Enhancing critical dialogue about intercultural integration: The Photovoice technique

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ABSTRACT

The present research used the Photovoice method to enhance critical and intercultural dialogue in a group of host young adults. Photovoice belongs to the field of participatory action research and Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), methods generally used in investigations of individual and social change. Taking part in this study were 99 Italian subjects (75 females and 24 males), living in a two north-western region of Italy. Findings show that integration is the most frequent acculturative strategy represented by the participants, followed by assimilation, separation and marginalisation. Participants also represent positive attitudes, that underline an openness towards others and feelings of equality. They also articulate solidarity, feelings of reciprocity towards immigrants and hope for a more intercultural future. Positive contact with immigrants is experienced. Participants also revealed negative attitudes, identifying the presence of mutual closure and uneasiness towards other groups. Moreover, they think that host negative attitudes include indifference, intolerance, prejudice, racism, discrimination, fear and ignorance. Conversely, they think that immigrants live in a situation of delusion about their own expectations of their experience, loneliness and isolation. Participants say that this study made them think about issues they do not usually explore and to develop a critical dialogue about them. From these findings, it may be possible to design a positive representation of an intercultural reality that is becoming more and more realistic in which young adults are amenable to an increasingly intercultural society and desirous of acquiring better understandings of other cultures.

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1. Introduction

In Europe, cultural diversity is considered a precious resource for society and contributes to critical dialogue. At the same time, the recent world crisis could generate conflicts between groups and increase negative attitudes towards immigrants and minorities. This situation highlights how intercultural integration is a meaningful and controversial topic in Europe, as emerge by the special issue of Berry and Sami (2013), that include five papers about some crucial aspects of living in a multicultural society in Europe, as the psychological and sociocultural adaptation to the new context and their interface with the institutions.

During the last thirty years, Italian society has seen a constant increase in the influx of individuals from abroad; consequently, Italians are becoming more and more aware of the intercultural issue. The recent multi-ethnic dimension of the
country, and of Western societies in general, animates various disciplines about immigrants' integration (Contini & Maturo, 2011; Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2010; Mancini, Ceresini, & Davolo, 2007). The current life context is global and multicultural and people who are embedded in it directly experience the cultural diversity present in everyday life (Cushner, 2008). People and culture reciprocally influence themselves, and this relationship develops a shared consciousness among society's members (Carlson, Engebretson, & Chamberlain, 2006). Indeed, people's attitude towards immigrants is one of the most important topics in social psychology studies (López-Rodríguez, Zagefka, Navas, & Cuadrado, 2014; Matera, Stefaneli, & Brown, 2011).

Such studies have examined this issue from different widely cited theoretical perspectives including Intergroup Relations, Social Representation, Cultural Competence, Social Identity, Social Dominance, Subtle and Blatant prejudice, Contact Theory and Acculturation Strategies.

According to the literature, acculturation strategies are originated by two usually correlated components: attitudes (individual preferences for acculturation) and behaviours (actual mechanisms of acculturation) exemplified daily within intercultural encounters.

Consequently, the present work aims to explore the positive and negative attitudes towards immigration, in hopes of delineating the most frequently used acculturation strategies and enhancing the critical consciousness and dialogue among society about these issues.

1.1. Review of acculturation theories

Acculturation processes represent one of the principal investigative areas within psychology (Berry, 2001). In a cross-cultural psychology perspective, researchers are oriented to identify the cultural changes that occur when two different cultural groups come into contact. In the one-dimensional model, the two groups are considered as opposite. Acculturation in this model assumes a linear change process; that is, immigrants lose their original culture while they increasingly identify with the new culture (Gordon, 1964). The most used theoretical model is the bi-dimensional designed by Berry (2003). This model accounts for the ethnic minorities' as well as the natives' points of view while also introducing the concept of acculturation strategies, which refers to the way in which individuals and groups are involved in the acculturation process. Acculturation strategies are linked to the psychological and psychosocial well-being of people belonging to ethnic minorities and to factors both collective (language, religion, values, economic and demographic conditions of the origin society and the host society) and individual (demographic, cultural and personal characteristics, prior and subsequent motivations and expectations of immigration experience). Strategies' labels can change based on whether one considers them from the point of view of the dominant group or a minority one. For example, when individuals do not strive to maintain their cultural identity while interacting daily with other cultures, we talk about assimilation. People who are assimilated prefer to forsake their cultural heritage and be entirely absorbed by the new society. Conversely, if they emphasise their own culture while trying to avoid contact with other cultures, this is a case of separation. In addition, 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. In contrast, marginalisation occurs when the individual does not want to maintain both his/her own culture and that of the host group. When discussing acculturation from the point of view of the dominant group, one must consider dimension of power with which members of the dominant group can affect acculturative choices. Therefore, the term melting pot corresponds to assimilation, while segregation corresponds to separation, when forced by the dominant group. Similarly, exclusion matches with marginalisation, and multiculturalism fits with integration.

Traditionally, research on acculturation has mostly been conducted from an immigrant’s point of view. More recently, there has been a gradual but substantial shift towards emphasising the experience of host communities. Some of the latest models develop the bi-directional nature of acculturative processes. For instance, in the Interactive Acculturation Model (IAM: Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senécal, 1997), relationships between immigrants and natives consist of a specific set of strategies that consider three factors: the immigrant community’s acculturative orientation, the host community’s acculturative orientation and the interpersonal and intergroup outcomes that result from the interaction of these two orientations. The interaction between an immigrant and host community can produce consensual relationships when both choose an assimilation, integration or individualism strategy. In other instances, such interactions create problematic or conflicting relationships (Montreuil, Bourhis, & Vanbeselaere, 2004; Moriconi, Montaruli, Barrette, El-Geledi, & Bourish, 2005). The Concordance Model of Acculturation (CMA: Piontkowski, Rohman, & Florack, 2002) uses Berry’s model dimensions to combine the dominant group’s strategies with those of the non-dominant group. In it, there are four concordance levels, based on the extent to which the attitudes of both groups converge:

- Consensual level: The host and immigrant communities’ attitudes fit.
- Problematic level towards cultural maintenance: if attitudes towards maintenance disagree, for example, where the host community wants immigrants to assimilate but immigrants prefer integration, there is a cultural problem.
- Problematic level towards the desire for between-group contact: there is a contact problem if attitudes towards interpersonal contact disagree. In such instances, for example, the host community adopts the position of segregation and the immigrant community adopts integration.
The conflicting level is achieved either when two groups disagree on the acculturative issue or if the dominant group prefers exclusion. Piontkowski et al. (2002) stated that this attitude always leads to intergroup conflict because the host country prefers to have no immigrants.

More recently, Arends-Toth and Van de Vijver (2003) affirmed that an individual's preference for adjustment or maintenance can vary according to life's subdomain or situation (Domain Specificity). For example, one can desire assimilation at work (economic assimilation) while speaking his or her own language and that of the host (linguistic integration) and still maintaining traditional cultural relationships within the family (separation in private life). The Relative Acculturation Extended Model (RAEM: Navas et al., 2005) further contributes relevant innovations, such as the differentiation between acculturation strategies (real plan: the acculturation options that immigrants say they put in practice within the new society versus those that the natives perceive as adopted by immigrants) and acculturation attitudes (ideal plan: the acculturation options that immigrants would choose to utilise if they could and that natives would prefer immigrants to use). The RAEM posits that there is no single or general acculturation attitude. Rather, the dynamic is more complex because different options, in different life areas (political, work, economic, social and family relationships, religious beliefs and customs, principles and values), can be preferred and adopted concurrently.

Navas et al. (2005) observed how the outcomes of intercultural contact can vary based on the different socio-cultural realities that both natives and immigrants must face. To differentiate between the central and peripheral domains of the space, where the two groups mutually meet, the authors described many solutions for intercultural encounters. According to them, some solutions are more easily acquired in the areas of career and economic choices, where both hosts and immigrants tend to prefer integration and assimilation strategies, but more difficult in the values domain, where immigrants prefer separation and natives prefer assimilation or integration to the host community.

1.2. Intergroup contact experiences

Because of the impact of attitudes towards immigrants, this outcome has been a focus of social psychologists. The topics of interest include ethnic prejudice, stereotypes, feelings and intergroup contact.

Avoidant behaviours and attitudes were one of the earliest measures of prejudice. Later studies, however, have suggested that a better way of studying subtle prejudice might be to measure people's positive emotions towards the group in question (Kosic, Mannetti, & Sam, 2005). Intergroup contact both enhances positive emotions and reduces negative emotions towards the outgroup (Petitgrew & Tropp, 2008). The contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) is a useful theoretical framework for understanding how prejudice can be reduced via positive contact with the outgroup. Recent community-based research is consistent with this theory, demonstrating that proximity to foreign-born neighbours reduced exclusion of foreigners (Escandell & Ceobanu, 2009).

Stephan and Stephan (2000) specify the concept of threat, describing the Integrated Threat Theory, which accounts for threats to the well-being of the ingroup: real, direct threats in terms of economic and political power; symbolic threat, aimed at values and beliefs; and inter-group anxiety, related to the anticipation of negative results during between-group interactions. The concept of negative stereotypes is also included in threats because such stereotypes can lead to expectations that members of outgroup will engage in behaviours that threaten the well-being of the ingroup.

Mackie, Devos, and Smith (2000) discussed Intergroup Emotion Theory. This theory asserts that emotions play a role in the creation of prejudice. The core idea is that one's group membership represents a part of the self. Individuals recognise themselves as a member of a group and consider themselves as relatively interchangeable exemplars of the group rather than as unique individuals. The sense of self and of the self's relationship with the group become significantly similar, and mental representations of the self and the ingroup are linked each other. As such, the ingroup acquires emotional significance. That is, when an event affects the ingroup, people have an emotional reaction. Intergroup Emotion Theory combines this social identity perspective with the appraisal theories of emotion (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). While appraisal theory assumes that emotions follow from events related to the individual and personal self, Intergroup Emotion Theory instead says that emotions are also generated by the collective aspects of the self. Therefore, when an outgroup is considered as threatening, may individuals will manifest negative ingroup emotions, such as fear or anger, and become part of the prejudice against the outgroup in armony with the study of Tip et al. (2012), which underline that the majority groups feel threatened by minority group when perceived that their members want to maintain their original culture. Also a Spanish study by López-Rodríguez et al. (2014), found that the perceived culture adoption had an effect on the stereotypes, perceived threat, the preference for culture maintenance and on the preference for culture adoption. Conversely, when the outgroup is viewed positively, positive emotions such as sympathy may emerge. These positive emotions then elicit behaviours and an overall reaction that are more positive towards the outgroup.

The effects of intergroup contact could also be mediated by affective and cognitive factors (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003). Anxiety is one of these affective mediators: majority groups avoid contact with minority groups because of anxiety experienced during between-group interactions. The majority group's members may feel uncertain about how to behave, have difficulty choosing subjects for discussion and may be afraid of unwittingly being offensive. Such anxieties can contribute to avoidance of interactions with minority group members. In consideration of these factors, one can see that experience with contact between groups can help reduce negative emotions. Another mediator is intergroup friendship. Aron, Aron, Tudor, and Nelson (1991) affirmed that friends are included in the psychological self. For the same reason, if an
individual’s friend is a member of a different group, then that group membership becomes part of the individual’s sense of self as well. This cognitive process indirectly fosters positives associations with the friend’s group. Friendship, then, should decrease negative emotions and increase positive ones, as also show the study of De Caroli, Falanga, and Sagone (2013), where findings demonstrate that subjects with friends from other ethnic groups expressed lower levels in some components of subtle and blatant prejudice than the others.

1.3. Enhance critical dialogue: Photovoice technique

Karasz and Singelis (2009) advocated the use of qualitative methods. Such methods can make the concept of culture more concrete and identify processes that influence individuals’ thoughts (Ratner & Hui, 2003). Moreover, qualitative methods develop a deeper understanding of participants’ experiences and perspectives.

Photovoice is originally developed in the 1990s by Caroline Wang. It belongs to the field of participatory action research and Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), generally used in investigations of individual and social change. In Photovoice, people are assumed to be experts of their own lives, in this work it means that they provide informations to investigate deeper their perspective about the topic of immigration. The use of a specific photographic technique cues participants to think about their community’s strengths and weaknesses, to represent and improve it. Photovoice has three main objectives: (1) enable participants to recollect and think about their community’s strengths and weaknesses, involving people in an active process of active listening and dialogue; (2) promote introspection and critical dialogue about personal and community issues; and (3) reach politicians of that area.

Wang (1999) described Photovoice as a method that finds its roots in the community, based on three theoretical frameworks. The first is Freire’s Education to Critical Consciousness theory (2002), which helps participants to understand and to act on historical, political and social conditions, all very important instruments to community change. The second is Feminist theory, which espouses an appreciation for subjective experience, recognising the meaning of an experience as well as political commitment. In illustrating the idea, Griselda Pollock (1996) stated: “Everyone has a specific story, a particular experience of the configurations of class, race, gender, sexuality, family, country, displacement, alliance. . . Those stories are mediated by the forms of representation available in the culture” (p. XVII). The last theoretical framework is Documentary Photography, largely used to give voice to the most vulnerable people (women, children, elderly), enabling them to tell their stories and describe their perception of the world.

Freire’s approach (2002) originated from the idea that social oppression imposes itself on a culture that has poor analytical skills and initiatives. If the culture is adequately stimulated to engage in collective introspection and discussion, then it can develop a critical consciousness to modify personal attitudes towards responsibility and initiate participant behaviours, based on the ability to understand social realities as consequences of individual choices. Wang and Burris (1994) used Freire’s educative approach (2002) to design Photovoice. In Photovoice, pictures are used to identify the community’s most important issues, to cue participants to think critically about contributing factors and to identify possible solutions.

As Wang (2006) and Carlson et al. (2006) stress youth Photovoice is a process that involves education for critical consciousness. The participation of youth in this qualitative technique originates from their desire to be autonomous and express creativity in documenting their lives. Photovoice allows youth, to express and advocate the issues that are important to them by their language and experiences, in line with Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2003) that describe Photovoice as an opportunity for youths to take part in activities and grow their critical consciousness and move towards action.

Photovoice has been used in different fields of investigation, however there is a lack of study about host youth perception on immigration and on youth communication to politicians about their solutions for positive intergroup integration. It was first utilised in China, with the women who worked in the Yunnan district’s rice fields. These women were considered less important than men. Thanks to Photovoice, they were able to express themselves and become advocates about their rights (Wang & Burris, 1994; Wang, Burris, & Xiang, 1996; Wang, Yi, Tao, & Carovano, 1998). Photovoice was later applied in Flint, Michigan, USA, in an area distressed by violence. Participants included young men and women, as well as adults and politicians. Experience with Photovoice stimulated efforts to engage in violence prevention in neighbourhoods (Wang, Morrel-Samuels, Hutchinson, Bell, & Pestronk, 2004). Photovoice has also been used with homeless men and women, to record their daily lives and to communicate their needs to politicians (Wang, 1998; Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000). Similarly, Collie, Liu, Podsadlowsi, and Kindon (2010) used Photovoice with immigrants and former refugees in communities whose relational networks, customs and social hierarchy were perceived as threatened. Photovoice has also been applied to groups of people with mental illness (Bowers, 1999), young peer educators (Moss, 1999a, 1999b) and managers and employees of public health departments (Wang, 1988).

Photovoice has been incorporated in Italy as well. It was used with university students to begin empowerment processes, in addition to discussions and reflections about university life (Santinello, Facci, Lenzi, Aleotti, & Cristini, 2008). Additionally, it was used in a study in Naples to examine the desires and expectations of tourists and residents, to create opportunities and well-being for both, in light of the view of tourism social capital in the development of a sustainable perspective (Arcidiacono & Di Napoli, 2009). More recently, Photovoice was employed with adolescents to promote community changes (Caso, 2011). Together, these works demonstrate how Photovoice can be a powerful instrument to enable community organisations to communicate with politicians. According with those and with the paper of Frankenberger, Kupper, Wagner, and Bongard (2013), that underline the importance of the host perspective to study multiculturalism, the present research wants to stress attitude towards immigration as an essential element to the integration, moreover it wants to enhance majority group’s
youth to think about the topic of immigration to provide possible solutions concerning the challenges perceived by their community. Furthermore this work investigate different domain specifics of acculturation emerged from the spontaneous categorization of participants, as claim Hatzigeorgiadis, Morela, Elbe, Kouli, and Sanchez (2013), about the need to consider different domain as, for example, sport.

1.4. The aims of the present study

The present study examines Italian young adults’ attitudes towards immigration with a particular attention to intergroup contact and acculturation strategies. The second aim is to foster critical dialogue on intercultural topic in participants and create their critical consciousness about emotionally meaningful topics of their lives, such as migration.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants included 99 Italian university students (95.1% females and 4.9% males), living in two north-western region of Italy were 35% of foreign people live (ISTAT, 2011). Participants had a mean age of 20.7 years (19–44 years old, standard dev. 3.45). They completed a schedule about their contact with immigrants: 4% of them declare to have no contact, they encounter immigrants only in the city, but does not speak with them; 17.2% see immigrants often in neighbours, on the job or in school context, but speaks with them only if they involve him/her; 25.3% see immigrants often in neighbours, on the job or in school context and speaks frequently with them; 44.4% has immigrants friends, 9.1% has immigrants relatives.

They are distributed into 10 groups of 10–12 members, each different in gender, age, contact with immigrants and socio-cultural level.

2.2. Procedure

In order to reach our aims we choose Photovoice method because it allow to deeper understand participants perspective about the issue of immigration, since that technique makes youth involve in their communities (Johnson & Martínez Guzmán, 2012) and is based on the assumption that participants are experts of their own lives (Wang, 2006). Therefore Photovoice inspire youth to express and stand up for the topic that are important to them, in agreement with Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2003), that in their study identify Photovoice an opportunity given to youth to grow their critical consciousness and move towards action. Fig. 1 illustrates the layout of Photovoice’s phases.

Each group takes part in a workshop conducted by moderators that have been trained on Photovoice method. During the workshop the target of the investigation is presented, along with the Photovoice method and basic photographic techniques. Moreover, they receive information about the ethical administration of Photovoice, as well as a release form to provide people whom they photograph, for the purpose of documenting their consent to use the pictures. The instruction is to think about “Immigration strengths and problems” (Phase 1). Phase 2 entails the photographic portion of the procedure. Specifically, participants have one week to photograph that which they consider best represents the topic. Moreover, participants are then asked to choose just three pictures, add a comment for each one and then send them by mail to the research team. Because the critical thinking and consciousness do not generate spontaneously, but instead must be encouraged, in Phase 3, each group meets with a facilitator belonging to the research team. During this phase, participants present the pictures and debate about the feelings that they produce. At first, each participant shows his or her own photos, sharing their meanings, and then the group, after observing all pictures, identifies the resulting topics around which the discussion is centred.
conducted using the “SHOWeD” method (Wang et al., 1998). This method fosters a deeper and more critical dialogue about the identified topics. Questions include the following: (1) What do you See here? (2) What’s really Happening here? (3) How does this relate to Our lives? (4) Why does this problem or this strength Exist? (5) What can we Do about this?

The facilitator enhances the communication, encouraging active participation among the members at the time pictures are presented and during the critical discussion about the identified topics. At the end of discussion, each group decides what to communicate during the final event and then creates a poster that summarises the discussion. The participant’s analysis of pictures is documented using audio and video and then transcribed to enable analysis by study investigators. In Phase 4, participants present their posters to the other groups of participants and to local authorities during a local meeting in University which involves municipality stakeholders, that are chosen as spokesperson to begin concrete action, in hopes of contributing to improvements in the issues revealed by the critical discussion.

2.3. Data analysis

After the public meeting in which participants present the themes emerged from the photographs categorization to display them to the authorities, the material, that come from the critical discussion of the pictures during the workshop, was analysed by researcher to insert them in the categories of acculturation attitudes and contact experiences to examine host’s attitudes towards immigration. The software NVivo 9 (2010) is used to analyse the qualitative data. Based on assumptions of Grounded Theory, this method assumes that theory emerges from data in a purely inductive way (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method’s objects of investigation are change and social construction processes (Richards & Morse, 2009). Grounded Theory assumes that data are collected as widely and accurately as possible and are not codified into predefined categories, which can vary during the investigation. The initially identified categories are descriptive and become increasingly general when theory emerges from the data. Another aspect of Grounded Theory is comparative analysis, which refers to the continuous evaluation of the mutual variability of data and categories (Mantovani & Spagnolli, 2003). In this work is used a constructivist approach of the Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2005, 2006). Therefore, some categories has been identified by the researchers through the analysis a posteriori of the discussions made by the participants to comment and to categorise the photographic material.

The text’s categorisation is made by two independent judges. They apply the protocol analysis separately, and afterwards, they meet to compare their identified categories and to select those that best account for the different points of view, to obtain a common categorisation and analyse it. Research team has considered, besides the analysis of the transcriptions of the discussions, also the photographs that has been re-classified by researchers in order to explore participants acculturation strategies.

3. Results

Data analysis conducted by researchers a posteriori generate a graphical representation, named model, that includes some nodes (categories that include text segments of one or more codified documents) (Mantovani & Spagnolli, 2003), that schematise the topics emerged during the discussion made by participants to comment the photographic material.

3.1. Positive attitudes and positive contact experiences

Analysing photographic material and its discussion yields many positive categories about the immigration issue, divided into two models: positive attitudes (Fig. 2) and positive contact experiences (Fig. 3), seen as contact with cultural groups other than their own.
Participants stress a growing trend towards disclosure:

“In my opinion we were more closed to foreigners, now there is a greater openness in society and there starts to be more exchange, more integration” (female, 20 years old).

Immigrants are not perceived as “different” but instead in terms of equality because, as claimed in the following, we are all people:

“According to me just a little ‘getting used to the idea of living with different ethnic groups . . . in the sense . . . we are all equal . . .’” (male, 19 years old).

However, the literature on subtle prejudice warns that considering only participants’ explicit expressions of their ideas about equality could foster too naïve of a perspective.

Attitudes towards foreigners of solidarity and reciprocity are identified, within a perspective of cooperation and integration among people, making it possible to hope for a future in which we will be heading towards increasing integration. Indeed, they say that:

“Solidarity can be established between people from different backgrounds in a context of sharing a common value that you can build beyond the origins” (male, 20 years old).

Participants report many positive contact experiences with other cultures, as synthesised in Fig. 3.

They say that contact between cultures is the first step towards integration and that through knowledge and cultural exchange, it is possible to reach mutual enrichment.

Participants represent the life stories of foreigners who they meet directly, and who let them understand how sometimes life abroad can be difficult and can require many sacrifices. For example, a participant states (Photo 3.1):

“Maria is from Ecuador, but she has been living in Italy for at least ten years. How many other people have to leave their family to work in my country, even accepting menial jobs, such as care for the elderly” (female, 19 years old).

Second, participants show a lot of faith in the future, and especially in children. They think that because of the purity of their minds and of education, today is more and more intercultural than the past, and it is possible to achieve positive coexistence between cultures.
They argue that people who have been in contact with other cultures since their own childhood, in the future, will have a greater openness to cultural comparison that can enrich their own lives. For instance, a girl commented thusly on one of her photos (Photo 3.2):

“Children of different nationalities, demonstrate that for them, it is easier to integrate, because they are spontaneous and go beyond the differences playing together” (female, 20 years old).

They talk about their friendship with foreign people and notice the importance of mutual comparisons (Photo 3.3):

“The handshake between me and my little friend to me is highly symbolic: the contact is the first step towards integration, through knowledge and cultural exchange you get to a mutual enrichment” (female, 19 years old).

In fact, as shown in the following image (Photo 3.4), the differences between cultures can become points of union, as in the case of mixed couples.

“I think that love can go beyond mere skin colour, love is union and sharing of the other, of his own diversity” (female, 19 years old).

3.2. Negative attitudes

Although participants identify many positive aspects regarding their attitudes towards acculturation, they also consider negative ones. Fig. 4 shows a native’s point of view.
Participants attribute attitudes of closure and uneasiness both towards their own group both towards immigrants, demonstrating that there are still people who feel indifference towards the unknown, towards others than themselves. Attitudes adopted by the natives towards immigrants include indifference, intolerance, prejudice, racism (Fig. 5), discrimination, fear (Fig. 6) and ignorance. As previously mentioned, participants demonstrate that there remains a low level of interest in knowing and coming into contact with new cultures. Participants still fear facing the unknown, that which is different from the self. This fear will persist due to the lack of contact opportunities. One could say that the problem of host negative attitudes has a circular nature. Here are images of racism and fear, with related comments of two girls who say:

“On the left there are two boys beating, one is Italian, the other one is immigrant. Often we see this scene of racism without doing anything” (female, 20 years old).

“I'm scared just walking by day in a little town, where incidents of crime are common” (female, 19 years old).

From the host point of view, negative attitudes experienced by immigrants would be loneliness, isolation and disappointment from unmet expectations attributed to the migration project.

Fig. 4. Negative attitudes model.

Fig. 5. Host negatives acculturative attitudes.
Regarding the first two, one must think that moving away from their country, from their loved ones and from their social networks would be a difficult choice. However, even more difficult is trying to reconstruct what is left in the host country. A participant represents this experience as follows (Fig. 7):

“Going on alone like this woman, without certainties and with the burden of having to start again from scratch, is the most critical element of migration” (male, 19 years old).

Regarding disappointment in expectations, a girl says:

“Most of those who come here are young people; they are seeking their fortune, but they have to find expedients to survive” (female, 19 years old).

This is a frustrating experience that, unfortunately, is often a part of immigrants’ lives. They do not always find in the host country the possibility of a better and serene life, as was desired before leaving home.

3.3. Acculturation strategies

Participants send to researchers a total of 297 photos with a brief description (3 from each participant). 123 was re-categorised by the research team as “acculturation strategies” according to Berry (2003) bi-dimensional model. Fig. 8 contains the four strategies considered and a representative picture of each of them.

Integration is the strategy most frequently represented by participants (108 photos). Participants mean that integration is currently present in their lives, and they demonstrate trust in it, hoping for increasing integration in society, as a girl says:

“I was lucky enough to grow up in a group of friends in which cultural differences hadn’t created any problems, but were considered as a source of enrichment” (female, 20 years old).

The second most frequent strategy presented, though with a lower number of photos, is separation (8 photos). Participants note that people often tend to converge in groups of their own culture, without interacting with others, representing a tendency towards closure rather than openness to knowing others. A girl describes the following:

“In this picture you can see the tendency of many (though not all) immigrants in joining groups of their ethnic group, rather than trying to integrate and interact with people of different nationalities developing a cultural exchange” (female, 19 years old).
Fig. 7. Loneliness/isolation.

Fig. 8. Acculturation strategies model (Berry, 2003).
The next strategy noted is assimilation (4 photos). Participants note that some immigrants acquire Italian habits, and they think that this is positive, as evidenced by this comment:

“This picture highlights the change in the stereotype of family roles within the society (the dad who watches the child instead of the mother) stands out, even the adaptation of this father, probably non-EU Western culture” (male, 19 years old).

The last strategy noted is marginalisation (3 photos). Participants emphasise that, unfortunately, a mutual indifference between cultural groups is still present, although to a lesser extent. A girl describes her picture as follows:

“This photo shows the “non-integration”, the difficulty to deal with a people mostly closed in itself. On the one hand, there are the Italians’ authorized stands, the customers are intrigued and interested in the products of their land, while on the other there is an abusive seller alone, isolated, perhaps resigned” (female, 20 years old).

4. Discussion

Interesting reflections emerge while thinking about this Photovoice experience, which allowed us to stimulate critical dialogue about immigration and intercultural integration.

According to Dejaeghere, Hooghe, and Claes (2012), participants report many positive interaction experiences with outgroup members, by which they have developed positive attitudes towards immigrants. Indeed, development of this attitude seems to depend on the quality of interactions perceived by participants: in our study more than 55% of Italian young adults have immigrants friends or relatives and 25% meets minority group in daily context underlining a frequent and positive contact with outgroup. Higher quality may lead the majority group to reduce their ethnic prejudice and perception of threat and to increase empathy towards minorities, in line with the content of Theory of Contact’s most current version (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Consistent with the literature on self-categorisation (Turner, 1999), exposure to people from different groups may spur people to re-categorise dissimilar people as ingroup members.

Kosic et al. (2005) conducted a study about acculturation strategies employed by natives towards immigrants, which showed that these strategies are related to prejudice against the outgroup. Therefore, it is possible to hypothesise that participants, whose photos represent assimilation, are those who have a high level of ethnic prejudice and think immigrants should be allowed only in the case of approval by the host culture.

When two cultural groups come into contact, indeed, they can produce not only positive results but also problems and conflicts (Piontkowski et al., 2002). Participants discuss about a number of negative attitudes towards immigration. Natives for instance, indicate uneasiness and a mutual tendency to be closed to the outgroup. That is, the uneasiness of contact between groups leads to feelings of closure towards those who are different, just as closure towards the outgroup fosters uneasiness against it. This observation is in line with the work of Ward and Masgroet (2006), who state that people feel threatened by intercultural relations because they are frightened by rejection, of being embarrassed and ridiculed or taken advantage of by the outgroup members. However, attitudes are not always mutual when members of different cultural groups interact. Negative attitudes that participants attach to themselves seem linked to a lack of knowledge about the outgroup (Rohmann, Florack, & Piontkowski, 2006) and to differences in language and culture. Differences alone play an important role in a group’s contact, as well as the lack of knowledge about the outgroup, shaping the development of prejudice and negative stereotypes. As Stephan and Stephan (2000, p. 38) stated, “If fear is the father of prejudice, ignorance is its grandfather”; the unknown frightens people and makes them feel threatened. Perceived threat, as identified in this and many other studies (Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, & Armstrong, 2001; Leong, 2008; Rohmann et al., 2006; Stephan, Renfro, Esses, Stephan, & Martin, 2005), is the cause of negative attitudes between groups. Intergroup anxiety, prejudice and negative stereotypes ultimately develop intolerance and racism towards other cultural groups (Yakushko, 2009).

Participants argue that the expectations that some immigrants placed on their arrival in Italy were disregarded. It could be difficult to recreate a social network in the host country, which would provide necessary support within the host country. The lack of support is a critical factor in immigrants’ failure to adapt to the new society. Indeed, poverty further contributes to lower self-esteem, as well as decreased confidence in themselves and others, leading to a feeling of inadequacy and inferiority in comparison with others, as well as negative expectations assigned to interpersonal relationships and communications (Ponizovsky & Ritsner, 2004).

Positive and negative attitudes form a motivation to implement the behaviours towards outgroup (Ajzen, Czasch, & Flood, 2009). As in many other studies on acculturation (Matera, Stefanile, & Brown, 2012; Montreuil et al., 2004; Pfaffert & Brown, 2006; Piontkowski, Florack, Höller, & Obdralálek, 2000; Zagefka & Brown, 2002), integration is the most frequent strategy identified by participants to show their inclination to be intercultural. People in favour of multicultural ideology believe that immigrants have the right to maintain and practice their culture. An encounter with different cultures from their own is perceived as an opportunity for not only personal but also economic improvement. As Berry (2006) stated, this perception of enrichment is a necessary condition for a society to be more open, inclusive and plural and in which different ethno-cultural groups can fairly integrate.

5. Conclusions

Cultural difference is a fact in Italy, in Europe and in most societies of the world, and its management is an issue on which the debate is still open. Psychology can contribute to this debate, improving intercultural relationships and understanding
the context in which they develop, Chonody, Ferman, and Martin (2013) heard the voice of youth, deepening their point of view about relevant issues in their own communities and developing their critical thinking skills. The present work, from Freire's perspective (2002), aims to stimulate a critical dialogue among participants, to encourage them, as stated by the participants themselves, to deliberate issues that otherwise would have remained submerged and unexplored due to their traditional indifference towards daily routine. Furthermore the critical dialogue allow participants to be aware about both the concealed and not elements of the culture. Cultural consciousness is an holistic perspective of the culture, that has to be applied to self and the others. There is no a culture that represent the best human experience as well as there is no a culture that represent only the worst (Chorbani Shemshadsara, 2012).

The findings of our study describe a very positive picture of integration and openness to the different ethno-cultural groups, offering an increasingly real hope for an intercultural future. Young adults seem to think favourably about an inter-cultural society, within a perspective of enrichment for those who are immersed in it and of respect for all cultures. This effect is most likely due to their having had positive experiences of contact with people from other cultures. Few are those who continue to regard the members of outgroup as threatening or as people to be avoided. This study demonstrates that Italian young adult are moving towards an increasing state of cultural integration.

6. Limits and implications

First, one of the limits identified in this work is that the youth who participated in Photovoice is not a heterogeneous group. Instead, they are people from two region of Northern Italy. Second, females are present in greater proportions among the participants, and it is known that women usually tend to be more prone to integration in their choice of acculturative strategies, which could explain the high frequency with which it is identified in this study, as well as the very low numbers relative to other strategies, in line with the study of Dandy and colleagues (2010). Currently, this work is limited to the context in which data are collected; therefore, future research should be extended to other regions to make a comparison with populations living in different areas of Italy, where the perception and the sensitivity towards immigrant people and the topics of contact with them and acculturation attitudes could be different. It would also be interesting to see immigrants’ perspectives with respect to these issues and to compare the two groups of participants. It could also be useful to have the same experience with mixed groups of natives and immigrants together in which the developmental process of critical and intercultural dialogue could be illuminated even more. In addition, taking into account that participants expressed a very positive evaluation of the Photovoice experience, which allowed them to reflect on issues on which they had not reflected before, it would be interesting to apply the technique in other contexts and regions, to further stimulate critical dialogue on these issues, with the aim of obtaining a more global and comprehensive understanding about migration and intercultural integration in Italy.

References


