



Diversity Contact: The Relationship of Positive and Negative Intergroup Contact with Assimilation and Multiculturalism

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Article History:

Received: 17-02-2025

Revision: 30-04-2025

Accepted: 12-05-2025

Publication: 10-06-2025

Cite this article as:

Genkova, P., & Schreiber, H. (2025). Diversity Contact: The Relationship of Positive and Negative Intergroup Contact with Assimilation and Multiculturalism. *Journal of Intercultural Communication, 25*(2), 164-182.
doi.org/10.36923/jicc.v25i2.1096

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Abstract: The present study investigates how positive and negative intergroup contact experiences relate to attitudes toward multiculturalism and assimilation, and examines whether these relationships are mediated by intergroup anxiety, intergroup threat, and pro-diversity beliefs. A secondary analysis was conducted using cross-sectional survey data from a sample of German university students. Structural equation modeling was applied to test the hypothesized relationships. The results demonstrated that positive intergroup contact was indirectly associated with lower support for assimilation through its effects on intergroup anxiety and pro-diversity beliefs. In contrast, negative intergroup contact showed both direct and indirect positive associations with support for assimilation, with a post-hoc model revealing that the effect of negative contact was stronger than that of positive contact. Mediation analyses confirmed that intergroup anxiety and pro-diversity beliefs significantly mediated these relationships, while intergroup threat showed no significant associations with either contact experiences or diversity ideologies. Notably, attitudes toward multiculturalism were not significantly related to any of the examined variables. These findings highlight the importance of considering both positive and negative intergroup experiences when explaining majority group members' diversity ideologies, particularly concerning assimilation. The study identifies pro-diversity beliefs as a central cognitive pathway linking contact experiences to diversity attitudes, suggesting that cognitive evaluations of diversity may play a stronger role than previously assumed affective threat perceptions. From an applied perspective, diversity interventions should not only promote positive intergroup contact but also strengthen cognitive appreciation of diversity while addressing the potential impact of negative contact.

Keywords: Assimilation, Multiculturalism, Intergroup Contact, Negative Contact, Pro-Diversity Beliefs

1. Introduction

Current research on the societal and individual consequences of immigration focuses on acculturation strategies, which refer to the reactions of host culture members and migrants to the experience of interculturality (Berry, 1980; Choy, Arunachalam, Taylor & Lee, 2021). However, how individuals deal with cultural otherness has also been argued to reflect individual preferences and reflections regarding norms for managing interculturality (Guimond, 2014). Across different cultures, relevant norms for intercultural interaction typically concern either the assimilation or integration of cultural minorities, and the recognition (multiculturalism) or denial (colorblindness) of cultural differences as a meaningful factor in human behavior (Whitley & Webster, 2019). Such attitudes towards assimilation and multiculturalism are termed diversity ideologies and serve as important predictors of intergroup behavior (Whitley & Webster, 2019). Differences in cultural connotations and research traditions have resulted in varying definitions in the current literature. Therefore, we refer here to the most widely used definitions in psychological literature. From this perspective, diversity ideologies represent individual preferences for social norms governing intercultural interactions, which typically fall between two opposing poles (Callens Meuleman & Valentova, 2019). Although alternative norms for intercultural interaction have been discussed (e.g., Rosenthal & Levy, 2010), preferences for assimilation/integration and multiculturalism/colorblindness remain the most widely acknowledged and empirically supported.

A preference for assimilation/integration norms reflects how immigrants are expected to handle their cultural heritage: either by discarding or maintaining it. More specifically, assimilation norms pertain to “an orientation to reduce or even eliminate differences between groups” by requiring minority groups to adapt to a subjectively perceived majority culture. For instance, second-generation immigrants who prefer assimilation over integration may discard their parents' cultural peculiarities and blend into the host society (Schalk-Soekar & van de Vijver, 2008, p. 2154). In contrast, integration norms (Berry & Kalin, 1995; Guimond, 2014; Whitley & Webster, 2019) encourage migrants to maintain their cultural distinctiveness while actively incorporating it into collaboration with other cultural subgroups (Schalk-Soekar & van de Vijver, 2008).

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Preferences for multiculturalism/colorblindness address the extent to which cultural heterogeneity and distinctiveness are acknowledged or dismissed (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). In this study, we adopt the definition of Rosenthal and Levy (2010), which differs somewhat from earlier conceptualizations. While Berry and Kalin (1995) defined multiculturalism as a general attitude toward immigration and interethnic relations, Rosenthal and Levy (2010) allow for the measurement of attitudes towards multiculturalism as distinct from assimilation attitudes. Strong preferences for multiculturalism imply that cultural differences are viewed as legitimate and should be recognized. Conversely, a preference for colorblindness rests on the assumption that people are fundamentally similar in thinking, behavior, values, lifestyles, or life opportunities. An individual's preference for multiculturalism or colorblindness often depends on whether they acknowledge the challenges posed by heterogeneity and systemic inequalities in society, and whether they support measures to assist minority groups (Whitley & Webster, 2019). Following existing literature and for ease of readability, we will refer to preferences for assimilation/integration simply as "preference for assimilation," and to preferences for multiculturalism/colorblindness as "preference for multiculturalism," with lower endorsement implying greater preference for the respective opposing norm.

Previous studies suggest that diversity ideologies may be shaped by everyday interactions and experiences (Whitley & Webster, 2019). Empirical evidence has shown that, for members of the cultural majority, more positive contact with immigrants is associated with stronger preferences for integration over assimilation and for multiculturalism over colorblindness (Callens et al., 2019; Whitley & Webster, 2019). Another study found that having more friendships with individuals from other cultures was linked to stronger mainstream acculturation orientations, particularly among individuals with fewer mainstream friends (Doucerain, Medvetskaya, Benkirane, Bragoli-Barzan & Gouin, 2024).

In terms of the mechanisms underlying these relationships, prior research indicates that intergroup threat, intergroup anxiety, and diversity beliefs may help clarify these associations (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Pettigrew, 2016; Genkova & Schreiber, 2022). While earlier studies have emphasized intergroup threat and anxiety as primary mechanisms linking intergroup contact to intergroup attitudes (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Stephan & Stephan, 2000), our study extends this work by introducing and testing the mediating role of pro-diversity beliefs. Unlike threat perceptions, pro-diversity beliefs capture the extent to which individuals view cultural heterogeneity as beneficial for society, thus offering a cognitively driven pathway to explain diversity ideologies. Our research, therefore, extends existing intergroup contact models by investigating whether the perception of diversity as a societal asset can independently mediate the effects of intergroup experiences on diversity-related attitudes, while accounting for both positive and negative contact experiences.

In the present study, we examine whether positive and negative intergroup contact experiences with individuals of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds are related to attitudes toward multiculturalism and assimilation in Germany. Furthermore, we investigate whether intergroup anxiety, intergroup threat, and pro-diversity beliefs serve as mediators of these relationships.

2. Literature Overview

2.1. Diversity-Ideologies

Previous research has shown that when individuals interact with people who have different cultural orientation systems, both individuals and groups are prompted to adapt to this experience (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). This process is referred to as acculturation (Ward & Szabó, 2019). One key finding of early acculturation research was that individuals exhibit both conscious and unconscious orientations, so-called acculturation strategies, for cultural adaptation and for determining the extent of contact when confronted with cultural differences (Berry, 1980). Two central factors shape these cross-cultural interactions: whether individuals seek or avoid contact, and whether they maintain or discard their cultural distinctiveness. Based on these dimensions, Berry (1980) introduced four acculturation strategies for migrants: integration (maintain contact and retain culture), assimilation (maintain contact but discard culture), separation (avoid contact but retain culture), and marginalization (avoid contact and discard culture; Berry, 1980; Sam & Berry, 2012).

Recognizing that individuals in multicultural societies display various adaptation and contact orientations, Berry and Kalin (1995) proposed that Berry's (1980) acculturation strategies could be interpreted as reflections of broader social norms for intercultural interaction and individuals' adoption of these norms. They modified Berry's model and identified three norms relevant for interaction in multicultural societies, based on a Canadian sample. These norms addressed whether migrants should adapt to the host culture (assimilation), whether cultural diversity should constitute a core element of the broader society (multiculturalism), and whether contact between cultural subgroups should occur (separation). Later research from diversity management expanded this framework, suggesting that norms for multiculturalism range along a continuum from multiculturalism, where cultural distinctiveness is recognized and valued, to colorblindness, where cultural differences are denied, and all individuals are treated identically, as though they share equal opportunities (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010, 2012).

Berry and Kalin (1995) also observed that individuals vary in their endorsement or rejection of these norms. They interpreted such individual attitudes as mental representations of ideologies, coining the term *multicultural ideology*. More recent literature has adopted the term *diversity ideology* to describe individual attitudes toward

social norms governing interactions among cultural subgroups (Whitley & Webster, 2019). These diversity ideologies have since been observed across different countries (Guimond, 2014; Lefringhausen, Marshall, Ferenczi, Zagefka, & Kunst, 2023; Whitley & Webster, 2019). However, separation and segregation policies (e.g., apartheid or World War II ghettos) are now universally prohibited and regarded as taboo in most countries (Guimond, 2014). Consequently, attitudes toward segregation are no longer a primary focus of contemporary research (Whitley & Webster, 2019).

In the German context, norms related to assimilation have played a central role in debates on national identity and integration, reflecting the country's evolving approach to diversity (Bogado, Bytzeck & Steffens, 2023). Historically, Germany's self-perception as a non-immigration country shaped policies that favored assimilation, requiring immigrants to adopt the German language, values, and cultural norms. This perspective was captured in the discourse of *Leitkultur* ("leading culture"), which emphasized a unified national identity based on shared cultural principles (Berry, 2016; Bogado et al., 2023; Zick, 2017). However, the influx of immigrants, particularly since the 1990s, challenged this assimilationist model. Its limitations became evident as it often resulted in the marginalization of immigrant communities, especially Turkish immigrants, who faced systemic barriers to full societal participation (Bogado et al., 2023). In response, there has been a gradual shift toward recognizing the value of integration, acknowledging both cultural plurality and the rights of minorities to preserve their cultural identities.

In contrast, multiculturalism in Germany has faced criticism and political resistance. Notably, in 2010, Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that multiculturalism had "utterly failed," citing concerns over the emergence of parallel societies that threatened social cohesion (Bogado et al., 2023). Comparative research shows that multiculturalism occupies a less politically salient and less polarized position in Germany than in Anglo-American contexts. Silver, Fagan, Connaughton, and Mordecai (2021) demonstrate that, unlike in the United States or the United Kingdom, German political discourse reveals relatively small partisan divides on diversity issues and tends to promote cultural adaptation as a condition for societal cohesion while largely disregarding cultural heterogeneity. Consequently, public opinion on multiculturalism in Germany is often described as narrower, less developed, and less politically charged. In an essay on cross-cultural norms regarding multiculturalism, Berry (2016) argued that multiculturalism, as defined in American and Canadian scholarship, has never been fully established in Germany. Based on the Multiculturalism Policies in Contemporary Democracies Index (MPC; 2020), he concluded that few manifestations of multiculturalism exist in Germany.

Nevertheless, related empirical work by Stogianni et al. (2023) attempted to adapt Berry and Kalin's (1995) Canadian-based multiculturalism scale for use in the German and Luxembourgish contexts. Their findings showed that the core elements of Berry and Kalin's (1995) definition, namely, acceptance of cultural diversity and perceived benefits of interethnic contact, could be reliably measured. However, two later subdimensions, Essentialistic Boundaries and Extent of Differences, partly inspired by Rosenthal and Levy's (2012) work on intergroup attitudes, demonstrated poor psychometric properties and failed to achieve acceptable model fit. Notably, Berry and Kalin's (1995) original dimensions, including attitudes toward integration, performed well and conceptually align with the dimensions we assess as attitudes toward assimilation/integration in the present study.

Given the societal context and existing research gaps, investigating the predictors of low preferences for assimilation and high preferences for multiculturalism is particularly important in the German context. The definition, measurement, and predictors of attitudes toward multiculturalism remain underexplored. The present study focuses on the conceptualization and measurement provided by Rosenthal and Levy (2010, 2012) to address these gaps and to distinguish the predictors of attitudes toward multiculturalism from those related to assimilation in Germany. One predictor consistently identified as a pathway to improving intergroup relations is intergroup contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008).

2.2. Intergroup contact

Considering the role of assimilative and colorblind norms and regulations (e.g., in politics), it is highly important to identify which intercultural experiences and attitudes contribute to support for assimilation and multiculturalism. The contact hypothesis (Allport, Kenneth & Pettigrew, 1954) posits that intergroup contact leads to improved intergroup attitudes if the contact is of high quality, involves common goals, and occurs between individuals of equal status (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). For example, one study found that cooperative interaction with a Black avatar led to more positive attitudes toward Black individuals (Tassinari et al., 2023).

Social categorization theory (SCT) further explains that individuals reflect on and adjust their social categories and related stereotypes based on both personal and reported experiences with ingroup and outgroup members (Turner, 1987). Interactions may be experienced along a continuum between intergroup interaction, where group membership is highly salient and individuals are seen as representatives of their group, and interpersonal interaction, where group membership is minimally salient and individuals are perceived as unique persons. Information linked to salient social groups becomes associated with group stereotypes, which may, over time, influence attitudes (Brown & Hewstone, 2005).

Recent perspectives suggest that intergroup contact can indeed be perceived along this continuum. Positive contact may reduce the salience of group membership, a process known as decategorization (Brown & Hewstone, 2005), or personalization (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010), whereby individuals are increasingly seen as unique human beings during positive encounters (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010; Dovidio, Love, Schellhaas & Hewstone, 2017; Vezzali et al., 2022). In contrast, negative contact (stressful or harmful interaction; Hayward, Tropp, Hornsey & Barlow, 2017) tends to reinforce perceived group differences and conflicts, thus shifting perception towards an intergroup interaction (Schäfer et al., 2021). In a comprehensive diary study, Schäfer et al. (2021) demonstrated that positive and negative contact often occur in distinct contexts and may involve different cognitive and affective processes. Positive interactions are most frequent in structured settings such as workplaces, while negative experiences often occur in public spaces and may be triggered by minor incidents (e.g., not being greeted), leading to the perception of negative contact even with limited interaction. As a result, group membership tends to be more salient during negative intergroup contact, despite its lower frequency (Hayward et al., 2017).

Most studies comparing the effects of positive and negative contact on outgroup attitudes have found that negative contact exerts a stronger influence on intergroup attitudes than positive contact experiences, a phenomenon known as contact asymmetry (Barlow et al., 2012; Hayward et al., 2017; Aberson, 2015; meta-analysis by Paolini & McIntyre, 2019).

Existing empirical research examining the relationship between intergroup contact and attitudes toward assimilation and multiculturalism indicates that positive contact is associated with stronger support for multiculturalism and rejection of assimilation among cultural majority members across various cultural contexts (Abu-Rayya, 2017; Gieling, Thijs & Verkuyten, 2014; Hässler et al., 2019; Teney, 2011; van Acker & Vanbeselaere, 2011; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006; Verkuyten, Thijs & Bekhui, 2010). However, findings related to intergroup friendships remain somewhat inconsistent (Callens et al., 2019), and empirical evidence on the effects of negative contact remains sparse. The simultaneous examination of both positive and negative contact thus presents a valuable approach to further our understanding of how intergroup contact shapes diversity ideologies.

2.3. Mediator Variables

To clarify the mechanisms underlying the relationship between intergroup contact and social attitudes (Blascovich et al., 2001; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, 2008; Schäfer et al., 2021), several potential mediating variables have been examined, as suggested by previous studies.

According to integrated threat theory (Stephan, 2014; Stephan & Stephan, 2000), negative intergroup attitudes arise from the perception of threat posed by outgroups. Negative experiences with migrants are likely to be linked to group stereotypes, especially when group membership is salient (Kauff et al., 2017; Park & Judd, 2005; Smith & Hogg, 2008). As a result, such associations are easily recalled in future encounters, eliciting anxiety (Kauff et al., 2017). Simultaneously, cognitive associations between outgroups and potential harm contribute to the perception of these groups as threats to the superordinate ingroup. Consequently, integration is resisted, and outgroup members' attributes and cultural distinctiveness are disregarded (Kauff et al., 2017).

While the sources of perceived threat or anxiety may vary across cultures, previous studies have consistently reported strong negative relationships between intergroup threat and multiculturalism (Scott & Safdar, 2017; Verkuyten et al., 2010; Callens et al., 2019), and at least marginally significant negative relationships between intergroup anxiety and multiculturalism (Hutchison, Chihade & Puiu, 2018). Additionally, prior studies have demonstrated strong positive relationships between support for assimilation and both intergroup threat (Brylka, Mähönen, Schellhaas & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2015; Callens et al., 2019; Florack, Piontkowski, Rohmann, Balzer & Petzig, 2003) and intergroup anxiety (Hässler et al., 2019; Olsson, Matera, Tip, Brown, 2019). Çakal, Halabi, Cazan, and Eller (2021) showed that intergroup anxiety mediates the relationship between contact experiences (intergroup friendship) and approval of inclusive policies, while Abu-Rayya (2017) found similar mediation effects of anxiety on preferences for assimilation following digital contact interventions.

Qualitative studies (Genkova & Schreiber, 2021, 2022), as well as the importance of instrumental beliefs about cultural diversity in Western societies, underscore the role of diversity beliefs in explaining the relationship between intergroup contact and diversity ideologies (Kauff, Stegmann, van Dick, Beierlein & Christ, 2019). Diversity beliefs are conceptualized as instrumental attitudes toward cultural outgroups (van Knippenberg & Haslam, 2003). Positive diversity beliefs (pro-diversity beliefs) are associated with stronger identification with a culturally heterogeneous superordinate group (van Dick & Stegmann, 2016). Pro-diversity beliefs thus reflect the extent to which individuals value and incorporate cultural diversity as a meaningful aspect of society.

Empirical research has found moderate positive associations between the frequency of intergroup contact and pro-diversity beliefs (Adesokan, Ullrich, van Dick & Tropp, 2011; Asbrock & Kauff, 2015), as well as between pro-diversity beliefs and both support for multiculturalism (Kauff, Asbrock, Thörner & Wagner, 2013; Kauff et al., 2019) and approval of integration (Stürmer & Benbow, 2017).

2.4. The Current Study

Theoretical considerations and existing studies suggest that (positive) intergroup contact is a relevant predictor of attitudes toward assimilation and multiculturalism. However, gaps remain in the existing research, particularly regarding the limited examination of negative contact and potential mediator variables.

The central research question of this study is whether the frequency of positive and negative contact with individuals from other ethnic or cultural backgrounds is related to attitudes toward multiculturalism and assimilation among German cultural majority students. Furthermore, we investigate whether intergroup anxiety, intergroup threat, and pro-diversity beliefs mediate these relationships.

Frequent and meaningful positive intercultural experiences have been shown to lead to more favorable evaluations of interculturality and stronger support for the recognition and maintenance of cultural diversity in society (i.e., integration and multiculturalism; Callens et al., 2019). Conversely, negative, stressful, or harmful experiences are expected to generate negative connotations concerning the maintenance and recognition of cultural diversity. These experiences should therefore be associated with greater support for assimilationist and colorblind norms. Negative contact experiences with members of other cultural groups are also likely to increase perceptions of intergroup threat and anxiety, thereby reinforcing tendencies to reduce or disregard cultural diversity within society (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Kauff et al., 2017). Based on this reasoning, we assume that intergroup threat and intergroup anxiety mediate the effects of both positive and negative contact on attitudes toward assimilation and multiculturalism.

H1: Positive contact has a positive indirect effect on support for multiculturalism and a negative indirect effect on support for assimilation via intergroup threat. Negative contact has a negative indirect effect on support for multiculturalism and a positive indirect effect on support for assimilation via intergroup threat.

H2: Positive contact has a positive indirect effect on support for multiculturalism and a negative indirect effect on support for assimilation via intergroup anxiety. Negative contact has a negative indirect effect on support for multiculturalism and a positive indirect effect on support for assimilation via intergroup anxiety.

Beyond the roles of threat and anxiety, previous research highlights the importance of pro-diversity beliefs in intergroup relations (Kauff, Asbrock & Schmid, 2020). While the relationship between pro-diversity beliefs and attitudes toward assimilation and multiculturalism has not been extensively studied, we argue that viewing interculturality as beneficial is central to supporting integration and multiculturalism norms. We therefore assume that pro-diversity beliefs mediate the relationship between both positive and negative contact and attitudes toward assimilation and multiculturalism.

H3: Positive contact has a positive indirect effect on support for multiculturalism and a negative indirect effect on support for assimilation via pro-diversity beliefs. Negative contact has a negative indirect effect on support for multiculturalism and a positive indirect effect on support for assimilation via pro-diversity beliefs.

Previous studies have shown that positive and negative intergroup contact are experienced and evaluated differently (Barlow et al., 2012; Hayward et al., 2017; Schäfer et al., 2021). Building on prior research concerning contact asymmetry (Hayward et al., 2017; Schäfer et al., 2021), as well as decategorization theory (Dovidio et al., 2017), we anticipate that negative contact will have a stronger association with attitudes toward assimilation and multiculturalism than positive contact. Since the mediators discussed here address attitudes that are particularly relevant in intergroup contact situations, we expect the total effect of negative contact on attitudes toward assimilation and multiculturalism to exceed that of positive contact. In contrast to a similar study on prejudice (Aberson, 2015), we directly compare the total effects of positive and negative contact, since a purely direct effect of contact on diversity ideologies cannot be meaningfully excluded.

H4: The frequency of negative contact experiences has a stronger total effect on support for assimilation and multiculturalism than the frequency of positive experiences.

Figure 1 visually displays the hypothesized model. In addition to the constructs discussed so far, two further variables were included to control for other potentially relevant effects. Aberson (2015) found that the effects of positive and negative contact differ depending on whether the outcome involves cognitively driven or affectively driven attitudes. We sought to control whether the effect of pro-diversity beliefs, defined as an instrumental (cognitive) construct, might instead be explained by non-instrumental, positive affective aspects of intergroup interaction, which are distinct from threat or anxiety. Therefore, we included the variable *non-instrumental appreciation of diversity (n.i. appreciation)* in the model. Since positive affect is likely to be associated with both positive and negative intergroup experiences (e.g., Kauff et al., 2017), this variable was included as a *competitive* mediator following the recommendation of Woody (2011).

Moreover, the frequency of general intergroup contact was included as a potential shared bias factor. Individuals with greater overall intergroup contact are naturally expected to report more frequent positive and negative contact experiences. Following Woody (2011), contact frequency was therefore included as a measured confounder that is statistically related to all other variables in the model. For clarity, paths from contact frequency to the other variables are not shown in the model figure.

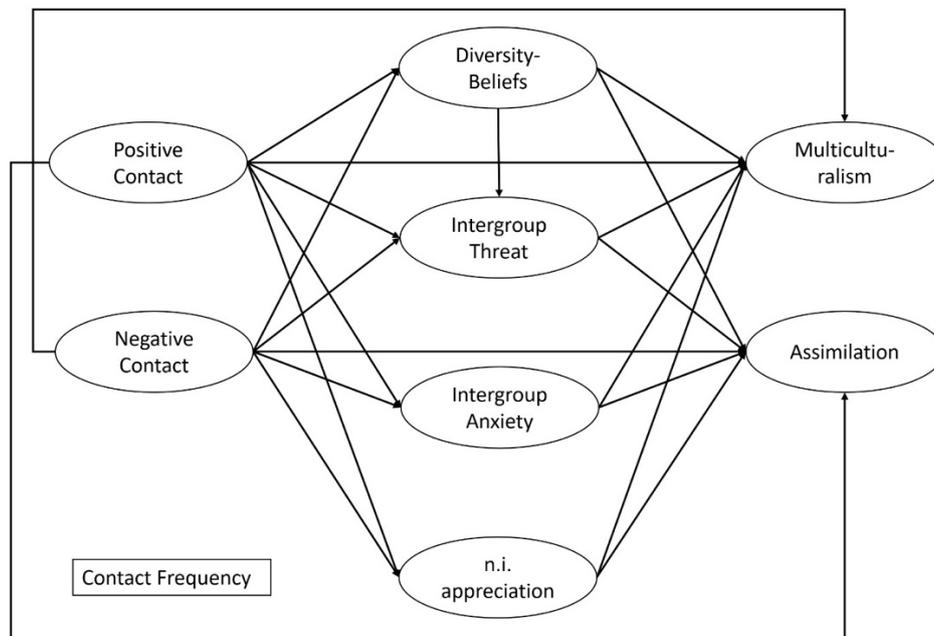


Figure 1: Path model

3. Methods

3.1. Design and procedure

To test these hypotheses, we conducted a secondary data analysis on cross-sectional data collected as part of the research project *Utilize and Appreciate Diversity*. The primary analysis of the dataset was published by Genkova, Semke, and Schreiber (2022), focusing on predictors of pro-diversity beliefs, particularly social dominance orientation and authoritarianism. The present study addresses a clearly distinct research question and scope.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire administered via the LimeSurvey platform between December 2019 and January 2021. Access to the survey was provided through a link distributed by email and personal invitation. The survey was accessible via both mobile and non-mobile devices and took, on average, 30 minutes to complete. No incentives were offered for participation.

At the beginning of the survey, participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and response format in accordance with the ethical principles and guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2017). They were explicitly informed that participation was voluntary and fully anonymous, ensuring that no data could be traced back to individual participants, and that non-participation would entail no negative consequences. Informed consent (APA, 2017) was obtained from all participants prior to beginning the questionnaire.

3.2. Measurement Instruments

The questionnaire comprised 50 items, including socio-demographic questions (age, sex, migration background, education, marital status, and employment). Table 1 presents the values for reliability and convergent/discriminant validity, assessed using congeneric reliability (ρ_c), average variance extracted (AVE), and maximum shared variance (MSV), following the recommendations of Hair et al. (2019), as these provide more precise estimates for scales where factor loadings differ across items. For comparative purposes, Cronbach's alpha is also reported, even though it systematically underestimates reliability in cases of unequal factor loadings (Hair et al., 2019).

Attitudes toward assimilation/integration were measured using a scale developed by van Dick, Wagner, Adams, and Petzel (1997) specifically for German-speaking contexts. This scale consists of 13 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = fully disagree, 6 = fully agree). Five items assess support for integration (e.g., "I would appreciate it if all ethnic groups in Germany would maintain their cultures"), while eight items assess preferences for assimilation (e.g., "I would appreciate it if migrants would set aside their culture rather quickly") and separation (e.g., "Children of different ethnic groups should go to separate schools"), the latter being considered an element of assimilation preferences in the German context (i.e., if assimilation fails, separation is preferred; Zick, 2017). Items related to integration were reverse-coded.

Attitudes toward multiculturalism were assessed using the scale by Rosenthal and Levy (2012), which includes five items (e.g., "Each culture has its own traditions and perspectives"), rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = fully agree; 7 = fully disagree).

Pro-diversity beliefs, conceptualized as positive instrumental attitudes toward ethnically and culturally diverse societies, were measured using five items on a 5-point Likert scale (e.g., “A diverse society works better than a society that is not diverse”), developed by Kauff et al. (2019).

Given the parsimony and solid theoretical foundation of Kauff et al.'s (2019) scale, intergroup threat (symbolic and realistic) was assessed using two items on a 7-point Likert scale (e.g., “Members of ethnic minorities / other ethnic groups threaten my financial situation” for realistic threat; 1 = strongly agree, 7 = strongly disagree).

Intergroup anxiety was measured using the four-item scale developed by Zagefka et al. (2017), with items such as “I feel uncomfortable interacting with members of ethnic minorities / other ethnic groups,” rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = not at all; 4 = absolutely).

To ensure that the relationship between pro-diversity beliefs and attitudes toward assimilation and multiculturalism was not merely driven by a general positive attitude toward cultural outgroups, non-instrumental appreciation of diversity was measured as a competitive mediator using four items on a 5-point Likert scale (e.g., “I prefer to work with people who are similar to me,” reverse-coded; 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree; Kauff et al., 2019).

Frequency of positive and negative intergroup contact was assessed with two items for each dimension, adapted slightly from Kauff et al. (2019) to use more neutral wording (e.g., “How often do you have beneficial contact with people with migration experience on average?”), rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never; 5 = very often).

General intergroup contact frequency was included as a control variable, measured by an item following Islam and Hewstone (1993): “How often do you have contact with members of ethnic minorities / other ethnic groups on average?” (1 = never; 6 = very often).

Additionally, we included malicious envy to test for potential common method bias by capturing variance across theoretically unrelated constructs. This was assessed using five items from the German translation of the *Benign and Malicious Envy Scale* (Lange & Crusius, 2015; Parrott & Smith, 1993), such as “I wish that superior people would fail at something,” rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree; 6 = strongly disagree), following Simmering, Fuller, Richardson, Ocal, and Atinc (2015).

Table 1: Reliability and Validity

	ρ_c	α	AVE	MSV
Assimilation	.793	.724	.359	.569
Multiculturalism	.716	.707	.407	.014
Negative Contact	.762	.751	.615	.315
Positive Contact	.850	.833	.742	.276
Pro-Diversity Beliefs	.912	.912	.676	.569
Intergroup Anxiety	.756	.735	.440	.276
Intergroup Threat	.772	.652	.649	.406
Envy	.841	.831	.514	.032
n.i. appreciation of diversity	.837	.812	.579	.152

Note. ρ_c = congeneric reliability, AVE = average variance extracted, MSV = maximum shared variance.

All scales exceeded the threshold for congeneric reliability ($\rho_c > .70$; Hair et al., 2019). The AVE for assimilation was above the recommended threshold of .50, although the MSV exceeded the AVE. However, given the strong congeneric reliability, internal consistency can still be considered sufficiently established (Malhotra & Dash, 2011).

In response to the high correlation observed between the latent constructs pro-diversity beliefs and assimilation, we assessed the potential risk of multicollinearity and construct overlap using established validity criteria. Since structural equation models with latent variables do not allow for the direct calculation of variance inflation factors (VIFs), we instead relied on the Fornell-Larcker criterion and congeneric reliability indicators. Specifically, we examined the average variance extracted (AVE), maximum shared variance (MSV), and congeneric reliability (ρ_c) for each construct. Although the AVE for assimilation was slightly below the recommended threshold (.359), its congeneric reliability was above .70 ($\rho_c = .793$), indicating sufficient internal consistency. Moreover, although the MSV for assimilation was higher than its AVE due to the strong correlation with pro-diversity beliefs, the squared correlations between assimilation and all other constructs were lower than the AVE, thereby supporting discriminant validity at the construct level (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2019; Malhotra & Dash, 2011).

Given that the strong negative association between pro-diversity beliefs and assimilation was theoretically expected and empirically supported in prior research (Genkova & Schreiber, 2022), we interpret this overlap as substantively meaningful rather than as problematic multicollinearity. Both constructs were therefore retained as theoretically and empirically distinct dimensions of diversity ideology.

3.3. Sample

No preliminary sample size calculation was conducted, as this study utilized an existing dataset. After excluding 37 outliers from the 247 participants without migration experience, the final sample consisted of $N = 210$ participants, which exceeds the minimum recommended sample size of 200 for conducting confirmatory factor analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Outliers were identified using boxplots, with cases exceeding 1.5 times the interquartile range considered outliers. The excluded cases displayed response patterns that raised concerns about response validity, such as extreme and contradictory answers provided in rapid succession.

The final sample consisted exclusively of non-immigrant student participants. As members of the societal majority, individuals without a migration background often occupy influential positions and play a role in shaping policies and social norms (Callens et al., 2019). Thus, the present study focused solely on individuals born and raised in Germany.

While the use of a student sample limits the generalizability of the findings, it offers specific advantages relevant to our research aims. Students, as highly educated and socially mobile individuals, frequently serve as cultural innovators and potential future policy influencers (Callens et al., 2019). They often adopt emerging social norms earlier than the general population, making them valuable early indicators of broader societal shifts, particularly with respect to diversity ideologies. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that their relatively high educational attainment and liberal values may restrict response variability, an issue discussed further in the Limitations section.

Participants were recruited from two universities (blinded for peer review), with 187 participants from one institution and 23 from the other. No meaningful differences between the two sites were assumed. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 43 years ($M = 23.50$, $SD = 3.33$). The sample included 128 male and 82 female participants, with no participants identifying as non-binary. A total of 120 participants reported being in a permanent relationship, while 90 participants reported being single.

4. Results

To test the hypotheses, both latent and manifest variables were specified within a structural equation model using AMOS. Data preparation and preliminary statistical testing were conducted in SPSS and AMOS. Table 2 presents the bivariate correlations of the imputed latent variables.

4.1. Statistical requirements

The assumption of normality was violated for intergroup threat (with responses skewed toward the minimum of the scale). Therefore, bootstrapping (500 samples) was applied, and bias-corrected confidence intervals (95% confidence level) were calculated (Byrne, 2016).

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the measurement model revealed that two items from the assimilation scale and one item from the multiculturalism scale displayed unsatisfactory factor loadings and were excluded. The decision to exclude these items was based on concerns that their formulations were misleading. After removing these items, the measurement model demonstrated good fit: $\chi^2(666) = 951.858$, $p < .001$, $CMIN/DF = 1.429$, $CFI = .936$, $RMSEA = .045$ (90% CI: LO = .038, HI = .051).

Harman's single-factor test showed no evidence of common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Tests for configural, metric, and scalar invariance across gender indicated configural invariance, but only partial metric and scalar invariance. Since no gender comparisons were performed, the analysis was able to proceed without adjustments (Byrne, 2016).

Graphical inspection of the proposed model revealed linear relationships for all paths, with the exception of the path between positive contact and intergroup threat. This non-linear relationship led to the exclusion of this path from the structural model (Byrne, 2016).

Table 2: Bivariate correlations of the imputed latent variables

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Positive Contact	1	.152	-.586**	-.134	.226**	-.014	-.218**	.571**	.195**
(2) Negative Contact	.152	1	.394**	.631**	-.457**	.145*	.640**	.094	-.297**
(3) Intergroup Anxiety	-.586**	.394**	1	.410**	-.341**	.095	.527**	-.326**	-.338**
(4) Intergroup Threat	-.134	.631**	.410**	1	-.588**	.088	.682**	.065	-.297**
(5) Pro-Diversity Beliefs	.226**	-.457**	-.341**	-.588**	1	-.037	-.807**	.067	.373**
(6) Multiculturalism	-.014	.145*	.095	.088	-.037	1	-.035	.081	.421**
(7) Assimilation	-.218**	.640**	.527**	.682**	-.807**	-.035	1	.065	-.108
(8) Contact Frequency	.571**	.094	-.326**	.065	.067	.081	.065	1	.029
(9) n.i. appreciation	.195**	-.297**	-.338**	-.297**	.373**	.421**	-.108	.029	1

Note. Values above the diagonal represent the correlation coefficients, values below the diagonal represent the corresponding p-values, * the correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed); ** the correlation is significant at the .001 level (2-tailed).

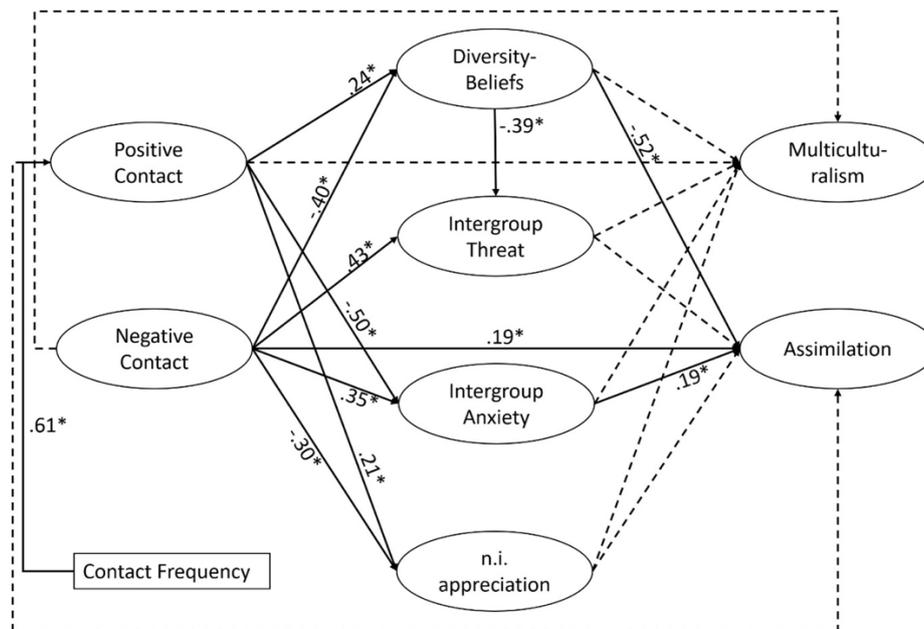


Figure 2: Structural equation model with manifest and latent variables and standardized path coefficients. **Note.** * The coefficient is significant on the adjusted .05 level, non-significant relationships are displayed in dashed lines, and non-significant paths of contact frequency are excluded.

4.2. Hypotheses Testing

We applied one-tailed testing to examine the directional hypotheses. To control for potential Type I errors, we computed rank-adjusted p-values ($p_{adj.}$) following the Benjamini and Hochberg (1995) procedure and Smith and Cribbie (2013), which has been shown to be superior to the commonly used Bonferroni correction. Local hypothesis tests were adjusted when necessary for evaluating the specific hypotheses under investigation (for further discussion on multiple hypothesis testing, see Rubin, 2021). To facilitate comparison with other studies, we report Cohen's d effect size estimates for both significant and non-significant paths. Although Cohen's d is traditionally used for mean differences between groups, it can be approximated in structural equation models using standardized path coefficients and the explained variance of the outcome variable.

The structural equation model demonstrated good fit: $\chi^2(535) = 781.312$; $p < .001$; CMIN/df = 1.460; CFI = .920; RMSEA = .047; $p = .759$; LLCI = .040; ULCI = .054. Figure 2 illustrates the model. To test hypotheses 1–3, we followed the Baron and Kenny (1986) criterion, requiring that both path a (independent variable to mediator) and path b (mediator to dependent variable) be significant. Table 3 additionally reports the cumulative indirect effects across all mediator variables.

Contrary to Hypothesis 1, which posited that intergroup threat mediates the relationships between positive and negative contact with support for assimilation and multiculturalism, we found that intergroup threat had no significant effect on attitudes toward multiculturalism ($\beta = .040$, LLCI = $-.166$, ULCI = $.273$, $p_{adj.} = .396$, Cohen's $d = .080$) or assimilation ($\beta = .187$, LLCI = $-.015$, ULCI = $.330$, $p_{adj.} = .054$, Cohen's $d = .681$). Furthermore, no linear or nonlinear relationship between positive contact and intergroup threat was observed when testing preconditions.

Table 3: Cumulated standardized indirect effects of positive and negative contact on attitudes towards multiculturalism and assimilation in Model 1

	assimilation			multiculturalism		
	$\beta_{indirect}, \text{Cohens } d$	$SE_{indirect}$	p	$\beta_{indirect}, \text{Cohens } d$	$SE_{indirect}$	p
positive contact	-.252, -.918 (-.448; -.113)	.086	.006	-.014, -.028 (-.180; .151)	.080	.877
negative contact	.406, 1.489 (.262; .570)	.087	.007	.026, .052 (-.130; .214)	.095	.708

Note. β = standardized point estimator (95% confidence interval), SE = standard error.

In support of Hypothesis 2, that intergroup anxiety mediates the relationships between positive and negative contact with support for assimilation and multiculturalism, we observed a significant negative effect of positive contact on intergroup anxiety ($\beta = -.501$, LLCI = $-.771$, ULCI = $-.312$, $p_{adj.} = .017$, Cohen's $d = -1.269$) and a significant positive effect of negative contact ($\beta = .355$, LLCI = $.175$, ULCI = $.548$, $p_{adj.} = .006$, Cohen's $d = .899$). Intergroup anxiety, in turn, had a significant positive effect on attitudes toward assimilation ($\beta = .190$, LLCI = $.035$, ULCI = $.345$, $p_{adj.} = .018$, Cohen's $d = .692$), but no significant effect on multiculturalism ($\beta = .022$, LLCI = $-.316$, ULCI = $.257$, $p_{adj.} = .523$, Cohen's $d = .044$).

For Hypothesis 3, which posited that pro-diversity beliefs mediate the relationships between positive and negative contact with support for assimilation and multiculturalism, we found significant effects of both positive contact ($\beta = .240$, LLCI = .039, ULCI = .477, $p_{adj.} = .027$, Cohen's $d = .536$) and negative contact on pro-diversity beliefs ($\beta = -.403$, LLCI = $-.568$, ULCI = $-.191$, $p_{adj.} = .009$, Cohen's $d = -.901$). Pro-diversity beliefs had a significant negative effect on attitudes toward assimilation ($\beta = -.519$, LLCI = $-.686$, ULCI = $-.372$, $p_{adj.} = .009$, Cohen's $d = -1.469$), supporting Hypothesis 3. However, there was no significant effect on attitudes toward multiculturalism ($\beta = .066$, LLCI = $-.174$, ULCI = .272, $p_{adj.} = .398$, Cohen's $d = .133$).

To test Hypothesis 4, that negative contact exerts a stronger effect on support for assimilation and multiculturalism than positive contact, we compared the total effects across all mediators. The total effect is defined as the sum of both indirect and direct effects (c'). However, no significant direct or indirect effects of either positive or negative contact on multiculturalism were found; thus, no total effect was calculated for this outcome.

For assimilation, analysis of the indirect and direct effects of positive contact revealed a negative indirect effect through intergroup anxiety and pro-diversity beliefs ($\beta = -.225$, Cohen's $d = -.820$), while the direct effect was positive but not statistically significant ($\beta = .120$, LLCI = $-.089$, ULCI = .328, $p_{adj.} = .170$, Cohen's $d = .437$). This pattern reflects inconsistent mediation, meaning that the direct and indirect effects operate in opposite directions, resulting in a nonsignificant overall total effect. Inconsistent mediation arises when the mediator transmits an effect that partially counteracts the direct relationship between the independent and dependent variables, often producing smaller or nonsignificant total effects despite meaningful underlying pathways (MacKinnon, Krull & Lockwood, 2000; Woody, 2011).

To provide a conservative reference point for Hypothesis 4, we conducted a post-hoc analysis by constraining the direct path from positive contact to assimilation to zero. As the statistical power may have been insufficient to conclude the absence of an effect based solely on the non-significant coefficient, the following results should be interpreted with caution. The restricted model also demonstrated good fit: $\chi^2(536) = 784.403$, $p < .001$; CMIN/df = 1.462; CFI = .919; RMSEA = .047; LLCI = .040; ULCI = .054; $p = .754$. A chi-square difference test indicated that the restricted model did not fit significantly worse than the unrestricted model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 2.091$, $df = 1$, $p = .148$). Table 4 presents the standardized total effects from the restricted model.

Since AMOS does not provide formal tools for comparing regression coefficients, we compared the 95% confidence intervals of the parameter estimates. According to Kwan and Chan (2011), non-overlapping 95% bias-adjusted confidence intervals suggest that the respective effects differ, although no exact significance level is provided.

We found that the confidence intervals for the standardized total effects of positive and negative contact on assimilation did not overlap. Thus, consistent with Hypothesis 4, negative contact exerted a stronger total effect on attitudes toward assimilation than positive contact.

Table 4: Standardized total effects of positive and negative contact on attitudes towards multiculturalism and assimilation in model 2

	assimilation			multiculturalism		
	β_{total} , Cohens d	SE _{total}	p	β_{total} , Cohens d	SE _{total}	p
positive contact	-.214, -.780 (-.381; -.077)	.077	.007	.023, .046 (-.225; .215)	.111	.943
negative contact	.597, 2.176 (.430; .746)	.077	.005	.118, .238 (-.078; .307)	.097	.239

Note. β = standardized point estimator (95% confidence interval), SE = standard error.

5. Discussion

The results indicate that positive contact has a negative indirect effect on attitudes toward assimilation. In contrast, negative contact exhibits both positive direct and indirect effects on support for assimilation. Moreover, results from the post-hoc adjusted SEM model demonstrate that the effect of negative contact is stronger than that of positive contact. Intergroup anxiety and pro-diversity beliefs serve as mediators of these relationships, while intergroup threat shows no significant relationship with attitudes toward assimilation or positive contact. Notably, we found no significant relationships between any of the investigated variables and attitudes toward multiculturalism.

5.1. Assimilation

This study aimed to extend previous research, which has shown that general contact frequency and intergroup friendships with individuals from migration backgrounds are related to support for assimilation (Abu-Rayya, 2017; Hässler et al., 2019). In contrast to previous studies, we differentiated between positive and negative contact experiences. The results revealed that positive contact frequency was associated with general contact frequency, while negative contact was not. Although initially surprising, this pattern aligns with Schäfer et al. (2021), as

discussed in the introduction. Schäfer et al. (2021) demonstrated that positive and negative contact often occur in different settings and are likely processed differently. For example, negative contact, such as superficial incidents like not being greeted, may occur independently of general contact frequency, whereas meaningful positive interactions often increase with greater time spent with outgroup members. This does not imply that increased intergroup interaction precludes negative encounters; rather, additional negative experiences may arise from distinct contexts unrelated to contact frequency. Furthermore, individuals who engage more frequently in intergroup contact may do so because they find such interactions enjoyable or possess stronger intercultural skills compared to those who have less contact.

After adjusting the structural model, we found that the effect of negative contact on support for assimilation was stronger than that of positive contact. This finding aligns with theoretical expectations (Hayward et al., 2017; Paolini, Harwood & Rubini, 2010) and supports the notion that negative experiences more readily activate group-based categorizations and stereotypes, while positive contact often leads to decategorization and personalization of outgroup members (Aberson, 2015). Schäfer et al. (2021) similarly observed that negative intergroup contact heightens subgroup salience, whereas positive contact tends to be interpreted at an interpersonal rather than intergroup level. Although our study cannot directly assess the salience of group membership during these contact experiences, this mechanism offers a plausible explanation for the stronger effect of negative contact. Our findings thus suggest that different types of positive and negative contact may exert distinct effects on diversity-related attitudes depending on situational and subjective interpretations.

Future research should more carefully differentiate between superficial and meaningful intergroup contact, and investigate how individuals' pre-existing normative expectations (e.g., preference for assimilation vs. multiculturalism) shape their evaluations of contact quality. For example, individuals favoring assimilation may evaluate contact more positively when migrants conform to dominant cultural norms, and more negatively when cultural distinctiveness is emphasized. Our findings highlight the importance of examining not only the frequency but also the quality, context, and subjective interpretation of intergroup contact. Experimental studies manipulating the salience of group membership and participants' normative expectations during contact would be valuable for advancing understanding of how positive and negative contact influence diversity attitudes.

Contrary to Hypothesis 1 and some prior studies (Aberson, 2015; Çakal et al., 2016), and consistent with Callens et al. (2019), we found no relationship between positive contact and intergroup threat. One possible explanation for this finding is the limited operationalization of threat using only two items. While these items have been used in prior studies, we cannot rule out measurement limitations, and further interpretations should be made cautiously. Divergent findings may also result from differences in contact operationalization across studies. The inclusion of both positive and negative contact may offer a more nuanced understanding of how threat operates as a mediator in the contact–attitude relationship.

Attitude formation is shaped by both the type and context of contact experiences. For example, some positive experiences, such as polite conversations at work, friendly interactions with salespeople, or romantic relationships between group members (Schäfer et al., 2021), may not challenge individuals' perceptions that cultural outgroups pose threats to their way of life or financial security. Future studies should further investigate the mechanisms linking contact experiences with attitude formation by incorporating more diverse contexts and nuanced interpretations of intergroup interaction.

Moreover, we did not find a relationship between intergroup threat and support for assimilation, contrary to Hypothesis 1. This finding contradicts prior results from Callens et al. (2019) and Florack et al. (2003). Since variance in negative contact was sufficiently distributed across the scale, restricted variance is unlikely to explain this inconsistency. The absence of a significant mediation effect suggests that other psychological mechanisms may play a more central role in shaping diversity ideologies within our sample.

One plausible explanation for the diminished role of intergroup threat lies in the stronger relationship between pro-diversity beliefs and superordinate group identification, as described in the social categorization framework. Van Knippenberg and Schippers (2007), building on Social Identity Theory, argue that pro-diversity beliefs serve as a key determinant of whether individuals identify with a culturally heterogeneous superordinate group or retreat into exclusive subgroup identification. This view is supported by Dovidio et al. (2017), who emphasize that diversity ideologies fundamentally influence group memberships and attitudes toward outgroups. Van Dick, van Knippenberg, Hägele, Guillaume, and Brodbeck (2008) found similar results in cross-sectional and longitudinal organizational studies, demonstrating that pro-diversity beliefs strongly predict identification with diverse teams. While their focus was organizational, our findings suggest that pro-diversity beliefs may similarly apply to broader societal identifications such as national identity in multicultural societies.

This interpretation is further supported by qualitative evidence (Genkova & Schreiber, 2021), which showed that intergroup threat plays a relatively minor role for German university students in shaping feelings and behaviors toward outgroup members, while instrumental benefits of diversity were far more salient. Participants rarely expressed fear or anxiety; instead, they emphasized potential gains from diversity or the lack thereof. Consistent with this, Long, Ye, and Liu (2023) found that intergroup threat predicts behavioral intentions such as lower

willingness to purchase outgroup products but does not necessarily influence broader ideological attitudes. Thus, threat may be more influential for specific behaviors rather than for generalized diversity ideologies.

Additionally, while intergroup threat has been extensively studied as a mediator in the contact–attitude relationship (Aberson, 2015), few studies have simultaneously controlled for pro-diversity beliefs. Meeusen and Kern (2014) demonstrated that when pro-diversity beliefs are included, the mediating role of threat and other negative affective responses often diminishes or disappears. This suggests that pro-diversity beliefs may "crowd out" the explanatory power of threat by providing a more cognitively elaborated and positively framed foundation for diversity-related attitudes.

Taken together, these patterns suggest that stronger pro-diversity beliefs may not only diminish threat perceptions but also reinforce social norms favoring cultural diversity and promote identification with a heterogeneous society. From this perspective, the absence of significant mediation via intergroup threat may reflect that individuals who cognitively embrace diversity are less susceptible to affective defensive reactions, even when faced with potentially threatening intercultural situations. Future research should test extended models incorporating superordinate group identification as a mediator between intergroup threat, pro-diversity beliefs, and diversity ideologies. Such models may clarify when threat leads to resistance to diversity and when it is neutralized through normative and identity-based cognitive processes.

An unexpected result was the emergence of an inconsistent mediation pattern in the relationship between positive contact and support for assimilation. Specifically, while the indirect pathway through intergroup anxiety and pro-diversity beliefs was significantly negative, suggesting that positive contact reduces assimilation support via these mediators, the direct effect of positive contact on assimilation was positive but nonsignificant. This may reflect a suppressor effect, where the inclusion of mediators reveals a latent negative relationship otherwise masked by competing influences. Alternatively, measurement error in the latent construct for positive contact may attenuate the direct path, or unmeasured variables such as contact context or quality may exert opposing influences.

To explore this issue, we tested a post-hoc model constraining the direct path from positive contact to assimilation to zero. The adjusted model demonstrated good fit and a stronger, clearly negative total effect of positive contact on assimilation, supporting the interpretation that the observed inconsistent mediation may reflect partial suppression. Nevertheless, these findings underscore the importance of exploring additional mechanisms and boundary conditions shaping the effects of positive intergroup contact on attitudes toward cultural assimilation.

5.2. Multiculturalism

Contrary to our expectations and previous findings (Hutchinson et al., 2018; Kauff et al., 2013; Kauff et al., 2019; Olsson et al., 2019; Scott & Safdar, 2017; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006; Verkuyten et al., 2010), attitudes toward multiculturalism were not significantly associated with any of the examined variables. Several factors may account for this result, including the small sample size, potential restriction of variance in the dependent variable, psychometric limitations, and the specific cultural context of the study.

First, the relatively small and homogeneous student sample may have limited both the statistical power and the variability required to detect such relationships. However, the distribution of the multiculturalism variable was adequate ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 0.96$), suggesting that restricted variance alone is unlikely to explain the null findings. Although the average variance extracted ($AVE = .407$) fell slightly below the conventional threshold, the scale's congeneric reliability was acceptable ($\rho_c = .716$), and item diagnostics, after excluding one ambiguous item, were satisfactory, mitigating concerns about serious measurement weaknesses. Nevertheless, possible measurement limitations intersect with both scale selection and cultural-contextual factors.

Our study employed the multiculturalism scale developed by Rosenthal and Levy (2012), which explicitly emphasizes the recognition of cultural differences as legitimate. This conceptualization differs from earlier measures, such as Berry and Kalin's (1995) broader scale, which includes general attitudes toward immigration and interethnic relations. While these operationalizations have demonstrated equivalence in North American contexts, it is unclear whether this equivalence extends to the German context, where multiculturalism carries distinct social meanings and political histories (Berry, 2016; MPC, 2020). Unlike countries such as Canada or the United States, Germany has historically framed immigration not through multicultural policies but through notions of cultural conformity and national identity. For much of the postwar period, Germany considered itself a non-immigration country and only gradually, particularly after the 1990s, acknowledged its de facto multicultural society. The notion that "if you don't want to adapt, you can leave" still appears to hold significant weight for a substantial segment of German society.

As noted earlier, Berry (2016) argued that social norms in Germany tend to favor colorblindness rather than multiculturalism, based on data from Canadian-based surveys. However, Berry (2016) did not directly examine whether attitudes and norms toward multiculturalism can be validly measured across cultural contexts. Differences in both the expression and connotation of multiculturalism may explain discrepancies between the present findings and prior research, raising questions about the cross-cultural applicability of existing measurement instruments (Genkova, 2019). Our results thus call into question whether earlier findings can be meaningfully compared to

those observed in German student populations. Among the nine studies reviewed on multiculturalism attitudes, only one directly pertains to the German context (Kauff et al., 2013); the remaining studies were conducted in the United States, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Chile, further complicating cross-cultural comparisons.

Qualitative research by Genkova and Schreiber (2021, 2022) on cultural diversity attitudes in Germany found that German students, employees, and managers often lacked explicit awareness of cultural diversity and tended to adopt colorblind perspectives. Explicit, argument-based multicultural attitudes were rare, frequently replaced by vague egalitarian statements. Few participants had received formal diversity training, and this lack of education appeared to limit explicit awareness and understanding of cultural diversity. Importantly, this vague understanding was not necessarily neutral; in the absence of institutional support and guidance, vague conceptions of cultural diversity may evolve into skepticism or rejection of diversity, as observed among both students and professionals. These findings align with Silver et al. (2021), who reported that public and political discourse on cultural differences in Germany largely reflects a colorblind orientation across much of the political spectrum. This may also support Genkova and Schreiber's (2022) findings that many participants held only a vague understanding of multiculturalism, which may foster more negative attitudes over time.

In this context, our findings suggest that, in the German setting, attitudes toward multiculturalism, at least as operationalized by Rosenthal and Levy (2012), may face measurement challenges that extend beyond simple differences in operationalization and instead concern broader construct validity. While our study found acceptable psychometric properties for the scale items, the absence of relationships with theoretically related constructs raises concerns. Stogianni et al. (2023) similarly encountered psychometric difficulties when measuring related constructs. Qualitative research (Genkova & Schreiber, 2021, 2022) further suggests that attitudes toward multiculturalism in Germany may vary not only in their intensity but also in their degree of explicitness and conceptual sophistication. This variation may help explain both the relatively low AVE observed for the multiculturalism scale and the lack of significant associations with other variables in our study.

For future research, we recommend beginning with qualitative investigations to capture the nuanced nature of multiculturalism-related attitudes in Germany. Such work could explore dimensions such as *Essentialistic Boundaries* and *Extent of Differences*, which have been identified as culturally relevant but remain underexplored in this context. This groundwork could serve to inform the development of culturally sensitive and psychometrically robust measurement instruments suitable for assessing multiculturalism in the German context.

5.3. Limitations

The present study is subject to several limitations that affect the interpretability of the results. Due to the cross-sectional study design, no causal inferences can be drawn from the observed relationships among variables. Although previous empirical work supports the proposed directional effects, all associations reported in this study should be interpreted as correlational rather than causal.

Another limitation concerns the sample, which was relatively small and consisted exclusively of university students born and raised in Germany. While students are valuable research participants as early adopters of emerging social norms and potential future policymakers, they are not representative of the broader German population, particularly in terms of age, socioeconomic status, and educational background. Younger individuals and those with higher education levels may hold more liberal or progressive views on diversity-related issues, which may result in restricted variability of responses and limit the generalizability of findings. Consequently, we suspect that the mediator variable *intergroup threat* may be right-skewed in our sample. Caution is therefore warranted when generalizing the findings to other demographic groups within Germany's cultural majority population. In particular, the results may not apply to individuals who perceive intergroup threat more strongly due to lower socioeconomic status or income.

A further limitation relates to the operationalization of intergroup threat. In this study, we employed a brief two-item scale derived from Kauff et al. (2019), chosen for its conceptual clarity and brevity within a larger model containing multiple constructs. Although this measure has been effective in prior studies, its brevity may have limited its reliability and reduced its ability to capture the full complexity of intergroup threat, which encompasses both realistic (e.g., economic) and symbolic (e.g., value-based) dimensions (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). More comprehensive operationalizations typically involve 6–12 items covering both domains (Croucher, 2017), and such measures may offer greater sensitivity for detecting associations within complex structural models. The condensed scale used here may partially explain the absence of significant mediating effects for intergroup threat, especially in comparison to findings from studies employing more detailed instruments (e.g., Aberson, 2015). Additionally, recent research suggests that pro-diversity beliefs, which we included as a cognitive-evaluative construct, may absorb variance previously attributed to threat perceptions (Meeusen & Kern, 2014). As pro-diversity beliefs reflect an affirmative stance toward diversity, they may serve as a more proximal predictor of diversity ideologies in contexts where threat perceptions are less salient or politically charged, such as in a highly educated student sample of cultural majority members. Future studies seeking to build on our findings should consider utilizing more detailed psychometric instruments and scales validated through cross-cultural research.

The exclusion of missing data represents another limitation affecting the objectivity of the results. Additionally, only partial metric invariance and no scalar invariance were achieved. According to Putnick and

Bornstein (2016), metric and scalar invariance are essential primarily when comparing mean values across groups. Since this was not the case in our study, analyses could be legitimately conducted based on the established configural invariance. Nevertheless, future studies should explore whether systematically different relationships exist for male and female participants by utilizing larger and more diverse samples.

Given the cultural specificity of some findings, it remains debatable whether our results can be generalized to other national contexts. While the relevance of pro-diversity beliefs for intergroup attitudes appears generalizable across Europe (Kauff et al., 2020), and extensive international research exists on intergroup contact (Lolliot et al., 2015), further investigation is needed to explore possible cultural differences in the structure and content of diversity ideologies, intergroup threat, and intergroup anxiety. Future research should also examine whether the current findings can be extended to other populations in Germany, particularly working adults.

6. Conclusion

The research question addressed in this study was whether experiences of positive and negative contact with individuals from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds are related to attitudes toward multiculturalism and assimilation. In addition, we examined whether intergroup anxiety, intergroup threat, and pro-diversity beliefs mediate these relationships.

Our findings support the assumption that both positive and negative intergroup contact serve as meaningful predictors of attitudes toward assimilation of cultural minorities. Whereas previous research has primarily focused on positive contact forms (e.g., quantity of contact, intergroup friendships), we expanded upon the existing literature by incorporating both positive and negative contact and analyzing their relationships with support for assimilation and multiculturalism. By considering mediator variables such as pro-diversity beliefs, intergroup anxiety, and intergroup threat, we also contribute to the growing body of research on the psychological mechanisms linking diversity ideologies to intergroup contact.

Importantly, our study highlights pro-diversity beliefs as a novel cognitive mediator in the relationship between intergroup contact and diversity ideologies. Unlike traditional mediators such as intergroup threat, pro-diversity beliefs emphasize the instrumental value of cultural diversity, offering a distinct and positively framed pathway for understanding support for multiculturalism and assimilation.

The central implication of our findings is that both positive and negative experiences contribute to the endorsement or rejection of assimilation norms among majority group members. Given the serious consequences associated with assimilationist policies in immigration countries in the past (Callens et al., 2019; Gordon, 1964; Markus, Steele, & Steele, 2000), it is not sufficient to focus solely on fostering positive contact situations, as social psychology has advocated for over 70 years. Equally important is the development of individual competencies and organizational structures capable of preventing or effectively addressing negative intergroup experiences.

Nonetheless, several questions remain open for future research. While we demonstrated that positive and negative contact relate to support for assimilation, as well as to pro-diversity beliefs and intergroup anxiety, we found no associations for multiculturalism or intergroup threat, contrary to earlier studies. We have discussed possible explanations, including the potential suppressive role of pro-diversity beliefs and measurement or equivalence issues concerning multiculturalism. However, we did not explore the deeper mechanisms underlying these links. Existing research suggests that positive and negative contact occur in different situational contexts (Schäfer et al., 2021), elicit different emotional responses (Barlow et al., 2019), and are differentially related to the salience of group membership (Hayward et al., 2017). Future studies should incorporate these mechanisms to clarify how contact experiences translate into attitude formation.

Finally, our results diverge from some of the existing literature regarding the contact–multiculturalism relationship and the role of intergroup threat. While we have offered plausible interpretations, these topics require further development, particularly through studies employing larger, more representative samples.

Acknowledgement Statement: The author would like to thank the reviewers for providing comments in helping this manuscript to completion.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares that he/she has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Author contribution statements: Author 1: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Data collection, Writing - Review & Editing. Author 2: Methodology, Data collection, Writing - Original Draft, Visualization.

Funding statements: As there was no external funding received for this research, the study was conducted without financial support from any funding agency or organization.

Data availability statement: Data is available at request. Please contact the corresponding author for any additional information on data access or usage.

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