

# 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 do with a rapid immigrant population increase. This change in "plural" society was not, and is not, without deep-rooted disagreements that sometimes are even source of conflicts. In this context, the public opinion has become more and more not very tolerant and in some cases overtly hostile. For these reasons, there is 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 complex societies (Berry, 2001). It is possible to identify three main core questions across these domains.

1. **How immigrant youth acculturate.** Generally, the literature proposed a bidimensional model of acculturation (Berry, 1997; Phinney, 1990; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001) based on two independent dimensions, maintenance of the culture of the country of origin (e.g., in terms of identity, language, ways of life) and involvement with the larger society, from which derive four acculturation 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.*, 2006) revealed four distinct profiles that are consistent with the bidimensional model (*integration*, *ethnic*, *national*, *diffuse* profiles).

2. **Whether and how young immigrants' ways of acculturating are related to different levels of adjustment.** Specific researches (Berry *et al.*, 2006) showed that the integration profile is related to the best psychological and socio-cultural adjustment, while the diffuse profile to the worst; in between, ethnic profile is related to moderately good psychological adjustment but poorer socio-cultural adjustment and national profile to moderately poor psychological 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 proposed, members of the host society hold specific acculturation expectations (*multiculturalism*, *melting pot*, *segregation*, and *exclusion*) parallel to immigrants' acculturation strategies; these acculturation orientations are likely to affect the acculturation of immigrants. However, the attitudes of the host group and the process of immigrants' adjustment involve adaptation on the part of both the immigrants and the receiving population. In this process, some important variables play an important role in characterizing the way immigrants and receiving population interact and the kind of cultural adaptation which can take place: immigrants' perceived discrimination and attitudes towards 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 relations.

Starting from this theoretical framework, the study was aimed at investigating in the Italian context: (a) young immigrants' ways of acculturating in connection with 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 comes from the Italian section of MIRIPS, an international research project leading by John 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 roughly divided in two equal age-groups (13-15 and 16-18 years). The Maghrebi group included both first-generation (those who were born in country of origin and arrived after the age of 6; 43%) and second-generation (born in Italy, or arrived before the age of 7; 57%) youth.

**Instruments and Procedure.** Data collection involved completion of two structured versions of MIRIPS questionnaire, one for immigrant groups and the other for host group. All participants were contacted in public schools and questionnaires were group-administered in classrooms. Both versions of the questionnaire assessed a wide range of variables. For the goals of this study, here only some measures were taken into account. Usually, response options ranged from 1 to 5.

♦ **Immigrants' Acculturation Attitudes.** A 16-item scale assessing four acculturation attitudes: integration, assimilation, separation, marginalisation.

♦ **Host group's Acculturation Expectation.** A 16-item scale assessing four acculturation expectation: multiculturalism, melting pot, segregation, exclusion.

♦ **Immigrants' Ethnic Identity.** A 7-item scale assessing ethnic affirmation.

♦ **National Identity.** A 3-item scale assessing national affirmation.

♦ **Ethnic and National Peer Contact.** Two scales assessing the quantity of, and the frequency of interaction with, peers from ethnic group (the one's own for immigrants), or from the national group.

♦ **Psychological Adaptation.** Three scales assessing self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), life satisfaction (Diener *et al.*, 1985), and psychological problems (items drawn from a variety of sources).

♦ **Immigrants' Socio-cultural Competence.** A 20-item scale assessing difficulty to live in the host country with final general score reversed.

♦ **Immigrants' Perceived Discrimination.** A 5-item scale assessing the perception to be treated unfairly.

♦ **Host group's Tolerance.** A 11-item scale assessing the degree of tolerance of immigrant and ethnic groups.

♦ **Attitudes towards Groups.** Rating scale of immigrant and host groups ranging from 0 (very unfavourable) to 100 (very favourable).

## RESULTS

### Maghrebi youth acculturation profiles

Cluster analysis was carried out with the variables associated with the acculturation process. Initially, different analyses were conducted using the TwoStep Cluster Analysis explorative procedure, suggesting a two cluster solution. Then, it was used the *k*-means cluster method. 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

Cluster analysis was carried out with the variables 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%).

Fig. 1. Acculturation profiles for Maghrebi youth

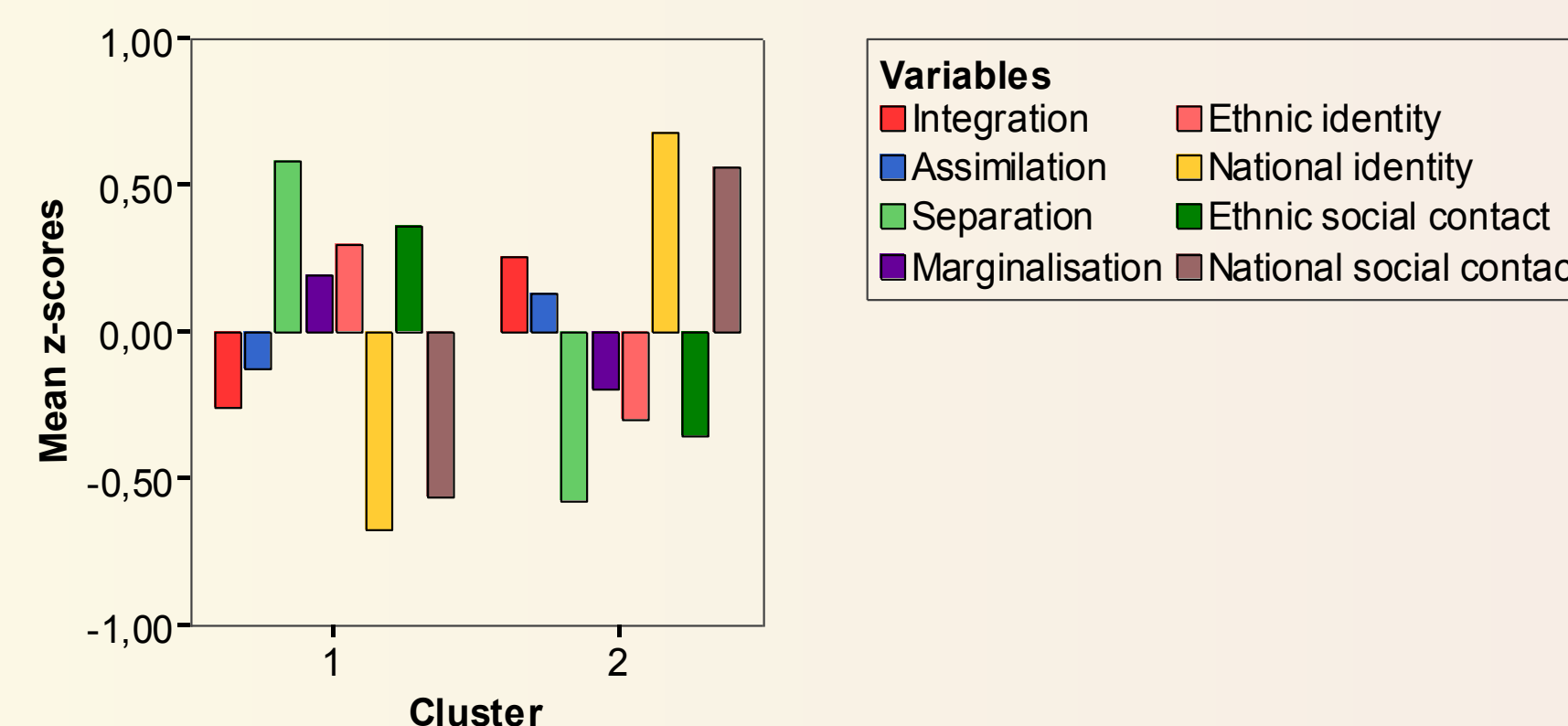
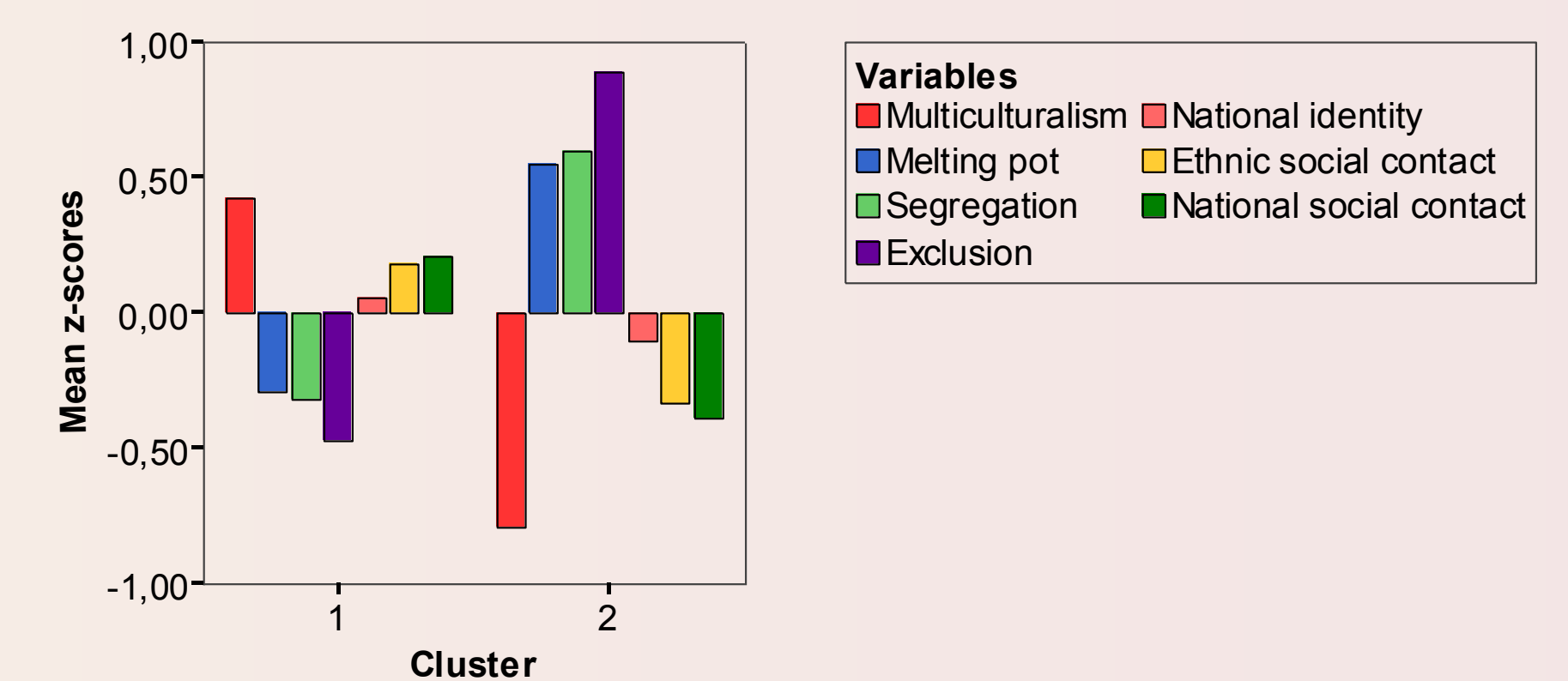


Fig. 2. Acculturation expectation profiles for Italian youth



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

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

### Relationships between acculturation profiles and psychosocial adjustment of young Maghrebi

A MANOVA was performed with profile as IV and self esteem, life satisfaction, psychological problems and socio-cultural competence as DV.

Results yielded significant multivariate effect for profile (Wilks'  $\lambda = .91, F(4,107) = 2.63, p < .05, \eta^2 = .09$ ). Subsequent univariate analyses showed that life satisfaction,  $F(1,110) = 5.66, p < .05, \eta^2 = .05$ , and socio-cultural competence,  $F(1,110) = 3.96, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$ , were related to acculturation profile (Fig. 4).

Fig. 3. Diffuse non-ethnic profile between generations

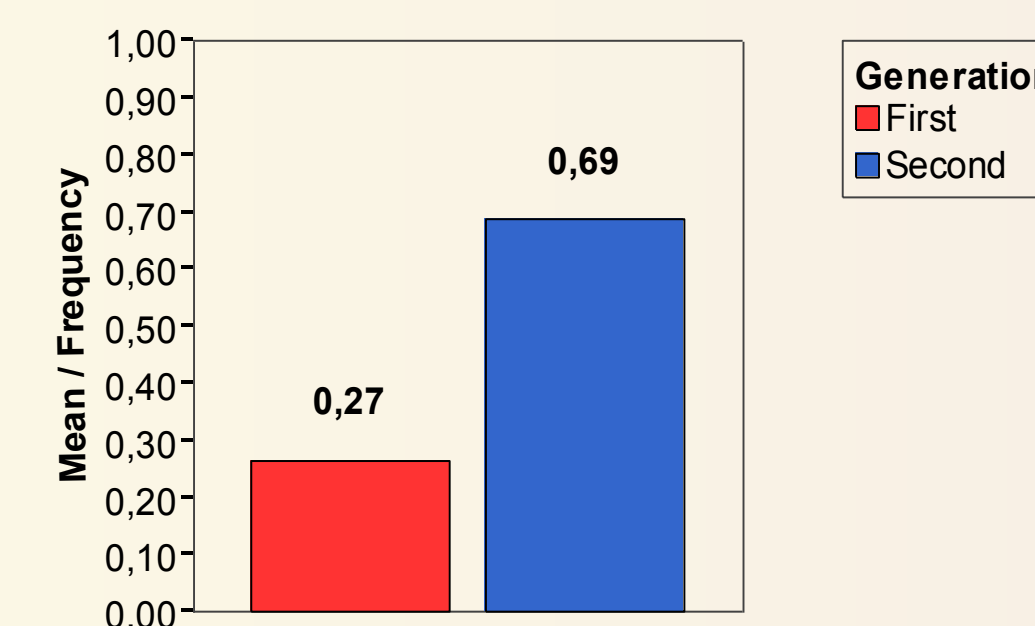


Fig. 4. Adjustment variables between acculturation profiles

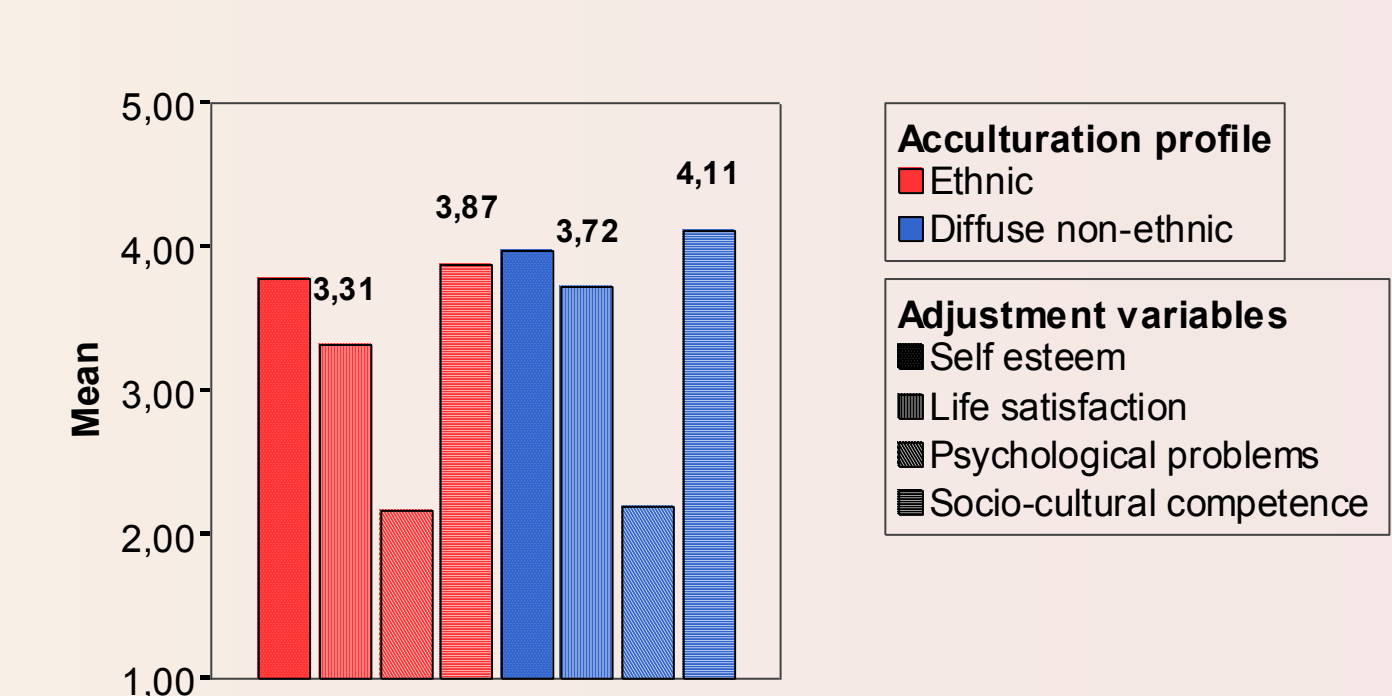
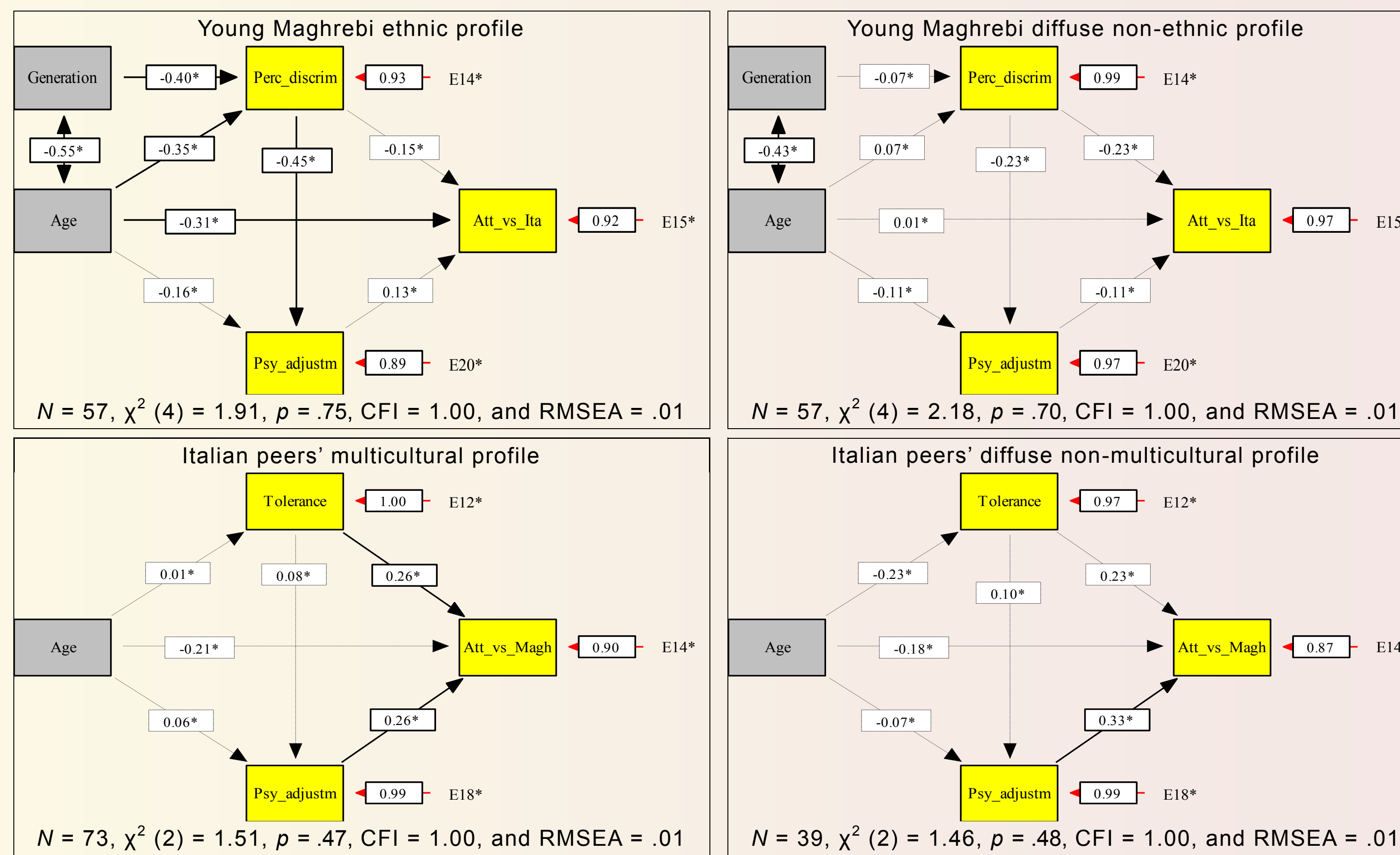


Fig. 5. Relationships among parallel variables for different Maghrebi and Italian peers' profiles using SEM



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### Mutual connections between Maghrebi and Italian young people

Only common parallel variables between immigrant and host youth were used. For the psychological adjustment was used the factor score deriving from the principal component analysis of self-esteem, life satisfaction, psychological problems, suggesting that they could grouped into one factor. The theoretical model was tested for each profile group using EQS 6.1 program (Bentler, 2006), constraining all error variances. As indicated by Fig. 5, all models showed an acceptable fit.

The estimates of the coefficients are presented in terms of completely standardized coefficients and dotted lines indicate nonsignificant paths.

## 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 are not consistent with the bidimensional model but not in opposition. A first number of Maghrebi youth was classified in an *ethnic* profile, characterized by an orientation towards the ethnic group, with limited involvement with the national society; the second one in an *diffuse non-ethnic* profile, characterized by a predominance of integration strategy with large involvement with the national society but restricted ethnic orientation, suggesting a sort of confusion mostly belonging to the 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 confusion among different orientations towards diversity along with a general limitation of social contacts.

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 a *ethnic* profile. In other words, Maghrebi youth with an integration strategy and involved in national culture showed some greater psychosocial 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; in 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 influenced attitude towards Maghrebi people.

Concluding, both Maghrebi and Italian adolescents' showed two different profiles, while the bidimensional view suggested four of them. In considering this finding is important to point out as the Italian immigration phenomenon is relatively new and to take into account the specific age range of participants of this study. In this sense, it is possible suppose that the "diffuse" profiles could differentiate in other kind of profiles depending on the increase of these variables; for immigrants, the generation status seems to have a significant role in distinguishing between the two profiles to date. 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 perceive a lower discrimination, and (b) for Italians to pursue the multicultural path, tolerance and psychological adjustment.

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