup avoidance (b = 0.32, SE = 0.10, p = .001, CI = 0.130, 0.516), stereotype threat (b = 0.37, SE = 0.08, p < .001, CI = 0.213, 0.523), anxiety (b = 0.20, SE = 0.08, p = .007, CI = 0.055, 0.350) and symbolic threat (b = 0.26, SE = 0.08, p = .001, CI = 0.103, 0.422).

Wald tests showed that only the association between positive contact and symbolic threat significantly differed between groups ($W_{I-T} = 3.88$; $p = .048$). Looking at the specific parameter estimates, the association between positive contact and stereotype threat was stronger for Syrian immigrants than for African immigrants. Instead, the associations of positive contact with outgroup avoidance ($W_{I-T} = 0.09$; $p = .755$), stereotype threat ($W_{I-T} = 0.44$; $p = .505$) and anxiety ($W_{I-T} = 0.01$; $p = .931$) did not significantly differ between African immigrants and Syrian immigrants. As for negative contact, Wald-tests indicated that the associations with outgroup avoidance ($W_{I-T} = 1.07$; $p = .300$), stereotype threat ($W_{I-T} = 0.61$; $p = .433$), anxiety ($W_{I-T} = 0.02$; $p = .873$) and symbolic threat ($W_{I-T} = 0.03$; $p = .847$) did not significantly differ between African and Syrian immigrants. Overall supporting similar evidence between groups.

Positive and Negative Contact Asymmetry

To test the positive-negative contact asymmetry we followed Hayward et al. (2017) analytic procedure. We conducted a series of hierarchical linear regressions including positive and negative contact as predictors (see Table 3). Then absolute values of the positive and negative contact coefficients and the correlation between predictors were then entered into a *t* test that examined the difference between two *related* coefficients, using the equation $t=(b1 - b2) / SE(b1 - b2)$. According to these results, in all but the case of symbolic threat for the African sample, the positive and negative slopes did not differ significantly from one another (as each was significantly different from 0, but in opposing directions), showing no asymmetry.

Moderation models

To test moderation between positive and negative contact, we obtained the interaction variable by calculating the product of positive and negative contact. This was grand mean-

centered. A multi-group regression model of moderations on social avoidance, anxiety, stereotype and symbolic threats showed a very good fit (CFI = 1, RMSEA = .00).

African sample. There was an interaction between positive and negative contact on social avoidance (b = 0.90, SE = 0.20, p = .017, CI = 0.161, 1.646), anxiety (b = 0.83, SE = 0.28, p = .003, CI = 0.275, 1.386) and stereotype threat (b = 0.68, SE = 0.25, p = .007, CI = 0.189, 1.172), but not symbolic threat (b = -0.17, SE = 0.36, p = .639, CI = -0.878, 0.538). As shown in Figure 1, for African immigrants reporting relatively low negative intergroup contact experiences, positive contact was associated with reduced avoidance of Italian people (b = -0.44, SE = 0.13, 95% CI = -0.71, -0.18). However, positive contact was not associated with reduced social avoidance for African immigrants who reported relatively high negative intergroup experiences (b = 0.05, SE = 0.13, 95% CI = -0.21, 0.30).

Similar results of the poisoning effect of negative contact were found for anxiety and stereotype threat (see Appendix). For African immigrants who have relatively low negative contact experiences with native people in Italy, positive contact was associated with reduced anxiety (b = -0.66, SE = 0.14, 95% CI = -0.96, -0.37) and stereotype threat (b = -0.36, SE = 0.13, 95% CI = -0.63, -0.09). Positive contact instead was not associated with reduced anxiety (b = -0.11, SE = 0.14, 95% CI = -0.39, 0.18) nor stereotype threat (b = 0.01, SE = 0.13, 95% CI = -0.25, 0.27) for African immigrants who reported relatively high negative intergroup experiences.

Syrian sample. Results showed that there was an interaction between positive and negative contact on stereotype threat (b = 0.95, SE = 0.36, p = .009, CI = 0.242, 1.665). As shown in Figure 2, for Syrian immigrants reporting relatively low negative contact experiences with native Turkish people, positive contact was associated with reduced stereotype threat (b = -0.47, SE = 0.12, 95% CI = -0.71, -0.23). However, positive contact was not associated with stereotype threat for Syrian immigrants who reported relatively high negative intergroup

experiences (b = 0.01, SE = 0.15, 95% CI = -0.29, 0.31). In line with findings of the African sample, this showed a poisoning effect of negative contact. No other interaction was significant, $p > .281$. Nevertheless, Wald-tests indicated that the interactions of positive and negative contact on outgroup avoidance ($W_{I\text{-}T} = 1.44$; $p = .23$), stereotype threat ($W_{I\text{-}T} = 0.43$; $p = .51$), anxiety ($W_{I\text{-}T} = 1.04$; $p = .31$) and symbolic threat ($W_{I\text{-}T} = 0.56$; $p = .45$) did not significantly differ between the two groups.

Mediation models

In Table 2, the strong correlations among stereotype threat, anxiety and social avoidance (relative to the correlations between contact and social avoidance) provide supporting evidence to assess mediational models for both samples. Given that symbolic threat did not correlate with social avoidance in the Syrian sample and did not correlate with positive contact in both samples, it was removed from the final model. Multi-group model was used to test if anxiety and stereotype threat mediated the association between intergroup contact (both positive and negative) and social avoidance. This model showed a good fit (CFI = .995; RMSEA = .05). The direct and indirect effects were tested simultaneously using the bootstrapping method, with 2000 re-samples a 95% confidence interval for both samples. Alternative model with the reverse direction of relationship between social avoidance and intergroup contact was tested. However, the model fit was worse (CFI = .977; RMSEA = .11), further supporting the hypothesized one.

African sample. As shown in Figure 3, the relationship between negative contact and social avoidance became non-significant after modelling the multi-group path analyses with anxiety and stereotype threat as mediators of outgroup avoidance. Negative contact was positively related with anxiety and stereotype threat. Both anxiety and stereotype threat were positively related to social avoidance of Italians. Both anxiety, B = 0.08, SE = 0.03, p = .018, and

stereotype threat, $B = 0.06$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .047$, fully mediated the relationship between negative contact and social avoidance.

The relationship between positive contact and social avoidance remains non-significant after including the mediators in the same regression. Positive contact was negatively related with anxiety and stereotype threat. Both anxiety and stereotype threat were positively related to social avoidance of Italians. The indirect effect of positive contact on social avoidance via anxiety was significant, $B = -0.10$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .022$, indicating a mediation, whereas the indirect effect of positive contact on social avoidance via stereotype threat was not significant, $B = -0.03$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .098$.

Syrian sample. As shown in Figure 3, the relation between negative contact and social avoidance remains significant after modelling the multi-group path analyses with anxiety and stereotype threat as predictors and mediators of outgroup avoidance after modelling the multi-group path analyses with anxiety and stereotype threat as predictors and mediators of outgroup avoidance. Negative contact was positively related with anxiety and stereotype threat. Neither anxiety, $B = 0.04$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .102$, nor stereotype threat, $B = 0.05$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .190$, mediated the relationship between negative contact and social avoidance.

Moreover, the relation between positive contact and social avoidance became non-significant after including anxiety and stereotype threat in the same regression. Positive contact was negatively related with anxiety and stereotype threat. Anxiety was positively related to social avoidance, whereas stereotype threat was not. However, anxiety showed a significant indirect effect, $B = -0.06$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .050$, whereas stereotype threat did not mediated the relationship between positive contact and social avoidance, $B = -0.03$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .200$.

General Discussion

The present research addressed the relationships among episodes of intergroup contact, perceived anxiety, threat, and outgroup avoidance from the perspective of immigrants in Italy and Turkey. Findings across the two countries showed that positive and negative contacts of immigrants with natives were respectively positively and negatively associated with the motivation to future interactions. Positive and negative contacts of immigrants were also negatively and positively associated with affective outcomes such as anxiety, stereotype threat and symbolic threat. Negative contact had a stronger association with symbolic threat than positive contact in the Italian context, showing little support to positive-negative asymmetry among minority groups. Moreover, the beneficial role of positive contact on intergroup emotions and attitudes was poisoned by negative contact, showing interaction between the two types of contact, mainly in the Italian context (the moderation was found only on stereotype threat in the Turkish context). The mediating role of anxiety on the relationship between intergroup negative contact and immigrants' intentions of avoiding interactions differ between the two countries. Only in the Italian context, did the stereotype threat mediate the relationship between intergroup contact and social avoidance. Overall, it is worth noticing that these findings extend previous research on intergroup contact by showing the role of positive and negative contact experiences of immigrants in the complex dynamic of intergroup relations with natives (Hayward et al., 2017).

Theoretical Implications

Recent research on intergroup contact has noted that it is critical to define factors that motivate individuals to engage in volitional contact leading to opportunities for novel cross-group interactions (Paolini et al., 2018; Turner & Cameron, 2016). The present research contributed to existing knowledge by comparing and contrasting two different national contexts regarding the relationship between the quantity of positive and negative intergroup contacts of immigrant people and their motivation to avoid interactions with native people.

First of all, across both samples, positive and negative contacts were associated with outgroup avoidance and affective outcomes such as anxiety, stereotype threat and symbolic threat. This evidence highlights that it is not just the frequency, but also the valence of intergroup interactions that impacts individuals' affective experiences and attitudes towards outgroup members.

Negative contact did not have a stronger association with variables considered than positive contact in both samples, in line with Árnadóttir et al.'s (2018) findings on Polish immigrants in Iceland. It is worth to notice that this happened even if all the outcomes were negative and according to the affect matching phenomenon (Barlow et al., 2019), negative contact has a disproportionally large association with negative outcomes in comparison to positive contact. Nevertheless, this suggests that future research should examine the role of both negative and positive emotions in underlying intergroup attitudes of ethnic minorities. This evidence is in contrast with the asymmetry findings in majority group samples (Barlow et al., 2012), suggests that this is mainly a majority group phenomenon. The primacy of negative contact can be influenced by different factors, such as cultural or historical aspects related to majority-minority relationships that contribute to increasing or reducing the frequency and thus the uniqueness and strength of negative compared to positive contact for one group compared to another.

The interactions between different valence contacts were similar between African and Syrian samples. In both countries, for immigrants who have experienced few negative contacts with natives, positive contact reduced stereotype threat than for those immigrants who had many negative intergroup contact experiences. This finding obtained with the minority group of immigrants is similar to the result obtained by Thomsen and Rafiqi (2018) with majority members. It shows the essential role of negative contact in shaping the effects of positive intergroup contact. In this vein, the present study adds to the literature on

interethnic relationships this crucial insight that needs to be taken into account when promoting intergroup social integration. Nevertheless, negative contact experiences with outgroup members are consistently less frequent than positive contacts for not only majority but also minority groups (e.g., Mähönen & Jasinskaja- Lathi, 2016; Visintin et al., 2017). Thus, evidence supports the role of intergroup contact in helping to promote social adaptation between immigrant and native people, especially when negative contact is low. Indeed, low stereotype threat may favour the desire of intergroup relationships that affect majority groups to be more willing to help the minority group to challenge inequalities. In this vein, reduced stereotype threat can ameliorate social adaptation of immigrant people in more egalitarian host countries. Moreover, the same moderation of negative contact was found on the relationship between positive contact and both avoidance and anxiety in the African sample. These interactions support the poisoning role of negative contact in preventing harmonious intergroup relationships, highlighting also the importance of diminishing negative intergroup experiences to foster effective and beneficial intergroup contact. The consistent poisoning role of negative contact in the African compared to the Syrian sample may be due to the different amount of negative contact experienced by immigrants in the respective Italian and Turkish contexts. The reported frequency of negative contact with native people was indeed higher in the former than in the latter country. Another contributing factor could be greater geographical proximity (Syria and Turkey being neighbouring countries) and deeper cultural similarities (e.g., sharing the same religion) between the host country and country of origin of immigrants in the Turkish context in comparison to the Italian one. This finding further increases the so far scarce evidence on the interplay between positive and negative contact: findings on the poisoning role of negative contact are in line with the results obtained by Árnadóttir et al. (2018). While research on the interplay of positive and negative contact from the perspective of the majority group underlined opposite effects, such as a buffering effect of

positive contact on the detrimental effects of negative ones (Prati et al., 2020). In this vein, these findings add to the importance of considering a specific group perspective when investigating intergroup contact effects.

Furthermore, in line with the literature on intergroup contact from the majority group perspective, across both countries anxiety explained the relationship between negative intergroup contact and people's future behavioural intentions of avoiding interactions. This evidence supported the idea that intergroup contact affects the personal feelings of minority group members and helps to explain intergroup behavioural intentions. Overall, evidence points to the importance of considering the joint effects of positive and negative contact also from the minority group perspective, given that the interaction of different valence contacts might vary compared to the majority group. Indeed, evidence shows that the effectiveness of positive contact as a strategy to promote intergroup relationships might be undermined by negative contact, especially for the minority group.

Practical Implications

The present research addressed significant issues related to the processes of reciprocal adaptation and integration between native and immigrant people in current modern societies. We focused on the relation between the frequency with which immigrants felt treated in a positive or negative way by the majority group and their motivation to outgroup avoidance. In this way, we intended to provide useful information on the role of intergroup exchanges in the form of immigrants' tendency to segregate themselves, as a first step towards preventing the construction of harmonious intergroup relationships. The evidence highlights that the way in which immigrants feel that they are treated by the majority in their encounters affects their desire for future interactions with them and thus the possibility to build constructive relationships. In other words, their motivation to interact represents a first step for the

facilitation of reciprocal knowledge and adaptation to the co-existence of diverse groups in the same society.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Overall, this research increases knowledge of the often neglected perspective of migrant groups in the literature on intergroup contact, and their social adaptation to the host country. The evidence collected however is based on convenience samples of migrants in both countries, hence conclusions should be drawn carefully, although they still help to shed light on the complexity of this phenomenon. More research is needed to support the interaction effect that was found, given the limited statistical power of the analyses due to the relatively small samples. This study employed a cross-sectional method, thereby allowing for limited assumptions about causality. Many other pathways among the variables examined may exist (e.g., behavioural intentions may lead to more or less negative intergroup contact, given that the frequency of intergroup contact can be strongly influenced by prior attitudes). Nevertheless, the reverse model fitted the data much worse and preliminary experimental studies have already shown the efficacy of contact in affecting behavioural intentions, such as social avoidance (Hayward et al., 2017).

Conclusions

The current research contributes to intergroup contact literature by providing evidence from the perspective of immigrants' intergroup experiences on their adaptation to host countries. The novelty of this research lies in having highlighted the crucial role of negative over positive experiences of immigrants with the majority group in weakening their desire for future intergroup encounters by increasing anxiety and symbolic threat towards the majority group. This is not good news since this emphasizes the downside of intergroup contact from the perspective of immigrants. Nevertheless, evidence warn about the possible consequences of negative interactions with immigrant people, which could give rise to a chain of associated

effects ending in segregated, discriminatory and potentially unsafe societies for everyone. In this vein, future research should aim to understand under what conditions positive intergroup contact can overcome the detrimental role of negative contact for immigrant populations.

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Figure 1.

Moderation results of the interaction between positive and negative contact on social avoidance within the African sample

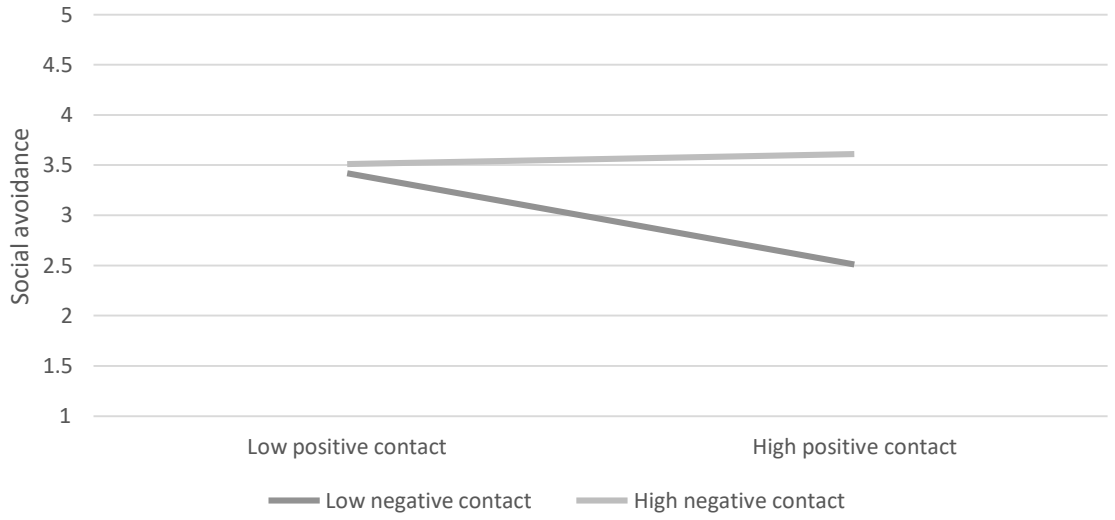


Figure 2.
Moderation results of the interaction between positive and negative contact on stereotype threat within the Syrian sample

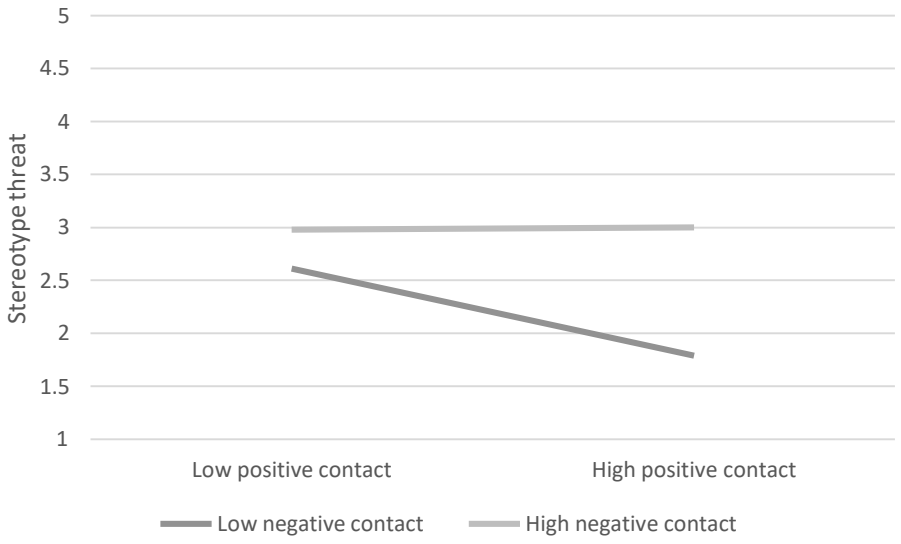
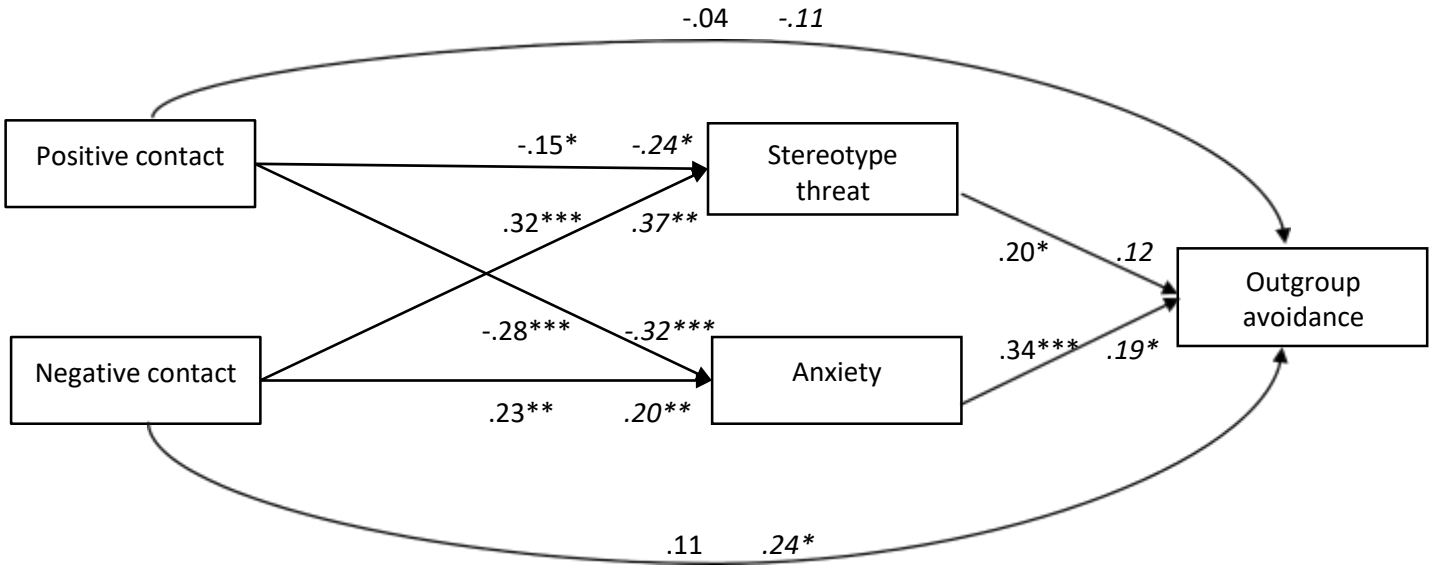


Figure 3.

Mediations of anxiety and stereotype threat (standardized results) within the African and Syrian samples



Note. Results are reported in *italic* for Syrian immigrants in Turkey and non-italic for African immigrants in Italy. Standardized estimates and errors of total indirect effects of negative contact on social avoidance: for the African sample $B = 0.14$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .001$ for the Syrian sample $B = 0.08$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .041$.
Standardized estimates and errors of total indirect effects of positive contact on social avoidance: for the African sample $B = -0.12$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .006$, for the Syrian sample $B = 0.09$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .016$.

Table 1.

Demographic characteristics of samples

Demographic	African sample	Syrian sample
Age range in years	18-61	18-50
Education level:		
% no education	2.6	0
% primary school title	4.4	5.6
% high school title	32.5	50.0
% university title	57.0	37.0
Missing educational level	3.5	7.4
Economic status:		
% indigent	0	0
% worse than most people	9.6	6.5
% poor	22.8	14.8
% mediocre	32.5	44.4
% good	29.8	30.6
% better than most people	3.5	3.7
% wealthy	0.9	0
Missing economic status	0.9	0
Time spent in the host country:		
% less than a year	0	0
% a year	15.8	8.3
% between 1 and 5 years	84.2	91.7
% more than 5 years	0	0
Host country language knowledge:		
% speak not well at all	1.8	6.5
% speak poorly	7.9	7.4
% speak neither well nor poorly	17.5	13.9
% speak well	49.1	30.6
% speak very well	23.7	41.7

Table 2.

Means and standard deviations and intercorrelations among variables

	Italian sample	Turkish sample						
Variables	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1.Positive contact	3.42 (0.87)	3.59 (0.88)	-	-.16	-.21*	-.33**	-.01	-.19*
2.Negative contact	2.24 (0.94)	2.00 (0.78)	-.04	-	.36**	.26*	.32**	.25**
3.Stereotype threat	2.41 (1.03)	2.57 (0.97)	-.27*	.36**	-	.22*	.17*	.33**
4.Anxiety	2.67 (1.13)	2.54 (0.96)	-.36**	.19*	.27**	-	.27**	.41**
5.Symbolic threat	3.27 (1.22)	3.26 (1.15)	-.20	.28**	.17	.05	-	.01
6.Social avoidance	3.21 (0.99)	3.49 (1.04)	-.22**	.32**	.26**	.30**	.21*	-

Note. Correlations are reported below the diagonal for African immigrants in Italy and above the diagonal for Syrian immigrants in Turkey. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.
Ranges of all variables are from 1 to 5.

Table 3.

Positive and negative contact asymmetry analyses

Sample	Outcome	Positive contact		Negative contact		t value	Model change statistics
		β	*b* (*SE*)	β	*b* (*SE*)		
African sample	Stereotype threat	-.15	-.18 (0.10)	.32***	.35 (0.09)	-1.42	R^2=.14, F=11.12***
	Anxiety	-.37**	-.28 (0.11)	.23*	.27 (0.10)	0.08	R^2=.15, F=11.52***
	Symbolic threat	.05	.07 (0.12)	.32***	.42 (0.11)	-2.33*	R^2=.10, F=7.36**
	Social avoidance	-.17*	-.19 (0.10)	.25**	.26 (0.09)	-0.58	R^2=.10, F=7.50**
Syrian sample	Stereotype threat	-.24*	-.27 (0.10)	.37***	.46 (0.11)	-1.35	R^2 =.20, F=13.43***
	Anxiety	-.32**	-.36 (0.10)	.20*	.25 (0.11)	0.78	R^2=.15, F=9.41***
	Symbolic threat	-.20*	-.26 (0.13)	.26*	.39 (0.14)	-0.72	R^2 =.11, F=6.46**
	Social avoidance	-.20*	-.24 (0.11)	.32**	.43 (0.12)	-1.26	R^2 =.15, F=9.09***

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Note. In the African sample, degrees of freedom were 132 in the t-test analyses, and were 2,126 in the analyses of variance. In the Syrian sample, degrees of freedom were 109 in the t-test analyses and 2, 103 in the analyses of variance.