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Is negative the new positive? Secondary transfer effect of exposure to LGBT portrayals in TV entertainment programs

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Abstract

This study investigates the primary effect of positive, neutral, and negative exposure to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) TV portrayals in entertainment programs on attitudes toward the LGBT community and the Secondary Transfer Effect (STE) of such exposure on attitudes toward people with Asperger's Disorder (the secondary out-group), controlling for face-to-face and online contacts with both out-groups. Research was conducted using a mixed methods approach. Quantitative Study 1 used an online survey of 716 Israeli Jews, to investigate primary and secondary effects of TV exposure to LGBT portrayals. The positive primary effect of TV exposure was shown—regardless of LGBT portrayals perceived as positive, neutral, or negative. STE of TV exposure to neutral and negative LGBT portrayals is likely to diminish social distance to people with Asperger's Disorder, while no STE was found with positive LGBT portrayals. Full mediation effect of attitudes toward the LGBT community was found. Qualitative Study 2, based on 52 in-depth interviews, was conducted in order to reveal the hidden mechanisms of these effects, examining the parasocial experience and its interpretations by the viewers. According to qualitative findings, the positive primary and secondary effects of negative exposure may be explained by varied interpretations of gay portrayals on TV by different people depending on social background and life experience, opposite reaction on stereotypical gay portrayals on TV, and asymmetrical negative-positive heuristic. Given the important role of TV in fostering more positive intergroup relations, this research revealed sources of prejudice reduction and increase in tolerance toward "others" for society at large.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Allport's (1954) classic intergroup contact hypothesis has considered one of the most theoretically important and practically useful strategies for improvement of intergroup relations. In encounters between people belonging to different groups, under specific conditions (i.e., equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and support of authorities), intergroup attitudes can be improved and prejudice reduced. The benefits of direct, positive contact with out-group members are well established and widely recognized (Brown & Hewstone, 2005). However, in multicultural societies intergroup contact is not always feasible. Even if it is, people may not easily develop friendships or intimate relationships with out-group members. In these contexts, indirect forms of contact, that do not necessarily imply face-to-face interactions, may be implemented with beneficial effects on intergroup relations (Dovidio, Eller, & Hewstone, 2011; Ma et al., 2019). Empirical research has shown that observing an in-group member having a successful interaction with an out-group member [vicarious contact] can positively impact intergroup relations (Mazziotta, Mummendey, & Wright, 2011; Vezzali, Di Bernardo, Stathi, Visintin, & Hewstone, 2018; Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997, Study 4). Due to its audio-visual nature, television serves as a key source of information for impressions that in-group members may have of other social groups, makes the identities and characters of out-group members' salient to

viewers, and in this way approximates face-to-face intergroup contact. Accordingly, previous research suggests that television represents an effective mechanism to influence beliefs and attitudes concerning less encountered out-groups (Garretson, 2015; Hoffner & Cohen, 2015; Mutz & Goldman, 2010; Wojcieszak & Azrout, 2016).

There is evidence that direct (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Capozza, Vezzali, Trifiletti, Falvo, & Favara, 2010) and indirect (Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005) contact effects can be generalized across situations, extending from specific out-group members to the larger out-group category. However, very little research has dealt with the basic issue concerning the generalization of attitudes developed during contact between intergroup and primary out-group members to other out-groups not directly involved in contact. This generalization of contact effect with a primary out-group to attitudes toward secondary out-groups was defined in the research literature as *secondary transfer effect* (STE) (Pettigrew, 1997, 2009). Recent studies have suggested that similar processes are also relevant in the impact of news media messages on attitudes (Bouman, van Zomeren, & Otten, 2014, 2015; Jacobs & van der Linden, 2017).

Exposure to mass media plays an important role even when direct contact does occur, as engendered emotions and impressions can influence intergroup perceptions and attitudes. The exposure to mass media leads to shifts in prejudice levels in both positive and negative directions, depending on the valence of the portrayal of out-groups (Browne Graves, 1999; Mutz & Goldman, 2010). Regardless of evidence showing the beneficial effects of positive vicarious contact for prejudice reduction (Lienemann & Stopp, 2013; Mazziotta et al., 2011; Schiappa et al., 2005; Shim, Zhang, & Harwood, 2012), investigating the effect of exposure to neutral and negative out-group portrayals is still limited (Mazziotta, Rohmann, Wright, De Tezanos-Pinto, & Lutterbach, 2015).

Although research has shown that both face-to-face and mass-mediated contact can impact intergroup attitudes, there is paucity of research investigating these forms of contact simultaneously, working either in synergy or in contrast (Ramasubramanian, 2013; Visintin, Voci, Pagotto, & Hewstone, 2017). Nevertheless, it is plausible that prior research overestimates mediated contact effects due to failure to control for direct contact. It is thus essential to simultaneously assess both contact forms. In addition, research on *STE* of mass media exposure, controlling for direct contact with primary and secondary out-group members, has yet to be conducted. The current research seeks to fill this void, focusing on primary and secondary effects of exposure to positive, neutral and negative portrayals of primary out-group members on TV, controlling for effects of face-to-face interaction and online contact with both primary and secondary out-group members. Moreover, the research on STE of indirect contact in general and of vicarious contact in particular is very limited, related only to very similar primary and secondary out-groups (e.g., different immigrants groups; Harwood, Paolini, Joyce, Rubin, & Arroyo, 2011; Joyce & Harwood, 2014). This study, however, focuses on *dissimilar* primary and secondary out-groups. Specifically, we investigated the primary effect of exposure to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) portrayals (the primary out-group) in TV entertainment programs. The aim of our study is to investigate the primary effect of positive, neutral, and negative exposure to LGBT (the primary out-group) TV portrayals in entertainment programs on attitudes toward the LGBT community and the STE of such exposure on attitudes toward people with Asperger's Syndrome (AS) (the secondary out-group), controlling for face-to-face and online contact with both out-groups.

Israel provides an appropriate setting for such a study because it is engaged in various demographic, social, and cultural changes leading to a constant process of negotiating sociocultural and moral orders. Social reactions to "otherness" are a part of this continuing development of the symbolic construction of moral boundaries in Israel.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Contact hypothesis and effects of positive, negative, and neutral direct contact

The classic *contact hypothesis* has stimulated an enormous body of research, validated across diverse settings and social groups (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Lemmer & Wagner, 2015; McIntyre, Paolini, & Hewstone, 2016; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). It has since developed into a more sophisticated and integrative *intergroup contact theory* focusing on different types of contact (Hewstone, 2009). However, positive contact represents only one part of the full evaluative spectrum of possible contact experiences (Paolini, Harwood, & Rubin, 2010; Stark, Flache, & Veenstra, 2013). While positive contact has received substantive empirical attention, negative, and neutral contacts have remained largely unexplored. The role of positive contact was found more effective in improving intergroup relations compared to neutral (Eller & Abrams, 2004; Pettigrew, 1998; Voci & Hewstone, 2003). However, the existing research is inconclusive with regard to which form of direct intergroup contact—positive or negative—is more strongly related to intergroup attitudes (Barlow et al., 2012; Pettigrew, 2008; Stark et al., 2013). Several studies reported stronger effects for positive contact (Lutterbach & Beelmann, 2019; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011), others found stronger effects of negative contact (Aberson, 2015; Barlow et al., 2012; Graf, Paolini, & Rubin, 2014; Techakesari et al., 2015), and others did not find reliable differences in the magnitude of the effects of positive and negative contact (Bekhuis, Ruiter, & Coenders, 2011).

2.2 | Parasocial contact hypothesis

Just as interpersonal interaction can lead to various sorts of interpersonal responses and relationships, parasocial interaction can lead to various forms of parasocial responses and (one-sided) relationships (Schiappa et al., 2005). The *parasocial contact hypothesis* claims that parasocial contact can provide a type of

prejudice-reducing experience. It can develop emotional bonds with, and sympathetic affinity for, positive portrayals of out-group individuals, particularly if a majority group member has limited opportunity for interpersonal contact with minority group members. Indeed, several studies have demonstrated that exposure to positive portrayals of members of stigmatized groups can lead to a reduction of prejudiced attitudes (Ortiz & Harwood, 2007; Paluck & Green, 2009; Schiappa et al., 2005). In three experiments, Schiappa and colleagues (2005) found that watching television programs that depicted positive contact of straight people with gay men (Experiments 1 and 2) and with transvestites (Experiment 3) led to lower levels of prejudice toward the respective target group. Ortiz and Harwood (2007) found in a correlational study that exposure to positive straight-gay and White–Black interactions in television was associated with more positive attitudes toward the respective out-group.

Similar to the classic contact hypothesis, parasocial contact "works" only under specific conditions. It has the potential to decrease prejudice when majority group viewers are exposed repeatedly to diverse, likable, and clearly identifiable representatives of a minority group (Schiappa et al., 2005). However, in reality these conditions are hard to come by in mass media coverage of minority groups. In a rare study on contact valence, Fujioka (1999) showed that the valence of parasocial intergroup contact is related to intergroup attitudes in both directions. That is, while predominance of negative exposure can be linked to negative intergroup attitudes, mostly positive portrayals of specific groups generated more positive attitudes toward those groups.

Moreover, researchers who applied parasocial contact theory focused on the consequences of parasocial interactions without considering *interpretation* of the content as the mediator of effects of exposure to TV portrayal on attitudes. Exposure to minority portrayals is often perceived as a routine, unproblematic, and passive process. That is, meaning was conceptualized as directional transmission (channeled from content source to its object through a medium), self-evident and consumed by a passively receptive viewer. However, social psychologists claim that audiences interpret TV programs in diverse ways, depending on their own sociocultural contexts (Brown, 2015; Livingstone, 2013). Our assumptions, images and knowledge of the world portrayed by television cannot be strictly separated from our assumptions, images, and knowledge of everyday life. Mediated TV interaction can be seen as providing people with "texts" to be interpreted, with the same "text" perceived and interpreted differently by various types of people with diverse identities. Therefore, research on meanings which viewers actually construct from TV programs, recruiting prior social knowledge and experience to guide and inform a constructive process, is important (Livingstone, 2013), especially when focusing on the effect of LGBT TV exposure. Indeed, increasing LGBT representation in entertainment media has sparked mixed public reactions, with some praise of gay characters and storylines as progressive and other criticism of these portrayals as perpetuating stereotypes (Sink, Mastro, & Dragojevic, 2017).

2.3 | Secondary transfer effect

More recently, the theorization of a potential *contact-prejudice effect*—that is, an effect without the presence of actual direct or indirect contact with the out-group, which is defined in the research literature as a STE (Pettigrew, 1997, 2009),—has gained popularity. Such an effect was first observed in a study examining the effects of intergroup contact between Black and White U.S. soldiers stationed in Germany. It revealed that Black respondents' contact experiences with White U.S. soldiers was not only predictive of their attitudes toward White U.S. soldiers, but also toward Germans—even when controlling for direct contact with Germans (Weigert, 1976). According to the meta-analysis conducted by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), out of the 515 studies on contact published during the 20th century, only 18 tests from 12 different studies investigated this form of effect, although since then research interest in STE has grown.

Many studies found that the positive effect of contact with one out-group was associated with greater acceptance of other out-groups not directly involved in the contact (Lissitsa & Kushnirovich, 2018). This effect was likely to be stronger the more similar the secondary out-group was to the primary out-group in terms of ethnicity, religion, and social status (Bowman & Griffin, 2012; Pettigrew, 2009; Tausch et al., 2010). Different processes mediating the relationship between contact with a primary out-group and attitudes toward a secondary out-group have been suggested (Lolliot et al., 2013). The mediating role of attitudes toward the primary out-group, known as attitude generalization, is the most widely discussed (Bowman & Griffin, 2012; Brylka, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Mähönen, 2016; Pettigrew, 2009; Schmid, Hewstone, & Tausch, 2014; Tausch et al., 2010; Vezzali, Di Bernardo, Stathi, Cadamuro, et al., 2018). Attitude generalization may explain the indirect effects toward secondary out-groups via changes in attitudes toward a primary out-group (Schmid, Hewstone, Küpper, Zick, & Wagner, 2012).

Research has demonstrated that STE of positive and negative direct contact are two distinct phenomena. Scholars reported that positive contact was positively associated with the attitudes toward either primary or secondary out-groups, while negative contact was associated with less positive attitudes toward primary and secondary groups (Brylka et al., 2016; Lissitsa & Kushnirovich, 2018; Mähönen & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2016).

Recent studies suggest that similar STE processes are also relevant for the parasocial contact experience (Bouman, Zomeren, & Otten, 2014, 2015; Jacobs & van der Linden, 2017). Bouman and colleagues (2014, 2015) found experimental evidence that exposure to a newspaper story involving a distant threat spreads to attitudes toward domestic immigrant groups. Jacobs and van der Linden (2017) reported STE from exposure to news stories about North African immigrants affecting attitudes toward unrelated immigrant groups. As far as we know, the STE from exposure to out-group portrayals in TV entertainment programs has yet to be examined.

3 | RESEARCH SETTINGS

As mentioned, the LGBT community constitutes the primary out-group in our research. Gay rights have played a central role in the branding of Israel, internally and externally, as a democratic state (Gross, 2014). From 1988 to 1993, Israel went through a process of gay rights reform. Anti-sodomy laws were abolished in 1988 and in 1993 homosexuals were allowed in the Israeli Defense Force (Kama, 2000). The past two decades witnessed an increase in LGBT visibility in the State of Israel, especially in promotion of equal rights for gay families and spectacular gay pride parades. These help to define LGBT activism in Israel, along with academic discourse and popular writing on gay issues (Preser, 2011). Even so, homosexuality still carries a negative stigma in Israel (Rosenmann & Safir, 2008), evident from contemporary studies on homophobia in Israel. For example, a study on Israeli lesbian and gay students (11 to 18 years) found that approximately one half of the participants were subjected to occasional homophobic remarks and about a third were the targets of harassment and violence (Pizmony-Levy, Kama, Shilo, & Lavee, 2008).

People with AS are the secondary out-group of our study. AS, recently reclassified as an Autism Spectrum Disorder, is a disorder largely characterized by pervasive deficits in social interactions. These impairments can present themselves in numerous ways, including poor use and understanding of eye contact and facial expressions, speaking too loudly, not understanding body language, rigidity in routine, becoming overly focused on one topic of interest, engaging in stereotyped behaviors, in addition to a myriad of other social deficits. Problematic social interactions can have numerous consequences including stigmatization. The negative consequences of stigmatization can include and are not limited to difficulties with employment, housing, access to health care, relationships, and self-esteem (Harré, 2001). Children with AS are often teased and ridiculed by their peers because of their social naivety and behavior that might seem odd and awkward to neurotypical children (Van Roekel, Scholte, & Didden, 2010; Welkowitz & Baker, 2005). In adulthood, it is not uncommon for people with AS to possess a high level of anxiety over being laughed at (Samson, Huber, & Ruch, 2011). Such fears exacerbate their "otherness" and impede their integration into social environments.

Although LGBT people and people with AS are ostensibly dissimilar, we may posit several shared common denominators. First, both groups are characterized by perceived otherness and difference from the mainstream—not from conscious choice, but due to some innate trait. Second, both groups are not visible minorities (in contrast to racial minorities and people with physical disabilities) and may not be recognizable at first contact. Third, according to the literature, both groups are stigmatized minorities (Harré, 2001; Hoyt, Morgenroth, & Burnette, 2019; Moss-Racusin & Rabasco, 2018; Van Roekel et al., 2010; Shilo, Antebi, & Mor, 2015) and are sometimes socially excluded. That is, they may lack social contact and friendship networks. They may even be shunned to the extent that people do not want to live near them (Đorđević, 2015; Van Roekel et al., 2010). Both groups encounter difficulties in establishing families and in adoption of children. Indeed, in Israel, for LGBT people both options are legally nonexistent.

This research was conducted using a mixed methods approach (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010), a combined analysis of simultaneously collected quantitative (Study 1) and qualitative (Study 2) data. The methodological advantage to this research type is in its ability to draw on strengths and minimize weaknesses of the two methods in a single research study (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). Quantitative research allows testing the hypotheses, while qualitative research provides explanations of our findings.

4 | STUDY 1

4.1 | Introduction to Study 1 and research hypotheses

According to the parasocial contact hypothesis, TV allows exposure to people different from us. We thus listen to their stories, without the anxiety associated with in-person contact. This may cause prejudice toward out-groups to decline (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Behaviors during such interaction events (e.g., television program, commercial, or talk show interview) help viewers to form opinions about these televised out-group individuals, which the viewer then carries into the next parasocial episode (e.g., Auter, 1992; Perse & Rubin, 1989). Recent literature has emphasized the importance of interaction content *quality* in outcome assessment (Graf et al., 2014; Lissitsa & Kushnirovich, 2018; Paolini et al., 2010, 2014; Pettigrew et al., 2011). Research found different effects of positive and negative parasocial contact (Browne Graves, 1999; Mutz & Goldman, 2010; Theorin, 2019). Predominance of negative exposure can be linked to negative intergroup attitudes, while mostly positive portrayals of specific groups generated more positive attitudes toward those groups. Accordingly viewers identified more strongly with liked and neutral characters than with disliked characters, and their parasocial relationships were stronger with liked and neutral characters than with disliked characters (Fujioka, 1999; Jacobs & van der Linden, 2017; Tian & Hoffner, 2010). Therefore quality should be differentiated from quantity of exposure to LGBT portrayals in TV programming. Thus, the former would refer to tone and the latter to amount of coverage. Consequently, based on the parasocial contact hypothesis and the mentioned studies, our hypotheses were formulated separately regarding exposure to positive, neutral, and negative portrayals of the primary out-group in TV programming:

> Hypothesis 1a. *There will be a direct, positive relationship between the frequency of exposure to LGBT TV portrayals and attitudes toward the LGBT community (the primary out-group), when the portrayals are defined by respondents as* positive.

> Hypothesis 1b. *There will be a direct, positive relationship between the frequency of exposure to LGBT TV portrayals and attitudes toward the LGBT community (the*

primary out-group), when the portrayals are defined by respondents as neutral.

Hypothesis 1c. *There will be a direct, negative relationship between the frequency of exposure to LGBT TV portrayals and attitudes toward the LGBT community (the primary out-group), when the portrayals are defined by respondents as* negative.

Several studies on STE found that positive and negative parasocial contact experiences with primary out-groups yielded different STEs. Jacobs and Van der Linden (2017) found that exposure to a positively valenced TV news story about a primary out-group increased positive attitudes toward unrelated immigrant groups. However, the STE of exposure to the negatively valenced TV news was not found. In contrast, Bauman and colleagues (2014) reported that the potential carry-over effects of negative news tone featuring one out-group (e.g., intolerance toward Turks due to perceived negative economic consequences of a Turkish accession to the EU) was generalized to other, uninvolved out-groups (e.g., Moroccan-Dutch people). As we can see, the mentioned results were not univocal and this issue remains largely unexplored. Moreover as far as we know, a study which examined STE of neutral parasocial contact was not conducted yet. Thus we may assume that in case of exposure to neutral portrayals due to the increasing awareness to different "others," a positive STE is expected.

In the current research, we examine social distance as outcome measures of relations with a secondary out-group. The STE is more pronounced the more similar the secondary out-group is to the primary out-group by ethnicity, religion, and social status (Bowman & Griffin, 2012; Pettigrew, 2009; Tausch et al., 2010). However, the generalization toward nonencountered *dissimilar* groups (Pettigrew, 2009) was also reported, but weaker than such an effect regarding similar out-groups. As mentioned, despite apparent dissimilarity, there are several common denominators between LGBT people and people with AS. Based on these, the current study observed STE from parasocial contact due to TV exposure, positing Hypothesis 2a, 2b, and 2c:

Hypothesis 2a. *There will be a STE of frequency of exposure to LGBT TV portrayals on social distance from people with AS (the secondary out-group) when the portrayals are defined by respondents as* positive.

Hypothesis 2b. *There will be a STE of frequency of exposure to LGBT TV portrayals on social distance from people with AS (the secondary out-group) when the portrayals are defined by respondents as* neutral.

Hypothesis 2c. *There will be a STE of frequency of exposure to LGBT TV portrayals on social distance from people with AS (the secondary out-group) when the portrayals are defined by respondents as* negative.

As mentioned, more recent studies on STE further substantiate the notion of attitude generalization as a STE mediator (Brylka et al., 2016; Schmid et al., 2012, 2014; Tausch et al., 2010; Vezzali, Di Bernardo, Stathi, Cadamuro, et al., 2018). According to the attitude generalization hypothesis, the attitude toward the encountered primary out-group may mediate the effects of contact on attitudes toward nonencountered secondary out-groups. As a consequence, the following can be claimed:

Hypothesis 3a. *The relationship between frequency of exposure to LGBT TV portrayals and AS social distance will be mediated by primary out-group attitudes (i.e., LGBT) when the portrayals are defined by respondents as* positive.

Hypothesis 3b. *The relationship between frequency of exposure to LGBT TV portrayals and AS social distance will be mediated by primary out-group attitudes (i.e., LGBT) when the portrayals are defined by respondents as* neutral.

Hypothesis 3c. *The relationship between frequency of exposure to LGBT TV portrayals and AS social distance will be mediated by primary out-group attitudes (i.e., LGBT) when the portrayals are defined by respondents as* negative.

4.2 | METHOD

4.2.1 | Sample

The study was conducted among 716 Israeli Jews aged 18–30, who use social media at least three times a week. The mean age of respondents was 24.6 (*SD* = 3.0). Of the sample, 47.3% were male. In addition, 18.8% had only a high-school education, 10.8% some college education, 46.2% were BA students, and 24.5% had an academic degree. Furthermore, 37.8% of the sample reported being atheist or secular, with the rest maintaining some traditions (18.7%), being religious (29.7%), or religious orthodox (3.8%). Lastly, respondents reported on level of good health (*M* = 4.5, *SD* = 0.7 on a scale from 1 = very bad to 5 = excellent).

4.2.2 | Procedure

A post addressed to potential interviewees, including the survey link, was published on various online Israeli general interest forums by research assistants. The survey invitation explained that the research involved a questionnaire on social issues. Each interviewee could complete the survey only once. Approximately 75% of users who opened the survey link completed the questionnaire. Prior to fieldwork, to identify the demographic characteristics of young Jewish social media users, we used social survey data from a study conducted by the Israeli Central Statistics Bureau in 2016 on a large

representative sample. To guarantee better a representativeness of our sample, after reaching approximately 80% of the preplanned sample size, we asked the respondents to share the link of our survey and/or send it to their acquaintances with specific characteristics (locality, gender, and religiosity). To maintain the anonymity promised to interviewees, the database did not include respondent email addresses, telephone numbers, or other identifying details.

4.2.3 | Measures

Attitudes toward LGBT was a measure based on five items—acceptance, empathy, sympathy, kindliness, and admiration. They were formulated as "To what extent do you experience the following feelings toward LGBT people?" and scaled 1–10, with 1 = "not at all" and 10 = "to a very large extent." The internal reliability value was .885.

Social distance from people with AS was a measure based on five items describing extent of not willing to be friends, to take part in joint events, to study in the same institution, to live on the same street, and to live in the same house (Bogardus, 1933), scaled 1–9, with 1 = "not at all" and 9 = "to a very large extent." The internal reliability value was .953.

Exposure to LGBT TV portrayals was measured by the following item: "How often do you encounter LGBT content on TV entertainment programs?" on a scale from 1 = "not at all" to 5 = "very often."

The *quality of LGBT TV portrayals* was measured by the following item: "How can you characterize the quality of LGBT portrayals in TV entertainment programs?" on a scale of "1" = "always negative," "2" = mainly negative, "3" = neutral, "4" = mainly positive, "5" = always positive. Afterward, this variable was divided into three categories: those who defined their contact as negative (1–2), neutral (3), or positive (4–5).

Face-to-face contact with LGBT was measured by the item: "How often do you meet with LGBT individuals?" scaled 1–8, from 1 = "not at all" to 8 = "a few times a day." *Face-to-face contact with people with AS* was measured by a similar item on the same scale.

Online contact with LGBT was measured by the item: "How often are you in online contact with LGBT individuals?" scaled 1–8, from 1 = "not at all" to 8 = "a few times a day." *Online contact with people with AS* was measured by a similar item on the same scale.

Control variables included gender (coded 1 = Male and 0 = Female), age (continuous variable) in years, education (1 = "less than high school," 2 = "completed high school," 3 = "vocational studies," 4 = "studying for a Bachelor's degree," 5 = "Bachelor's degree," 6 = "Master's degree or higher"), and religiosity (scaled 1–5, with higher values indicating higher religiosity), and health status (scaled from 1 = very bad to 5 = excellent).

Variable definitions and descriptions are presented in Table 1.

The study used multigroup Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) analysis, in which attitudes toward the LGBT community and social distance from people with AS were treated as latent variables. A Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was estimated using AMOS software, version 22, with the Maximum Likelihood estimation method.

4.3 | RESULTS

4.3.1 | Overview

Our sample of young Israelis were exposed to LGBT portrayals on TV with medium frequency (i.e., neither rare nor often) (M = 2.64, SD = 1.03) (see Table 1). About half of them (52%) defined these portrayals as positive, 35.6% as neutral and the rest (12.4%) as negative. They contacted LGBT people face-to-face a few times a month (M = 4.42, SD = 2.36); whereas online the respondents contacted them slightly rarer (M = 3.64, SD = 2.40). Only 13.7% of the respondents did not have face-to-face contact with LGBT, and 28.5% did not have online contact with them. The attitudes of young Israelis toward the LGBT community were ambivalent (M = 5.59, SD = 2.48). They reported moderate acceptance levels (M = 7.50, SD = 2.81), but low levels of admiration (M = 3.29, SD = 2.69). The levels of other attitude dimensions were medium.

About a quarter of the sample (28.6%) met people with AS face-to-face, with a slightly lower percent (25.6%) reporting online social media contact. Young Israelis reported rather a small social distance from people with AS (M = 2.36, SD = 2.02). The lowest distance was reported for willingness to live with AS individuals on the same street (M = 2.04, SD = 2.08), willingness to live in the same house (M = 2.19, SD = 2.17), and willingness to study in the same institution (M = 2.22, SD = 2.20). The slightly higher social distance was reported for willingness to take part in joint events (M = 2.45, SD = 2.23) and for willingness to be friends (M = 2.92, SD = 2.35).

4.3.2 | Effects of TV exposure to positive and negative LGBT portrayals on attitudes toward the LGBT community

To examine the effects of TV exposure to positive and negative LGBT portrayals on attitudes toward the LGBT community, we ran multigroup SEM for three groups: those who viewed LGBT TV portrayals of homosexuals as predominantly *positive*, *neutral*, or *negative*. The fit indices and results of the model are presented in Table 2 (Model 1); all fit indices were found acceptable.

The study found positive significant relationships between TV exposure to LGBT portrayals and attitudes toward the LGBT community when respondents defined the portrayals as *positive*, as well as when they defined the portrayals as *neutral* and *negative*. Thus, Hypotheses 1a and 2a were supported, but Hypothesis 3b, that there would be a negative relationship between frequency of exposure to LGBT TV portrayals and attitudes toward the LGBT community when these portrayals are defined as *negative*, was not supported.

We also found that women had better attitudes toward the LGBT community than men did. Higher religiosity was negatively related to attitudes toward the LGBT community when the portrayals were defined as positive. More face-to-face or online LGBT contact was associated with better attitudes toward the LGBT community.

TABLE 1 Definition and description of variables

Variable	Definition	Factor loadings	Mean	(*SD*)	% Reported the highest value
Exposure to LGBT TV portrayals	Scaled 1–5, from 1 = not at all to 5 = very often		2.64	(1.03)	14.5
Attitudes toward the LGBT community	Index computed as a factor average based on 5 items formulated as "My feelings towards the LGBT community are" (scale 1–10[a]), Cronbach Alpha = .885:		5.59	(2.48)	
	Acceptance	.53	7.50	(2.81)	38.5
	Empathy	.70	5.54	(3.22)	20.3
	Sympathy	.91	5.99	(3.05)	20.1
	Kindliness	.94	5.64	(3.14)	18.9
	Admiration	.62	3.29	(2.69)	5.2
Social distance from people with AS (Bogardus, 1933)	Index computed as a factor average based on 5 items (scale 1–9[b]), Cronbach Alpha = 0.953:		2.36	(2.02)	
	Not willing to be friends	.80	2.92	(2.35)	4.5
	Not willing to take part in joint events	.87	2.45	(2.23)	4.7
	Not willing to study in the same institution	.95	2.22	(2.20)	5.0
	Not willing to live on the same street	.97	2.04	(2.08)	4.6
	Not willing to live in the same house	.96	2.19	(2.17)	4.7
Defined exposure to LGBT TV portrayals as:	"How can you characterize the quality of LGBT portrayals in TV entertainment programs?" (scale 1–5)				%
Always or mainly positive					52.0
Neutral					35.6
Always or mainly negative					12.4
Face-to-face contact with LGBT	Scaled 1–8, 1 = not at all, 8 = a few times in a day		4.42	(2.36)	15.5
Online contact with LGBT	Scaled 1–8, 1 = not at all, 8 = a few times in a day		3.64	(2.40)	10.3
Face-to-face contact with people with AS	"Do you meet persons with AS on a regular basis?", 1 = yes, 0 = no				28.6
Online contact with people with AS	"Do you have online contact with persons with AS on social media?", 1 = yes, 0 = no				25.6
Gender	1 = Male, 0 = Female				47.3
Age	Continuous variable in years		24.6	(3.0)	
Education	Scaled 1–6:1 = less than high school, 2 = completed high school, 3 = some college education, 4 = enrolled in Bachelor degree program, 5 = Bachelor degree, 6 = Master degree or higher		3.79	(1.11)	
Religiosity	Scaled 1–5:1 = atheist, 2 = secular, 3 = maintaining some traditions, 4 = religious, 5 = religious orthodox		2.80	(1.09)	
Health status	Scaled from 1 = very bad to 5 = excellent		4.5	(0.7)	

[a]The more positive attitude received the higher score.

[b]The question was formulated as "To what extent are you willing to do any of the following activities with people with AS?" The answers were recoded so that higher scores meant higher social distance.

TABLE 2 Standardized coefficients of TV exposure to LGBT portrayals on attitudes toward the LGBT community and social distance from people with AS

Predictors	Dependent variable: Attitudes toward LGBT (Model 1)[a]			Dependent variable: Social distance from people with AS (Model 2)[b]		
	Positive portrayals	Neutral portrayals	Negative portrayals	Positive portrayals	Neutral portrayals	Negative portrayals
TV exposure to LGBT portrayals	.273***	.209***	.143*	−.049	−.128*	−.185*
Gender (Male)	−.219***	−.224***	−.149***	.136*	.136*	.207*
Age	.022	.024	−.073	.065	.102	.142
Education	−.024	.044	−.171	.030	.031	.082
Religiosity	−.162***	−.103	−.086	−.128*	.036	−.092
Health status	−.049	.061	−.014	.418***	.410***	.359***
Face-to-face contact with HS	.229***	.267***	.291**	−.034	−.280***	−.302**
Online contact with HS	.266***	.128	.311**	−.085	.132	.065
Face-to-face contact with people with AS				−.130*	−.109	−.116
Online contact with people with AS				−.006	−.071	.064

[a]Fit indices: χ^2 = 234.024 (p < .001), χ^2/df = 1.632, CFI = .971, IFI = .971, TLI = .952, NFI = .929, RMSEA = .030, SRMR = .084.
[b]Fit indices: χ^2 = 373.261 (p < .001), χ^2/df = 1.616, CFI = .973, IFI = .974, TLI = .964, NFI = .934, RMSEA = .029, SRMR = .076.
*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p<.000.

However, no significant relationships were found between age, education, health, and attitudes toward the LGBT community.

4.3.3 | STE effects

To examine the effects of TV exposure to LGBT portrayals on social distance from a secondary group, we used a multigroup SEM, where the social distance was the dependent variable; all fit indices were acceptable (see Model 2 in Table 2). In this model, in addition to demographic variables and LGBT contact, we also controlled for face-to-face and online contact with people with AS. The study found a significant relationship between exposure to LGBT TV portrayals and social distance from people with AS when the portrayals were defined by respondents as *negative* and neutral, evidence of STE. The more frequent the exposure to the portrayals, the lower the reported social distance. Thus, *Hypothesis* 2b and 2c were supported. However, STE was not found when the TV portrayals were defined as *positive*. That is, there was no significant relationship between TV exposure to positive LGBT portrayals and social distance from people with AS. *Hypothesis* 2a was, therefore, not supported.

A better state of health and face-to-face contact with people with AS were associated with lower AS social distance when respondents defined LGBT TV portrayals as either *positive*, *neutral*, or *negative*. Males reported significantly higher social distance than women did. When portrayals were *positive*, those who reported face-to-face LGBT contact scored higher, translating into lower AS social distance. The latter may be evidence of STE from face-to-face LGBT contact on AS social distance. Higher religiosity was associated with lower social distance when the portrayals were positive. No effects of age, education, and online contact with LGBT or AS individuals on AS social distance were found.

4.3.4 | Mediation effects

To examine whether the relationship between TV exposure to LGBT portrayals (primary out-group) and social distance from people with AS (secondary out-group) was mediated by attitudes toward the LGBT community, the mediator "Attitudes toward LGBT" was added to the model with the dependent variable "Social distance from people with AS." The model controlled for effects of gender, age, education, religiosity, health, primary group (LGBT) face-to-face and online contact, and secondary group (AC) face-to-face and online contact. We used a multigroup SEM; the fit indices were acceptable: χ^2 = 690.504 (p < .001), χ^2/df = 1.621, CFI = .966, IFI = .967, TLI = .955, NFI = .918, RMSEA = .030, SRMR = .084.

Direct, indirect and total effects of TV exposure to LGBT portrayals on AS social distance are presented in Table 3. The study found a direct positive relationship between frequency of TV exposure to LGBT portrayals and attitudes toward the LGBT community across all three groups. This supports findings received in previous

sections. The results also showed that positive LGBT attitudes were associated with lower AS social distance when the portrayals were defined as neutral and negative; when the portrayals were defined as positive, no significant relationship was found.

For those who defined the LGBT portrayals as neutral and negative, indirect effects of exposure to LGBT TV portrayals on AS social distance were significant. The total effects of exposure to LGBT TV portrayals on AS social distance before mediation were significant, and direct effects after mediation were nonsignificant in both groups. Thus, in line with Hypothesis 3b and 3c, the relationships between frequency of exposure to LGBT TV portrayals and AS social distance are mediated by primary out-group attitudes (LGBT) when the portrayals were defined by respondents as neutral and negative. The more frequently respondents watched LGBT TV portrayals perceived as neutral or negative, the more positive their attitudes toward the LGBT community. Ultimately, these attitudes were generalized and transferred to people with AS. However, no mediation effect was found when the portrayals were defined as positive. Hypothesis 3a was not supported.

5 | STUDY 2

5.1 | Method

In the context of majority cultural domination, minorities may face the problem of legitimacy, combining recognition (acknowledged by others) and respect (identity confirmation by others), which is critically important from a psychological perspective (Clark, 1973). Clark (1969) established four stages of media representation for minority groups: Nonrepresentation, ridicule, regulation, and respect. Nonrepresentation was defined as outright exclusion from the media. In the ridicule stage, formerly nonrecognized groups are presented in the media, but only as objects of derisive humor. The third stage of regulation is when the minority group is represented—but in limited, socially acceptable roles. During the fourth stage of respect, members of the minority group are presented in both positive and negative roles of everyday life.

The evolution of LGBT TV representation in Western societies reflects a gradual process of transition through Clark's (1969) stages: the 1970s, when television LGBT characters were forced to remain in the closet even on the screen; through the 1990s, when these representations were outrageously stereotypical; and today, when TV movies and programs present an enormous variety of LGBT characterizations. In Israeli mass media, the LGBT community was studiously ignored until the end of the 1980s. They were then represented as a bullied minority in the 1990s and into the next decade, leading to the recent rich array of representational offerings. This shift in LGBT representation in Israeli films and television was paralleled by their political, legal, and social rise in status. LGBT characters are in many cases now seen as more than sympathetic; they are worthy of identification and emulation. The first TV genres to welcome LGBT representation and inclusivity were daytime soap operas and entertainment programs. Openness and diversity have now enabled LGBT actors to take on main character roles, occupying prominent places as regular cast members in dramas, comedies, and even action series. Moreover, LGBT people are presented in more complicated contexts; for example, in religious and ultra-religious populations that forbid homosexuality or as elements in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. One television series, "Srugim" (Knitted), broadcast between 2008 and 2012, deals with the complex confrontation between observant Jewish life and LGBT identity. In the same vein, a 2007 drama called "HaSodot" (The Secrets) featured a love story between two Orthodox girls who study in a Midrasha (women's yeshiva). "Habua" (The Bubble) (2006) is a movie centering on an LGBT relationship between two men—a young Jew and a young Palestinian, foregrounding the deepest rift in Israeli society. Furthermore, recently homosexual characters have appeared in series designed for children and youth. In "HaShkhuna" (The Neighborhood), a series that aired between 2014 and 2018, two

TABLE 3 Direct, indirect, and total effects of TV exposure to portrayals of primary out-group on social distance from secondary out-group (Mediator: Attitudes toward the LGBT community)

Effects of frequency of TV exposure to LGBT portrayals on social distance from people with AS	Estimates					
	Positive portrayals, *N* = 372		Neutral portrayals, *N* = 255		Negative portrayals, *N* = 89	
	b	*β*	*b*	*β*	*b*	*β*
Total effect of TV exposure to portrayals before mediator was entered	−.092	−.065	−.238**	−.124**	−.349*	−.164*
Direct effect of TV exposure to portrayals after mediator was entered	−.051	−.036	−.166	−.086	−.198	−.093
Effect of TV exposure to portrayals on mediator	.412***	.273***	.335***	.211***	.282*	.143*
Effect of mediator on social distance from secondary out-group	−.099	−.105	−.217*	−.180*	−.537***	−.497***
Indirect effect	−.041	−.029	−.073*	−.038*	−.151*	−.071*
Lower bounds	−.094		−.174		−.151	
Upper bounds	.010		−.019		−.013	
Two tailed significance	.197		.025		.049	

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .000$.

characters emerged from the closet. A "Flashback" series that was broadcast on the children's channel presented Aviv's handling of questions about his sexual identity and how he chose to come out in public in front of the school. In the popular Israeli reality show "HaAh Hagadol" ("The Big Brother"), multiple LGBT moments were prominent in different seasons: Ram Pries Siton's coming out, Amir Guttman's live kiss with his partner, Frieda Hecht's strong lesbian identity, and Stav, a transgender who broke stigmas.

The positive effect of exposure to negative LGBT portrayals on attitudes toward the LGBT community as well as the positive STE of such exposure which were found in Study 1 deviate from the research literature (Fujioka, 1999; Jacobs & van der Linden, 2017). Accordingly, Study 2 attempts to reveal the hidden mechanisms of these effects, examining the parasocial experience and its interpretations by the viewers by using a qualitative methodology.

5.2 | Introduction

The in-depth interviews were conducted in order to deeply understand the mechanisms of parasocial exposure to LGBT people in different media (TV, newspapers, radio, and digital media) and reveal the possible social consequences of such exposure, including attitudes and relations with other minorities. The present paper addresses our findings regarding exposure to LGBT portrayals in TV. The analysis is based on in-depth interviews with 52 Jews aged 18+. Of them, 31 were females and 21 males. The interviewees were contacted through advertisements placed on online forums, with subsequent consecutive referral or snowballing (Rosenthal, 1993). Respondents participated from a wide range of regions in Israel. The interviewees responded to the following topics: LGBT relations, changes in attitudes toward the LGBT community over time and contributing factors to these changes, LGBT representation in traditional and digital media, respondent experience of contact with the LGBT community, and possible connections between contact with and exposure to the LGBT community and attitudes toward other minority groups. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed in accordance with a grounded theory methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Thematic units of meaning were consolidated into thematic categories based on unique shared content repeatedly raised in discussion. Each category was given a representative heading (Rosenthal, 1993), typically derived from words or phrases used by the interviewees themselves. Due to space constraints, this paper includes only a small part of our findings which correspond to our research objectives and may clarify the quantitative findings.

5.3 | Results

5.3.1 | Progress with a dead end

For years, the LGBT community struggled for recognition, positive representation and equal rights, culminating in widespread success (Gross, 2014; Harlap, 2017; Kama, 2000). Most respondents agreed that attitudes toward homosexuals changed from mostly negative to more accepting. The majority emphasized the role of media as a change agent. Gay representation in media started with entertainment programs, in which they typically featured as outrageous, funny, and stereotypical characters. Over time, gay representation evolved such that many roles place only minor emphasis on their sexual orientation:

> *There is less obsession with the issue of gay sexual orientation. Entertainment programs really give them a stage like everyone else. Their sexual orientation is not the issue, which is a sign of acceptance of homosexuals. (Y.A., 37, male)*

> *Nowadays, to present a blatantly negative gay character in the media won't pass, in my opinion. The trend today is in favor of LGBT. If the group is defined as a disadvantaged minority, nothing is presented to weaken it further. (I.R., 32, male)*

However, LGBT acceptance is not universal and ubiquitous. Negative views tend to be expressed by the older generation and people who embrace religious traditionalism. They may interpret homosexuality as a sickness or violation of the natural order, one that should be "curable" with treatment:

> *From the religious point of view, homosexuality is a sickness. Animals in the wild breed and produce offspring. And if not—it is not something natural. (A.M. 27, female, religious)*

All respondents are pessimistic regarding unconditional acceptance of homosexuals by all segments of Israeli society with full equal rights. The future of the LGBT community was defined by one of the respondents as "progress with a dead end":

> *I do not think we have reached the peak such that gays and lesbians are part of society in a full and equal way. I'll say something that is kind of sad, but there's a situation where they'll never be equal. There* is a progress with a dead end. *(T.M., 55, female)*

5.3.2 | Negative is the new positive

It was found in Study 1 that exposure to positive LGBT content on TV had a positive effect on attitudes toward the LGBT community, a finding consistent with the literature (Fujioka, 1999). Even so, the finding that exposure to negative LGBT content on TV was positively related to attitudes toward the LGBT community is rather surprising, and contradicts previous studies (Jacobs & van der Linden, 2017). Study 2 revealed a few possible explanations for the positive effect of exposure to negative content on TV.

It's a matter of interpretation

As media images are inseparable from our assumptions, images, and knowledge of everyday life, it follows that movies, entertainment, and news programs are "texts" to be interpreted. Importantly, the same text can be variedly perceived and interpreted. Relevant variables that influence and predict interpretation include age, religiosity, belonging to the LGBT community, as well as personal proximity to and identification with the community and its challenges. The interviews showed that the same content may be perceived by some respondents as positive and by others as negative:

> *Are gay portrayals in TV show positive or negative? It absolutely depends on the opinions of the viewer. (I.R., 32, male)*

> *Something perceived as negative for me can be perceived differently by someone else.* It's all a matter of interpretation. *For example, when I see, who, to me is extreme, I can see it negatively, but someone else can say that he presents us properly. (A.M., 26, male)*

There is no bad publicity

The parasocial contact hypothesis claims that there is the potential to decrease prejudice when majority group viewers are exposed repeatedly to diverse, likable, and clearly identifiable representatives of a minority group (Schiappa et al., 2005). However, the literature shows that the negative behavior of fictional characters in movies or television programs might not receive the same negative assessment, and viewers sometimes bond with unpleasant characters. Hugh Laurie's appeal as "Dr. House" is an example of audience attraction to an unpleasant character (Pickett, 2012) and shows that a parasocial process between viewers and characters can occur regardless of their positive or negative valence. According to our findings, some of the parameters mentioned by Schiappa and colleagues (2005)—"likability" and "diversity"—are not even necessary as frequent exposure to identifiable LGBT portrayals may increase recognition and decrease prejudice.

> There is no such thing as bad publicity. *Even if you see gays in a negative way, as long as you see gays—it is positive, because you get to know the phenomenon and know it exists. The media really contributes… once there is high media representation and there is also recognition. (A.M., 26, male)*

Moreover, we found that exposure to negative information about LGBT on TV may cause a reverse reaction. People with no LGBT prejudice are very annoyed when exposed to "over negative" (in their opinion) LGBT content:

> *The gay characters from "Race to a Million" and "Big Brother" [i.e., very popular reality TV shows in Israel] are usually presented as exaggerated, because exaggeration is interesting. I love them less and… they are perceived as not real, and annoying.)Y.T., 26, male, religious(*

> *… Rabbi Yigal Levinstein suggested eradicating homosexuality as they have eradicated AIDS. But then there is a wave of criticism and protest… Channel 2 looked at him as a racist and he expressed that they [homosexuals] were perverts or something and [the channel] attacked him as a racist. In other words, blatant negative publicity also contributes to more positive perceptions of the community (M.S., 24, female)*

One of the respondents explains how negative discourse may lead to positive consequences for the LGBT community:

> *It is very easy to extrapolate that negative publicity will be bad for the community. It depends on your point of origin and who is exposed to negative publicity. Yes, anything negative will cause negativity, but you don't ultimately know how it will turn out. When the head of a religious school said that homosexuals are deviant, it was clear that this would negatively affect his students [i.e., an incident from 2016]. But what happened a few days later? Demonstrations! Shaming in a lot of Facebook groups and everywhere else. Condemnation by the Prime Minister, news items… This little negative thing caused a positive backlash. There's no such thing as negative coverage! (K.I, 28, male)*

Our findings confirmed that people engage in varied interpretation of the same content. Thus, making easy divisions in sorting negative and positive content may be quite problematic.

It makes me think differently and arouses compassion for the LGBT community

In general, people are wary of accepting strangers. However, when exposed to content about them in the media—even if negative content—they are familiarized with and attain better understanding of these putative strangers. In our LGBT case, this facilitates compassion and empathy for their community. For example, A.D. reported:

> *I personally do not have friends or acquaintances who are gay, and I was exposed to LGBT issues mainly through the media. I was exposed to harsh statements about LGBTs, especially from the religious angle. Now, I myself am a religious person, and it is difficult for me to accept the idea of single-sex relationships. However, I say to myself that they are people who did not choose this. They have a hard life and face difficult challenges, with a lot of hatred and lack of acceptance.* It makes me think differently and become more compassionate. *(A.D., 33, male, religious)*

They have a hard life and have difficulties with things that are natural for us, like bringing up a child, adoption, and buying a home. It is hard for me to see them in a negative light in the media. Because of these difficulties, I think they need our support. (M.S., 24, female, traditional)

These interviews indicate that exposure to LGBT content, regardless of its valence, still creates intimacy and familiarity with LGBT difficulties and disadvantages, generating empathy.

5.3.3 | Bad is stronger than good

The positive effects of exposure to negatively perceived content which was found in the quantitative study may be attributed to the asymmetrical negative-positive heuristic—"Bad is stronger than good" (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). Such an effect was originally detected mainly in news programs, and explained by the fact that negative news is more eye-catching, adds drama, stimulates interest, and is easier to understand (Lengauer, Esser, & Berganza, 2012). However, this effect may be also applied to the entertainment media. Bennett and colleagues (Bennett, Diamond, Miller, & Williams, 2018) found that negative events in which celebrities were involved have a greater effect on beliefs and judgments of the viewers than positive information. The literature shows that morally ambiguous characters are often more likeable by audience members than neutral ones. For example, popular television characters such as Gregory House, Walter White, Dexter Morgan, and Don Draper are deeply flawed and often behave badly, yet have huge devoted fan followings (Krakowiak & Tsay-Vogel, 2013). Corliss (as cited in Hoffner and Cantor (1991)) reported that intense negative characters could promote enduring involvement. Our respondents addressed this issue and claimed that public response to negative media framing is much stronger than to positive framing:

> Bad is stronger than good. *We prefer to remember what was bad for us than what was good. Sometimes, when I read a positive story, I say to myself, "Wow, well done," and forget it. I don't take part in the struggle or identify with the content beyond a few minutes. But when I see a negative item, I think the impact is much greater. It is easier to remember it. (R.P., 28, male)*

Thus, interviews supported the contention that negative tends to be weighed more heavily than positive information when forming overall impressions.

5.3.4 | A light of openness and acceptance—revealing the generalization mechanisms

As noted, the STE may occur due to generalization of the contact effect with one group to attitudes toward other groups (Pettigrew, 1997, 2009). Our interviews revealed a set of transference mechanisms when changes in public opinion about one group are extended to other groups. Our interviewees explained how LGBT community achievements, widely covered in the media, may be transferred to other disadvantaged minorities:

> *I think something quite amazing is happening in the country. The achievements of the LGBT community illuminate and spread a positive light*, a light of openness and acceptance *on society as a whole. This legitimizes other populations, makes them voice their voices. Because it is as if the LGBT community is raising its voice in the name of others. (R.C., 40, female)*

Although we pointed out several shared features between LGBT people and people with AS, our interviewees addressed one. Both LGBT people and people with disorders/disabilities are perceived by interviewees as disadvantaged groups—discriminated against, suffering from lack of awareness, and socially excluded:

> *The only similarity is that all minority groups suffer from discrimination. The LGBT community, similar to other minorities, fights against prejudices, but also confronts restrictions that expressed in the law as opposed to other groups. (A.S., 27, male,)*

> *Gays are a minority group in every respect, like other minority groups. It is mainly about legislation, rights and acceptance. People with disabilities and disorders are also a minority. There are groups that are being excluded from society. (A.M., 27, female)*

> *The similarity between gays and people with disabilities is that many people do not have a personal acquaintance with them, and then this causes them to be excluded. There is a feeling that only someone who is committed to them is close to them. (H.K., 45, male)*

> *There is a discrimination against different minorities in Israel. But discrimination against homosexuals or other non-ethnic groups, for example people with disabilities, is not always as direct, as discrimination against the Ethiopian or Arab community, for example. When gay presents a resume to an interviewer, the interviewer does not know that he is gay, no matter with that person hiding it or not. " (S.K., 23, female).*

In sum, the interviews in Study 2 revealed that LGBT attitudes have improved, although acceptance is still not universal and ubiquitous. Their portrayal in media is of high importance. Moreover, the effect may be even more pronounced for negative than positive content, and this effect may be transferred to other disadvantaged minorities.

6 | DISCUSSION

This paper adds to a growing body of research on STEs of intergroup contact (Lolliot et al., 2013), and extends previous work considering a previously unexplored STE of *parasocial* contact. To our knowledge, this study is the first to examine the secondary effect of parasocial contact due to TV exposure, controlling for face-to-face and online interaction both with the primary and secondary out-groups. Furthermore, as far as we know, the current research is one of the very few to distinguish between positive, neutral, and negative out-group portrayals (Jacobs & van der Linden, 2017).

Our descriptive findings showed that young Israelis are from time to time exposed to portrayals of LGBT people on TV, with 52.0% perceiving these as mostly positive, 35.6% as neutral, and 12.4% as negative. They contact LGBT people offline and online a few times in a month. Only about 14% of Israeli youth do not have at all face-to-face contact with LGBT, and about 29% do not contact with them online. The attitudes of young Israelis toward LGBT people were ambivalent. As for people with AS, slightly more than a quarter of the sample reported face-to face and online contact with them, with the social distance from people with AS rather small.

We found that all examined types of contact with LGBT (direct social contact through online and face-to-face interactions and parasocial contact) were positively correlated with attitudes toward this group. Thus, generally speaking, both social and parasocial contact hypotheses were supported in our study. Moreover, to our knowledge, this study was the first to find that TV exposure to minority portrayals in entertainment media is meaningful for social distance reduction—even if direct contact is present. In other words, through parasocial contact, respondents may add or correct out-group portrayals formed through direct personal interaction or exposure to prejudice. Our study does not allow for distinguishing between these assumptions, and future research on this issue is needed.

Our analysis of the effect of parasocial contact exposed rather ambiguous findings. The positive effect of parasocial contact on attitudes was shown, regardless of whether the portrayals of LGBT people were perceived as positive, neutral, or negative. These findings contradict the research literature, which claims that negative exposure generally correlates with negative intergroup attitudes, while positive portrayals of specific groups generates more positive attitudes toward those groups (Fujioka, 1999; Jacobs & van der Linden, 2017). This may be explained by varied interpretations of gay portrayals on TV by different people depending on social background and life experience (Livingstone, 2013). It may also be attributed to the fact that most gay images on TV programs are presented as positive characters and worthy subjects of identification (Harlap, 2017). Therefore, a slightly less than glowingly positive gay portrayal may be interpreted and reported as neutral or even negative. Respondents also clarified that stereotypical and exaggerated gay portrayals on TV are annoying, are perceived as extremely negative, and produce an opposite reaction. Moreover, we found that some parasocial contact theory conditions for effective parasocial contact (Schiappa et al., 2005) such as "likability" and "diversity" are, in fact, not necessary. We found that frequent exposure to identifiable LGBT portrayals, even if perceived as neutral or negative, may increase compassion, recognition and decrease prejudice.

These findings have important methodological contribution: due to the possibility of different interpretation of the same TV portrayals in case of minorities with dynamic community development, which challenge the traditional values and way of life, the division on positive/neutral/negative content may be very problematic. As such, a focus on frequency of exposure is more relevant for studies on parasocial contact.

Our findings show that STE of exposure to negative LGBT TV portrayals is likely to diminish social distance to people with AS, while no STE was found when the portrayals of LGBT were perceived as positive. The full mediation effect of attitudes toward LGBT was found. This may be explained by what is defined in the research literature as the asymmetrical negative-positive heuristic—"Bad is stronger than good" (Baumeister et al., 2001); that is, individuals tend to weigh negative information more heavily than positive information when forming their overall impression. Such a phenomenon was also described by our respondents in the qualitative study. We assume that among people with unprejudiced attitudes toward homosexuals such "blatant" negative information is memorized and produces a positive reaction regarding the primary out-group, which then carries over to the secondary out-group—people with AS. In contrast, exposure to portrayals interpreted as positive does not leave an indelible impression in the memory, and, therefore, its STE is insignificant.

One of the important and promising findings of our study is that those who reported more frequent exposure to neutral LGBT portrayals were more likely to outline more positive attitudes toward LGBT people and shorter social distance from AS. The possible explanation is that the very exposure to "others" increases the awareness, compassion, and likability not only for a specific group, but also increases tolerance and inclusion for other minorities. These findings are in line with the research literature, which found parasocial bonds with neutral characters (Tian & Hoffner, 2010).

As noted, exposure to LGBT characters on TV programs is undergoing rapid expansion. Our findings on the positive effect of exposure to TV LGBT portrayals thus carry promising potential for normalizing LGBT images in Israeli public opinion. In addition, gay rights play a significant role in the branding of Israel as a modern liberal-democratic state (Gross, 2014). Moreover, the STE of exposure to LGBT characters perceived as neutral or negative may lead to more acceptable and tolerable relations to people with AS, diminish their exclusion and include them in the "strong ties." Given the important role of TV in fostering more positive intergroup relations, this research revealed sources of prejudice reduction and increase in tolerance toward "others" for society at large.

7 | LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

It should be noted that this research may be affected by study limitations. Our research relied on cross-sectional data, preventing us from drawing causal inferences on the nature of the relationships.

In order to investigate causal relationships between TV exposure and intergroup relationships, the research literature recommends a full cross-lagged panel approach, which allows for direct comparison of parasocial contact effects on attitudes and attitude effects on parasocial contact in the same analysis. This, in turn, requires a longitudinal research design (Dhont, Van Hiel, De Bolle, & Roets, 2012). We thus draw heavily on the theoretical and substantive plausibility of the tested relationships, based on previous research, which has shown that contact with the primary out-group is longitudinally related with attitudes to secondary out-groups (Tausch et al., 2010). Consequently, we strongly recommend the use of experimental methods and further longitudinal data to reach more confident conclusions on causality.

Our distinction between positive, neutral and negative portrayals of LGBT people is based on respondent perceptions. Moreover, while our research distinguished between exposure to positive, neutral, and negative portrayals of homosexuals, it did not differentiate between positive, neutral, and negative online and face-to-face contact. Such differentiation may supply a more complete picture of primary and secondary effects of different types of contact.

We should also be cautious of generalizing the results. Participants in this study do not represent the general population of Israeli young people.

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