

## ACCULTURATION STRATEGIES AND ADJUSTMENT AMONG IMMIGRANT AND HOST ITALIAN COMMUNITIES

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This study examines the relationships between acculturation strategies, social support, and social well-being among Italians and immigrants. The paper outlines the acculturation experience that includes inter-ethnic contact and social distance. Adults (309 Italian members of the host society and 104 immigrants) participated in a questionnaire study. Results confirmed the expected association between acculturation strategies, social distance, and positive emotions toward the outgroup. Italian participants that choose integration as the acculturation strategy showed: lower social distance, more positive emotional feelings toward immigrants, higher social well-being. Furthermore, results showed that for immigrants higher levels of social support nullify the positive effects of intergroup contact on social distance or even increase immigrants' intentions to distance themselves from Italians.

Key words: Acculturation strategies; Social support; Intergroup contact; Social distance; Social well-being.

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During the last several decades, immigration and migration phenomena have characterized not only European countries but also the entire world. The international migration of people lies at the core of the ongoing process of globalization (Berry, 2008). Over the last thirty years, Italian society has seen a steady increase in the influx of individuals from abroad; consequently, Italians are becoming increasingly aware of intercultural issues. The recent multiethnic dimension of the country, and of Western societies in general, animates various studies about immigrants' integration (Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2010).

Migration is considered, from a community psychology perspective, as an ecological transition that involves vast changes in the contexts of interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Garcia-Ramirez et al., 2005). In these contexts, immigrant groups often find themselves in a minority position, which has implications for the way in which they adapt and negotiate their ethnic and cultural identities (Soon, 2002; Yijälä, Lönnqvist, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Verkasalo, 2012). Studies about the psychological aspects of the relations between different cultures are mainly focused on a minority perspective (Sam & Berry, 2010). Nevertheless, the need to consider the host society's perspective to reach a deeper understanding of social relationships in a plural society is becoming stronger. Social psychology has placed much value on human diversity including social class, gender, and ethnicity (Kral et al., 2011), and has framed the relationship between immigrant minorities and host communities within the concept of acculturation. Acculturation is defined as the individual changes

that result from direct contact with members of a different ethno-cultural group (Berry 2005; Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Different researchers (Berry, 1997; Birman, 1994; Tajfel, 1981) have offered models to understand individual and community responses to intergroup contact. Berry's (1980, 2005) acculturation model considered four acculturation strategies (integration, separation, marginalization, assimilation) in order to identify the different typology of contact between host and immigrant community. The model provides for the simultaneous presence of two dimensions independent of each other: maintaining links with one's culture of origin and with one's roots, on the one hand, and the creation and maintenance of links with the culture of acceptance, on the other.

The model of acculturation describes the possible strategies of acculturation that individuals and groups put in place in relation to a culture different from their own. Each individual can be positioned between total rejection and unconditional acceptance along one or the other dimension, giving rise to four strategies in intercultural relations: integration, separation, marginalization, assimilation.

The concept of integration refers to instances in which individuals are interested in both maintaining their own customs and keeping in contact with other ethnic groups. On the other hand, people may emphasize their own culture while trying to avoid contact with other cultures; this attitude is called separation. In contrast, marginalization occurs when people do not want either to maintain their culture or to adopt that of the host society. People may not try to maintain their cultural identity while interacting daily with other cultures; this strategy is defined by Berry (1980) as assimilation. Individuals who are assimilated prefer to forsake their cultural heritage and be entirely absorbed by the new society.

Other acculturation models state that an individual's preference for adjustment or maintenance could vary according to life domain or situation (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2004). Further models introduce important innovations like the relative acculturation extended model (Navas et al., 2005), that distinguishes between acculturation strategies (real plan) and acculturation attitudes (ideal plan). Navas and colleagues observed how the outcomes of intercultural contact can vary according to the different sociocultural realities that both natives and immigrants have to face.

In the Italian society, a considerable amount of research has been devoted to the understanding of immigration, acculturation, and adaptation of host communities. Capozza, Vezzali, Trifiletti, Falvo, and Favara (2010) tested the basic propositions of the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) and acknowledged the importance of emotions for the generalization of contact effects. Vezzali and Giovannini (2010) analyzed the effects of intergroup attitudes and emotions toward immigrants on Italians' acculturation orientations. Recently Mancini and Bottura (2014) have studied the quality of intercultural relations in Italian and migrant adolescents by using the relative acculturation extended model by Navas et al. (2005).

There is now a rich body of literature that examines acculturation strategies and their outcomes on sociocultural adjustment and psychological well-being in adolescence (see, e.g., Rania, Migliorini, Sclavo, Cardinali, & Lotti, 2014) but not much research has been done on adult population. However, recent work (Rania, Migliorini, Cardinali, & Reborra, 2015; Rania, Migliorini, Reborra, & Cardinali, 2014; Rania, Migliorini, Reborra, & Cardinali, 2015) has proposed a qualitative methodology to enhance critical and intercultural dialogue among young adults of the host society. In a study, Matera, Stefanile, and Brown (2011) investigated the role of two factors in affecting the attitudes of majority members: the desire of first- and second-generation immigrants for culture maintenance and intercultural contact.

Intergroup behavior and psychological and social well-being will be, in large part, a product of various factors of psychosocial adjustment. The vast majority of well-being research has

been individual-focused, examining personal experiences as if individuals lived in isolation. Social adaptations imply socially structured transactions between the person and the environment. Adaptation can involve biological, social, individual, and value dimensions (Yijälä et al., 2012). Furthermore, nothing in the concept of adaptation precludes adapting by acting to change the social conditions. In everyday contexts, immigrant groups often find themselves in a minority position, and this has implications for the way in which they adapt and negotiate their ethnic and cultural identities (Soon, 2002; Yijälä et al., 2012). A state of adaptation is also situation-specific and temporary, not sweeping and permanent; new stressors and other changes in the external environment may disrupt it, so that periods of adaptation inevitably alternate with transient periods of disequilibrium (Levine, Perkins, & Perkins, 2005). In general, better-adjusted individuals fare better in society, particularly in times of stress and adaptation (Safdar, Lay, & Struthers, 2003). In the migration process, support transactions might be interrupted either when the guest society is not receptive of recently arrived immigrants or when the subject's psychosocial characteristics restrain him/her from accessing social resources (Martinez Garcia, Garcia Ramirez, & Maya Jariago, 2002). Investigation of the role of social support in the acculturation process is a growing area of study. Some researchers have shown that social support acts as a buffer against the negative impact of intercultural contact and acculturation, and individuals demonstrate higher levels of adjustment when social support is available (Gaudet & Clément, 2009). Nevertheless, social support has been studied as an exclusively positive factor in mastering difficult life situations. But new studies show that social support may also have negative impact and act as a significant stressor (Sirin, Gupta, Katsiaficas, Suárez-Orozco, & Rogers-Sirin, 2013).

Several studies have been carried out in order to understand the factors that affect the relationship between the host population and immigrant groups (Birman, Trickett, & Buchanan, 2005). While a large body of research has focused on the link between intergroup contact and prejudice, analysis of the literature shows that few studies have investigated social distance as a measure of intergroup relations. Social distance refers to the degrees of intimacy that characterize social relations (Bogardus, 1925; Stephan, Liberman, & Trope, 2011). The main effect of social distance is that it allows the maintenance of social status, that is, of status quo in social relationships. Bogardus (1926) states that "as long as races stay in ghettos" there are no problematic relationships, but when minority members "invade" the host community's neighborhoods, new reactions of social distance are generated against them. According to Bogardus, the speed at which this invasion occurs has a direct bearing on the rise of social-distance feelings. This kind of prejudice is evident where a strong segregation between ethnic or religious groups remains even when explicit negative attitudes are rare (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Williams & Eberhardt, 2008). Avoidant behaviors and attitudes were one of the earliest measures of prejudice; however, more recent studies have suggested that a better way of studying subtle prejudice might be to measure people's emotions toward the target group (Kosic, Mannetti, & Sam, 2005). Intergroup contact both enhances positive emotions and reduces negative emotions toward the outgroup (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Previous studies emphasized that intergroup contact leads to reduce social distance if it occurs within contexts where significant others are supportive of intergroup contact and the outgroup in general (Ata, Bastian, & Lusher, 2009). Some researchers (Kessler et al., 2010) have shown that positive emotions are negatively correlated with social distance, subtle prejudice, and social competition. The relationship between group stereotypes, emotions, and behaviors, has been explored by Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick (2007).

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## Overview of the Study

Among a number of potentially relevant variables, this paper will focus on acculturation strategies, social distance, and social support, due to their importance for psychological and cultural adjustment. Furthermore, this work outlines a contextual model of acculturation experiences that includes interethnic contact and social distance. The study considers five main research questions based on theory and research reviewed above. Specifically, it proposes that: (1) there will be a difference between Italians and immigrants regarding the variables considered; (2) participants will show more positive emotional feelings and less social distance for the ingroup members; (3) social support will be associated with social well-being, positive emotions, social distance, and acculturation strategies; (4) favored acculturation strategies will affect the quality of intergroup relations; (5) there will be a difference between Italians and immigrants for the variables that predict social well-being. Furthermore, the study evaluates the interactive effect of intergroup contact and social support on social distance among Italian and immigrant participants.

In the recent decades, Italy has turned from a country of emigration into one of immigration, and the number of migrants has significantly increased. During the last decade, the migrants residing in Italy has tripled, rising from just over one million and three-hundred thousand people in 2001 to over four million in 2011 (ISTAT, 2012). Furthermore, immigration to Italy did not start in a period of reconstruction and economic development, but it took off in a period of economic recession (Kosic & Phalet, 2006). In Liguria, the region where we conducted the present research, Ecuadorians are the first community, representing 19% of the total number of foreigners residing in this region, followed by Albanians (17.5%), and Moroccans (10.7%).

## METHOD

### Participants

A total of 413 adults participated in the study, of which 309 were Italians and 104 were immigrants. Participants were parents of children attending the kindergarten; they were interested in taking part in the study (we used a convenience sample). For inclusion into the sample, schools were required to be located within several neighborhoods of a medium city in the North-West of Italy (Genoa). Italian participants were older ( $M = 41.10$ ) than immigrant participants ( $M = 33.89$ ); immigrants had been in Italy for 9.84 years on average. They came from: Ecuador (74%), Albania (9.6%), Morocco (16.4%). In both samples, there were more women than men (Italian sample: 53.6% women; immigrant sample: 65.4% women). Participants' educational level was coded as: low (less than high school; Italians 29.5%, immigrants 25.7%), medium (high school; Italians 51%, immigrants 56.5%), and high (university; Italians 19.5%, immigrants 17.8%).

### Procedure

Participants were contacted thanks to the mediation of teachers in an educational institution for children; parents completed the questionnaire in the kindergarten when children attended school. The instrument used was the questionnaire and, with the support of cultural mediators, we

translated it into several languages in order to facilitate its understanding. A research assistant was present at school and supervised data collection. Participants completed the questionnaire, working in small groups. The questionnaire was self-explanatory, but standard oral instructions were given at the start of the section: respondents were informed that participation was voluntary, responses were confidential and anonymous, and only used for research purposes. Participants were also informed that at the end of data collection they could know the collective results in a meeting organized in the school. One hour was approximately required to complete the questionnaire. Procedures of data collection fully complied with the research ethical code of the Italian Psychology Association. The informed consent protocol was provided to participants while presenting the research aims. Researchers clearly informed participants about all the research aspects that could induce them not to provide the informed consent. Participants were reassured that their answers would be kept anonymous in compliance with the Italian law on privacy No. 196/2003.

### Measures

*Sociodemographic data.* These included age, gender, and educational level.

*Social Well-Being Scale* (Keyes, 1998). The scale includes 33 items measuring five dimensions of social well-being on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*): social integration (individuals' appraisal of the quality of their own relation with society and community; sample item, "You feel like you're an important part of your community"); social contribution (the feeling of being a vital member of the society, with something important to offer to the world; sample item, "You feel you have nothing important to contribute to society," reverse code); social acceptance (trusting others, and having favorable opinions of human nature; sample item, "You believe that people are kind"); social actualization (the evaluation of the potentials of society, corresponding to the idea that society has potentials coming true through institutions and citizens; sample item, "You think the world is becoming a better place for everyone"); social coherence (the perception of the quality and organization of social world; sample item, "I find it easy to predict what will happen next in society"). The Italian version of the scale was used (Cicognani, Albanesi, & Berti, 2001).

*Duke Social Support Scale* (Parkerson & Broadhead, 1991). Participants were asked to consider a list of 11 items and decide how much each person or group of persons (e.g., wife/husband, children, parents, brothers or sisters) was supportive of them at that time in their life. A 4-point scale was used (1 = *there is no such person*, and 4 = *a lot*). The scale was translated by the authors of this article (forward and backward translation procedure).

*Bogardus's Social Distance Scale* (Bogardus, 1925). This scale consists of seven social situations with varying degrees of intimacy; Italian participants were required to indicate their willingness to become involved with members of the three most numerous immigrant groups living in the social context of the research (Ecuadorians, Moroccans, and Albanians). Similarly, immigrant participants were required to indicate their willingness to become involved with Italians. Participants were asked to indicate if they were willing to accept members of each of these groups as wives/husbands, friends, relatives, neighbours, colleagues, tourists, or alternatively, if they would prefer to have no relationships. Scores were coded on a scale from 1 (*the lowest social dis-*

tance) to 7 (*the highest social distance*). The scale was translated by the authors of this article (forward and backward translation procedure).

*Emotional feelings toward minorities* (Kosic et al., 2005). Italian participants were asked to express what feelings they experienced when they saw, met, or thought about people from Ecuador, Morocco, and Albania on a 3-point scale (ranging from 1 = *never* to 3 = *always*); similarly immigrants express emotional feelings toward Italians. Feelings were sympathy, happiness, admiration, curiosity, attractiveness, friendliness, solidarity, and trust.

*Acculturation strategies* (Berry, 1997). Participants rated on a 5-point scale how they perceived their acculturation strategies in response to two items: (a) "Please, evaluate the frequency of social contact you have with immigrants" (from 1 = *absent* to 5 = *frequent*); (b) "Please, evaluate the level of importance you attach to the maintenance of your culture of origin" (from 1 = *not important at all* to 5 = *extremely important*). These two measures assess the two acculturation dimensions of cross-cultural contact and culture maintenance; when these two dimensions are considered simultaneously they generated four acculturation strategies (integration, separation, marginalization, assimilation). The items were translated by the authors of this article (forward and backward translation procedure).

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents the chi-square and MANCOVA findings. MANCOVA was used to compare the mean scores of Italians and immigrants (under the label "immigrants" we averaged data from Ecuadorians, Moroccans, and Albanians) regarding the scales of social well-being, social support, social distance, and emotional feelings. MANCOVA showed a multivariate significant effect, Pillar's Trace = 0.113,  $F(1, 279) = 2.77, p < .002$ , that is, a significant difference between the two groups controlling for age and gender.

Significant univariate effects were found. One was for social integration,  $F(1, 279) = 5.61, p = .02, \eta^2_p = .02$ , and another was for social distance in immigrant group,  $F(1, 279) = 18.00, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .06$ . The third univariate effect was for the social distance toward the majority group,  $F(1, 279) = 7.95, p = .005, \eta^2_p = .03$ . Other variables did not reach statistical significance:  $F_s(1, 279) < 2.40, p_s > .12$ . Moreover, Italians and immigrants were not differently distributed,  $\chi^2(3, N = 408) = 6.26, p = .60$ , for acculturation strategies; however, the majority of Italians chose integration (40.8%) while immigrants preferred separation (37.3%).

A correlation matrix (Table 2) was obtained to determine the relations between social support, social well-being and measures of intercultural relationships in the Italian and immigrant groups. Results show that in the Italian group there was a significant correlation between social support and social well-being ( $r = .26, p < .01$ ) and between social support and positive emotional feelings toward immigrants ( $r = .21, p < .01$ ). Furthermore, we found a high correlation between social well-being and positive emotional feelings toward immigrants ( $r = .41, p < .01$ ) and a negative correlation between social well-being and social distance from immigrants ( $r = -.36, p < .01$ ). Regarding intergroup contact, for Italians data show a positive correlation with social well-being ( $r = .21, p < .01$ ), positive emotional feelings toward immigrant ( $r = .27, p < .01$ ), and a negative correlation with social distance ( $r = -.28, p < .01$ ). This pattern of results was not present in the immigrant group in which there was only a significant relation between social support and the maintenance of one's culture ( $r = .28, p < .01$ ).

TABLE 1  
Comparison of Italian and immigrant participants (MANCOVA and chi-square test) with respect to social well-being, social support, social distance, emotional feelings, and acculturation strategies

	Italians	Immigrants
Social well-being	4.34	4.43
Social support	.52	1.47
Social distance		
from Italians	2.20	3.14
from immigrants	4.61	4.08
Emotional feelings		
about Italians	16.76	17.28
about immigrants	13.38	14.22
Acculturation strategies		
Integration	40.80%	28.40%
Separation	26.50%	37.30%
Assimilation	16.30%	16.70%
Marginalization	16.30%	17.60%

TABLE 2  
Correlations between variables for Italians and immigrants

Italians	Social support	Social well-being	Positive emotional feelings (toward immigrants)	Social distance (from immigrants)	Intergroup contact	Maintenance of one's culture
Social support	1.00					
Social well-being	.26**	1.00				
Positive emotional feelings (toward immigrants)	.21**	.41**	1.00			
Social distance (from immigrants)	-.16*	-.36**	-.62**	1.00		
Intergroup contact	.08	.21**	.27**	-.28**	1.00	
Maintenance of one's culture	.10	.21**	.04	-.13*	.10	1.00

Immigrants	Social support	Social well-being	Positive emotional feelings (toward Italians)	Social distance (from Italians)	Intergroup contact	Maintenance of one's culture
Social support	1.00					
Social well-being	.00	1.00				
Positive emotional feelings (toward Italians)	.09	-.09	1.00			

(Table 2 continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Immigrants	Social support	Social well-being	Positive emotional feelings (toward Italians)	Social distance (from Italians)	Intergroup contact	Maintenance of one's culture
Social distance (from Italians)	.11	-.19	.04	1.00		
Intergroup contact	.11	.16	-.06	.04	1.00	
Maintenance of one's culture	.28**	.12	.04	.00	-.05	1.00

Note. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$  (two-tailed).

In order to investigate the acculturation process, in the majority group ANOVA was applied. We investigated individuals that chose acculturation strategies of integration, separation, marginalization, or assimilation with respect to social distance, emotional feelings toward immigrants, and social well-being (Table 3). As predicted, acculturation strategies were associated with the selected variables. In particular, those who chose integration are characterized by: lower social distance ( $M = 4.09$ ) than those who chose separation ( $M = 5.18$ ) and marginalization ( $M = 5.20$ ), as confirmed by the post hoc Bonferroni test,  $p < .05$ . Furthermore, people who chose integration felt more positive emotions toward immigrants ( $M = 14.35$ ) than people who chose separation ( $M = 12.19$ ) and marginalization ( $M = 12.76$ ), as confirmed by the post hoc Bonferroni test,  $p < .05$ . Finally, people who chose integration showed higher levels of social well-being ( $M = 4.56$ ) than those who chose marginalization ( $M = 3.94$ ), as confirmed by the post hoc Bonferroni test,  $p < .05$ .

TABLE 3  
Acculturation strategies and intergroup relationship (Italian group)

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F(df)</i>	<i>p &lt;</i>
Social distance from immigrants	Integration	4.09	1.74	9.29 (3.251)	.001
	Separation	5.18	1.19		
	Marginalization	5.20	1.37		
	Assimilation	4.73	1.59		
Positive emotional feelings toward immigrants	Integration	14.35	3.50	7.12 (3.265)	.001
	Separation	12.19	3.05		
	Marginalization	12.76	3.20		
	Assimilation	13.03	2.91		
Social well-being	Integration	4.56	0.77	8.39 (3.287)	.001
	Separation	4.30	0.77		
	Marginalization	3.94	0.61		
	Assimilation	4.27	0.79		

Multiple regression was used to reveal which variables were predictors of social well-being in the Italian and immigrant groups. Results are reported in Table 4; they demonstrate that the set of predictors explained more than 20% of variance in psychological well-being for Italian participants. The significant predictors were: positive emotions toward immigrants,  $\beta = .27$ , social support,  $\beta = .18$ , the maintenance of one's culture,  $\beta = .14$ , and intergroup contact,  $\beta = .13$ . It was also found that social distance from immigrants had no significant effects. The model did not explain psychological well-being for the immigrant group.

TABLE 4  
Regression model predicting social well-being

Italians					
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> ≤
(Constant)	2.56	0.44		5.84	.001
Social support	0.03	0.01	.18	2.92	.001
Maintenance of one's culture	0.22	0.10	.14	2.23	.03
Intergroup contact	0.19	0.10	.13	1.97	.05
Positive emotions toward immigrants	0.06	0.02	.27	3.43	.001
Social distance from immigrants	-0.04	0.04	-.08	-1.07	.28
<i>F</i> (5, 211) = 14.89, <i>p</i> < .001; <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .24					
Immigrants					
(Constant)	4.86	0.69		7.05	.00
Social support	0.01	0.02	.10	0.77	.44
Maintenance of one's culture	0.17	0.19	.11	0.86	.39
Intergroup contact	0.19	0.18	.14	1.05	.30
Positive emotions toward Italians	-0.04	0.03	-.18	-1.43	.16
Social distance from Italians	-0.10	0.05	-.23	-1.83	.07
<i>F</i> (5, 55) = 1.57, <i>ns</i> ; <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .46					

As an additional analysis, we aimed at testing whether social support may moderate the relationship between intergroup contact and social distance. We hypothesized different effects depending on the group of respondents. More specifically, for Italians we expected that social support (both familiar and extrafamiliar) would not influence the positive effects of intergroup contact on social distance. In other words, intergroup contact would decrease Italians' intentions to distance themselves from ethnic minorities, regardless of different levels of social support. Instead, for immigrants higher levels of social support should nullify the positive effects of intergroup contact on social distance or even increase immigrants' intentions to distance themselves from Italians.

With regard to Italians, moderation analysis showed that intergroup contact was negatively associated with perceived social distance from immigrants,  $b = -0.40$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $t(250) = -4.68$ ,  $p < .001$ . Also social support was negatively related to social distance,  $b = -0.04$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t(250) = -2.02$ ,  $p = .04$ . However, these main effects were not qualified by the Contact ×

Social support interaction,  $b = -0.02$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t(250) = -1.42$ ,  $p = .16$ , indicating that social support did not moderate the effects of intergroup contact on social distance.

With regard to immigrants, neither intergroup contact nor social support were significantly associated with social distance,  $bs < 0.18$ ,  $t(83) < 1.01$ ,  $ps > .30$ . However, the Contact  $\times$  Social support interaction was significant,  $b = 0.07$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $t(83) = 2.27$ ,  $p = .03$ . Supporting our hypotheses, simple slope analyses revealed that intergroup contact significantly increased perceived social distance from Italians for immigrants with higher levels of intraethnic social support (+1SD),  $b = 0.60$ ,  $SE = 0.29$ ,  $t(83) = 2.02$ ,  $p = .05$ . In contrast, the relationship between contact and social distance from Italians was not significant for immigrants with lower levels of social support (-1SD),  $b = -0.24$ ,  $SE = 0.20$ ,  $t(83) = -1.20$ ,  $p = .23$  (Figure 1).

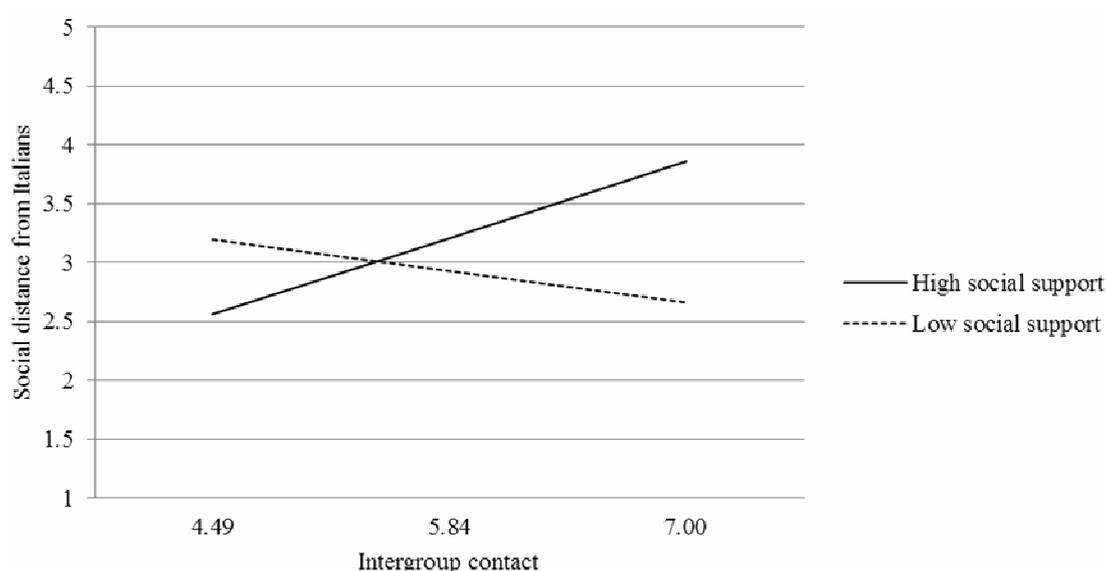


FIGURE 1  
The interactive effect of intergroup contact and social support on social distance from Italians.  
Immigrant participants.

## DISCUSSION

The present study sought to examine the relationships between acculturation strategies, social support, and social well-being in Italian and immigrant groups. The results highlight that immigrant participants perceived high social well-being; this finding is consistent with the characterization that other authors make of immigrants as persons who feel comfortable with other people (Martinez Garcia et al., 2002). There is a wealth of literature that illustrates the centrality of social support systems for individual and community well-being; social support networks play an important role for immigrants during the process of adjustment to the host community (Gaudet & Clément, 2009).

International migration leads to changes in social integration, in the structures of social networks, and in the support functions (Maya Jariego & Molina, 2007). People move into a new

context where they probably have a weaker integration. Since social isolation is a cause for stress in itself and is directly related to psychological symptoms, we expected that social inclusion and general social well-being would be a source of psychological support for immigrants (Sirin et al., 2013). However, our study demonstrates that, in the immigrant group, these constructs are not related. The intraethnic social support seems not to help the subject to fit into the host society; in fact, social support is not correlated with a more general social well-being for immigrants. Family ties provide individuals with emotional support, but weak ties (low levels of closeness) could be more helpful in providing the individual with informational and instrumental support that facilitates integration in the community (Wang & Kanungo, 2004). In any case, these interpretations must be considered taking into account the limitations of this study, which are discussed further on.

Furthermore, this latter interpretation is supported by Záleská, Brabcová, and Vacková (2014) who show that the changes in immigrant network composition by increasing its heterogeneity within acculturation process lead to a reorganization in the distribution of support and leverage functions. Consequently, contact and attitudes toward others groups play a key role in the acculturation outcomes. Záleská et al. stated that social distance can be felt as the difficulty and need to obtain formal support in the host community context. This can be explained by the impact of family network that allows the access to information and support. Although these findings require further investigations, they seem to show a potential (negative) role by immigrants' social support. More clearly, these results seem to indicate that, for ethnic minorities, higher perceptions of strong and supportive intraethnic bonds may negatively shape the experiences of intergroup contact and even lead to stronger intentions to distance themselves from ethnic majorities (i.e., Italians); however, findings related to the effects of moderation of social support are difficult to interpret. According to Sirin and colleagues (2013), the adverse influence of social support could be interpreted as a strategy of people who prefer to cope with stress by using their own forces. In fact, it is relevant to analyze social support considering the broader social context in which support processes take place.

In sum, it appears that social well-being is not linked to a subject's ability to encounter sources of support or with the readiness of social networks to become sources of support. In the case of immigrants, receiving social support depends as much on the subject's skill in gaining access to it, as on the psychological and social resources' receptiveness to the subject's needs (Laireiter & Baumann, 1992). In this study, we used frequency of intergroup contact and the importance related to the maintenance of culture of origin as components of acculturation, but these variables do not fully capture the complex process of acculturation and its effects on well-being. Furthermore, the majority of studies on acculturation and well-being vary in how they measure acculturation, and this variation may account for different results across studies (Rudmin, 2009). In addition, because of sample size limitations, we were unable to further separate the immigrant group across different ethnic groups and countries of origin.

The most important direction for future research lies in the analysis of the quality and consistence of social support and the relationship between acculturation strategies, various kinds of support and immigrant well-being, in order to understand the suitability of the source of support. The phenomenon of immigration has led to an important increase in the number of social programs and services for migrant populations in many European countries. However, some investigations have shown that the use of formal resources is extremely low among these groups. In contrast to the limited utilization of programs and services, research in social psychology has re-

vealed that the primary source of help and support for immigrants is represented by their informal social networks (Plaza, Alonso-Morillejo, & Pozo-Munoz, 2006).

The conclusions, as well as limitations of this study, identify some interesting possibilities for future research. Furthermore, future studies should individuate the possible mediation variables that could be involved in the relationship between social support and well-being; one of them could be represented by acculturation strategies (Rivera, 2007). It is possible to conclude that the impact of acculturation strategies on the relationship between social support and social well-being has only partially been investigated.

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