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Prejudicial Ethnic Bullying: The Role of Individual and Contextual Factors

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Wisdom is knowing how to accept differences
without wanting to eliminate them.

Gregory Bateson

ABSTRACT

The present dissertation aims to investigate prejudicial ethnic bullying in adolescence and shed light on the role of individual and contextual factors associated with it. Despite much evidence of the psychological benefits of diversity (Mok et al., 2007), highly diverse environments also expose minority youth to heightened risks of experiencing social exclusion and discrimination (Baysu et al., 2014; Rutland & Killen, 2015). Thus, some minority adolescents show problems "fitting" with their ethnically diverse peer group, and may experience peer rejection and discriminatory episodes towards them (Celeste et al., 2016). Bullying is an intentional, deliberate, and repetitive behaviour initiated by aggressive children and adolescents towards their weaker peers (Smith, 2016). Among different forms of bullying, the experience of ethnic harassment (i.e., negative treatments or derogatory comments about one's ethnic background) is one of the major contextual stressors for immigrant youth (Coll et al., 1996). In a more and more multi-ethnic society, the rates of ethnic bullying raise concerns on how to create an inclusive environment. Ethnic bullying is defined as a form of bullying perpetrated against members of ethnic minority groups (Elamé, 2013). A number of studies have shown that young people victimize or harass their peers in school in light of their ethnic background (Durkin et al., 2012; Larochette et al., 2010; Monks et al., 2008; Strohmeier et al., 2011) and as a consequence of their negative attitudes toward immigrants (Bayram Özdemir et al., 2016). The importance of the topic is crucial, especially in this historical period where ethnic diversity is increasing and the consciousness concerning ethnic minorities' is gaining political and media attention in Europe.

Adopting a socio-ecological perspective in considering these dynamics, the external environment, together with individual characteristics, contributes in large part into acquiring and maintaining negative attitudes towards people with different ethnicity. For these reasons, the general aim of the present dissertation is to deepen the knowledge on prejudicial ethnic bullying and its association with individual and contextual factors. Three studies are presented: 1) a systematic review and meta-analysis on the association between negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities and ethnic bullying; 2) a cross-sectional, multilevel study about the impact of prejudice in the proximate socio-ecological contexts (i.e., family and school) on ethnic bullying; 3) a three waves longitudinal study on individual factors that can directly or indirectly youth's engagement in ethnic bullying.

In the first study (Chapter 1- systematic review and meta-analysis) the search was done following the PRISMA guidelines at the beginning of June 2022 in the SCOPUS, Web of Science and ERIC scientific databases. We identified 64407 records and after screening for duplicates, inclusion criteria and quality assessment a final set of 10 papers were selected for the systematic review. The number of included articles suggests a dearth in literature in the topic of attitudes towards ethnic minorities and the dimension of ethnic bullying. Nevertheless, results from the qualitative analysis confirmed that researchers have been interested of the topic, especially in relation to school years. Most of research came from the European context where the attention was mainly given to secondary school students. A mixed model meta-analysis was then carried out with 22 assessments belonging to 9 articles. Results showed the important role of attitudes in the explanation of the behaviour among young people. Specifically, an overall significant association between negative attitudes against ethnic minorities and ethnic bullying emerged. Additional analysis on the role of possible moderators in such relation, revealed a non-statistically significant

difference between the level of negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities coming from the individual or the context (peer influences both in formal and informal contexts). Thus, both levels of attitudes played an important role in youth's involvement in ethnic bullying.

In the second study (Chapter 2), it was analysed the impact of prejudice in the proximal socio-ecological contexts on ethnic bullying. Specifically, we aimed to investigate whether a tolerant classroom context (i.e., teachers and classmates' attitudes) could buffer the impact of parents' prejudice on adolescents' ethnic bullying. Participants were 582 students (M_{age} = 15.23; *SD* = .65; 50.9% females; 30.7% with immigrant background) and 72 teachers (aged between 27 and 65 years; 79% females) that belonged to 37 secondary school's classrooms. Multi-informant reports were used with both adolescents and their class- teachers. Besides, students were also asked to assess their parents' attitudes towards ethnic minorities. Results of a multi-level regression analysis showed that teachers' tolerance moderated the effect of parents' prejudice on youth's engagement in ethnic bullying. In particular, we found that in classes with low levels of teachers' tolerance, parents' prejudice was significantly related with ethnic bullying. Conversely, in classes with high levels of teachers' tolerance, parental prejudice was no longer a risk factor for the engagement in ethnic bullying.

In the third study (Chapter 3), it was examined the role of individual characteristics that can predict ethnic bullying. Specifically, the study aimed at analyzing the reciprocal and longitudinal association between youths' prejudice, ethnocultural empathy and ethnic bullying during the first two years of high school. The analysis included 666 Italian high school students (M_{age}=15.13; SD = .53; 44.6% females) belonging to 36 classrooms of 10 secondary schools, who participated in at least one of three time points of data collection. Results from a Cross-Lagged Panel Model showed that the effect of prejudice on ethnic bullying was fully mediated by

ethnocultural empathy (β = .054; SE = .021; p = .009). Besides, according to previous literature (Bem, 1972), ethnic bullying resulted predicting both prejudice and ethnocultural empathy over time.

The final chapter (Chapter 4) presents a general discussion of the main results of the three studies, highlighting their contributions to the literature on prejudice-based ethnic bullying, strengths, limitations, and the implications for future prevention interventions.

Keywords: Ethnic Bullying; Ethnic Minority Groups; Negative Attitudes; Contextual Influences; Individual Factors; Meta-Analysis; Multi-informant Approach; Multilevel Analysis; Cross-Lagged Panel Model (CLPM).

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THEORETICAL FRAME OF THE DISSERTATION

"People would whisper and laugh as I walked past. When the teachers weren't around, they would call me names, such as 'jungle girl' and 'shadow' and toss out racist jokes. Although I knew these were disgusting, ignorant comments, I ***still took them to heart****.*
I went from feeling proud and special, to ugly and alienated*.*
There are different types of bullying. My bullying started off as verbal abuse but soon it turned physical. They started throwing milk at me during lunchtime and taunting me for how my hair was different to theirs.
On a daily basis I was sworn at, told to go home, and that my family should die. […]
The bullying made me feel so ashamed of myself *that I didn't tell my parents or teachers.*
I suffered alone, constantly running to the toilets to cry.
I didn't feel safe […] ***I was a shell of my former self****".*

(Testimony of Andrea from Kenya.
THE MIX forum, 2021)

"When I was in the juniors, they used to call me names in the playground all the time, like 'nigger'. They used to upset me and sometimes I would get so mad I would fight and then I would get in trouble. I was always the one who got in trouble.
They didn't do nothing to the ones that was doing it. They sent me to the head. I was crying and he told me that I mustn't fight, ***he said it didn't mean anything****, everybody gets called names and I must rise above it.* ***But they kept on doing it****".*

(Testimony from 'Respecting others:
Bullying around race, religion, and culture'
September 2011)

"It started from day one actually, and it wasn't just name-calling, there was a lot of physical bullying as well, she wears a headscarf as I do, and she had her headscarf pull out her head a few times. The very first day she started school, she was locked in the library. It was quite a lot of bullying, and it was ***all about the way she looked****, she looked like a Muslim because she wore a headscarf.* ***All those things were associated to her because she is Muslim****"*

(Deposition of the mother of a 14-year-old girl
who suffered verbal and physical abuse
BBC News, 23 May 2012)

These are just few of the thousands and thousands of stories of young people experiencing suffering and distress because of their ethnical backgrounds. People who feel "*ugly and alienated*", who must accept hatred they receive because of a garment, a creed. Being offended, physically or verbally abused not because of committing some horrible behaviour, but simply because of being born with some characteristic that accentuates, in a more or less pronounced way, the diversity within them, compared to others. Why does this happen? What leads young people to pour out hatred and anger to their peers or classmates? Can we imagine how detrimental those thoughts are for the definition of inner self of a young child? Victims of ethnic bullying must live the guilt of being themselves, of being who they are, guilt of being born "different". The object of hatred is an unchangeable, permanent characteristic. And no, it's not true that the actions that spring from that hatred "*didn't mean anything*". Those actions, that victim condition remains, remains in their minds, and defines the adult that will be. Those ignorant comments, those actions "*still took them to heart*" (as testifies Andrea).

"*All those things were associated to her because she is Muslim*" is something we hear too often, that takes on a negative connotation just for living in a world full of stereotypes. For its nature, a stereotype, define clear boundaries among people, based solely on their membership in a group, regardless of any other individual characteristics. Thus, it's not difficult to understand the words of that 14-year-old mother saying, "*it was all about the way she looked*". Stereotypes are universal and whether someone agrees or not with it, its content is well-known within a given culture (Devine, 1989). This perspective has serious implications because stereotypes are part of the social heritage of a society, thus usually "normalized" as part of the learning process of the prevalent attitudes and stereotypes of the majority ethnic group (Ehrlich, 1973). Stereotypes and

prejudices are often tightly interwoven. Groups associated with highly negative attributes (e.g., dumb, lazy) are likely to be regarded with prejudice.

Prejudice is the result of a categorization processes (Allport et al., 1954; Tajfel, 1981). Social categorization has been shown to produce increased perception of between-group differences and within-group similarity (e.g., Doise et al., 1978), increased perception of outgroup homogeneity (e.g., Park & Rothbart, 1982; Quattrone & Jones, 1980), and increased intergroup bias, including both ingroup favouritism and outgroup discrimination (i.e., ethnic bullying based on prejudice; Elamé, 2013). Youth belonging to racial and ethnic minorities are particularly at risk of bias-based bullying, which results when youth are targeted for their socially stigmatized identities, including gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, or immigrant status (Russell et al., 2012).

THE CONSTRUCT OF ETHNIC BULLYING

The term ethnic bullying refers to bullying that target another's ethnic background or cultural identity in any way. This relatively new form of bullying may take the form of direct aggression, such as taunting and slurs, derogatory references to culturally specific foods, costumes, and customs, or indirect aggression, such as exclusion from a mainstream peer group due to ethnic differences (McKenney et al., 2006). Hence, ethnic bullying presents the same characteristics of traditional bullying. The only difference is the motive that drive ethnic bullies to engage in the behaviour (Elamé, 2013). To understand this new construct, it is important to compare it with traditional bullying.

Although different definitions of bullying exist in the literature, several criteria appear to be commonly employed to define the phenomenon. According to Olweus (1994; p. 9), "*a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other student*s". Intentional exclusion from a group, spread of rumours, and physical aggression are all examples of negative actions. The author further refines the term by arguing that it should only be used when the bully-victim relationship is characterized by an imbalance in strength (an asymmetric power relationship). That is, the victimized student is somewhat helpless against the perpetrator. This imbalance of power can take a variety of forms, including the victim being "different" than the majority group. In a school setting, diversity alone does not create an inevitable context for ethnic or immigrant bullying, but it can create a condition for asymmetrical power between groups of students. Moreover, traditional bullying requires an ongoing, predictable pattern of negative interaction, not just an impulse or occasional outburst of

temper, to be qualified as bullying. Similarly ethnic bullying is not defined by an occasional hurtful episode, but rather the existence of a systematic pattern of direct or indirect aggression over time, because one's ethnicity or ethnic background.

Direct bullying involves overt attacks on the victim (e.g., hitting or name-calling). In contrast, indirect bullying is more covert, with the aggressor harming the victim circuitously to remain unidentified (Björkqvist, 1994). Thus, indirect bullying can include behaviours such as persuading another person to hit or insult someone (Rivers & Smith, 1994). More typically, indirect bullying is considered to be socially manipulative behaviour, such as excluding someone from a group or saying nasty things behind a person's back. In most cases, ethnic bullying can be considered more 'subtle' than other forms of bullying. It goes unnoticed since it does not usually involve physical aggression. On the contrary, it is more indirect and verbal (e.g., insults, bad words regarding one's ethnicity, humiliations, exclusion) and that is why it can be considered more "subtle" than other kinds of bullying (Elame, 2013).

A distinction between physical and verbal forms of bullying has also been made (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Physical bullying can include hitting, spitting, or throwing stones, whereas verbal bullying can take the form of name-calling and verbal insults. One of the many examples of ethnic verbal assaults is the testimony of a high school girl, emigrated from Guatemala to the US, saying "*They call us names like 'ref' and say, 'Get back on the banana boat'*". Schools throughout Europe recognize this behavior as a serious and dangerous issue of verbal racism, which becomes a clear case of ethnic bullying if repeatedly repeated against the same person (Elamé, 2013). In light of that, prior research also highlighted some gender differences in youth's engagement in problems behaviours, especially for what concerns the different typologies of bullying behaviours.

A large body of literature demonstrates that boys are more likely to engage in physical bullying than girls (e.g., Espelage, et al., 2000; McDermott, 1996), while girls are more often likely to use

indirect forms of aggression (Björkqvist. 1994). Besides, adolescent boys tend to engage in more deviant and aggressive behaviours than girls (e.g., Leadbeater et al., 1999; Thijs et al., 2015), and there are similar findings in studies focusing on ethnicity-based bullying and harassment (e.g., Bayram Özdemir et al., 2016; Larochette et al., 2010). Although it is unclear whether bullying differs by race, there is some evidence that race and gender interact to produce bullying risk (e.g., Sawyer et al., 2008).

In sum, among different forms of discrimination, ethnic bullying represents a kind of discriminatory behaviour (Russell et al., 2012) perpetrated against individuals because of their belongingness to specific minority ethnic groups or because of their migratory background (Plenty & Jonsson, 2017; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). The hostility between social groups is not only based on individually learned emotions and convictions, but are also historically grown, and may have its roots in normative processes of racial negative attitudes, preference development and group identification.

1. Predictors of Ethnic Bullying: the interplay between individual factors in group dynamics

Most research on social identity emphasize that people have a basic need to obtain a relatively positive view of themselves and their social group according to the comparison between the ingroup and the outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). If another group is perceived to be similar, and threatens the distinctiveness of the group, then group members are likely to try and enhance the status or the importance of their group through a variety of strategies (e.g., accentuating inter-group differences or by showing extreme favouritism towards the ingroup). Therefore, perceived similarities between groups tend to be extremely important in motivating individuals to look for group distinctiveness and social identity by differentiating their in-group from similar out-groups on relevant dimensions of comparison through in-group bias (Brown & Abrams, 1986; Jetten et

al., 1996; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Moreover, perceived similarity is an extremely important determinant of liking (Sprecher, 2014). Members of culturally diverse groups may be less attracted to each other than are members of more homogeneous groups, may have more difficulty communicating with each other, and in some cases, may actively dislike and even engage in aggressive behaviour toward each other. Despite acknowledging that group identification develops in primary school, Graham and Juvonen (2002) concluded that it is reinforced in secondary school and takes on a new significance when children move towards adolescence. If identification with one's own group is a normal developmental process, why, and for what purposes does hostility toward another (ethnic) group develops? Under what circumstances does a student move from simple preference and comfort to committing ethnic bullying behaviour?

In many ways, human behaviour is influenced by the context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It is common for adolescents to participate in a complex social environment characterized by hundreds of friendship groups, cliques, and crowds. Numerous studies indicate that adolescence is a period influenced by peer group behavior (e.g., Coleman, 1974; Palmonari et al., 1990; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986), supporting the idea that peer group membership can contribute to social development and self-esteem (e.g., Palmonari et al., 1990). There is relatively little research on how adolescents evaluate their peers based on social comparisons, and social identity theory (SIT: Tajfel & Turner, 2004) could provide valuable insights. As SIT argues, a positive evaluation of one's own group (the ingroup) can only be achieved by comparing it with groups of which one is not a member (outgroups) along dimensions that are important to group definition (Turner et al., 1979). Through comparisons that distinguish the ingroup from the outgroup and portray the ingroup as 'better off' than the outgroup, positive social identity and self-esteem are maintained (Tajfel, 1978). In this sense, it is noted that when young people align their behaviour to the behaviour and

attitudes of referent others, they ensure that their actions are efficient and correct (Cialdini et al., 1990), thus their belongingness to that group is not compromised. But why belonging to a specific social group is so important?

During this period, young people are developing their sense of self, by redeeming their autonomy from parents and family. Thus, close friends and social groups become not only a significant source of social and emotional support (Gorrese & Ruggieri, 2012), but also a way of recognizing and knowing themselves (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Nevertheless, the attitudes of an adolescents' peer group can have both positive and negative influences. It has been shown how in peer settings, social norms affect how children interact with immigrant peers (Titzmann et al., 2015; Tropp et al., 2016) and determine how they think about them (Miklikowska, 2017; Nesdale et al., 2007). Given the significance of peer relationships for adolescents' development, it is crucial to understand the effect that they have in affecting or preventing their behaviour (i.e., ethnic bullying).

However, peers and friends are not the only socializing actors in one adolescents' life. Attitudes, including the negative ones, are socialized. It is typically assumed that children have learned the underlying beliefs and attitudes from close others, primarily their parents (Degner & Dalege, 2013). Traditional conceptions of socialization assume that families (specifically parent-child relationships) are the major context in which socialization occurs whereby the role of parents is the one to guide and assist children to incorporate attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours of the larger culture into their actions. Thus, parents are perceived as the principal agents of socialization in childhood (e.g., Dalhouse & Frideres, 1996; Jennings et al., 2009). It should, however, be noted that some researchers have questioned this primacy of parental socialization especially in the domain of intergroup relations and attitudes. Attitudes, values, beliefs, and

behaviours might be learned from parents but are retained by children only if they are approved and shared by their peer groups (as mentioned above).

Moreover, in the context of multicultural societies, behaviours that are moved by negative attitudes towards ethnic diversity (i.e., prejudice), if unnoticed and not sanctioned by the context, may lead to the engagement in ethnic bullying behaviours (e.g., Sapouna et al., 2022). Throughout the history of social psychology, prejudice has been conceptualized in many ways as a multifaceted phenomenon (Duckitt, 2010). A common point is that ethnic and racial prejudice can be defined as a negative orientation toward individuals or groups due only to their ethnic or racial group membership or nationality (Brown, 2011). Ethnic prejudice in youth, refers to a tendency to react unfavourably to people belonging to other ethnic group because of their ethnic background (Aboud, 1988). Multiple dimensions are involved, including the dislike of social outgroups (affective component), the attribution of negative characteristics (cognitive component), thus resulting in negative behaviour (behavioural component). According to this, it is fundamental to promote a multicultural education, where discrimination and prejudicial ethnic bullying are morally unacceptable (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2013). To do so, not only parents, but also teachers are in an influential position as educators and agents of socialization, to promote healthy relationships among students and prevent negative interactions (Smith et al., 2004).

It is noted that teachers' approaches and behaviours are crucial in fostering positive interactions between youth from diverse backgrounds and counteracting negative interactions. In fact, students with a high tolerance of immigrants were less likely to engage in ethnic victimization when they perceived their teachers as not tolerating it (Bayram Özdemir & Özdemir, 2020). Moreover, teachers' attitudes have the potential to influence not only how young people of diverse backgrounds interact, but also the way they respond to ethnicity-based victimization as bystanders.

Specifically, a recent study on Swedish adolescents highlighted that when their teachers communicated non-tolerance of ethnic victimization, students were more likely to actively ask the perpetrator to stop and talk to their teacher (Bayram Özdemir et al., 2022).

Despite an increasing number of studies that aim to understand the consequences of such negativity, relatively little attention has been paid to understanding who the perpetrators of ethnic bullying are. Results from a recent study have highlighted how specific individual characteristics, such as a lack of perspective taking skills or having low level of positive attitudes toward immigrants, put some adolescents more at risk of engaging in ethnic bullying (Bayram Özdemir et al., 2020).

In conclusion, in light of these premises, why do individuals participate in this bad behaviour? Are there any risk or protective factors that are more relevant for the involvement in ethnic bullying? Those are the main questions that this dissertation seeks to answer through three main studies.

2. Dissertation overview

The main aim of the present dissertation is to shed light on the interplay of individual and contextual factors that contribute to the engagement on ethnic bullying during adolescence. The interaction between individual and contextual factors plays a crucial role in influencing and explaining how ethnic bullying behaviour develops, is maintained, and changes over time (e.g., Bayram Özdemir & Özdemir, 2020; Bayram Özdemir et al., 2020).

Ecological systems theory, as posited by Bronfenbrenner (1979), emphasizes the development of individual behaviour within several interconnected social environments. Researchers have embraced this ecological perspective by studying bullying involvement within

the broader context of the school, as most individual bullying behaviours occur within this complex social system (Olweus, 1994). School is a setting where interpersonal relations are promoted, which are important for youngsters' personal and social development (Ruini et al., 2009); it is responsible for the transmission of behavioural norms and standards and it represents an essential role in the adolescent's socialization process. Adolescents spend a great part of their time at school, which also makes it a privileged context for involvement in or protection from risk behaviours (Piko & Kovács, 2010). A school class can be seen as one unit, or level, at which these group mechanisms work, but youth also form several smaller subgroups, or social networks, inside the class, which may be even more powerful group mechanisms involved in bullying than at the class level (e.g., social learning and identity processes). In accordance with these premises, three studies have been carried out to give an answer to a series of issues raised from the scientific literature.

Study 1 (Chapter 1) presents a systematic review and meta-analysis of published studies to understand the relation between negative attitudes and the involvement in aggressive behaviours. Specifically, we aim at systematically synthesizing literature results on the association between negative attitudes coming from different levels (i.e., parents and school context) towards ethnic minorities and the involvement in ethnic bullying among school-aged students. Doing so, we also examined the role of the context more systematically by identifying potential moderators of such relation (i.e., individual attitudes and peers' attitudes that comes from formal and informal contexts). Our results first highlighted a lack in literature of quantitative studies. In fact, only 9 articles that dealt with the association between negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities and ethnic bullying, were included in the present meta-analysis. Nevertheless, a significant and positive association was found between the constructs, confirming previous considerations suggesting that negative attitudes and prejudices towards ethnic minority groups are important predictors of

aggressive and bullying behaviours against them. Moreover, following an ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), many systems, including peers', school' context, or parents may play an important role into acquiring and maintaining negative attitudes towards people with different ethnicity. In light of this, it became fundamental to deepen the research on the reasons why youths engage in aggressive behaviours towards peers with a migrant background. The second aim was to investigate how this association can vary according to different levels of attitudes (i.e., individual vs peers in formal and informal contexts). Results highlighted a lack in literature research on the association between family's prejudice and youths' engagement in ethnic bullying. Besides, no significant difference in the mean effects between attitudes perceived at the individual level or at the peers' level was found. These findings highlighted how both youth who hold negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities, and those who perceived negative attitudes from their classmates (i.e., peers in formal contexts), or best friends (i.e., peers in informal contexts), have the same probability to get involved in ethnic bullying. Thus, both individual attitudes towards ethnic minorities, and those that come from the proximal context (i.e., peers) play an important role in student's behaviours.

Following these results, the second and third study of the present dissertation are focused on factors and mechanisms that may explain ethnic bullying and the role of both contextual (i.e., family, classmates, teachers; Study 2), and individual factors (i.e., prejudice, empathy; Study 3).

Study 2 (Chapter 2) is the first effort to answer the literature gap on the examination of the interplay of multiple proximal social contexts on adolescents' behaviour. Peers and family have a key role in promoting behaviours during adolescence, as well as the perception that youngsters have of their own subjective attitude towards ethnic minorities. To our knowledge, no study has examined the simultaneous influence of multiple socialization agents, (i.e., parents, classmates,

and teachers) on ethnic bullying. Therefore, we aimed to investigate whether the effect of family prejudiced beliefs towards ethnic minorities on adolescents' ethnic bullying would be buffered by a tolerant school context characterized by positive social norms (i.e., classmates and teachers' tolerant attitudes), after controlling for adolescents' own individual prejudice, their immigrant background, and classrooms' ethnic diversity. A multi-informant approach was used, assessing both students' and their teachers reports. This study consisted in a multilevel analysis that allowed us to differentiate between individual and classroom's levels, in order to examine the extent to which the perception that each student have of their parents' prejudice, together with the actual attitudes exhibited by the class context (i.e., classmates and teachers), would have on their ethnic bullying behaviour. To the best of our knowledge, holding negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities (i.e., prejudice) and having high levels of empathy, have been found to be related to ethnic bullying (Bayram Özdemir et al., 2018; Bayram Özdemir et al., 2020); nevertheless, these variables have never been investigated within a comprehensive conceptual model. Additionally, most previous literature on ethnic bullying used a cross-sectional approach. In order to fill these literature gap, our third Chapter (Study 3) aimed at providing a better understanding on the reciprocal and longitudinal association between prejudice, empathy towards ethnic minorities, and ethnic bullying, among secondary grade Italian adolescents. The link between these variables was tested with a cross-lagged panel model (CLPM) using three time points. The first assessment was conducted between January and February 2020. Our next data collection was delayed due to the spread of COVID-19 outbreak. Thus, the second assessment occurred after one year, between January and February 2021, and the third, three months later the latter, between May and June 2021. Relying on previous research on prejudice, empathy, and ethnic bullying the main aim of this research was to expand current literature by hypothesizing a fully mediating role of empathy in the relation between prejudice and ethnic bullying.

CHAPTER 1

Negative Attitudes Towards Ethnic Minorities and Ethnic Bullying: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis on Individual and Peers' Effects

1.1 Introduction

Over the past years, global international migration has increasing exponentially. As a result of the worldwide migration phenomenon, youths daily interact with peers from numerous ethnic backgrounds. Multi-ethnic societies have the potential to enrich societies culturally, but they can also foster intolerance and anti-immigrant movements. In spite of the evidence of the psychological benefits of contact with highly diverse environments (Mok et al., 2007), some minority youth may be exposed to negative peer experiences, such as rejection and discrimination (Bayram Özdemir & Sattin, 2014). The great increase of immigrants into the communities, may pose a fundamental psychological (e.g., dominance) and symbolic threat (e.g., moral, values, standards). Thus, certain features of social out-groups might exacerbate perceptions of the out-group as threatening that in turn, may influence behaviours and attitudes, typically resulting in increases in prejudice and intergroup conflicts (Stephan et al., 2005; Stephan & Stephan, 1996). In fact, youths with biased beliefs may tend to attribute blame to people and factors outside the self, minimize/mislabel the severity and the consequences of the behaviour, or refer it to others using belittling or dehumanizing labels, and assume the worst from a social situation, that is, attributing hostile

intentions to others (Pornari & Wood, 2010). For this reason, stereotypes and prejudicial beliefs are used to legitimize discrimination, especially in terms of low status groups (i.e., ethnic minority groups) with the aim of maintaining and enhancing a group-based hierarchy (Pratto et al., 2006). Hence, interethnic prejudice is used as a mean of maintaining and securing the integrity and position of a dominant social group (i.e., majority ethnic group). The attitudes of ethnic majority populations towards other communities are a potentially important determinant of social exclusion and need a deeper understanding of its determinants.

1.1.1 Negative Attitudes and Prejudice Against Ethnic Minorities

In more diverse societies, individuals must frequently interact with 'others' who may not share their physical traits, cultural practices, or systems of values. As a result, these others are more likely to be seen as threatening national identity or the dominant way of living. According to group threat theory (Blumer, 1958), an in-group develops hostile attitudes toward an out-group when it perceives it as challenging its collective status and boundaries (e.g., Bobo, 1999; Scheepers et al., 2002). In line with this reasoning, a number of empirical studies have examined the effect of demographic changes on the attitudes of members of majority groups (e.g., Craig & Richeson, 2014; Danbold & Huo, 2015; Wetts & Willer, 2018). Contact hypotheses argue that increased interaction between members of in-groups and out-groups helps individuals overcome prejudices (Allport et al., 1954; Pettigrew et al., 2011). Indeed, in this vein, empirical research shows that the reduction of stereotypes and intolerance can be achieved through increased interaction with ethnic or racial others (Massey et al., 1999; Ellison et al., 2011).

Prejudice has been defined as "*the holding of derogatory social attitudes or cognitive beliefs, the expression of negative affect, or the display of hostile or discriminatory behaviour towards members of a group on account of their membership of that group*" (Brown, 2011). It has

been operationalized as a cognitive attitude (Sanford et al., 1950), an affective preference (Northway & Quarrington, 1946), and an observable aspect of the individual behaviour (Wilner et al., 1952). In this regard, Mann (1959) have highlighted a positive intercorrelation between the cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects of racial prejudice, supporting the idea that they are to some extent measures of an underlying general prejudice factor. More recently, Fiske and North (2015) have published an overview of the main measures in the areas of intergroup bias research, stressing how attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours are revealing category-based biases that frequently are based on just one simple characteristic, namely one's group membership.

Interethnic prejudice can be defined as a relative devaluation of individuals belonging to a different ethnic group, identified in terms of their racial, cultural, and/or religious characteristics (Eagly & Diekman, 2005). It is expressed by beliefs, likings, and behavioural predispositions, that can take the form of out-group rejection (i.e., the negative attitude toward members of other ethnic groups), or in-group favouritism (i.e., the positive attitude toward members of own ethnic group; Dovidio et al., 2010).

As previously mentioned, interethnic prejudice is understood as a challenge for group position, and it is used by majority group members, as a mean for securing the integrity and the position their dominant social group. Beliefs and emotions are used to legitimize discrimination of low status groups (e.g., ethnic minority groups), with the aim of maintaining and enhancing a group-based hierarchy, which may be also driven by some cognitive distortions that are typical among youths who aim to maintain their social status within peers (Pratto et al., 2006). This attitude is called Social Dominance Orientation (Sidanius & Pratto, 1993). Social dominance theory postulates that people who are more social-dominance oriented will tend to favour hierarchy enhancing ideologies and policies. Individuals who have a high social dominance orientation are more likely to discriminate against ethnic minority groups, partly because of their negative attitudes

or anti- immigrant beliefs, and partly because of their lack of openness toward cultural diversity (Küpper et al., 2010) perceived as a potential risk for their status. Individuals with specific characteristics that differ from the regulatory group are more likely to be more likely to be victims of bullying behaviours, such as ethnic bullying (Espelage & Swearer, 2004; Bayram Özdemir et al., 2016).

Previous literature highlighted that name-calling is the most common form of bullying, followed by being excluded from social groups (e.g., Smith & Shu, 2000; Whitney & Smith, 1993), and that these kinds of bullying are more frequent among youths from marginalized ethnic groups (Bucchianeri et al., 2016). Hence, investigating whether foreign students might be at risk of bullying due to their immigrant background has become prioritizing.

1.1.2 The role of attitudes coming from different levels

Although many people, especially adolescents, frequently consider themselves as individuals in their actions, a considerable degree of social influence is documented. Many are the factors that intervene in the transmission of such negative attitude towards ethnic minorities, including parents, peers, and community (school/general community) (Resnick et al., 2004; Spriggs et al., 2007). Social psychological theories have highlighted the role of social contexts in the development of prejudicial attitudes towards out-groups (Aboud & Amato, 2001; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). The ecological framework about the interplay of multi-level contexts and individual characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), has created the ground to examine the risk factors associated with bullying (Hong & Espelage, 2012).

Social learning theory holds that children and adolescents learn attitudes through observation and imitation of important role models (i.e., parents; Allport et al., 1954; Bandura & Walters, 1977). The effects of parents have been explained in terms of social learning and attitudes

transmission. Parents communicate, model, and reinforce attitudes, which contributes to parent–child attitudinal similarity. Despite that, the empirical evidence for the connection between parents and their offspring's intergroup attitudes is mixed (see Aboud & Doyle, 1996; Katz, 2003).

The effect of peers on aggressive behaviour is important, especially during school-aged students. Results from cross-sectional studies showed that youths are more likely to perceive members of other groups as a threat if their friends hold negative attitudes toward out-group members (Kiesner et al., 2003; Nesdale et al., 2005). For instance, a recent study showed that adolescents were more likely to make friendship with immigrants, and maintain their bonds over time, only when their peers hold favourable attitudes toward inter-ethnic relationships (Titzmann et al., 2015). Likewise, it has been shown that adolescents became more comfortable and interested in forming cross-ethnic friendships if they feel that such relationships would be acceptable and supported by their peer groups (Tropp et al., 2016).

According to Sherif and Sherif's (1953) Group Norm Theory, prejudice-related norms have origin within social groups because of the pressures placed on individuals to conform to group norms. Negative beliefs, emotions, and prejudicial behaviours "*are the products of contact with members of a group; they are standardized and become common property within a group*" (Sherif, 1936). It is stated that individual ideologies and beliefs are based on the social norms of their group of identification. For example, Ojala and Nesdale (2004) found that bullying carried out by members of the in-group against an out-group was more acceptable by in-group members when it was consistent with group norms, and when the out-group represented a threat to the in-group. Espelage and colleagues (2003), in a study on middle school early adolescents, presented evidence that peer group membership and contextual effects influence and shape adolescent's aggression in bullying and fighting behaviours.

Findings about the impact of group norms on youth's negative behaviours (i.e., aggression and bullying) revealed that classroom norms (held by most or all members of a class) influence children's aggressive attitudes and behaviours (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004). Given the importance that youth seem to place on being accepted by peers, and belonging to a social group, children's social group norms can enhance their preparedness to engage in direct and/or indirect aggression toward other children (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Nesdale et al., 2007). In fact, schools can provide a regulatory context that structures relations between youths from different groups (Nipedal et al., 2010). School norms for cross-group relations can contribute to children's development of intergroup attitudes. Perceiving support for cross-ethnic relations within the school environment (i.e., from teachers and other school authorities) may be critical for encouraging positive orientations toward cross-ethnic interactions between both ethnic minority and majority youths (Tropp et al., 2016).

1.2 Aims of the present study

Ethnic bullying is a form of bullying perpetrated against members of ethnic minority groups (Elamé, 2013). Despite previous considerations seem to suggest that negative attitudes and prejudices towards ethnic minority groups were important predictors of aggressive and bullying behaviours against them, no study has systematically summarized the association between these variables. Existing literature typically focuses on the influence of different systems of prejudice and the consequences that it may bring in terms of behavioural outcomes, without examining at what extent they are related to each other. Moreover, following an ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), many systems, including peers', school' context, or parents may play an important role into acquiring and maintaining negative attitudes towards people with different ethnicity. However, despite previous theoretical considerations seem to suggest that negative

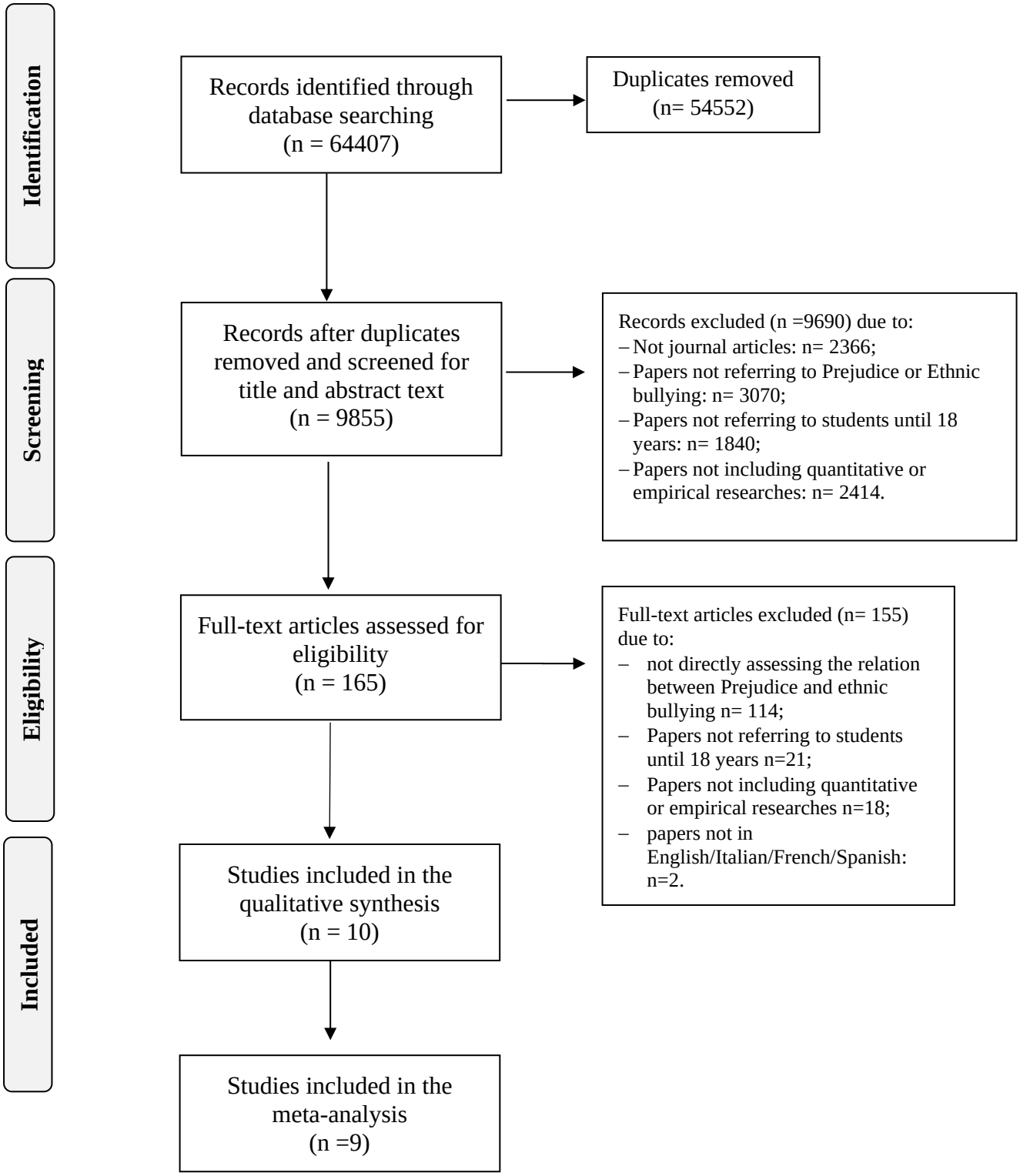
attitudes are related to ethnic bullying, conclusive findings about the size and the weight of these associations compared to the individual attitudes are not yet present in literature.

To fulfil this literature gap, The present study aimed at quantitatively synthesizing literature results (i.e., meta-analysis) on the association between negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities and the involvement in ethnic bullying behaviours among school-aged students. Moreover, we aimed at identifying potential moderators of such relation. In this effort, we examined the role of the external environment, including parents, peers', school context, in the process of acquiring and maintaining negative attitudes towards people with different ethnicity.

1.3 Method

The present study was conducted following the PRISMA guidelines for systematic review and meta-analyses (Moher et al., 2009). The stages are summarized in the flow-chart reported in **Figure 1.1.**

Figure 1.1
Flow-chart of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion of studies



1.3.1 Identification

The search was performed in June 2022, by combining a set of keywords belonging to four clusters. The first cluster referred to the attitudes towards minorities (keywords: 'Attitud*', 'Prejudi*', 'Bias*', 'Stigma*', 'Stereotyp*'); the second one was related to the ethnic context (keywords: 'Ethnic*', 'Minorit*', 'Immigra*', 'Rac*'); the third to the behaviour (keywords: 'Bull*', 'Victim*', 'Violence', 'Harassment', 'Discriminat*', 'Reject*', 'Exclusion'); and the last one delimitated the age of the sample ('Student*', 'Adolescen*', 'Youth*', 'Child*'). The search was conducted by combining Abstract, Title and Keywords in SCOPUS, ERIC, and Web of Science databases, and led respectively to 21348, 19826 and 23233 articles.

1.3.2 Screening

All records were imported in the ZOTERO Program. Overall, the search in all the three databases included 64407 records. Duplicated were excluded both automatically and manually and the final literature search resulted in 9855 records to screen for title and abstract according to inclusion and exclusion criteria. The screening of abstracts and titles was made by looking at the following hierarchical criteria: (1) articles published in scientific journals (2) the studies were referring both prejudice and bullying/discrimination involving minority groups (3) participants were under 18 years old; (4) empirical and quantitative studies.

1.3.3 Eligibility

This stage resulted in 165 papers selected for the eligibility phase. The full texts were downloaded and assessed for eligibility. The inter-rater's agreement on the acceptance/rejection criterion was computed on a subsample of 60 papers (36% of records included at this stage) and was 95.3% ($k = .62$). Inclusion criteria at this stage were the same of the previous one, excepting for an additional one related to the language known by the authors: only papers in English, Italian,

Spanish and French were included. A total of 155 articles were further excluded according to these criteria leading to a final set of 10 and 9 papers, respectively for the qualitative and quantitative synthesis.

1.3.4 Coding

All eligible studies were coded following these criteria: year of publication, study design (longitudinal or cross-sectional), country of the study, participants' information (i.e., N, mean age, school level), and the different definition of ethnicity (see Table 1 for the qualitative synthesis).

The following quantitative analysis (meta-analysis) was made according to the different assessment included in the studies. In particular, each article, included: different components of attitudes towards ethnic minorities (i.e., cognitive, affective), different forms of ethnic harassment behaviours (i.e., ethnic bullying, discrimination), and different levels of attitudes towards ethnic minorities (i.e., individual attitudes, peers 'attitudes coming from formal and informal contexts).

Quality assessment. To measure the quality of the included 10 papers, two of the authors independently assessed them, using the Standard Quality Assessment Criteria by Kmet et al. (2004). This tool enabled us to examine the quality of papers using a checklist for quantitative studies that evaluated aspects such as the appropriateness of sample size or if the objectives were sufficiently described. Each article was scored depending on the degree to which the specific criteria of the checklist were met: 2 points – full adherence to the criterion, 1 point – partial adherence to the criterion, or 0 – nonadherence to the criterion. A summary of quality score was computed by summing the total score and dividing it by the total possible score for each study. To assess the interrater reliability of the summary scores, a random selection of 4 papers (40% of the total records) was double coded and resulted in excellent agreement (100%). All quality scores are displayed in the last column of **Table 1**.

1.3.5 Data analysis

To summarize the strength of the association between negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities and ethnic bullying over the included articles, we performed a meta-analysis. Data from the correlation at the univariate level (Pearson's index of correlation) was needed (one article was excluded because the Author did not report the correlation data). Moreover, different levels of attitudes were tested as moderators in the meta-regression analysis. In particular, we created two categories: one referring to attitudes at the individual level (IA), and the other derives from the combination of school' and peers' observations. This latter level was merged into "Peers' attitudes in formal and informal contexts" (PAFIC).

Statistical analysis has been carried out using the statistical software R (RStudioTeam, 2015). The package *compute.es* was used for computing effect size, transforming correlation coefficients (Pearson's *r*) into Cohen's d. According to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, effect sizes were interpreted as follows: d values under |0.20| represent a small effect, between |0.20| and |0.50| a medium effect, |0.50| and above a high effect. The package *metafor* (Viechtbauer, 2010) was used to compute meta-regressions. Effect sizes were computed according to every assessment, using a random-effects approach to account for study design variability (Borenstein et al., 2009). Moreover, when several data were available for the same variable in each study, only one measure per construct was used to avoid duplication of participants. In the same way, when there were multiple time points in a study, only the first one was used.

1.4. Results

1.4.1 General characteristics of included studies

General characteristics of all articles selected for the qualitative synthesis are reported in **Table 1.1.**

The articles included were published between 2002 and 2021. Most of the studies used a cross-sectional design (9/10), while one of them used longitudinal data. Sample sizes ranged from 273 to 1106 participants, out of which percentage of females ranged between 46% and 68.7% (one article did not report the gender of the sample). Every article reported the mean age of the participants, ranging between 9.08 and 16.75 years old. According to this, most of the sample belonged to secondary school (80%; 8/10) (except for two articles that addresses its data to primary school children), with youth's school grade ranging from 3rd to 12th grade. As for the context of the studies, 30% of data were collected in the Northern Europe (Sweden), 50% in the Middle and Southern Europe (3 articles from Italy, 1 from Spain, 1 from Croatia and 1 from Greece) and the remained article was from North America. Almost every paper (9/10, 90%) evaluated ethnicity by using an operationalization based on the country of origin (i.e., "participants' and/or their parents' country of birth that define their immigrant background"). There was an overlap between the operationalization of ethnicity and the country where data have been collected: research referring to participants' race (i.e., African American, Hispanic, Caucasian) were collected in USA.

Table 1.1

General characteristics of the included studies for the qualitative analysis

Article ID	References	Year	Study design[1]	Country	Participants					Definition of ethnicity	Quality Assessment
					N of participants	Percentage of Females	Youths' grade	Mean Age and SD	School level		
1	**Bayram Özdemir, Özdemir, & Stattin**	2016	L	Sweden	583 Students	50%	7^{th}-9^{th}	M= 13.93; SD= 0.71	Secondary school	Country of origin	1
2	**Bayram Özdemir, Sun, Korol, Özdemir, & Stattin**	2018	C-S	Sweden	902 Students	50.3%	7^{th}-9^{th}	M= 14.40; SD= 0.95	Secondary school	Country of origin	1
3	**Bayram Özdemir, Giles, & Özdemir**	2021	C-S	Sweden	963 Students	46%	7^{th}-9^{th}	M= 13.11; SD= 0.41	Secondary school	Country of origin	1
4	**Caravita, Stefanelli, Mazzone, Cadei, Thornberg, & Ambrosini**	2019	C-S	Italy	692 Students	54.6%	8^{th}-9^{th}	M= 13.7; SD= NR	Secondary school	Country of origin	.95
5	**Iannello, Camodeca, Gelati, & Papotti**	2021	C-S	Italy	552 Students	47.6%	3^{rd}-4^{th}	M= 9.08; SD= 0.59	Primary school	Country of origin	1
6	Hoskin	2011	C-S	USA	726 Students	NR	7^{th}- 12^{th}	M= 16; SD= NR[2]	Secondary school	Race	.86
7	**Papotti & Caravita**	2020	C-S	Italy	489 Students	68.7%	9^{th}	M= 16.75 SD= 1.30	Secondary school	Country of origin	1
8	**Pehar, Čorkalo Biruški, & Pavin Ivanec**	2020	C-S	Croatia	1106 Students	55%	6^{th}-10^{th}	M= 15.3; SD= 1.98	Secondary school	Country of origin	1

[1] C-S = Cross-Sectional; L = Longitudinal.

[2] NR= Not reported

9	**Sarafidou, Govaris, Loumakou**	2013	C-S	Greece	329 Students	49.54%	5^{th}-6^{th}	M= 11.3; SD= NR	Primary school	Country of origin	.86
10	**Sotelo**	2002	C-S	Spain	273 Students	54.21%	9^{th} -12^{th}	M= 15.5; SD= NR	Secondary school	Country of origin	.77

Note: References in bold indicate those articles included in the meta-analysis

1.4.2 Overview of effects' distribution

A total of 23 analyses were found (see **Table 1.2**), but it was decided that one more had to be excluded from the meta-analysis (Pehar et al., 2020) because it was the only one referring to parents' attitudes (PA) towards minorities, thus not being representative of the hypothesized scenario. Out of 22 analyses, attitudes towards ethnic minorities are described for the 40.91% referring to the cognitive component (9/22), 22.72% as the affective one (5/22) and the 31.82% as norms from the context (7/22). Attitudes coming from the individual level, where present at the 63.64% of the analyses (14/22), while peers' attitudes in formal and informal contexts are 36.36% of the analyses (8/22). 45.45% of the assessments were made to the full sample (10/22), 31.82% to the majority group (7/22), and 22.73% to the minority group (5/22).

The detection of peer aggression towards ethnic minority groups are present for the 63.63% of the analyses (14/22) addressing it as specific forms of ethnic bullying, while the 36.36% (8/22) of discrimination. The Cohen'd effect size of negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities on ethnic bullying ranged from 0.06 to 1.19. The 9.09% of the reported effects (k=2) are small, the 54.54% (k= 12) are medium, and the 36.36% (k= 8) are high.

Table 1.2

Type of assessments, Sample size, Correlation, Cohen's effect size and Variance of the included studies of the meta-analysis

N assessments	Reference	Attitude component	Attitude level[3]	Type of peer aggression	Subgroups	N	Correlation[4]	Cohen's d	Cohen's d Var.
1	Bayram Özdemir, 2016 (1)	Cognitive	IA	Ethnic Bullying	Full sample	583	.27	0.56	0.007
2	Bayram Özdemir et al., 2018 (1)	Cognitive	IA	Ethnic Bullying	Full sample	902	.18	0.37	0.005
3	Bayram Özdemir et al., 2018 (2)	Norms	PAFIC	Ethnic Bullying	Full sample	902	.13	0.26	0.005
4	Bayram Özdemir et al., 2018 (3)	Norms	PAFIC	Ethnic Bullying	Full sample	902	.10	0.20	0.005
5	Bayram Özdemir et al., 2021(1)	Cognitive	IA	Ethnic Bullying	Minority	365	-.08 *	0.16	0.011
6	Bayram Özdemir et al., 2021(2)	Cognitive	IA	Ethnic Bullying	Majority	597	-.32 *	0.68	0.008
7	Caravita et al., 2019 (1)	Cognitive	IA	Ethnic Bullying	Full sample	692	.14	0.28	0.006
8	Caravita et al., 2019 (2)	Norms	PAFIC	Ethnic Bullying	Full sample	692	-.12 *	0.24	0.006
9	Caravita et al., 2019 (3)	Affective	IA	Ethnic Bullying	Full sample	692	-.12 *	0.24	0.006
10	Iannello et al., 2021 (1)	Affective	IA	Ethnic Bullying	Full sample	552	.15	0.30	0.007
11	Papotti & Caravita, 2020 (1)	Affective	IA	Ethnic Bullying	Minority	22	.51	1.19	0.257
12	Papotti & Caravita, 2020 (2)	Affective	IA	Ethnic Bullying	Majority	148	.18	0.37	0.028
13	Pehar et al., 2020 (1)	Cognitive	IA	Discrimination	Majority	543	.49	1.12	0.009

Note: The numbers in brackets indicate the assessment's number for each included article

[3] IA = Individual Attitudes; PAFIC = Peers' Attitudes in Formal and Informal Contexts; PA = Parental Attitudes

[4] Correlations marked with an asterisk indicate that the correlations are considered in a reversed way, since it was assessed the positive side of prejudice (e.g., *"Openness towards peers of other cultures*" or "*Acceptance of cultural diversity at school"*).

14	Pehar et al., 2020 (2)	Cognitive	IA	Discrimination	Minority	563	.03	0.06	0.007
15	Pehar et al., 2020 (3)	Norms	PAFIC	Discrimination	Majority	543	-.15 *	0.30	0.008
16	Pehar et al., 2020 (4)	Norms	PAFIC	Discrimination	Minority	563	-.17 *	0.35	0.007
17	Pehar et al., 2020 (5)	Norms	PAFIC	Discrimination	Minority	563	- .17 *	0.35	0.007
18	Pehar et al., 2020 (6)	Norms	PAFIC	Discrimination	Majority	543	- .28 *	0.58	0.008
NA[5]	Pehar et al., 2020 (7) [6]	Norms	PA	Discrimination	Majority	563	- .27 *	NA	NA
19	Sarafidou et al., 2013 (1)	Norms	PAFIC	Discrimination	Majority	327	.35	0.75	0.014
20	Sarafidou et al., 2013 (2)	Cognitive	IA	Discrimination	Majority	327	.25	0.52	0.013
21	Sotelo, 2002 (1)	Cognitive	IA	Ethnic Bullying	Full sample	273	- .26 *	0.54	0.016
22	Sotelo, 2002 (2)	Affective	IA	Ethnic Bullying	Full sample	273	- .22 *	0.45	0.016

[5] NA= Not Assessed

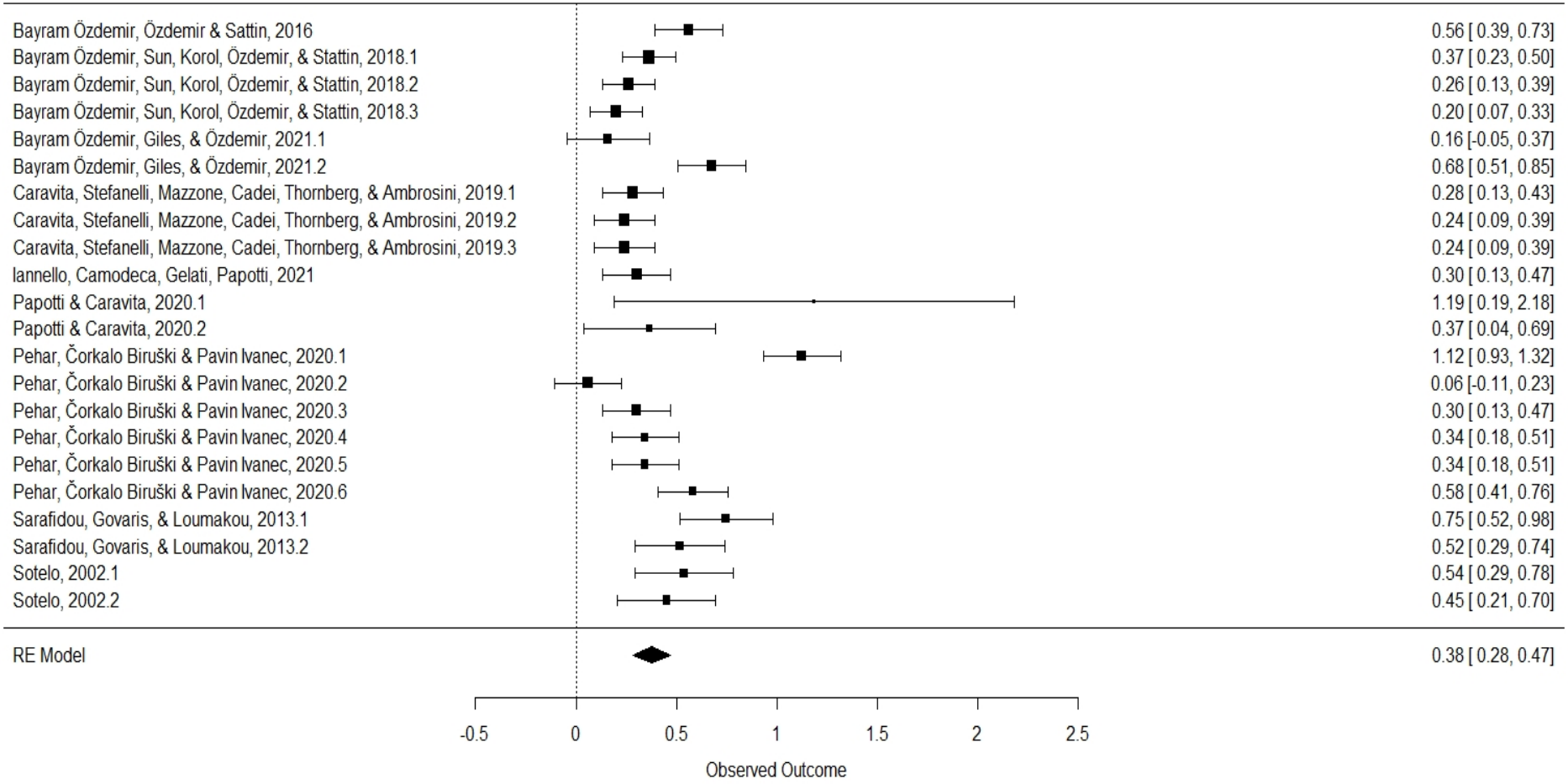
[6] This assessment was not included in the meta-analysis because it is the only level of PA.

1.4.3 Meta-analysis of the effect of negative attitudes towards minorities on ethnic bullying

A mixed model controlling for the random effect of the ID, was used to account for the overall effect of negative attitudes towards minorities on ethnic bullying (k = 22). Results showed a positive and medium (Cohen, 1988) mean effect size of d= 0.38, (95% CI [0.28, 0.48], $p < .001$) (see **Figure 1.2** for the Forest Plot). The results of the tests of homogeneity across effect suggest the presence of heterogeneity $Q_{(df = 21)} = 132.81$, $p < 0.001$.

Figure 1.2

Forest plot for the effect sizes of the association between negative attitudes toward ethnic minorities and ethnic bullying.

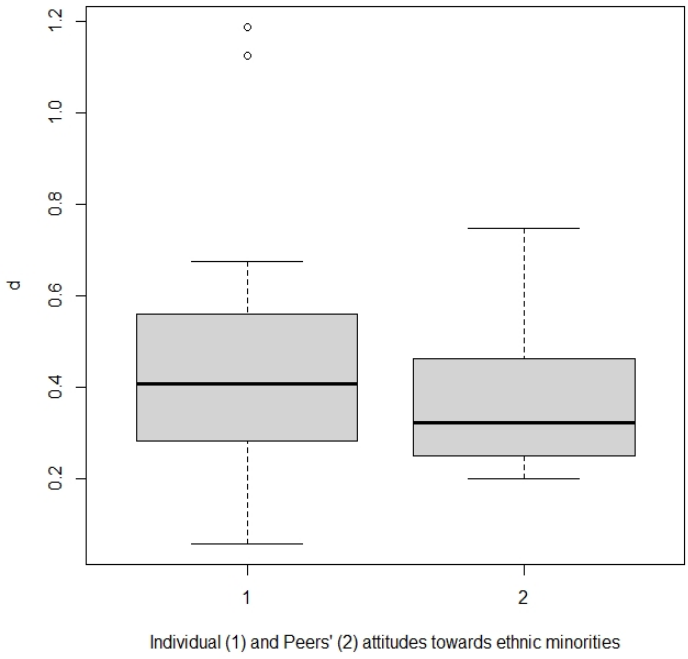


1.4.4 Moderators' role

We tested the possible moderator role of attitudes coming from two different levels: the individual (IA) and those from peers in formal and informal contexts (PAFIC).

Meta-regression results showed that there is no significant difference in the mean effects between IA and PAFIC on the engagement in ethnic bullying and discrimination behaviours (d= -0.03, 95% CI [-0.12, 0.06], *p*= 0.54) (see **Figure 1.3** for the Boxplot of the Cohen's d distribution between the two levels). Therefore, it is noted how both levels are significantly associated with students' engagement in bullying and discrimination behaviours: in particular, both IA and PAFIC showed a medium and positive (Cohen, 1988) mean effect sizes, respectively: d= 0.38 (95% CI [0.27, 0.49], $p < .001$), and d= 0.40 (95% CI [0.25, 0.55], $p < .001$).

Figure 1.3
Boxplot: Cohen's d distribution among Individual (1) and Peers' (2) attitudes towards ethnic minorities [7]



Note: Individual (1): d = 0.38, p < .001 (95% CI [0.27, 0.49]); Peers' (2): d = 0.40, p < .001 (95% CI [0.25, 0.55]).
[7] The horizontal line in the box indicates the median values of each level.

1.5 Discussion

The current study confirmed that the topic of attitudes towards ethnic minorities and the dimension of ethnic bullying during the school years have tickled the curiosity of researchers in the field of social and developmental sciences over the past 20 years, with an increased stability in the publication of empirical studies from 2018 until 2021. Most of research came from the European context where the attention was mainly given to secondary school students attitudes. Adolescents are more prone to engage in ethnic bullying behaviours as a direct effect of the internalization of norms in the formation of ethnic attitudes. Authors have argued that peer influences strengthen during middle adolescence (i.e., 12 to 15 years; Pehar et al., 2020); youth's mean age of our included articles with a positive significant correlation between peer's negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities and ethnic discrimination, ranged from 11 to 14 years. It has been shown how adolescence is an important period for conceiving normative features in terms of socially shared beliefs and values (Sani & Bennett, 2004) and it may be throughout these years that negative attitudes towards out-groups' forms and crystalizes.

Our meta-analysis findings showed a significant and positive association between having negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities and ethnic bullying in all the included studies, confirming that the more a person has high levels of prejudicial attitudes towards minorities, the more his/her behaviour towards them will be of exclusion and discrimination. A recent systematic review confirmed our result showing that negative stereotypes and discrimination operating within community contexts increase the risk of racist bullying victimization for ethnic minority groups, immigrant, and refugee youth (Sapouna et al., 2022). Negative stereotypes concerning ethnic 'others' are widespread and acquired in the early years through socialization processes (Devine, 1989). Children are susceptible to stereotypes that are stored in their memory from early ages

(McKown & Weinstein, 2003) and, if encouraged by contextual factors, they may evolve in prejudicial beliefs and attitudes (Aboud & Doyle, 1996).

The growing need for autonomy and increasing time that adolescents spend with their peer friends, have increased peer and school influences over the parental one (Berndt, 1979). This result is in line with ours that highlights only one association at the parental level on ethnic bullying behaviour. It has been shown that the association between parents and adolescents' racial prejudice is inconsistent (Dhont & Van Hiel, 2012; Edmonds & Killen, 2009; Miklikowska, 2016) and supports the idea that prejudicial attitudes towards ethnic diversity are not directly transmitted from parents to children, and even if so, it does not necessarily determine or influence their children's behaviour.

Consistent with prior research, adolescents with prejudiced friends are more exposed to negative portrayals of immigrants in their school context's social interactions, and such exposures may fuel their anti-immigrant attitudes (Miklikowska, 2017). Friends' influence may be particularly important when the school fosters more tolerant attitudes than home do. Peer relations are a ubiquitous aspect of social life from early childhood; in forming peer relationships children regularly make decisions about social exclusion and inclusion (Killen & Rutland, 2013). What is almost certain is that the change from childhood to adolescence is marked by an increase in the frequency and intensity of peer interactions. In fact, no significant difference in the mean effects between attitudes perceived at the individual level or at the peers' level in formal and informal contexts, was found. Consistent with this finding, previous research has shown that adolescents may perceive ethnic out-group peers from the perspective of their classmates or friends, and adopt their attitudes and belief, in forming their own personal opinions (Gniewosz & Noack, 2008; Thijs & Verkuyten, 2013).

Thus, both individual attitudes towards ethnic minorities, and those that come from peers in formal and informal contexts play an important role in student's behaviours.

1.5.1 Limitations and future directions

Even though, this work, to the best of our knowledge, is the first meta-analytical summary of the empirical literature on negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities and ethnic bullying, it must be interpreted in light of some limitations. First, our evaluation did not include grey literature or studies in languages other than Italian, English, Spanish or French, and it is possible that important findings have been excluded because of that. Moreover, the method applied in the articles considered only youth as informants, assuming that youth provide valid reports of parental attitudes towards immigrants or ethnic minorities. Further research is therefore needed to identify the real processes in the construction of prejudicial attitudes towards ethnic minorities; since current literature does not take into account the actual views of the reference persons (i.e., peers or school's personnel), it should be included in future studies in order to directly examine false consensus effects or these projections. Additionally, it would have been interesting to investigate the role played by parental negative attitudes on youth's bullying behaviours against ethnic minorities. However, our literature review has evidenced scarce attention on this topic (i.e., one assessment from Pehar and colleagues, 2020) which is more oriented to the investigation of the transmission of attitudes (aside from being negative or positive) from parents to children. Thus, several theoretical perspectives converge in suggesting that children's prejudice is a function of their parents' expressed beliefs (Sinclair et al., 2005). Consistent with this, and in light of the fact that home is the most important source of ethnic bias, with children adopting their parent's views searching for their affection and approval (Allport et al., 1954), future research should focus on the impact of the family level on youth's behaviour.

Furthermore, our study only focuses on negative attitudes, without taking into considerations other important aspects, which may play a moderating or mediating role such as ethnic socialization practices, gender, or minority versus majority group belongingness. In fact, previous research with African American, Mexican American, and Chinese American families also suggests that some parents take a proactive attitude, socializing their children to be proud of their race as a means of developing coping styles to deal with discriminatory practices and negative ethnic stereotypes (Demo & Hughes, 1990; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1992). Gender differences in prejudice seems to be relevant and should be taken into consideration in future studies, since previous studies found higher levels of prejudice among males regarding explicit forms of racial prejudice (Akrami et al., 2006) and higher levels of implicit prejudice among women (Ekehammar et al., 2003).

Finally, it is pivotal that future studies would take into consideration the possible moderating role of belongingness to minority versus majority group, and plausible differences among these two subgroups, that was not possible to do in our meta-analysis because of the limited number of associations included. Literature data on this topic is mixed: a recent study has found that minority groups are less inclined than the majority group to convert their negative experiences into negative attitudes toward the majority, because they are more experienced and have developed more skills in coping with negative intergroup relationships than majority group members (Vedder et al., 2017). However, it could also be that minority youths react more strongly to negative intergroup experiences, because they experience them as evidence for the prevailing negative attitude toward ethnic minority groups in Western societies (Kanas et al., 2015; Tropp, 2007; Velasco González et al., 2008).

The major limitation, however, is that the present meta-analysis included only 9 articles that are hardly representative of every scenario; it is difficult to draw generalizable conclusions on

the basis of research comparing only a few schools, but also the variability in terms of country of research and participants' mean ages. Moreover, because of the limited number of articles, it has been impossible to analyse other possible moderators on the association between negative attitudes towards minorities and ethnic bullying. Future studies need to take into consideration multi-informant collection, but also as much contextual dynamics as possible in order to effectively evaluate the strength of association between external influences on prejudicial attitudes and the involvement in ethnic bullying.

Despite these limitations, our study gives a unique contribution to the knowledge on the association between attitudes towards ethnic minority members and ethnic bullying and discrimination behaviours.

1.6 Conclusion

Youths in contemporary societies are expected to develop their own attitudes toward immigrants in multicultural societies (Green, 2007). During this process, some adolescents may develop negative, xenophobic attitudes, which are risk factors for aggression against minority groups (Kuhn, 2004) and harassment of immigrants (Strohmeier et al., 2011; Verkuyten & Thijs 2002). Proper attention should be given to ecological levels that have profound impact on individuals, such as cultural norms and negative prejudicial beliefs that may be already implicitly transmitted. Evidence from our study, emphasizes the need to keep on working on the associations between negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities and youth's aggressive behaviours. Those findings are important in order to implement accurate and effective bullying prevention and intervention programs. Therefore, in line with our results, future protocols should focus on the social aspects of the school context (e.g., by encouraging specific rules regarding appropriate and prosocial norms towards diversity in peer groups and classrooms) and to the development of

strategies to intervene and deal with individual forms of xenophobia or negative attitudes towards diversity.

In conclusion, along with our results, and despite the long history of social concern on how negative attitudes are related to prejudiced aggressive behaviours, this study highlights the lack of empirical research in the scientific literature on this association, and the need for more studies on negative attitudes that comes from different levels (e.g., parents and teachers). In particular, consistent with this perspective, Allport and colleagues (1954) argued that home is the most important source of ethnic bias, with children adopting their parent's views to the extent that children desires their affection and approval. Thus, several theoretical perspectives converge in suggesting that children's prejudice is a function of the expressed beliefs of their parents and the degree to which children identify with them (Sinclair et al., 2005). These findings were supported also from a previous study carried out by Radke-Yarrow and colleagues (1952). They found that the restrictions imposed by parents on their children's social relationships, provide an important frame of reference in which children develop beliefs, attitudes and view of people and groups. Despite that, the empirical evidence for the connection between parents and their offspring's intergroup attitudes is still mixed.

What do we know about the effect of parental prejudice on youth's behaviour? Does growing up in families high on prejudice against ethnic minority groups, constitute a risk factor for youth's engagement in ethnic bullying behaviours?

CHAPTER 2

Parental Prejudice and Tolerant Class Context in Ethnic Bullying: The Role of Teachers

2.1 Introduction

Over the past years, the rapid growth of immigration, has increased cultural heterogeneity in all European countries. As a result, more nations and communities are called to adjust with increased levels of social and cultural diversity and prompted the need to understand its impact on individuals' beliefs and behaviours. In fact, belonging to a multi-ethnic context, generates more opportunities for intergroup interactions, and may led societies to face a cultural enrichment on one side, but also intolerance and anti-immigrant movements, on the other. One setting in which interethnic relations and contact opportunities are particularly salient, is the school context.

The growing ethnic diversity in our societies is reflected in the composition of school classrooms, which makes them one of the most likely places for youth to meet and interact with people of different backgrounds. The school years is a time when social influences become increasingly important (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011), other than a critical time for the development of ethnic identities (French et al., 2006). According to the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004), individuals strive to maintain a positive social identity, that is based on favourable comparisons between the in-group and the out-group. Individuals seek to identify with their chosen in-group and place a value on that identity, thus, negative attitudes (i.e., prejudice) develops as

people create positive associations with in-group characteristics and negative associations with out-group characteristics to justify the perception of belonging to that group.

Prejudice against ethnic minorities represents a key issue to address when discussing about intergroup relations. It relies on individuals' negative orientation towards other people because of their group membership or immigrant status (Brown, 2011). Such negative orientation involves cognitive (i.e., attributing negative traits to ethnic minorities), affective (i. e., dislike of ethnic minorities), and behavioural (i.e., exhibiting negative behaviours such as ethnic bullying or discrimination) components. What's alarming, is that higher levels of prejudice diminished the identification with the outgroup members (Albarello et al., 2020), that in turn, may result in the engagement in direct or indirect aggressive behaviours (i.e., ethnic bullying).

Bullying among students of different ethnic background is an extreme form of negative interethnic relations. It is a repeatedly, ill-intentional behaviour that occurs between one or more students and their victims and is usually characterized by an imbalance in power (Olweus, 1994). Researchers recognize prejudice-based or stigma-based harassment as a form of bullying based on personal characteristics such as race/ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation; it is common and often more harmful than general bullying (Felix et al., 2009; Russell et al., 2012). Recent research on an Italian sample of 711 early adolescents, have showed that those who belong to an ethnic minority, are at greater risk factor for ethnic bullying, as compared to their Italian counterpart (Caravita et al., 2016). From an individual point of view, being bullied because of ethnic affiliation may be particularly detrimental to students' adjustment during adolescence, when the sense of self and ethnic self-identification develops (Hitlin et al., 2006; McKenney et al., 2006). Supporting this argument, Bayram Özdemir and Stattin (2014) showed that youth who experienced ethnic harassment had lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of depressive symptoms over time. It is possible that when youth are subjected to derogatory comments based on their ethnicity, the way

they perceive themselves in social settings may be influenced, and they may feel as less valuable as members of other groups. In turn, they may come to internalize their negative social circumstances as a reflection of their self-worth (Graham et al., 2009).

Despite a growing body of research on ethnic victimization and bullying, the available studies only provide information regarding the implications of these negative experiences on its victims. By contrast, there is a dearth of information from the perpetrator perspective. That is, limited knowledge is available regarding the factors that might contribute to youth's engagement in ethnic bullying (Bayram Özdemir et al., 2016; Bayram Özdemir et al., 2019). More importantly, the current literature fails to provide a comprehensive understanding of the extent to which adolescents are exposed to prejudiced beliefs across multiple socialization contexts, and the implications of this on their engagement in ethnic bullying. Adolescents are surrounded by a variety of social contexts, and thus, are subjected to the influence of multiple socialization agents, including their parents, classmates, and teachers. In this vein, we aimed at examining the roles of multiple socialization agents on youth's engagement in ethnic bullying, by focusing on parental prejudiced beliefs and tolerance of classmates and teachers to immigrants.

2.2. Parental Prejudice and Engagement in Ethnic Bullying

Parents and primary caregivers play an important role in the development of intergroup prejudice (Bigler & Liben, 2007) but less is known about the impact on youth's behaviours. A large number of studies have demonstrated that the first signs of intergroup biases can be observed from early ages (see the meta-analyses of Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). It is assumed that children learn beliefs and attitudes from close others, primarily their parents. Two socialization processes are recognized: a process of adopting parental prejudice as the direct transfer of parental words and gestures, along with their concomitant beliefs and views on the one side, and a process of

developing prejudice through parents' creation of an atmosphere in which prejudice forms in their offspring (Allport et al., 1954). In a famous meta-analysis by Degner and Dalege (2013) with over 45.000 parent-child dyads, it has been shown that parent-child intergroup attitudes are related not only throughout childhood but maintained also along with adolescence and young adulthood. Research has showed that parents and their offspring hold similar attitudes towards immigrants (Allport et al., 1954; Degner & Dalege, 2013) and this influence is maintained over time, with a maximal level of parent-adolescent agreement in early adolescence (Gniewosz & Noack, 2015). In light of this, the role of parents in the development of prejudicial attitudes towards ethnic minorities is explained in terms of direct communication of opinions, or by showing discriminating behaviours against minorities. Besides, it is supported by the fact that parents' non-verbal behaviours toward an out-group, is even more important than their verbal manifestation in predicting children's explicit attitudes (Castelli et al., 2008). Nevertheless, to our knowledge, little empirical research has examined the link between prejudicial parental beliefs and adolescents' engagement in ethnic bullying behaviours (Pehar et al., 2020). According to the developmental ecological systems framework, parental influence is often cited as one of the most important for a child's development (Allport et al., 1954). Accordingly, it is reported that parents' attitudes toward immigrants, influence their adolescent children's tolerance and intolerance (Miklikowska, 2017; Grusec, 2011). As so, we may assume that as parents transmit a part of their attitudes to their offspring, there may also be a behavioural manifestation of such tolerant and intolerant attitudes in adolescents' interethnic relations. It is crucial to understand the effect that parental transmission of prejudicial beliefs have on their children's behaviours, since to our knowledge there is no empirical study that examines the link between parental prejudice and adolescents' engagement in ethnic bullying behaviours.

2.3. School Context and Engagement in Ethnic Bullying

School represents a key social environment for peer relations, and fulfil adolescents' fundamental need of connectedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000), since most of their time is spent at school, with their classmates and teachers. Unfortunately, in some cases, the school context may become a playing field for competition and stratification (Benner et al., 2015). Prior research has shown that perceived classroom norms regarding out-group attitudes are positively related to students' self-attitudes toward out-groups (Gniewosz & Noack 2008; Thijs & Verkuyten, 2013). Recent meta-analyses indicate that school climate is an important contextual predictor of bullying involvement for youth who bully others, are bullied by others, or who experience both roles (Cook et al., 2010; Thapa et al., 2013). As a result, the general social climate of schools (e.g., interaction between people at school, openness to the other) matters for the short- and long-term outcomes among students. Accordingly, we attempt to characterize school context according to the effect of classmates and teachers on students' engagement in ethnic bullying.

2.3.1. The role of classmates: Classmates spend lot of time together, and their social development is greatly influenced by one another. Peer relations are built on a range of interests and values that often overlap with ethnicity (Stark & Flache, 2012), and adolescents tend to show greater preference for same-ethnicity peers over different-ethnicity peers (Echols & Graham, 2020). In fact, previous findings have showed that adolescents surrounded by prejudiced friends, or who hold negative views on out-group members, are more likely to act aggressively toward their immigrant peers and engage in ethnic bullying behaviours (Bayram Özdemir et al., 2016; Bayram Özdemir et al., 2018). People with more prejudiced beliefs are less likely to seek contact with members of outgroups and tend to actively keep their distance from them. In this regard, prejudiced youth avoid interethnic contact and have fewer cross-racial friends (Binder et al., 2009). Allport and colleagues (1954) were one of the first researchers to study ways to reduce prejudice between

groups. Under specific circumstances, creating opportunities for contact among groups can reduce intergroup prejudicial attitudes. In that sense, cross-ethnic friendships promote more extended, voluntary, and intimate contact among interethnic groups, thus reducing prejudice and negative attitudes towards minorities (Graham, 2018). On one side, we assume that contact with ethnic diversity have positive effects on social inclusion and school well-being, on the other, it may be even reinforced by a class context high on tolerant beliefs towards minorities.

2.3.2. The role of teachers: Previous studies have showed that the incidence of youth's rate of aggression and bullying was linked to the specification of rules or norms concerning appropriate attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours by the school authorities (Geerlings et al., 2019; Bottiani et al., 2020). However, little research has assessed the impact of norms or rules displayed by school authorities that proscribe such behaviour. Teachers are in an influential position as educators and agents of socialization, that help to promote healthy relationships among students and prevent negative interactions (Smith et al., 2004). To promote a multicultural education, where discrimination is morally unacceptable (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2013), teachers are required to "teach" also by the behavioural examples they set through their relationships with students from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Geerlings et al., 2019). What teachers think about their students and how they behave towards them has an impact on their students' social experiences in the peer group (McAuliffe et al., 2009). In fact, they may affect individuals' behaviours directly (e.g., what teachers do when a bullying episode happens; Palladino et al., 2020) or indirectly throughout the established social norms.

2.4 The Moderating Role of School Context

Classroom norms regarding out-group attitudes are positively related to students' self-attitudes towards out-groups (Gniewosz & Noack, 2008; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2013); these results

guided our research question that aimed at understanding whether a tolerant class context may buffer the effect of other contextual influences (i.e., parents) on students behaviour (i.e., ethnic bullying).

The social dimension of school context contributes to the definition of the concept of "school effects", extensively portrayed by developmental researchers (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Coleman, 1961; Eccles & Roeser, 2011). As a result, the general social climate of schools matters to the short- and long-term outcomes of young people (i.e., ethnic bullying and discrimination). Studies on ethnic bullying indicate that in schools where students perceive a warmer and more supportive relationship with teachers, ethnic bullying incidents are fewer (Wright & Wachs, 2019). But is this "school effect" powerful enough to buffer other contextual influences?

Although research has studied the influence of parents (Miklikowska, 2017; Grusec, 2011), classroom climate (Bayram Özdemir et al., 2018; Bayram Özdemir & Özdemir, 2020), and teachers (Glock & Klapproth, 2017) on students' behaviours, the relative effects of these socialization contexts and the possible interplay between them in relation to students' behaviour are still unclear. Previous studies have focused on one context at a time, that is why our study aims to fill this gap analysing the influence of multiple socialization agents by using a multilevel moderation model.

2.5 The Present Study

The present study is the first effort to answer the literature gap on the examination of the interplay of proximal social contexts on adolescents' behaviour. In particular, we tested whether the effect of family prejudiced beliefs towards ethnic minorities on adolescents' ethnic bullying can be buffered by a tolerant school context characterized by positive social norms (i.e., classmates and teachers' tolerant attitudes), after controlling for adolescents' immigrant status and classrooms' ethnic diversity. Despite recent efforts in understanding the possible implications of contextual

factors on adolescents' engagement in ethnic aggression, most existing studies have focused on one context at a time (e.g., Bayram Özdemir & Özdemir, 2020; Bayram Özdemir et al., 2020). However, adolescents are embedded in multiple social contexts and are thus simultaneously exposed to the influence of multiple socialization agents, including parents, classmates, and teachers. Hence, perceiving social norms supporting cross-ethnic relations within the school environment (e.g., teachers' and peers' tolerance and positive attitudes towards minorities) may be crucial to prevent -or at least not detrimental, bullying behaviours.

2.6 Method

2.6.1 Design and Procedure

This research is based on a two-year longitudinal Project of National Interest (PRIN) called "*Prejudicial bullying involving ethnic groups: Understanding mechanisms and translating knowledge into effective interventions.* The Ethical committee of the Department of Psychology of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart (Milan, Italy) approved the research project (N. 20173E3Z7W_003). The study was conducted according to the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (APA).

In November 2019, an email invitation to participate to the Project was sent to 60 secondary schools of Tuscany. We included the first 13 schools that accepted the invitation and asked them to indicate at least four classes each. Data collection was held during regular school class hours between December 2019 and February 2020, across 58 classrooms of 13 secondary schools located all over the Region of Tuscany in Italy: two schools from Florence, two from Massa and Massa Carrara, two from Lucca and two from Prato, and one from San Miniato, Volterra, Pistoia, Viareggio, and Livorno.

Measures were administered using paper-pencil questionnaires under the supervision of teachers and two trained PhD students. Written consent to participation in the study was obtained from parents or legal representatives of the participants. Students were informed about the purpose of the research, the modalities of the data collection, and that they were allowed to leave the study at any time without having to give any kind of explanation or justification. Since students were not yet adult, only those allowed by their parents and those themselves declaring their willingness to participate took part in the study. It was also clarified that participants' responses were anonymous and data would be treated in aggregated way.

After collecting student's data in each class, the researchers gave a consent form to each representative teacher of the sample classes, with the request to broadcast it to other colleagues of the same classes. Together with their consent, they also had to indicate their personal email; online questionnaires were sent to those who allowed data treatment.

2.6.2 Participants

The initial sample comprised 58 classrooms of 13 Secondary Schools in Tuscany; teachers' data from 21 classes were missing, and after matching with students' data, the final sample belonged to 37 classes of 12 secondary schools.

A total of 120 mails were sent to those teachers who return their written consent, and 74 of them filled out the online questionnaire. Two teachers' answers were excluded because they did not belong to any of the included classes. The final teachers sample consisted in 72 teachers, with an age range between 27 and 65 years (M_{age} = 47.66, *SD* = 10.59), most of which were females (79.2%). In each classroom, teachers' numerosity ranged from a minimum of one to a maximum of seven. Out of 72 teachers, 33.3% of them reported that they taught in more than one class included in the sample. All of them were born in Italy, except for one teacher who was original

from Sri Lanka. The average of teaching experience was 15.3 years (*SD* = 11.62), ranging from 1 to 40 years. Most of them (63.8%) had already participated to at least one project against bullying and cyberbullying in their career.

As concerns the target students' sample, data were collected from 582 participants out of the initial 960 adolescents (M_{age}= 15.23; *SD* = 0.65; 50.9% girls). Most of them were born in Italy (87.8%) and the rest was born in middle-northern and Eastern Europe (4.5%), Asia (1.4%), Africa (1.6%), South America (5.8%) and North America (0.3%). About one fourth of the adolescent sample (30.6%) had at least one parent born outside Italy. Their parents came from around 50 different countries, including China, Albania, Romania, Russia, Morocco, Filipins, Peru, and Dominican Republic.

2.6.3 Measures

Family's prejudice. We used a revised version of Stephan and colleagues' scale (Stephan et al., 1999) to measure parents' attitudes about people with different origin or ethnicity from adolescents' perspective (Papotti & Caravita, 2020; Papotti et al., 2021). To assess *students' perception of their parents' attitudes towards immigrants*, adolescents were asked to rate 5 items on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from "1" (strongly agree) to "6" (strongly disagree). Examples of the items are: "*In my family it is thought that people of different ethnicity/origin get more than they deserve*" or "*In my family it is thought that people of different ethnicity/origin are a threat*". In the present sample, CFA resulted with good fit indices ($\chi^2(5) = 18.830$, $p = .002$; CFI = .971; RMSEA = .069, 90% CI [.038, .104]), using maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors (MLR). Cronbach's alpha was used as index of internal consistency, demonstrating good reliability of the measure ($\alpha = .73$).

Prejudice and tolerance towards immigrants. The Tolerance and Xenophobia scale (Van Zalk et al., 2013) was used to assess adolescents' and teachers attitudes toward immigrants. The scale consists of two subscales: Tolerance (4 items, i.e., "*We should have a welcoming attitude toward immigrants that would like to live in Italy*.") and Xenophobia (4 items, i.e., "*Immigrants increase criminality*"). This scale was used to measure both adolescents' and teachers prejudicial and tolerant beliefs. Both informants were asked to report the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "1" (*strongly disagree*) to "4" (*strongly agree*). High scores corresponded to high levels of tolerant beliefs toward immigrants in the Tolerance subscale, and high levels of prejudicial beliefs toward immigrants in the Xenophobia's one. In the present study, CFAs showed good fit for adolescents' assessment of the two subscales for students' ($\chi^2_{(19)}$ =34.426, p=.016; CFI= .985; RMSEA= .038, 90% CI [.016, .057]), and for teachers' assessment of the Tolerance subscale ($\chi^2_{(2)}$ = 0.154, p= .926; CFI= 1.000; RMSEA= .000, 90% CI [.000, .082]) using for both, maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors (MLR). Moreover, Cronbach's alpha demonstrated good reliability for both, students' xenophobia's subscale (α= .75), and teachers' tolerance subscale (α= .80).

Ethnic bullying. To measure adolescents' engagement in ethnic bullying, a revised version of the Florence Victimization and Bullying Scale (Palladino et al., 2016) was used (Palladino et al., 2020). The ethnic bullying subscale consisted of 4 items. Students were asked how often, in the past couple of months, they have acted particular attacks about physical (i.e., "*I have beaten*…"), verbal (i.e., "*I have made fun of*…"), and indirect forms (i.e., "*I have excluded*…") against "*someone because of his/her belongingness to a different ethnicity/origin*". Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from "*Never*" to "*Several times a week*". Items were evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale from "*Never*" to "*Several times a week*". In the present sample, CFAs showed good fit for the assessment of ethnic bullying ($\chi^2_{(6)}$ =63.799, p< .001; CFI = .944; RMSEA = .053, 90% CI

[.000, .111]), using maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors (MLR). Cronbach's alpha was used as index of internal consistency, demonstrating good reliability of the measure (α= .79).

Immigrant status. To measure adolescents' immigrant status, we asked every student to indicate whether their parents were born in Italy or abroad and created a dichotomous variable by distinguishing from those students with at least one parent born elsewhere Italy, and those with both parents born in Italy. *Immigrant status* was then coded as "0", for those students with an immigrant background (with at least one parent born abroad), and "1" for Italian students (both parents born in Italy).

Ethnic composition of the classroom was calculated using Simpson's Diversity index (1949). This index allowed us capture both the number of different ethnic groups, and the relative representation of each group in each classroom. Scores ranged from 0 to 1, with higher numbers reflecting greater ethnic diversity. To calculate the diversity index, we used adolescents' data on their parents' country of birth. The mean ethnic diversity across classroom of the present study is .47, and the average classroom size is about 15 students each.

2.6.4 Analytic structure

Multilevel regression modelling (Hox et al., 2017; Snijders & Bosker, 2011) with two analytic levels (level 1: student, and level 2: classroom) using Mplus Version 7 (Muthén & Muthén 2009-2017) was used in the present study. Some of the measured variables were aggregated to create classroom-level variables. In particular, adolescents' responses to the 4-item Tolerance's subscale (Van Zalk et al., 2013) were aggregated to measure classroom-level tolerant beliefs. Moreover, teachers' responses to the Tolerance's subscale (Van Zalk et al., 2013) were weighed with the number of hour that every teacher teaches in each classes and then aggregated

to measure classroom-level teachers' tolerant beliefs. Besides, cross-level interactions were tested among all the study variables.

Control variables at the individual level are students' immigrant background and students' individual prejudice, while ethnic composition of the classroom was used as a control variable at the classroom-level. Group mean centering was used for all the predictors at the individual levels, and grand mean centering was used for all the predictor variables at the classroom level (Enders & Tofighi, 2007). Missing data were treated by availing the full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation in Mplus.

2.6.5 Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables are presented in **Table 2.1**. As shown, ethnic bullying was positively correlated with both perceived family prejudicial beliefs (r = .14, p< .001) and students' individual prejudice (r = .19, p< .001). Perceived family prejudicial beliefs were positively associated with students' individual prejudice (r = .46, p< .001). Ethnic bullying at the classroom level is correlated to the ethnic diversity of the class (r = .21, p< .001), to classroom's tolerance (r = - .37, p< .001) and teachers' tolerance (r = - .14, p< .001). Ethnic diversity index is negatively correlated with classroom tolerance (r = - .18, p< .001) and teachers' tolerance (r = - .38, p< .001). Moreover, classroom's tolerance is positively correlated with teachers' tolerance (r = .18, p< .001).

Table 2.1

Means, Standard Deviations and Bivariate Correlations matrix of the study variables [8]

Level 1 – Student Level	**1.**	**2.**	**3.**	**4.**	**M**	**SD**	**Range**	**N**
1. Immigrant status	1				0.69	0.46	0-1	579
2. Student prejudice	- .03	1			2.05	0.67	1-4	573
3. Family prejudice	.01	.46**	1		3.34	0.93	1-6.5	579
4. Ethnic bullying	- .01	.19**	.14**	1	1.05	0.26	1-4.5	572
Level 2 – Class Level	**1.**	**2.**	**3.**	**4.**	**M**	**SD**	**Range**	**N**
1. Ethnic diversity	1				0.47	0.25	0-0.87	582
2. Classroom tolerance	- .18**	1			3.10	0.23	2.5-3.61	582
3. Teacher's tolerance	- .38**	.18**	1		11.73	5.78	4-37.5	582
4. Ethnic bullying	.21**	- .37**	- .14**	1	1.05	0.10	1-1.62	582

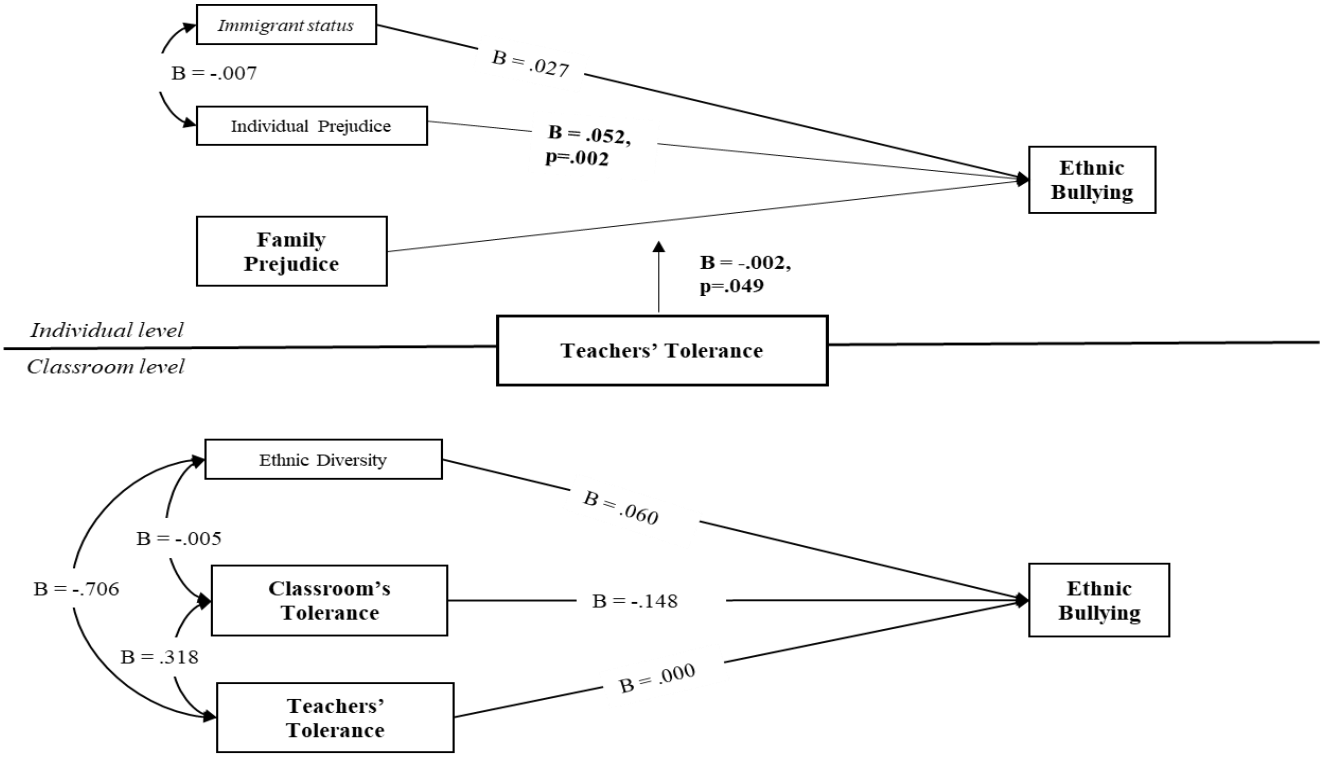
Intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs), based on the null model of the multilevel model, showed that 8.5% of the variance in adolescents' engagement in ethnic bullying was at classroom level. Multilevel analysis is therefore the most appropriate strategy to examine the link between prejudicial beliefs of parents, classmates, teachers, and adolescents' engagement in ethnic bullying.

[8] *Note: ** p< .01*

Cross-level interactions between individual factors and classroom context

Looking at the **Figure 2.1**, results are presented with the cross-level interaction among the individual and the classroom level. In particular, the individual-level resulted in a positive and significant effect of individual prejudice, on ethnic bullying (B = .052, SE = .033, p< .01). As for the classroom level, non-significant effects were found for each variable on the outcome variable. Cross-level interactions were tested in order to examine whether the link between perceived family prejudice and adolescents' engagement in ethnic bullying vary across classrooms' context effect. Results highlighted a significant cross-level interaction between teachers' tolerance and family's prejudice on ethnic bullying (B = - .002, SE = .001, p = .049).

Figure 2.1
Path-model of the final cross-level results [9,10]

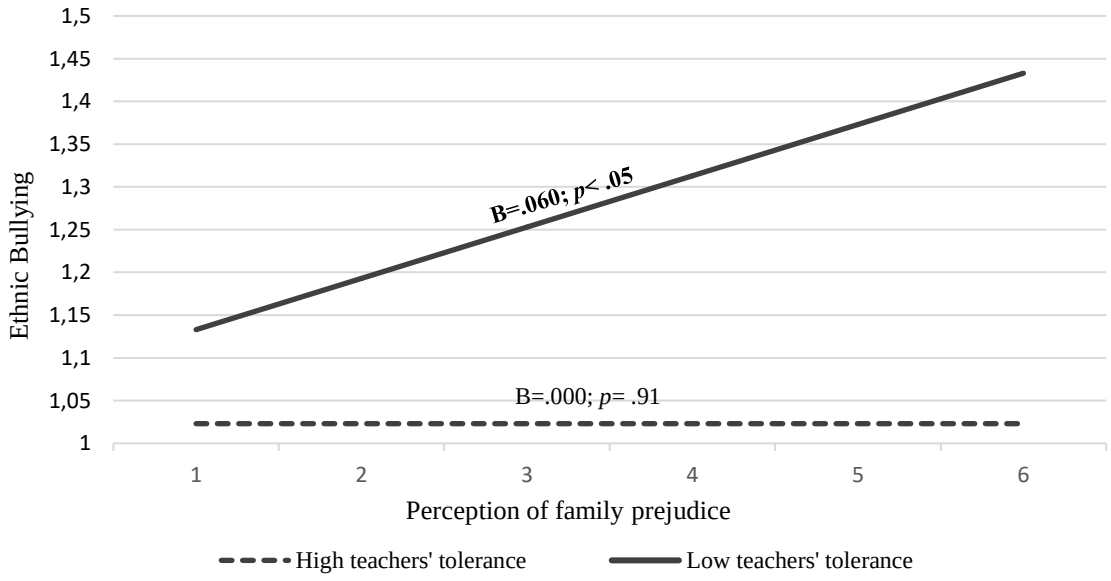


[9] Predictor path estimates are unstandardized regression coefficients (b).
[10] Significant results are in bold

In particular, in classrooms with low levels of teachers' tolerance (values under the mean level of teachers' tolerance; *M* =11.72), parental prejudice was significantly associated with ethnic bullying (*B* = .060, *SE* = .024, *p*= .014). Conversely, in classes with high levels of teachers' tolerance (values upper the mean level of teachers' tolerance; *M* = 11.72), parental prejudice was no longer significantly associated with ethnic bullying (*B* = .000, *SE* = .004, *p*= .909) (see **Figure 2.2**).

Figure 2.2

Moderation plot of the association between perceived family prejudice and ethnic bullying with high and low levels of teachers' tolerance



2.7 Discussion

Adolescence is a crucial period for the development of ethnic identity, for youths of both the ethnic minority and majority, (French et al., 2006; Meus, 2011; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). This process includes not only exploring their group membership, but also reflecting on their own group's place relative to that of others, along with the implications of intergroup relations as well as prejudices (Verkuyten, 2018). In addition to promoting students' intellectual development, schools have the important task of fostering children's emotional and social maturity (Ladd et al., 2014).

Despite the attention on the development of prejudice in early years, little is known about the role of different agents in influencing ethnic bullying during adolescence. The purpose of the present study was to provide a better understanding of the influence of family's prejudice on ethnic bullying, and the possible buffering effect that can have a tolerant school context, from the point of view of both teachers and classmates. We have therefore tested whether the effect of parental prejudice against ethnic minorities on the behaviour of adolescents could be moderated by a positive class context, controlling for the individual prejudice and immigrant status (individual level), and ethnic composition of the class (classroom level).

Our findings showed a significant cross-level interaction between family's prejudicial beliefs against ethnic minorities, and teachers' tolerance. When teachers have low levels of tolerance towards ethnic minorities, the perception of students' family's prejudice increases, leading to higher levels of ethnic bullying. This means that attending a class context where ethnic diversity is not appreciated or valued, and growing up in families who hold strong prejudices and stereotypes against ethnic minorities, increase the risk for youth to be involved in aggressive

behaviours against ethnic diverse peers. Whereas the impact of perceived prejudice from the family's context is no longer significant when there are high levels of tolerance in the classroom.

Our results are in line with the fact that belonging to a school climate that do not tolerate ethnic diversity, may reinforce some beliefs or negative attitudes that belong to a family context who hold strong prejudices against ethnic minorities. Along with this, the role of other significant adults (i.e., teachers) in the formation of adolescents' attitudes was examined (e.g., Bigler & Liben, 2007; Castelli et al., 2008), and is consistent with teachers' transmission of implicit attitudes to their students. The Italian context also provided empirical support for the idea that teachers are important role models for children (Vezzali et al., 2012), and together with our results, we suggest that students' attitudes and their behaviours against ethnic minorities are simultaneously reinforced by multiple contextual influences.

Moreover, our findings confirm the idea that also individual prejudice play a role in the adolescents' engagement in ethnic bullying, regardless of parental or teachers' influences. Stereotypes are stored in children's memory from early ages (McKown & Weinstein, 2003) and acquired in their early years through multiple socialization processes (Devine, 1989). This makes difficult to state whether they are responding by following their own beliefs, or if it is the result of other influences. What is empirically shared is that there is specific individual characteristics that prompt some students more than others, to engage in ethnic bullying. In particular, results from a research in Sweden highlight how adolescents are more likely to harass their peers by targeting their ethnic or cultural background, if they are morally disengaged (Bayram Özdemir et al., 2021). In fact, youth may attribute the responsibility of their act to the victim to be morally disengaged and minimize their roles in immoral acts (Thornberg & Jungert, 2014), and eventually, they might underestimate the negative consequences of their behaviours. Several studies have stressed the role of other personality traits (e.g., impulsivity; Bayram Özdemir et al., 2016) that may predispose

youth to engage in bad behaviours. During socialization mechanisms, moral standards are constructed from information conveyed by direct teaching, evaluative social reactions to one's conduct, and exposure to the self-evaluative standards modeled by others. Once formed, such standards serve as guides and deterrents for action (Bandura, 1991). In sum, we argue that many factors may intervene in the act of bullying, that are difficult to attribute exclusively to the individual itself but may be the result of multiple contexts' conditioning (e.g., family).

Our findings showed a non-significant direct effect of both classmates and teachers' tolerance towards ethnic minorities on ethnic bullying. This result is in contrast with previous literature and need to gain more attention for future analyses. For instance, a growing body of research has shown that perceived positive contact norms in class (e.g., being inclusive, respecting each other, cooperating activities in class) are associated with lower prejudiced beliefs (Molina & Wittig, 2006), and in turn, in less episodes of ethnic victimization (Bayram Özdemir & Özdemir, 2020).

2.7.1 Limitations and Future Directions

The over reported results must be seen in the light of some limitations. The first issue concerns the measurement of teachers' tolerance towards ethnic minorities. In fact, since the institutional role of teachers as educators and contextual role models for students, it is possible that they have not answered to the Tolerance and Xenophobia scale (Van Zalk et al., 2013), according to their true beliefs, but paying attention to their institutional role. In order to overcome the social desirability phenomenon, this measure was weighted with the number of hour that each teacher weekly spend in the class. This raised a methodological issue due to the availability of data. Teachers were called to choose voluntarily whether to participate or not to data collection, resulting

in a wide variability among the classes. Some classes had up to seven informants, while other classes were given with just one teacher's questionnaire.

Another critical issue emerged when we realized that the variability was also within the classes. It is also possible that the classes that had the data of a single teacher, was not the reference one (i.e., Italian, Mathematics) but one with a few hours (i.e., Religion). Therefore, it would be interesting to run our hypotheses again with a more reliable measure in which we can have either all teachers of the same subject, or the same number of teachers for every classroom.

In relation to possible differences within the general population, a dimension we have not explored is the relation between prejudice and behaviour in the minority or majority groups. Could we assume that the processes are similar or are they strengthened in the minority as compared to majority group? Is the minority family attitude being more important for adolescents' behaviour as compared to peer and teachers' attitudes and do the processes differ from the majority group? Previous studies have showed that acculturation level may moderate the effects of ethnicity: research suggests that second-generation immigrants have more similar perceptions of the school environment than first-generation immigrants do (Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Phalet & Andriessen, 2003). Future studies should further explore these differences among subgroups of population not reported in the present results.

Moreover, all individual level variables are measures of student's own perceptions. This methodological issue limits the research in multiple ways: first, since we aim at investigating parental attitudes towards ethnic minorities, it is not representative of the addressed population, and secondly because individual perceptions may interfere with student's responses to the scale. Future studies should replicate our hypothesis using different informants (i.e., parents) to catch more accurate information and disseminate more reliable results.

Finally, the role of gender as covariate was not tested given the complexity of the multilevel model. Thus, future studies will address the possible effect of gender on ethnic bullying.

2.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, these findings represent an important first step towards understanding why adolescents engage in ethnic bullying, highlighting ways to prevent it. A culturally responsive school leadership appears to be critical for promoting all aspects of a diversity-friendly school context (Khalifa et al., 2016). In culturally diverse schools, the approaches to cultural diversity have guided a broad range of interventions (Denson, 2009). Increasing attention has been paid to teachers' roles in shaping the cultural diversity context at school. Indeed, teachers' diversity beliefs and diversity-related norms are a fruitful target for interventions, such as teacher training programs.

This study is the first effort that attempts to analyse the relative influence of multiple contexts on adolescents' engagement in ethnic bullying, which predictors may explain the intent to bully, and which factors can buffer it. Our findings provide evidence that ethnic prejudice in early adolescence is related to the major developmental context of the student (family) and suggests that it is a significant predictor of students' engagement in ethnic bullying when teachers' level of tolerance is low. Therefore, teachers play a buffering role in this relationship, showing how future research should focus on both school and family contexts for interventions aiming at reducing ethnic bullying among adolescents. These findings suggest that multicomponent interventions that focus on the child, on his or her family, the school, and the community appear to be particularly promising.

CHAPTER 3

Prejudice, Ethnocultural Empathy, and Ethnic Bullying in Adolescence: a 3-Waves Longitudinal Study

3.1 Introduction

Nowadays, since our communities are becoming more and more multi-ethnic, ethnic bullying is raising concern from both professionals and scholars for its impact on youth well-being (e.g., Vervoort et al., 2010; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002; Xu et al., 2020). Ethnic bullying is identified as an aggressive action perpetrated toward individuals based on their ethnic origins, and can be defined as a subcategory of traditional bullying (Elamé, 2013). It can take the form of taunts and slurs, derogatory references to the immigration process, physical aggression, social manipulation, or social exclusion. Ethnic bullying is related to immutable characteristics of identity (i.e., one's origin), thus its consequences for victims can be very detrimental (e.g., Williams & Peguero, 2013). Therefore, examining what provokes (or restrains) people to harass their immigrant peers based on their ethnic background, is crucial to intervene and prevent such episodes.

3.1.1 Prejudice and Ethnic Bullying

Prejudice is seen as an important predictor of ethnic hostile behaviours (Schütz & Six, 1996), and bullying someone because of his/her ethnicity is clearly a form of such hostile behaviour (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Ethnic prejudice refers to the tendency to overgeneralize and simplify (mostly in a negative sense) information on other cultural groups and to have irrational

preconceptions about them (van Dijk, 1984). In particular, it is composed by the cognitive (i.e., beliefs about ethnically different groups), the affective (i.e., emotional reactions, usually negative such as the feeling of discomfort associated with these groups and individuals), and the behavioural components (i.e., actions carried out toward these targets such as social exclusion and discrimination) (Duckitt, 2003; Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960). Recent body of research has postulated the role of negative attitudes towards immigrants in determining violent behaviours against them. In particular, a recent meta-analysis (Taiti et al., in progress) highlighted that holding negative attitudes against ethnic minorities (i.e., ethnic prejudice) is significantly related with ethnic bullying and discrimination in youths until 18 years old. During adolescence, prejudiced beliefs are commonly assumed to be a relevant antecedent of inter-ethnic relations at school, including ethnic bullying (e.g., Scherr & Larson, 2009) especially, when combined with specific personality and behavioural characteristics (e.g., impulsivity, violent tendencies; Bayram Özdemir et al., 2016).

Multiple individual factors contribute to youth's involvement in ethnic bullying (e.g., moral disengagement, impulsive traits) (Bayram Özdemir et al., 2020; Iannello et al., 2021), but most researchers agree on the important role played by prejudicial attitudes towards ethnic minorities, to be one of the main predictors of ethnic bullying. Moreover, recently emerged how the affective component of prejudice (theorised as an emotional reaction towards an object or a person; Duckitt, 2003) was a major predictor of ethnicity-based bullying among youths (Papotti & Caravita, 2020). For instance, it is reasonable to assume that there may be underlying mechanisms behind such component of prejudice (i.e., lack in emotional reaction when observing discriminatory experiences and emotions of people from different ethnic backgrounds). The literature clearly shows that prejudice beliefs are one of the underlying factors that contribute to youth's engagement in ethnic bullying. Yet, it is still unclear why this might be the case. It is possible that negative

views about immigrants might interfere with development of feelings of empathy among adolescents, thus they become at risk of engagement in ethnic bullying.

3.1.2 Prejudice and Empathy

Emotions have always been recognized as fundamental in people's relationships with outgroup members, and interestingly, it has been showed that the amygdala is the brain area that is most often reported to be active in studies of black-white race attitudes and decision-making (Kubota et al., 2012). Amygdala is known for its role in governing the emotion of fear and fear conditioning, or fear learning (LeDoux, 2002). The fact that these findings demonstrate a relationship between implicit prejudices and the amygdala suggests that there is a substantial emotional component of prejudice. Interethnic relations themselves are highly saturated with negative emotions, such as fear, anger, and lack of trust (i.e., Kubota et al., 2012). In multi-ethnic societies, it is possible to be concerned about physical harm or a loss of resources as realistic threat, and to concern about the integrity or validity of the ingroup's meaning system as symbolic threat.

An intergroup threat is experienced when members of one group perceive that another group is in a position to cause them harm (Stephan et al., 2016). Results from a recent study showed a reciprocal association between adolescents' empathic concern and their anti-immigrant attitudes (Miklikowska, 2018). In this vein, the role of empathy has been explained in terms of positive effects on adolescents' understanding to other people's needs and negative experiences, as well as its positive effects on adolescents' anti-immigrant attitudes. This result is also in line with previous research showing the connection between empathy and prejudice in children (e.g., Nesdale et al., 2005), adolescents (Quintana et al., 1999), and adults (Gutsell & Inzlicht, 2012). Empathy seems to be a motivated phenomenon in which individuals are driven to engage in or avoid on the bases of their beliefs and attitudes. Thus, prejudiced individuals might actively avoid situations where

they could be exposed to others' misfortunes. This assumption is confirmed with the fact that empathic failures predict discrimination, neglect and overt aggression (Zaki & Cikara, 2015).

3.1.3 Empathy and Ethnic Bullying

In a multi-ethnic society, empathy could play an essential role in strengthening interethnic relationships. Empathy is a complex multidimensional phenomenon, which comprises the capacity of individuals to respond to others, taking both cognitive and affective factors into account, and emphasizing the ability to distinguish one's own self from that of others (Davis, 1983). Literature results highlighted that both affective and cognitive empathy are associated with prosocial behaviours and inhibit anti-social behaviours (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 2010). While the literature on the link between cognitive empathy and bullying finds either no association or a negative one (van Noorden et al., 2015), the negative association of bullying with affective empathy is quite consistent across studies (Zych et al., 2019 for a review).

Nevertheless, there is only one empirical research that has examined the link between empathy and ethnic bullying among adolescents (Bayram Özdemir et al., 2020). In particular, it is shown that a lack on empathic concerns and having lower levels of positive attitudes toward immigrants, are the bases for ethnic victimization. Thus, it may be also important to examine the role played by other emotional reactions towards discriminatory experiences. Hence, a more specific kind of empathy is needed in order to analyse the empathic responses towards ethnic minorities (i.e., ethnocultural empathy).

Hence, ethnocultural empathy was defined as empathy directed towards people from ethnic and cultural groups different from one's own ethnocultural group (Wang et al., 2003). It is conceptualized as a skill that includes perceiving, thinking, feeling, and understanding negative experiences and disadvantages of people from different ethnic backgrounds. These empathic

responses towards different others, may be the triggers for the reduction of negative behaviours against them (i.e., ethnic bullying).

3.2 The Current Study

To our knowledge, holding negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities (i.e., prejudice; Bayram Özdemir et al., 2018) and having low levels of empathy, have been found to be directly related to ethnic bullying (Bayram Özdemir et al., 2020). Besides, it is known that people come to know their attitudes (i.e., prejudice), and other internal states (i.e., empathy) by observing their own overt behaviour (Bem, 1972). Nevertheless, these variables have never been investigated within a comprehensive conceptual model. Moreover, given the cross-sectional nature of the majority of previous studies (e.g., Bayram Özdemir et al., 2020; van Noorden et al, 2017), we still know little about the reciprocal effects of these variables over time. In order to address this gap in knowledge, the present work aimed to provide a better understanding on the reciprocal and longitudinal association between prejudice, ethnocultural empathy towards ethnic minorities, and ethnic bullying among secondary grade Italian adolescents. The links between these constructs were tested with a cross-lagged panel model (CLPM) using three time points.

Relying on previous research on prejudice, empathy, and ethnic bullying, we aim at expanding current literature by hypothesizing two research questions:

1) can ethnocultural empathy act as a mediator in the relation between prejudice and ethnic bullying? To date, no study has tested the possibility that empathy would mediate the longitudinal association between prejudice and ethnic bullying, even though it was assumed that negative attitudes towards immigrants, longitudinally predict their empathic concerns traits (Miklikowska, 2018), and in turn, lack on empathic concerns predicted adolescents' engagement in ethnic bullying (Bayram Özdemir et al., 2020).

2) Does negative behaviour towards ethnic minorities (i.e., ethnic bullying) predict adolescents' negative attitudes towards them and their ethnocultural empathy? In line with previous literature (Bem, 1972), it was expected that ethnic bullying would predict both prejudice and empathy over time.

3.3 Method

3.3.1 Participants and procedure

The participants of the study were part of an ongoing longitudinal Project of National Interest (PRIN) called *"Prejudicial bullying involving ethnic groups: Understanding mechanisms and translating knowledge into effective interventions"*, that aims at examining the psychological mechanism related to Prejudicial Ethnic Bullying (PEB) and developing anti-PEB interventions in the Italian context. The project was approved by the Ethical committee of the Department of Psychology of the Catholic University of Milan (N. 20173E3Z7W_003).

Secondary schools of Tuscany region were contacted by e-mail to recruit participants. Preliminary approval by the school principal and the class council was required to obtain informed consent. Subsequently, to the school that gave the permission, consent forms were distributed to both students' families and students themselves to inform them about the project. Information letters explaining the study were sent to parents and teachers, and written consent to participation in the study was obtained from parents or legal representatives of the participants below 14 years old (according to the D.lgs. n. 101/2018). Only students with both parents' authorization participated in the questionnaire administration. As for students at the age of 14, they were allowed to state their own written consent, were informed about the purpose of the research, the modalities of the data collection, and were allowed to leave the study at any time. Participants' responses were anonymous, and data were treated as aggregate.

We included the first 13 schools that accepted the invitation and asked them to indicate at least four classes each. The initial sample consisted in every student belonging to the classes that fill in the questionnaires at each wave (*N*= 826; *M*= 15.23; *SD*= 0.65; 46.4% females; 80.6% Italians). Time 1 data collection was administered in person, by using self-reported paper-pencil questionnaire, under the supervision of a teacher and two doctoral students. Starting from Time 2, data collection was administered online due to COVID-19 restrictions. A link was sent to the teachers, and data collection was supervised online by the two doctoral students that were connected through an online platform to support the students. Students filled in the questionnaires through their personal smartphone or computer device digitally (i.e., by accessing a link).

Because of COVID-19 pandemic, 3 schools decided to quit the project. Students from 10 high schools were assessed three times in the data collection. Specifically, 36 classes of grade 9 (baseline; Time 1) and grade 10 (Time 2 and Time 3) were involved. Only students who were born in Italy and those who had at least one Italian parent, were included in the analyses. Thus, the final sample comprised 666 Italian students (44.9% females), belonging to 36 classrooms of 10 secondary schools, who participated in at least one of three time points of data collection. The mean age was 15.13 years (*SD*=0.53) at baseline, ranging from 12 to 18 years. The sample was assessed between January and February 2020, before the first COVID-19 outbreak in Italy, (T1; N =470), after one year, between January and February 2021 (T2; N = 495), and one year and three months later from the baseline, between May and June 2021 (T3; N= 450).

Retention rates between consecutive assessments (T1-T2; T2-T3; T1-T3) was respectively 70.85%, 74.34%, and 67.87%, while retention rate between the three data collections (T1-T2-T3) was 57.66%. Specifically, out of 666 students at baseline, 271 completed all the assessments. Study attrition was mainly due to the difficulties and restrictions related to the Covid-19 situation, that occurred after the end of Time 1 data collection, which strongly limited data collection conditions

of that same year. Therefore, Time 2 and Time 3 have been collected one year later the first assessment. To compare participants with and without missing data, Little's (1988) Missing Completely at Random (MCAR) tests were performed. The test emerged to be not significant ($\chi^2_{(2175)} = 2207.213$, $p = .310$), suggesting that data were missing at random (Bollen, 1989).

3.3.2 Measures

Prejudice towards immigrants. The Xenophobia's subscale from the *Tolerance and Xenophobia scale* (Van Zalk et al., 2013) was used to assess adolescents' prejudicial attitudes towards immigrants. It comprised 4 items (i.e., "*Students with a different ethnicity/origin increase criminality*"), and students were asked to report the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "1" (*strongly disagree*) to "4" (*strongly agree*). High scores corresponded to high levels of prejudicial beliefs towards students with a different background/ethnicity. In the present study, CFAs showed good fit for adolescents' assessment of the Xenophobia's subscale, in each wave (T1: $\chi^2_{(2)} = 3.207$, $p = .201$; CFI= 0.997; RMSEA= 0.036, 90% CI [0.000, 0.107]; T2: $\chi^2_{(2)} = 1.946$, $p = .378$; CFI= 1.000; RMSEA= 0.000, 90% CI [0.000, 0.089]; T3: $\chi^2_{(2)} = 0.174$, $p = .917$; CFI= 1.000; RMSEA= 0.000, 90% CI [0.000, 0.035]), using maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors (MLR). Cronbach's alpha was used as index of internal consistency, demonstrating good reliability of the measure (T1: $\alpha = .78$; T2: $\alpha = .77$; T3: $\alpha = .82$).

Ethnocultural empathy. To measure adolescents' empathy towards ethnic minorities, we used a shorter version of the subscale of the Scale of Ethnocultural Empathy (Wang et al., 2003) adapted for the Italian context (Albiero & Matricardi, 2013). The original subscale was composed by 15 items and was referred to the empathic feeling and expression. This subscale explores the emotional reactions an individual experiences when observing or learning about the discriminatory

experiences and emotions of people from different ethnic backgrounds (i.e., "*I share the anger of people who suffer injustice because of their ethnicity/origin"*). It also measures concern about conveying one's own discriminatory attitudes to members of other ethnic groups (through words, actions) (i.e., "*When I know that my friends are being treated unfairly because of their ethnicity/origin, I defend them"*). Level of agreement was measured on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from "*Not agree at all*" to "*Completely agree*". CFA on this study sample, resulted with low factor loadings of four items (Overall & Klett, 1972). Thus, the analyses were made using 11 items that showed good fit indices at each wave (T1: $\chi^2_{(44)}$ =129.124, p<.001; CFI= 0.920; RMSEA= 0.065, 90% CI [0.052, 0.078]; T2: $\chi^2_{(44)}$ =142.975, p<.001; CFI= 0.945; RMSEA= 0.068, 90% CI [0.056, 0.081]; T3: $\chi^2_{(44)}$ =70.725, p<.01; CFI= 0.987; RMSEA= 0.037, 90% CI [0.020, 0.053]), using maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors (MLR). Cronbach's alpha was used as index of internal consistency, demonstrating good reliability of the measure (T1: α = .86; T2: α = .92; T3: α = .94).

Ethnic bullying. To measure adolescents' engagement in ethnic bullying, a revised version of the Florence Victimization and Bullying Scale (Palladino et al., 2016) was used (Palladino et al., 2020). The ethnic bullying subscale consisted of 4 items. Students were asked how often, in the past couple of months, they have acted particular attacks about physical (i.e., "*I have beaten*…"), verbal (i.e., "*I have made fun of*…"), and indirect forms (i.e., "*I have excluded*…") against "*someone because of his/her belongingness to a different ethnicity/origin*". Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from "*Never*" to "*Several times a week*". In the present sample, CFAs showed good fit in each wave (T1: $\chi^2_{(2)}$ =5.021, p <.05; CFI= .990; RMSEA= .057, 90% CI [0.000, 0.123]; T2: $\chi^2_{(2)}$ =6.548, p <.05; CFI= 0.975; RMSEA= 0.068, 90% CI [0.014, 0.129]; T3: $\chi^2_{(2)}$ =2.505, p =.286; CFI= 0.985; RMSEA= 0.024, 90% CI [0.000, 0.100]), using maximum likelihood

estimation with robust standard errors (MLR). Cronbach's alpha demonstrated good reliability of the measure (T1: α = .87; T2: α = .94; T3: α = .91).

3.3.3 Data Analysis Strategy

Cross-Lagged Panel Model (CLPM) was used to examine the longitudinal reciprocal association between prejudice, ethnocultural empathy, and ethnic bullying. To evaluate the model fit, traditional goodness-of-fit indices were used, including the chi-square (χ^2) statistic, the root-mean-squared error of approximation (RMSEA), the comparative fit index (CFI) and the weighted root mean square residual (WRMR). Models with RMSEA less than .08, WRMR higher than 1.0 and CFI higher than .90 are considered to have acceptable fit, while RMSEA less than .05, WRMR less than 1.0 and CFI higher than .95 are considered to have good fit (Bollen, 1989; Hu & Bentler, 1998; Yu, 2002).

All models were initially tested with all paths freely estimated over time, to allow for possible developmental differences in the examined effects. Subsequently, to examine whether effects were similar over time (i.e., time-invariance of effects), we compared a model with freely estimated paths to a model where paths were fixed to be equal over time. Time invariance of model estimates were examined by comparing groups of effects, starting with autoregressive effects - separately for each variable - followed by concurrent (i.e., within-time) effects (i.e., residual covariances) and residual variances[11] and finally with cross-lagged effects separately for prejudice, ethnocultural empathy, and ethnic bullying. Since the models are nested, it was examined the tenability of the imposed constraints by computing both $\Delta\chi^2$, ΔCFI and ΔRMSEA tests. In the nested model, statistically significant differences were reported when at least two of the following

[11] We fix the covariances between the residuals of the within-person centered variables (i.e., concurrent associations) and residual variances in the same step.

three criteria were matched: $\Delta\chi^2$ at $p<.05$ (Satorra & Bentler, 2001), $\Delta CFI \geq .01$, and $\Delta RMSEA \geq .015$ (Chen, 2007). Whenever the constrained model did not result in a significantly worse fit than the unconstrained model (i.e., non-significant chi-square difference test; $\Delta CFI \leq .01$; $\Delta RMSEA \leq .015$), the constrained model was retained. All analyses used robust standard errors estimator (WLSMV) which is a requirement in Mplus for the TYPE=COMPLEX option, and the best choice when modelling categorical data. Ethnic bullying variable was declared as dichotomous at two time points (Time 2 and Time 3). Since the data were nested within classrooms, the *SE*s and model fit have been corrected by considering stratification, nonindependence of observations, and unequal probability of selection (Muthén & Muthén, 2009–2017). All main analyses were conducted in Mplus version 7 (Muthen & Muthen, 2009).

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Preliminary Analysis

Descriptive analyses were performed. Variables were normally distributed, except for ethnic bullying. Thus, analyses were performed by dichotomizing the ethnic bullying variable into 0 and 1 at each time point, to aggregate those who reported to be engaged in the behaviour at least once (1), and those who were not (0). Percentages of engagement in the previous three months were 6.9% at T1, 4.9% at T2, and 3.1% at T3. Means, standard deviations, frequencies, and bivariate correlations between prejudice, ethnocultural empathy and ethnic bullying at each time points are reported in **Table 3.1**.

Table 3.1

Means, Standard Deviations and Point Biserial Correlations among the study variables across all time points.

Variables	Means or %	*Sd*	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**
1. Prejudice T1	2.06	0.69	1								
2. Prejudice T2	1.95	0.65	.47 ***	1							
3. Prejudice T3	2.02	0.72	.42 ***	.45 ***	1						
4. Ethnocultural Empathy T1	3.30	0.96	- .39 ***	- .21 ***	- .36 ***	1					
5. Ethnocultural Empathy T2	3.50	1.06	- .35 ***	- .34 ***	- .29 ***	. 48 ***	1				
6. Ethnocultural Empathy T3	3.12	1.13	- .37 ***	- .32 ***	- .36 ***	. 51 ***	.57 ***	1			
7. Ethnic Bullying T1	6.9%	-	.23 **	.48 ***	.25 **	- .10	- .26	- .15	1		
8. Ethnic Bullying T2	4.9%	-	.24 **	.16*	.10	- .38 ***	- .35 ***	- .26 *	.57 **	1	
9. Ethnic Bullying T3	3.1%	-	.10	.31**	.26	- .13	- .31 *	- .30	.32	.56***	1

Note. For Ethnic Bullying T1, T2 and T3 we reported the frequency of engagement in the behaviour.
*p <.05; **p <.01 ***p< .001.

To test whether the constructs were invariant over time, time invariance analysis was performed. The fit indices of the initial, unconstrained model showed good baseline model fit (χ^2 (9) = 32.132 (p< .001), RMSEA = .062, 90% CI = [.022, .071], CFI = 0.946). Next, with factor loadings constrained to be equal across times to test time invariant, fit model resulted as follows: χ^2 (21) = 42.426 (p < .01), RMSEA = .039, 90% CI = [.022, .056], CFI = 0.950. In particular, when the criteria supported the tenability of the imposed constraints over time (non-significant chi-square difference test; ΔCFI $\leq$ .01; ΔRMSEA $\leq$ .015), meant that the autoregressive paths, within time correlations, and unidirectional lagged effects, were time invariant and these parameters could therefore be constrained over time, reducing the model complexity (Hamaker et al., 2015). Results showed autoregressive paths constrained for all of the study variables: $\Delta\chi^2$ (1) = -0.174, p<.001, ΔCFI = .003, ΔRMSEA = -.004 (Model 1a); $\Delta\chi^2$ (1) = 1.525, p= .217, ΔCFI = -.001, ΔRMSEA = -.002 (Model 1b); $\Delta\chi^2$ (1) = 1.461, p=.227, ΔCFI -.001, ΔRMSEA = -.002 (Model 1c); constrained within-time correlations among the three time points, between ethnic bullying and ethnocultural empathy: $\Delta\chi^2$ (2) = -0.517, p< .001, ΔCFI = .007, ΔRMSEA = -.009 (Model 2a); constrained within-time correlations among the three time points, between ethnic bullying and prejudice: $\Delta\chi^2$ (2) = -1.865, p= .394, ΔCFI = .001, ΔRMSEA = -.006 (Model 2b); constrained lagged effects of ethnic bullying on ethnocultural empathy: $\Delta\chi^2$ (1) = 1.672, p= .196, ΔCFI = -.001, ΔRMSEA = -.002 (Model 3a); constrained lagged effects of ethnocultural empathy on ethnic bullying: $\Delta\chi^2$ (1) = -0.67, p< .001, ΔCFI = .004, ΔRMSEA = -.005 (Model 3c); constrained lagged effects of ethnocultural empathy on prejudice: $\Delta\chi^2$ (1) = 1.432, p= .231, ΔCFI = -.001, ΔRMSEA = -.002 (Model 3d); constrained lagged effects of prejudice on ethnic bullying: $\Delta\chi^2$ (1) = 1.493, p= .222, ΔCFI = -.001, ΔRMSEA = -.002 (Model 3e); and finally, constrained lagged effects of prejudice on ethnocultural empathy: $\Delta\chi^2$ (1) = 1.411, p= .235, ΔCFI = -.001, ΔRMSEA = -.002 (Model 3f). For all the steps of the time invariant analysis see **Table 3.2**.

Table 3.2

Time invariance of the cross-lagged panel model between ethnic bullying, ethnocultural empathy and prejudice [12]

	Model fit indices					Difference test				
Models	χ^2	*df*	*p*	CFI	RMSEA	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	*p*	ΔCFI	ΔRMSEA
Free_Model	32.132	9	0.0002	.946	.062					
Model 1a	31.958	10	0.0004	.949	.058	-0.174	1	<.001	0.003	-0.004
Model 1b	33.657	10	0.0002	.945	.060	1.525	1	.2168	-0.001	-0.002
Model 1c	33.593	10	0.0002	.945	.060	1.461	1	.2267	-0.001	-0.002
Model 2a	31.615	11	0.0009	.953	.053	-0.517	2	<.001	0.007	-0.009
Model 2b	33.997	11	0.0004	.947	.056	1.865	2	.3935	0.001	-0.006
Model 2c	**62.682**	**11**	**0.0000**	**.880**	**.084**	**30.55**	**2**	**<.001**	**-0.066**	**0.022**
Model 3a	33.804	10	0.0002	.945	.060	1.672	1	.1959	-0.001	-0.002
Model 3b	**28.301**	**10**	**0.0016**	**.957**	**.052**	**-3.831**	**1**	**<.001**	**0.011**	**-0.01**
Model 3c	31.462	10	0.0005	.950	.057	-0.67	1	<.001	0.004	-0.005
Model 3d	33.564	10	0.0002	.945	.060	1.432	1	.2314	-0.001	-0.002
Model 3e	33.625	10	0.0002	.945	.060	1.493	1	.2217	-0.001	-0.002
Model 3f	33.543	10	0.0002	.945	.060	1.411	1	.2348	-0.001	-0.002
Final	42.426	21	0.0037	.950	.039	10.294		.8008	.004	-0.023

Note: **Model 2c** (concurrent association between ethnocultural empathy and prejudice) and **Model 3b** (cross-lagged effect of ethnic bullying on prejudice) are the unconstrained time variant paths.

[12] Model 1a, 1b, 1c are the autoregressive paths for all the variables (respectively ethnic bullying, ethnocultural empathy and prejudice); Model 2a, 2b, 2c are the concurrent associations (respectively ethnic bullying with prejudice, ethnic bullying with ethnocultural empathy and ethnocultural empathy with prejudice); Model 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d, 3e, 3f are the cross-lagged paths (respectively, ethnic bullying on ethnocultural empathy, ethnic bullying on prejudice, ethnocultural empathy on ethnic bullying, ethnocultural empathy on prejudice, prejudice on ethnic bullying and prejudice on ethnocultural empathy) .

3.4.2 Cross-Lagged Panel Model (CLPM) Results

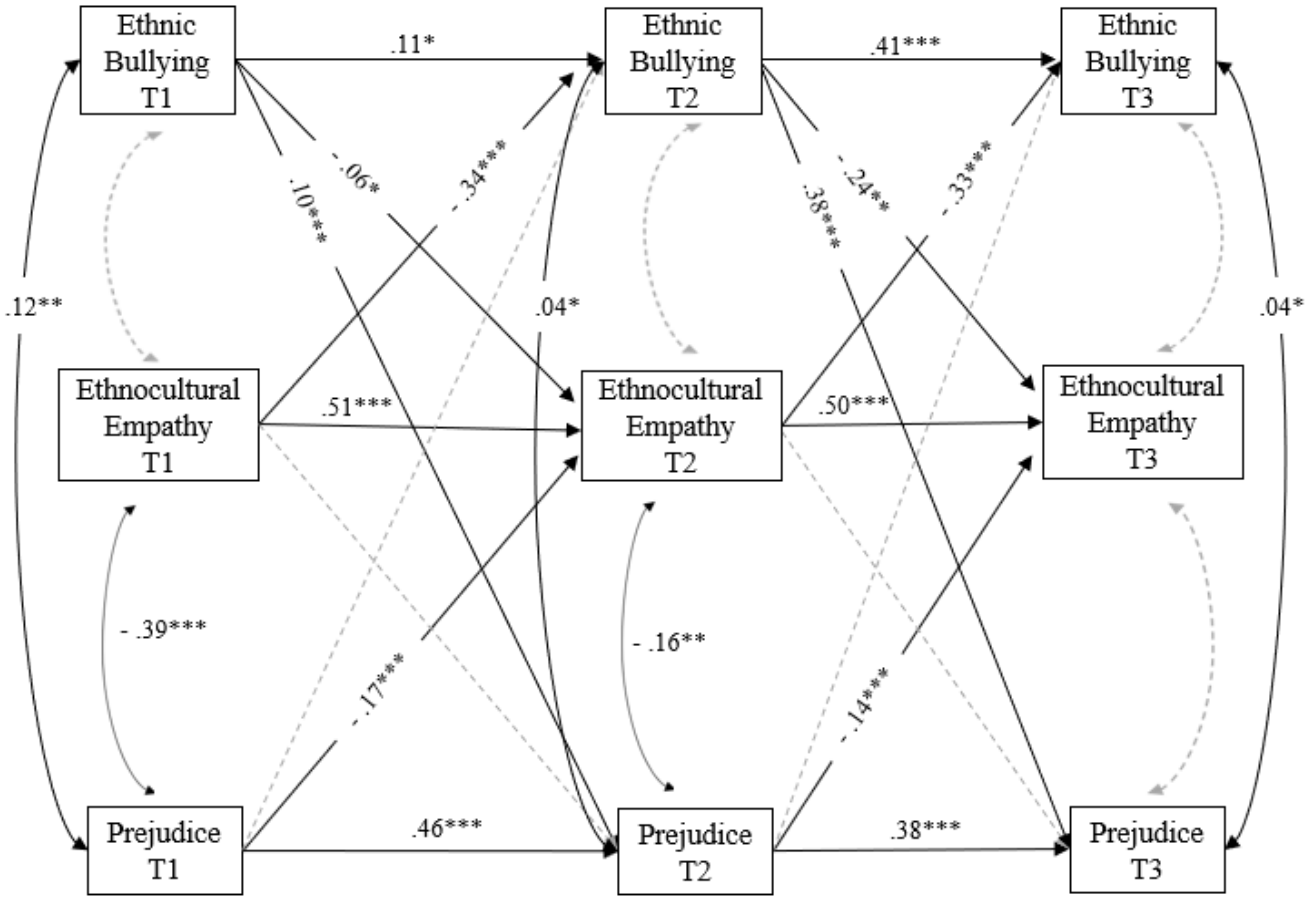
The results of CLPM (see **Figure 3.1** for the standardized estimations) showed that there were positive and significant correlations at each time point between prejudice and ethnic bullying. Additionally, prejudice was negatively associated with ethnocultural empathy at T1 and T2. Ethnic bullying was not correlated to ethnocultural empathy across the three time points. Autoregressive paths resulted in stability paths for each study variables.

As for the cross lagged effects, prejudice had a significant negative and direct effect on ethnocultural empathy (T1-T2: β = - .17, *SE* = .038, p< .001; T2-T3: β = -. 14, *SE* = .032, p< .001), but not on ethnic bullying. Ethnocultural empathy resulted in negative and significant effect on ethnic bullying (*T1-T2*: β = -. 34, *SE* = .088, p< .001; *T3-T3*: β = - .33, *SE* = .100, p< .01), while non-significant effect was found on prejudice. Consistent with these results, the indirect effect test confirmed the role of ethnocultural empathy at T2 in mediating the overtime association between prejudice at T1 and ethnic bullying at T3 (β = .05, *SE* = .021, p< .01).

Finally, results highlighted a significant effect of ethnic bullying on both prejudice and ethnocultural empathy: in particular, ethnic bullying positively predicted prejudice (T1-T2: β = .10, *SE* = .027, p< .001; T2-T3: β = .38, *SE* = .082, p< .001), and negatively ethnocultural empathy (T1-T2: β = - .06, *SE* = .029, p< .05; T2-T3: β = - .24, *SE* = .086, p< .01), across the three time points.

Figure 3.1

Final Cross-Lagged Panel Model linking prejudice, ethnocultural empathy and ethnic bullying, aggregating between- and within-person variance



Indirect effect of:
Prejudice T1 → Ethnocultural Empathy T2 → Ethnic Bullying T3: β = .054; SE = 0.021; p = .009

Note. Standardized estimates are reported. Dotted lines indicate non-significant effects. Solid lines represent significant paths.
*** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

3.5 Discussion

Despite evidence posits prejudice as a critical issue in predicting ethnic bullying in many multicultural societies, little is known about the underlying mechanisms or processes explaining this link. To date, this study is the first effort that examined whether empathy would fully or partially mediate the longitudinal association with prejudice and ethnic bullying.

The results from the Cross-Lagged Panel Model confirmed this study hypothesis. Ethnocultural empathy fully mediated the association between prejudice at T1 and ethnic bullying at T3. This result is in line with a previous review of prejudice reduction techniques that state how empathy 'has the potential to improve intergroup relations' (Batson & Ahmad, 2009). Besides, empathy can reduce behaviours based on prejudicial beliefs as it leads people to share a sense of common identity with other cultural groups (Stephan & Finlay, 1999) or by arousing feelings of injustice (Finlay & Stephan, 2000). This finding is consistent with the growing research literature on the central role of affect in intergroup processes in general, and intergroup contact in particular (see Tropp & Pettigrew, 2004). Intergroup contact for instance, and especially close, cross-group friendship, may enable one to take the perspective of outgroup members and empathize with their concerns. This new perspective could in turn contribute to improve intergroup attitudes, thereby acting as a mediator in contact's reduction of prejudice. This contention is consistent with recent findings that intergroup contact can involve self-expansion processes, in which individuals extend their sense of self to include the outgroup's ones (Aron & Mclaughlin-Volpe, 2001). Notably, empathy is correlated with prosocial behaviour and altruism (Carlo et al., 2003) as well as inhibiting antisocial and aggressive behaviour (LeSure-Lester, 2000). Higher levels of empathy and emotional management are also associated with better relationships with peers (Eisenberg et al., 1991) and are believed to be important for developing pro-social behaviour and for appropriate

moral development. It is possible that empathy might lead to a decrease in negative outgroup attitudes because empathic adolescents feel increased compassion or sympathy towards ethnically different groups who are less well-off and/or the latter are the recipients of unfair and hurtful attitudes. Alternatively, empathic youths might be more open to unfamiliar people or are less threatened by differences such as skin colour and hence display less negative attitudes or behaviours towards them.

Accordingly, this study resulted in a non-significant direct effect of prejudice on ethnic bullying behaviours over time. This result extended most of existing literature highlighting that this association is fully mediated by empathy. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that after our data were collected at Time 1, COVID-19 pandemic has spread all over the world and its consequences were devastating in terms of social relations restrictions and mental health (Sommerlad et al., 2021; Cooper et al., 2021). Infectious disease pandemics, (e.g., SARS and COVID- 19), demand intrapersonal behaviour change and present highly complex challenges for public health. Racial discrimination can be experienced directly or vicariously, in which one witnesses, reads, or hears about an incident of discrimination directed at others of the same race. With social distancing requirements, experiences with discrimination have been particularly salient, and may have impacted differently according to specific ethnic groups. A recent study revealed that a high percentage of Chinese American parents and their children, personally experienced or witnessed anti-Chinese or anti–Asian racial discrimination both online and in person, due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Cheah et al., 2020). Discrimination experiences can threaten individuals' identity and sense of control and thus foster hopelessness and the internalization of negative attitudes from the dominant group (e.g., Cheah et al., 2021).

Our longitudinal design struggled with the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the delay of one year of T2 data collection. Besides, during this period, students were not completely able to go to school full time (e.g., integrated digital education), thus resulting in a decrease in engagement on the behaviour over time (see Table 1 for ethnic bullying percentages from T1 to T3).

Besides, no direct effect from ethnocultural empathy to prejudice was found. Even though this result goes against recent research posing that empathy trumps prejudice (Miklikowska, 2018), one explanation may rely on the nature of the scale that it was used to assess empathy. This subscale takes into consideration not only the emotional concerns over ethnic minorities inequalities, but it is also assessed the active reaction against it. Moreover, previous studies showing that adolescence is a period of changes in cognitive, rather than affective, aspects of empathy-trait (Decety & Michalska, 2010), which suggests that perspective taking might be a better predictor of prejudice development in this period. Since our ethnocultural empathy subscale assesses emotional reactions and concerns about ethnic minorities experiences of discrimination, the cognitive component of perspective taking is not assessed. On the other hand, research has shown that affective factors (e.g., empathic concern) were superior mediators of intergroup friendships effects than cognitive factors (e.g., increased knowledge; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008), and that empathic concern accounted for most of the variance in the association between perspective taking and prejudice (Batson et al., 1997; Vescio et al., 2003).

This study final research question was moved by the possibility that adolescents' ethnic bullying would predict their prejudicial attitudes and ethnocultural empathy competencies. Individuals come to understand their own attitudes, emotions, and other internal states, by inferring them from observations of their own overt behaviour, and/or the circumstances in which this

behaviour occurs (Bem, 1965). This process is relevant in explaining why students engage in bullying. It is well known that bullying episodes are seen as wrong (Caravita et al., 2009; Gasser & Keller, 2009), hence there is a discrepancy between the moral judgement of bullying as not acceptable and the bullies' actual conduct. This cognitive dissonance can be reduced by using self-justification processes, which allow people to morally disengage (Bandura, 1991) to avoid negative feelings and related self-censure by cognitively reframing the situations and one's own actions, so that they appear congruent with internalized standards. Plausible cognitive explanations may be related to the blame of the victims, considering them as less human or with unusual characteristics. In this way, students can easily justify a negative behaviour, because, for instance, they perceive the target as deserving it. This thinking may favour the use of prejudicial beliefs to justify and reiterate discrimination and ethnic bullying behaviours over time, especially in a period where xenophobic attitudes increased after Covid-19 pandemic's spread. Evidence suggested that self-reported disease vulnerability and activation of disease concerns (health threats) cause people to become less supportive of unfamiliar immigrant groups (Faulkner et al., 2004). Accordingly, if this idea is reinforced by media and politicians (Esses, et al., 2013), who portrayed ethnic minorities, immigrants, and refugees as vectors of COVID-19, this will lead to dehumanization (Esses & Hamilton 2021). Moreover, denial of humanness to others is linked with lower levels of empathy towards them (Halpern & Weinstein, 2004).

In order to justify their actions, bullies cognitively reconstruct their own as right and acceptable (Menesini et al., 2003; Pozzoli et al., 2012), usually by putting the blame on others, instead of assuming their own responsibility for harming their peers (Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011). Ethnic minorities are often denied with their human qualities and view as inferiors (Costello & Hodson, 2014). As far as the role of empathy in bullying situations is concerned, there is evidence

that when people do recognize human characteristics to victims, they experience more empathy towards them (Čehajić et al., 2009). As a matter of fact, this may result in the need to take the distance to what has been done and explains lower levels of empathic feeling towards their victims. For this reason, after such ethnic bullying is behaved, their morally engagement is led to the need to take the distances to the sense of guilt that may arise after being involved into bullying behaviours. Given that guilt has been associated with positive social behaviours and responsibility for others' welfare (Sheikh & Janoff-Bulman, 2010), it is likely that adolescents who engage in ethnic bullying are less prone to empathize towards victims' emotions (i.e., ethnocultural empathy).

3.5.1 Limitations of the study

This study must be interpreted in light of some limitations. First, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic caused an important delay of the scheduled data collections. While T1 was collected between January and February 2020, before the pandemic, T2 was collected one year later, when the situation allowed the researchers to restore contacts with the schools' principals. Moreover, Covid-19 restrictions caused the drop-out of two schools, thus constituting a decrease in terms of sample size. Second, self-report measures were used, thus, the impact of social desirability on this study variables (adolescents' ethnocultural empathy, anti-immigrant attitudes and ethnic bullying) could be argued. Third, gender differences were not tested in this study. Future analyses should address to possible gender differences among cross lagged models. Finally, for the assessment of ethnocultural empathy, it was used a subscale that explored both the emotional concern and active reactions (through words, actions), when observing or learning about the discriminatory experiences and emotions of people from different ethnic backgrounds. It would be interesting to use a general measure of empathy, consisting of both perspective taking and empathic concern's competences (e.g., IRI; Davis, 1983), to detect whether this study results are replicated.

3.6 Conclusion and Future Implications

In conclusion, despite the above limitations, this study enriches knowledge about the effect of prejudice on ethnic bullying, highlighting the fundamental role played by ethnocultural empathy that fully mediates the relation. These results open new possibilities of facilitating positive intergroup relations by focusing on reducing prejudicial attitudes towards ethnic minorities, thus enhancing of the propensity to empathize. Thus, it is important to foster youths' empathy in the socialization process: stimulating the progressive widening of their egocentric focus through presentation of the perspective of others' feelings, through the use of reasoning as a rearing and educational technique and encouraging an understanding of others' feelings and on possible consequences of one's behaviour for others, especially in racial and ethnic discrimination situations. Finally, this work has implications from the perspective of psychological intervention in educational contexts, underlining the importance of interventions aimed at promoting and enhancing empathic feelings to reduce ethnic bullying.

CHAPTER 4

General discussions and conclusions

The general aim of this dissertation was to shed light and contribute to the scientific literature on bullying directed towards peers with a different ethnicity (i.e., ethnic bullying), during the most critical developmental period of adolescence. Specifically, we aimed to improve knowledge on ethnic bullying through the investigation of the role played by individual and contextual factors. The following three studies were conducted:

1) Negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities and ethnic bullying: a systematic review and meta-analysis on individual and peers' effects (Chapter 1);
2) Parental prejudice and tolerant class context in ethnic bullying: the role of teachers (Chapter 2);
3) Prejudice, ethnocultural empathy, and ethnic bullying in adolescence: a 3-waves longitudinal study (Chapter 3).

As a first step, a systematic analysis of literature, to summarize the presence of published empirical studies dealing with the association between having negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities and being engaged in ethnic bullying. Consequently, it was tested the power of this association among the included studies, and the impact that different socio-ecological contexts may play on the relation between having negative attitudes (i.e., ethnic prejudice) and acting according to those (i.e., by engaging in ethnic bullying). Results from the systematic review highlighted a

lack in literature of longitudinal studies dealing with this latter association, and a dearth of possible contextual moderators in such relation. In particular, attitudes coming from adults, such as parents and teachers, were not found. Analyses were made using just two levels of negative attitudes: those coming from peers in formal (i.e., classmates) and informal contexts (i.e., friends and best friends) and those coming from an individual level. Both resulted in having a strong effect on the engagement in ethnic bullying.

The following two studies (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3) were designed according to the results of this first Chapter. Therefore, as a second step, we analysed the interplay of multiple proximate socializing agents (i.e., parents, classmates, and teachers) on the involvement in the behaviour, by exploring whether a tolerant class context would buffer the impact of parental prejudice on adolescents' ethnic bullying. As a final step, we longitudinally examined the role of possible individual risk, and protective factors, in the explanation of the behaviour, by analyzing the reciprocal association between negative attitudes (i.e., prejudice), socio-cognitive skills (i.e., ethnocultural empathy), and aggressive behaviours towards ethnic minorities (i.e., ethnic bullying), using a sample of Italian majority students, during their first two years of high school.

4.1 Dissertation's contribution to the literature

The three studies included in this dissertation, allowed us to deepen some critical issues in the scientific literature about the construct of ethnic bullying.

Ethnic bullying, as well as traditional bullying, is carried out intentionally and repetitively, against those who are not able to defend themselves. It may be enacted directly through verbal attacks (e.g., name-calling, slurs), or physical means (e.g., hitting or throwing the headscarf), but

also indirectly (e.g., exclusion, discrimination) and through digital technologies (e.g., hate speech online; Blaya, 2019) (McKenney et al., 2006; Scherr & Larson, 2010). Besides, literature highlights that social exclusion based on ethnic membership is much different from peer rejection based on individual characteristics, such as temperament, shyness, and social deficits (Killen et al., 2013).

Unlike peer rejection based on those individual characteristics, ethnic-based social exclusion is linked with a major concerning outcome: feeling irreparably responsible for their victim condition. Ethnicity is something that cannot be changed and being harassed because of that has serious implications in terms of identity and a sense of belonging to their culture and ethnic background. Moreover, it has to do with the role of prejudice and bias as well as the unfairness experienced by children who are excluded because of their ethnicity. Unfairness that is linked with the feeling of guilt of being themselves, being "different". What is not well understood is what "being different" means when used as an explanation to justify peer exclusion.

Youths who reject or exclude peers because of their group membership (i.e., ethnicity) provide reasons for their actions that are based on "group functioning," which is often defined as the perceived problem that arises from including someone who differs in some characteristics, into a group (Killen et al., 2002). Youth' social exclusion is therefore, often caused by stereotypes, prejudicial attitudes, and negative biases, as a function of moral concerns, group identity, group norms, outgroup threat and stereotypic assumptions (Rutland et al., 2010). This dissertation offers a contribution to the present literature in terms of explanation of the motives behind youth's engagement in ethnic bullying.

1) The role of Prejudice in Ethnic Bullying

First, to date, there are no studies that have quantitatively synthesized (i.e., meta-analysis) the association between having negative attitudes towards minorities (e.g., prejudicial attitudes,

stereotypes, negative biases), and actively engaging in ethnic bullying. For this reason, our first study aimed at providing a comprehensive understanding of the individual and contextual factors associated with it. A systematic review and meta-analysis were performed in order to synthesises the state of art of this new kind of bullying (i.e., ethnic bullying) that represents a critical issue for our society. Findings highlighted a significant association between negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities (i.e., prejudice) and ethnic harassment (i.e., ethnic bullying, discrimination), among young population (i.e., primary, and secondary schoolers). Besides, both youth who hold negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities, or those who derive from classmates (i.e., peers in formal contexts), or best friends (i.e., peers in informal contexts), have the same probability to get involved in ethnic bullying.

Therefore, given that ethnic bullying is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, our first contribution (Chapter 1) underlined the need to deepen the effect of other contextual influences (i.e., school and family members) on youth's development of the attitude (i.e., prejudice) and the consequent behaviour (i.e., ethnic bullying).

2) The role of the context: interplay of multiple levels of attitudes

Etiological perspectives on aggression have progressed from the view of aggression as an innate characteristic in all humans to the more recent conception that aggression reflects some degree of learning from our surroundings (e.g., Eron, 1994). From a social learning perspective, Bandura (1991) has argued that the external environment contributes, in large part, to acquiring and maintaining aggression. In this sense, it was developed the idea that people lean from observing and imitating the behaviour modelled by others.

The present investigation used this theory as a framework by examining the social context within which bullying occurs during early adolescence. Children learn from role models, including

adults and peers, to use aggressive means to achieve their goals. School represents a crucial social environment for peer relations in terms of adolescents' need of connectedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The factors linked to youth victimization within schools have drawn increasing attention, since schools are institutions of socialization and education. Given the amount of time youth spend at school, it is likely that adults at school can play an important role in buffering other contextual influences (i.e., parents).

According to this conclusion, this dissertation aimed at analysing the interplay of multiple contexts (i.e., family and school) in the association between negative attitudes and youth's engagement in ethnic bullying. Study 2 consisted in a multilevel regression analysis that allowed us to differentiate between individual and classroom's levels, in order to examine the extent to which the perception that each student have of their parents' prejudice, together with the self-reported tolerant attitudes towards ethnic minorities exhibited by the class context, would have on their ethnic bullying behaviours.

3) Moderators in the relationship between prejudice and ethnic bullying

Following the results of the meta-analysis (Chapter 1), negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities have represented an important characteristic that impacted the way youth behave against them. Several studies have shown that young people victimize or harass their peers in school in light of their ethnic background (Larochette et al., 2010; Monks et al., 2008; Strohmeier et al., 2011) and as a consequence of their negative attitudes toward immigrants (Bayram Özdemir et al., 2016). It is assumed that prejudice is the main predictor of inter-ethnic relational issues at school, including ethnic bullying (Dessel, 2010). Nevertheless, this dissertation highlights possible protective factor that fosters and strengthens positive interethnic relationships.

School teachers: when teachers can recognize, and are aware on how to intervene against bullying, they implicitly communicate that it is not acceptable, and students become less inclined to engage in these bad behaviours (Campaert et al., 2017; De Luca et al., 2019). Results from Chapter 2 highlighted that schoolteachers have a crucial role in preventing negative influences from the family. Those classes where teachers reported low levels of tolerance towards ethnic minorities, their students' perception of prejudice coming from their families was significantly related with their involvement in ethnic bullying. Conversely, in classes with high levels of teachers' tolerance, parental prejudice was no longer a risk factor for the engagement in ethnic bullying. This finding is fundamental in order to implement effective interventions against bullying and ethnic discrimination.

The involvement of teachers has a long history of success in prevention projects. In the field of bullying prevention, one of the most effective is the KiVa program (Salmivalli et al., 2010), developed at the University of Turku, in Finland. KiVa rely most of its efficacy on the active involvement of teachers with a specific teacher's training. An important aim of the training was to extend the education of those participating in the face-to-face training, to the whole-school personnel, by motivating them to start implementing KiVa as recommended. This program provides evidence of effectiveness also in Italy (Nocentini & Menesini, 2016), highlighting a reduction in traditional bullying, victimization and pro-bullying attitudes in primary schools and increased pro-victim attitudes and empathy toward the victim in primary and middle schools. This evidence highlights the importance to actively involve teachers in bullying prevention projects (e.g., NoTrap!). Nevertheless, this program does not take into consideration bullying towards ethnic minorities. This is why, this dissertation's empirical studies (Study 2 and Study 3) are based on a three-year longitudinal project (PRIN- Project of National Interest) called *"Prejudicial*

bullying involving ethnic groups: Understanding mechanisms and translating knowledge into effective interventions" (Caravita, Camodeca, & Menesini, 2017), that aimed at examining the psychological mechanism related to Prejudicial Ethnic Bullying (PEB) and developing anti-PEB evidence-based interventions.

To date, it is the only intervention that focuses on preventing ethnic bullying behaviours among middle and high school students, that expands the NoTrap! Program (Palladino et al., 2016), by implementing a new module that specifically sensitize the field of prejudicial ethnic bullying. Again, the involvement of teachers is prioritized and sees a long and intense teachers' training. Moreover, the Italian attention to the prevention of bullying dynamic through the involvement of teachers is also carried out by the Elisa Platform developed by the Laboratory of Longitudinal Studies in Developmental Psychology, lead by Professor Ersilia Menesini. It provides online courses to promote knowledge and psycho-educative skills for preventing bullying and cyberbullying at school. Recently, the need to focus on different forms of prejudicial bullying was fulfilled with the development of a new course. Today, there are more than 2500 schools with at least one teacher who's following the 4-hours education.

Empathy as a mediator: Empathy is a multidimensional phenomenon which comprises both the cognitive ability of perspective-taking, and the affective component of concern for others' feelings and emotions (Davis, 1983). Usually, it is seen as the ability to share someone else's emotions or experiences by imagining (and feeling) what it would be like to be in that person's situation. It's not difficult to imagine its beneficial contribution to improve the understanding and sympathy between majority and minority groups and avoid conflicts and negative behaviours such ethnic bullying. As a matter of fact, several studies have hypothesized the relationship between low empathy traits and bullying (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006; Smith & Thompson, 2017), highlighting

empathy's protective role in facilitating prosocial behaviours and inhibiting the anti-social ones. The increase of multiculturality into classroom settings, have driven researchers to develop a mor specific kind of empathy: ethnocultural empathy.

Ethnocultural empathy refers to the empathic competence directed toward people from ethnic cultural groups who are different from one's own (Wang et al., 2003). The subscale of the "Empathic Feeling and Expression" was used. In particular, why this specific component of empathy is so important when we're dealing with ethnicity? Because the affective component truly enables individuals of feeling others' emotions through oneself. It is necessary to put oneself in the place of another and feel what they are feeling (instead of just imagining it) to understand their perspective on that deeper, empathetic level. This "Empathic Concern" trait enables valuing of others' welfare, sensitizes to their needs and negative experiences, and motivates to alleviate their distress (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990). Youth who are better at empathetic feeling others, are better equipped for the situations of intergroup contact; that is, they are better at making friends with children who are different from them and at overcoming these differences (Lease & Blake, 2005). In fact, empathy provides lenses through which children and adolescents experience intergroup environment (Rutland & Killen, 2015; Turner & Cameron, 2016).

Additionally, empathy consistently mediates the link between intergroup contact and prejudice (see meta-analysis by Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). In that sense, our Study 3 contributes to the current literature highlighting that also this specific type of empathy (i.e., ethnocultural empathy), mediate the link between prejudice and ethnic bullying, and partially fulfil the need of more and deeper research on the ethnic minorities. Moreover, the use of a specific subscale that take into account the affective and behavioural component of empathy, is fundamental to detect its role in affecting and preventing ethnic bullying behaviours.

4.2 Methodological strengths of the dissertation

As a final contribution, this dissertation offers important insights in terms of methodology. First, the studies included have the strength of increasing knowledge on ethnic bullying using multi-level, multi-informants and longitudinal approaches.

The first methodological contribution of this dissertation deals with the fact of having simultaneously analyzed the influence of multiple contextual influences (i.e., parents, classmates, and teachers) that entangle ethnic bullying behaviours. Despite recent efforts to understand what contextual factors might affect adolescents' engagement in ethnic discrimination, most of existing research have focused on one context at a time (e.g., Bayram Özdemir & Özdemir, 2020; Bayram Özdemir et al., 2020). Adolescents are simultaneously exposed to the influence of multiple socialization agents, including parents, classmates, and teachers. Hence, perceiving social norms supporting cross-ethnic relations within the school environment (e.g., teachers' and peers' tolerance and positive attitudes towards minorities) may be crucial to prevent -or at least not detrimental, bullying behaviours. To date, study 2 is the first effort to answer the literature gap on the examination of the interplay of proximal social contexts (i.e., family and school context) on adolescents' behaviour. Following the "individual by context" perspective (Cicchetti, 1993; Rutter, 2014; Sameroff, 2014), the dissertation focused on the role of both individual and contextual mechanisms in the development of ethnic bullying among young adolescents. In fact, both individual (i.e., prejudice and ethnocultural empathy) and contextual (i.e., the influence of peers, parents, and teachers) factors are crucial in explaining why some youths are more at risk in the engagement in ethnic bullying.

Second, study 2 was made using a multi-informant approach. This approach involves taking assessments from multiple informants who share close relationships (De Los Reyes et al., 2013).

Our data allowed us to build a multi-level analysis combining both the perspective of the students, and the perspective of their class teachers. The same scale (Van Zalk et al., 2013) was presented to both informants to capture the real measure of adolescents' and teachers prejudicial and tolerant beliefs. This approach gives an important contribution about the protective effect of teachers' tolerant attitudes towards ethnic minorities, supporting current literature on the importance of promoting a multicultural education, where bullying and discrimination are morally unacceptable (De Luca et al., 2019; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2013).

Third, according to the lack of longitudinal studies, highlighted from the first study, our study 3 presents a longitudinal contribution to the current scientific literature. This chapter offered a fundamental insight about the longitudinal mediation of empathy in the relation between prejudice and ethnic bullying. In fact, in agreement with socio cognitive developmental theory, with the advancement of the ability to empathize and to think in relative rather than absolute terms, children learn to understand the feelings and perspective of members of the outgroups. Although basic aspects of socio cognitive functioning are reported to appear in childhood (Ensink & Mayes, 2010), more complex aspects continue to develop in adolescence (Eisenberg et al., 1991). Therefore, adolescence is not only a developmental time in which one begins to define a sense of self, but it is also a time when considering one's level of belonging to various social groups and contexts makes someone especially vulnerable. Even though adolescence is a period of continuous changes and influences, little research is given to the longitudinal development of individual characteristics. Adolescence is a developmental stage when a sense of self and belonging become increasingly important (Steinberg, 2014). Thus, it's especially in this period that developmental trajectories shift according to contextual influences. Social psychological theories have highlighted the role of social contexts (parents, peers; Miklikowska, 2017) in determining youth's attitudes

towards minorities. Changes in prejudicial attitudes towards minorities are plausible and may vary according to youth's age. This dissertation wants to contribute to the analysis of age-related developmental changes, with both the empirical studies (Study 2 and 3).

4.3 Limitations of the present dissertation

The present dissertation must be interpreted considering some limitations.

First, according to the systematic review and meta-analysis' results highlighting the need of more longitudinal studies, the initial aim of Study 2, was to test the interplay of multiple contexts, including the school one, on students' ethnic bullying behaviours, using a longitudinal sample. Unfortunately, as the COVID-19 pandemic rapidly spread across the world in 2020, several restrictions were imposed. The Italian government declared national lockdown and closed all schools on February 23rd in order to prevent the spread of the virus. As a result, students' context dramatically changed. It was no longer possible for them to interact with their teachers, friends, or classmates, and not possible for us to explore their influence on the behaviour. It was only through a cross-sectional design, using data collected before COVID-19, that the research goals about the interplay between contextual factors and adolescent bullying behaviors could still be answered.

According to this, it would have been interesting to also look for the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on adolescents' prejudice and empathy trajectories, especially during lockdown. Emerging research indicates that racism and xenophobia have increased during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (Clissold et al. 2020). As a result, minority groups across European countries as well as the United States have experienced racism, discrimination and hate crimes under the heightened COVID-19 context (Croucher et al., 2020; Devakumar et al., 2020). Our dissertation does not take into consideration the possible effect that this situation might have had on our ethnic

minority (e.g., increase of fear and stress) and majority (e.g., by exacerbating anti-immigrant attitudes) sample.

Second, our dissertation aims at analysing ethnic bullying as a "whole" process, so it would have been interesting to make a distinction between different minority groups migrated into our country, and investigate who were the targets of ethnic bullying, but also from whom it was perpetrated. The risk in doing such parcel out, laid in the difficulty of segmentize different cultures resulting in probably too strict categorizations. Italy is a country that is seeing migration as recent process, at least compared to the American's history, so the idea of addressing "ethnic minority group" as a whole, involve other important issues, such as acculturation. In fact, when migrating, people face a range of unfamiliar contexts and relationships that demand adaptive responses, which includes achieving a balance between cultural continuity (i.e., retain ideals, values, and beliefs from their original culture) and cultural change (i.e., shed their culture and adopt ideals, values, and beliefs of the receiving society and seek participation with it). Adolescents face acculturation at a time when they are involved in the typical negotiations associated with the construction of a personal identity that characterize this developmental period (Berry et al., 2006; Kennedy & MacNeela, 2014). Therefore, it is plausible that adolescent migrants, who are trying to merge with the host country, are going towards a different transitional process. Along with this, this dissertation is the first effort that examine the negative implications that belonging to a minority group takes with it, the role of prejudice in social exclusion and discrimination.

Considering this, also possible gender differences might have been tested. Existing research has found gender differences in the areas of prejudice toward out-groups, ethnocultural empathy and ethnic bullying. Adopting the distinction between explicit (conscious, slow, controlled) and implicit (unconscious, fast, automatic) attitudes (e.g. Banaji & Greenwald, 1995),

explicit prejudice was displayed more among men (e.g., Akrami et al., 2000), and implicit prejudice was systematically higher among women (e.g., Ekehammar et al., 2003). Gender differences on ethnocultural empathy traits have also been discussed, showing that women are more ethnoculturally empathic than man (Wang et al., 2003; Cunidiff & Komarraju, 2008). Moreover, such gender differences may also be reflected in the way adolescents harass peers due to their immigrant background (e.g., Bayram Özdemir et al., 2016; Larochette et al., 2010). Although gender differences are well documented, as mentioned above, the present dissertation did not include the effect of gender in the analyses of chapters 2 and 3, due to methodological reasons. Thus, future research should address this gap by considering the effect of gender on broader developmental changes in ethnic bullying.

Moreover, also some methodological issues need to be discussed. First, self-report measures were used. Given the sensitive themes treated with this dissertation (i.e., ethnic bullying, prejudicial attitudes, ethnoculturally empathy traits), it could be argued that social desirability biased adolescents' reports. Nevertheless, as concerns empathy reports, research highlight that this self-judged competence is in agreement with, for instance, reports of their parents' (Cliffordson, 2001). This limitation was partially solved, by using a multi-informant analysis with the Study 2, where it was considered also teachers reports. On the contrary, as for the measure of parents' prejudicial attitudes towards ethnic minorities, it was asked students to respond as if they were thinking as their parents. This limits the generalizability of the study results, since children might not know their parents' attitudes, either because they are rarely openly expressed, or because they might misinterpret their parents' attitudes in light of their own (e.g., Aboud & Doyle, 1996; Gniewosz & Noak, 2015).

Finally, a specific subscale of SEE (Wang et al., 2003), was used to assess the affective component of empathy in the Study 3. Specifically, it explores the emotional reactions an individual experiences when observing or learning about the discriminatory experiences and emotions of people from different ethnic backgrounds (e.g., "*I share the anger of people who suffer injustice because of their ethnicity/origin*" or "*It bothers me to know that other people's unfortunate experiences depend on their ethnicity/origin"*), but also the concern about conveying one's own discriminatory attitudes to members of other ethnic groups, through words, and active actions against the perpetrator (i.e., "*I express my opinion on discrimination against people of different ethnicity/origin*" or "*When I know that my friends are being treated unfairly because of their ethnicity/origin I defend them"*). Thus, it might be interesting to use a general measure of empathy, consisting of both perspective taking and empathic concern's competences (e.g., IRI; Davis, 1983), to detect whether our results are replicated.

4.4 Future research directions

Overall, the present dissertation opens new directions in the field of ethnic bullying prevention. Starting from the results of our meta-analysis, it appears to be necessary to increase research on prejudicial ethnic bullying. Thus, literature research should guarantee a starting point for developing interventions aimed at enhancing knowledge of the antecedents of ethnic bullying (i.e., having negative attitudes towards them/prejudice). Moreover, according to a socio-ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in considering these dynamics, and according to the results of Study 2 and 3, the external environment, together with individual characteristics, contributes in large part into acquiring and maintaining negative attitudes towards people with different ethnicity. Indeed, Study 1 highlighted a need to deepen research on possible socializing agents in affecting adolescents' bad behaviour (i.e., ethnic bullying). Future studies should take into consideration

multi-informant collection (Study 2), but also as much contextual dynamics as possible to effectively evaluate the strength of association between external influences on prejudicial attitudes and the involvement in ethnic bullying.

Moreover, following the results from the systematic review (Study 1), a universal definition of "ethnicity" is needed. The construct of "race", typically used in the American context, divides people into groups on the basis of physical characteristics, while "ethnicity" is more concerned with shared cultural or national identity (e.g., Betancourt & Lopez, 1993), and it is of common use in European countries. Ethnicity is a multi-faceted construct (Bhopal, 2004). When determining the distinguishing attributes which define an ethnic group, there is no universally agreed definition to make this distinction. Nevertheless, a recent systematic review found that the operationalization of ethnicity and the area of data collection play a role for both bullying perpetration and victimization (Basilici et al., 2022). Thus, even though existing literature have not reached a universal agreement on the definition of ethnicity, future directions should menage to understand its weight in the analysis of the predictors of ethnic bullying. Is it always a matter of prejudicial attitudes that motives majority people to act against every ethnic minority groups or is it something else? What impact the most in bullying against ethnic minorities? The way they look? The country they belong to? These are few questions that future studies should take into consideration.

In addition to this, another important consideration for further studies is related to possible cross-cultural differences not only in terms of different definitions of ethnicity (i.e., race vs ethnic background), but also in the definition of the determinants of the behaviour. In fact, it might be that when replicating the objectives of this dissertation in other countries, there might intervene other cultural factors (e.g., differences between Eastern and Western countries; collectivist vs individualist cultures).

In conclusion, future interventions should focus on the implementation of protocols that facilitate and support the involvement of school components (i.e., especially teachers; Study 2) to reduce individual forms of xenophobia (i.e., by enhancing empathic feelings towards diversity; Study 3), thus resulting in preventing the behaviour. If social psychology's goal is to continue to make useful contributions to prejudice reduction techniques, we need to identify psychological mechanisms that might be manipulated in interventions. It is known that the main influence on people's behaviour is the behaviour of other people, particularly people they like (e.g., friends) and people in authority (e.g., parents, teachers) (Finkelstein, 2011; Dawnay & Shah, 2005). People learn their behaviour from watching others and look to others for guidance on how to act (a phenomenon called social proof), deriving norms about what is appropriate and accepted behaviour (Finkelstein, 2011). According to the behavioural economics discipline, when our actual behaviour diverges from our expectation of how we usually behave (or from our perception of how others expect us to behave) we often feel uncomfortable. It is possible to change someone's behaviour by focusing on a range of behaviours that exhibit systematic patterns. Thus, future directions might take into consideration the applications of this discipline's strategies to make an impact on effective behaviour changing strategies. In might be interesting to start from Nudge strategies (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009) which positively influence several behaviours of public concern (decreasing tobacco-use increasing physical exercise, and encouraging financial planning; Marteau et al., 2011), and expand its application in ethnic aggression reduction.

This dissertation findings suggest that multicomponent interventions that focus on enhancing specific individual characteristics (i.e., empathy) and preventing negative influences from the proximal social context (i.e., parental prejudice) by straightening those coming from the school context (i.e., teachers), appears to be promising in terms of ethnic bullying prevention.

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