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Interethnic Relations in Adolescence: Risk and Protective Factors

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General Introduction

Adolescence is a crucial stage of human development that requires individuals to navigate many intricate physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes. These changes expose adolescents to various new social and educational challenges concurrently with numerous other alterations in their physical and psychological experiences.

So, during adolescence, individuals find themselves immersed in more extensive and intricate social networks, with peer relationships taking on greater significance in their lives. Indeed, young people can be significantly influenced by their social interactions, which may result in potentially positive or negative outcomes for their health. Therefore, understanding the complex dynamics of peer relationships is of primary importance for policymakers, educators, and healthcare professionals. This understanding constitutes a valuable aid in creating supportive and inclusive environments that foster positive peer relationships while addressing the challenges associated with negative peer influence. By harnessing the potential of peer relationships in a constructive manner, we can enhance the health and well-being of young individuals and, in turn, promote healthier communities as a whole.

Today's adolescent generation is growing up in increasingly ethnically diverse environments. In this context, fostering positive interactions among individuals from various ethnic and racial backgrounds is crucial for building a more equitable and just society. However, while some young individuals embrace this diversity and actively seek opportunities to engage with various perspectives, others may be more hesitant to interact with those from different ethnic backgrounds. In some cases, individuals may even exhibit hostile behaviors, such as bullying.

Peer bullying is a prevalent form of violence among children and adolescents, which involves deliberate actions, either by an individual or a group, repeatedly targeting a victim who can not

defend themselves (Olweus, 1993). These acts of violence include verbal attacks like name-calling and threats, physical behaviors such as hitting and property damage, and relational or social aggression, including social exclusion and spreading rumors. Recently, it has also extended to include cyberbullying, carried out over the internet and new technologies (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017).

It is important to note that victimization experiences can have detrimental effects on the psychosocial well-being and behavioral adjustment of young people. Previous research has indicated that victimized adolescents tend to report heightened feelings of loneliness and poorer overall health (Fekkes et al., 2006), along with increased levels of anxiety and depression, when compared to their non-bullied peers (Christina et al., 2021). Furthermore, such exposure can disrupt the process of ethnic minority individuals integrating into the host society.

Concerning this, two lines of research have emerged regarding the study of bullying in the context of ethnic-cultural differences (Rodrìguez-Hidalgo et al., 2019). Some studies consider bullying victimization characterized by various acts of violence and motives underlying interpersonal aggression, including those related to racial discrimination (e.g., Collins et al., 2004; Strohmeier et al., 2011). Conversely, other researchers have distinguished ethnicity-based bullying, conceptualized as a form of peer victimization motivated explicitly by racial, ethnic, or cultural motives, from the traditional definition of the behavior (e.g., Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002, 2006; McKenney et al., 2006; Monks et al., 2008).

This type of bullying may encompass various forms of aggression, including physical, verbal, and relational acts — both direct and indirect — leading to potential physical and psychological harm to the victim (Rodrìguez-Hidalgo et al., 2019). Thus, the manifestations of traditional victimization and ethnicity-based bullying may appear similar. However, the distinction lies in the explicit

declaration of the aggressor, or the implicit motivation perceived by the victim, rooted in personal or ethnic-cultural motives (Monks et al., 2008; Rodrìguez-Hidalgo et al., 2019).

It is plausible to think that ethnic-cultural bullying more frequently involves students from ethnic minority groups. Nevertheless, previous meta-analytic evidence has shown that ethnic minority adolescents are not consistently bullied more than those of the ethnic majority, concluding that ethnicity, assessed as a demographic characteristic, exhibits no significant association with peer victimization (Vitoroulis & Vaillancourt, 2015). Thus, ethnicity per se does not constitute a risk factor for peer bullying. In line with the *socio-ecological model of human behavior* (Bronfenbrenner 1992), the *transactional framework of ethnicity-based bullying* (Kuldas et al., 2021) highlights that ethnic-cultural victimization should be considered as the result of the interaction between individual characteristics and contextual factors (e.g., ethnic composition of schools/classrooms). Furthermore, the model highlights two pivotal factors in the occurrence of ethnicity-based bullying: ethnical misfit and ethnical power imbalance (Kuldas et al., 2021).

Ethnic misfits encompass culturally inherited characteristics, such as values and religious beliefs, and genetically inherited traits, like skin color and other physical attributes. Bullies perceive these traits as deviations from the social norms of the ethnic majority or dominant group. Moreover, the *social misfit theory* (Wright et al., 1986) suggests that bullying may result from perceiving the victim as different or deviating from the norm within the peer group. Thus, instances of ethnicity-based bullying are more likely to occur when individuals from an ethnic minority are perceived as socially deviant from the norm.

Ethnic power imbalance refers to the numerical representation of ethnic majority and minority students in classrooms or schools, indicating the extent of heterogeneity or homogeneity within a given educational setting. According to *social dominance orientation theory* (Pratto et al., 1994;

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Sidanius & Pratto, 2001), ethnic majority students might engage in bullying or harassment against ethnic minority peers to assert their racial dominance. Specifically, racial dominance orientation involves the endorsement of ethnocultural ideologies or beliefs that provide moral justifications for oppressing other ethnic groups.

In summary, Kuldas and colleagues (2021) sustain that the risk of being victimized is not directly correlated with ethnicity. Nevertheless, they emphasize the need for further investigation into contingent factors affecting interethnic relations within the school context. Concerning this, migration constitutes a contextual factor that can influence the occurrence, motivations, and dynamics of bullying behavior (Fandrem et al., 2020). However, previous research reported mixed evidence regarding the prevalence rates of bullying victimization among migrant-origin adolescents. Although some studies have observed that students belonging to socially marginalized groups, including migrants, are at a higher risk of experiencing peer bullying (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Walsh et al., 2016), others have not reported differences in victimization between migrant and native youth (for a review, see Strohmeier et al., 2019). However, examining ethnic-cultural bullying, there is evidence that migrants have a higher risk of being bullied compared to their native counterparts (Maynard et al., 2016).

Migration refers to the movement of individuals, either permanently or temporarily, to a new geographic region. Overall, the estimated number of international migrants has increased over the past five decades (IOM, 2022). According to the latest *World Migration Report* of the International Organization on Migration (2022), the current global estimate is that there were around 281 million international migrants in the world in 2020, corresponding to 3.6% of the global population. Shares of international migrants in 2020 were exceptionally high in Europe, representing 12% of the total population (IOM, 2022).

Migrant-origin youth are defined as those with at least one foreign-born parent (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015, 2018). Those who personally undergo this change are identified as first-generation migrants. Second-generation migrants, on the other hand, are individuals born in the country of settlement but have at least one parent who migrated from another country.

Migrant-origin youth and their families encounter significant challenges when adapting to a new host culture. Compared to their native-born counterparts, their problematic behaviors typically align with migration-related risk or migrant advantage patterns. For instance, the *immigrant risk theory*, also known as the *migration morbidity hypothesis*, posits that the migration process places youth at risk for behavioral issues (Berry, 2006). First-generation youth are perceived as more vulnerable to such problems than second-generation and other native-born peers. This heightened vulnerability is attributed to the stress associated with factors like poverty, discrimination, and the adaptation to new cultural and linguistic norms (Bhugra, 2004). Supporting this theory, first-generation adolescents often report more internalizing problems than second-generation youth (Katsiaficas et al., 2013), with acculturative stress predicting these adverse outcomes (Sirin et al., 2013).

Conversely, the *immigrant advantage theory,* also referred to as the *immigrant paradox*, introduces a different perspective. This model suggests that first-generation youth exhibit fewer problem behaviors than their second-generation counterparts (García Coll & Marks, 2012). This duality in theoretical frameworks underscores the complexity of migrants' experiences and the nuanced interplay of factors influencing the well-being of immigrant youth.

Thus, according to the *integrative risk and resilience model for understanding the adaptation of immigrant-origin children and youth* (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015), the psychological development of migrant adolescents takes place across various cultures, depending on numerous acculturation

challenges involving the adoption of cultural and social norms within the receiving community. Simultaneously, they navigate the process of enculturation, wherein they uphold the cultural and social patterns of their family's origin. These tasks involve acquiring cultural competence, a crucial skill for positive adaptation in different social environments. Specifically, migrant youth are tasked with mastering the national language, thereby cultivating the ability to articulate thoughts clearly while discerning the nuances of culturally sensitive expressions. Simultaneously, these young individuals must establish connections with their peers and various ethnic groups. Therefore, the ability to understand and switch between the values and practices of both their culture of origin and the new culture is crucial for developing friendships with peers from other ethnic groups and building bridges between different communities. This may influence migrant psychosocial adaptation, especially in adolescence (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015).

Adolescence is also a crucial developmental phase for the formation of identity. During this period, individuals explore their identities and work on understanding who they are and who they want to become. Through the processes of exploring alternative identities and committing to choices in various areas of life, adolescents gradually realize their individuality and commonalities with their peers, becoming increasingly aware of their strengths and weaknesses as they navigate life's complexities (Marcia, 1989). However, as well as the normative developmental challenges typically faced by their native peers, adolescents with a migrant background must also address additional tasks. For instance, they may need to acquire a new language and adapt to the features of the new culture, all while concurrently assimilating and preserving their family's culture of origin (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015).

Developing a sense of ethnic identity, which is how individuals identify with their ethnic group, plays a significant role in adolescents' adjustment and behaviors (Phinney, 2003). Similar to

Marcia's *identity status model* (1980), the development of ethnic identity involves stages of exploration and commitment/resolution (Phinney, 1993; Umaña-Taylor, 2011).

Exploration involves enhancing one's understanding and familiarity with one's ethnic group through activities such as engaging in conversations with others about their ethnic background or actively seeking information about their cultural heritage (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). On the other hand, committing to one's ethnic identity implies individuals reaching a resolution regarding their membership in an ethnic group. Specifically, ethnic identity resolution entails understanding the significance of one's ethnic group membership and its importance in one's life (Umaña-Taylor, 2011).

In addition to exploration and resolution, another crucial aspect of ethnic identity pertains to feelings of affirmation (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). This construct is drawn from *social identity theory* (Tajfel et al., 1979), which suggests that individuals, in order to maintain a positive self-concept, tend to adopt favorable attitudes toward the social groups to which they belong. Therefore, the affirmation dimension refers to whether individuals hold positive feelings regarding their ethnic heritage. (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004; Umaña-Taylor, 2011).

Ethnic identity plays a crucial role in predicting individuals' psychosocial functioning and development (Umaña-Taylor, 2011). Indeed, existing research has highlighted that a strong ethnic-racial identity is associated with positive outcomes and a reduced likelihood of behavioral problems in adolescent development (Rivas Drake et al., 2014a; Umaña-Taylor & Rivas Drake, 2021). For instance, a positive sense of ethnic identity correlates with higher self-esteem, improved well-being, and reduced depressive symptoms in adolescents (Smith & Silva, 2011). Therefore, ethnic identity could be served as a protective factor for the psychological adaptation of young migrants.

Thus, the current research has two aims: first, to investigate distinct social and individual risk and protective factors impacting the psychological well-being of both native and migrant adolescents; second, to contribute to understanding their role in influencing positive interethnic relations among both groups.

The first aim is to enhance our understanding of the specific risk factors affecting the psychological and social adaptation of young individuals with a migrant background, contributing to mental health disparities among native and migrant adolescents. Specifically, two studies focused on the investigation of bullying victimization and ethnic discrimination among native and migrant adolescents in the school environment.

The second aim involves analyzing the potential protective role of ethnic identity in the social and psychological adjustment of native and migrant adolescents. Specifically, the investigation has focused on the predictive role of different dimensions of ethnic identity in the formation of positive interethnic relationships during adolescence.

This thesis is composed of four sections or chapters. The first section of this work focuses on mental health disparities among native and migrant adolescents in Italy, with a specific interest in the predictive roles of bullying victimization and perceived ethnic discrimination on the presence of social anxiety symptoms among secondary school students. Initially, a comprehensive literature review synthesizes the theoretical perspectives concerning the disparities in psychological adjustment observed among young migrants compared to their native counterparts. Additionally, the complex issue of school bullying is addressed by examining its characteristics and psychological repercussions on victimized adolescents. Particular attention is given to the internalizing problems often associated with these experiences. Following this theoretical introduction, a research study is presented to investigate whether the differences in internalizing

problems among native and migrant adolescents can be attributed to the heightened risk of victimization experienced by students belonging to ethnic minority groups to the heightened risk of victimization experienced by students belonging to ethnic minority groups. A detailed presentation of the participants, the procedures employed, the methodology adopted, and the results obtained are provided. The study's findings are discussed within the framework of existing scientific literature, addressing its limitations and broader implications.

In the second chapter, the exploration of the relationship between experiences of victimization and internalizing problems in both native and migrant adolescents is contextualized within the framework of the *social information processing model* and the *minority stress model*. The first paragraph introduces the two models in the context of victimization experiences. Subsequently, a review of prior research exploring the social cognition of students who have experienced bullying is provided, with a specific emphasis on negative attribution styles. Furthermore, Meyer's (1995) conceptualization of social stigma-related stress encountered by individuals belonging to social minorities is presented, paving the way for a discussion of its psychological consequences in internalizing problems.

Following this, a research study is presented, which investigates how the interplay between depressive attribution style of interpreting negative social interactions may intersect with the migratory background in explaining internalizing problems associated with peer victimization. An overview of the study's participants, the procedures employed, the methodology utilized, and the results obtained are presented. The study's findings are then discussed within the context of existing scientific literature, with attention to addressing its limitations and exploring its implications.

The third section focuses on examining the positive aspects associated with the development of ethnic identity during adolescence, particularly in the Latin American cultural context. This section explicitly investigates the relationship between ethnic identity and prosocial development in Latin American adolescents. A narrative review of the scientific literature introduces the topics under study, defines the constructs, and provides an interpretation of their association in the context of a positive perspective on youth development. Carlo and Padilla-Walker's *sociocultural model of prosocial behaviors* (2019; 2020), derived from the recent research on adolescents with a Latin heritage, is subsequently introduced. The role of potential protective factors, such as self-esteem and openness to relations with other ethnic groups, is then reviewed. Following this, a cross-cultural study is presented to investigate the relationship between ethnic identity and prosocial behavior, analyzing the mediating role of self-esteem and inter-ethnic group interactions among Chilean and Colombian adolescents. The research was conducted during a visiting experience at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile in Santiago, Chile, as part of the doctoral program under the supervision of Professor Paula Luengo Kanacri. The third chapter provides a detailed presentation of the participants, the procedures employed, the methodology adopted, and the results obtained. The study's findings are discussed within the framework of existing scientific literature, addressing its limitations and broader implications.

Finally, the final section offers a comprehensive discussion of the findings, emphasizing the theoretical and practical implications, acknowledging limitations, and suggesting potential future directions.

1. Peer Victimization and Social Anxiety in Adolescence: A Comparison between Migrant and Native Students in Italy

1.1. Introduction

In recent years, Europe has witnessed significant growth in international migration, to the extent that some experts have declared a "migration crisis" (Buonanno, 2017; Dragostinova, 2016). One result of the shifting demographics has been an increased number of adolescents from ethnic minority backgrounds attending schools in European countries (McAuliffe & Khadria, 2020). In the Italian context, children of migrants accounted for approximately 20% of the total migrant population in 2020, comprising 1,022,471 individuals under the age of 18 years (ISTAT, 2020). This group also represented 11% of the resident youth population, signifying a notable increase over the past two decades (ISTAT, 2020). A similar population change has also been observed within the education system. Between 1999 and 2008, the number of students with non-Italian citizenship showed an astonishing increase of 510,000 students. Although the growth rate decelerated in the subsequent decade, it remained substantial, at 27.3%. Today, most non-Italian students are second-generation migrants, having been born in Italy to non-Italian parents. In the 2020/2021 academic year, Italian schools accommodated 865,388 students of migrant origin, constituting 10% of the total student population (MIUR, 2022). In this multi-ethnic context, adolescents (both native and migrant) face a distinctive developmental challenge, requiring them to adapt and thrive in a culturally heterogeneous society and effectively embrace diversity as part of their growth (Larson, 2002). Therefore, it is essential to actively promote the inclusion of migrant students in schools by fostering positive inter-ethnic relationships and addressing instances of victimization and discrimination within the school environment.

Bullying victimization refers to the deliberate and repetitive infliction of harm upon an individual by one or more peers, who typically possess some form of power advantage (Farrington, 1993;

Olweus, 1993). This definition encompasses a wide range of aggressive acts, which can be classified into four types: (1) verbal aggression, including name-calling and threatening; (2) physical attack, including hitting a person or damaging property; (3) relational or social aggression, including social exclusion and the spreading of rumors; and (4) cyberbullying, including attacks carried out over the internet and other technologies (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Monks & Smith, 2006; Olweus, 1993; Smith, 2014). Different individual (e.g., differences in physical strength) and social factors (e.g., hierarchical status within a group) contribute to determining the precise power imbalance that characterizes the relationship between a bully and a victim (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). For this reason, not all adolescents face the same risk of bullying victimization. Many studies have examined the factors influencing the risk of victimization during adolescence, yielding substantial evidence regarding the predictive roles played by a wide range of individual and interpersonal factors (Card et al., 2008; Card & Hodges, 2008; Troop-Gordon, 2017). For instance, some authors have observed that migrant and ethnic minority youth tend to be more frequently harassed by children and adolescents (Alivernini et al., 2019; Graham & Juvonen, 2002; Pistella et al., 2020). According to the *social misfits theory* (Wright et al., 1986), ethnic minority students may be more frequent targets of bullying behavior due to their deviation from the norms of the majority group, particularly when they belong to a culture that is very distant and different from the dominant one.

Within the scientific literature on peer victimization, researchers have distinguished ethnicity-based bullying from the traditional definition of the phenomenon (Rodrìguez-Hidalgo et al., 2019). This type of bullying may include direct forms of harassment, such as the use of racial epithets and taunts, along with derogatory references to culturally specific costumes. It may also involve indirect aggression, such as social exclusion from a peer group based on ethnic differences (Kuldas

et al., 2021). Similar to the traditional conceptualization, ethnicity-based bullying is characterized by aggressive intent, repetition, and an imbalance of power. However, both victims and perpetrators in these instances acknowledge the racial motivation underlying the behaviors (Monks et al., 2008; Rodrìguez-Hidalgo et al., 2019). Thus, ethnic harassment is defined as any violent act that appears to have a motivation rooted in racism or when there is a coexistence of racial, ethnic, or cultural motives (Kuldas et al., 2021). In addition to this, bullying based on ethnicity could be as prevalent and as hurtful as, or even more hurtful than, general bullying (Hightow-Weidman et al., 2011). Finally, a recent study conducted in the Italian context (Palladino et al., 2020) showed that students born abroad without Italian citizenship are more likely to experience ethnic victimization compared to adolescents born in Italy with at least one Italian parent.

Considering that previous research has consistently found an association between peer victimization and psychosocial maladjustment, particularly concerning internalizing problems such as depression and anxiety (Arseneault, 2017; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Reijntjes et al., 2010; Silberg et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2015), the present study aimed at investigating whether differences in victimization and experiences of ethnic discrimination might contribute to explaining mental health disparities between native and migrant adolescents in Italy.

1.1.1. Adjustment Outcomes among Migrant Youth

Studies investigating the psychophysical health of migrants have given rise to two contrasting theoretical perspectives: the *immigrant advantage theory* and the *migration morbidity hypothesis* (Dimitrova et al., 2017; Tilley et al., 2021). The immigrant advantage theory, often referred to as the *immigrant paradox*, delineates a pattern whereby first-generation migrants, despite having fewer economic and social resources and experiencing greater stress associated with acculturation and migration, report better psychological adjustment than their second-generation counterparts

(García Coll & Marks, 2012). While the majority of the evidence for this paradox has stemmed from research based in the United States and Canada (for a review, Tilley et al., 2021), some European research has also provided evidence for its veracity (Sam et al., 2008). Specifically, previous European studies have indicated that migrant groups, in comparison to their non-migrant counterparts, exhibit lower rates of internalizing symptoms such as depression and anxiety (Slodnjak et al., 2002; Stevens et al., 2003; Vaage et al., 2009; van Geel & Vedder, 2010; Vollebergh et al., 2005), as well as lower rates of externalizing problems such as substance and alcohol use (Amundsen et al., 2005) and fewer aggressive behaviors (Dimitrova & Chasiotis, 2012). Similarly, European research on academic attitudes and behaviors has also generated evidence to support the paradox, showing that migrant adolescents tend to demonstrate better school adjustment in terms of self-reported orientations toward schooling, perceived behavior problems within an academic setting (Liebkind et al., 2004), and levels of school motivation (Vedder et al., 2005), compared to their native peers.

In light of the growing scientific evidence in support of the healthy migrant effect, recent explanations have been proposed to clarify the mechanisms behind this phenomenon. For instance, some authors have hypothesized that the pattern largely relies on immigration selection processes and the return migration of those who have experienced significant adaptation difficulties or developed severe health issues due to the migration process (Shoer & Roelf, 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). In more detail, two immigration selection processes may be relevant: first, the host country's facilitation of the migration of individuals with better socioeconomic and health conditions; and second, within the home country, individuals' self-selection to migrate, suggesting their capability of enduring the process.

Conversely, the migration morbidity hypothesis, also known as the *acculturation strain theory*, is rooted in the longstanding assumption that the migration process results in an increased risk of problematic behaviors among migrant youth (Berry et al., 2006). Specifically, foreign-born or first-generation migrant youth are considered more susceptible to psychological maladjustment than their second-generation migrant or native-born peers, due to the stressors associated with poverty, discrimination, and adaptation to new cultural and linguistic norms (Bhugra, 2004). According to this theory, migrant adolescents are likely to report a higher prevalence of internalizing problems than their counterparts (Katsiaficas et al., 2013), with acculturative stress identified as a crucial predictor of these adverse outcomes (Sirin et al., 2013). Additionally, many first-generation migrant youths are victims of ethnic discrimination, which can increase their risk of developing internalizing problems (Katsiaficas et al., 2013; Maynard et al., 2016). According to the *minority stress model* (Meyer, 1995), individuals belonging to a social minority group face adverse living conditions within their social environment, representing stressors that place them at greater risk of developing mental health problems. According to Meyer (1995), social minority individuals, including migrants, also face chronic social stress from daily experiences of discrimination and prejudice.

The contrasting findings within the literature emphasize the imperative for a comprehensive investigation into the disparities in mental health between native-born individuals and migrants, analyzing the roles played by individual, societal, and cultural factors. Indeed, recent meta-analytic reviews on this subject (Dimitrova, 2016; Tilley et al., 2021) have indicated that the psychological adaptation of migrants, be this advantageous or disadvantageous, is not exclusively determined by migratory history. Instead, it is associated with a multifaceted interplay of risk and protective factors that intersect with ethnic heritage, collectively shaping mental health outcomes.

1.1.2. Bullying Victimization and Internalizing Problems among Adolescents

Previous research has extensively demonstrated the existence of a relationship between peer victimization and psychological maladjustment, specifically concerning internalizing problems such as depression and anxiety (Arseneault, 2017; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Reijntjes et al., 2010; Silberg et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2015). Within this literature, particular attention has been given to social anxiety. Social anxiety entails a pervasive fear of and avoidance of social situations, driven by the anticipation of negative evaluations by others (Stein & Stein, 2008). These symptoms can manifest in specific situations or across social contexts, causing significant psychological distress that may have broader implications for an individual's overall functioning (Katzelnick & Greist, 2001). The developmental stage of adolescence is one in which individuals are highly vulnerable to experiencing social anxiety symptoms (Rapee & Spence, 2004). This is because, during this stage, adolescents' interest in peer social relationships tends to intensify, assuming a pivotal role in their development of a self-concept and identity. This can heighten the distress and fear associated with social interactions, which form the core symptomatic aspects of social anxiety.

Consistent with this perspective, peer relationships involving negative evaluations (e.g., peer victimization) are likely to exert the most significant influence on the development and persistence of social anxiety during adolescence (Wong & Rapee, 2016). Regarding potential mechanisms through which peer victimization may contribute to subsequent internalizing issues (e.g., social anxiety), developmental theories suggest that negative beliefs and self-evaluations often induced by this type of social experience may lead to enduring problems related to self-esteem and negative emotions (Wang, 2011). For instance, the *interpersonal risk model* posits that adverse interpersonal interactions represent significant stressors in the lives of children and adolescents (Forbes et al., 2019; Noret et al., 2018). According to this theory, bullying constitutes a crucial risk factor for the

satisfaction of adolescents' fundamental belongingness needs, linked to internalizing problems (Kochel et al., 2012). Furthermore, victimization typically elicits negative emotional states, encompassing feelings of humiliation, fear, shame, and hopelessness, which represent characteristic facets of internalizing problems (Cole et al., 2014; Hamilton et al., 2013; Irwin et al., 2019), and it also tends to result in heightened levels of rumination (Barchia & Bussey, 2010). In line with this, recent meta-analytic studies have provided empirical evidence for the predictive role played by peer victimization in the development of internalizing symptoms (Liao et al., 2022; Moore et al., 2017).

However, recent studies have suggested that the relationship between peer victimization and internalizing symptoms may not be strictly unidirectional. While there is clear evidence indicating that peer victimization can lead to the development of internalizing symptoms such as anxiety and depression, there is also a growing body of research highlighting a bidirectional relationship (Christina et al., 2021; Liao et al., 2022). According to symptom-driven models, children and adolescents with internalizing symptoms may exhibit behaviors or emotional responses that make them more susceptible to peer victimization (Carthy et al., 2010; Forbes et al., 2019). For example, a child with high levels of social anxiety may withdraw from social interactions, making them an easier target for bullies. Similarly, children experiencing depression may display signs of emotional distress that can attract hostile attention from peers. Additionally, Reijntjes et al. (2010) suggested that individuals dealing with internalizing issues may find it harder to defend themselves when confronted with aggression, and this may lead to their continued victimization, thereby further reinforcing their status as victims. Support for this idea comes from recent research (Ji et al., 2018; Kochel et al., 2012) highlighting that internalizing problems tend to compromise psychosocial adjustment by making individuals more vulnerable to victimization. This reciprocal association

between peer victimization and internalizing problems has been confirmed by meta-analytic evidence and shown to be consistent across cultures (Christina et al., 2021; Liao et al., 2022). In particular, the bidirectional relationship underscores the complex interplay between internalizing symptoms and peer victimization, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics to develop effective intervention strategies for children and adolescents facing these challenges.

1.2. Aims and Hypotheses

The present study aimed at investigating bullying victimization experiences and social anxiety among native and migrant adolescents in Italy. Specifically, the research pursued three main objectives: (1) exploring differences between natives and first- and second-generation migrants regarding experienced victimization episodes; (2) analyzing the indirect effect of migrant status on the presence of social anxiety symptoms, mediated by bullying victimization; and (3) investigating the associations between reflected minority categorization, perceived ethnic discrimination at school and the presence of social anxiety symptoms in the subgroup of migrant students.

Based on previous research (Alivernini et al., 2019; Pistella et al., 2020; Stevens et al., 2020), it was hypothesized that there would be more reports of bullying victimization experiences among migrant students, compared to natives. Consequently, higher victimization was expected to be associated with more severe social anxiety symptoms. According to the minority stress model (Clark et al., 1999; Meyer, 1995; 2003), it was further hypothesized that migrant students who feel perceived by others as a member of a ethnic minority group, would be more prone to developing internalizing symptoms such as social anxiety, due to the heightened risk of experiencing discrimination.

1.3. Method

1.3.1. Participants and procedures

The sample comprised 527 secondary school students (45% girls; 18% migrants), aged 16 to 21 years (M_{age} = 17.47, SD = 1.01), enrolled in two schools in the province of Rome that were selected on the basis of their willingness to participate. Following approval from the school administrators, informative letters and consent forms were distributed to students and parents. Subsequently, self-report questionnaires were administered during regular school hours. Students who provided verbal assent and had parental authorization completed paper-and-pencil questionnaires over a duration of approximately 30 minutes. In each classroom, two research assistants were present to explain the activity, provide instruction, and address any participant concerns. Confidentiality of the results and the voluntary nature of participation were ensured. The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of the Department of Developmental and Social Psychology at Sapienza University of Rome.

1.3.2. Measures

Bullying Victimization. Following the definition of victimization experiences that adolescents may encounter in the school context, the Florence Victimization and Bullying Scales (Palladino et al., 2016; Palladino et al., 2020) were administered to investigate the frequency with which participants had experienced or engaged in various forms of physical, verbal, and indirect aggression over the prior 2 months. The Florence Victimization and Bullying Scales are comprised of 22 items rated on 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*several times a week*). Among these, 11 items ask about victimization (e.g., "I have been physically attacked"), with 4 items specifically addressing ethnic-based bullying (e.g., "I have been excluded due to my ethnicity"). The remaining 11 items assess bullying behaviors (e.g., "I made fun of someone"), with 4 items focused on ethnic-based bullying (e.g., "I spread rumors about someone because of their ethnicity"). The scale has

been validated in the Italian context, showing good psychometric properties (Palladino et al., 2016). In the present study, only the Victimization subscale was used, with the exclusion of items related to ethnic victimization. The decision to exclude these specific items was driven by the aim to avoid overlap in research objectives and mitigate potential bias, ensuring that the study's focus on traditional victimization did not inadvertently lead to the assumption that students with a migratory background experience bullying more frequently than their native counterparts because of racial motives. The instrument demonstrated good statistical reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha score of .80.

Social Anxiety. The Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SAS-A; La Greca & Lopez 1998, Italian version by Bianchi et al., 2020) was employed to assess non-clinical levels of social anxiety among participants, considering both the presence and frequency of symptoms in their social interactions. The scale is comprised of 18 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*always true*). It includes three subscales: Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE: 8 items; e.g., "I am afraid they are making fun of me"), Social Avoidance and Distress Specific to New Situations or Unfamiliar Peers (SAD-New: 6 items; e.g., "I become nervous when I talk to people I know little"), and Social Avoidance and Distress that is Experienced More Generally in Social Interactions (SAD-General: 4 items; e.g., "It is difficult for me to ask others to do something together"). The scale has previously been validated in the Italian context, demonstrating good psychometric properties (Bianchi et al., 2020). In the current study, all three subscales demonstrated good statistical reliability, with Cronbach's alpha scores of .83 for SAD-General, .90 for SAD-New, .92 for FNE, and .95 for overall social anxiety.

Perceived Ethnic Discrimination. The short version of the Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire–Community Version (PEDQ-CV; Brondolo et al., 2006, Italian translation by

Andrighetto et al., 2013) was used to examine migrant adolescents' perceived ethnic discrimination at school. The questionnaire consists of 16 items (e.g., "Due to my ethnic background... classmates make me feel different because of my appearance") rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*very often*). Items assess four aspects of perceived discrimination: exclusion, stigmatization/devaluation, institutional discrimination, and threat/aggression. The present study utilized a composite score of perceived ethnic discrimination, calculated as the mean of all items. The scale demonstrated good statistical reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha score of .82. The instrument was administered exclusively to first- and second-generation migrant participants.

Reflected minority categorization. To assess reflected minority categorization, an item utilized in prior investigations (Ferrari et al., 2022a, 2022b) was employed. Using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*often*), participants were asked to evaluate the frequency with which they had experienced the following situation: "When a stranger encounters me, they assume I am a foreigner rather than Italian." Specifically, this item was used to measure the extent to which participants felt perceived by others as a member of a minority ethnic group.

Sociodemographic Variables. Participants provided sociodemographic information referring to their gender, age, and ethnic background. Regarding the latter, participants were asked to indicate their own and their parents' countries of birth. Based on established criteria (Gönültaş & Mulvey, 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018), individuals with at least one foreign-born parent were operationally categorized as migrant youth. Furthermore, a distinction was made between first-generation migrants (i.e., born abroad from foreign-born parents) and second-generation migrants (i.e., born in the host country from foreign-born parents). Conversely, adolescents were classified as non-migrant (i.e., native) youth if they and both parents were born in Italy.

Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted using Jamovi version 2.3 (2022). Initially, descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations were computed. To assess differences in victimization experiences between native and migrant students, a general linear mixed model (GLMM) was estimated, using school class as the clustering variable. The model included migrant status and gender as factors, with age as a covariate. Fixed effects and the interaction effect between migrant background and gender were analyzed, while controlling for the fixed effect of age and accounting for the random effect of intra-school class variation.

A multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted to explore differences in social anxiety dimensions between immigrant and native adolescents. Fixed effects and the interaction between immigrant background and gender were examined, using age as a covariate.

In the entire sample, a multivariate mediation model was estimated to investigate the indirect pathways linking immigrant background with the three dimensions of social anxiety (i.e., Fear of Negative Evaluation, Social Avoidance and Distress in New Situations, General Social Avoidance and Distress), mediated by experienced victimization. Additionally, participant gender and age were included as covariates.

In the entire sample, a multivariate mediation model was estimated to investigate the indirect pathways linking migrant background with the three dimensions of social anxiety (i.e., Fear of Negative Evaluation, Social Avoidance and Distress in New Situations, General Social Avoidance and Distress), mediated by experienced victimization. Additionally, participant gender and age were included as covariates.

Finally, a simple mediation model was tested exclusively in the subsample of migrant participants to analyze the mediating role played by perceived ethnic discrimination in the relationship between reflected minority categorization and social anxiety. This involved estimating the indirect effect of

reflected minority categorization on social anxiety via perceived ethnic discrimination. Gender, age and migrant background effects were controlled in the model.

For both models, bootstrapping with 5,000 samples (Preacher & Kelley, 2011) was conducted to estimate the indirect effects and 95% confidence intervals (CIs).
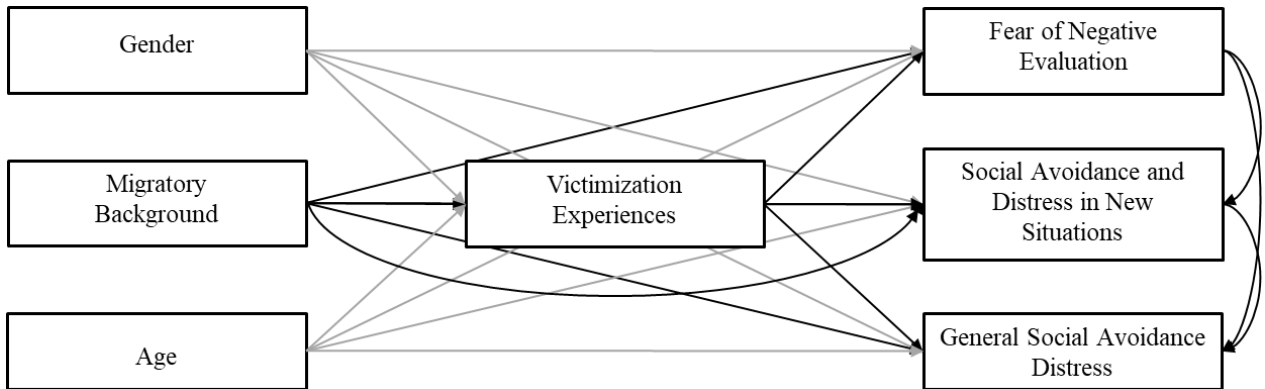
Note. Control paths are shown in grey.
Gender (0 = male, 1 = female); Migrant status (0 = native, 1 = migrant).
Figure 1. *Paths estimated in the multivariate path analysis*
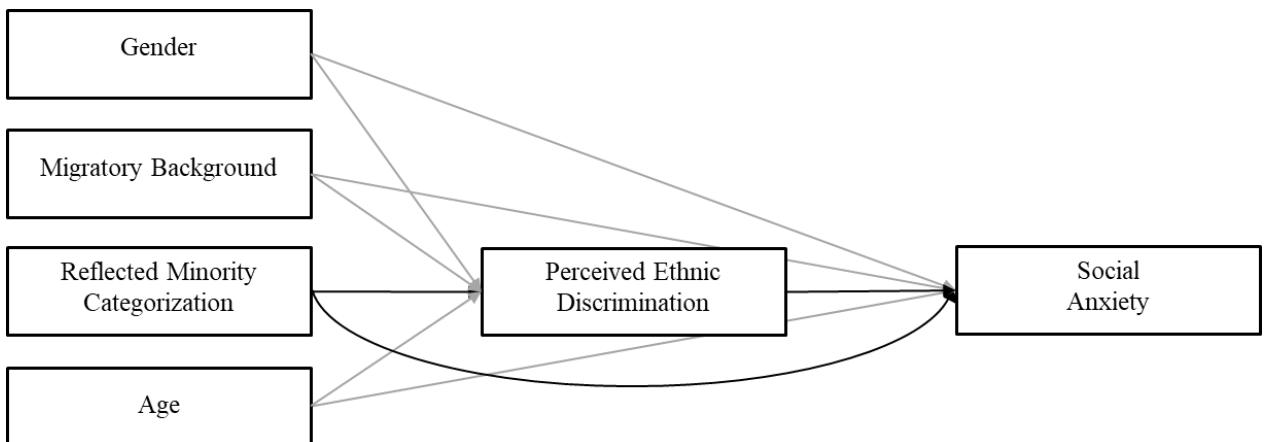
Note. Control paths are shown in grey.
Gender (0 = male, 1 = female); Migratory Background (0 = first-generation migrant, 1 = second-generation migrant).
Figure 2. *Paths estimated in the mediation model*

1.4. Results

The bivariate correlations for the study variables can be found in Tables 1.1 and 1.2.

Table 1.1. *Bivariate correlations among study variables in native and migrant students*

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Gender	-						
2. Age	-.01	-					
3. Migrant status	.01	.09*	-				
4. Victimization	.02	.02	.15**	-			
5. SAD - New	.16**	.02	.09*	.23**	-		
6. SAD - General	.03	.00	.10*	.29**	.76**	-	
7. FNE	.22**	-.04	.02	.28**	.76**	.70**	-
M (SD)	-	17.46 (1.01)	-	1.38 (.51)	2.77 (1.14)	2.22 (1.06)	2.75 (1.16)
Scale range	0-1	16-21	0-1	1-5	1-5	1-5	1-5

Note. SAD – New = Social Avoidance and Distress in New Situations; SAD – General = General Social Avoidance and Distress; FNE = Fear of Negative Evaluation; Gender (0 = male, 1 = female); Migrant status (0 = native, 1 = migrant).
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 1.2. *Bivariate correlations among study variables only in migrant students (n=95)*

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Gender	-					
2. Age	-.26*	-				
3. Migrant generation	-.05	.04	-			
4. Reflected Minority Categorization	-.09	.09	.01	-		
5. Perceived Ethnic Discrimination	-.15	.19	-.06	.33**	-	
6. Social Anxiety	.22*	-.04	.13	.11	.31*	-
M (SD)	-	17.66 (1.06)	-	1.93 (.99)	1.48 (.55)	2.78 (1.10)
Scale range	0-1	16-21	0-1	1-5	1-5	1-5

Note. Gender (0 = male, 1 = female); Migrant generation (0 = first-generation migrant, 1 = second-generation migrant).
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

1.4.1. General Linear Mixed Model

A general linear mixed model (GLMM) was estimated to examine the effect of migratory background on school victimization experiences while accounting for gender differences and age. School course acted as a random factor. The results indicated a significant effect of migrant status on victimization, $F(2, 518) = 5.57$, $p < .01$. Specifically, Tukey's post-hoc comparison showed that

both first- and second-generation migrants reported more frequent victimization experiences at school relative to native students. However, no significant differences in victimization emerged between first- and second-generation migrants. Moreover, no statistically significant differences were observed with respect to gender, $F(21, 493) = .08$, $p = .78$, or age, $F(1, 129) = .02$, $p = .89$. The interaction effect between gender and migrant background was not statistically significant, $F(2, 515) = .38$, $p = .68$. The random factor accounted for 3% of the variance in victimization.

Regarding social anxiety dimensions, the MANCOVA revealed significant differences in Social Avoidance and Distress that is Experienced More Generally in Social Interactions between immigrant and native students, Wilks's $\lambda = .97$, $F(6, 1036) = 2.37$, $p < .05$. Specifically, according to Tukey's post-hoc comparison, second-generation immigrant adolescents scored higher on this aspect of social anxiety compared to their native peers. Additionally, the results indicated a significant effect of gender on Fear of Negative Evaluation and Social Avoidance and Distress in New Situations, Wilks's $\lambda = .92$, $F(3, 518) = 15.67$, $p < .01$, with higher scores registered for girls. However, no significant effects were found for the fixed effect of age, Wilks's $\lambda = 1.00$, $F(3, 518) = .80$, $p = .49$, or the interaction between gender and immigrant background, Wilks's $\lambda = .99$, $F(6, 1036) = .77$, $p = .59$.

Tables 2 and 3 reports the descriptive statistics for the study variables within each group.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics of study variables across ethnic background groups*

	Natives M(DS)	First-generation Migrants M(DS)	Second-generation Migrants M(DS)
Victimization	1.34 (.47)[b]	1.60 (.85)[a]	1.51 (.57)[a]
SAD - New	2.72 (1.14)	2.81 (.99)	3.04 (1.18)
SAD - General	2.16 (1.02)[b]	2.26 (1.19)	2.51 (1.23)[a]
FNE	2.74 (1.14)	2.47 (1.12)	2.91 (1.23)

Note. SAD – New = Social Avoidance and Distress in New Situations; SAD – General = General Social Avoidance and Distress; FNE = Fear of Negative Evaluation.
Different letters indicate significant mean differences among groups: a > b

Table 3. *Descriptive statistics of study variables, divided by gender*

	Boys M(DS)	Girls M(DS)
Victimization	1.37 (.54)	1.39 (.47)
SAD - New	2.60 (1.14)[b]	2.97 (1.12)[a]
SAD - General	2.19 (1.07)	2.26 (1.05)
FNE	2.53 (1.13)[b]	3.03 (1.13)[a]

Note. SAD – New = Social Avoidance and Distress in New Situations; SAD – General = General Social Avoidance and Distress; FNE = Fear of Negative Evaluation.
Different letters indicate significant mean differences among groups: a > b

1.4.2. Multivariate Mediation Model

A multivariate mediation model was conducted to test the indirect effect of migrant status on social anxiety dimensions through the frequency of victimization experiences. Gender and age were included as covariates to control for their effects. Based on the preliminary results of the GLMM, which indicated no significant differences in bullying victimization between first- and second-generation migrants, these groups were aggregated into a single group for the multivariate mediation analysis. Figure 3 presents the path coefficient estimates.

The results demonstrated a significant effect of migrant status on school victimization. Specifically, migrant students reported more frequent victimization experiences relative to their native counterparts. Additionally, a significant and positive effect of victimization frequency on social anxiety symptoms was observed across all three dimensions (i.e., Fear of Negative Evaluation, Social Avoidance and Distress in New Situations, General Social Avoidance and Distress). The analysis also revealed a significant effect of gender on Fear of Negative Evaluation and Social Avoidance and Distress in New Situations, with higher scores observed among girls.

The analysis of indirect effects showed that bullying victimization mediated the relationships between migrant status and Fear of Negative Evaluation ($B = .12$, $SE_B = .04$ [.04, .20], $p < .01$), Social Avoidance and Distress in New Situations ($B = .09$, $SE_B = .03$ [.03, .16], $p < .01$), and General Social Avoidance and Distress ($B = .11$, $SE_B = .04$ [.04, .18], $p < .01$). Thus, migrant

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adolescents reported higher levels of victimization, constituting a risk factor for various aspects of social anxiety. The model explained a significant 12% of the variance in Fear of Negative Evaluation, 8% of the variance in Social Avoidance and Distress in New Situations, and 9% of the variation in General Social Avoidance and Distress[1].
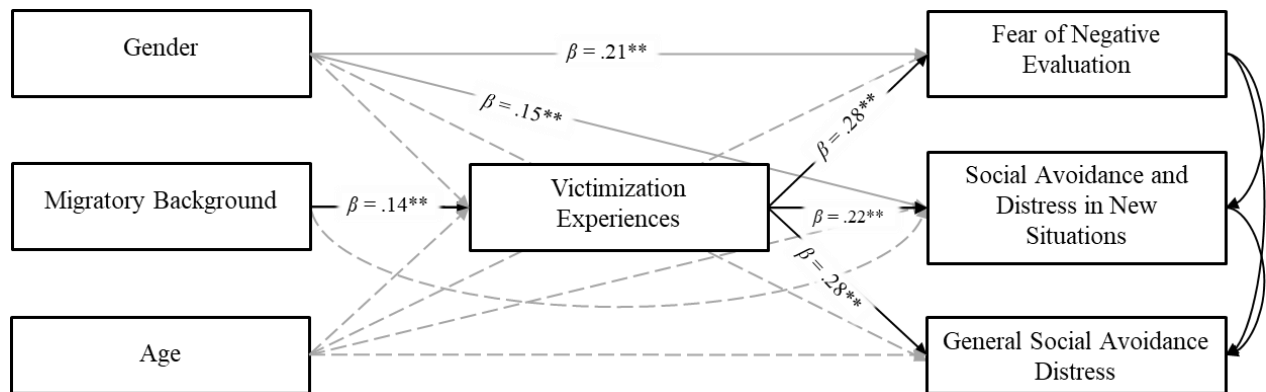
Note. Control paths are shown in grey. Significant paths of interest are represented by solid lines. Dashed lines represent the non-significant paths of interest.
Gender (0 = male, 1 = female); Migratory Background (0 = native, 1 = migrant).
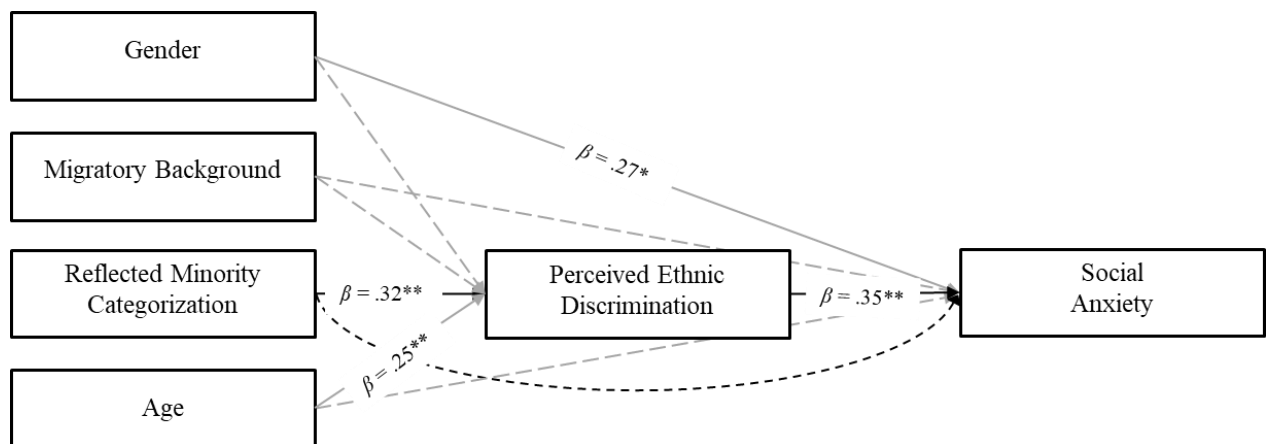* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$
Figure 3. *Path diagram for the multivariate mediation model.*

1.4.3. Mediation Model

A simple mediation model was estimated to analyze the mediating role of perceived ethnic discrimination within the school context in the relationship between migratory background, reflected minority categorization, and social anxiety among first- and second-generation migrant adolescents. Gender and age were included as covariates to control for their effects. Figure 4 reports the path coefficient estimates.

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[1] Considering the bidirectional relationship between victimization and social anxiety documented in previous longitudinal studies, an alternative model was examined to assess the indirect effect of migratory background on experienced victimization mediated by symptoms of social anxiety. The mediational analysis did not reveal significant indirect effects of migratory background on bullying victimization, mediated by Fear of Negative Evaluation, ($B = .01$, $SE_B = .01$ [-.02, .04], $p = .67$), Social Avoidance and Distress in New Situations, ($B = -.01$, $SE_B = .01$ [-.04, .01], $p = .32$), and General Social Avoidance and Distress, ($B = .03$, $SE_B = .02$ [.00, .07], $p = .14$), respectively.

The results revealed a significant indirect effect of reflected minority categorization on social anxiety, mediated by perceived ethnic discrimination ($B = 2.23$, $SE_B = .98$ [.33, 4.14], $p < .05$). Adolescents who perceived that others categorized them as members of an ethnic minority group reported higher levels of perceived ethnic discrimination. In turn, perceived ethnic discrimination emerged as a positive and significant predictor of social anxiety symptoms. Regarding the control variables, significant and positive effects of gender (with higher scores observed among girls) and age on perceived ethnic discrimination were observed. The model explained a significant 16% of the variance in social anxiety.

Note. Control paths are shown in grey. Significant paths of interest are represented by solid lines. Dashed lines represent the non-significant paths of interest.
Gender (0 = male, 1 = female); Migratory Background (0 = native, 1 = migrant).
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$
Figure 4. *Path diagram for the mediation model*

1.5.   Discussion

The present study investigated bullying victimization experiences and social anxiety among native and migrant adolescents in Italy. More specifically, the research objectives were to discern differences in victimization frequency and social anxiety symptoms between native Italian and first- and second-generation migrant adolescent students. Additionally, the study examined the indirect impact of migrant status on social anxiety symptoms mediated by peer victimization, and

explored the association between perceived ethnic discrimination within the school context and social anxiety symptoms among migrant students.

For the analysis of differences in bullying victimization between native and migrant students, the study utilized a general linear mixed model. The findings indicated that, in the 2 months preceding the research, both first- and second-generation migrant students experienced more frequent school victimization relative to their native counterparts. However, no statistically significant differences were observed between first- and second-generation migrants with respect to this factor. These findings align with prior studies conducted in Italy (Alivernini et al., 2019; Pistella et al., 2020) showing an elevated risk of victimization among ethnic minority students. Importantly, the current findings extend this vulnerability also to second-generation migrant students, lending support to the social misfits theory (Wright et al., 1986), which posits an increased risk of victimization among ethnic minority students due to their deviation from majority norms. The dynamics of bully–victim interactions, characterized by an imbalance of power (Olweus, 1993), likely reflect broader societal interactions between majority and minority groups in society (McKenney et al., 2006; Vervoort et al., 2010), with minority groups facing social and economic disadvantages marked by exclusion and discrimination across various facets of life. This marginalized social status, combined with prejudiced attitudes held by members of the native community toward ethnic minorities (Griffiths & Nesdale, 2006; Váradi, 2014), may foster an environment in which migrants are more prone to victimization. Moreover, ethnic prejudice may affect the emotional impact of bullying victimization. As noted by Caravita et al. (2019), the emotional consequences of bullying victimization may be diminished in migrant students due to desensitization effects.

Regarding social anxiety symptoms, the MANCOVA revealed a significant effect of migratory background, with higher scores for Fear of Negative Evaluation among second-generation migrants

compared to native adolescents. This finding aligns with the migration morbidity hypothesis, which suggests an increased risk of internalizing problems among migrants, consistent with previous European studies (Bourque et al., 2011; Lindert et al., 2008; Lindert et al., 2009; Mindlis & Boffetta, 2017). While no disadvantage was observed for first-generation migrants compared to their native peers, caution is warranted in the interpretation of this result, due to the limited size of the first-generation migrant group (n=24). Indeed, it is imperative to consider the potential influence of the relatively small size of the first-generation migrant sample on the statistical power and the results. Further research with larger samples is needed to provide more robust insight into this aspect of the research.

Additionally, the multivariate mediation model showed significant indirect effects of migrant status on all three dimensions of social anxiety: Fear of Negative Evaluation, Social Avoidance and Distress in New Situations, and General Social Avoidance Distress. Hence, migrant adolescents in the study experienced more frequent episodes of bullying victimization, which, in turn, may have constituted a risk factor for their development of social anxiety symptoms. This pattern aligns with the minority stress model (Meyer, 1995, 2003), suggesting that some individuals experience chronic stress from stigmatization and victimization due to their minority background. This persistent form of social stress constitutes a significant risk factor for poor psychological health, operating through processes influenced by both distal and proximal stressors that fuel shame, fear, and negative social expectations linked to one's identity (Meyer, 2003). In these terms, it could be hypothesized that migrant adolescents who have experienced victimization may internalize relational attacks, thereby developing a negative self-evaluation and heightened psychological distress, both during and in anticipation of peer aggression, as suggested by prior research (e.g., Grills & Ollendick, 2002; Storch et al., 2005). Furthermore, as a coping mechanism, adolescents

may selectively avoid social interactions in which they perceive a risk of aggression (Storch et al., 2005).

Finally, among migrant participants, an indirect effect of reflected minority categorization on social anxiety was observed, mediated by perceived ethnic discrimination at school. This finding supports the minority stress model (Meyer, 1995, 2003), indicating a direct association between stigmatization and social anxiety symptoms among ethnic minority adolescents. Moreover, the result emphasizes that the risk of discrimination and its psychological consequences is not solely determined by an individual's migratory background, but also the extent to which they are perceived as deviating from the majority culture. This aligns with both social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1979) and social misfit theory (Wright et al., 1986), which suggest that individuals who deviate from the dominant group and are perceived as outgroup members are more likely to face rejection and negative evaluations. Finally, this result aligns with the findings of a recent Italian study (Palladino et al., 2020) on ethnicity-based bullying in adolescence, which have observed higher levels of racist victimization at school among students without Italian citizenship compared to their counterparts with Italian citizens status. In this national context, citizenship may be connected not only to political benefits but also to how migrant individuals are recognized and perceived by the majority group.

1.6.   Conclusion

In light of the noticeable increase in migration to Europe in recent years, it is crucial to understand the individual, social, and contextual factors that might negatively impact the psychological well-being of young migrants. However, contradictory results have been observed regarding the relationship between migration and adaptation outcomes among children and youth in Europe. Since prior research has consistently identified a link between peer victimization and psychosocial

difficulties, the present study aimed at exploring whether bullying victimization and experiences of ethnic discrimination may contribute to determining disparities in social anxiety symptoms among native and migrant adolescents in Italy. The results showed that migrant students were more likely to experience bullying, which subsequently affected their levels of social anxiety symptoms. Furthermore, the study generated new insight into the factors that contribute to perceived ethnic discrimination and the correlation between perceived ethnic discrimination and internalizing problems.

However, it is important to note several limitations of the present study. First, the data referred to diverse and small migrant groups comprised of individuals of varying ethnic backgrounds, making it challenging to differentiate between groups. This constitutes a significant limitation that warrants further investigation. Second, although a distinction was made between first-generation migrants (i.e., those born in the country of origin) and second-generation migrants (i.e., those born in the receiving country), information regarding first-generation migrant youths' length of residence in the receiving country was lacking, and therefore their primary socialization context was unknown. Third, the absence of longitudinal data prevented the description of causal relationships. Future research employing longitudinal designs is therefore needed to gain a deeper understanding of how migrant background might influence peer victimization and its associated negative outcomes over time. Fourth, the reliance on self-report measures introduced the potential for inaccuracies and desirability bias in respondents' answers. Future research should therefore explore migrant victimization risk using multi-informant measurement methodologies and network analysis techniques to provide a more comprehensive view of inter-ethnic relationships in the school context. Finally, the utilization of convenience sampling raises concerns about selection bias, thereby limiting the generalizability of the results.

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Despite the abovementioned limitations, the present findings regarding the vulnerability of migrant youth to bullying victimization and ethnic discrimination may inform the development of prevention or intervention programs to foster positive inter-ethnic relationships among adolescents of diverse ethnic backgrounds.

2. Peer Victimization and Internalizing Problems during Adolescence: The Interaction of Depressive Attribution Bias and Migratory Background

2.1. Introduction

Peer victimization is a global issue (Craig et al., 2009) that presents significant social and emotional challenges for children and adolescents (Vivolo-Kantor et al., 2014). In the context of school bullying, victimization refers to the deliberate and repetitive harm inflicted upon a less powerful individual by one or more individuals with greater power (Olweus, 1993, 1994). This violence can manifest in various forms, including overt action (e.g., physical aggression) or verbal remarks (e.g., name-calling). It can also involve subtler behaviors, such as social exclusion and the dissemination of rumors, both in person and through technology, with the latter commonly referred to as cybervictimization (Casper, 2021; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Scheithauer et al., 2021).

A recent meta-analysis investigating the prevalence of bullying and cyberbullying in various countries (Modecki et al., 2014), drawing on a sample of 335,519 adolescents aged 12–18 years, reported an average prevalence rate of 35% for traditional bullying (encompassing both perpetration and victimization) and 15% for cyberbullying. Although the literature presents varying rates of peer victimization due to differences in measurement tools and settings across studies, previous research has revealed that 9–25% of school-aged children experience bullying (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). Such experiences can have long-lasting negative consequences that persist into adulthood (Arseneault, 2017), including mental health conditions that limit psychosocial adjustment (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015). Previous studies have also observed that peer victimization is longitudinally related to the development of internalizing symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Christine et al., 2021; Liao et al., 2022; Mullan et al., 2023). Considering that bullying is a complex phenomenon, Swearer and Hymel (2015) proposed a *socio-ecological diathesis-stress theory* to understand the dynamics of bullying and its

association with depressive symptoms. In line with Beck's *cognitive model of depression* (1967), which posits that cognitive vulnerabilities interact with challenging life experiences to predict the onset of depressive symptoms, Swearer and Hymel (2015) proposed that bullying victimization could be seen as a stressful life event that interplays with individual and social vulnerability factors, contributing to the development of subsequent internalizing problems. This observation is particularly pertinent for adolescents, who are considered highly vulnerable to bullying due to the growing influential role of peers during this stage of life.

Social information processing theory (SIP; Crick & Dodge, 1994; Dodge, 1986) may provide valuable insight into the psychology of bullying victims. In more detail, the SIP helps to elucidate how social-cognitive processes during social interactions may influence the interpretation of negative social experiences and lead to psychosocial maladjustment. According to the model, when individuals encounter a social situation cue (e.g., when they are provoked by another individual), they undergo a series of cognitive processes to formulate a behavioral response. These processes are influenced by memories of past experiences, as well as internalized rules, social knowledge, and schemas (Crick & Dodge, 1994). Hence, the relationship between SIP mechanisms and victimization may manifest through multiple pathways, highlighting the importance of this theory for the study of behavioral issues linked to victimization.

The present research examined the relationship between victimization experiences and internalizing problems in both native and migrant adolescents, within the framework of the SIP (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Dodge, 1986) and the *minority stress model* (Meyer, 1995, 2003). The study also explored the potential moderating influence of depressive/self-blame attribution bias. Specifically, it investigated how the interplay between a depressive attribution style in the

interpretation of negative social interactions may intersect with migratory background in explaining adverse mental health effects arising from peer harassment.

2.1.1. The Social Cognition of Victimized Students

Theoretical models of attribution biases offer frameworks for examining and understanding human responses to social interactions, such as bullying. The SIP framework is considered one of the most relevant models of social cognition in child and adolescent development (Crick & Dodge, 1994). According to the model, individuals activate social-cognitive processes to interpret situations and determine behavioral responses during social interactions. These processes can be delineated into six sequential steps or phases, each influenced by information acquired from past experience. This repository continually shapes the SIP phases and is consistently updated with new experiences (Crick & Dodge, 1994).

The initial two phases of the SIP model involve the selection and interpretation of social cues. Specifically, the first phase concerns the perception of information from the given social situation (i.e., encoding). In this phase, individuals direct their attention to specific elements/cues within the context and formulate interpretations of this information, including interpretations of the intentions of others (i.e., interpretation of cues). The following four phases pertain to the selection of behavioral responses. In the third phase, individuals establish a desired outcome (i.e., clarification of goals). Subsequently, in the fourth phase, they generate potential responses to the situation (i.e., response access). These potential responses are evaluated considering factors such as social approval, the ability to execute the behavior, and expectations of the outcome. Based on these considerations, a response is selected (i.e., response decision) and put into action. Each phase in the mental process influences the subsequent phase, and it is assumed that these tasks occur automatically and unconsciously (Crick & Dodge, 1994).

Bullying is a social process (Salmivalli, 2010) involving perpetrators and victims who actively shape and interpret social interactions. Following Crick and Dodge's model (1994), victimization can intersect with cognitive mechanisms at various phases of social information processing. These mechanisms, and their related behaviors, may increase one's risk of being bullied and be influenced by prior victimization experiences (van Reemst et al., 2016).

In the context of social information processing, numerous studies have examined how victims of bullying interpret social cues and how this interpretation affects their psychosocial adaptation (for an extensive review, see Kellij et al., 2022). Most empirical evidence has provided support for the prevention hypothesis (Kellij et al., 2022; van Reemst et al., 2016), which posits that victims tend to form pessimistic interpretations of social cues due to their heightened attention to threatening information (Rapee & Heimberg, 1997). For instance, previous studies have found that individuals who have been victims of bullying tend to interpret social intentions as hostile (for a review, see van Reemst et al., 2016). Additionally, victimization experiences have been linked to an expectation of threat (Balan et al., 2018; González-Díez et al., 2017; Röder & Müller, 2020), concerns about negative evaluations (Estévez et al., 2019; Gómez-Ortiz et al., 2018; Zimmer-Gembeck & Duffy, 2014), and increased sensitivity to rejection (Ding et al., 2020; Rowe et al., 2015; Zimmer-Gembeck, 2015) and aversive stimuli (Rudolph et al., 2016). Moreover, a longitudinal study by Calvete et al. (2018) observed that adolescents who had experienced victimization tended to adopt rejection schemas more frequently, which recursively predicted their risk of being bullied.

Regarding the cognitive patterns through which children and adolescents interpret cues from their peers, self-blame/depressive attribution bias describes an inclination to attribute interpersonal failure to internal, global, and stable causes (Abramson et al., 1989). This maladaptive cognitive

schema has been found to be associated with victimization experiences (Graham & Juvonen, 1998).

Additionally, previous longitudinal studies have identified the tendency to blame oneself for negative social events as a moderating factor in the association between peer victimization and internalizing problems (Gibb & Alloy, 2006; Perren et al., 2013). Thus, children and adolescents' previous experiences and social-cognitive styles may play a pivotal role in shaping their perceptions of and tendency to internalize victimization experiences.

2.1.2. Minority Stress and Coping

The *minority stress model* (Meyer, 1995, 2003) provides a valuable theoretical framework for comprehending the factors that may contribute to the development of internalizing problems in individuals with a migratory background. Minority stress refers to the chronic stress experienced by individuals in a stigmatized social group, who frequently occupy minority positions within society (related to, e.g., socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, gender, or sexuality) (Brooks, 1981). Experiences of discrimination have been shown to have a specific negative impact on mental health that differs from general stress (Meyer, 2003; Pascoe & Richman, 2009). First, social stigma limits individuals' access to resources needed for psychological adaptation and the management of developmental challenges (Clark et al., 1999). Second, discrimination may extend beyond individual interactions, also permeating social groups and institutions. Thus, members of social minority groups risk encountering cumulative forms of social stigma at various societal levels.

Numerous studies have identified an association between perceived discrimination and a wide range of adverse physical and mental health outcomes, such as heightened psychological distress and increased depressive symptoms (for extensive reviews, see Cave et al., 2020; Paradies et al., 2015; Pascoe & Richman, 2009). However, the literature also emphasizes the role played by potential moderators in this relationship. In the minority stress framework (Meyer, 2003), for

example, discriminatory events represent external and objective sources of stress that are conceptualized as distal stressors. However, their impact is influenced by proximal factors that depend on the individual's perception and appraisal of these events, which may be dictated by a negative self-image. Specifically, the *self-blame attribution hypothesis* posits that experiences of discrimination are more distressing for individuals who hold prejudicial attitudes consistent with the victimization event (Meyer, 1995). A recent study observed that self-blame attribution bias moderates the impact of perceived discrimination on mental and physical health (Feasel et al., 2022). Similarly, Clark et al. (1999) theorized that the coping abilities of individuals from social minority backgrounds interact with sociodemographic factors and personal disposition to buffer or exacerbate the relationship between perceived discrimination and adverse outcomes.

2.2.   Aims and Hypotheses

The present study aimed at examining the potential presence of a three-way interaction involving victimization experiences, depressive attribution bias, and migrant background in relation to internalizing problematic behaviors. Recent qualitative research has observed that a substantial percentage of victimized students attribute their bullying experiences to intrinsic causes, such as deviation from group norms (Negi, 2021). Adding to this, a more pronounced longitudinal effect of peer victimization on the development of internalizing problems has been found among students with elevated levels of self-blame (Gibb & Alloy, 2006; Perren et al., 2013).

Following the minority stress model (Meyer, 1995), which suggests that experiences of discrimination and violence due to one's social identity tend to be experienced as more distressing for individuals who self-blame, it was hypothesized the existence of a three-way interaction effect involving victimization, depressive attribution bias, and migrant status in relation to the presence of internalizing problematic behaviors. In line with previous research on ethnic discrimination

attribution (Feasel et al., 2022), it was further hypothesized that a self-blaming attribution style would moderate the effect of victimization experiences on internalizing problematic behaviors, particularly among migrant students.

2.3. Method

2.3.1. Participants and procedures

The sample consisted of 219 participants (20% girls, 27% migrants) aged 14–17 years (M_{age}= 14.80, $SD = 0.73$). Data were collected from a secondary school in the province of Rome, which was selected on the basis of its willingness to participate in the study. Following approval from the school administration, informational letters and consent forms were distributed to students and their parents. Subsequently, self-report questionnaire data were collected during regular school hours. The administration of the questionnaires took approximately 30 minutes per class and was supervised by trained assistant researchers. Prior to administering the questionnaire, the assistant researchers explained the study objectives and scope. Anonymity and voluntariness of participation were ensured. The study and its procedures received approval from the Ethics Committee of the Department of Developmental and Social Psychology at Sapienza University of Rome.

2.3.2. Measures

Victimization. The Florence Victimization and Bullying Scales (Palladino et al., 2016; Palladino et al., 2020) were utilized to assess the frequency of participants' experiences or engagement in various forms of physical, verbal, or indirect aggression over the 2 months preceding the study. Chapter 1, Section 2.2 of this thesis provides detailed information regarding this instrument. For the present study, only the Victimization subscale was used, with the exclusion of items related to ethnic victimization. The subscale demonstrated good statistical reliability, as evidenced by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .75.

Internalizing Problematic Behaviors. The Youth Self Report 11-18 (YSR; Achenbach & Rescorla,

2001) was utilized to assess internalizing problems. This questionnaire consists of 112 items that

assess respondents' experiences of behavioral, emotional, and social problems over the prior 6

months. Respondents are asked to rate the occurrence of these problems using a 3-point scale,

ranging from 0 (*not true*) to 2 (*very true or often true*). The YSR enables the assessment of

internalizing and externalizing problems across eight syndrome scales: Anxious/Depressed (e.g.,

"I am too fearful or anxious"), Withdrawn/Depressed (e.g., "I am unhappy, sad, or depressed"),

Somatic Complaints (e.g., "I have physical problems without known medical causes"), Social

Problems (e.g., "I do not get along with other kids"), Thought Problems (e.g., "I cannot avoid

certain thoughts"), Attention Problems (e.g., "I cannot concentrate or sustain attention for long"),

Aggressive Behavior (e.g., "I am frequently involved in fights and arguments"), and Rule-Breaking

Behavior (e.g., "I break rules at home, school, or elsewhere"). The present study utilized the

Internalizing subscale, comprised of the first three syndrome scales. The subscale demonstrated

strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .87. The reliability and validity

of the YSR have been previously demonstrated in international research (Achenbach & Rescorla,

2001; Ivanova et al., 2007).

Depressive/Self-Blame Attribution Bias. The Anger and Sadness Self-Regulation Scale (Di Giunta

et al., 2017) was employed to investigate attribution biases in response to ambiguous social

situations. The instrument presents six stories depicting ambiguous peer social interactions. After

each narrative, items ask respondents to rate the extent to which they would be likely to engage in

various attribution styles, forms of emotional regulation, and regulatory self-efficacy, according to

a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 5 (*very likely*). The scale has been

validated in various countries (Di Giunta et al., 2017) and previously been used with Italian

adolescents (Di Giunta et al., 2017; Di Giunta et al., 2018). The present study used the Self-Blame Attribution Bias subscale to measure participants' tendency to attribute negative situations/actions to themselves (e.g., "How likely is it that the person behaved this way because of something negative about you?"). The scale demonstrated satisfactory statistical reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .75.

Sociodemographic Variables. Participants were also asked to provide sociodemographic information referring to their gender, age, self-reported socioeconomic status, and ethnic-racial background. Regarding the latter, participants reported their country of birth as well as that of their parents. Following criteria established in previous studies (Gönültaş & Mulvey, 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018), participants with at least one foreign-born parent were operationally categorized as migrant youth. Conversely, participants were classified as native youth if both of their parents were born in the country in which the study was conducted.

2.3.3. Data Analysis

Data analyses were conducted using SPSS statistical software version 27.0 and Hayes' PROCESS macro version 4.2 (Model 3). Initially, descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations were computed. Subsequently, a moderation regression analysis was utilized to examine the fixed effects and interactions involving victimization, self-blame/depressive attribution bias, and migratory background on the presence of internalizing problems. Gender, age, and self-reported socioeconomic status were included in the model as covariates to control for their effects. As recommended by Cohen et al. (2003), independent variables were centered around their grand means before the two-way and three-way interaction terms were calculated.

Specifically, the multiple regression analysis was conducted in three steps, with internalizing behaviors as the dependent variable. Gender, age, and perceived socioeconomic status were entered

in Step 1 as covariates, to control for their potential effects. In Step 2, victimization experiences and depressive attribution bias were included, to test their independent effects while controlling for gender, age, and socioeconomic status. Finally, to test the interaction effects of migrant background, victimization, and depressive attribution bias on internalizing problems, the two- and three-way interaction terms were added in Step 3. Table 5 reports the estimated model coefficients. A simple slope analysis was also performed to investigate the direction of the significant interaction effect that emerged in the moderated regression (Aiken & West, 1991). This analysis was conducted by plotting the predicted values of internalizing problems as a function of bullying victimization at two levels of depressive attribution bias for each group (i.e., native and migrant): 1 *SD* below the mean (low), and 1 *SD* above the mean (high).

Figures 5.1 and 5.2 depict the plots of the slope analysis for the native and migrant groups, respectively.

2.4. Results

Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations.

Table 4. *Bivariate correlations among study variables in native and migrant students*

	1.	**2.**	**3.**	**4.**	**5.**	**6.**	**7.**
1. Gender	-						
2. Age	.04	-					
3. Migrant status	.06	.10	-				
4. SES	-.01	.07	.03	-			
5. Victimization	.05	-.06	.05	-.01	-		
6. DAB	.15*	-.10	-.02	.00	.16*	-	
7. Internalizing problems	.39**	.01	.02	-.15**	.31**	.16**	-
M (SD)	-	14.79 (.73)	-	2.09 (.45)	1.63 (.60)	3.01 (.72)	20.95 (16.09)
Scale range	0-1	14-17	0-1	1-3	1-5	1-5	0-80

Note. SES = Socioeconomic Status; DAB = Depressive / Self-Blame Attribution Bias;
Gender (0 = male, 1 = female); Migrant status (0 = native, 1 = migrant); SES (1 = low, 2 = medium, 3 = high).
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

2.4.1. Moderated Regression Analysis

A moderated regression analysis was conducted to investigate the fixed effects and interactions among migratory background, school victimization experiences, and depressive/self-blame attribution bias on the presence of internalizing problematic behaviors. Gender, age, and socioeconomic status were included as covariates to control for their potential influence.

In Step 1 of the analysis, when gender, age, migratory background, and perceived socioeconomic status were entered as control variables, a statistically significant result was obtained, explaining 19% of the variance in internalizing problematic behaviors. Gender exhibited a significant positive effect, indicating higher internalizing problematic behaviors among girls, while perceived socioeconomic status had a significant negative effect.

In Step 2, victimization and depressive attribution bias were introduced into the model, accounting for an additional and significant 9% of the explained variance. Victimization showed a significant positive effect on internalizing problematic behaviors.

In Step 3, interaction terms were incorporated into the regression equation, contributing an additional and significant 3% to the explained variance. Notably, a significant three-way interaction effect was observed among victimization, depressive attribution bias, and migratory background on the presence of internalizing problematic behaviors.

The comprehensive model, including all of the abovementioned effects, accounted for 31% of the variance in internalizing problematic behaviors. Table 5 presents the model statistics.

Table 5. *Moderated regression analysis*

	Internalizing Problematic Behaviors								
	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
Predictors	*B*	*SE*	*β*	*B*	*SE*	*β*	*B*	*SE*	*β*
Gender	16.13	2.47	.40**	15.39	2.35	.38**	15.40	2.33	.38**
Migratory Background	.65	2.24	.02	.22	2.12	.01	-1.02	2.14	-.03
Age	.15	1.36	.01	.71	1.29	.03	.48	1.28	.02
SES	-5.67	2.22	-.16*	-5.68	2.09	-.16**	-6.16	2.07	-.17**
Victimization				4.60	.95	.29**	4.96	1.09	.31**
DAB				1.40	.98	.08	2.31	1.17	.14*
Victimization x Migratory Background							-3.12	2.25	-.10
DAB x Migratory Background							-2.35	2.39	-.07
Victimization x DAB							-1.38	1.21	-.08
Victimization x DAB x Migratory Background							6.45	2.64	.18*

Note. SES = Socioeconomic Status; DAB = Depressive / Self-Blame Attribution Bias;
Gender (0 = male, 1 = female); Migrant status (0 = native, 1 = migrant) ; SES (1 = low, 2 = medium, 3 = high).
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

2.4.2. Simple Slope Analysis

Simple slope analysis was conducted to investigate the three-way interaction effect involving victimization, depressive attribution bias, and migratory background on internalizing problematic behaviors, with the goal of ascertaining its direction. Specifically, the analysis aimed at illustrating and estimating the relationship between victimization and internalizing problematic behaviors for participants with high versus low levels of depressive attribution bias within each group (i.e., native, migrant) while controlling for all other variables in the model. Therefore, the statistical significance of slope differences among four pairs of slopes were tested, plotting the predicted values of internalizing problematic behaviors as a function of bullying victimization under the following conditions: (a) at high versus low levels of depression attribution bias in natives; and (b)

at high versus low levels of depression attribution bias in migrants. Bonferroni's correction for multiple comparisons ($\alpha = .05/4 = .012$) was applied.

The results of the slope analysis revealed that, within the native group, victimization exhibited a significant positive association with internalizing problematic behaviors at low, $B = 10.64$, $SE_B = 3.01$, $p < .01$, and high levels of depressive attribution bias, $B = 6.11$, $SE_B = 3.01$, $p < .012$ (Figure 5.1). In contrast, within the migrant group, a significant effect of victimization on the dependent variable was observed only at high levels of the moderator, $B = 12.52$, $SE_B = 3.89$, $p < .01$, but not at low levels of depressive attribution bias, $B = - 4.08$, $SE_B = 6,35$, $p = .52$ (Figure 5.2).

These results suggest that, among the native group, victimization was significantly and positively associated with internalizing problematic behaviors, regardless of the level of depressive attribution bias. However, among the migrant group, this association became significant only at high levels of depressive attribution bias.
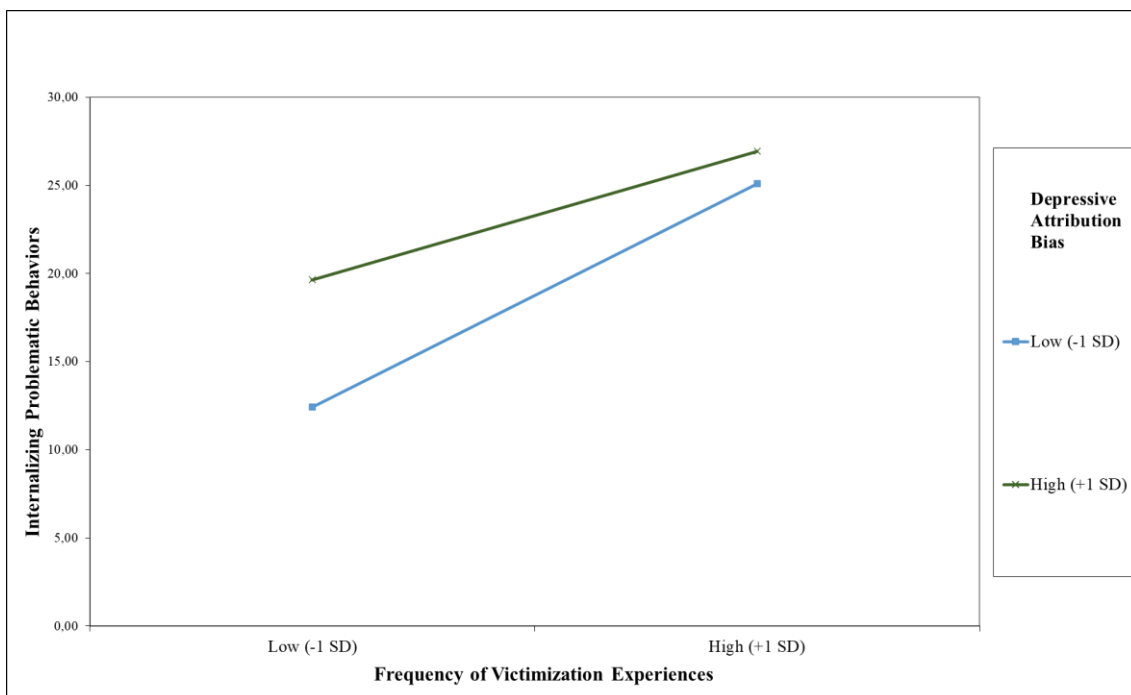

Figure 5.1. *Three-way interaction plot of victimization, depressive attribution bias, and migrant background on internalizing problems (natives group)*
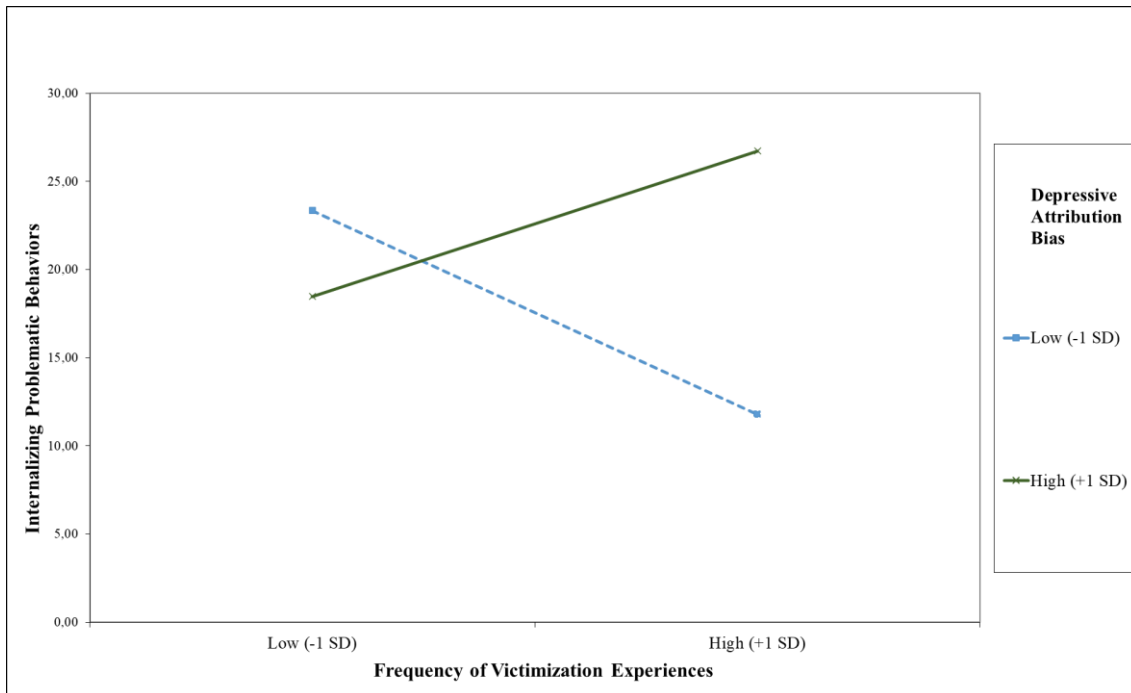
Figure 5.2. *Three-way interaction plot of victimization, depressive attribution bias, and migrant background on internalizing problems (migrants group)*

Note. A solid line represents the significant path of interest. A dashed line represents the non-significant path of interest.

2.5. Discussion

The present study examined the effects of victimization and self-blame/depressive attribution bias on the presence of internalizing problematic behaviors in native and migrant adolescents. A three-way interaction effect was hypothesized, in which the interplay between victimization, depressive attribution bias, and migratory background was expected to significantly affect internalizing problematic behaviors while controlling for the effects of gender, age, and perceived socioeconomic status.

Concerning the covariates, significant effects of gender and socioeconomic status on internalizing problematic behaviors were found. These findings align with previous research emphasizing a positive relationship between low subjective social status and elevated levels of mental health problems (for a more extensive review, see Zell et al., 2018). Furthermore, in line with prior research (McLean et al., 2011; Parker & Brochie, 2010; Shorey et al., 2021), the present study

found elevated levels of internalizing problems in girls, in comparison to boys. Moreover, the results of the regression analysis add to an extensive literature indicating a positive relationship between victimization experiences and internalizing symptoms (Casper & Card, 2017; Christine et al., 2021; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Liao et al., 2022; Tsaousis, 2016). Indeed, peer victimization can result in increased social isolation, self-doubt, lowered self-esteem, and a disruption of the fundamental need for social belonging among children and adolescents, thereby contributing to their risk of developing internalizing problems (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bernasco et al., 2022). A positive and significant effect of depressive attribution bias on internalizing problematic behaviors was also found. This result aligns with previous research establishing significant associations between cognitive factors (i.e., cognitive styles, attribution biases) and the emergence of depressive symptoms (Graber, 2004; Kaslow et al., 2000; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1994). According to these findings, adolescents who lean towards negative attribution biases (and especially depressive bias) are more inclined to blame themselves for interpersonal failure (Graber, 2004). This maladaptive cognitive pattern, in which individuals tend to attribute adverse events to stable and internal causes while believing they are unable to cope with adverse circumstances, contributes significantly to their risk of developing internalizing disorders (Abramson et al., 1978; Kinderman & Bentall, 1997; Luten et al., 1997). Undoubtedly, an individual's cognitive style interacts with their environmental demands and developmental challenges, which all contribute to influencing the occurrence of internalizing problems. Following this perspective, previous studies have identified depressive attribution bias as a moderator of the adverse effects of victimization, thereby exacerbating its impact on mental health (Gibbs & Alloy, 2006; Perren et al., 2013).

Furthermore, the present results confirmed the presence of a significant three-way interaction indicating that, among native individuals, victimization was significantly and positively associated

with internalizing problematic behaviors, regardless of the level of depressive attribution bias. In contrast, among migrants, this association was significant exclusively at high levels of depressive attribution bias. According to the diathesis-stress perspective (Chicoine et al., 2021; Colondro-Conde et al., 2018; Robins & Block, 1989; Swearer & Hymel, 2015), peer victimization represents a significant risk factor for the development of internalizing problems, especially among children and adolescents with a cognitive inclination to interpret stressful events in a self-critical manner (Perren et al., 2013; Swearer & Hymel, 2015).

The present findings offer new insight into the diathesis-stress perspective on minority stress (Burns et al., 2012; Meyer, 1995), suggesting that a self-blame attribution style may amplify the harmful effects of victimization experiences among ethnic minority students. According to the self-blame attribution hypothesis, experiences of violence or discrimination may be more distressing when individuals endorse the prejudicial attitudes that characterize the events (Meyer, 1995, 2003). By stigmatizing their personal condition and attributing their victimization to intrinsic causes, ethnic minority students appear to align themselves with their aggressors and endure additional distress, potentially heightening their risk of developing internalizing problems. The scientific literature on the interpersonal functioning of ethnic minority individuals suffering from racism provides additional support for this argument. For example, previous research has observed that exposure to ethnic discrimination is linked to significant alterations in social-cognitive processing (Brondolo et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2023). Specifically, individuals subjected to racial and ethnic discrimination frequently develop maladaptive cognitions about themselves and others, which can amplify their perceptions of threat and harm in various interpersonal situations (Brondolo et al., 2009; Ross et al., 2023). This is also consistent with the *internalized oppression theory* (David,

2013), which asserts that individuals who are socially oppresed and stigmatized tend to internalize self-destructive and negative thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors.

Conversely, at low levels of self-blame attribution bias, bullying victimization has not shown a significant effect on internalizing problematic behaviors in migrant adolescents. According to Perren et al. (2013), it is plausible to think that individuals who attribute the cause of their victimization to external factors (e.g., blaming bullies for their behaviors) exhibit greater resilience in the face of the psychological consequences of bullying experiences. Specifically, attributing blame to others has been proposed as a regulatory strategy to prevent shame associated with self-blaming interpretations of episodes of discrimination among social minority groups (Burns et al., 2012). Thus, cognitive interpretation styles may influence the affective response of migrant students to bullying. Future studies should further investigate how the way in which adolescents process information about other people and social situations may represent a protective factor against the adverse psychological consequences of bullying, especially in students with a migratory background.

Concerning native students, victimization appeared to significantly predict internalizing problematic behaviors, regardless of the level of depressive attribution bias. This result confirms that a self-blame attribution style may constitute a pivotal risk factor for internalizing problems associated with bullying victimization, especially among students belonging to social minority groups.

2.6. Conclusion

Bullying constitutes a complex social phenomenon in which perpetrators and victims interpret and attribute meanings to the relational patterns that bind them. In this context, the present study aimed at understanding how the social-cognitive thought patterns of native and migrant adolescents might

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influence the association between internalizing problematic behaviors and victimization experiences.

The results indicated a significant three-way interaction effect between victimization, depressive attribution bias, and migratory background on internalizing problematic behaviors. Specifically, it was observed that, among native students, victimization was significantly and positively associated with internalizing problematic behaviors, regardless of the level of depressive attribution bias. In contrast, among migrant students, this association was significant only at high levels of depressive attribution bias. These findings provide support for the diathesis-stress framework (Spielman et al., 1987; Swearer & Hymel, 2015) within the context of the minority stress model (Burns et al., 2012; Meyer, 1995), suggesting that a self-blame attribution style may amplify the harmful effects of victimization experiences in ethnic minority students.

However, the present study had several limitations. First, the absence of longitudinal data prevented the estimation of causal relationships. Future research employing longitudinal designs should investigate the reciprocal effects of victimization, cognitive style, and internalizing problems. Indeed, several studies have highlighted a bidirectional relationship between the risk of being bullied and the presence of internalizing disorders, suggesting the existence of a vicious cycle in which these two phenomena exert a mutual influence (for a comprehensive review, see Christina et al., 2021).

Second, the reliance on self-report measures introduced the potential for inaccuracies and desirability bias in respondents' answers. Future research should utilize more precise measures of victimization, incorporating a multi-informant approach including peer and teacher evaluations.

Third, the study applied a convenience sampling technique, raising concerns about selection bias. This limits the generalizability of the findings, alongside the small sample size. Future research should seek to replicate the study using representative samples of the population.

Lastly, the study employed a definition of migrant students that limited any exploration of ethnic and cultural differences. Recent studies have highlighted cultural variations in youth attributions about peer victimization, and the relationship between these attributions and internalizing problems (Yang et al., 2022). Future research should investigate these aspects further, as attributions regarding victimization experiences may have different implications for the psychological adaptation of students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Despite the abovementioned limitations, the present study contributes to the literature by identifying specific risk factors for the psychosocial adaptation of young individuals with a migrant background. Understanding the unique challenges and vulnerabilities faced by these youth is crucial for designing effective programs to enhance their psychological and social well-being. Furthermore, by identifying factors that may impact their adaptation (e.g., cognitive styles, victimization experiences), researchers and practitioners may tailor interventions to address these specific needs, thereby enhancing the mental health and resilience of young individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

3. Ethnic-racial Identity and Prosocial Behaviors among Latino Adolescents: A Cross-Cultural Comparison

3.1. Introduction

Adolescence represents a crucial developmental stage during which individuals actively strive to comprehend who they are and who they aspire to become. This process involves the construction of a personal identity, defined as an internal dynamic organization of motives, abilities, beliefs, and personal history (Marcia, 1989). Consequently, during adolescence, individuals progressively recognize their uniqueness, shared characteristics with peers, and strengths and weaknesses in navigating life complexities. Simultaneously, they endeavor to define and situate their identities within the broader social context, in accordance with the principles expounded by Tajfel and Turner (1987). In this process, the development of an ethnic-racial identity (ERI), defined as one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group (Phinney, 2003), may assume a central role, exerting a significant influence on individuals' adjustment and behavioral patterns.

There is substantial empirical evidence linking ERI to favorable outcomes in adolescent development, such as a reduced risk of maladjustment (Rivas Drake et al., 2014a; Umaña-Taylor & Rivas Drake, 2021). For instance, Smith and Silva (2011) reported a positive association between ERI and self-esteem and well-being, alongside a negative correlation between ERI and depressive symptoms, in adolescence. Furthermore, recent studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between ERI components and academic achievement (Miller & Cotto-Barnes, 2016; Supple et al., 2006). Finally, a meta-analysis focused on youths' positive emotions related to ethnic-group membership observed positive associations between this aspect of ERI and self-esteem, positive social functioning, and overall well-being; and negative associations between this same component of ERI and depressive symptoms, externalizing behaviors, internalizing behaviors, and risky attitudes (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014b).

Prosocial behaviors (e.g., helping or comforting others) have also been shown to play a crucial role in adolescents' positive development (Lerner et al., 2005; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010). In more detail, recent research has highlighted that prosociality is associated with positive outcomes such as self-esteem, academic performance, and self-regulation skills during adolescence (Alessandri et al., 2004; Carlo et al., 2012; Caprara et al., 2000; Fu et al., 2017; Zuffianò et al., 2014). Additionally, youths who exhibit prosocial behavior tend to experience lower levels of negative adjustment (Chen et al., 2019; Memmott-Elison & Toseeb, 2022; Padilla-Walker et al., 2018). Finally, recent studies have observed a relationship between prosocial behaviors and ERI among adolescents, and especially youth of Latin descent (Armenta et al., 2011; Knight & Carlo, 2012). However, our comprehension of this relationship remains marked by gaps and limitations. Accordingly, the present study aimed at investigating the relationship between ERI and prosocial behavior in depth, analyzing the mediating role played by self-esteem and inter-ethnic interactions among Chilean and Colombian adolescents.

3.1.1. Prosocial Behaviors and Ethnic-Racial Identity among Latino adolescents

While much of the literature on adolescence emphasizes problematic behaviors, recent years have seen a notable increase in studies on the development of prosociality during this developmental period (Eisenberg et al., 2006, 2015; Pfattheicher et al., 2022). This shift aligns with a broader change in perspective from a deficit-based model of psychological development to one emphasizing positive youth attributes (e.g., Benson et al., 2006; Lerner et al., 2005, 2015). Prosociality, referring to voluntary actions taken to benefit others, represents a key indicator of positive adjustment and social functioning. Prosocial behaviors include sharing, helping, caring, and showing empathy (Batson, 1998; Carlo, 2014), and they have been found to be associated with various adaptive factors (for a review, see Silke et al., 2018). For example, previous studies have

shown a positive association between prosocial behaviors and self-esteem (Fu et al., 2017; Zuffianò et al., 2014). As suggested by Fu et al. (2017), adolescents with higher self-esteem may feel more capable of assisting others in need, and therefore more inclined to do so.

Developmental theorists recognize prosociality as a multifaceted concept, encompassing a diverse range of expressions (Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2014). For instance, Carlo and Padilla-Walker's (2020) multidimensional model of prosocial behavior proposes three key dimensions, pertaining to motives, the situation, and the target. Within this framework, the dimension of motives concerns the intentions that drive prosocial behaviors, which can be selfless or selfish. The situation dimension acknowledges social and environmental factors and associated pressures, which can exert favorable or adverse influences on prosocial behaviors. Finally, the target dimension focuses on factors linked to the recipients of prosocial behaviors. This conceptual model also posits that each of the three dimensions intersects with cultural values to shape prosocial behavior. Indeed, culture is an integral part of adolescent development, manifesting through sociocultural mechanisms at individual, interpersonal, and environmental levels. Thus, it is an essential factor to consider in any study of prosocial behaviors.

Applying this culture-specific approach to investigate the impact of ethnic heritage on prosocial development, researchers have proposed culture-related socialization models of altruistic behaviors within U.S. Latino groups (Carlo & Conejo, 2019; Carlo & de Guzman, 2009; Raffaelli et al., 2005). These models posit that the family (including parents and other caregivers) plays a central role as a primary socializing agent for prosocial cultural values. Such values are expressed through various practices that either encourage or discourage specific beliefs and corresponding behaviors in youth. With respect to Latin culture, many scholars have asserted a core set of traditional ethnic values that predict prosocial and moral outcomes in youth (Carlo & Conejo, 2019). One such value

is *familismo* (Garcia-Preto, 1996; Knight et al., 2012; Sabogal et al., 1987), representing a strong cultural orientation towards the family that many Latinos express as a deep sense of duty to care and contribute to their relatives. In Latino families, a strong emphasis on *familismo* may promote prosocial behaviors towards not only family members, but also friends. Another cultural value connected to prosocial development is *respeto*, which describes polite and considerate behavior in interactions with others (Delgado & Ford, 1998).

The importance of respect towards others, as expressed through *familismo* and *respeto*, seems conceptually linked to empathic responding and prosocial behaviors. In this vein, numerous studies have observed positive associations between *familismo* and prosocial behaviors in the U.S. Latino community (Armenta et al., 2010; Knight et al., 2015; Knight et al., 2016). Furthermore, research involving U.S. Latino children and adolescents has observed a positive association between stronger ethnic identity and elevated levels of prosocial behavior, underscoring the connection between ethnic-cultural heritage and this particular behavioral adjustment (Carlo & Conejo, 2019). However, it is unclear whether these findings are specific to interactions within the Latino community or if the Latino ethnic identity also encourages positive and altruistic interactions with members of different ethnic groups.

Further research is needed to understand the pathways through which ethnic identity influences prosocial behaviors among young individuals of Latin American descent. Most previous research on the sociocultural model of prosocial behavior in this community has concentrated on children and adolescents of Mexican origin living in the United States, emphasizing the importance of broadening the investigation to include boys and girls from other Latin American countries (Carlo & Padilla-Walker, 2020). In examining the cultural aspects of prosocial behaviors, it is crucial to recognize the diverse sociocultural backgrounds within the Latino population, especially

concerning their national origins. Many studies on Latin American descents often oversimplify, treating them as a homogeneous entity and overlooking significant cultural distinctions among Latino national groups (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2002). Nevertheless, in accordance with the *ecological systems theory* (Bronfenbrenner, 1989), the sociohistorical context of each country may play a role in shaping the experiences of individuals belonging to those nations.

3.1.2. Ethnic Diversity and Prosocial Behavior

In light of the growing ethnic diversity in modern society, there is an increasing need to investigate the factors that promote inclusive and altruistic attitudes among individuals from various ethnic backgrounds. Despite existing evidence linking ethnic identity to prosocial behaviors towards one's ethnic-racial group, researchers have recently recognized the importance of understanding how these attitudes might also extend to interactions with other ethnic-racial groups (Baldassarri & Abascal, 2020). Specifically, there is growing acknowledgment of the need to identify individual, social, and cultural factors that foster positive relationships among individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds. In this context, social differentiation and inter-group contact may lay the foundation for social cohesion and prosocial behaviors among different ethnic groups (Baldassarri & Abascal, 2020).

According to *contact theory* (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), opportunities for individuals from different ethnic backgrounds to interact can foster favorable attitudes towards the outgroup. Numerous studies have provided empirical support for this theory, indicating that prolonged interactions with individuals from other ethnic groups can reduce racial prejudice and hostility, thereby forming the basis for positive inter-ethnic relationships (Paluck et al., 2019). Indeed, interactions with individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds can influence attitudes towards members of different ethnic groups in various ways, potentially enhancing individuals'

empathic abilities. For example, the diversity perspective suggests that when children interact with a more diverse group of peers, they are challenged to recognize and make sense of the differences in thought between them (Benner & Crosnoe, 2011). These cognitive adjustments are believed to enhance critical thinking skills and social-cognitive abilities, such as perspective-taking (Gurin et al., 2003; Gurin et al., 2002; Wells & Crain, 1994). Consequently, the inclination to approach and interact with members of other ethnic groups may enhance youths' capacity to understand and empathize with others, promoting positive relationships through increased exposure to alternative viewpoints. A recent study provided support for the diverse perspective hypothesis, demonstrating a relationship between classroom ethnic diversity and students' socioemotional abilities and prosocial tendencies (Rucinski et al., 2021). However, further research is needed to fully understand the association between inter-ethnic group interactions and prosocial development in children and adolescents.

3.1.3. Ethnic Identity, Self-Esteem and Interethnic Group Contact

The development of ERI in adolescence involves a dynamic interplay between several processes, including exploration (e.g., personal exploration of one's ethnicity), resolution (e.g., formation of a personal understanding of one's ethnicity), and affirmation (e.g., development of positive feelings about one's ethnic background). These processes have significant implications for youths' psychological adjustment and behaviors (Williams et al., 2020). Research has shown that engaging in the ERI developmental process (through, e.g., exploration and resolution) and having a positive self-concept related to ERI can enhance adolescents' self-esteem (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014)— defined as an individual's subjective evaluation of their worth as a person (Donnellan et al., 2011; MacDonald & Leary, 2012). Specifically, it has been suggested that adolescents who actively explore and achieve a clear understanding of their ERI are likely to develop a positive and well-

informed self-concept and, by extension, positive self-esteem (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2016). Furthermore, in line with the social identity perspective, research has shown that individuals who hold a more positive view of their ethnic-racial group tend to exhibit higher levels of self-esteem (Verkuyten, 2016).

Another positive psychological outcome of ERI development in adolescence is openness to contact with other ethnic groups. In particular, it has been suggested that individuals with higher levels of ERI exploration and resolution may be more adept at forming positive relationships with members of ethnic-racial outgroups, due to their heightened self-awareness and self-confidence (Phinney et al., 1997). Moreover, strong ERI affirmation and resolution can lead to a greater willingness to approach and interact with members of other ethnic groups, driven by increased social self-efficacy and self-esteem (Berry, 2013).

Previous research has provided evidence of positive associations between ERI dimensions and both high self-esteem (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Smith & Silva, 2011) and positive attitudes towards outgroups (French et al., 2013; Wantchekon et al., 2022). It has also demonstrated a link between self-esteem and attitudes towards contact with youth from diverse cultural backgrounds (Phinney et al., 1997; Phinney et al., 2007; Juang et al., 2006). Moreover, a recent longitudinal study reported evidence regarding the mediational role played by self-esteem in the relationship between ERI resolution and attitudes towards inter-group contact (Wantchekon et al., 2023). The present study proposed that adolescents' enhanced ERI would positively affect their self-esteem, contributing to more favorable attitudes towards interactions with individuals from different ethnic backgrounds.

3.2. Aims and hypotheses

The present study examined the pathways linking ethnic identity and prosocial behaviors among adolescents with a Latin heritage, to investigate intra-individual and social factors that may

intersect with cultural background in determining prosocial behaviors. Specifically, two research questions were addressed: (a) Does ethnic identity predict prosocial behavior through the indirect effects of self-esteem and attitudes towards other ethnic groups? (b) Are there differences in the relationship between ethnic identity dimensions and prosocial behaviors across distinct cultural groups from Latin America (i.e., Chilean and Colombian)?

Building on previous research concerning the relationship between ethnic identity and psychological adjustment in adolescence, it was hypothesized that higher levels of ERI exploration, resolution, and affirmation would correlate with higher self-esteem. Consequently, it was expected that higher self-esteem would be associated with a greater inclination to approach other ethnic groups, which would predict a higher propensity for engaging in prosocial behaviors. In line with the diversity perspective (Benner & Crosnoe, 2011), it was further hypothesized that a greater inclination to engage in inter-ethnic social interactions would yield positive effects in terms of adolescents' prosocial tendencies.

Given that prior studies on the relationship between ethnic identity and prosocial behaviors among Latino adolescents have produced limited findings concerning whether—and to what extent—these relationships differ among various ethnic-racial groups, the investigation of whether these processes varied between Chilean and Colombian youths was more exploratory.

3.3. Method

3.3.1. Participants

Data were drawn from the Identity and Positive Youth Development across Cultures (IPYDAC) project, which aimed at investigating the relationship between ERI development and psychological adjustment in adolescents from Colombia and Chile. The participants were 789 adolescents (51%

female, 17% migrants) aged 11 to 19 years (M_{age} = 14.38, SD = 1.75). All were recruited from secondary schools in Santiago (Chile) and Medellin (Colombia).

Data for the Chilean sample were drawn from a broader project focused on the development, implementation, and assessment of a school-based intervention named ProCiviCo, which aimed at fostering social cohesion and civic engagement in adolescence (Luengo Kanacri & Jiménez-Moya, 2017). For the present study, only data referring to students who did not participate in the intervention were included. The Chilean sample was comprised of 327 adolescents (50% girls, 34% migrants) aged 11 to 17 years (M_{age} = 12.88, SD = 1.31). Regarding the ethnic composition of this sample, migrant adolescents were from Argentina (3%), Bolivia (5%), Brasil (2%), Colombia (11%), Ecuador (6%), Haiti (9%), Peru (39%), Dominican Republic (1%), and Venezuela (24%). The Colombian sample was comprised of 462 participants (47% girls, 4% migrants) aged 13 to 19 years (M_{age} = 15.43, SD = 1.16). Concerning the ethnic background of migrant participants of this sample, they were from Venezuela (69%), Mexico (23%) and Chile (11%).

3.3.2. Procedures

For both samples, trained researchers collected self-report questionnaire data during school hours. Adolescents who obtained parental consent and provided assent completed paper-and-pencil questionnaires, which required approximately 45 minutes to complete. In each classroom, two to four research assistants were present to explain the activity, provide instructions, and address any participant concerns. The study was approved by the Ethical Committees of Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile and Universidad de San Buenaventura, Medellín.

3.3.3. Measures

Prosociality. The Prosociality Scale (Caprara et al., 2005) was used to evaluate adolescents' overall inclination to engage in prosocial behaviors. The instrument comprises 16 items rated on a five-

point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*), which assess helping (e.g., "I try to help others"), sharing (e.g., "I share the things that I have with my friends"), comforting (e.g., "I try to console those who are sad") and empathic behaviors (e.g., "I easily put myself in the shoes of those who are in discomfort"). The scale has undergone cross-cultural validation in diverse countries (Luengo-Kanacri et al., 2021) and previously been utilized with Chilean and Colombian adolescents (Chávez et al., 2022; Luengo-Kanacri, 2017). In the present study, a general factor of prosociality was used, and the scale demonstrated excellent statistical reliability, with Cronbach's alpha of .93.

Ethnic-racial identity. The Ethnic Identity Scale-Brief (EIS-B; Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2015) was used to evaluate respondents' ERI exploration (e.g., "I have attended events that have helped me learn more about my ethnicity"), resolution (e.g., "I know what my ethnicity means to me"), and affirmation (e.g., "I wish I were of a different ethnicity"). Each subscale consists of three items that are rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*does not describe me at all*) to 4 (*describes me very well*). The affirmation scale is scored via reverse coding. The EIS-B has been shown to demonstrate configural and metric invariance across diverse racial and ethnic groups (Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2015; Sladek et al., 2020). In the present study, each subscale demonstrated acceptable and good statistical reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values of .74 for exploration, .81 for resolution, and .88 for affirmation.

Self-esteem. Self-esteem was assessed using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1979). This measure is comprised of 10 items that are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). As suggested by previous research (Alessandri et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2008), the scale considers two factors of self-esteem: positive self-esteem is measured by five positively worded items (e.g., "I feel that I have a number of good qualities") and

negative self-esteem is measured by five negatively worded items (e.g., "I feel I do not have much to be proud of"). Previous research has confirmed the robustness of the bifactorial structure and the metric invariance across samples from different countries (Alessandri et al., 2015). In consideration of a recent debate about the scale's sensitivity to cultural differences (Alessandri et al., 2015; Chen, 2008; Gnambs et al., 2018), the present study used only the positive self-esteem factor. The scale demonstrated good statistical reliability, with Cronbach's alpha of .80.

Attitudes toward inter-group contact. The Other Group Orientation subscale of the Multi-Group Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992, 1997) was used to assess respondents' attitudes towards inter-group contact. This instrument is comprised of six items that are rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Two items evaluate avoidance of outgroups (e.g., "I don't try to become friends with people from other ethnic groups"), while four items assess positive orientation towards other ethnic groups (e.g., "I enjoy being around people from ethnic groups other than my own"). Previous research (Sladek et al., 2020; Wantchekon et al., 2023) has confirmed the configural and metric variance of this scale across different ethnic groups. Given the aims of the present study, only the positive orientation towards other ethnic groups factor was utilized. The scale demonstrated good statistical reliability, with Cronbach's alpha of .80.

Sociodemographic Variables. Participants provided information regarding their gender, age, and ethnic-racial background. Concerning the latter, participants were asked about both their country of birth and that of their parents, with the aim of developing an migrant-status classification. Following the criteria established in previous studies (Gönültaş & Mulvey, 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018), individuals with at least one foreign-born parent were operationally categorized as

migrant-origin youth. Conversely, adolescents were classified as non-migrant-origin youth if both of their parents were born in the country of residence.

3.3.4. Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted with R software in its RStudio Environment (RStudio Team, 2022), using the lavaan (Rosseel, 2012), semTools (Jorgensen et al., 2016) and semPower (Moshagen & Bader, 2023) packages. Preliminarily, the configural and metric invariance of the scales between groups (i.e., Chile, Colombia) were examined to test the metric invariance of the measurement model. The pattern of modification indices and inter-item correlations indicated significant error covariance between items 1 ("I am pleased to help my friends from class in their activities") and 3 ("I try to help others") of the Prosociality Scale. Since these items depict the same aspect of prosocial behavior (i.e., helping), the residual covariance between them was included in the measurement model. Subsequently, employing the country variable (i.e., Chile, Colombia) as the grouping factor, a multigroup sequential mediation model was estimated to examine the indirect pathways leading from ERI dimensions (i.e., resolution, exploration, affirmation) to prosociality, mediated by positive self-esteem and an orientation towards other ethnic groups. Additionally, participants' gender, age, and migrant status served as covariates in the model, predicting all endogenous variables. Figure 1 illustrates the estimated model paths.

A fully unconstrained model was initially evaluated to assess path differences between the Chilean and Colombian samples, followed by a model in which all parameters were constrained as equal across groups. Subsequently, the models were compared using Satorra's (2020) chi-square difference test. Following Kline (2023), a statistically significant result in the chi-square difference test was considered indicative of a significant difference between models, suggesting that the path estimates could not be reasonably constrained as equal across the groups. In cases where the models

could not be constrained to equality, the statistical significance of the imposed constraints on model parameters were inspected using Lagrange multiplier (LM) tests to pinpoint parameter equality constraints contributing to model misfit. The results of the LM tests, in conjunction with theoretical justification, informed the decision to constrain certain parameters as equal across groups and to allow other parameters to vary freely in the final mediation model. In all analyses, robust full information maximum likelihood estimator was utilized. Model fit was evaluated using the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and the comparative fit index (CFI). RMSEA values of .05 or less were considered indicative of good fit, and values between .05 and .08 were considered indicative of adequate fit (Schumacker & Lomax, 2010). Similarly, CFI values of .95 or greater were considered indicative of good fit, while values of .90 or greater were considered indicative of adequate fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Following Preacher and Selig (2012), Montecarlo simulations with 20,000 iterations were computed to estimate the indirect effects and their 95% confidence intervals (CIs) in the mediation analysis. Finally, to assess the power of the SEM model, the semPower package (Moshagen & Bader, 2023) was used in RStudio. This package assesses the post hoc power of the sample based on a given level of model fit.
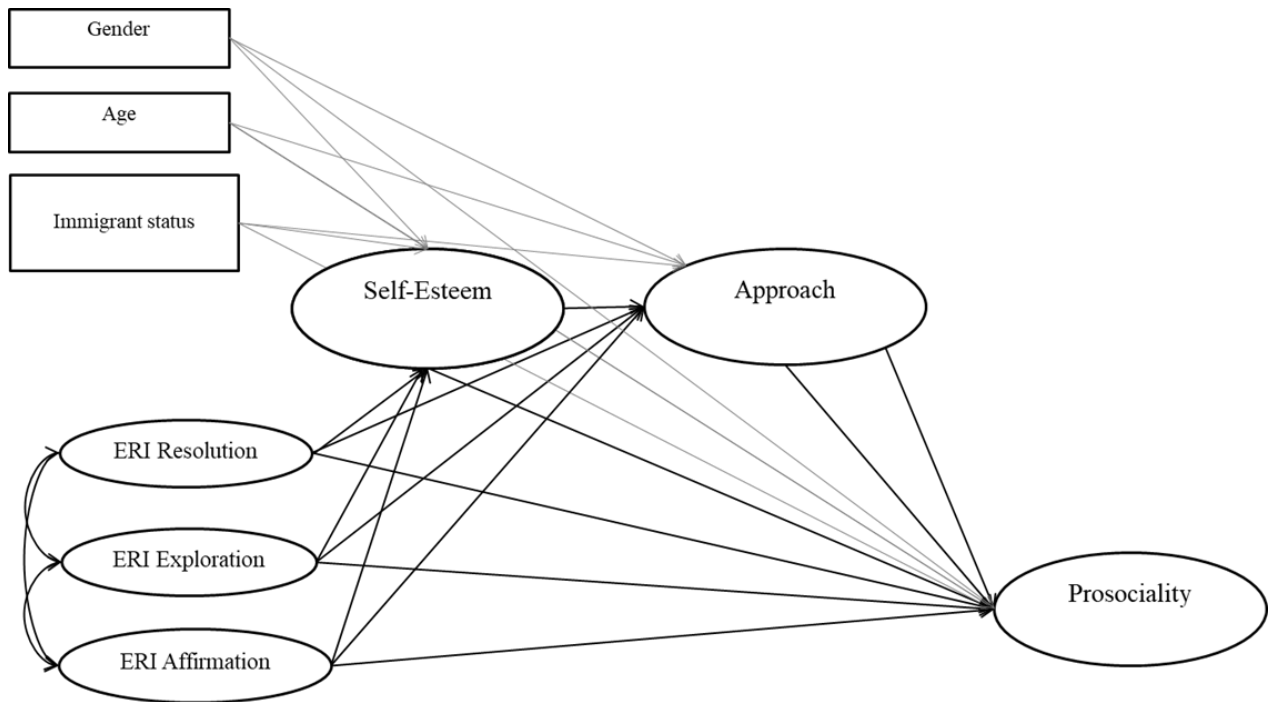
Note. ERI = Ethnic-Racial Identity. Control paths are shown in grey.
Gender (0 = male, 1 = female); migrant status (0 = native, 1 = migrant).
Figure 6. *Paths estimated in the model*

3.4.   Results

Tables 6.1 and 6.2 report the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for the study variables according to the national group.

Table 6.1. *Bivariate correlations among study variables for Chilean participants (n=327)*

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Gender	-								
2. Age	-.09	-							
3. Migrant status	-.03	.18**	-						
4. ERI Exploration	-.01	.10	.21**	-					
5. ERI Resolution	.03	-.02	.18**	.48**	-				
6. ERI Affirmation	.01	.01	.00	.16**	.09	-			
7. Self-esteem	-.06	.02	.11*	.05	.17**	-.06	-		
8. Approach	.15**	.18**	.21**	.25**	.26**	-.01	.20**	-	
9. Prosociality	.08	.17**	.24**	.16**	.06	-.07	.30**	.42**	-
M (SD)	-	12.88 (1.31)	-	1.78 (.83)	2.51 (.96)	1.51 (.61)	2.95 (.68)	2.67 (.82)	3.14 (.88)
Scale range	0-1	11-17	0-1	1-4	1-4	1-4	1-5	1-4	1-5

Note. ERI = ethnic-racial identity; gender (0 = male, 1 = female); migrant status (0 = native, 1 = migrant).
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 6.2. *Bivariate correlations among study variables for Colombian participants (n=462)*

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Gender	-								
2. Age	-.01	-							
3. Migrant status	-.01	.02	-						
4. ERI Exploration	-.09	.05	.01	-					
5. ERI Resolution	-.10*	-.02	.03	.48**	-				
6. ERI Affirmation	.06	-.04	-.09	-.13**	-.06	-			
7. Self-esteem	-.09	.07	.07	.20**	.24**	.12**	-		
8. Approach	.01	-.02	.05	.22**	.21**	.09	.14**	-	
9. Prosociality	.22**	.08	.01	.21**	.23**	.09	.25**	.40**	-
M (SD)	-	15.43 (1.16)	-	1.80 (.72)	2.59 (.83)	3.62 (.58)	3.23 (.60)	3.01 (.60)	3.50 (.74)
Scale range	0-1	13-19	0-1	1-4	1-4	1-4	1-5	1-4	1-5

Note. ERI = ethnic-racial identity; gender (0 = male, 1 = female); migrant status (0 = native, 1 = migrant).
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Preliminarily, configural and metric invariance were assessed within the measurement model to evaluate the psychometric equivalence of the constructs related to ethnic identity dimensions, positive self-esteem, an orientation towards other ethnic groups, and prosociality across the Chilean and Colombian groups. The baseline model was estimated, allowing all factor loadings to be freely estimated across the groups ($\chi^2(1190) = 2265.465$; CFI = .90; SRMR = .05; RMSEA = .05; 90%

CI [.04, .05]). Subsequently, all loadings were constrained as equal across the Chilean and Colombian samples (χ^2(1218) = 2296.145; CFI = .90; SRMR = .05; RMSEA = .05; 90% CI [.04, .05]). A chi-square difference test revealed no statistically significant difference in fit between models, confirming metric invariance between the groups ($\Delta\chi^2$(Δdf) = 30.68(28); p = .33). Confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the constrained model exhibited acceptable fit to the data (χ^2(1218) = 2296.145, p < .001; CFI = .90; SRMR = .05; RMSEA = .05; 90% CI [.04, .05]). The factor loadings for the latent constructs were all statistically significant and in the range of .34–.85.

To test the main hypothesis, a latent sequential mediation model was estimated, in which ethnic identity dimensions predicted prosociality through self-esteem and an orientation towards other ethnic groups, while controlling for the effects of gender, age, and migrant status. A multigroup analysis was conducted to compare the regression path coefficients between the Chilean and the Colombian samples. Initially, a sequential mediation model was estimated, allowing all regression coefficients to be freely estimated across the groups. The model showed acceptable fit to the data (χ^2 (1190) = 2265.465, p < .001; CFI = .90; SRMR = .05; RMSEA = .05; 90% CI [.04, .05]). Thus, all regression parameters were constrained as equal across the Chilean and Colombian samples (χ^2(1211) = 2325.740, p < .001; CFI = .90; SRMR = .06; RMSEA = .05 90% C.I.: [.04, .05]). The chi-square difference test revealed a significant difference between the constrained and unconstrained models ($\Delta\chi^2$(Δdf) = 60.27(21); p < .01), with the latter demonstrating better fit to the data. Given the observed non-invariance, a partially invariant model was considered and specified based on the results of the LM tests. This final sequential mediation model demonstrated acceptable fit to the data (χ^2(1205) = 2281.715, p < .001; CFI = .90; SRMR = .05; RMSEA = .05; 90% CI [.04, .05]). The chi-square difference test showed no statistically significant difference in terms of

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fit between this model and the one allowing all regression parameters to vary, indicating that the smaller model could be accepted ($\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df) = 16.25(15)$; $p = .36$).

The results revealed that, in both groups, ERI resolution had a positive effect on self-esteem and an orientation towards other ethnic groups. This suggests that, as adolescents felt more resolved in their ERI, they reported higher levels of self-esteem and a more favorable attitude towards outgroup members. Additionally, self-esteem and an orientation towards other ethnic groups were positively associated with prosocial behavior, with adolescents with higher self-esteem and a more positive attitude towards outgroup members demonstrating a greater inclination to engage in prosocial behaviors. A significant negative association between ERI resolution and prosociality emerged exclusively in the Chilean group.

Regarding ERI exploration, a positive and significant association with prosociality was observed in both groups. Therefore, the extent to which adolescents were exploring their ethnicity was significantly correlated with their inclination to feel and behave in prosocial ways. Both ERI exploration and ERI affirmation emerged as positive and significant predictors of self-esteem only among Colombian adolescents. No significant relationships emerged between ERI exploration or ERI affirmation and adolescents' approach attitudes, in either group. Figure 7 presents the path coefficient estimates.

The analysis of indirect effects revealed that self-esteem mediated the relationship between ERI resolution and prosociality for all adolescents ($\beta = .04$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI [.016, .075], $p < .01$). Thus, adolescents who expressed a greater sense of ERI clarity also tended to report higher self-esteem. This, in turn, positively predicted prosocial feelings and behaviors. Similarly, a higher inclination to approach outgroup members was found to mediate the association between ERI resolution and prosociality ($\beta = .07$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [.026, .124], $p < .01$). Additionally, a

significant sequential indirect effect of ERI resolution on prosociality via self-esteem and an orientation towards other ethnic groups emerged for all adolescents ($\beta = .01$, $SE = .006$, 95% CI [.003, .023], $p < .05$). Therefore, adolescents with a greater sense of clarity regarding their ERI reported higher self-esteem and a greater inclination to approach outgroup members. This latter factor significantly and positively predicted prosociality.

Regarding the other ERI dimensions, no significant indirect effect on prosocial tendencies were observed in either group. The model included the covariates of gender, age, and migrant status to control for their direct and indirect effects. Concerning self-esteem, a significant gender difference was observed, with boys reporting higher self-esteem than girls. Conversely, females tended to show a greater orientation towards other ethnic groups and more prosocial behavior. However, the impact of gender on prosociality was statistically significant only in the Colombian group. Similarly, age displayed a significant and positive association with approach attitudes in the Chilean group, while this effect was not observed in the Colombian group. A significant and positive effect of age on prosocial feelings and behaviors was also observed in both groups. Furthermore, both groups demonstrated a significant and positive effect of age on prosocial feelings and behaviors. Additionally, the results showed a significant effect of migrant status on the inclination to interact with other ethnic groups, with higher results for the latter observed among foreign-born participants. Lastly, significant indirect effects of gender ($\beta = .05$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI [.020, .085], $p < .01$), age ($\beta = .08$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [.031, .127], $p < .01$), and migrant status ($\beta = .03$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI [.003, .066], $p < .05$) on prosociality were identified, mediated by an orientation towards other ethnic groups. Notably, the indirect impact of age on prosociality was only significant for the Chilean group.

The final model explained 29% of the variance in prosocial behaviors in the Chilean group and 38% in the Colombian group.

To ensure the robustness of the sequential indirect effect, a post-hoc power analysis was performed, adhering to the recommendations outlined by Moshanger and Bader (2023). The parameters were set as follows: degrees of freedom (df) = 1,205; sample size (N) = 462, 327; and Fmin value based on $RMSEA$ ($F0$) = 1.446, 1.446. Power exceeded 99% at a significance level (α) of 0.05.
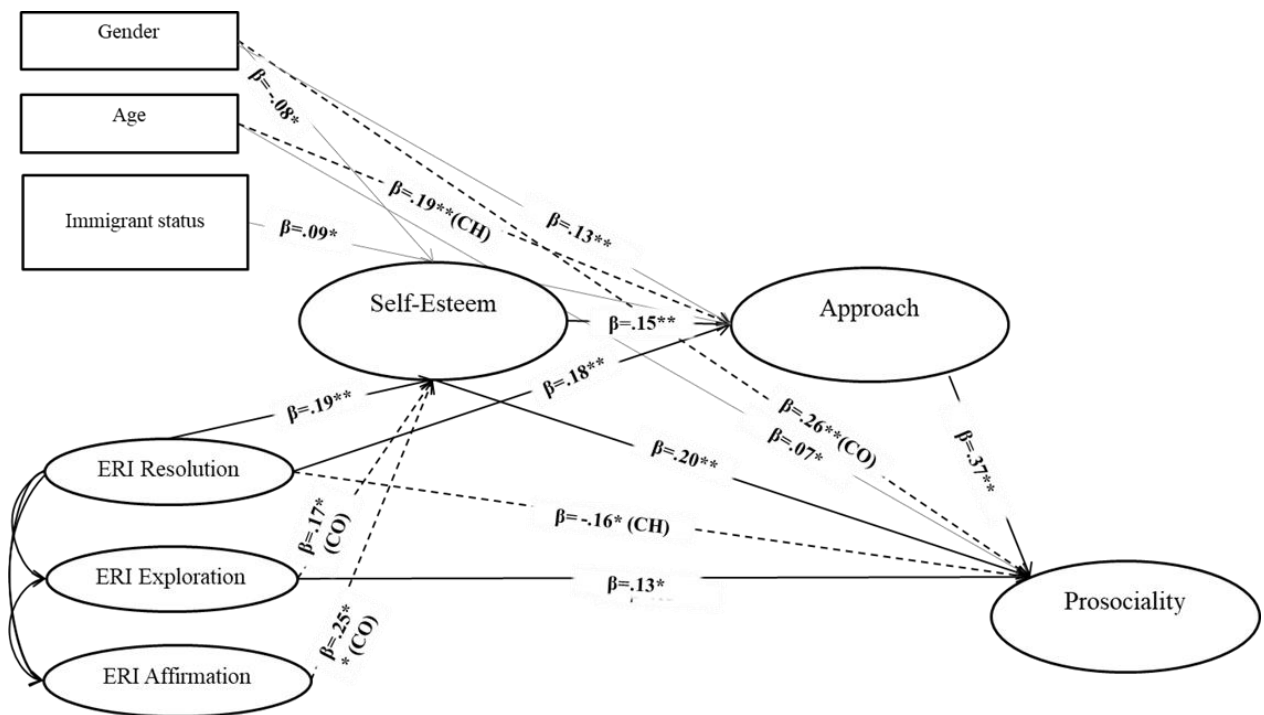
Note. ERI = Ethnic-Racial Identity; CH = Chilean group; CO = Colombian.
Gender (0 = male, 1 = female); migrant status (0 = native, 1 = migrant).
Significant paths of interest constrained to be equal across national groups are represented by solid lines. Paths of interest that could not be constrained across groups but were significant for at least one group are represented by dashed lines. Paths of interest that were not significant for any group were not shown for ease of illustration. Control paths are shown in grey.
Model fit statistics: $\chi^2(1205)$ = 2281.715, $p < .001$; CFI = .90; $SRMR$ = .05; $RMSEA$ = .05 (*90% C.I.:* .04-.05), p = .899.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$
Figure 7. *Path diagram for the partial constraints model.*

3.5. Discussion

The present study aimed at investigating the pathways linking ERI to prosocial behaviors among adolescents of Latin heritage. Specifically, the effects of ERI dimensions (i.e., exploration, resolution, affirmation) on prosocial tendencies in Chilean and Colombian adolescents were examined while considering the mediating roles played by positive self-esteem and attitudes towards other ethnic groups. Higher levels of ERI exploration, resolution, and affirmation were hypothesized to correlate positively with greater self-esteem. Consequently, it was expected that higher self-esteem would be linked to a stronger orientation towards other ethnic groups, which would be correlated with higher prosocial tendencies.

To test the hypotheses, it was estimated a latent sequential mediation model in which ERI dimensions predicted prosociality through self-esteem and an orientation towards other ethnic groups, while controlling for the effects of gender, age, and migrant status. Additionally, it was conducted a multigroup analysis to explore cross-cultural differences in the relationship between ERI and prosocial behaviors among adolescents from Chile and Colombia.

The results demonstrated a significant sequential indirect effect of ERI resolution on prosociality through positive self-esteem and an orientation towards other ethnic groups, for both Chilean and Colombian adolescents: Adolescents with more clarity and stability around their ERI had higher self-esteem and reported a greater propensity to approach members of other ethnic groups. This increased inclination to approach others from different backgrounds represented a significant and positive predictor of prosocial behaviors.

These findings align with prior research demonstrating the positive impact of ERI resolution on adolescents' psychological adjustment (Rivas-Drake & Umaña-Taylor, 2019). In more detail, the results provide further evidence of positive relationships between ERI resolution and both self-

esteem (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2015) and an orientation towards other ethnic groups among adolescents (Juang et al., 2006; Phinney et al., 2007). Accordingly, they lend empirical support to the diversity hypothesis, linking inter-group interactions with socioemotional skills in youth development (Benner & Crosnoe, 2011). Essentially, this theory suggests that engaging with individuals from different ethnic backgrounds offers valuable social experience that can promote the development and use of empathy and thereby encourage prosocial behavior. The present findings provide support for the relevance of this theory during adolescence, which represents a crucial period for the development of prosocial tendencies.

Furthermore, the results extend previous knowledge concerning the relationships between ERI, self-esteem, and approach attitudes (Wantchekon et al., 2023), as well as the sociocultural perspective on prosocial behaviors (Carlo & Conejo, 2019; Carlo & Padilla-Walker, 2020), providing new insights into the pathways through which ERI resolution may affect prosocial behaviors among Latino adolescents. A recently proposed theory posits the existence of a cultural foundation for prosocial behaviors within this ethnic community, rooted in the cultural values of *familismo* and *respeto* (Carlo & Padilla-Walker, 2020). In line with this theory, several studies have highlighted that adherence to these cultural norms, which emphasize care for loved ones and respect for others, is associated with altruistic behaviors among young individuals with Latin heritage (Armenta et al., 2010; Knight et al., 2015; Knight et al., 2016).

It is worth noting the direct and significant negative effect of ERI resolution on prosocial tendencies among Chilean adolescents. This counterintuitive result, which contradicts previous findings and the indirect effects discussed in this study, may be a statistical artifact attributable to multicollinearity between the dimensions of ERI exploration and ERI resolution (as demonstrated

in Table 5.1). However, given the robust acceptable fit of the model, this multicollinearity is not believed to undermine the validity of the analyses.

The present study represents a novel contribution to the literature by illustrating how ERI might shape the prosocial inclinations of Latino adolescents, influencing their beliefs about and attitudes towards members of other social groups. Contrary to expectations, a significant indirect effect of ERI affirmation on prosocial behaviors was not observed in either group. However, a significant effect of this dimension on self-esteem emerged among Colombian adolescents. Specifically, Colombian adolescents who reported positive feelings related to their ethnic belonging exhibited higher levels of self-esteem. This observed difference between the two groups may be attributable to the higher average age of Colombian participants (M_{age} = 15.43) compared to their Chilean counterparts (M_{age} = 12.88). Indeed, previous research has highlighted that the affirmation of one's ethnic belonging tends to increase and become more salient during adolescence (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2009). In accordance with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which posits that individuals tend to view the groups to which they belong in a positive light, the heightened self-awareness that characterizes adolescence may play a significant role as a catalyst for the effects of ERI affirmation (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2009). However, no effect of ERI affirmation on attitudes towards other ethnic groups or prosocial behaviors emerged in the present study.

With respect to ERI exploration, the results did not reveal a significant indirect effect on prosociality mediated by self-esteem or an orientation towards other groups. However, a significant positive and direct effect of ERI exploration on prosocial behaviors in both groups was observed. This finding confirms previous research (Rivas Drake et al., 2014a; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2009; Umaña-Taylor & Rivas Drake, 2021) showing that typical processes of ERI development (e.g., exploration) contribute to psychological adjustment during adolescence. In this context, active

engagement in exploration of one's identity may represent an important indicator of psychological well-being in adolescence, linked to prosocial behaviors.

3.6.   Conclusion

As societies become increasingly ethnically heterogeneous, positive interactions among individuals from various ethnic and racial backgrounds must be fostered to promote equity and justice. The present study expanded upon the literature by investigating pathways of connection between ERI, self-esteem, attitudes towards other ethnic groups, and prosocial behaviors. Additionally, the study generated new insights into the link between ERI and prosocial behaviors in adolescents with a Latino heritage, with respect to two different national groups.

The findings revealed that the development of ERI significantly contributes to adolescents' more positive self-perceptions, inclination to engage with members of ethnic-racial outgroups, and, consequently, prosocial behaviors. Specifically, the study generated new insights into the pivotal role played by ERI resolution in adolescents' psychological adjustment.

Nonetheless, the study suffered from notable limitations. First, the absence of longitudinal data hindered our ability to establish causal relationships. Future investigations employing longitudinal designs are needed to gain a deeper understanding of how ERI development might influence adolescents' attitudes towards outgroups and engagement in prosocial behavior, building upon existing research on inter-group contact.

Second, the reliance on self-report measures introduced a potential for desirability bias in respondents' answers. Additionally, the scale used to assess ERI (i.e., the EIS) may not have comprehensively captured positive ethnic identity, as recent research has suggested that the affirmation subscale, which is reverse coded, may primarily reflect the absence of negative affect rather than the presence of positive affect (Meca et al., 2022). Consequently, the study's use of

negatively worded items in the measurement of ERI affirmation may have influenced the variable's association with self-esteem, representing a positive indicator of adjustment. Future research should seek to replicate the study considering different affirmation measures that incorporate both positive and negative wording. The development of scales with a balanced mix of positively and negatively worded items should also be considered.

Third, the study's utilization of convenience sampling raises concerns about selection bias and limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader Chilean and Colombian population. Finally, the study employed a general measure of prosociality that did not allow for any differentiation according to the targets of prosocial behaviors. Future research should consider measures and techniques such as peer reports and social network analysis to generate further insight into the enactment of prosocial behaviors among different social groups.

Finally, future studies involving young individuals from diverse ethnic-racial backgrounds should consider the potential moderating role of other individual variables, such as migratory background and acculturation strategies, on the relationship between ethnic identity and prosocial behaviors.Despite the aforementioned limitations, the present study provides a valuable contribution to the literature on protective factors influencing the development of prosocial and positive inter-ethnic relationships during adolescence. The findings may provide direction to researchers and practitioners seeking to customize interventions aimed at enhancing prosocial behaviors and promoting social cohesion among students from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds.

4. General Discussion

As our societies become more ethnically diverse, there is a growing need to explore ways to encourage interactions and foster cohesiveness among individuals from various cultural backgrounds. This matter is particularly important for the younger generation.

Adolescence is a critical stage of development during which individuals experience the expansion of their social world, navigate the intricacies of peer relationships, and build their identity. These processes can be particularly challenging for migrant adolescents as they must navigate the duality of their ethnic-racial identity and their integration into the host society, all within the context of their migratory history and cultural background.

This research aimed to shed light on the various influences of peer interactions and individual dispositions that contribute to the well-being and mental health of native and migrant adolescents. Understanding the intricate interplay of factors impacting the mental and social development of native and migrant adolescents, especially those with a migratory background, is vital for informing policies and interventions to promote positive psychological outcomes and mitigate potential risks. This research provided valuable insights into the psychological resilience and social challenges faced by those with diverse ethnic backgrounds, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between ethnic identity, social environment, and psychological adjustment of native and migrant adolescents. The results have the potential to provide helpful information for developing tailored intervention strategies to foster positive interethnic relationships among adolescents.

Previous research has consistently shown that migrant and minority youth are more likely to be unfairly treated and victimized due to factors associated with their ethnic or cultural background, religion, or language. This mistreatment often takes the form of social prejudice and discrimination

directed at them. At the same time, numerous studies have established a strong association between peer victimization and negative psychological consequences, particularly in internalizing issues like depression and anxiety. So, when young individuals are subjected to bullying, it can harm their mental well-being. Bringing these two aspects together, it becomes evident that the unfair treatment and victimization experienced by migrant and minority youth can significantly contribute to their psychological maladjustment.

Following this, the first two studies presented in this paper have investigated bullying victimization and internalizing issues among native and migrant adolescents in Italy.

The first study specifically aimed to examine whether experiences of victimization and encounters with ethnic discrimination might play a role in shaping disparities in social anxiety between migrant and native adolescents. The findings suggested that, within the 2 months before the study, first-generation and second-generation migrant adolescents experienced school victimization more frequently than their native counterparts. This increased vulnerability to bullying resulted in a significant risk factor for social anxiety symptoms. Furthermore, among the migrant participants, an indirect effect was observed, where the perception of being categorized as a minority was associated with social anxiety through the mediation of perceived ethnic discrimination at school. This finding offers valuable evidence that individuals' migratory background does not solely determine the likelihood of experiencing discrimination and its subsequent psychological consequences. Instead, it is significantly influenced by how much they are perceived as deviating from the majority culture.

The second study focused on understanding how certain cognitive processes can contribute to the development of internalizing issues in migrant adolescents who have experienced victimization. Specifically, it examined how a depressive attribution style in interpreting negative social

interactions might intersect with one's migratory background to explain the adverse mental health effects of peer harassment. The results indicated that among native individuals, victimization is significantly and positively associated with internalizing problematic behaviors regardless of depressive attribution bias levels. In contrast, among migrants, this association becomes significant exclusively at high levels of depressive attribution bias. This finding provided evidence of the diathesis-stress framework within the context of the minority stress model, suggesting the potential for a self-blame attributing style to amplify the harmful effects of victimization experiences in ethnic minority students.

These two studies have contributed to identifying specific risk factors affecting the psychological and social adaptation of young individuals with a migrant background. Understanding these adolescents' unique challenges and vulnerabilities is essential for designing effective programs to enhance their mental and social well-being, thereby addressing social and health disparities. By pinpointing risk factors such as negative cognitive styles and experiences of victimization that can impact their adaptation, this research provided helpful information for developing interventions specifically tailored to address the unique needs of these adolescents. This targeted approach can significantly enhance the mental well-being and resilience of young individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds.

Although the research provides valid results, several research questions await further investigation. For instance, future studies should conduct longitudinal studies to examine how the identified risk factors impact the long-term psychological and social well-being of young individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. This approach would provide insights into the lasting effects and the potential for change over time. Additionally, comparative analyses across different countries or regions should be conducted to determine the extent to which risk factors and their effects might

vary based on cultural and social contexts. Furthermore, it would be important to study the differences between first and second-generation migrants regarding social integration at school and its implications for mental health.

The third study within this thesis was carried out during a 6-month visiting period to Santiago de Chile. Its primary focus was investigating the positive aspects associated with the formation of ethnic identity during adolescence. The study aimed to identify specific protective factors that influence the development of prosocial and positive interethnic relationships during this critical life stage. The findings from this research unveiled that the development of ethnic-racial identity significantly contributes to adolescents' more positive self-perceptions, their propensity to interact with individuals from different ethnic-racial backgrounds, and, consequently, their inclination towards prosocial behavior. In particular, the study offered valuable insights into the pivotal role of the resolution process of ethnic identity development in promoting psychological adjustment. It emphasized that the appreciation of ethnic and cultural differences and the socialization of the positive values associated with them can play a significant role in fostering positive intergroup relations among young people.

This insight underscores the importance of developing interventions to promote cultural diversity and encourage the sharing of positive values within diverse ethnic and cultural groups. Doing so could help build harmonious and positive relationships among young individuals from different backgrounds. This approach will not only enhance social cohesion among adolescents but also enrich the cultural fabric of society. Researchers could design and evaluate interventions based on the insights gained from this study. These interventions might include educational programs to promote intercultural understanding and foster positive ethnic identity among adolescents. Active community engagement and collaboration with educational institutions, cultural organizations, and

youth groups could be valuable in promoting cultural diversity and positive interethnic relationships among young people.

The conclusions drawn from this study suggest several directions for future research that could further enhance our understanding of the effects of ethnic identity and interethnic relationships among young individuals. For instance, future studies may employ longitudinal designs to track the developmental path of ethnic identity and interethnic relationships among young people over time. This would allow for an analysis of how these factors evolve and influence the long-term lives of youth. Additionally, comparative studies involving young individuals from diverse ethnic-racial backgrounds can provide valuable insights into the influence of specific variables, such as acculturation and cultural values, on interethnic relationships.

These potential research directions could further solidify our knowledge and inform future efforts to support migrant's well-being and foster positive interactions among young people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Finally, in the context of this work, it is important to acknowledge and critically assess the general limitations that may impact the extent and applicability of our findings. One prominent limitation of this research is the absence of longitudinal data. The three studies relied on data collected at a specific point in time, providing a snapshot of the situation. In the absence of longitudinal data, the ability to track the development of trends and patterns over time is limited. Another limitation is the specificity of the cultural contexts in which the research was conducted. The study was carried out in specific regions or countries, such as Italy, Colombia and Chile, each with its unique cultural and social dynamics. While the findings offer valuable insights within these contexts, they may not be universally applicable. The research findings should be interpreted within the specific cultural contexts they represent, and caution should be exercised when applying them to different settings.

Furthermore, the lack of representative population samples in the three studies constrains the generalizability of the findings, marking another overarching limitation of this research.

In conclusion, while this research has yielded valuable insights into the risk and protective factors influencing the psychological and social adaptation of young individuals with migrant backgrounds, it is imperative to recognize and acknowledge its inherent limitations. These limitations, encompassing the absence of longitudinal data, the specificity of cultural contexts, and the lack of representative samples, emphasize the need for cautious and context-specific interpretation of the findings. Furthermore, they provide directions for future research to address these limitations and expand our knowledge in this critical area of study.

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