PSYCHOSOCIAL ADJUSTMENT AND QUALITY OF INTER-GROUPS RELATIONS AMONG IMMIGRANT ADOLESCENTS IN SICILY: FROM ELABORATING EXPLANATORY MODELS TO IDENTIFYING STRATEGIES TO FOSTER MUTUAL INTERCULTURAL COMMUNAL LIFE

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INTRODUCTION
In the last two decades, Italy had to deal with a rapid immigrant population increase. This change in “plural” society was not, and is not, without debates. In order to overcome rising xenophobic tendencies, political parties have the need to foster the national scientific research in the field to overcome intercultural conflicts among acculturating groups (Kalin & Berry, 1996), especially during a period of economic recession, characterized among other things, by a renewal in unemployment rates. From this perspective, both psychology of immigration and more recently developmental psychology have begun to contribute to an understanding of those factors that support the management of intercultural relations within a sort of cohesive societies. It is possible to introduce three main core questions across these domains.

1. Are young Maghrebi youth better integrated? Generally, the literature proposed a bidimensional model of acculturation (Berry, 1997; Phinney, 1990, Kram濡t & Bernal, 2001) based on two independent dimensions, maintenance of the culture of the country of origin and (e.g. in case of Maghreb immigrants) the identity, language, ways of life and involvement with the larger society, from which derive four acculturative strategies: integration (high maintenance and high involvement), assimilation (high maintenance and low involvement), separation (low maintenance and high involvement), and marginalisation (low maintenance and low involvement). Researches focused on young immigrants (Berry et al., 1986) demonstrated that there are four main clusters in the bidimensional model (integration, nationalism, ethnocultural, diffuse profiles).

2. How are young Maghrebi and host peers related to each other? Specific researches (Berry, 2001) showed that the integration profile is related to the best psychosocial adjustment, while the diffuse profile to the worst; in between, ethnocultural profile is related to worse psychosocial adjustment but more socio-cultural adjustment and the national profile to moderately psychosocial adjustment along with slightly negative socio-cultural adjustment.

3. How the connections between young immigrants and host peers affect the mutual attitudes and the quality of intercultural relationship? As Berry et al. (2001) proposed, members of the host society hold specific acculturation expectations (multiculturalism, melting pot, segregation, and exclusion) parallel to immigrants’ acculturation orientations; these acculturation expectations are related to the acculturation of immigrants. However, the attitudes of the host group and the process of immigrants’ acculturation involve a complex adaptation on the part of both the immigrants and the receiving population. In this process, some important variables play an important role. Adjusting the way immigrants and receiving population interact and the kind of cultural adaptation which can take place are in the acculturation strategies of both the dominant group, host group’s tolerance and attitudes towards immigrants, and psychosocial adjustment. Beyond these three issues, demographic factors as age, gender and generation status may also play a role in understanding the processes affecting the intercultural relationships.

Starting from this theoretical framework, the study aimed at investigating in the Italian context: (a) young immigrants’ ways of acculturating in contact with both demographic variables (age, gender and generation status) and parallel host peers’ acculturation orientations; (b) relationships between acculturation profiles and psychosocial adjustment of young immigrants; (c) quality of mutual attitudes and intercultural relationship with regard to young immigrants’ and host peers’ profiles.

METHOD
The data for this paper came from the Italian section of MIIPRS, an international research project leading by J. Berry. Maghrebi group (Tunisians and Moroccans) was chosen as prototypic immigrant group because it constitute the largest immigrant group in Sicily.

Participants: The total group of participants consisted of 226 adolescents living in Sicily and aged from 13 to 18 years old: 114 Maghrebi youth (54 M and 60 F) and 112 Italian youth (41 M and 71 F). Each group was divided into two subgroups: an immigrant generation (those who were born in the host country with final general score reversed) and a second generation Maghrebi youth. Parallel to this classification, Italian adolescents were classified in a multicultural profile, characterized by an openness towards diversity, and in a diffuse non-multicultural profile, characterized by a sort of confusion mostly belonging to the second generation Maghrebi youth.

Cluster analysis was carried out with the variables associated with the acculturation process. Initially, different analyses were conducted using the Two-Step cluster analysis procedure, suggesting a two cluster solution. Then, a confirmatory procedure was applied. Results showed two acculturation profiles (Fig. 1): an ethnic profile (50% of the participants) and a diffuse non-ethnic profile (50%).

Italian youth acculturation expectation profiles: Two distinct profiles were associated with the host process, following the previous procedure. Results showed two acculturation expectation profiles (Fig. 2): a multicultural profile (65.2%) and a diffuse non-multicultural profile (34.8%).

RESULTS

Fig. 3. Acculturation profiles for Maghrebi youth

Mean z-scores

Fig. 4. Acculturation expectation profiles for Italian youth

Influence of age, gender and generation on young Maghrebi acculturation profiles

A 2 x 2 ANOVA was performed. Results yielded significant main effect for generation (Fig. 3). F(1,106) = 15.64, p < .001, η² = .13.

Fig. 5. Relationships among parallel variables for different Maghrebi and Italian peers’ profiles using SEM

Three-way interaction (age, gender and generation) on self-esteem, life satisfaction, psychological problems and socio-cultural competence was performed, yielded a significant interaction on self-esteem, life satisfaction and socio-cultural competence, suggesting that they could be interacted in one factor. The theoretical model was tested using EQS 6.0 program (Bentler, 2006), constraining all error variances. As indicated by Fig. 5, all models showed an acceptable fit.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

1. With respect to the first main goal of the study, two distinct immigrants’ profiles or ways of acculturating were found, that do not comply with the bidimensional model but not in opposition. A first generation of Maghrebi youth was classified in an ethnic profile, characterized by an orientation towards the ethnic group with final general score reversed, while the second one in an diffuse non-ethnic profile, characterized by a predominance of intergroup interaction strategy with diversity in contact with both the national society and a less restricted ethnocultural identity. Parallel to this classification, Italian adolescents were classified in a multicultural profile, characterized by an openness towards diversity, and in a diffuse non-multicultural profile, characterized by a sort of confusion mostly belonging to the second generation Maghrebi youth.

2. Regarding the second goal, being in a diffuse non-ethnic profile served to promote better life satisfaction and socio-cultural competence than being in an ethnic profile. In other words, Maghrebi youth with an integration strategy and involved in national culture showed some greater psychological adjustment than those ethnically oriented.

3. Concerning the third goal, in both Maghrebi adolescents’ profiles attitude towards Italians was not affected by perceived discrimination and psychological adjustment, but youth in ethnic profile showed a psychological adjustment negatively affected by perceived discrimination. The Italian peers’ multicultural profile attitude towards Maghrebi people was positively affected by tolerance and psychological adjustment, while in diffuse non-multicultural profile only psychological adjustment positively affected attitude towards Maghrebi people.

4. Comparing the results of the two groups, the bidimensional view could differentiate four of them. In considering this finding is important to point out also the Italian immigrant phenomenon is relatively new and to take into account the specific age range of the participants. In this sense, it is possible to suppose that the diffuse profile could differentiate other four of them depending on the increase of these variables; for immigrants, the generation status seems to have a significant role in distinguishing the two processes. Moreover, against the backdrop of unclear immigration and settlement policies in Italy, findings suggest that there should be support (a) for Maghrebi youth to pursue integration strategy (even if in this study is associated with a diffuse non-ethnic path) and to receive a lower discrimination, and (b) for Italians to pursue the multicultural path, tolerance and psychological adjustment.