

Greek university students' attitudes towards refugees: The role of contact with refugees in a common context since the beginning of refugees' arrival

Actitudes de los estudiantes universitarios griegos hacia los refugiados: El papel del contacto con los refugiados en un contexto común desde el comienzo de la llegada de los refugiados

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Abstract

Introduction: The massive migration flow that arrived into Europe since 2015 was a new challenge which gained prominent attention. Despite the vast literature on migration processes, research on refugees' arrival in Greece is still limited. The aim of this study was to examine Greek university students' attitudes towards refugees and to explore factors that are possibly related to the academic context where participants studied or to their contact with refugees.

Method: A self-report questionnaire was administered to 437 Greek young adults with a mean age of 22.63 years ($SD=4.72$).

Results: Factorial ANOVA showed a significant interaction effect among gender, year of study and academic discipline on attitudes towards refugees. A multiple linear regression analysis also showed that the interaction effect of seeing a refugee, meeting a refugee and discussing with a refugee explained a small but a significant proportion of variance in attitudes towards refugees.

Discussion: Findings have important implications for the better integration of refugees in Greece.

Keywords: refugees, Greek university students, attitudes, feelings, immigrants.

Resumen

Introducción: El flujo migratorio masivo que llegó a Europa desde 2015 fue un nuevo desafío que llamó la atención. A pesar de la vasta literatura sobre procesos de migración, la investigación sobre la llegada de refugiados a Grecia sigue siendo limitada. El objetivo de este estudio fue examinar las actitudes de los estudiantes universitarios griegos hacia los refugiados y explorar los factores que posiblemente estén relacionados con el contexto académico en el que los participantes estudiaron o su contacto con los refugiados.

Método: Se administró un cuestionario de autoinforme a 437 adultos jóvenes griegos con una edad media de 22.63 años (SD = 4.72).

Resultados: El ANOVA factorial mostró un efecto significativo de interacción entre género, año de estudio y disciplina académica sobre las actitudes hacia los refugiados. Un análisis de regresión lineal múltiple también mostró que el efecto de interacción de ver a un refugiado, reunirse con un refugiado y discutir con un refugiado explicaba una pequeña pero significativa proporción de variación en las actitudes hacia los refugiados.

Discusión: Los resultados tienen implicaciones importantes para la mejor integración de los refugiados en Grecia.

Palabras Clave: refugiados, estudiantes universitarios griegos, actitudes, sentimientos; inmigrantes.

1. Introduction

Although refugees' arrival cannot be characterized as a novel situation considering the historical past, the massive number of migrants who come from Africa and Middle East and travel across the Mediterranean Sea to reach European countries has been so far unexampled (Hammond, 2015). The unexpected continuous migration flows who arrive to Greek islands (Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros, Kos and Simi) through the Aegean Sea from Turkey have also been a serious issue of public concern and of political discussions in Greece receiving important media coverage.

In order to better understand the topic that is under investigation, a significant semantic distinction should be noticed between the concepts 'refugee' and 'immigrant', provided that they are related to different types of migration (voluntary or forced) (Roman, 2015). On the one hand, an 'immigrant' chooses to migrate in order to seek for more economic perspectives than those that exist in his birth country. On the other hand, according to 1951 United Nation Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a 'refugee' is a person who is forced to flee the country of his nationality due to the well-grounded fear of persecutions for reasons of race, religion nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion (UNCHR, 2011). The same Convention defined the international rights of the refugee, protecting him from being returned to his country of nationality, because he is unable to receive protection from the country of his nationality and his life is at risk (Marfleet, 2006). This semantic differentiation could be more clarified if we consider that a lot of refugees belong to an upper socio-economic class, being well-educated and having high status professions or occupations (i.e. doctors, lawyers, professors) (Zunes, 2017).

2. Literature Review

The contribution of Greek authorities, non-governmental organisations, church charities and local communities had been determinant in order to meet the basic needs of refugee children and pregnant women (Giannakopoulos & Anagnostopoulos, 2016). Systematic research about the societal attitudes of Greeks towards refugees has been limited so far (Christodoulou & Abou-Saleh, 2016) and the results are not consistent. According to recent research projects' findings (Dixon et al., 2019; Tent, 2016) as well as to European Commission's reports (European Commission, 2015, 2017, 2018), a large proportion of Greeks believed that refugees should be welcomed in Greece, reporting their willingness to provide help to refugees as well as to migrants to a higher

degree compared to native respondents in other host countries. During the years 2015-2017 Greeks perceived the refugees' need for help and support as a national responsibility, even though there was a decline in this percentage from 2015 (85%) to 2017 (70%) (European Commission, 2015, 2017, 2018). These findings seem to be in line with the country's culture of solidarity and compassion and the respect for the principle of asylum.

Although the Greek population generally has shown signs of empathy towards refugees, the constant increase in refugee flows creates agitation and disquietude in case of pernicious refugees' actions at the expense of the Greek economy, such as blocking the railroads in places where refugees camps exist (Christodoulou & Abou-Saleh, 2016). The findings of the above research projects (Dixon et al., 2019; Tent, 2016) suggested that there are concerns and doubts among Greeks about some issues, such as the financial effects of the refugee arrival in conjunction with the impact of the economic crisis in the country and the suspicions about the possible authorities' loss of control because of these seemingly unstoppable refugee movements. Another research project conducted by the Pew Research Center (Pew) in many European countries including Greece, found that natives believed that refugees posed a major threat to their country (Wike et al., 2016). This standpoint could be justified by the fact that a significant proportion of Greeks is not sure if a great number of those arriving in Greece are genuine refugees, wondering if they are authorized to seek asylum (Dempster & Hargrave, 2017). However, the "threat" felt by the Greek population is not related to terrorist attacks, but to the possible negative effects on the Greek economy and on the culture according to the InterCap transnational report on migration, sustainability and development education in twelve European Member States (InterCap, 2018). The 2018 Pew survey of 18 countries also confirms the findings of the previous study, since only a minority of native respondents in Greece, Germany and Italy agreed that immigrants make their countries stronger, probably because these three host countries received a large number of refugees (Gonzalez-Barrera & Connor, 2019). Despite the natives' initial welcoming response towards these people, the massive number of refugees on the Greek islands created high levels of agitation and distress (Samek Lodovici et al., 2017). Generally, as stated by Torres (2019, p. 72), "most Europeans hold a variety of views which are more flexible, ambiguous and sometimes conflicting". In other words, the moral imperative of welcoming and accepting refugees in Europe gets along with

the worries and the doubts about this refugee arrival. These conflicting attitudes towards refugees and migration are also present in the Greek society (InterCap, 2018).

It is clear that previous work has only focused on the attitudes of natives towards refugees in the Greek society rather than on the feelings of the Greek population towards refugees. The findings of a recent research project carried out by the non-profit organization More In Common, showed that the majority of the Greek participants aged 18 to 64, seemed to have more positive feelings towards refugees and migrants than people in other host countries, showing empathy and understanding rather than accusing them for the turbulent situation and the constantly changing scene in Greece (Dixon et al., 2019). In the Amnesty International's Refugees Welcome Survey (Amnesty International, 2016), a large number of Greek respondents reported that people should have the right to take refuge in other countries to escape from war or persecution, but the government should take more actions to provide help to refugees. Indeed, despite the challenges that the Greek society had been facing during that time, the maturity and the dignity of the natives towards refugees were obvious in order to manage refugee influx (Kalantzakos, 2017).

The term "feelings" is used in this study as well as in the research tool instead of the term "emotions". Although the two notions are usually used interchangeably, the distinction between them should be clarified. Feelings "have an identifiable rationale and a definable content" (James & Crawford, 2015, p. 151). They comprise conscious and cognitive perceptions that are labelled and interpreted (e.g. sadness, happiness, anger, fear). A feeling can be interpreted verbally, as the person has experienced in the past such a sensation and he or she can describe it more or less precisely (Shouse, 2005). On the other side, emotions are "personal display of feelings" (Fineman, 1999, p. 292) that is feelings that are shown. However, the display of emotion can be either genuine (facial expressions of our internal state e.g. crying, laughing) or feigned (satisfying the social expectations) (Shouse, 2005). This study aims to investigate Greeks' feelings towards refugees, as there is still considerable controversy about how the natives' feelings of compassion and solidarity intermingle with the challenges that refugees face, taking also into account the well-established attitudes of immigration and the effects of economic crisis in Greece (InterCap, 2018).

2.1 Possible Factors related to Natives' Attitudes towards Refugees

Social psychology theory of intergroup relations supports the importance of intergroup connection which under certain circumstances can lead either to the reduction of prejudice or to the cultivation and the reinforcement of biased attitudes towards out-group members. As stated by Amir (1976, p. 248) “unqualified ethnic contact is not sufficient to produce positive changes”. In his intergroup contact theory, Allport (1954), suggested that four features should be present so that an inter-group contact could have a positive impact on attitudes: a) an established equal status in the contact situation between majority and minority group members, b) cooperation through shared activities, mutual interest and reciprocity, c) a common objective and d) the official support of authorities, law or custom. The role of cooperation was also noticed by Sherif (1967), describing that intergroup contact can influence attitudes positively, considering that the different groups share a common goal which is unfeasible without their interrelationship. Moreover, behavioral (positive behavioral interactions), affective (high level of empathy) and cognitive factors (learning new information about others, social representations) are considered to be mediating mechanisms by which intergroup contact can contribute to more positive intergroup attitudes (Dovidio et al., 2003). On the other hand, there are factors which mitigate the relationship between the cross-group interaction and the reduced prejudice. Particularly intergroup anxiety (i.e. the feeling of uncertainty and threat in an intergroup environment) as well as other situational factors (e.g. in-group preference tendency, salience of group membership, language and religious barriers, negative attitudes towards ethnic contact, a situation that promotes antagonism, different moral standards, willingness to trust the out-group) not only affect the positive contact outcomes, but also they enhance the risk for increased conflicts and tension among groups (Amir, 1976; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). In case of a successful intergroup contact, the positive outcomes refer to the reduction of bias and prejudice, as in-group and out-group members get to know with each other (Pettigrew, 1998). Previous studies (Ferwerda et al., 2017; Koos & Seibel, 2019) have also shown that the intergroup contact with refugees increased the sense of solidarity, diminishing the effects of an anti-immigrant and xenophobic context. Arguments of intergroup theory regarding the positive consequences of intergroup interaction have been taken as a support for the assumption that the natives' exposure and contact with refugees could lead to the formation of more positive attitudes towards them.

Beyond intergroup contact, several studies have examined if socio-demographic factors (e.g. sex, age, socio-economic status, educational attainment, political beliefs) are related to native young adults' attitudes towards a different ethnic group. A review of the literature (Ceobanu & Escandell, 2010; Quillian, 1995) on this topic found that the higher educational level as well as socio-economic variables (i.e. higher status occupations, satisfactory income) are considered to be significant predictors of less prejudiced attitudes towards immigrants. Investigations on the impact of demographic factors are less systematic, suggesting that older people, men and people living in rural areas, hold more negative beliefs towards immigrants (Gorodzeisky & Semyonov 2009; Quillian, 1995). In the last decade, much more information on the positive association between education and intergroup attitudes has become available (Hastie, 2007). People with a high education status report more sympathy towards immigrants and immigration, since the impact of education includes broader perspective and knowledge, critical thinking, respect for diversity, contact with different cultures and foreign ideas (Chandler & Tsai, 2001). However, limited research has focused on the relationship between the academic discipline that native students are committed to and the formation of intergroup attitudes. In the study by Sidanius et al. (1991), where 5,655 students in the University of Texas participated, it was found that participants, who studied "high status professions", such as business or law, had more racist attitudes than participants who studied social or art sciences. In a sample of 675 students in three fields of study (social sciences, natural sciences and commerce sciences) Guimond, Palmer and Bégin (1989) aimed to examine whether dominant ideology' hypothesis or education as liberation' hypothesis was valid. Researchers found that the impact of university education in the formation of intergroup attitudes depends on the academic discipline to which students are committed. Social science students had more positive intergroup attitudes compared to the other categories. Therefore, academic fields are possibly different in the ideology that they promote. For example, university students in business administration develop more negative attitudes towards immigrants, because they realize the social dominance of their academic discipline. Contrarily, students in the social sciences have more positive attitudes due to the fact that they are committed to a less dominant academic field (Guimond & Palmer, 1996). Stember (1961) also showed that there were differences in students' social and political views according to their academic field. However, no study has been conducted so far, investigating the relation between university students' academic discipline and attitudes towards refugees.

The academic discipline, that students are committed to, is not the sole factor which is included among variables related to the university context. The education length could also be associated with young adults' attitudes towards refugees. Senior year students are usually more mature than freshmen students as they have developed their critical thinking being able to judge each situation more objectively, due to their age and to their experiences. Therefore, they are expected to be more aware of critical and serious current issues, such as refugees' arrival, to understand better and to judge more objectively the dimensions in the educational context where they study. Although the age factor is not always related to bias and prejudice, a senior year student has been present for more years within the university classes and generally in the campus life and climate, where humanistic values might be fostered, forms of social behavior (altruism, volunteering) might be learned and contact with members from different ethnic or racial group might be achieved. Furthermore, such a student could have more opportunities for intergroup experiences, because his university life is more extended and richer compared to that of a first year student. In his longitudinal research, Astin (1993) focused on the importance of environmental experiences, showing that senior year students who were exposed to different types of education programs differed from freshmen in various aspects, such as student interactions and the effect of the peer group. In the study by Sidanius, Pratto, Martin and Stallworth (1991), it was found that greater exposure to the academic environment was associated with more egalitarian views and less prejudiced attitudes. Therefore, it is possible that senior year university students would have more positive attitudes towards refugees than freshmen or second year students.

One of the most important socio-demographic factors which could be related to young adults' attitudes towards refugees is the gender. Numerous studies (Gross & John, 1998; Lawrence et al., 2004; Schieman & Van Gundy, 2000; Simon & Nath, 2004) have shown that women report higher scores on dimensions of emotional functioning, such as emotional intensity, emotional expressiveness and empathy. The higher emotional expressiveness of women was supported earlier by Parson in his functional theory about gender (1964). Social expectations about the gender roles and the behavior that is considered suitable for each gender, could explain the observed differences in emotional functioning (Eagly, 1987). Due to gender stereotypes women might also be more motivated to show higher empathic behavior compared to men (Klein & Hodges, 2001). The investigation of gender differences in attitudes towards

refugees is an issue that has not been brought to scientific attention so far. However, previous findings about women's higher emotional expressiveness could be taken as a support for the assumption that native female participants would have more positive attitudes than men, as long as attitudes include a combination of affective elements (Walther, Nagengast, & Trasselli, 2005).

The aim of the present study is to examine Greek university students' attitudes towards refugees and to explore if possible socio-demographic factors (e.g. gender, academic field and year of study) and variables related to natives' contact with refugees are associated with their attitudes. This is the first study which systematically focuses on Greek young adults' attitudes towards refugees and recent refugees' arrival in Greece. Although refugees' arrival is a serious issue of public concern and of political discussions, there is a lack of systematic and scientific knowledge. So far, only sporadic information about this issue is available, which derived either from articles published in press or from limited both in number and in scale studies presenting the current situation in Greece and emphasizing mostly on data as for the migration flows. The investigation of natives' attitudes would help to better understand if Greeks consider refugees' arrival as a phenomenon which poses at risk the stability and the structure of Greek society or it is of benefit.

The following research questions were posed:

- 1) Are there any differences in Greek university students' attitudes towards refugees as for the gender, the year of study and the academic discipline that they studied?
- 2) What is the relationship among factors related to contact with refugees (seeing a refugee, meeting a refugee and discussing with a refugee) and participants' attitudes towards refugees?
- 3) Do native participants' feelings differ towards refugees and towards immigrants?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The sample was composed of 437 Greek young adults (66 males; 371 females) with a mean age of 22.63 years ($SD=4.72$). Participants were students in universities at large Greek cities (in Athens, in Thessaloniki, in Patras, in Ioannina) or abroad. All of participants were defined as native Greeks according to the birth country that they

reported in the questionnaire. The use of the convenience sampling method was considered appropriate, because the focus of the study was to include a diverse sample of students from different academic backgrounds and universities. As for the academic discipline 215 participants were committed to Health and Medical Sciences (e.g. Medicine, Nursing), 194 participants to Social Sciences (e.g., Psychology, Science of Education, Sociology) and 28 of them studied Law & Economic Sciences. These academic fields usually focus on the investigation of human phenomena and experience and such professions usually demand inter-personal contact in contrast to Natural Sciences (Physics, Chemistry) where students are primarily involved in a variety of laboratory-based investigations and only a small proportion of graduates are occupied with jobs that require interaction (i.e. teaching). According to the year of their studies, participants were divided into two different categories: students who were in the first, second or third year of study (first, second and third year students, n=279) and senior year students (fourth or higher-year students, n=158). Although third-year students are considered as middlers, they were included in the first category for coding purposes, because the second category consisted of final-year students who have grown and developed during the previous years, planning the next steps of their life as members of the society and looking for future job opportunities.

3.2. Instrument

A self-report questionnaire was designed by researchers and it was administered to Greek university students in order to systematically explore their attitudes towards refugees who arrived in Greece since 2015.

At first, the questionnaire included socio-demographic questions (gender, age, country of birth) and questions about the university studies that participants attended (year of study, kind of academic discipline).

Participants' contact with refugees was measured by three separate items: a) 'Have you ever seen a refugee' (yes/no), b) 'Have you ever met a refugee' (yes/no) and 'Have you ever discussed with a refugee' (yes/no). The first item refers to the personal experience of seeing an individual called as refugee some time in his life, without having any further contact with him or her, aiming to evaluate if the native is familiar with the image of a refugee based on his experience rather than the image of "refugee" disseminated by the mass media. The second item assesses if the individual has ever been in a common context with a refugee for some reason over a short or long period of

time (e.g. co-presence in a store or in the hospital) and the third item assesses if there had been a genuine interaction between the native and the refugee involving conversation between them.

Feelings towards refugees and towards immigrants were measured by two items developed on 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very cold*) to 5 (*very warm*), where participants were asked to indicate their feelings (e.g. ‘What are your feelings towards refugees’, ‘What are your feelings towards immigrants’).

Attitudes towards refugees in Greece were measured using a scale which was designed by the researchers. The scale consisted of two subscales. The first subscale contained 19 items measuring the attitudes about the consequences of refugees’ arrival (e.g. ‘Refugee children will decrease the quality of education in Greece’, ‘Refugees will increase criminality in Greece’, ‘Refugees will destroy the Greek economy’). Six items of this subscale were reverse-coded in order to prevent response bias (e.g. ‘Greece could benefit from friendly relationships with refugees’). The second subscale contained 6 items concerning the attitudes about refugees’ cultural integration in the host country (e.g. ‘Refugees should adapt to the Greek tradition’, ‘Refugees should learn to speak fluently Greek’, ‘The Greek culture will be destructed due to refugees’). Response items were given on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Agree*) to 5 (*Strongly Disagree*). Higher scores in the scale represented more positive attitudes towards refugees. Cronbach’s alpha for the 25-item “Attitudes towards refugees in Greece” Scale from the current sample (N=437) was .922, based on the participants’ score in this study. This measure indicates a high level of internal consistency for the scale.

3.3. Procedure

The present study was a part of a general larger project which aimed to map and to compare the attitudes of young people towards refugees in Greece and in France. In this article, the findings derived from the Greek sample will be presented. Over the last years, refugee’s arrival had been an important issue which drew the public attention. Online and traditional recruitment methods were used. On the one hand, researchers came in personal contact with students who attended Greek universities, sending them an email which contained a hyperlink to the online questionnaire. Moreover, recruitment messages were posted at university student groups and pages on social media platforms (i.e. Facebook) in order to generate interest from potential participants.

Participants could directly access the Internet questionnaire via the hyperlink. It took approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

4. Results

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 21.

4.1. Differences in attitudes towards refugees as for participants' gender, year of study and their academic discipline

A 2 (gender) x 5 (year of study) x 4 (academic discipline) between-subjects factorial ANOVA was calculated comparing the scores in attitudes towards refugees for participants who were male or female, who were first/second/third year students or senior/higher year students and who studied Health & Medical Sciences or Social Sciences or Law & Economic Sciences. Levene's test showed that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met, $F(38,419)= 1.247$, $p> .05$. Results showed that there was a non-significant main effect of the gender [$F(1,419)=0.000$, $p>.05$, $n2=.00$]. There was also a non-significant main effect for the year of study [$F(8,419)=0.667$, $p>.05$, $n2=.013$]. It was found that the main effect for the academic discipline was not significant as well [$F(3,419)=0.052$, $p>.05$, $n2=.00$]. However, the interaction effect among the three variables was significant [$F(7,419)= 2.223$, $p< .05$, $n2=.036$]. Thus, the effect of participants' gender on their attitudes towards refugees was influenced by the year of their studies and by the academic discipline that they studied. Specifically, the score in attitudes towards refugees was similar in first/second/third year male and female participants who studied Social Sciences (for males $M=58.54$, $SD=17.21$; for females $M=57.54$, $SD=13.63$), Human Sciences (for males $M=63.57$, $SD=20.58$; for females $M=60.97$, $SD=14.65$) or Economics & Law Sciences (for males $M=23.87$, $SD=6.53$; for females $M=61.23$, $SD=14.20$). However, the score in attitudes towards refugees reported by fourth or higher year male participants was significantly lower than that reported by female participants who studied Social Sciences (for males $M=49.08$, $SD=11.26$; for females $M=56.44$, $SD=17.49$), Human Sciences (for males $M=56.33$, $SD=24.79$; for females $M=64.52$, $SD=14.04$) or Economics & Law Sciences (for males $M=49.66$, $SD=9.53$; for females $M=55.00$, $SD=12.01$).

4.2. Relationship among factors related to participants' contact with refugees and their attitudes towards them

A multiple linear regression analysis was used in order to examine how well variables related to the contact with refugees (seeing a refugee, meeting a refugee, discussing with a refugee) predict Greek young adults' attitudes towards refugees. The prediction model was statistically significant, $F(3,465) = 5.395$, $p < .001$, although it explained only a small proportion of the variance in attitudes towards refugees ($R^2 = .034$, Adjusted $R^2 = .027$). The effect of discussing with a refugee was the only significant unique predictor in the model, $t = 3.724$, $p < .001$, two-tailed. In other words, discussing with a refugee makes a significant unique contribution towards explaining more positive attitudes towards refugees, but seeing a refugee or meeting a refugee does not. The raw and standardized regression coefficients of the predictors for attitudes towards refugees are shown in Table 1. Consequently, university students, who have discussed with a refugee, had more positive attitudes towards them.

Table 1. Regression Coefficients resulting from Multiple Regression Analysis (n=437)

Predictor	<i>b</i>	SE-<i>b</i>	Beta
Seeing a refugee	-.923	1.221	-.039
Meeting a refugee	.007	1.767	.000
Discussing with a refugee	6.471*	1.738	.188

Note. The dependent variable was Attitudes towards refugees. $R^2 = .034$, Adjusted $R^2 = .027$. * $p < .001$

4.3. Difference in native adults' feelings towards refugees and towards immigrants

A dependent sample t-test (paired sample t-test) was conducted to compare the mean score of feelings towards refugees to the mean score of feelings towards immigrants. Results showed that the difference in the mean scores of feelings towards the two different groups was statistically significant, $t(512) = 2.588$, $p < .01$. On average, Greek university students had more positive feelings ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.97$) towards refugees than towards immigrants ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.98$).

5. Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of the present study was to examine Greek university students' attitudes towards refugees who have arrived to Greece since 2015. Factors related to the academic context where participants studied, were also examined. The investigation of natives' thoughts towards refugees is very important, because they can facilitate or inhibit refugees' integration in the host country. Furthermore, the role of contact with refugees on natives' attitudes was also studied.

Results showed that there was a significant interaction effect among gender, the year of study and the academic discipline that participants studied on attitudes towards refugees. In all types of academic discipline to which university students were committed to, senior year female participants reported more positive attitudes towards refugees than senior year male participants. Previous theory and studies support the greater emotional responsiveness of women compared to men. According to Gordon Allport, attitudes include an emotional dimension, explaining the thoughts, the feelings and the behavior towards other people, events or ideas (Bordens & Horowitz, 2008; Erwin, 2001). Affective reactions are also mentioned by attitude construction models who define attitudes as evaluative appraisals including both cognitive and affective processes (Schwarz, 2007; Schwarz & Bohner, 2001). For this reason, attitudes are closely related to emotional functioning. Differences in emotional responsiveness are due to the different social and structural positions that each gender adopts in the society (Eagly, 1987; Simon & Nath, 2004). Having probably more maturity towards the issue, senior female university students seem to be able to understand more easily than men of the same year of studies the difficulties and the harsh living conditions that refugees have to deal with. They probably identify better with their dramatic experiences during their journey, trying to understand their feelings and their urgent calls for help, support, protection and safety. Furthermore, women might be better informed and more aware of the physical and mental issues that refugees' adults, children and adolescents face, including exposure to violent forms of behavior, separation from their family, uncertainty, poor housing conditions and even sexual exploitation (Hebebrand et al., 2016). The non-significant main effect of academic discipline on participants' attitudes possibly shows that today's institutions of higher education aim to give an intercultural dimension in the structure and the teaching processes in all scientific fields, focusing on the relations between different cultures and national groups (Marginson, 2000).

Therefore, university students learn to accept and to respect diversity without feeling that their own cultural identity is at risk.

Discussing with a refugee was uniquely associated with more positive attitudes towards refugees, and the interaction effect of seeing a refugee, meeting a refugee and discussing with a refugee explained a small but a significant proportion of variance in attitudes towards refugees. This finding is in line with the positive outcomes which arise from intergroup contact (Pettigrew, 1998). That is, a talk between a native and a refugee could give the opportunity, so that in-group and out-group members learn to co-exist together peacefully, enhancing the possibility for sharing their thoughts and collaborating with each other. However, factors such seeing a refugee or meeting a refugee in daily life do not seem to be sufficient for native people to reduce possible negative attitudes towards refugees and towards their massive arrival in Greece. Therefore, attitude change demands a genuine dialogue between natives and refugees in order to get to know with each other and to respect the diversity. As this true interaction unravels, the native obtains a direct personal experience having the opportunity to discover the similar or different characteristics and interests based on social values, such as acceptance, tolerance and solidarity. Previous research (Ferwerda et al., 2017; Koos & Seibel, 2019) confirms that the intergroup contact with refugees alleviates the impact of a xenophobic and hostile social environment.

Another conclusion from our analysis was that Greek participants reported that they had more positive feelings towards refugees than towards immigrants. Refugees' arrival in Greece had been a serious issue which received prominent attention by media. Greek mainstream media seemed to foster a humanitarian approach as for their representations of refugees, reproducing their forced displacement, the suffering and the tragic images of refugee babies and children. A possible explanation for this finding is that in the media and in the public opinion the figure of refugee is positively constructed as an innocent and vulnerable victim who has experienced the dramatic and forced migration and now calls for humanitarian help and safety. According to Kalantzakos "the pictures of the drowning women and children filling the Aegean waters sent a shock-wave throughout Greek society" (Kalantzakos, 2017, p.12). Because of the positive media representations of refugees, native participants have possibly developed more warm feelings towards them – including empathy for their dramatic experiences– than towards other groups, such as immigrants. The power of contemporary portrayals of refugees cannot be ignored, because media could create the public opinion's support

or condemnation of serious issues, such as the immigration or asylum policy (Van Gorp, 2005). University students' more positive feelings towards refugees compared to immigrants could also be explained by the fact that there is a fundamental difference in the meaning between the concepts 'refugee' and 'immigrant'. Although the semantic distinction between the two words is still not completely explicit (Marfleet, 2006), 'immigrants' are forced to leave their country for economic reasons in order to seek for better or more job opportunities, whereas 'refugees' are forced to flee their homes due to the ongoing conflicts and persecutions.

Despite the contribution of this research to the social psychology theory of intergroup relations, there are some limitations. First, male participants are under-represented compared to female participants due to the convenience sample that was used. Furthermore, all kind of academic disciplines that are available in university learning programs are not included in this study. In other words, the findings of the study are not representative for the population of Greek university students. Secondly, a part of the sample derived from online recruitment, so that the representativeness of the population cannot be guaranteed (Gosling et al., 2004; Rhodes et al., 2003). Furthermore, factors which could influence the quality of interaction between the native and the refugee (e.g. the place of possible contact, the time that people have at their disposal for interaction, etc) - thus affecting the natives' attitudes (Amir, 1976) - are not examined in the present study. Variables such as the profile of the refugee (age, gender) or his/her personality traits can also have an impact on the inter-personal contact with the native, giving rise to issues in need of further investigation. Another limitation is the lack of previous scientific systematic information on Greek young adults' attitudes towards the recent refugees' arrival which would have provided the opportunity to compare the findings of this study with the results of other previous relevant studies.

Beyond methodological issues, the research provides novel insights into how factors related to the educational context where young adults study and variables related to the contact with refugees, are associated with their attitudes towards refugees' arrival in their host country. However, further research is needed to understand what native young adults think about refugees in Greece and what the causes of their attitudes are. For example, the investigation of other socio-demographic factors such as the family environment where young adults live, could possibly explain the variance in attitudes towards refugees, because the formation of young adults' thoughts are affected to a large part by the opinions that are developed among family members.

The continuous migration flow of people arriving to the country since 2015 has coincided with the burden of the economic recession that Greece has to deal with. The socio-economic crisis along with the massive waves of refugees could possibly affect negatively the public opinion towards refugees. Therefore, one lesson that can be drawn from our research is that an important future challenge is to focus more thoroughly on natives' attitudes towards refugees' arrival in order to detect any possible factors that are related to ignorance, negative feelings (fear, hesitation, insecurity) and bias towards this ethnically heterogeneous group. However, longitudinal studies have shown that if refugees have the opportunity to be integrated smoothly in European and North American countries, they contribute to the production of the host countries and the criminality rates are lower compared to natives (Zunes, 2017). A stronger consideration of refugees' arrival as a multifaceted social phenomenon could yield a deeper understanding of intergroup relations between natives and refugees, of their integration in the host country and of the consequences that their arrival has in various domains of Greek society.

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