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Promoting Adolescents' Cultural Identity Development:

Adaptation and Implementation of the *Identity Project* Intervention in Italian Schools

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Summary

As societies worldwide become increasingly diverse, the successful adaptation of immigrant and cultural minoritized youth represents a pivotal challenge also in recent receiving countries like Italy, that still struggle with finding an effective path toward multiculturalism. This ambivalent attitude is shown in immigration policies, the scarce resources allocated to enhance inclusion services and pluralistic education, as well as the rise of anti-immigration sentiments among the local population. Given the increasing social polarization and interethnic tensions, reaching a definition of one's identity in relation to our cultural background(s) and learning how to navigate diversity have become even more pressing and relevant tasks for all youth as they transition into adulthood.

The construct of cultural identity has been extensively studied in countries characterized by complex intercultural relationships and long migration history such as the United States. In the last years, however, also the European institutions repeatedly addressed issues of systemic discrimination, respect for diversity, and the right of minoritized groups to maintain their cultural heritages. At the same time, scholars in Europe took an interest in these topics and current findings indicate that cultural identity might promote better adjustment and greater intercultural competence also in this geographical context. Furthermore, they suggest that individual identity development can also be fostered within the school setting, which plays a central role in youth's acculturation and socialization. Yet, in spite of these international calls to foster support for diversity and the acknowledged significance of cultural identity formation, there is still a dearth of evidence-based interventions that offer effective tools and safe environments for youth to engage with these issues.

On these premises, the *Identity Project* (IP) was originally designed in the United States as a school-based intervention to engage students in activities that stimulate cultural identity

exploration processes and, in turn, wellbeing and quality of interethnic relationships. The intervention was successfully tested in the United States and piloted in Germany, showing promising results. Hence, the main goal of my doctoral project, as reported in this thesis, was to culturally adapt and then implement the IP among multiethnic adolescents in Italy, to test its efficacy in a different sociocultural context with distinct histories and patterns of migration.

Study 1 presents the online pilot implementation of the Italian version of the IP conducted between March and May 2021. Findings supported the feasibility and acceptability of the culturally adapted IP, with students enjoying its participatory approach and learning more about their classmates' cultural origins, and indicated an increase in cultural identity resolution, but not exploration. Yet, the remote delivery and the overall impact of the COVID-19 pandemic posed some lingering questions on possible differential effects of an in-person delivery with respect to participants' engagement and exploration opportunities in and out of the classroom.

In study 2, we evaluated the efficacy of the Italian IP through a large-scale randomized controlled trial conducted between October 2021 and January 2022, exploring the potential moderating role of immigrant background and environmental sensitivity. Results confirmed the efficacy of the adapted version of the IP in boosting exploration from pre- to postest, whereas no ripple effect on resolution emerged at follow-up. Moreover, adolescents with higher (vs lower) levels of environmental sensitivity, also in combination with immigrant background, benefited more in terms of exploration.

In study 3, we used a person-centered approach to identify longitudinal profiles of cultural identity exploration and resolution over a year (October 2021-2022) among youth who had participated in the main implementation of the Italian IP. We also explored differences among profiles in terms of immigrant background and family ethnic socialization, and examined whether profiles were associated with adolescents' psychosocial outcomes. Results showed one exploration profile (with exploration increasing after the intervention and then returning to

initial levels) and four resolution profiles ("stable low", "stable average", "increase low-to-average", "increase high-to-higher"). Youth with immigrant background and highest family ethnic socialization were overrepresented in the "increase high-to-higher" profile. Finally, profile membership was a significant predictor of positive adjustment one year after for all indicators (i.e., global identity cohesion, self-esteem, academic engagement, depressive symptoms, prosocial behavior) except other group orientation, with youth increasing in their levels of resolution reporting the best outcomes.

Our work provides novel evidence on the cultural adaptation process and efficacy of the IP program, and highlights the relevance of intervening on cultural identity formation among adolescents from diverse background also in recently receiving countries like Italy. Taking into account the role of individual and contextual factors (e.g., minoritized background, environmental sensitivity, family ethnic socialization) appears essential to comprehend for whom the IP intervention might be more beneficial, also in terms of adjustment in the long run. Furthermore, the identification of distinct pathways for cultural identity exploration and resolution paves the way to research on socialization processes involved in these dimensions, as well as to practical implications on spot interventions to enhance their development.

Our wish is for future researchers and professionals to further acknowledge the value of different cultural heritages within the school setting as well as in the broader society. In doing so, some of the extant limitations will be hopefully overcome, by better rendering the unique experiences of distinct cultural groups and implenting interventions like the IP in different geographical areas and sociocultural settings to extend ecological validity. To ensure sustainability and effectiveness, educational institutions should integrate such tools and spaces to foster identity development and positive interethnic relationships in a systematic and structured way, ultimately preventing ethnoracial-based disparities and building a more inclusive education in a pluralistic perspective.

CHAPTER 1

General introduction

"In the social jungle of human existence,

there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity."

Erik Erikson (1968)

Societies worldwide are becoming increasingly multicultural, due to globalization and major sociopolitical events including the so-called "refugee crisis" (Silove et al., 2017). Recent estimates indicate that there were around 281 million international migrants in the world in 2020, equating to 3.6% of the global population (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2022). Consequently, youth from various cultural backgrounds, who have experienced migration either vicariously or first hand, constitute now a fundamental part of the social fabric of many European countries (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2020). The COVID-19 outbreak massively impacted human mobility and somewhat temporarily disrupted migration flows, as a consequence of governmental restrictions on internal and international movements (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2022). At the same time, a large body of evidence shows that the pandemic has exacerbated socioeconomic disparities and discrimination against immigrants and individuals from ethnoracial minoritized[1] groups (Devakumar et al., 2020; Katikireddi et al., 2021). Hence, as a result of growing up in diverse societies often characterized by interethnic tensions and polarization, reaching a positive self-concept with respect to one's cultural background(s) and developing intercultural competence are two interconnected processes that are crucial for youth's wellbeing and may also contribute to the creation of more inclusive

[1] In this work, the use of the word "minoritized" instead of "minority" is adopted because, quoting Wingrove-Haugland and McLeod (2021), "it makes it clear that being minoritized is not about numbers, but power and equity" (p.1).

multicultural societies. Despite an increasing interest toward these topics in the European scientific community, prevention interventions for youth addressing issues of identity and cultural pluralism are still scarce, especially in more recently receiving countries like Italy.

This thesis sets out on these premises and illustrates the Italian cultural adaptation and implementation of the *Identity Project*, a school-based intervention originally developed in the United States to foster ethnic-racial identity processes and appreciation of cultural diversity (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2017). Indeed, enhancing students' cultural backgrounds within the school environment aligns with the position of the European Union's Commission of the European Communities (2003), supporting the preservation of heritage cultures as a key step in the successful adaptation of minoritized populations, and with Goal 4 of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, i.e., ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

In this chapter, the concept of ethnic-racial/cultural[2] identity is introduced, explaining the theoretical framework and reviewing research investigating this construct as a promotive factor for adolescents' psychosocial adjustment. Next, differences in the conceptualization and terminology related to this construct in Europe and the United States are outlined, to better understand the role played by the sociocultural context in studying and intervening on ethnic-racial/cultural identity. Finally, the *Identity Project* is described, presenting evidence in support of its efficacy in the United States and preliminary results in Europe.

1.1 The role of ethnic-racial identity in adolescents' positive adjustment

As defined by the Ethnic-Racial Identity in the 21st Century Study Group, ethnic-racial identity (ERI) is a multidimensional construct that reflects the knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes

[2] The term "ethnic-racial identity (ERI)" is used to discuss research conducted in the US, while "cultural identity" is used for studies conducted in the European context and for the implementation of the *Identity Project* intervention in Italy, to acknowledge different conceptualizations of ethnicity, race, and culture (for a more detailed explanation, see Chapter 1.2). For the sake of brevity, the two terms are combined ("ethnic-racial/cultural identity") when referring to the broader topic in both geographical contexts.

individuals hold toward their ethnic–racial group membership(s), as well as the processes through which ERI develops (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). The ERI meta-construct, as operationalized in the US, synthesizes two aspects that are pivotal in ERI formation, i.e., race and ethnicity. Race refers to phenotypic distinctions, e.g., skin color, hair texture, and facial features, that are used to justify the unequal distribution of power and resources across groups. Thus, race acquired significant behavioral, psychological, and social implications despite having none in itself, drawing from the social construction of a belief system that amplifies differences between groups and minimizes differences within groups (Helms, 1990). Ethnicity, conversely, refers to the cultural heritage (language, traditions, and customs) passed down through generations among individuals sharing the same ethnic background (Phinney, 1996). Indeed, in societies like the United States characterized by complex ethnic-race relationships and migration history, both ethnicity and race are salient components that inform individuals with respect to their understanding of this part of their identity (Umaña-Taylor, 2016).

Two main theoretical notions underlie the conceptualization of ERI adopted in this thesis (see Umaña-Taylor, 2023): the developmental perspective (Erikson, 1968) and the social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1987). Indeed, the pursuit of identity is a crucial developmental task: although identity keeps evolving throughout the lifespan, its formation gains momentum during the age of adolescence because of the advances in cognitive maturity (e.g., abstract thinking, introspection) and the possibility to explore different potential "selves" (Erikson, 1968). Adolescents, in fact, thanks to increased independence from their parents and autonomy in decision making, can engage more freely with peers and the overall external environment. In his theory of psychosocial development, Erikson (1968) defined adolescence as the "identity vs role confusion" stage, noting that succeeding in resolving one's identity could lead to a more cohesive sense of self and reduce role confusion, and consequently also enhance one's ability to build positive interpersonal relationships and to define one's

values, goals, and future plans. Whereas the developmental perspective focuses on identity formation processes (which also apply to ERI), the social perspective places greater emphasis on the affective components of identity and their relation with individuals' self-concept and psychosocial outcomes (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Indeed, the social identity theory and self-categorization theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1987) posit that an individual's understanding of their identity is highly context dependent, as one's self-concept is influenced by the salience of certain social group memberships in a given context. Moreover, a person's self-concept is based on their personal perspective on the social groups they identify with and their perceptions of how these same social groups are viewed by others.

A relevant distinction in this conceptualization is between ERI process and content (Umaña-Taylor, 2016; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Process concerns how individuals gain awareness on the implications of their race/ethnicity and its impact on their lives, and is captured by the concepts of exploration and resolution. Exploration involves actively searching, observing, and reflecting upon one's identity and heritage (e.g., by learning more about the history of one's ethnoracial group and participating in relevant cultural events and traditions) and it is critical for ERI development, because only by discovering and getting to know more about their cultural background individuals can achieve a definition of this part of their identity (Marcia, 1980; Phinney, 1989). Engaging in this process of exploration helps individuals reach a resolution, i.e., understanding what role their ERI plays in their lives and their global self, and being clear about the meaning this part of their identity has to them (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). This resolution component (also referred to as "commitment"; see Marcia, 1980; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004) may undergo changes especially during adolescence, when youth are most active in discovering the culture, history, and traditions of their ethnoracial group (Huang & Stormshak, 2011), but also later in life, when individuals are confronted with experiences that make them reevaluate emotions and perceptions related to their ethnoracial backgrounds. On

the other hand, content pertains to the attitudes and affect that individuals have with respect to their ethnoracial group affiliation(s). Some examples of content include: affirmation, i.e., positive or negative feelings that individuals hold about their ethnoracial group membership; public regard, i.e., the opinions and attitudes individuals believe that others have about their ethnoracial group; centrality, i.e., the degree of importance individuals give ERI as a meaningful part of their global identity and self-concept; and salience, i.e., the extent to which an individual is aware of their ethnoracial group membership at a certain moment in time or in a specific situation (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

In sum, in a context like the US, ERI is a particularly salient social identity that youth try to understand as they make a meaning of who they are and who they will become (Erikson, 1968), especially in relation to others around them (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As previously mentioned, this increased relevance of ERI partially stems from a socially constructed racial hierarchy that determines a privileged access to resources and life opportunities to the majority group. i.e., White, and marginalizes and systemically discriminates against the other minoritized groups, i.e., Black, Latinx, Asian Americans, Native Americans (Umaña-Taylor, 2016). Furthermore, youth are constantly exposed to messages regarding race and ethnicity from the media and engage with these topics in multiple virtual and in-person interactions, with family, peers, and the broader society (Jones & Rogers, 2022; Rivas-Drake & Umaña-Taylor, 2019a; Sladek et al., 2022). In addition, focusing on this construct is relevant from a scientific and public health perspective, in light of existing research pointing to ERI as a developmental competency that fosters positive psychosocial outcomes. Indeed, there is a wealth of evidence showing that ERI is directly and favorably linked to positive psychological and academic adjustment and negatively associated with indicators of maladjustment, as reported in reviews (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014a; Umaña-Taylor & Rivas-Drake, 2021) and meta-analyses (Miller-Cotto & Byrnes, 2016; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014b; Smith & Silva, 2011). These psychosocial

benefits can be explained as an effect of engaging in ERI exploration and resolution because, via these processes, youth can gain a more mature understanding of their background and status, and thus develop tools to protect their adjustment even in face of adversity, including ethnoracially based discrimination, as well as foster empathy for diverse others (Umaña-Taylor, 2016, 2023). Specifically considering adolescents' samples, ERI as a composite of exploration, commitment, and affirmation was found to have a positive association with self-esteem and wellbeing and a negative association with depressive symptoms, with no relevant differences emerging across participants' ethnoracial groups (Smith & Silva, 2011). Another meta-analysis investigating specifically adolescents' positive feelings toward their ethnoracial group membership also showed negative associations with depressive symptoms, externalizing and internalizing behaviors, and risky attitudes (e.g., substance use), and conversely positive associations with self-esteem and wellbeing, as well as greater academic attitudes and higher achievement, with findings appearing consistent across ethnoracial groups (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014b). Similarly, ERI as a composite of exploration, commitment, affirmation, and belonging was found to be positively related to academic achievement; however, the strength of the relation varied based on participants' ethnoracial group and the dimension of ERI examined. For instance, affirmation was significantly positively related with academic achievement among Black and White youth (but not Latinx and Asian American youth), whereas exploration showed this association only among Black adolescents and public regard only among Latinx adolescents (Miller-Cotto & Byrnes, 2016). Looking at individual studies, higher public regard was linked to more positive attitudes toward engaging with peers from different ethnoracial backgrounds (Wantchekon et al., 2022). Interestingly, a stronger ERI was also found to be associated with youth's support of equality and social justice in a Latinx and Asian American sample (Chan & Latzam, 2015).

To conclude, literature seems to support an overall promotive function of ERI with respect to psychosocial outcomes, but also suggests that the extent to which this construct is facilitative of positive adjustment may vary according to the specific ERI domain and youth's ethnoracial group (Umaña-Taylor & Rivas-Drake, 2021). Moreover, this evidence is mostly based on theoretical and empirical work conducted in the United States (see Seaton et al., 2017), which is understandable in light of the focus placed on issues of ethnicity and race in US society. Yet, it could be argued that the "ethnic-racial" conceptualization might not be sufficient or specific enough to examine this construct among majority and minoritized youth in other geographical and sociohistorical contexts (Verkuyten, 2016).

1.2 Ethnic-racial…or cultural? A European conceptualization

In Europe, core contextual and historical factors contribute to a different perspective and terminology related to ERI. A prominent factor is the still existing taboo around the concept of "race" that originates from World War II, during which the idea of alleged biological differences between groups led to legalized and nationwide discrimination, persecutions, and atrocities that are still vivid in the collective memory. Hence, direct references to these concepts represent to date a very sensitive topic, and the use of the word "race" is erased from the legislation and strongly discouraged in the local vocabulary (Juang et al., 2021; Jugert et al., 2022). Thus, European scholars often shift to terms such "cultural identity" or "heritage identity" when referring to ERI (Juang et al., 2020; Schotte et al., 2018), while encompassing in this notion both the ethnic heritage and the racialization of a particular group in a given socio-historical context synthesized in the Ethnic-Racial Identity in the 21st Century Study Group's definition (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). The attempt of avoiding the reification of racial categorization has often resulted in the adoption of "color-blind" or "color-evasive" ideologies, as if placing more emphasis on the equality among all individuals rather than on racial and

ethnic group differences could help move beyond the past tragic history (Simon, 2017). Nonetheless, discriminatory acts based on ethnicity or racial features, such as skin color, are an existing reality in Europe (Eurobarometer, 2019). There is also an acknowledgment that discrimination does not solely arise from interpersonal attitudes, but it's ingrained in the broader societal system, resulting in inequities and disadvantages based on ethnicity, race, and migration status (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017, 2018). In conclusion, despite the different terminology and egalitarian approach adopted, phenotypic traits and ethnic origin are in reality still used as social markers (Jugert et al., 2022). Similarly, racialization as a societal system of power remains salient, consequently increasing the relevance of ethnic-racial/cultural identity also for European youth (Erentaitė et al., 2018; Grigolo et al., 2011).

A second distinctive factor is the stigmatization weighing in European countries on having a different heritage culture and/or an immigrant background, and thus being labeled a "foreigner" or an "immigrant" (Levy, 2015; Moffitt et al., 2020). This can be explained as a consequence of equating ethnic/cultural identity and national identity, which is also referred to as "ethnic nationalism" (Brubaker, 2009). This overlap between nationality and ethnicity/culture leads to the creation of national identifiers (e.g., "Italian") that become exclusive and are used to describe only individuals of the majority group, as opposed to "'immigrants" or "foreigners" (Moffitt et al., 2018; Svensson et al., 2018).

Despite conflicting opinions among scholars on whether nationality is in fact a proper indicator of culture (Akaliyski et al., 2021; Syed & Kathawalla, 2017), this assumption heavily influences the scientific discourse in Europe, resulting in studies dividing participants between "native" or "national" youth vs youth with "immigrant background" (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2020; Vietze et al., 2023). This binary categorization is problematic not only for terminological reasons (i.e., "immigrant" participants often were born and raised in the country and/or have national citizenship), but is closely related to the exclusion of "non-immigrant"

majority adolescents from most studies investigating cultural identity (Erentaitė et al., 2018). This strengthens the idea that cultural background explains only the behavior exhibited by minoritized youth who, in a way, are the only ones with a "culture" (Causadias et al., 2018), and ultimately relegates the responsibility to resolve their identity and integrate solely to "immigrant" youth (Moffitt et al., 2020). Potentially connected to these theoretical and methodological limitations, research in Europe on cultural identity and related constructs (e.g., cultural socialization, heritage vs national identity) still presents some indecisive evidence. For instance, a review of identity development among cultural minoritized youth found that the positive association between cultural identity and psychological wellbeing was less consistently observed in Europe as compared to the United States (Erentaitė et al., 2018). Moreover, a study conducted in Italy among adolescents from minoritized backgrounds showed that higher levels of cultural identity were, in fact, linked to greater acculturative stress (Musso et al., 2017).

In light of these partially conflicting findings and the predominant focus on so-called "immigrant" youth (Verkuyten et al., 2019), it is essential to further investigate specific dynamics and challenges related to cultural identity development in contemporary European societies among adolescents from both majority and minoritized backgrounds. Furthermore, in such contexts where institutions and people still struggle with addressing issues of multiculturalism, diversity, and racialization, protected collective spaces should be provided for all youth to engage in discussions about these sensitive but highly salient topics.

1.3 How to promote ethnic-racial identity via the *Identity Project*

The *Identity Project* (IP) is a manual-based intervention developed in the United States to support adolescents in achieving the developmental asset of ethnic-racial/cultural identity and fostering understanding and respect toward diverse others within the classroom setting (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2017).

The theory of change underlying the IP curriculum is visually represented in Figure 1.1. Throughout 8 weekly sessions (see Table 1.1), students are given opportunities to delve into their ethnoracial heritage and traditions (such as taking and sharing photos of significant cultural symbols and interviewing individuals from their cultural community), learn about their classmates' background through collective discussion, and develop an understanding of the country's history of migration by listening to stories of past and present discrimination based on real-life events. Through active reflections and debates with facilitators and classmates, adolescents are guided to overcome stereotypes and misconceptions about ethnoracial/cultural affiliation(s), and to understand that everyone is allowed to discover their unique way of experiencing this part of their identity (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a). Participation in the IP sessions encourages adolescents to explore and reflect upon their ERI, and in turn increases their overall identity cohesion, by helping them understand how this component fits within their global identity and the sociohistorical context in which they live. Ultimately, this process has a cascading beneficial effect on several adjustment outcomes (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2017).

Figure 1.1 Theoretical model guiding intervention development for the IP (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2017)

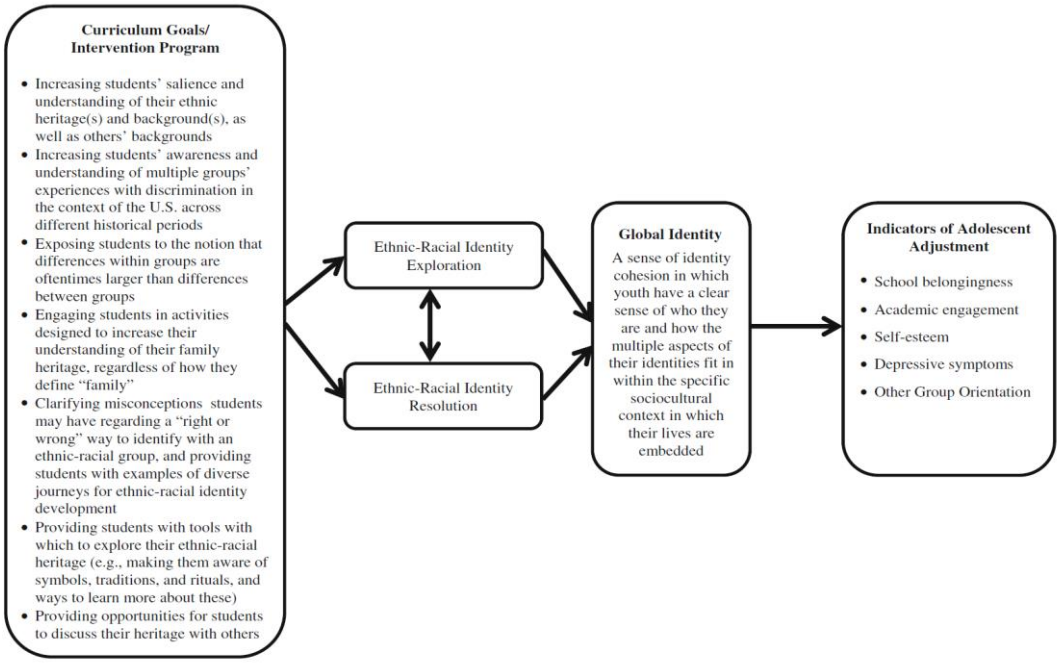


Table 1.1 Overview of the *Identity Project* 8-week curriculum (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a)

1: Unpacking identity
a. Introduce the idea of identity as a multidimensional, fluid construct
b. Identify and categorize different components of students' identities (e.g., personal, social)
c. Emphasize how different components of students' identities can change across time and situations
2: Group differences: Within and between
a. Introduce stereotypes as presumptions based on assumed similarities within groups; allow students to both acknowledge and distinguish themselves from stereotypes
b. Introduce idea that there are more differences within than between "groups"
c. Introduce idea that differences that do exist are continuous, not categorical, and also occur within groups
3: Stories of our past
a. Increase students' awareness of ways in which various groups (e.g., ethnic, religious) have been marginalized throughout U.S. history by sharing true accounts of discrimination from people of different backgrounds
b. Use the various stories to build a sense of community between students
c. Review themes covered to date
4: My family history
a. Increase students' exploration and knowledge of their own ethnic and cultural heritages
b. Increase students' understanding of complex family systems, and how family members can have different degrees of influence on people
c. Demonstrate similarities that exist between one another in terms of the diversity that exists in family histories
5: Symbols, traditions, and rites of passage
a. Define symbols, traditions, rites of passage, and rituals—as they relate to ethnic/cultural heritages
b. Increase students' understanding of symbols, traditions, rites of passage, and rituals as markers of culture for different ethnic/cultural groups
c. Increase students' exploration and understanding of symbols, traditions, rites of passage, and/or rituals for one of their ethnic heritages
6: Photo processing and storyboards
a. Facilitate students' processing of the photos they took through discussion with peers and the creation of personal storyboards
b. Acknowledge differences in the individual content of students' storyboards, and commonalities in the general themes that students' storyboards represent
c. Increase students' sense of clarity regarding the meaning that the various symbols have for them
7: Ethnic–racial identity as a journey
a. Increase students' understanding that some family members' cultural experiences will be relevant to students but some will not; normalize and validate these contrasting experiences
b. Increase students' understanding that ethnic and cultural heritage(s) can inform who one is, but this is just one part of identity and will vary in importance (across people and time)
c. Students will learn that the meaning of ERI can change across time; and that there is no, single, "correct" ERI journey
8: Grand finale
a. Review major themes covered in Sessions 1–7
b. Celebrate and share the ethnic and cultural heritages that students have explored throughout the past seven sessions
c. Provide an opportunity for students to teach visitors about the information they have learned in the past 7 weeks

The original developers of the intervention specifically targeted middle adolescence because of advances in social and cognitive maturity typical of this developmental period, that enable youth to think about more abstract concepts such as race and ethnicity (Steinberg, 2005). In this phase, adolescents also become increasingly socially aware and focused on defining their identity in a more multifaceted way (Phinney, 1989; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Moreover, the transition into high school can enhance youth's exposure to diversity and has been shown to stimulate changes in ethnic-racial/cultural identity (French et al., 2006).

The IP is conceived as a "universal intervention", drawing from the assumption that ethnic-racial/cultural identity represents an essential competence for all youth, and that the ways and strategies through which youth explore their identity are common across groups, even if the content of the exploration is different (Helms, 1990; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018b). The potential benefits of this program for minoritized youth are based on abundant evidence supporting the promotive role of ERI for their psychosocial adjustment (see Umaña-Taylor & Rivas-Drake, 2021). In addition, a program such as the IP that centers students' identities in the classroom and values diverse backgrounds could foster minoritized youth's academic engagement and learning, making them feel represented in a setting where they often experience marginalization from teachers and peers (Benner et al., 2018; Paris, 2012). Importantly, the IP intervention could play a distinct role in promoting ethnic-racial/cultural identity among majority adolescents. Indeed, the dominant nature of their group membership and the perception of their background as "normative" often hinders a process of exploration, resulting in a lack of conscious reflection with respect to this part of their identity (Helms, 1990; Markus & Moya, 2010). However, as previously mentioned, the polarization and interethnic tensions that characterize contemporary societies made ethnic-racial/cultural identity salient for all youth. In this historical moment, the IP could serve as a first prompt for majority youth to gain more awareness of their identity, while also acknowledging and confronting issues of power

and privilege in a protected space (Umaña-Taylor, 2023). Understanding their own identities, in addition to the power dynamics and inequities of the social context, could make them develop a more positive attitude toward diversity and heighten their sense of agency in terms of making a positive impact on society (Satterthwaite-Freiman et al., 2023). Indeed, evidence in the US and European context showed that ethnic-racial/cultural identity exploration and intercultural contact were positively associated with intercultural competence (Phinney et al., 2007; Schwarzenthal et al., 2017). Following the same rationale of "universality", the sessions are designed to be accessible and relevant to all students, regardless of their family constellations and cultural composition of the classroom. For instance, when the family topic is addressed, students are encouraged to adopt a broad perspective, including also individuals they are not biologically related to (i.e., "social families"). Furthermore, because classrooms can be very diverse within themselves, activities alwas reflect different ethnoracial/cultural backgrounds.

To test its efficacy, the original developers of the IP conducted a small-scale randomized controlled trial ($N = 218$; 37% White, 30% Latinx, 24% Black, 6% Native American, 3% Asian American) among 10th graders (M_{age} = 15 years) attending a high school in the Southwest US (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a). Classrooms were randomly assigned to the intervention or control group, with students in the intervention condition participating in the IP and students in the control condition receiving a contact-equivalent curriculum about educational and career opportunities after high school. Students were administered four surveys over the course of a year (i.e., pretest, posttest, short-term follow-up 18 weeks after pretest, long-term follow-up 67 weeks after pretest). In line with the proposed theoretical model, ERI exploration increased among adolescents in the intervention (vs control) group at posttest, and program-induced change in exploration was linked to increases in ERI resolution at short-term follow-up, with no significant differences between majority and minoritized students. In addition, the long-term follow-up study found that the aforementioned increases in ERI processes predicted better

psychological and academic adjustment (i.e., greater global identity cohesion and self-esteem, lower depressive symptoms, and higher grades) one year later (see Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018b).

Despite the differences in the conceptualization of ethnic-racial/cultural identity previously illustrated, several European scholars saw the relevance of the IP to their national contexts, and adaptations and implementations of the intervention are presently in progress in six European countries, i.e., Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden (Juang et al., 2022; Umaña-Taylor, 2023). The first pilot implementation of the IP in Europe was led by the German research team with a relatively younger age group (i.e., 12-13 years). Results showed moderate support for an increase in cultural identity exploration among students in the intervention group, with youth who participated in the IP also being more conscious of ethnoracially based unfair treatment in the classroom setting and systemic inequities in society (Juang et al., 2020). In October 2020, following the US and German example, our research team embarked on the journey of culturally adapting and implementing the IP in multiethnic classrooms in Italy.

1.4 The present research project

The main purpose of the present research project was to culturally adapt and implement the *Identity Project* (IP) among multiethnic adolescents in Italy, responding to a professed need for evidence-based interventions to foster identity formation, respect for diversity, and equal access and representation within the school context for students from all backgrounds (Commission of the European Communities, 2003; United Nations, 2015). Furthermore, we aimed to explore individual and contextual factors that might moderate intervention efficacy, and investigate potential benefits on long-term psychosocial adjustment.

From a theoretical perspective, this thesis was guided by two main theoretical notions, i.e., the developmental (Erikson, 1968) and social identity perspectives (Tajfel & Turner, 1986;

Turner et al., 1987), that respectively posit that achieving a sense of clarity with respect to one's identity is associate with wellbeing and positive interpersonal relationship, and that this understanding of one's identity is highly context dependent and is based not only on individuals' beliefs about their social groups, but also on how these groups are viewed by others. Following the theory of change underlying the IP (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2017), we focused on cultural identity exploration and resolution as universal processes that are relevant for youth across all cultural groups in globalized and diverse societies (Erentaitė et al., 2018; Umaña-Taylor, 2016).

From a methodological perspective, throughout this doctoral work international guidelines regarding the cultural adaptation of evidence-based interventions were thoroughly observed (Barrera Jr & Castro, 2006; Marsiglia & Booth, 2015). In the three empirical studies included in this work, we initially field-tested the key logistics of our prospective study through a pilot implementation (Kistin & Silverstein, 2015). Secondly, to replicate findings from the original efficacy study (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a), we conducted a randomized controlled trial that was submitted as a Registered Report following open science practices (Syed & Donnellan, 2020). Finally, we adopted a person-centered approach (Bergman & El-Khouri, 2003) and used longitudinal latent profile analysis to investigate identify constellations of cultural identity exploration and resolution assessed at four different time points, including a long-term follow-up one year after baseline (Flay et al., 2005).

From an applied perspective, this work offers valuable practical insights with respect to future intervention implementations and new directions to be explored, including the adaptation to non-formal educational setting, the delivery of the IP in different geographical and sociocultural context to extend generalizability, and its integration within the standard curriculum within Italian schools.

1.5 Overview of chapters

Before reporting on the empirical studies, a general introduction to sociodemographic and historical aspects of the migration phenomenon in Italy and on the cultural adaptation of the IP intervention to the Italian context is provided in Chapter 2.

In Study 1 (Chapter 3), the feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary efficacy of the Italian adaptation of the IP are investigated through an online pilot implementation of the intervention among diverse high school students.

In Study 2 (Chapter 4), we evaluate the efficacy of the Italian IP in stimulating cultural identity exploration and, in turn, resolution through a large-scale randomized controlled trial; in addition, we explore immigrant background[3] and environmental sensitivity as potential moderators of intervention efficacy.

In Study 3 (Chapter 5), we focus on identifying longitudinal profiles of cultural identity processes (i.e., exploration and resolution) among youth who participated in the main implementation of the Italian IP. Moreover, we examine differences among profiles in terms of immigrant background and family ethnic socialization, and whether profile membership predicts adolescents' psychosocial outcomes (i.e., global identity cohesion, self-esteem, academic engagement, depressive symptoms, other group orientation, prosocial behavior) at the long-term follow-up one year after baseline.

Finally, in Chapter 6, findings and lessons learned from the abovementioned implementations of the Italian IP are integrated and discussed. To conclude, limitations, ideas for future research, and insights for practical implications are addressed.

[3] In the chapters illustrating the three empirical studies, the term "immigrant background" is used for youth born in Italy or abroad from at least one parent born abroad, following extant research conducted in Europe (e.g., Schachner et al., 2016). However, it is important to acknowledge that this term is highly controversial for a number of reasons that will be further discussed in Chapter 6.2.

CHAPTER 2

Adaptation of the *Identity Project* to the Italian school context

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part presents an overview of the Italian sociocultural context, with a specific focus on the history of the migration phenomenon in Italy and its current multicultural demographic composition, as well as on the pedagogical approach adopted to manage cultural diversity within the national educational system. The second part illustrates the procedure carried out by our research team in adapting the IP program to the Italian context. In doing so, the relevance of cultural adaptations in the realm of evidence-based interventions is highlighted and detailed descriptions of the modifications made to the curriculum are provided. Overall, the aim of this chapter is to inform the reader with respect to distinctive elements of the local Italian milieu in terms of intercultural dynamics and migration history, to better contextualize and understand the adaptation process of the IP intervention.

2.1 The Italian sociocultural context

2.1.1 Becoming a multicultural country: the migration phenomenon in Italy

Italy is currently a multiethnic society, that has rapidly shifted from being a country of emigration into one of immigration due to some major historical events, including the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the so-called "refugee crisis" (Juang et al., 2022; Macioti & Pugliese, 2003). Indeed, the challenges and ambivalence observed in the management of the migration phenomenon by the social body and political organization might be partially attributed to this recent shift (Dixon et al., 2018; Gozzoli & Regalia, 2005).

Despite being commonly perceived as a rather homogeneous country, Italy has in fact experienced along its history prolonged and extensive interactions with different cultures, due to its central geographic position in the Mediterranean, and thus being both a commercial

crossroads and site of conquests and invasions for many populations. Italy became a unified nation in 1861, following an uprising that expelled foreign dynasties from the country's territory (Gilbert & Moneta, 2020). Despite its unification, the regions of Southern Italy were excluded for the most part from economic advancement, resulting in significant internal and international migration flows, and contributing to a North-South divide that endures to this day. Together with regional differences in terms of traditions, history, and language, this situation contributed to a heightened salience of local cultures in individuals' identity, that frequently coexists alongside a broader sense of national identity (Inguglia et al., 2009). As previously mentioned, for a long time Italy was the origin, and not the destination, of large migration flows: between 1880 and 1914, 13 million Italians left their homeland, turning Italy into the scene of one of the most extensive voluntary emigrations ever recorded in world history (Choate, 2008).

While a foreign population was already present in the country immediately after World War II, the first substantial migration flows to Italy started in the 1960s and 1970s. From the very beginning, they were characterized by a great heterogeneity in terms of nationalities, with individuals arriving in Italy in search of a job from European Economic Community member states, Jugoslavia, North and East African countries, as well as a significant number of political refugees from various backgrounds (CENSIS, 1979). For several years, the migration phenomenon remained somehow marginal in the public and political discourse, also because immigrants were mainly employed in less structured economic sectors, such as domestic work and agriculture, and hence were not concentrated in the main cities, like in other European countries (Colucci, 2018). The early '90s were a turning point, due to new arrivals of asylum seekers fleeing from the war in Somalia, large immigration flows from Albania and former Yugoslavia, and the murder of Jerry Masslo, a South African exile who had been refused international protection and was working illegally as a day laborer. Thanks to the consequent national anti-racist demonstrations and strikes of land laborers, a new law was enacted in 1990,

enabling the recognition of the right to asylum for all applicants, previously granted only to exiles from Eastern Europe (Colucci, 2018). However, this law also explicitly addressed the need to regulate the entry of non-European Union immigrants in Italy, based on employment opportunities and national economic necessities, and introduced the first penalties to tackle illegal immigration, including imprisonment and fines (Ambrosini, 2015). As the amount of foreign workers kept growing in the late '90s, immigrant labor became a structural and fundamental element to address the demands of the job market. Furthermore, a "complementary paradigm" came into place, based on which immigrant workers performed only those tasks that local workers were uninterested in, such as low-skilled jobs in manufacturing industries, social and domestic services, and healthcare system (Riva & Zanfrini, 2013).

After the turn of the millennium, the foreign resident population in Italy exceeded one million, marking a significant milestone, and, for the first time, immigration became a dominant issue in political elections. In 2002, the Bossi-Fini law tightened existing immigration legislation, providing for reinforcements to combat irregular immigration, a decrease in the number of family members eligible for reunification, and the granting of a residence permit only for individuals who already had a work contract. The outbreak of the Arab Spring in North African countries and the civil war in Syria caused new migration waves that reopened the Mediterranean and Balkan routes and challenged the European Union's border control system (Colucci, 2018). Europe experienced at the time an unprecedented influx of migrants, with more than one million individuals seeking international protection between 2015 and 2016 (European Commission, 2017). Since then, Italy has been one of the most affected countries in terms of arrivals from the Mediterranean sea (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2023). The crossing of the Mediterranean is an extremely hazardous route: migrants have to pay criminal organizations and human traffickers to make it across borders (European Commission, 2017) and the majority of deaths and reports of migrants going missing globally

is registered in the Mediterranean (more than 2,500 only in 2023; UNHCR, 2023a). On one hand, the outburst of this "refugee crisis" mobilized many humanitarian organizations and deeply touched the Italian public opinion, with the shocking images of shipwrecks and children drowned on nearby coasts broadcasted by social media. On the other hand, it also created the "invasion" myth: according to a survey conducted by a national newspaper, 36% of Italian respondents feared that an invasion was taking place and believed that refugees in our country were one-third of the total population (Zinola, 2016). In response to this large inflow, the Italian reception system took emergency measures, by increasing the number and capacity of extant structures and establishing the so-called "extraordinary accommodation centers", that actually hosted the most part of asylum seekers (Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, 2018). However, rather than adopting a structured, long-term, integration-oriented approach, the subsequent national policies on immigration geared toward the restraint of the migration phenomenon, sadly aligning with a rise of anti-immigration attitudes among the native population and the emergence of populist movements (Torelli, 2020). In 2017, the Minniti-Orlando legislation introduced the creation of further permanent centers for repatriation (previously known as "identification and expulsion centers"). In 2018, the Salvini decree marked a large setback in the Italian reception system, by authorizing the elimination of residence permits for humanitarian reasons, as well as a significant reduction in resources allocated to accommodation centers (Colucci, 2018). Finally, in the current year, the approval of the Cutro decree drastically reduced asylum seekers' procedural guarantees, for instance by officially excluding them from the services provided by the national reception system ("Sistema di accoglienza e integrazione", SAI) and prohibiting the conversion of residence permits for special protection, medical treatment, and calamity into work permits (Gagliardi, 2023).

At present, approximately 5 millions of individuals with non-Italian citizenship legally reside in Italy (9% of the total population; ISTAT, 2023). The foreign resident population is

very diverse within itself and includes over 200 different nationalities, the main ones being Romania (23%), Albania (8%), Morocco (8%), China (6%), and Ukraine (4%). Despite the recent large arrivals of refugees and asylum seekers, the main reason for immigration remains related to better employment opportunities. People from former Communist (e.g., Albania, Romania, Ukraine) and North African countries (e.g., Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia) tend to choose Italy as their destination due to geographical and/or cultural proximity, whereas individuals from farther nations are attracted by the possibility of being employed in seasonal jobs (e.g., Bangladesh, Pakistan) or launching new business activities (e.g., China). The heterogeneous nature of the migration phenomenon in Italy also entails varied experiences of adjustment and integration across cultural communities. For instance, individuals that are characterized by distinct phenotypic traits (e.g., Chinese and African origins) or a larger cultural/religious distance from the mainstream society (e.g., Muslims, both from Northern African countries and South-Eastern Asia) are more at risk of being stigmatized and discriminated against (Ambrosini, 2013; Voglino et al., 2022), which may hinder their process of acculturation and result in a lower sense of belonging to the local community (Moscato et al., 2014). On the other hand, individuals migrated from countries that are more similar to Italy in terms of language and cultural values (such as Romanians) might assimilate more easily and even perceive themselves being closer to the majority group than to individuals from other immigrant communities (Colombo, 2013; Musso et al., 2018).

Over the past decades, the population of immigrant descent in Italy has become increasingly stable, as a result of reunifications, marriages, and births on the Italian soil (Fondazione ISMU, 2023), with a notable impact on social transformation, as it introduces different cultural traditions and customs where these communities settle (Ricucci, 2021). Moreover, there is currently a statistically significant presence of migratory generations subsequent to the original ones, commonly referred to as “second generations”, making up 13%

of minors in Italy (ISTAT, 2020a). Although, strictly speaking, "second generations" refer to the children, born in the host country, of citizens who have previously migrated, this term often encompasses individuals who immigrated to Italy before the age of 18 (Corchia, 2015). The second generations' experience is emblematic of the contradictions and unresolved issues that the migration phenomenon has revealed with respect to multiculturalism, inclusion, and identity in Italy (Ambrosini, 2015). The predominance of the "*ius sanguinis*" for the attribution of nationality (i.e., citizenship determined by the nationality of the parents) and the consequent difficulty in obtaining the citizenship of the very country in which one is born are examples of how these youth's sense of belonging and Italian identity are jeopardized and questioned at their core. The potential risk is the creation of "perpetual foreigners", who perceive themselves and are seen as such by those who consider themselves "natives" (El-Tayeb, 2014; Will, 2019). Indeed, a recent survey conducted in Italy among second-generation youth showed that, while 38% of the respondents felt "Italian", 33% self-identified as "foreigners", and the remaining 29% didn't know how to define themselves (ISTAT, 2020a).

According to the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX; Solano & Huddleston, 2020) and the Multiculturalism Policy Index (MCP; Queen's University, 2022), Italy exhibits moderately supportive policies toward multiculturalism at the societal level. Nonetheless, only 21% of Italians seem to have a totally positive perception and almost half (46%) consider immigrants as having a negative societal impact, mirroring the overall suspicious and ambivalent attitude toward immigrants spread in the country (European Commission, 2018). Indeed, politicians and media often portray immigration as an additional challenge weighing down an already struggling society, that cannot support "foreigners" arriving in pursuit of a better life (Ambrosini, 2015; Zamora-Kapoor et al., 2013), and reinforce stereotypes of migration associated with illegality and crime (Rubaltelli et al., 2020). At the policy level, the aforementioned citizenship law and the scarce enhancement of the reception system and

integration services suggest that Italian institutions are reluctant to take the path of multiculturalism (Ambrosini & Molina, 2004). Moreover, recent data confirm that individuals with different cultural heritages continue to experience racism and discrimination on an individual and structural level, in everyday life and on social media (Fondazione ISMU, 2023; ISTAT, 2020a). In light of this situation, the social institutions that multicultural youth encounter in their development might play a key role in their socialization and adjustment, starting with the school environment (Ambrosini & Molina, 2004).

2.1.2 Inclusion and approaches to diversity in the Italian education system

School has always been regarded as one of the most important socialization environments, second only to the family (Schachner et al., 2017, 2018). The Italian educational context has undergone significant changes in recent years, and is expected to become increasingly multicultural due to the growing number of students with diverse backgrounds and origins (Save the Children, 2023). In the 2021-2022 school year, there were nearly 900,000 students with non-Italian citizenship, representing 10.6% of the total school population (see Table 2.1). Among them, overall 67.5% were born in Italy, a percentage that rises to 72.9% in Veneto, the region where the studies described in this thesis were carried out (MIM, 2023). Over 200 different nationalities are represented: 44.1% of students with non-Italian citizenship have European origins (mostly in Balkan and Eastern European countries, e.g., Romania, Albania, Moldova), while 27.6% have African origins (especially from Northern African countries, e.g., Morocco, Egypt), and 20.5% have Asian origins (e.g., China, India, Bangladesh). The geographical distribution of these students is not uniform, and it presents a higher concentration in the Northern regions (65.5%), followed by the Central regions (21.9%), and finally the Southern regions and islands, i.e., Sicilia and Sardegna (12.6%; MIM, 2023). Specifically, the geographical area where we conducted our studies (the city of Padova, in the

Northeastern region of Veneto) hosts a large proportion of families of immigrant descent. It should be noted, however, that the ratio of students with non-Italian citizenship changes based on the education level, with these students being less numerous in upper secondary schools[4] (i.e., high schools) as compared to primary schools (MIM, 2023). According to regional statistics, in most high schools (65%) the percentage of students with non-Italian citizenship ranges from 0% to 15%; in 25% of the schools between 15% and 30%; in 5% between 30% and 40%; in the remaining 5%, students with non-Italian citizenship account for over 40% of the total student population (MIUR, 2020). Padova ranks among the top ten provinces that host 39.4% of the total number of students with non-Italian citizenship in the country (MIM, 2023)

Table 2.1 Absolute values and percentages of students with non-Italian citizenship (s.y. 2011/ 2012 - 2021/2022)

Anni scolastici	Totale alunni		
	v.a.	Variazione % rispetto all'A.S. precedente	Alunni stranieri per 100 alunni totali
2011/12	755.939	6,4	8,4
2012/13	786.775	4,1	8,8
2013/14	803.053	2,1	9,0
2014/15	814.208	1,4	9,2
2015/16	814.851	0,1	9,2
2016/17	826.091	1,4	9,4
2017/18	841.719	1,9	9,7
2018/19	857.729	1,9	10,0
2019/20	876.801	2,2	10,3
2020/21	865.388	-1,3	10,3
2021/22	872.360	0,8	10,6

The Italian school system distinguishes itself from other European countries as it adopts a universalist and inclusive approach involving the absence of early school tracking, the inclusion of students from cultural minoritized groups into mainstream classes from the

[4] The Italian school system is structured into primary education, lower secondary education, and upper secondary education (14-18 years of age, corresponding to 9th-13th grade). Upper secondary schools can be private or public, and are divided into academic schools, fine arts schools, technical, and vocational schools, with no specific requirements in terms of academic achievement that need to be met to attend a specific type of school.

beginning of their schooling, and the possibility to attend Italian language classes during school hours or after-school programs (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019). Entering this multicultural school environment is a significant and delicate transition for culturally minoritized students, but also for members of the majority group, as it often constitutes the first contact with values and worldviews different from those they are familiar with in their families (ISTAT, 2020a). Despite a greater sensitivity and awareness regarding multiple cultural affiliations among the new generations, it is imperative for the educational context in Italy to address such issues via effective approaches and interventions (MIM, 2023). Indeed, as in the rest of Europe, the presence of students with diverse cultural origins still poses considerable challenges to educators, researchers, and policymakers in order to ensure optimal learning settings and equal educational opportunities (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2013; Özdemir & Özdemir, 2020). Whereas education remains a key priority on the political agendas of many receiving countries, students from minoritized backgrounds still encounter a number of difficulties in comparison to their majority counterparts, including higher perception of teachers' unequal treatment, more frequent experiences of discrimination, and earlier school leaving, particularly among newcomers (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice; Schleicher, 2019). Moreover, these youth also tend to exhibit lower levels of academic and psychological adjustment (i.e., more internalizing and externalizing problems) as compared to their peers from the majority group, even when accounting for factors such as geographical area, developmental stage, gender, and SES (Dimitrova et al., 2016).

The Italian reality seems to mirror the overall European situation, with students with non-Italian citizenship having higher rates of school dropout (Fondazione ISMU, 2023), frequent school delay (53% in upper secondary school; ISTAT, 2020a), lower academic performance, and a possibly related tendency to choose technical-vocational schools focused on the immediate entry into the job market (Pirchio et al., 2020; Strozza, 2015; Triventi et al., 2022).

Language proficiency may be a preeminent factor to explain this gap in academic performance between majority and minoritized students, given that linguistic fluency appears to be associated with students' performance in all academic domains (OECD, 2019). While language learning is surely crucial in the acculturation process (Kmiotek, 2017) and more multilingual educational practices should be adopted within classrooms to value students' diversity (Costa et al., 2023), issues related to identity and belonging should be also taken into account to build truly inclusive schools in Italy. For instance, a recent qualitative survey (Save the Children, 2022) shows that, while 56% of majority students always or almost always feels part of the school context, this percentage drops to 47% for students from culturally minoritized groups who have Italian citizenship and to 40% for those students from culturally minoritized groups who don't have Italian citizenship. Moreover, 18% of students from this latter group report they never or rarely feel like they belong at school, as opposed to 14% of students from culturally minoritized groups who have Italian citizenship and 11% of majority students. Of note, a general detachment toward Italy as "home country" emerged. Only 26% of the majority students say they feel "close" to Italy and, not surprisingly, this percentage falls to 18% for students from culturally minoritized groups who have Italian citizenship and to an even lower 14% students from culturally minoritized groups who don't have Italian citizenship. This data suggests that practices to promote a positive concept with respect to youth's cultural identity and affiliation might be necessary and relevant for all students, regardless of their background.

In this sense, also social relationships and peer behaviors, as well as teachers' attitudes and pedagogical approaches to multiculturalism, play a key role. Based on the literature, diversity and intercultural contact can in fact be risk factors, but they also proved to be valuable resources, when properly addressed and nurtured (e.g., Bayram Özdemir et al., 2021; Closson et al., 2014; Titzmann et al., 2015). On one hand, the coexistence of different cultural backgrounds in the same classroom has been associated with the ethnic bullying phenomen,

which includes direct forms of aggression, such as verbal insults based on xenophobic or racist ideologies, as well as indirect forms, such as exclusion (Basilici et al., 2022). On the other hand, greater cultural diversity was also found to have a positive relation with better mental health outcomes, academic adjustment, and orientation toward peers from different origins (Graham, 2018; Schwarzenthal et al., 2017). Italian educational policies overall encourage teachers to adopt an approach inspired by principles of equality and inclusion, i.e., "aiming at overcoming racial and ethnic divides by promoting equality and positive contact, thereby reducing or preventing prejudice and discrimination by members of the cultural majority" (Schachner, 2019, p. 3). Similarly to the broader societal level, this approach might be explained in light of the European history, specifically the racially motivated atrocities committed during World War II (see Chapter 1.2), but has also been criticized as being "color-blind" or "color-evasive", i.e., a neglect of cultural diversity combined with a tendency toward the assimilation of minoritized youth to the mainstream culture (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). However, it is important to also acknowledge differences between groups and value the presence of diverse cultural heritages within the classroom, i.e., creating a climate of cultural pluralism (Schachner, 2019). Indeed, the endorsement of both these approaches (egalitarian and pluralistic) was found to be promotive of psychological and school adjustment, i.e., better well-being, fewer mental health and behavioral problems, higher academic self-concept and motivation (Schachner et al., 2016).

Many barriers still seem to hinder the adoption of a pluralistic ideology within the Italian educational system. Indeed, Italian majority teachers who participated in a study by Vezzali et al. (2012) admitted they found it hard to discuss sensitive topics, such as racism, cultural diversity, and systemic inequities, with their students. This reluctance to address these issues could also be related to majority teachers perceiving diversity as complicated and overwhelming to deal with (Dooly Owenby, 2005). In addition, they might feel less effective and comfortable in their interactions with students from cultural backgrounds other than their

own (Kumar & Hamer, 2013). Moreover, studies conducted in Italy found that, while teachers openly rejected assimilation and exclusion acculturation strategies (Portioli et al., 2012) and displayed positive explicit attitudes toward students from cultural minoritized groups, they still held a strong implicit bias toward the Italian-origin students (Vezzali & Giovannini, 2010). This aligns with findings from a systematic review by Costa et al. (2021), showing that teachers from different school levels and countries, including Italy, overall held negative implicit attitudes toward students with immigrant and cultural minoritized backgrounds. This is alarming, in light of evidence showing how teachers holding negative biases might behave differently in classroom interactions, e.g., being less likely to foster mutual respect and intervene to resolve conflicts among students from different backgrounds (Kumar et al., 2015). Even more worrying, a recent meta-analysis on perceived teacher-based racial–ethnic discrimination confirmed its detrimental effects not only on acade mic outcomes, e.g., grades, motivation, and school belonging, but also on psychological well-being, e.g., self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and somatic symptoms (Civitillo et al., 2023). Given the difficulties encountered by Italian teachers and considering, on the contrary, the potential benefits for students of promoting a pluralistic discourse in the class, more spaces should be provided to do so in Italian schools. Indeed, recent national guidelines (MIM, 2022) propose an intercultural education, aiming to celebrate the multicultural heritage of all students, and also underline the need to provide opportunities for youth to meet, exchange, and discuss their cultural backgrounds. In this perspective, our research team approached the adaptation of the IP to the Italian context.

2.2 Cultural adaptation of the *Identity Project*: the Italian experience

2.2.1 Definition and relevance of cultural adaptations

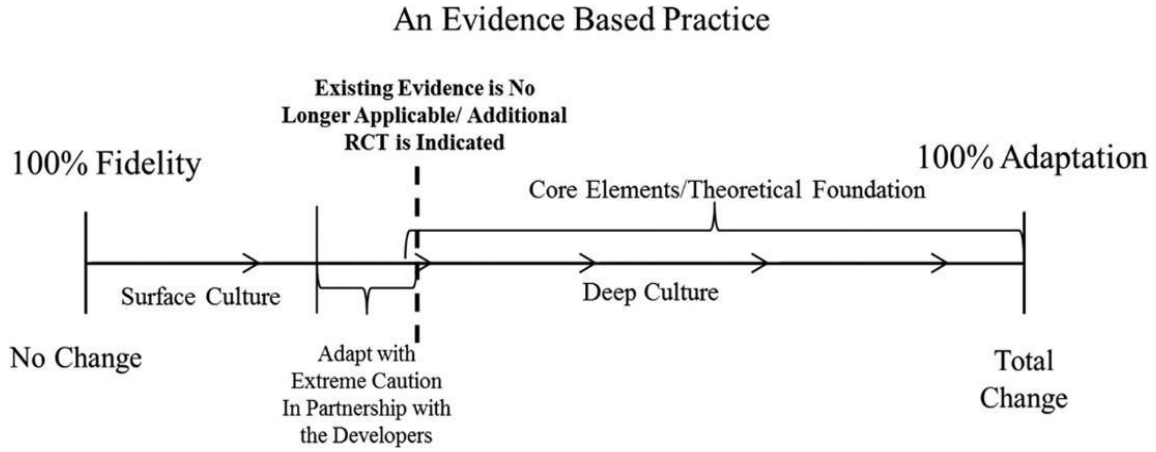
In the field of psychosocial interventions and clinical treatments, most of the research and consequent intervention-design process has been conducted in the United States or other so-

called WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic) countries, hence mostly relying on related values, mindsets, and conceptualizations of health and disease (Henrich et al., 2010; Rathod et al., 2020). Hence, cultural adaptations, defined as the systematic modification of an evidence-based treatment or intervention to make it compatible with the cultural patterns and meanings of the context where it is meant to be implemented, constitute an effective tool to overcome this limitation (Barrera Jr et al., 2013; von Thiele Schwarz et al., 2018). The main goal of carrying out a cultural adaptation before administering an intervention in a new context is to develop a version of such intervention that aligns with the beliefs, worldviews, and norms of that particular cultural community, while maintaining its efficacy (Sidani et al., 2017). Indeed, interventions that have been successfully tested within a certain population or context might show lower efficacy, or no efficacy at all, in another cultural context, due to the fact that culture shapes the way we see ourselves and our environment, including what is considered a healthy or risk behavior, and indicators of distress or well-being (Barrera Jr et al., 2013; Marsiglia & Booth, 2015). Extant literature questions the idea of "universality" when it comes to behavioral science and conversely supports the importance of cultural adaptations, evidencing how adapted interventions show overall a higher efficacy as compared to non adapted ones (Beelman et al., 2018; Hall et al., 2016; Perera et al., 2020). Together with ensuring or possibly boosting intervention efficacy, cultural adaptations also respond to a host of ethical and scientific purposes. For example, they enable researchers and practitioners to take into account values specific to a cultural minoritized and potentially vulnerable group rather than imposing the ones present in the dominant/majority group. Adaptations also increase the ecological validity of an intervention and hence its generalizability to underrepresented samples, tackling the dearth of efficacy studies conducted with minoritized groups. They help ensure feasibility by promoting participants' engagement

and compliance and, finally, respond to the ethical responsibility of providing the best possible intervention and equal access to treatment to everyone (Bernal et al., 2009).

Conceptual adaptation is fundamental when replicating and evaluating the efficacy of an intervention in a different sociocultural context, but it also poses a "fidelity vs fit" dilemma (see Figure 2.1). Indeed, researchers need to take cultural differences into account, while also maintaining adherence to the original intervention to ensure efficacy and respond to the aim of knowledge accumulation (Marsiglia & Booth, 2015).

Figure 2.1 The continuum of adaptation: balancing the fidelity and fit (Marsiglia & Booth, 2015)



In this process of integrating culture-specific content, researchers should then be careful in addressing those core components that underpin the efficacy of the intervention in the initial context (Rathod et al., 2020). To this end, it is useful to distinguish between surface structure and deep structure adaptations (Resnicow et al., 2000). Surface structure entails fitting intervention materials and key messages within the "superficial", observable traits of a specific culture, e.g., familiar references to places, music, food, language, well-known public figures, etc. Such adaptations can be realized based on expert and community review by involving the target population in the development process. Practically, they do not alter the program's

content itself, but simply adjust factors such as materials, delivery, and setting (Resnicow et al., 2000). Deep structure, in contrast, requires incorporating those psychological, social, historical, and environmental elements (e.g., thought patterns, value systems, and societal norms/institutions) that influence behavior differently across populations. Because deep structure adaptations reflect the way these elements contribute to the lived experiences and behavior in a certain culture, they often involve changing the content of the program on a more structural level (Knight et al., 2009; Resnicow et al., 2000). While surface structure primarily enhances the "receptivity" or "acceptance" of an intervention and thus guarantees feasibility, deep structure addresses "salience" and affects the program's impact (Resnicow et al., 2000). Therefore, both "surface" and "deep" adaptations are pivotal, but extreme caution and the supervision of the original developers are needed when making the latter type of modifications (Marsiglia & Booth, 2015).

2.2.2 Adapting the Identity Project: step-by-step procedure

As also described in Juang et al. (2022), our research team based the adaptation process of the IP to the Italian context on two main frameworks. Overall, we complied with the best practices suggested by Knight et al. (2009), i.e., considering the cultural context and using it to inform all aspects of the adaptation; collaborating with representatives of the local community; translating materials and procedures in participants' language; and defining where to implement the intervention. More specifically, we followed a sequence of steps described in international guidelines regarding the adaptation of evidence-based interventions with minoritized groups (Barrera Jr & Castro, 2006). These steps are: 1) information gathering, 2) preliminary adaptation design, 3) preliminary adaptation test, 4) adaptation refinement, and 5) cultural adaptation trial. The aims of each step, together with the methods and procedures implemented to carry it out in the Italian adaptation process, are outlined in the paragraphs below (see Step

1-Step 5). The whole adaptation procedure was conducted in close collaboration with the original developer of the intervention and with the German team that had already completed the first European adaptation and pilot implementation (see Juang et al., 2020). In addition, we collected feedback from community representatives and stakeholders (e.g., students, teachers, linguistic-cultural mediators) at every step, fostering a circular process that enabled us to integrate this information in the curriculum before carrying out the main study implementation.

Step 1: information gathering. The goal of this step was to examine and compare the new context (i.e., Italy) with the original context (i.e., US) in which the intervention was designed and tested, to identify which components of the intervention required modifications. Scholars suggest performing a bibliographic search to assess cultural distance and differences between the source and the target culture in terms of language, traditions, and lifestyle (Hambleton, 2001). Other recommended methodologies include quantitative (e.g., surveys) and/or qualitative research (e.g., semi-structured interviews, focus groups) with community representatives, to further explore aspects such as wording and examples, activities, mode of implementations, and assessment instruments (Knight et al., 2009; Sidani et al., 2017). In this phase, we reviewed the literature on cultural identity in Europe and Italy and adaptation of interventions, as well as published studies on the IP implementation in the United States and in Germany. We then conducted 16 interviews comprising both individuals from cultural minoritized backgrounds living in Italy as well as Italian-origin individuals migrated abroad (interviewees' age range = 20-50 years old). In the interview, we asked about their ideas concerning symbols (e.g., food, music, traditions), family structure, religion, lifestyle, thought patterns, beliefs, and values of their heritage cultures.

Step 2: preliminary adaptation design. This step is meant to integrate all collected information to determine and develop modifications to be made, and also comprises the translation of all written materials used in the intervention. Hence, we carried out the translation

of self-report measures assessing our variables of interest using standard translation-backtranslation techniques, i.e. one researcher translated the questionnaires to the target language (i.e., Italian), another researcher translated them back literally to the original language (i.e., American English), and then this translation was compared with the original text. To prevent participants' fatigue and facilitate surveys' comprehension and completion, when necessary we proceeded to simplify the phrasing of the items and make it more accessible to our target sample (i.e., Italian mid-adolescents), for instance by including familiar examples or idioms. These new phrasings also undergo the backtranslation procedure to ensure fidelity to the original items' formulation. Finally, the survey was administered to a subsample of adolescents (n = 10) from the same age group (14-15 years old), to check for length of completion, accessibility of wording, and potential issues. While some scholars advocate for the creation of new tests in case of a different language group (e.g., Hambleton, 2001), we deemed important to use the same questionnaire to assess cultural identity. Indeed, this construct is the focus of the IP intervention and our study was designed as a replication study to test the underlying theoretical model (see Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a) in a different context.

To create an overall draft of the culturally adapted intervention and discuss which parts needed further adaptation, we went through the program curriculum and the manual session by session. We carried out 2 focus groups and 5 in-depth individual interviews with linguistic-cultural mediators whose backgrounds were consistent with the major foreign communities in Italy (i.e., North Africans, Eastern Europeans, Central Africans, Eastern Asians, and Southern Asians; ISTAT, 2023). On these occasions, we discussed each of the eight sessions of the IP to assess the cultural appropriateness of expressions, concepts, and activities used in the intervention. As indicated in the aforementioned guidelines (Barrera Jr & Castro, 2006; Marsiglia & Booth, 2015), we carefully avoided any changes to those mechanisms described as key components by the original developers of the IP, i.e., "increasing students' salience and

understanding of their ethnic heritage(s) and background(s), as well as others' backgrounds; clarifying misconceptions students may have regarding a 'right or wrong' way to identify with an ethnic group; providing students with tools with which to explore their ethnic heritage; providing opportunities for students to discuss their heritage with others" (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2017, pp. 449-450). However, we identified areas for both surface and deep structure adaptations and examined them with the linguistic-cultural mediators, who offered valuable insights about the content and how to share it with students in a culturally sensitive way.

There were two main set of modifications, with the first entailing a change in terminology. In particular, we shifted from concepts of "race" and "ethnicity" to "culture", also with respect to identity (i.e., "cultural identity" instead of "ethnic-racial identity"), in light of the different conceptualization adopted in Europe with respect to these constructs (see Chapter 1.2). Furthermore, we specifically used the term "cultural" rather than "heritage" identity to imply: first, that this identity component can also be related to cultures that are not necessarily "inherited"; and second, that we all tap into various cultural dimensions (ethnic, national, regional, local, linguistic, religious, …) that are in constant interaction and evolution (Morris et al., 2015). We decided to still include a discussion on the topic of race in Session 2 ("*Nel gruppo, tra gruppi*"), by showing a short video in which an Italian geneticist explains how the division of human beings in different "races" is scientifically flawed, and thus supporting the decision to talk about cultures. The video is available at the following link: https://www.raiplay.it/video/2019/03/Il-test-delle-razze-23032019-a67e9315-2e07-4da8-8e24-5bc6a9295f27.html

Following the original manual, we explained how differences between groups are continuous and not categorical, and how this apparently clear division is socially constructed by exaggerating differences between groups and minimizing differences within groups. However, because systemic inequities and discrimination based on skin tone and other

phenotypic traits are still prominent in European societies (Eurobarometer, 2019; Grigolo et al., 2011), we shared with students the definition of "visible minorities", i.e., people presenting physical features different from the normative Italian-looking person. We then emphasized how individuals from these groups are more easily targets of discriminatory acts and often disadvantaged in the education and employment areas (Figures 2.2a and 2.2b).

Figures 2.2a and 2.2b. Slide from Session 3 about discrimination against visible minorities (on the left); slide from Session 2 about differences as continuous and not categorical, using skin color as example.

In addition, because in Italy being considered an "immigrant" or a "foreigner" (terms commonly used to refer to any individual with a national, religious, or linguistic background different from the dominant population) is highly stigmatized (Levy, 2015), we considered important to openly discuss and de-stigmatize these terms across the intervention curriculum. For instance, commonalities between internal and international migrations were emphasized in order to create a sense of community among all students. Moreover, we gave the opportunity to students with multicultural backgrounds to share with the class whether they felt like "foreigners" in Italy or not, and explain the reasons behind their answer. This discussion helped them and their classmates understand how identifying as "Italian" or "foreigner" or both, depending on the situation and context, was a subjective experience, but heavily dependent on how they were perceived by the Italian "natives".

The second set of modifications concerned sessions about discrimination, family heritage, and change of cultural identity over time. Despite remaining faithful to the original goals and

activities, we adapted the materials to make them more relevant and appropriate for the Italian context. Specifically, in Session 3 ("*Storie dal nostro passato*"), while the original manual illustrated examples of ethnoracially-based marginalization along the US history, we replaced them with public and personal episodes of discrimination targeting individuals from minoritized cultures in Italy (including internal migrants from the Southern to the Northern regions) or Italian people migrated abroad. Moreover, we provided information about current migration flows arriving in Italy and the often forgotten past of Italians as migrants, encouraging a reflection about commonalities between these historical facts (Figures 2.3a and 2.3b).

Figures 2.3a and 2.3b. Slides from Session 3 regarding Italian "diaspora" in the United States (on the left) and commonalities between past and present migration flows (on the right).

In Session 5 ("*Alberi di relazioni*"), when students are asked in the US version to map their family in terms of ethnoracial backgrounds and then define their own ERI, our team opted for the graphical and metaphorical representation of a tree to depict meaningful relationships that shaped participants' cultural identity (Figure 2.4a). The division of the tree in different parts based on the "role" played by important people in the students' lives (i.e., roots = adult figures who taught them something about their cultures; trunk = peers who are growing and exploring with them their cultural backgrounds) served a twofold purpose. First, it partially shifted the focus from family members to non-biological figures (as already intended in the definition of "social family" presented in the US manual) who were nevertheless relevant in students' identity development. This aimed at ensuring participants' comfort in sharing

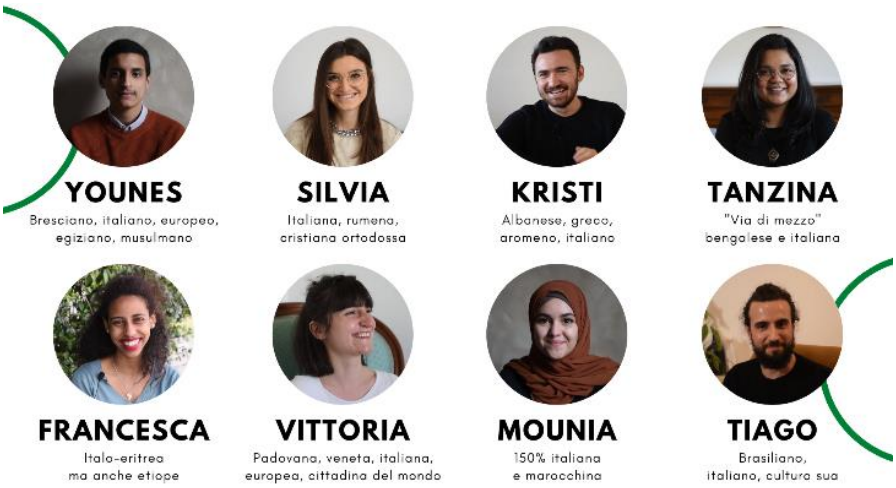
personal life experiences, especially in the case of students with non-traditional or delicate family constellations (e.g., adopted youth, adolescents living in residential care communities). In addition to the possibility to disclose only initials of the mentioned individuals, this change was connected to regulations concerning privacy and data protection issues in Europe and people's heightened sensitivity about revealing personal information (Juang et al., 2020). Second, it emphasized how one or more specific culture(s) could become relevant in students' lives through the encounter with peers from different backgrounds, and showed them the cultural diversity within their relational networks despite growing up in a monocultural family, as it was for most adolescents who exclusively identified as Italians. To this aim, we also shared with the class a digital world map highlighting all the countries mentioned in the students' relationships' trees (Figure 2.4b).

Figures 2.xa and 2.xb. "Relationships' trees" displayed in a classroom during the last session (on the left); digital world map showing all countries of origin represented among students (on the right).

Finally, we substituted multimedia material (e.g., videos, interviews) portraying the United States or American individuals with similar materials contextualized in Italy. For example, for Session 7 ("*Il viaggio dell'identità culturale*"), to replace the original video including interviews to three young adults from ethnoracial minoritized groups in the United States (i.e., Black, Latinx, Asian-American), we made an ad-hoc video interviewing eight young adults with various backgrounds residing in Italy, i.e., seven who identified as bi- or multicultural and one girl of Italian origin who had lived most of her life abroad (Figure 2.5).

This new video aimed at mirroring the great heterogeneity present in Italy in terms of cultural origins, and thus facilitate the identification of participants with the interviewees.

Figure 2.5. Slide from Session 7 with an overview of the video-interviewees and their self-identified definitions of cultural identity.



In addition to the abovementioned modifications, some relevant contextual and socio-historical features especially guided the overall adaptation process on a practical level. First of all, the existing difference between the American and Italian schooling system. Indeed, while American students are more accustomed to group works, open discussions, and a more "proactive" pedagogical and learning approach, teachers in Italy still predominantly employ frontal lectures. Consequently, the new target population of Italian students might have been less prepared and willing to engage in the participatory activities of the IP, possibly resulting in longer times required to complete such activities. For this reason and to ensure that all key contents would still be addressed, the general effort was to simplify or reduce the length of the activities to fit local duration of classes. Furthermore, while youth in the United States are constantly exposed to messages regarding ethnicity and race in multiple virtual and in-person contexts (Sladek et al., 2022; Umaña-Taylor, 2023), these topics are not equally salient and discussed in Italy (yet). Indeed, Italian adolescents' microsystems (peers, family, school) often

lack opportunities to learn and reflect upon concepts such as multiculturalism and racism. This may be due to the intrinsic sensitivity of such topics, together with an overall attitude in the public discourse emphasizing assimilation rather than cultural pluralism. Consequently, the IP might have been the first structured space where to face these constructs for many prospective participants. To facilitate the understanding and apprehension of such concepts, we included at the beginning of each session a short recap of the previous one, creating an opportunity to go through the main definitions and key points once more, and answer clarifying questions.

Last but definitely not least impactful, the Italian IP had to undergo not only a process of cultural adaptation, but also a logistical adaptation related to the COVID-19 outbreak. The pilot study was conducted in Spring 2021 during the second wave of the pandemic in Italy, a period characterized by medium-severe restrictions such as hybrid teaching in schools, partial closure of shops and restaurants, requirement to wear face masks both indoor and outdoor. On a conceptual level, our research team had to consider that school closure and remote learning might have negatively impacted on students' motivation to focus on the lectures and do schoolwork, as well as increased perceptions of loneliness, since they had been separated from their peers for most of the school year (see Guazzini et al., 2022; ISTAT, 2020b). Indeed, the IP mostly relies on highly engaging activities to maximize youth's participation, and the same level of active involvement is hard to render in an online modality. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy disproportionately affected migrants and cultural minoritized groups on a variety of levels, possibly widening the gap with the majority group in wealth, health care, and academic achievements (Cordini & De Angelis, 2021). Whereas this further supports the need for interventions like the IP, it can also be assumed that minoritized students, for whom the program might have been especially salient, encountered logistical difficulties in actively taking part in the sessions, e.g., limited access to remote teaching due to low economic resources (Save The Children, 2023).

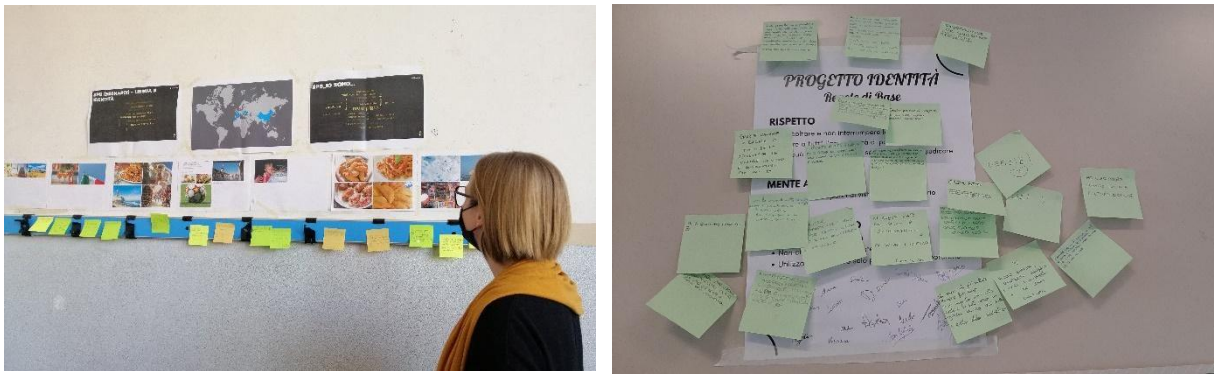
On a more practical level, several group activities could not be administered in the pilot implementation as originally planned, starting from the ice-breaker in Session 1 ("*Lo zaino dell'identità*") to the closure sharing activity in Session 8 ("*Gran Finale*"). In this cases, to work around the hybrid modality (i.e., 50% of the students in the classroom, 50% online, and facilitators from remote), we employed an online learning platform for all participants to share their personal characteristics and final reflections with the class (Figures 2.6a and 2.6b). Moreover, all surveys were filled in by students via a Qualtrics link using their phones, tablets, or laptops. The use of digital tools was overall appreciated by participants, and thus we decided to keep it for the main implementation, despite the in-person delivery.

Figures 2.6a and 2.6b. Responses given by students via the online learning platform during the ice-breaker activity in Session 1 (on the left) and the final sharing activity in Session 8 (on the right).

The major modifications, however, concerned the last session, which was originally conceived as a celebration during which students could invite external guests (e.g., parents) and share typical recipes from different cultural backgrounds cooked by the participants. Due to the pandemic situation and consequent persisting strict regulations with respect to bringing and sharing food in the school setting, this activity had to be removed from both pilot and main implementations, and was replaced by ad-hoc developed "party games". The playful activity was maintained throughout next implementations and, starting from the main study, we could

also restore the gallery walk activity and let students decorate the classrooms with all the materials created during the IP program (Figures 2.7a and 2.7b).

Figures 2.7a and 2.7b. Materials created during the IP displayed in a classroom during Session 8.



Steps 3-4: preliminary adaptation tests and adaptation refinement. These steps include facilitators' training, the implementation of a pilot study, and collection of feedback to evaluate the intervention's feasibility and usefulness, and inform possible changes. Guidelines highlight the importance of gathering continuous feedback by both facilitators and participants, via quantitative and/or qualitative data collection during and after intervention. With respect to the Italian IP adaptation process, we carried out a pilot study (March-May 2021) with 138 adolescents recruited in a public high school in Padova, in Northeastern Italy. Following the abovementioned guidelines, we held regular weekly meetings with the whole research team (i.e., the author as main IP facilitator, the doctoral supervisor, and six Psychology Master students who assisted the main facilitator during the sessions), to discuss the intervention's progress and, if need be, consider making further modifications to the pilot implementation. Pre- and posttest surveys provided information about psychometric properties of our main instrument assessing cultural identity. Moreover, we carried out focus group discussions with both students and teachers at the end of the intervention to explore participants' appreciation of the program, any difficulties encountered with the content or logistics, and suggestions for

improvement. This feedback greatly informed the large-scale implementation of the Italian IP and subsequent refinements were made to the adapted curriculum before conducting the main study, e.g., inclusion of long vs short version of the measure for cultural identity, addition of an activity focused on native languages and multilingualism, use of interactive digital tools. Detailed information on the IP pilot study can be found in Chapter 3.

Step 5: cultural adaptation trial. The final step comprises the implementation of a full trial of the revised intervention to evaluate the efficacy of the adaptation through scientifically validated methods. Hence, our research team carried out a randomized controlled trial with a waitlisted control design among 747 high school students, replicating the original study by Umaña-Taylor et al. (2018a). In doing so, we tested whether participation in the intervention would lead to increases in cultural identity exploration at posttest in the intervention (vs control) group, and whether in turn this would have a ripple effect on increases at resolution at follow-up. In addition to administering surveys at 3 time points (pretest, posttest, follow-up), we also conducted focus group discussions with students and teachers after intervention completion to integrate quantitative data with qualitative feedback from stakeholders. Detailed information on the IP main study can be found in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3

Study 1. Piloting the *Identity Project* in Italy: feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary efficacy

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This chapter was adapted from:
Ceccon, C., Schachner, M. K., M., Umaña-Taylor, A. J., & Moscardino, U. (2023, under review). *Promoting Adolescents' Cultural Identity Development: A Pilot Study of the Identity Project Intervention in Italy*. [Manuscript submitted for publication]

3.1 Abstract

This study evaluated the feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary efficacy of the Italian adaptation of the *Identity Project*, a school-based intervention promoting cultural identity formation in adolescence. Participants were 138 adolescents (M_{age} = 15.66 yrs, *SD* = 0.84, 63% female, 37% with immigrant background) from nine classrooms assigned to intervention or control condition based on teachers' indications to ensure sustainability. The curriculum was delivered online due to COVID-related restrictions in Spring 2021. Youth self-reported on their cultural identity one week before and one week after the intervention. Feedback on the cultural appropriateness and salience of the program was gathered from students and teachers via online focus groups. The analysis of qualitative data supported the feasibility and acceptability of the adapted IP, with students expressing appreciation for its interactive approach and the possibility to learn about their classmates' cultural origins. Analysis of quantitative data showed increases in resolution, but not exploration. This pilot implementation confirms the importance of intervening on cultural identity development in multiethnic classrooms in Italy, although further work is necessary to better understand if non-significant findings for exploration were due to measurement issues related to the pandemic or if modifications are necessary to stimulate adolescents' engagement in exploration processes. Delivering the activities in person and without social distancing measures may be crucial to increase its efficacy.

3.2 Introduction

Reaching a definition of one's cultural identity has become a particularly salient developmental competence for adolescents in contemporary globalized and increasingly ethnically diverse societies, including recently receiving countries like Italy (Musso et al., 2018; Umaña-Taylor, 2023). Extant research suggests that having a clear sense of one's cultural identity is associated with various positive outcomes, especially among youth from culturally minoritized backgrounds (Umaña-Taylor & Rivas-Drake, 2021). Based on this evidence, Umaña-Taylor and Douglass (2017) created the *Identity Project* (IP), a school-based intervention designed to stimulate ERI exploration and resolution. Previous research in the United States provided support for the efficacy of the IP in increasing ERI exploration from pre-to posttest which, in turn, led to greater resolution at follow-up (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a). Furthermore, positive effects on adolescents' psychosocial functioning in terms of global identity cohesion, self-esteem, academic grades, and fewer depressive symptoms were found one year after the intervention (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018b).

Although Europe hosts the largest number of international migrants globally (Motti-Stefanidi, 2023) and students from cultural minoritized groups tend to experience less school belonging, more victimization, and higher school drop-out than their majority peers (Schleicher, 2019), interventions targeting the development of cultural identity are still lacking in the European context. Recently, Juang et al. (2020) adapted the IP for the German context, highlighting the relevance and usefulness of the intervention, although only partial support for its efficacy was found. Given the differences in migration history, intercultural relations, and structural inequalities between Europe and the US, cultural tailoring of this intervention to meet the unique needs of the local target population is warranted to ensure sustainability, participant engagement, and maximize its efficacy (Barrera et al., 2017).

To address these issues, several scholars have started to adapt and implement the IP in Europe (Juang et al., 2022). In the current paper, we describe a pilot study evaluating the adaptation of the IP intervention in Italy, an increasingly multicultural society where programs for youth's identity development have largely been neglected in the school setting. The choice to conduct a pilot study before proceeding with a large-scale implementation of the IP was taken in light of international guidelines recommending it as an important step of the cultural adaptation process ("preliminary adaptation test", Barrera Jr & Castro, 2006; see Chapter 2.2.2). Pilot studies are an effective tool to field-test the key logistics (e.g., data collection, randomization procedure, recruitment and consent procedure) of a prospective study, especially randomized controlled or clinical trials (Kistin & Silverstein, 2015). They represent an opportunity to understand potential barriers and facilitators to intervention implementation, and thus be able to address and/or integrate these aspects into the study planning and design (Pearson et al., 2020). Indeed, carrying out a randomized controlled trial without a preliminary implementation has a significant risk of undermining the results, due to unforeseen difficulties related to the design or acceptability of the intervention (Kistin & Silverstein, 2015). In this sense, pilot studies encompass the main function of feasibility studies, i.e., address the question whether the study at issue can be done and how, but also add a specific design feature, i.e., conducting a future study on a smaller scale (Eldridge et al., 2016). In addition to feasibility (i.e., the extent to which the program can be successfully carried out within a given setting), we also measured acceptability (i.e., the perception that a given program is agreeable/satisfactory) and appropriateness (i.e., the perceived fit of the program for a given practice setting, provider, or consumer), following the Implementation Outcomes Framework (Proctor et al., 2011; see also Pinto et al., 2023). Given that this work was conducted when COVID-related social distancing measures were still in place, this pilot study also provided an opportunity to identify possible challenges associated with an online implementation of the program.

3.2.1 The present study

Consistent with prior recommendations (Kistin & Silverstein, 2015; Pearson et al., 2020), this pilot study was designed to evaluate whether an Italian cultural adaptation of the IP would be feasible and salient in a context with a different socio-cultural milieu and migration history compared to previous countries of implementation. Specifically, our main purpose was to examine the feasibility, acceptability, and cultural appropriateness of the Italian adaptation of the IP. In addition, because this was the first time the intervention was delivered online in Europe and that our sample was of moderate size, although it was not our primary goal, we decided to also perform a preliminary test of intervention efficacy.

3.3 Method

3.3.1 Participants and procedure

The pilot implementation of the IP intervention was carried out between March and May 2021 in a public high school in Padova, in the Veneto region, which hosts a great number of citizens of immigrant descent (ISTAT, 2023). The study protocol had been previously approved by the Ethics Committee of the School of Psychology at the University of Padova (protocol n. 3871). After establishing informal contact with the school, we proceeded to obtain approval from the principal and teachers; one teacher was appointed as a contact person, to serve as intermediary between the school and the research team and to schedule the intervention sessions to fit in with preexisting activities. Written informed consent forms to be signed by parents were distributed to all students enrolled in one of the nine 10th grade classrooms. Inclusion criteria were (a) attending 10th grade during the period of data collection, (b) having sufficient proficiency in Italian, and (c) having no certified intellectual disability or neurodevelopmental disorder. Students who did not meet criteria (b) or (c) were nonetheless invited to participate in the IP sessions to prevent feelings of social exclusion, but their responses were not considered

for statistical analyses. Overall, 88% (N = 153) of the students agreed to take part in the study. However, for statistical purposes, we adopted a listwise deletion approach and included in our analytic sample only the 138 adolescents who participated in both pre- and posttest assessments (M_{age} = 15.66 years, SD = 0.84, range = 14-19, 63 % self-identifying as girls).

Data from this sample are publicly available in the Open Science Framework (OFS) at the following link: https://osf.io/gvz23/?view_only=56a0a05975484e6b801d87ad80dd4d92

As regards sociodemographics, 37% of the adolescents had an immigrant background (i.e., born in Italy or abroad from at least one parent born abroad) and, among them, the majority (59%) were born in Italy, while the remaining 41% were born abroad and had lived in Italy for 10 years on average (SD = 4.35, range = 1-15 years). Students reported 22 different heritage cultures (including their own and their parents' birth countries), the main ones being Morocco (19%), Romania (8%), Nigeria (4%), North Macedonia (4%), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (4%). The mean score on the Family Affluence Scale (see Measures section) assessing socioeconomic status (SES) was 5.56 (SD = 1.84, range = 0-9). With respect to parental education, 1% of parents had no education, 3% had completed primary school, 22% had completed lower secondary school, 52% had completed upper secondary school, 18% attended university, and 4% preferred not to answer/did not know.

All participants filled in surveys online during class hours 1 week before (pretest, T1) and 1 week after the intervention (posttest, T2; 9 weeks after pretest) using the software Qualtrics. Due to the difficult situation that the school was facing in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, our research team decided to prioritize teachers' requests and availability to ensure feasibility; hence, classrooms were non-randomly assigned to the intervention or control condition following teachers' demands. Students in the intervention group (n = 82, 5 classrooms) were administered the IP intervention throughout 8 weekly sessions (55 min each) that were conducted during the school day by the two facilitators via remote modality, due to

COVID-related safety measures. Students shifted between hybrid, completely online, and again hybrid teaching (i.e., 50% in the classroom, 50% online), with the teacher always present in the classroom. The author was the main facilitator and was supported by specifically trained and supervised Psychology graduate students. Students in the control group (n = 56, 4 classrooms) received standard curriculum lessons. Students whose parents did not provide consent to participate in the project did not complete the surveys and did not actively take part in the sessions. In agreement with teachers, these students either carried out their homework or were assigned other school-related activities (whether they were in person or from remote). To collect qualitative feedback about appreciation of the curriculum and implementation-related challenges, we conducted separate online focus group discussions with teachers (n = 7) and students (n = 5) after intervention completion.

3.3.2 Measures

Sociodemographics. Participants provided information about their age, gender, their own and their parents' birthplace, length of time since arrival in Italy (for foreign-born youth), first and second language spoken, family composition, parental occupation, and educational level. Family wealth was measured through the Family Affluence Scale (Currie et al., 2008), a 4-item scale (e.g., "Does your family have a car?") with a final total score ranging from 0 (lowest affluence) to 9 (highest affluence). This instrument has been previously cross-culturally validated in a study involving 35 countries, including Italy, showing good psychometric properties (see Boyce et al., 2006).

Cultural identity exploration and resolution. The two dimensions of cultural identity were measured via the respective subscales from the Ethnic Identity Scale-Brief (Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2015a), which was previously validated in the United States and showed measurement invariance across ethnic-racial groups. Students answered 9 items (e.g., "I know

what my culture means to me", "I have attended events that have helped me learn more about my culture") on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = does not describe me at all, 4 = describes me very well) referring to their culture of origin (i.e., cultural background prevalent in their family), which they had been previously asked to report in an open-ended question. Scores assigned to each item were then averaged to obtain a final score for each subscale, e.g., exploration and resolution, with higher scores indicating stronger cultural identity exploration/resolution. As mentioned in Chapter 2, because the Ethnic Identity Scale-Brief had not been previously applied in the Italian context, our research team translated it using standard translation-back translation procedures, supervised by the developers of the measure. In the current study, Cronbach's Alphas and McDonald's Omegas were respectively: α = .57, 95% CI [.40 - .68], and ω = .58, 95% CI [.44 - .71], for the exploration subscale at T1; α = .60, 95% CI [.42 - .71], and ω = .64, 95% CI [.53 - .76] for the exploration subscale at T2; α = .81, 95% CI [.72 - .87], and ω = .81, 95% CI [.74 - .88] for the resolution subscale at T1; α = .83, 95% CI [.77 - .87], and ω = .85, 95% CI [.80 - .87] for the resolution subscale at T2.

3.3.3 Data analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS (version 26, IBM CORP) and *R* software (*R* Core Team, 2018). As preliminary analyses, we screened for missing data at baseline. If a participant had more than 10% of missing values on one of the questionnaires, we explored the presence of recurrent patterns (if any) of such values and critically discussed these findings as appropriate (i.e., possibility of excluding these participants from the analyses if missing data showed recurrent patterns). In light of our decision to adopt a listwise deletion approach and exclude from analysis those participants who were not present at all assessments, we also assessed whether participants who missed and did not miss survey administrations differed on sociodemographic and intervention-related characteristics. Finally, we ascertained whether

adolescents randomly assigned to the intervention and control groups were comparable, with potential differences being taken into account in our statistical model. Next, we computed descriptive statistics and bivariate for sociodemographic variables, i.e., immigrant background, age, SES, and gender, and for our main variables of interest, i.e., cultural identity exploration and resolution (see Table 3.1). We ran two repeated measures ANOVAs, one for each cultural identity processes, to assess preliminary evidence of intervention efficacy.

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Preliminary analyses

First, we screened for missing data at baseline: only 2.90% (n = 4) of participants had missing values in the Ethnic Identity Scale-Brief, i.e., each participant had not answered to 1 of the 9 items, and no recurrent patterns emerged. Thus, we computed exploration and resolution mean scores using mean imputation method. Youth who participated in both assessments did not differ from those who participated in only one assessment in terms of gender (t = 0.16, df = 151, p = .87), immigrant background (t = 0.68, df = 151, p = .50), socio-economic status (t = -0.85, df = 151, p = .40), cultural identity exploration (t = 0.08, df = 151, p = .93) or resolution (t = -1.40, df = 151, p = .16). However, t-test results showed that students who had missed one assessment were older on average than the those who were present at both assessments (group 1: M = 16.07, SD = 0.96; group 2: M = 15.55, SD = 0.82; t = 2.27, df = 151, p = .02). To assess whether students in the control group differed from their peers in the intervention group, we ran another logistic regression model including sociodemographic characteristics (i.e., gender, age, immigrant background, and SES) and our variables of interest (i.e., exploration and resolution) as predictors, and having participated in all assessments as the dependent variable. The analysis of deviance showed that no predictors had a significant effect, except for gender (χ^2 = 3.921, df = 1, p = .048).

Table 3.1 Correlations and descriptive statistics for study variables by group (intervention $n = 82$, control $n = 56$)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. T1 exploration		.25*	.26*	-.06	.16	.08	-.13	-.06
2. T2 exploration	.56***		.37***	.41***	0.09	-.05	-.06	.27*
3. T1 resolution	.55***	.11		.33**	.28*	.16	-.24*	.06
4. T2 resolution	.33*	.26	.48***		.20	.07	-.13	.34**
5. Immigrant background	.35**	.01	.33*	.19		.21*	-.24*	.09
6. Age	.08	-.07	.20	.22	.26		-.05	-.31**
7. Socioeconomic status (SES)	-.13	.03	.08	.08	-.44***	-.09		-.07
8. Gender	.14	-.12	.14	-.02	.31*	-.04	-.16	
Intervention								
M (SD)	2.68 (0.59)	2.68 (0.52)	3.08 (0.53)	3.27 (0.59)	0.35 (0.48)	15.48 (0.80)	5.51 (1.79)	1.81 (0.39)
Control								
M (SD)	2.61 (0.75)	2.52 (0.72)	3.27 (0.62)	3.20 (0.54)	0.38 (0.49)	15.66 (0.84)	5.64 (1.93)	1.37 (0.49)

Note. $N = 138$. Correlations are presented for the intervention group (above the diagonal) and the control group (below the diagonal). Immigrant background was coded as 0 = without immigrant background (i.e., born in Italy from Italian-born parents) and 1 = with immigrant background (i.e., born in Italy or abroad from at least one parent born abroad). T1 = pretest, T2 = posttest. Gender was coded as 1 = boys and 2 = girls.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

3.4.2 Feasibility, acceptability, and cultural appropriateness

Based on previous recommendations (see Kistin & Silverstein, 2015; Pearson et al., 2020), the first aim of this pilot study was to assess feasibility, acceptability, and cultural appropriateness of the IP intervention among adolescents attending multiethnic classrooms in Italy before proceeding with the main adaptation trial (Barrera Jr et al., 2013).

With respect to feasibility, the current study provided overall positive results. Participation rate for survey completion was high (88%), with an attrition rate lower than 10%. Moreover, despite the ongoing health emergency, we were able to respect our planned timeline in terms of both data collection and implementation of the IP program, replicating the original assessment time points (i.e., pretest 1 week prior to intervention, posttest 1 week after intervention end). The main practical issues encountered were connected to the remote delivery modality, e.g., delays in starting the sessions caused by management of the online platform by teachers and subsequent reduction of the time spent on each activity. Indeed, while core contents were always maintained, the research team had sometimes to revise the structure and pedagogical approach used to make the sessions suitable for this modality. For instance, the use of digital tools was enabled for the sharing activities and all small-group discussions had to be replaced with whole-group discussion, due to the fact that the online platform did not allow for the creation of breakout rooms.

With respect to acceptability and appropriateness, we reviewed feedback provided by students and teachers during focus groups, which highlighted various existing strengths and indications for further improvements in the curriculum. Students seemed to especially enjoy the interactive and participatory methods used by facilitators, which substantially differed from the frontal teaching style used within the Italian school system. Moreover, they appreciated the novelty of the emphasis on personal, identity-related subjects, that they said were usually not covered by standard educational programs: "*All the concepts we have addressed in this project,*

as important as they are, we have never covered them at school, except superficially". One student also found value and significance in thinking about how identity can evolve over time and change based on varying circumstances: "*I really saw myself in the metaphor of the identity backpack, always changing, never the same…depending on the people you are with and the context*". Participants with an immigrant background acknowledged that explaining what being bicultural meant to them and elaborating on their feelings about having a multifaceted identity had been challenging, but also rewarding: "*If I say that I am not a foreigner, it's kind of like I'm denying my origins… Whereas if I say that I am a foreigner, it is as if I were disowning my life now".* Indeed, on one hand they characterized their multicultural affiliation as something enriching, for instance when they incorporated symbols from various countries into their shared activities; however, it seemed to pose challenges primarily in the way others perceived them: "*When I go back to Morocco, they call me 'gheoria' - the foreign one. So whether I am in Italy or Morocco, I am considered a foreigner*". A few participants also stressed the importance of discussing subjects like stereotypes and discrimination within the classroom environment: "*Hearing that others are sometimes stereotyped makes you realize that you are not the only one who experiences these things…*".

Revisiting each session's content, students showed to prefer those activities that enabled them to build connections with and learn more about their classmates' backgrounds, even more than their own: "*I liked learning more about symbols from other cultures and discovering my classmates' origins*", "*I found out things that I did not know about my classmates and would not have found out otherwise; since that day we have talked about our families even more*". In addition, they also seemed to appreciate the focus on peers and non-biologically related figures in the formation of their cultural identity. Homework assignments were found to be engaging, although they would sometimes overlap with other tasks assigned by teachers, weighing upon the overall tiredness related to the final period of the school year. Nonetheless, one participant

reported to have especially enjoyed the cultural interview, because it gave her a unique opportunity to connect with her parents and discover more about her family's history ("*I sat with my Mom for an hour talking about Cameroon and how she felt when she arrived here…*"). In conclusion, students did not have specific suggestions on how to improve the curriculum and expressed general satisfaction with all the activities. On the other hand, surveys were criticized for being "*too long*" and the sessions were sometimes experienced as too short to allow enough time for individual reflections, group discussions, or clarifying questions.

Feedback from teachers who had taken part in the intervention and focus group supported the salience and cultural appropriateness of the IP, as well as its compatibility with the regular school curriculum. In particular, various teachers reported to have incorporated and extended topics addressed in or related to the program into their own classes once the IP was concluded, e.g., by centering lessons on citizenship law and history of migration, or by giving students the task to record videos about their cultural backgrounds and sharing them through the creation of an online platform. Teachers also observed among students a great degree of interest and involvement, despite the abovementioned challenges related to the hybrid delivery and time limitations, as well as a heightened sensitivity toward their own cultural heritage: "*I noticed more awareness with respect to the concept of cultural identity, which honestly surprised me*". Finally, they noted how the sharing activities often managed to foster among the students a sense of cohesion and unity, an aspect that had been negatively impacted by the social distancing restrictions and remote teaching modality that had been in force since the COVID-19 outburst: "*Not all students know about the experience of the classmate sitting next to them. This project brought the class together, because they got to know each other much more deeply*".

When asked to provide input regarding potential adjustments to the curriculum, teachers offered two main suggestions. The first one concerned an organizational feature, specifically

ensuring more continuity in the teachers' presence during the IP program, for the benefit of both students and teachers themselves. Indeed, some of them expressed regret for having observed only a limited number of sessions and wished to take part in the entire project in future editions. The second one was the proposition to create an ad-hoc activity about language and multilingualism to be included in the same session focusing on the social value of cultural symbols: "*Language is a vehicle of culture, our native language builds your view of the world… Perhaps it would be useful to expand on that"*. Teachers deemed such activity particularly important for bicultural students, who had grown up speaking Italian in the school setting and having their heritage language somehow "segregated" within their homes, but also for students of Italian descent, due to local and regional differences in terms of dialects and the enhanced salience of this linguistic component in the development of their cultural identity.

3.4.3 Preliminary evidence of intervention efficacy

The last aim of the present study was to assess initial evidence of the intervention efficacy. The repeated measures ANOVA for cultural identity exploration revealed no significant effects of time x condition interaction on exploration, $F(1, 136) = .50$, $p = .481$, $\eta_p^2 = .004$ (Figure 3.1). On the other hand, there was a significant time x condition effect on resolution, $F(1, 136) = 5.12$, $p = .025$, $\eta_p^2 = .036$, with students in the intervention group showing an increase in resolution from pre-to posttest (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.1 Observed points, box plot, and density plot by condition and time for cultural identity exploration.

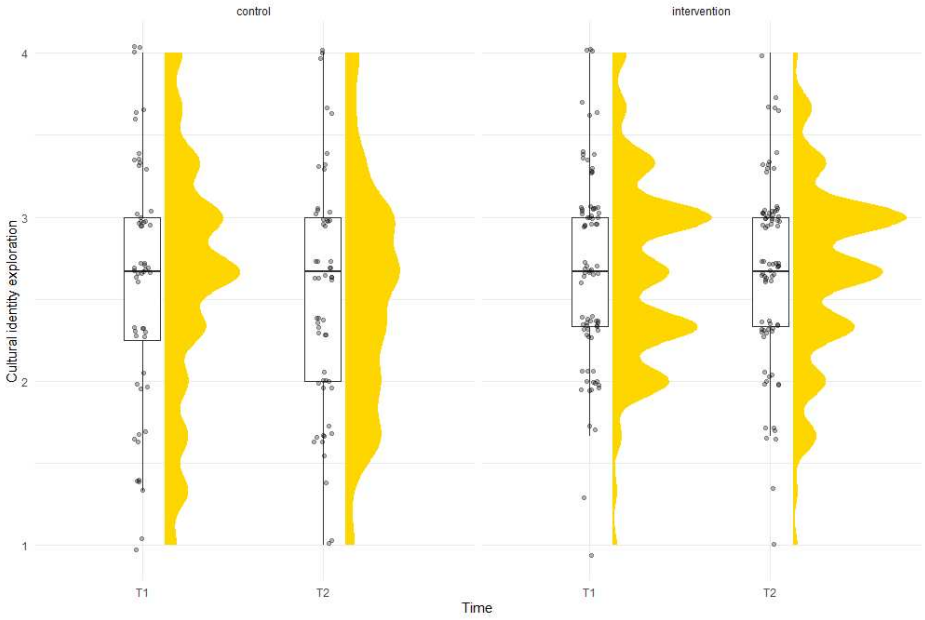
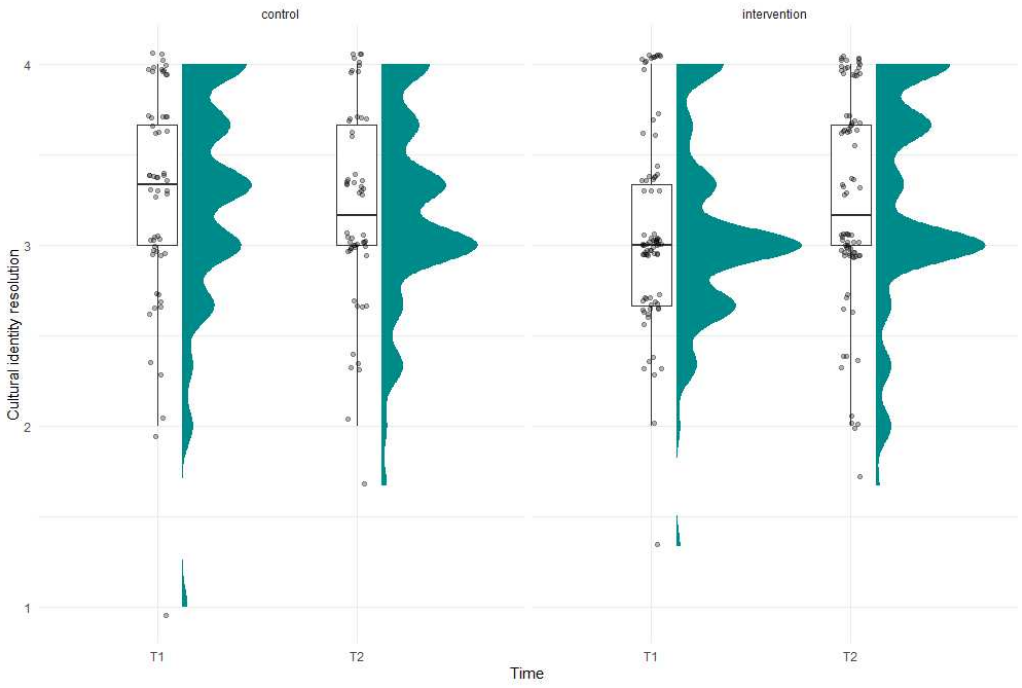


Figure 3.2 Observed points, box plot, and density plot by condition and time for cultural identity resolution.



3.5 Discussion

This pilot aimed to evaluate the salience and preliminary efficacy of an Italian adaptation of the IP intervention among adolescents attending multiethnic classrooms. Focus group discussions with students confirmed the feasibility of the intervention, although some issues were raised concerning the online implementation modality, length of questionnaires, and potential conflicts between IP assignments and standard homework. Regarding acceptability and cultural appropriateness, students particularly enjoyed the focus on topics such as culture and identity, and the chance to get to know their classmates better through participatory activities. Teachers confirmed how this approach positively impacted classroom climate in terms of connectedness and cooperation, especially in light of the prolonged isolation due to the ongoing social distancing norms. Moreover, the program proved to be suitable for integration with other school subjects, as it addresses timely issues such as migration, discrimination, and citizenship laws. Beyond the general positive response, some suggestions for modifications were made (e.g., teachers participating with more continuity; adding an activity about language and multilingualism). On the whole, our findings are consistent with the literature pointing to the benefits of culturally sustaining pedagogical practices, which provide spaces in the school setting to uphold students' identities and cultural pluralism (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris, 2012).

Regarding preliminary efficacy of the intervention, our study highlighted an effect from pre- to posttest on cultural identity resolution, but not on exploration, which was unexpected based on the theoretical assumptions underlying the intervention (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2017) and findings from the original efficacy trial (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a). However, given that the study was conducted while COVID-19 related restrictions were in force, opportunities for exploration were extremely limited. Considering that two out of the three items of the exploration subscale from the Ethnic Identity Scale-Brief referred to actual

attendance of events and participation in activities involving groups of people, we reasoned that social distancing restrictions might have influenced the endorsement of those items. Moreover, despite efforts to adapt the in-person curriculum for remote delivery to ensure fidelity, the online modality might have been less stimulating and engaging for high school students, a finding that has been reported in several studies on adolescents experiencing distance learning during the pandemic (Guazzini et al., 2022; Lessard & Puhl, 2021).

The increase in cultural identity resolution after participation in the program fails to replicate results of the US implementation (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a). However, a similar effect emerged in the German pilot study, with the authors reporting an increase in both exploration and resolution at posttest in one of the two cohorts of participating students (Juang et al., 2020). A possible explanation is that, even though adolescents were prevented from opportunities for exploration due to the ongoing health emergency, they might have grown in resolution by engaging in a more private and introspective process of reflection. Indeed, while the curriculum activities are primarily designed for students to engage in exploration of their cultural background(s), participants are also provided tools to gain a clearer sense of their cultural identity. Therefore, it is possible that the IP was efficacious in prompting such reflection and reconsideration.

3.5.1 Limitations and directions for future research

This study provided a unique opportunity to evaluate an online implementation of the IP in the Italian school setting during a particularly challenging historical period. However, some limitations need to be acknowledged. First, the remote delivery of the intervention involved several constraints in terms of logistics and participant engagement. Although online psychological interventions are deemed a valid alternative to "traditional" treatments in terms of efficacy, accessibility, and benefits (e.g., Lamb et al., 2019), studies comparing different

delivery modalities for school-based interventions are still lacking. Thus, it is possible that the IP might have been more efficacious if delivered in person. Second, the unique circumstances of implementation during a pandemic required the team to accommodate the school's requests, resulting in the non-random assignment of classrooms into intervention and control conditions. Following extant recommendations (see Keogh-Brown et al., 2007), to avoid competing and contamination effects, we instructed teachers of intervention classes not to share information with their colleagues and students from the control classes about the IP activities, and monitored program implementation using a fidelity checklist in every session. Moreover, due to social distancing norms that were still in place, students from different classes had no opportunities to meet in the school environment. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that these effects have occurred to some extent. Hence, future efficacy tests should use randomization to eliminate selection bias, balance potential confounding factors, and prevent contamination and/or competition effects that might influence intervention outcomes. Third, due to the relatively low sample size and its heterogeneity, we were not able to ascertain differential effects based on national origin or generational status. Further research is needed to explore whether specific cultural groups, or first vs second generation students, benefit more (or less) from the IP (see Sladek et al., 2021), especially in light of the varied migration and reception experiences that characterize different cultural groups in Italy (see Ambrosini, 2013; Musso et al., 2018). Finally, also due to the remote modality, there was no systematic recording of whether there were any negative interactions among students (e.g., discriminatory remarks) during the sessions. It would be an important topic for future implementations to document and evaluate whether the occurrence of such interactions might impact the efficacy of the IP curriculum.

In conclusion, involving ethnically diverse youth in activities and reflections concerning their cultural affiliation(s) is both feasible and meaningful in the Italian context. Future

implementations may integrate digital tools that were engaging for students (e.g., online surveys and sharing/learning platforms) and fostered multigenerational, family discussions (e.g., cultural interviews via phone or video call with relatives still living in the home country), as well as language-related activities to tackle the affective meaning of mother tongue for youth's cultural identity. Although further refinement of the IP curriculum is warranted, our results confirm the importance of targeting cultural identity processes through school-based interventions also in European countries with varying social and historical milieus.

CHAPTER 4

Study 2. Evaluating the efficacy of the adapted *Identity Project* among Italian adolescents: a randomized controlled trial

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This chapter was adapted from:
Ceccon, C., Schachner, M. K., Lionetti, F., Pastore, M., Umaña-Taylor, A. J., & Moscardino, U. (2023). Efficacy of a Cultural Adaptation of the Identity Project Intervention Among Adolescents Attending Multiethnic Classrooms in Italy: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *Child Development, 94,* 1162–1180.
https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13944

4.1 Abstract

This registered report evaluated the efficacy of an Italian adaptation of the *Identity Project* (IP), a school-based intervention that fosters cultural identity exploration and resolution during adolescence. After adapting and piloting the intervention (Ceccon et al., 2023a), a randomized controlled trial was conducted between October 2021 and January 2022 on 747 ethnically diverse youth (M_{age} = 15 yrs, 53% girls, 31% with immigrant background) attending 45 classrooms randomly assigned to intervention or control groups. Participants were administered self-report surveys assessing the variables of interest 1 week before the intervention (pretest), 9 weeks after baseline (posttest), and 13 weeks after baseline (follow-up). Immigrant background and environmental sensitivity were explored as potential moderators of intervention efficacy. Bayesian analyses confirmed the efficacy of the Italian IP in enhancing exploration processes (Cohen's d = 0.18), whereas no cascading effect on resolution emerged at follow-up. Youth with higher (vs lower) levels of environmental sensitivity, also in a combined fashion with immigrant background, benefited more in terms of exploration. This study provides novel evidence on the efficacy of the Italian IP in engaging students with their heritage cultures, and on the importance of youth's immigrant background and sensitivity as conditions to better understand for whom the intervention is more beneficial. Implications for developmental theory and practice are discussed.

4.2 Introduction

The successful adaptation and integration of immigrant and ethnic minority youth is a key challenge that has become increasingly relevant not only in societies with a long history of migration and multiculturalism, but also in the European context due to globalization and other major sociopolitical events, including the so-called "refugee crisis" (Silove et al., 2017). This is particularly true in recent receiving countries like Italy, where immigration is still perceived as a new and potentially threatening phenomenon by the local population. Politicians and the media often amplify these negative sentiments, contributing to the perpetuation of stereotypes and prejudice through the use of a narrative emphasizing fear and societal insecurity (Rubaltelli et al., 2020). In addition, the recent COVID-19 outbreak has further intensified socioeconomic disparities and discriminatory acts against members of ethnic minorities and immigrants (Katikireddi et al., 2021; Tai et al., 2021).

Given the growing social polarization and persistent interethnic tensions, understanding one's own cultural identity and learning how to approach cultural diversity have become even more pressing tasks that both ethnic majority and minoritized youth need to face on their way to adulthood (Schwarzenthal et al., 2017). Achieving a stable cultural identity and intercultural competence are two interrelated processes that are pivotal for adolescents' wellbeing (see Rivas-Drake et al., 2014a) and represent a step toward building more inclusive multiethnic societies. Yet, despite international calls to promote tolerance and respect for diversity among youth and the recognized importance of cultural identity formation in the scientific field, evidence-based interventions that provide effective tools and protected spaces for adolescents to address such topics are still scarce, especially in the European context.

The *Identity Project* (IP) is a school-based intervention in which, through the stimulation of identity exploration processes, all students are involved in a series of activities that aim to foster sense of belonging, acceptance of cultural diversity, and quality of interethnic

relationships (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2017). The intervention was designed and successfully tested in the United States (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a, 2018b), and a first study in the European context has been recently carried out in Germany (Juang et al., 2020), yielding promising results. However, as stated by the authors, the small sample size decreased the power to detect effects (see Juang et al., 2020). Thus, more research is needed to test the efficacy of the IP in other countries outside the United States with different histories and patterns of immigration. For example, compared to the United States and Germany, Italian society differs greatly in terms of multicultural policies, ethnic composition, and intergroup dynamics between cultural majority and minoritized members (Musso et al., 2018). In addition, the identification of specific subgroups of adolescents for whom the intervention might be most (or least) effective merits further investigation.

This registered report aimed to test the efficacy of a culturally adapted version of the IP in Italy, a country that is one of the main entries into Europe for immigrants and refugees. Replication of efficacy studies in new sociocultural contexts is essential to ensure external validity and generalizability of evidence-based interventions, while adaptation responds to a professed lack of cultural sensitivity when implementing programs with different target groups (Beelmann et al., 2018). In doing so, we followed recommended guidelines concerning study preregistration and open science (see Nosek et al., 2018; Syed & Donnellan, 2020) to increase transparency, avoid questionable research practices (e.g., insufficient statistical power, *p*-hacking, hypothesizing after results are known), and ultimately increase reproducibility. Furthermore, given that the efficacy of interventions might be underestimated when it is hidden in individual-by-environment interactions (Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 2015), we explored whether immigrant background and sensitivity to environmental influences (defined as the ability to register, process, and respond to stimuli; Pluess, 2015) moderated adolescents' response to the intervention, as discussed next.

4.2.1 Immigrant background and environmental sensitivity as moderators

In the original IP, the authors considered ethnic-racial minority status as a relevant variable possibly influencing intervention efficacy in light of their diverse sample. Indeed, Sladek et al. (2021) found that ethnic-racial minoritized youth reported greater levels of identity resolution from pre- to posttest, whereas their majority counterparts showed higher increases of this variable over a 1-year follow-up period. This result is attributable to the higher salience of ERI-related issues for minoritized adolescents due to their involvement in acculturation processes and the need to accommodate between heritage and mainstream culture values (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014a; Schachner et al., 2018). However, several differences exist between the majority/minority distinction within the US context and what is considered to be an "immigrant" or a person with immigrant background in Europe. For example, in the former case, ethnic-racial minorities are grouped into a few major categories (e.g., Latinx, African Americans, Asian Americans) that represent a sizable part of the social fabric, whereas immigration in Europe is a rather heterogeneous and relatively recent phenomenon in many countries, due to its rapid increase only in the past 50 years. In addition, whilst immigrants in the United States tend to become part of the majority group or extant minoritized groups over the course of two or three generations, in European countries individuals of immigrant descent keep being referred to as "immigrants" long after having settled into host societies, also due to differences in citizenship attribution (El-Tayeb, 2014; Motti-Stefanidi, 2023). Thus, in the European context, immigrant background might play a different role in relation to identity processes compared to ethnic-racial majority or minority status in the US.

Beyond group-based characteristics, theoretical and empirical evidence also suggests that temperamentally based traits can influence individuals' responses to treatment (Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 2015; de Villiers et al., 2018). Among these, environmental sensitivity has gained particular attention in recent years due to its importance for adaptation

and mental health (Lionetti et al., 2019a). Environmental sensitivity is defined as the fundamental "ability to register, process, and respond to external factors" (Pluess, 2015, p. 138). Although such ability is critical for all human beings to adapt successfully to their social and physical environment, people substantially differ in their levels of sensitivity, with some being more affected by contextual conditions than others (Aron et al., 2012). Building on previous theoretical models concerning person-environment interactions and their role in adjustment quality (Aron et al., 2012; Belsky & Pluess, 2009; Boyce & Ellis, 2005), Pluess (2015) proposed a meta-framework to capture theories of individual-environment interaction under the same umbrella and defined environmental sensitivity as an inherited trait responsible for individual differences in response to stimuli. This trait has been shown to increase vulnerability when people are faced with negative events (in line with the diathesis-stress model), but it also renders individuals highly susceptible to positive environments, as postulated by the "vantage sensitivity" proposition.

In line with this meta-framework, a number of studies confirmed the moderating role of environmental sensitivity in a variety of contexts. For instance, Lionetti et al. (2019b) found that children with high levels of behaviorally observed sensitivity were more affected by the influence of a negative parenting style in relation to emotional-behavioral problems, but they also showed greater social competence in the presence of good parenting quality than low sensitive children. Similarly, Scrimin et al. (2018) reported that highly sensitive children were more vulnerable to the negative effects of a stressful environment, but they also benefited more from a supportive family environment than their low-sensitive counterparts. Of importance, intervention studies where the environmental variable was manipulated revealed that highly sensitive adolescents had greater advantage from being exposed to positive environmental conditions compared to less sensitive ones (Nocentini et al., 2018; Pluess & Boniwell, 2015). Given that the IP aims to create a safe context where students receive positive feedback and

support in their identity formation process, and consistent with the vantage sensitivity proposition, it is possible that the intervention might be more effective for high (vs low) sensitive participants.

4.2.2 The present study

Considering the scarcity of empirically based interventions designed to promote cultural identity development and psychosocial adjustment among youth from diverse backgrounds in the European context, the purpose of the present study was to evaluate the efficacy of a culturally adapted version of the IP intervention in a sample of multiethnic adolescents in Italy. Specifically, we aimed to replicate Umaña-Taylor et al.'s (2018a) process model postulating that the intervention would result in an increase in cultural identity exploration which, in turn, would be linked to higher levels of resolution at follow-up. In intervention research, replication is particularly important to evaluate whether the intervention meets the challenges associated with cultural adaptation and implementation in a different context, including the use of materials in another educational setting, participant engagement, or the adjustment of organizational structures (Huitsing et al., 2020). In addition, we explored the possible role of immigrant background and environmental sensitivity in moderating intervention efficacy.

Building on previous research related to the IP intervention, the following preregistered hypotheses (https://osf.io/kd2gb) were tested:

(H1) Adolescents in the intervention group will show an increase in cultural identity exploration from pretest (T0) to posttest (T1) as compared to their peers in the control group.

(H2) In the intervention (vs control) group, increases in cultural identity exploration from pre- (T0) to posttest (T1) will be linked to increases in resolution at follow-up (T2).

These hypotheses were formalized in terms of plausible effect sizes that are further described in the Data analysis section. In addition to these hypotheses, and in light of emerging

evidence suggesting that personal characteristics might play a role in how adolescents respond to school-based interventions, our study also explored whether participants with an immigrant background and those with higher levels of trait-like sensitivity benefited more (or less) from the intervention than their nonmigrant, low-sensitive counterparts.

4.3 Method

4.3.1 Participants and procedure

In order to determine the sample size for the current study, we conducted a Bayesian power analysis. The *R* code can be found in the following project in the OSF: https://osf.io/zry23/?view only=b6898693f3cf45258a6a76d470deec21

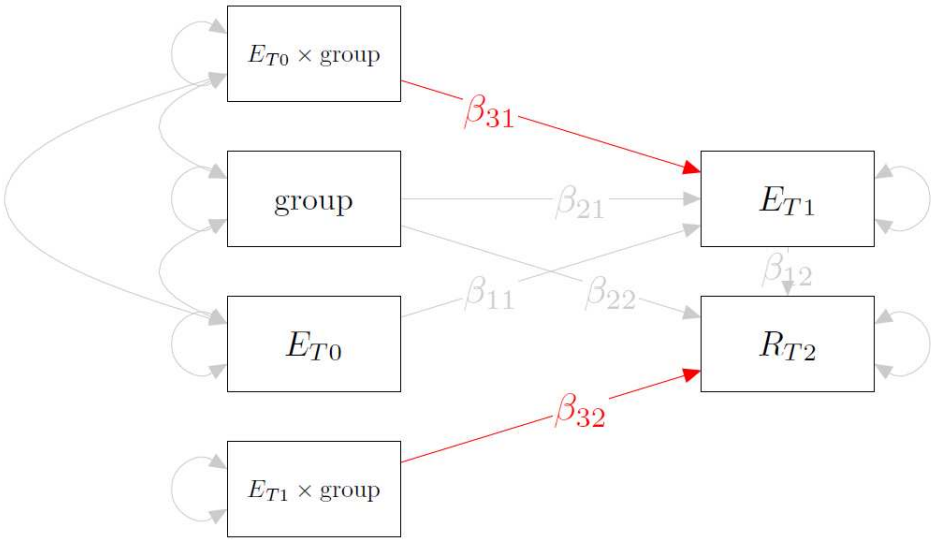
The Bayesian approach is deemed particularly useful in the field of intervention research, as it allows to incorporate differentially informative data from prior studies into the intervention design and development process (Chen & Fraser, 2017). As recommended by Kruschke (2014), we first selected relevant parameters. To test H1 (i.e., adolescents in the intervention group will show an increase in cultural identity exploration from T0 to T1 as compared to their peers in the control group) and H2 (i.e., in the intervention vs control group, increases in cultural identity exploration from T0 to T1 will be linked to increases in resolution at T2), we evaluated a multivariate linear model (see Figure 4.1) represented by the following two equations:

$$\begin{cases} E_{T1} = \beta_{01} + \beta_{11} E_{T0} + \beta_{21}\text{group} + \beta_{31} E_{T0}\text{group} \\ R_{T2} = \beta_{02} + \beta_{12} E_{T1} + \beta_{22}\text{group} + \beta_{32} E_{T1}\text{group} \end{cases}$$

where E = exploration, R = resolution, T0 = pretest, T1 = posttest, T2 = follow-up, β = standardized beta, and group = condition (intervention vs waitlist control). Specifically, the two β_3. represented the relevant parameters that defined the effect sizes of the intervention. Only standardized parameters were considered for the sake of simplicity.

Next, we defined a plausible value of the $\beta_{3.}$ parameters with a credibility interval (CI) for our estimates at 90%, as well as the Region of Practical Equivalence (ROPE; Kruschke, 2018), that is, the interval of parameter values that can be considered substantially null. Since in longitudinal studies effect sizes tend to be relatively small (Adachi & Willoughby, 2015), we established a ROPE interval of [-0.1, 0.1] and a plausible effect of 0.3, which is in line with previous implementations of the IP intervention in the United States and Germany (Juang et al., 2020; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a) as well as with extant meta-analyses of school-based psychosocial intervention programs (e.g., Taylor et al., 2017).

Figure 4.1 Target model



Note. ET0 = Exploration at pretest; ET1 = Exploration at posttest; RT2 = Resolution at follow-up; β = standardized beta. Group coded as 1 = intervention, 0 = waitlist control. Intercepts are omitted for clarity. Red arrows represent parameters considered in power analysis.

We then defined a sample size of 100, 200, and 300 for each group (intervention vs control). For each of these samples, we simulated 1000 datasets. On each generated dataset, we estimated model parameters using Monte Carlo Markov Chain (MCMC) as well as 90% CI. We used the following prior distributions: Normal(0;1) for intercepts and regression

coefficients, and Gamma(1,0.5) for residual standard errors. Posterior distributions of parameters were obtained from 4 chains of 3000 replications; thus, posterior parameter distributions were based on 12000 samples. Each parameter posterior was summarized by its mean value (representing the estimated parameter) and associated 90% Highest Posterior Density Intervals (HPDI; Kruschke, 2018), which provide a direct representation of the most credible values of estimated parameters. We counted how many times the CI did not fall into the ROPE out of the total amount of replications; this ratio represented our estimated power. Results indicated that a total sample of 600 participants was needed to have at least 80% of power for detecting a hypothesized effect of 0.3 in each of the two parameters in relation to our statistical model.

Based on the participation rates reported in previous implementations of the IP intervention in the United States (79%; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a) and Germany (96%; Juang et al., 2020), as well as on our own pilot study (82%), we expected an average participation rate of 80% (range = 70-90%). Furthermore, we anticipated recording overall modest attrition rates (around 10%) based on what has been previously reported for school-based interventions involving adolescents (see Taylor et al., 2017) and because the IP lasts for a relatively short period of time (8 weeks). We therefore planned to approach 800-850 eligible students (approx. 40 classrooms) to take these factors into account and attenuate the possible impact of missing data. Although we considered classroom and school membership as random effects in our statistical model, we did not include them in the power analysis because we lacked specific a priori information on the possible magnitude of such effects in relation to the IP intervention. Furthermore, inclusion of these effects would have increased the number of parameters and consequently the required sample size (which is already 3 times the original study), therefore compromising feasibility of the study.

Participants were recruited in public technical and vocational upper secondary schools (including the school that took part in the pilot study) located in urban areas of the city of Padova, in the Veneto region. We established partnerships with technical and vocational schools specifically to make sure that our sample would be composed of at least 20-25% students with non-Italian citizenship, based on national statistics indicating that youth from cultural minorities are more likely to attend these types of schools (MIM, 2023; see Chapter 2.1.2). This is related to several contextual factors (e.g., preference for work-oriented schools to contribute to family income), but sadly also to the fact that teachers and guidance counselors in middle school often steer minoritized students toward technical-vocational programs, even when they could pursue more extended educational careers based on their interests and abilities (MIM, 2022).

After obtaining approval from the Ethic Committee of the School of Psychology at the University of Padova (protocol n. 3871) and from relevant authorities (i.e., school principals, teachers), we proceeded to present the study to prospective participants and distributed informed consent forms to be signed by the students themselves and both their parents. To achieve our planned sample size (i.e., $N = 600$), and based on national regulations indicating that classroom composition in upper secondary school entails between 20-30 students per classroom (MIUR, 2020), we asked 1037 students from 45 classrooms in 6 different public upper secondary schools located in urban areas to volunteer for the study. One teacher served as a contact person for each school, organizing the intervention schedule to fit in with preexisting activities. In line with our pilot study, participants were eligible to be included in the analytical sample if they (1) attended 10th grade, (2) had sufficient proficiency in the Italian language, and 3) had no certified intellectual disability or neurodevelopmental disorder. Data collected from youth who did not meet the second ($n = 6$) or third ($n = 6$) criterion were excluded from analyses. However, to avoid generating feelings of social exclusion, these students were

encouraged to take part in the surveys as well as in the IP activities with the support of a teacher or one of the two IP facilitators. Furthermore, non-Italian speakers were given materials translated in their native languages and, in one specific case, an interpreter was assigned to further assist the newcomer student.

Participation rate was 92%, with 957 (M_{age} = 15.12, *SD* = .68; 52% self-identifying as girls) eligible students who returned consent. For analytical purposes, however, we used a listwise deletion approach and excluded from analyses those participants who had missed one or more assessment (*n* = 210, 22%), obtaining a final analytic sample of 747 (intervention *n* = 382, control *n* = 365). With respect to sociodemographics, 1% of parents had received no education, 2% had completed primary school, 22% had completed lower secondary school, 47% had completed upper secondary school, 25% attended university, and 3% were missing or preferred not to answer/did not know. With regard to socioeconomic status (SES), the average score on the Family Affluence Scale (see Measures section) was 6.35 (*SD* = 1.76, range = 0-9). Thirty-one percent of the participants had an immigrant background, i.e., born abroad or in Italy from at least one parent born abroad. Among them, 72% were born in Italy. Students listed 55 different countries of origin, the main ones being Romania, Morocco, Moldova, Albania, and Tunisia.

This study was designed as a randomized controlled trial at the classroom level, i.e., students attending classrooms in the intervention group were administered the IP program, while students in the control group classrooms were put on a waitlist before being delivered the intervention. The efficacy of the IP was compared relative to the waitlist control group. Classrooms were randomly allocated to either the intervention or control group using computer-generated randomization sequences. Although the randomization procedure could only be conducted one week before baseline assessment due to logistical constraints, neither students

nor teachers were informed of their classroom's group assignment until after baseline survey completion, in order to prevent any potential contamination effects.

Surveys were completed by adolescents in both groups 1 week before the beginning of the intervention (T0, pretest), 9 weeks after baseline (T1, posttest), and 13 weeks after baseline (T2, follow-up). The inclusion of this short-term follow-up was in line with the original US-based study (see Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a) as well as with international guidelines (see Flay et al., 2005), based on the consideration that intervention outcomes might diminish over time. Students in the control group started the intervention 2 weeks after T2 assessment, i.e., 15 weeks after baseline and 7 weeks after students in the intervention group had finished the IP curriculum.

The IP intervention consisted of 8 sessions, held once a week and each lasting approximately 55 minutes. The sessions took place between October and December 2021 and were facilitated by the author together with a team of Psychology graduate students who had received extensive training and were supervised on a weekly basis. Facilitators worked in pairs and took turns in delivering the activities, with the non-leading facilitator responsible to ensure that all key concepts and activities were carried out and, otherwise, to address such potentially omitted contents. To this aim, facilitators relied on fidelity checklists specifically developed to evaluate adherence, i.e., the degree to which the core elements of an intervention are being implemented as originally intended (Lee & Chue, 2013). In this study, the mean fidelity of implementation was 94%, with a range of 48%-100%, and half of the sessions (50%) reported a 100% adherence. In the case of sessions with an adherence score below 60% (n = 4, 2%), facilitators took measures to address the missing contents during the following session. While there were no COVID-19-related school closures, a few classrooms were occasionally quarantined and 6 meetings (3% of the total number) were held from remote, building on previous experience from the pilot study.

One week following the follow-up survey administered in January 2022, students and teachers from the intervention classrooms were invited to take part in focus group discussions (duration = 1 hour each). In total, 50 students volunteered to participate and, based on the classroom/school they attended to, were divided into 10 focus groups (4 conducted in presence, 6 from remote), i.e., 5 students on average, ranging from 2 to 9 students per group. Moreover, 6 online focus groups (one per school) were held with a total of 24 teachers, i.e., 4 teachers on average, ranging from 2 to 6 teachers per group. Each focus group was led by two facilitators.

4.3.2 Measures

Sociodemographics. Students reported on their age, age, birthplace, parents' birthplace, length of residence in Italy (for youth born abroad), first and second language spoken, family composition, parental occupation, and educational level. Similarly to our pilot study, family SES was assessed via the Family Affluence Scale, a 4-item instrument (e.g., "Does your family have a car?") with a total score ranging from 0 (lowest affluence) to 9 (highest affluence). This measure had been validated in a cross-cultural study involving 35 countries, including Italy, demonstrating good psychometric properties (see Boyce et al., 2006).

Cultural identity exploration and resolution. For the main study, due to the low internal reliability found in our pilot study for the exploration subscale of the Ethnic Identity Scale-Brief (Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2015a), we opted for the 17-item Ethnic Identity Scale (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Specifically, we used the 7 items from the exploration subscale (e.g., "I have experienced things that reflect my culture of origin, such as eating food, listening to music, and watching movies") and the 4 items from the resolution subscale (e.g., "I am clear about what my culture of origin means to me"). Since this instrument had never been used in Italy, we translated it using standard translation-back translation procedures building on the translation of the Ethnic Identity Scale-Brief employed during our pilot study. As for the brief

version (Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2015a; see Measures section in Chapter 3), responses ranged from 1 = does not describe me at all to 4 = describes me very well; for each subscale, the scores given to the respective items were averaged to obtain a total score, with higher scores representing higher levels of exploration/resolution. Before responding to the questionnaire, participants had to specify their culture of origin (i.e., cultural background prevalent in their family) and were instructed to consider that specific cultural group in answering the subsequent questions. After filling in the items, students had the option to list any additional cultural groups with which they self-identified.

The Ethnic Identity Scale has been previously employed with ethnic-racially diverse samples in the US, demonstrating strong validity, internal reliability, and measurement consistency among both ethnic majority and minoritized group individuals (Sladek et al., 2020a; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Additionally, it displayed good internal consistency in the German IP study (Juang et al., 2020). In this study, Cronbach's Alphas and McDonald's Omegas were respectively α = .78, 95% CI [.75 - .80] and ω = .79, 95% CI [.77 - .81] for the exploration subscale, and α = .84, 95% CI [.82 - .86] and ω = .85, 95% CI [.83 - .86] for the resolution subscale. We performed a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to test the 3-factor structure (i.e., exploration, resolution, and affirmation) proposed in the original validation (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). We used the Diagonally Weighted Least Squares (DWLS) estimator to address the ordinal nature of the data. To assess model fit we computed various goodness-of-fit indices, including the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker Lewis index (TLI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). Based on suggested cutoff values (e.g., Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003), the 3-factor model had an overall acceptable fit (CFI = .98, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .09, SRMR = .06).

Environmental sensitivity. Participants' sensitivity to environmental stimuli was assessed through the short version of the Highly Sensitive Child Scale (Pluess et al., 2018). The

scale comprises 12 items (e.g., “I notice when small things have changed in my environment”) pertaining to three subscales: Ease of Excitation (5 items), Low Sensory Threshold (3 items), and Aesthetic Sensitivity (4 items). Items are rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely). In this study we used the mean score, which is obtained by averaging all item responses, with higher scores indicating higher sensitivity. The scale has shown good psychometric properties in terms of validity and reliability in adolescent samples across different countries (Weyn et al., 2021). In the original development and validation studies, the Highly Sensitive Child Scale showed adequate internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and construct validity in relation to measures of temperament and personality traits (Pluess et al., 2018). Consistent with previous studies concerning the psychometric properties of the Italian version of the scale as applied in intervention research with children (Nocentini et al., 2018), in the current sample this instrument had good internal reliability (Cronbach’s α = .75, 95% CI [.73 - .77] and McDonald’s ω = .74, 95% CI [.71 - .77]). As prior research showed that this scale fits a bifactor structure, i.e. a general sensitivity factor with items loading onto three separate factors represented by the three subscales (Ease of Excitation, Low Sensory Threshold, and Aesthetic Sensitivity; Pluess et al., 2018), we tested this type of model using CFA. Results supported a bifactor solution showing a good fit (CFI = .99, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .03, SRMR = .04).

Focus groups. Students were asked open-ended questions regarding which activities they enjoyed the most/least; if they had noticed any changes in the way they perceived or felt about their own cultural identity and attitudes toward others’ cultural backgrounds; and whether they would add, remove, or modify any activities. Teachers were asked about their general impressions of the curriculum; whether any IP-related topics had been discussed during standard lessons; possible issues encountered during implementation; and suggestions for improving the intervention.

4.3.3 Data analysis

All analyses were conducted via *R* software (R Core Team, 2018), including *blavaan* (Merkle & Rosseel, 2018) and *brms* (Bürkner, 2017) packages, and we used STAN to implement MCMC sampling (Stan Development Team, 2018).

As preliminary analyses, we screened for missing data at the different time points. If a subject presented more than 10% of missing values on any of the questionnaires, we examined potential recurring patterns in these values and considered to possibly exclude from analyses participants with such patterns. We used a Bernoullian logistic model to ascertain whether participants who missed and did not miss survey administrations (and were consequently included in the final analytic sample) differed on sociodemographic and contextual characteristics, as well as our study variables (i.e., cultural identity exploration and resolution, environmental sensitivity). We also explored data distribution to verify the comparability of participants in the intervention and control groups, and any potential differences were considered within our statistical model. As part of our quality check, we analyzed measurement invariance of the two main measures (Ethnic Identity Scale and Highly Sensitive Child Scale) by exploring the degree of overlap of the posterior distribution of parameters separately in the two groups (i.e., students with and without an immigrant background). This method provides information on the degree to which the two groups may differ with respect to the variables of interest (Pastore & Calcagnì, 2019). Results of this analysis are reported in Appendix A.

Finally, we calculated descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among study variables (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Correlations and descriptive statistics for study variables by group (intervention $n = 382$, control $n = 365$).

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. T0 exploration		.57	.54	.53	.38	.41	.12	.20	.04	.01	-.07
2. T1 exploration	.62		.69	.31	.51	.44	.11	.18	.10	.02	-.05
3. T2 exploration	.63	.72		.36	.39	.60	.13	.24	.04	.01	-.12
4. T0 resolution	.44	.36	.37		.49	.50	.04	.20	-.13	.10	-.03
5. T1 resolution	.38	.49	.46	.62		.58	.06	.13	-.05	.04	-.05
6. T2 resolution	.40	.46	.55	.61	.78		.06	.18	-.04	.06	-.03
7. Environmental sensitivity	.04	-.03	-.03	.02	.00	-.01		.18	.36	.09	-.12
8. Immigrant background	.16	.13	.08	.23	.23	.17	.05		.13	.21	-.30
9. Gender	.01	.02	.01	-.09	-.13	-.11	.33	-.04		-.02	-.08
10. Age	.06	.04	-.01	.09	.11	.04	-.06	.19	-.23		-.19
11. Socioeconomic status (SES)	.02	-.01	-.02	-.09	-.03	-.06	.05	-.31	.06	-.20	
Intervention											
M (SD)	2.63 (0.55)	2.70 (0.55)	2.64 (0.57)	2.81 (0.65)	2.95 (0.62)	2.88 (0.64)	4.56 (0.85)	0.30 (0.46)	1.55 (0.55)	15.10 (0.67)	6.38 (1.74)
Control											
M (SD)	2.63 (0.61)	2.61 (0.57)	2.62 (0.57)	2.86 (0.68)	2.83 (0.64)	2.83 (0.63)	4.73 (0.87)	0.32 (0.47)	1.64 (0.54)	15.03 (0.62)	6.39 (1.74)

Note. Correlations are presented for the intervention group (above the diagonal) and the control group (below the diagonal). Immigrant background was coded as 0 = without immigrant background (i.e., born in Italy from Italian-born parents) and 1 = with immigrant background (i.e., born in Italy or abroad from at least one parent born abroad). Gender was coded as 1 = boys, 2 = girls. T0 = pretest, T1 = 9-week posttest, T2 = 13-week posttest.

To test our main hypotheses we used a Bayesian approach comparing a series of multivariate multilevel linear models. Variations between students of different schools and classrooms were included as random effects by analyzing the posterior distributions of their associated variance. The tested models (with school and classroom as random intercepts) were as follows: model 0, i.e. a model assuming that there were no associations among the study variables; model 1, representing the interaction between exploration at T0 and group on exploration at T1, and the interaction of exploration at T1 and group on resolution at T2; model 2, a model including the main effects of exploration at T0 and group on exploration at T1, and of exploration at T1 and group on resolution at T2; model 3, representing the interaction of exploration at T0 and group on exploration at T1, and the main effects of exploration at T1 and group on resolution at T2; and model 4, considering the main effects of exploration at T0 and group on exploration at T1, and the interaction between exploration at T1 and group on resolution at T2.

We fitted an observed (vs latent) variable model for three main reasons. First, because our aim was to replicate the original study's approach; second, because the main instruments had been previously validated in different countries and ethnic-racial groups (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004; Weyn et al., 2021); and third, for feasibility reasons, because including additional parameters related to latent variables would have doubled the number of required participants (i.e., approximately 1200) based on our power analysis. The following informative priors were used: for main effects (exploration at T0 on resolution at T1; exploration at T1 on resolution at T2) Student's *t* (3, 0.5, 0.5), for group effect Student's *t* (3,1,0.5) and for interaction effects Student's *t* (3, 0.2, 1); for random effects and residual standard deviations we used truncated Student's t (3, 0, 2.5); and for residuals' correlations a Lewandowski-Kurowicka-Joe distribution. For all models, estimates were based on 4000 samples extracted from the posteriors with 4 chains, using the package *brms* (Bürkner, 2017) which interfaces with STAN (Stan

Development Team, 2018). We compared models via the following criteria: Bayesian R^2; Leave-one-out Cross Validation information criterion, with lower values indicating a greater predictive capability of the model; and model weights, with higher values indicating a better model. We also verified the normalcy of model residuals. Then, to test the exploratory research questions we included participants' immigrant background and environmental sensitivity in our statistical model using weak-informative priors.

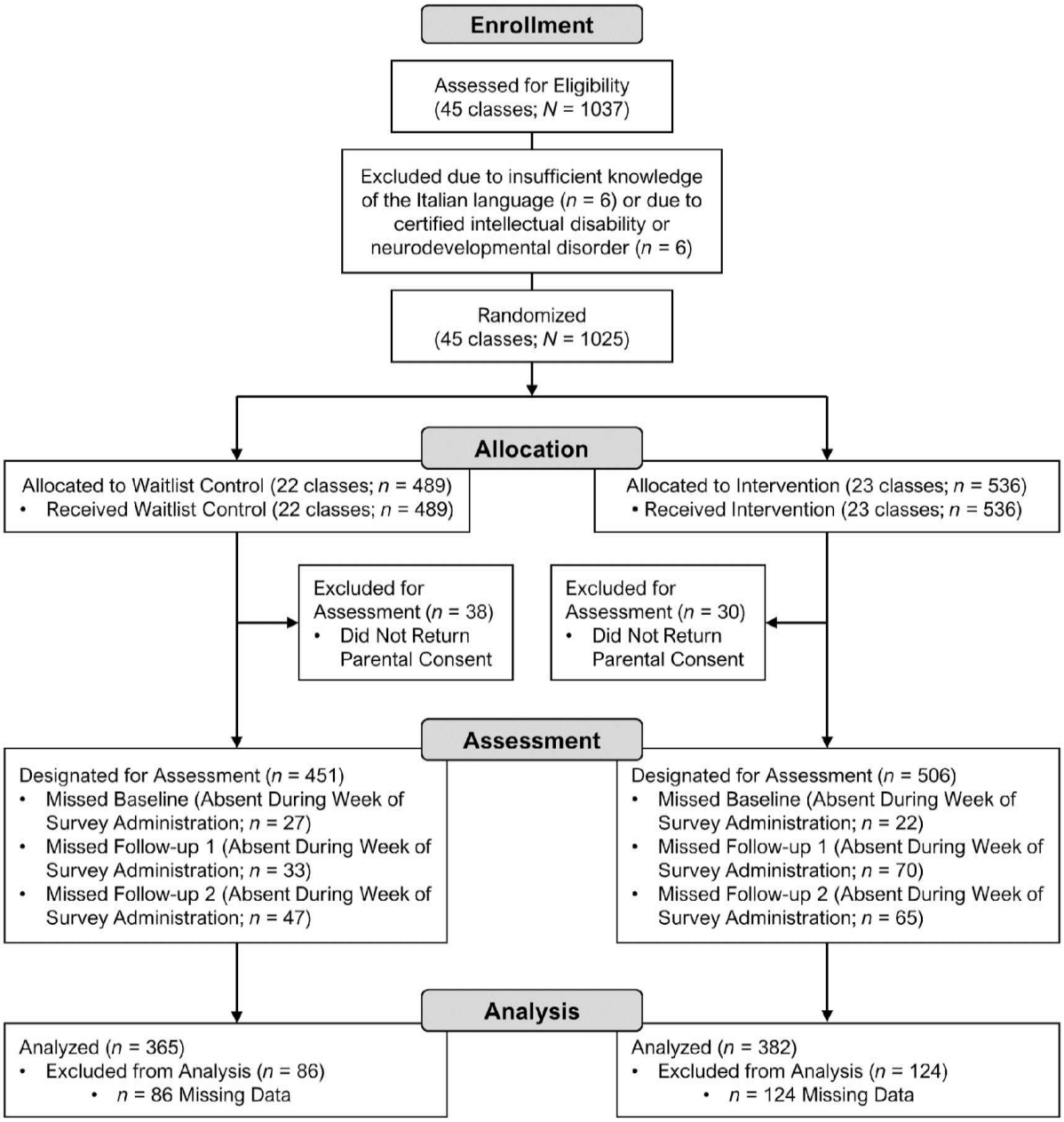
The focus group data were subjected to thematic content analysis to describe recurrent themes across participants' responses following procedures from previous research (e.g., Ceccon & Moscardino, 2022; Moscardino et al., 2007). Two members of the research team independently reviewed students' and teachers' responses, generated and compared codes, and discussed emerging interpretations of salient aspects related to intervention implementation.

4.4 Results

4.4.1 Preliminary analyses

Among the eligible students ($N = 957$), 908 filled in the survey at T0, 854 at T1, and 845 at T2, with an attrition rate of 7% (see consort map in Figure 4.2). Only 8% of subjects had missing values in the questionnaires: 0.33% ($n = 3$) had more than 10% of missing values in the EIS at T0 and 0.23% ($n = 2$) at T1, while no participants had more than 10% of missing values in the EIS at T2 or in the Highly Sensitive Child Scale at T0. No recurring pattern emerged from missing values. Because both measures had shown good psychometric properties (see Measures section), we computed mean scores for our variables of interest at all time points.

Figure 4.2 Consort map for trial enrollment and analysis



We used a Bernoullian logistic model to compare participants who missed and did not miss survey administrations to ascertain whether they differed on sociodemographic and intervention-related variables (i.e., gender, immigrant background, SES, school, classroom, number of IP sessions attended, pair of facilitators, intervention vs control group, cultural identity exploration and resolution at T0, T1, T2, environmental sensitivity at T0). All variables without missing data were included as predictors in the model, while the dependent variable was an indicator variable taking the value of 1 when a participant had at least one missing data. Thus, we estimated the posterior probability of missing data as a function of those variables without any missing data. If the relations are null, the hypothesis that missing data do not depend on particular characteristics of the grouping variable is supported. Since we did not expect such effects, for all parameters we used a prior of the same type, i.e., Student's $t(3,0,1)$. No relevant differences emerged for any of the predictors (with expected probabilities ranging from 0 to .17), except for the group variable, with participants in the intervention group being more likely to present missing data (i.e., to have missed at least one assessment) than participants in the control group. Based on observed data distribution, no relevant differences emerged between the intervention and control groups on sociodemographic variables (gender, immigrant background, and SES) and on our variables of interest (cultural identity exploration and resolution, environmental sensitivity) at T0.

4.4.2 Main hypotheses testing

Table 4.2 shows the results of the Bayesian model comparison for our main hypotheses testing. The best performing model was model 2 (i.e., without interactions and with random intercepts for school and classroom), which highlighted a main effect of condition (intervention vs control) on cultural identity exploration at T1. Residuals of both dependent variables of the model (exploration and resolution) were normally distributed.

Table 4.2 Comparison of multivariate multilevel linear models for main hypotheses testing

Model	R2ET1	R2RT2	LOO	SE	Weight
Model 2	0.38	0.36	2176.628	65.308	0.60
Model 4	0.38	0.36	2179.298	65.407	0.16
Model 3	0.38	0.36	2179.302	65.349	0.16
Model 1	0.38	0.36	2180.672	65.348	0.08
Model 0	0.02	0.03	2534.392	60.363	0.00

Note. $N = 747$. R2ET1 = Bayesian R^2 for exploration at T1; R2RT2 = Bayesian R^2 for resolution at T2; LOO = Leave-one-out cross-validation information criterion; SE = standard error; weight = model weights.
Model 0 = exploration at T1 ~ (1 | school/classroom); resolution at T2 ~ (1 | school/classroom)
Model 1 = exploration at T1 ~ exploration at T0 x group + (1 | school/classroom); resolution at T2 ~ exploration at T1 x group + (1 | school/classroom)
Model 2 = exploration at T1 ~ exploration at T0 + group + (1 | school/classroom); resolution at T2 ~ exploration at T1 + group + (1 | school/classroom)
Model 3 = exploration at T1 ~ exploration at T0 x group + (1 | school/classroom); resolution at T2 ~ exploration at T1 + group + (1 | school/classroom)
Model 4 = exploration at T1 ~ exploration at T0 + group + (1 | school/classroom); resolution at T2 ~ exploration at T1 x group (1 | school/classroom)

In this model, students in the intervention group reported higher scores on cultural identity exploration compared to the control group (H1). The expected difference between intervention and control group was about 0.10 points, with a 90% CI [0.04; 0.15], corresponding to a Cohen's *d* posterior mean of 0.18, with a 90% CI [0.07; 0.28]. Standard deviation of intercepts (random effects) ranged from 0.04 to 0.1, indicating irrelevant differences between schools or classrooms. However, this model did not include the hypothesized interaction effect of exploration at T1 and group on resolution at T2, suggesting that increases in resolution at follow-up were not linked to increases in exploration in the intervention (vs control) group; hence, H2 was not supported. Indeed, the latter interaction was included in model 1 and model 4, both of which had lower model weights than model 2. A closer inspection of these models indicated that our parameter of interest was equal respectively to -0.01, with a 90% CI [-0.13; 0.12] in model 1 and to -0.01, with a 90% CI [-0.13; 0.11] in model 4, and therefore could not be considered a relevant effect.

We reran this analysis with an imputed dataset applying a Bayesian estimation method to ensure that findings were not influenced by missing data. Results obtained with the imputation were substantially the same as those obtained with non-imputed data (see Appendix B).

4.4.3 Exploratory analyses

To address our exploratory research questions, we included immigrant background and environmental sensitivity as possible moderators in our analyses. Given that the intervention and control groups were comparable in terms of identity exploration at baseline, we did not control for this variable in the models. All tested models are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Comparison of multivariate multilevel linear models for exploratory analyses.

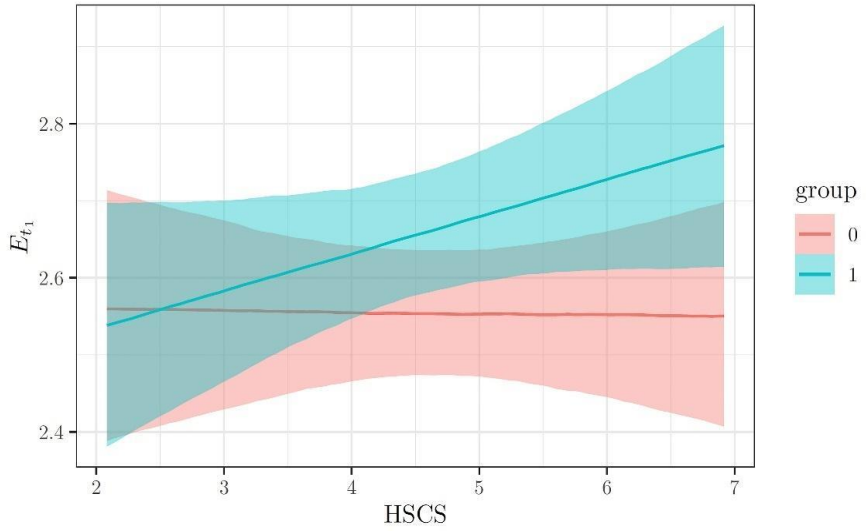
Model	R2ET1	R2RT2	LOO	SE	Weight
Model 14	0.06	0.06	2516.60	61.07	0.22
Model 10	0.07	0.29	2516.84	60.72	0.19
Model 5	0.06	0.26	2517.09	60.88	0.17
Model 13	0.06	0.06	2518.32	61.01	0.09
Model 12	0.06	0.26	2518.50	60.80	0.08
Model 6	0.06	0.29	2518.76	60.91	0.07
Model 11	0.06	0.26	2519.52	60.92	0.05
Model 8	0.07	0.25	2519.62	60.93	0.05
Model 7	0.06	0.27	2520.05	60.88	0.04
Model 9	0.06	0.25	2520.05	61.08	0.04
Model 0	0.02	0.03	2534.39	60.36	0.00

Note. N = 747. R2ET1 = Bayesian R^2 for exploration at T1; R2RT2 = Bayesian R^2 for resolution at T2; LOO = Leave-one-out cross-validation information criterion; SE = standard error; weight = model weights.
Model 0 = exploration at T1 ~ (1 | school/classroom); resolution at T2 ~ (1 | school/classroom);
Model 5 = exploration at T1 ~ group + migr. background + sensitivity + (1 | school/classroom); resolution at T2 ~ exploration at T1 + group + migr. background + sensitivity (1 | school/classroom)
Model 6 = exploration at T1 ~ migr. background + group x sensitivity + (1 | school/classroom); resolution at T2 ~ exploration at T1 + migr. background + group x sensitivity (1 | school/classroom)
Model 7 = exploration at T1 ~ sensitivity + group x migr. background + (1 | school/classroom); resolution at T2 ~ exploration at T1 + sensitivity + group x migr. background + (1 | school/classroom)

Model 8 = exploration at T1 ~ group x migr. background x sensitivity + (1 | school/classroom); resolution at T2 ~ exploration at T1 + group x migr. background x sensitivity (1 | school/classroom)
Model 9 = exploration at T1 ~ group + migr. background + sensitivity + (1 | school/classroom); resolution at T2 ~ exploration at T1 + group x migr. background x sensitivity (1 | school/classroom)
Model 10 = exploration at T1 ~ group x migr. background x sensitivity + (1 | school/classroom); resolution at T2 ~ exploration at T1 + group + migr. background + sensitivity (1 | school/classroom)
Model 11 = exploration at T1 ~ group + migr. background + sensitivity + (1 | school/classroom); resolution at T2 ~ exploration at T1 + migr. background + group x sensitivity + (1 | school/classroom)
Model 12 = exploration at T1 ~ group + migr. background + sensitivity + (1 | school/classroom); resolution at T2 ~ exploration at T1 + sensitivity + group x migr. background + (1 | school/classroom)
Model 13 = exploration at T1 ~ sensitivity + group x migr. background + (1 | school/classroom); resolution at T2 ~ sensitivity + group + migr. background + (1 | school/classroom)
Model 14 = exploration at T1 ~ migr. background + group x sensitivity + (1 | school/classroom); resolution at T2 ~ sensitivity + group + migr. background + (1 | school/classroom)

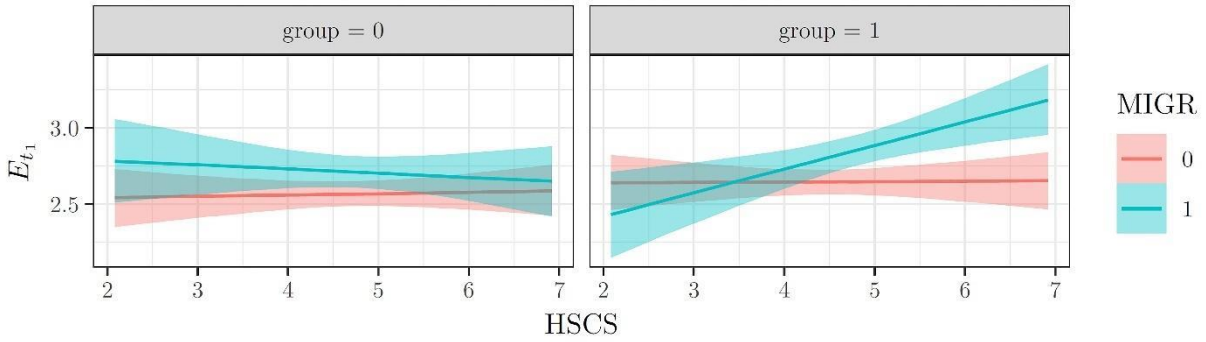
Results of model comparison suggested that two models outperformed the others to a comparable extent (in terms of weight and explained variance): model 14 (with the interaction between group and environmental sensitivity and the main effect of immigrant background on cultural identity exploration at T1, and the main effects of these variables on resolution at T2) and model 10 (with the triple interaction of group, immigrant background, and environmental sensitivity on cultural identity exploration at T1, and the main effects of these variables on resolution at T2). In model 14, there was a relevant effect of the interaction between group and environmental sensitivity (0.05, [-0.02; 0.12] 90% CI) on exploration at T1), suggesting that for students in the intervention (vs. control) group, those with higher levels of sensitivity reported greater exploration at T1 compared to their less sensitive peers (see Figure 4.4). In model 10, there was a relevant effect of the three-way interaction among group, immigrant background, and sensitivity (0.19, [0.04; 0.35] 90% CI) on cultural identity exploration at T1. In other words, for students in the intervention (vs control) group, those with an immigrant background reporting higher levels of sensitivity showed greater exploration at T1 compared to their nonmigrant, less sensitive peers (see Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.3 Expected values of model 14 with the interaction between group and environmental sensitivity.



Note. E_{t1} = exploration at T1; R_{t2} = resolution at T2; group = experimental condition (0 = waitlist control, 1 = intervention); HSCS = environmental sensitivity. Expected values of the model on exploration at T1 as a function of environmental sensitivity (x-axis) and group (colors). The bands indicate 90% credibility intervals.

Figure 4.4 Expected values of model 10 with the interaction among group, immigrant background, and environmental sensitivity.



Note. E_{t1} = exploration at T1; R_{t2} = resolution at T2; group = experimental condition (0 = waitlist control, 1 = intervention); MIGR = immigrant background (0 = no, 1 = yes); HSCS = environmental sensitivity. Expected values of the model on exploration at T1 as a function of environmental sensitivity (x-axis), migrant background (colors), and group (panels). The bands indicate 90% credibility intervals.

Effect sizes for moderation effects related to student subgroups for models 14 and 10 are reported in Appendix C. We subsequently replicated the best performing model in terms of weight (i.e., model 14) controlling for exploration at baseline, but the two-way interaction effect was not evident anymore (see Appendix D), most likely due to the high correlation between levels of exploration at T0 and T1.

4.4.4 Focus group analyses

A recurrent theme for students was their emphasis on the usefulness of the IP in addressing issues related to their heritage culture(s) and those of their classmates, as these topics are seldom discussed in the school curriculum. The opportunity for exploration was particularly appreciated by students of immigrant descent, who described how they developed further curiosity and acceptance toward their heritage cultures ("*I realized that I was losing touch with my culture... Now I feel more interested, I even started searching for in-depth material*", "*The fact that my classmates started asking me about our traditions and symbols made me feel more accepted by them and closer to my origins*") or became increasingly aware of how this dimension could be integrated into a multifaceted, multicultural identity ("*Before the project I felt only Chinese, now I think that the way I would define myself would include my Italian identity as well*"). The IP was described as an eye-opening opportunity also by majority students, who often found themselves reflecting for the first time on their own cultural identity and on how culture may shape behaviors and ways of thinking ("*This project made me think more about my culture and the aspects that characterize it: I thought about things that I normally do that in another culture would not be normal or obvious*"). Participants particularly enjoyed the hands-on activities of sharing cultural symbols and creating their own family tree, as well as the possibility to strengthen relationships with their classmates. They also valued the opportunity to engage with external professional figures (i.e., linguistic-cultural mediators,

psychologists) to discuss issues concerning social inclusion and intercultural communication from a different perspective. In addition, they pointed out that the IP rendered them more sensitive to issues such as discrimination and prejudice and stimulated them to adopt a more critical look at others' experiences. For instance, some students reported how having participated in the IP had prompted them to defend fellow classmates who had been discriminated against ("*After our sessions, I started noticing that one of our classmates was treated in a discriminatory way… I'm trying to include him more in our group, I don't want him to feel different*").

Amongst teachers, a recurrent theme concerning the effects of the IP was the increase in cohesion amongst classmates, mostly resulting from the sharing activities: "*It was most useful for students to know each other better, and also to know themselves better*", "*The sessions helped students to build a team, to create a group*". Teachers also noticed a heightened sensitivity and awareness among adolescents on issues of cultural belonging: "*This year I noticed how much it mattered to them, this sense of belonging to their own culture: it's a topic that really touched them*". This observation led some of them to incorporate specific contents of the IP curriculum into their lessons and carry out independent, content-related projects: "*During my history class, we examined the concept of identity in depth; it was no longer an abstract topic, a 'required reading', the students had made the topic their own*". Some teachers, similar to students, were enthusiastic about the practical and personal approach of the project, which, in their opinion, helped the participants to open up and maintain an intrinsic motivation: "*They have never been so collaborative as when the facilitators came in… It is precisely the approach that is different. Just do something practical and concrete that touches them in their everyday life, and everything changes completely*". Others, however, perceived some activities, including the survey, as too "*invasive*" and commented that students might have been hesitant

to share in fear of peer judgment. Moreover, the length of the project in terms of hours of lessons requested and the impossibility of grading students were reported as critical issues.

4.5 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to assess the efficacy of a culturally adapted version of the IP intervention among adolescents attending multiethnic classrooms in Italy. In doing so, we aimed to replicate the original study carried out by Umaña-Taylor et al. (2018a) in the US, hypothesizing that the intervention would lead to an increase in cultural identity exploration at posttest which, in turn, would result in higher levels of cultural identity resolution at follow-up. Moreover, we were interested in exploring the potential moderating role of immigrant background and environmental sensitivity on intervention effects. Overall, the Italian version of the IP proved to be efficacious in stimulating exploration processes among adolescents who participated in the intervention compared to those who were in the waitlist control group, but no differences were found in resolution at follow-up (T2) as a function of levels of exploration at posttest (T1). With regard to potential moderators, the results of our model comparison revealed that in the intervention (vs control) group, students with greater environmental sensitivity reported higher levels of exploration at posttest than their less sensitive counterparts. In addition, youth of immigrant descent who reported higher (vs lower) levels of sensitivity to environmental influences showed more exploration at posttest. No effects of these variables on resolution emerged at follow-up.

Consistent with our theoretical model and previous implementations of the IP (Juang et al., 2020; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a, 2018b), we observed higher levels of exploration from pre- to posttest among adolescents in the intervention (vs control) group, confirming our first hypothesis. In other words, despite originating from a different sociocultural milieu, the IP in its culturally adapted version to the Italian school context was effective in stimulating youth's

reflections concerning their heritage culture(s) through a meaningful search, observation, and consideration of this salient identity dimension across the sessions (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). This heightened interest was also mirrored in students' responses during focus groups and supports the idea that, in middle adolescence, providing a protected space for collective reflection on cultural diversity, inequalities, and their implications for one's identity is beneficial for an increased awareness and understanding of ethnically diverse others among both ethnically minoritized and majoritized groups (Juang et al., 2020).

In our study, no evidence was found to support the cascading effect of cultural identity exploration at posttest on resolution at follow-up in the intervention group. Hence, the participants did not report a greater sense of clarity concerning their own cultural identity one month after experiencing an increase of exploration processes linked to their attendance of the IP. This can be interpreted in light of the peculiar characteristics of identity development and socialization in Italy compared to the United States and other European countries. Indeed, identity formation among Italian youth has been shown to be affected by the "delay syndrome" (Livi Bacci, 2008), that involves the extension of education, deferral of entry into the job market and in a committed relationship, living in the parental home until the late 20s or 30s, and a delayed transition to parenthood. This postponement of adult commitments, which is overall socially accepted, can enhance identity instability during adolescence (Crocetti et al., 2012a). Individuals may experience adolescence as a prolonged period of moratorium, during which they consider and reconsider multiple identity alternatives instead of solidifying a sense of identity, or even as a return to a diffused state. In support of this view, cross-country studies found that Italian youth had lower levels of commitment and were more represented in the moratorium status compared to their Dutch counterparts (Crocetti et al., 2012b). Furthermore, Crocetti et al. (2011) reported that adolescents from immigrant families in Italy had higher levels of reconsideration of commitment than their peers from mixed and non-immigrant

families. Indeed, these youth may experience additional difficulties in finding a personal identity coherence, possibly because this process is closely intertwined with the negotiation between parents' expectations of carrying on their "cultural legacy" and the pressure from peers and other societal agents to conform to social norms of the majority group.

There is a dearth of studies concerning cultural socialization processes in relation to identity formation among both cultural majority and minoritized youth in Italy. This may be due to the relatively late unification of the country, the coexistence of both regional and national identities, and the recency of the immigration phenomenon, which started to become numerically relevant from the 1990s (Colucci, 2018). These factors, together with immigration policies emphasizing assimilation rather than integration, may render cultural socialization practices less salient than in contexts with a longer history of immigration such as the US. In the latter society, complex interethnic dynamics as well as systemic and structural inequalities likely have contributed to an increased relevance of ERI for individual development (Umaña-Taylor, 2016). In Italy, structured learning opportunities occur less frequently within students' microsystems (family, school) due to the inherent difficulty of such topics and the lack of shared meanings concerning terminology and conceptualization to address them (Juang et al., 2020). Therefore, it is possible that messages about knowledge, beliefs, and practices concerning one's cultural heritage are much more pervasive in the US than in Italian society. The qualitative data collected during our post-intervention focus groups seem to support this interpretation, given that especially for majority students, cultural identity was less central to their global identity than other social identities, such as gender identity and sexual orientation. Thus, the absence of a rippling effect on resolution may reflect an overall delayed salience of this identity in youth, connected with lower emphasis on cultural socialization. It also must be considered that gaining awareness and clarity about one's own cultural identity is a process that requires time and prolonged reflection, as well as the opportunity to engage in multiple real-life experiences

concerning one's own heritage culture(s). Future research needs to shed light on this issue, for example by including more time points and/or long-term assessments to ascertain the presence of possible chain effects that could become evident after the conclusion of the intervention.

Regarding our exploratory research questions, Bayesian analyses revealed that two models outperformed the others to a comparable extent. The first model indicated that, among adolescents in the intervention (vs control) group, those with greater environmental sensitivity showed higher levels of exploration at posttest in comparison to their peers with lower levels of sensitivity. In the second model, participants in the intervention group with an immigrant background and who scored high on environmental sensitivity reported greater exploration at posttest than their less sensitive counterparts of immigrant descent. Thus, students characterized by a deeper processing and a greater reactivity to both favorable and adverse conditions particularly benefited from having the opportunity to engage in activities and discussions within the school setting focusing on one's heritage culture(s), symbols and traditions, and people who are relevant in shaping cultural identity, encouraging them to further reflect upon and explore their backgrounds and possible selves. Interestingly, the second model also indicated that this effect was more relevant for adolescents of immigrant descent. Although caution is needed when interpreting this result and more replication research is necessary, it suggests that potential vulnerability factors like environmental sensitivity and challenges related to having a minoritized cultural background (e.g., discrimination, acculturative stress), in the context of positive environments and when considered in a combined fashion, lend support to vantage sensitivity theory (de Villiers et al., 2018; Pluess, 2015). The latter posits that highly sensitive individuals benefit especially strongly from favorable features of environmental experience.

Our candidate moderators did not have any impact on the expected cascading effect of exploration at posttest on resolution at follow-up in the intervention group. As mentioned in relation to our second hypothesis, resolution is a process that requires time, repeated and

prolonged experiences allowing for exploration, as well as cognitive-affective maturity (Sladek et al., 2021). The time interval in which we assessed adolescents' possible changes in their sense of clarity regarding their own cultural identity is probably insufficient to tackle these changes, at least in the Italian social context, for both ethnic minoritized and majority groups. Of note, a previous study conducted with US adolescents showed that ERI resolution increased across a 1-year follow-up period for ethnic majority youth who participated in the IP (Sladek et al., 2021). Hence, future research involving long-term follow-up assessments is warranted to shed light on possible differential paths over time in terms of intervention efficacy based on adolescents' ethnocultural background. With regard to sensitivity, given that this construct refers to the processing of environmental (including interpersonal/social) stimuli, it might play a greater role in exploration rather than in resolution processes. Indeed, while exploration was prompted within the classroom by facilitators and classmates during collective discussions and reflections across the sessions, resolution is a more introspective, private process involving multiple individual characteristics (e.g., personality) which might be less influenced by external factors.

4.5.1 Limitations and directions for future research

The current study presents several strengths, such as: relying on the "gold standard" in intervention research (i.e., randomized controlled trials) with a pre- and posttest design with a further follow-up assessment; the a priori power analysis and subsequent recruitment of a large sample size; the application of open science practices, i.e., study submission as Registered Report, availability of data and analytic codes, publishing open access; the inclusion of potential moderators of intervention efficacy; and the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to better understand the intervention impact on adolescents' cultural identity and interethnic relationships. Nonetheless, numerous limitations also need to be acknowledged.

First, it should be noted that the percentage of students with an immigrant background in our sample was modest (approximately 30%), especially when compared to countries with longer migration histories like the US, and was very diverse in itself, with adolescents reporting over 50 countries of origin. Although both this diversity and the relatively low percentage of immigrant-descent students mirror the current situation in the Italian education system, we cannot rule out that this might have influenced the intervention efficacy. Indeed, previous studies suggest that the IP might be particularly efficacious in classrooms with a higher percentage of minoritized students (e.g., 63%; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a). Furthermore, due to the heterogeneity among our participants with an immigrant background, we were not able to investigate differential effects based on factors such as generational status or national origin. Following extant research conducted mostly in the United States (e.g., Rivas-Drake et al., 2014a), future studies should explore whether youth from a specific cultural group or first vs second generation students could particularly benefit from the IP also in the Italian context. Second, as previously mentioned, several changes were made to the original intervention protocol to accommodate both logistic/organizational needs and cultural-contextual characteristics. Although facilitators used fidelity checklists to ensure implementation quality, and feedback during focus groups highlighted that specific adapted activities were deemed effective by participants, such modifications might have impacted on intervention effects. More replication studies are needed - especially within the European context - to evaluate the IP intervention and identify culturally specific components that may influence its efficacy (Beelmann et al., 2018). Third, the effect sizes within our statistical models were relatively small, resembling those found in previous implementations of the IP (Juang et al., 2020; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a). Yet, it should be noted that large effect sizes are rarely found in the context of psychological research with large samples or in replication studies. Moreover, a recent meta-analysis reported that the median average effect of universal intervention programs

targeting youth tends to fall within the range of 0.07 - 0.16 standard deviations (Tanner-Smith et al., 2018), indicating that the value found in our study as regards exploration (Cohen's d = 0.18) is in the upper boundary of this range. As highlighted by Funder and Ozer (2019), when estimates are reliable, small effects can still translate to a considerable increase in individual outcomes if they are aggregated across all the students in a class, a school, or a school district. They may also trigger long-term psychological change within an individual not only in relation to cultural identity resolution, but also to exploration. Beyond quantitative estimates, qualitative insights gained from focus group data are equally important to consider given the value of hearing adolescents' perspectives. Fourth, even though a waitlist control design was chosen to ensure that all students eventually received the intervention, we cannot exclude that adolescents and/or teachers in the intervention group possibly revealed information about the project that might have reduced potential differences between the two groups. Last, our study was conducted in a northern Italian region (i.e., Veneto) characterized by economic wealth, high population density, and one of the highest shares of immigrants coming to Italy (ISTAT, 2023). Thus, examination of program efficacy in other geographical areas with differing sociodemographic characteristics and immigration patterns is necessary to ascertain generalizability.

Despite these limitations, our study provides novel evidence concerning the efficacy of a universal, school-based intervention stimulating adolescents' cultural identity exploration within multiethnic classrooms. While the intervention was developed in the US, the current study shows that it can also be effective in a European country that considers itself an immigrant-receiving society only since the past few decades. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of youth's immigrant background and sensitivity to environmental influences as conditions to better understand for whom the IP is more beneficial, although more research is needed to uncover the mechanisms underpinning individuals' heightened responsivity to

interventions. From an applied perspective, the current study emphasizes the importance of tailoring psychological interventions to the social context in which they are implemented, especially when working with minoritized groups. The Italian version of the IP has proven to be feasible, acceptable, and efficacious in engaging students with their heritage culture(s), resulting in more exploration of their sense of self. Further work is necessary to boost resolution processes, involve teachers, and identify factors that can enhance long-term efficacy using rigorous statistical procedures and an open science approach to generate reliable estimates, facilitate replication, and share good practices.

CHAPTER 5

Study 3. Longitudinal profiles of cultural identity processes and associations with psychosocial outcomes among adolescents participating in the *Identity Project*

This chapter was adapted from:
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5.1 Abstract

The *Identity Project* (IP) intervention has been proven efficacious in promoting cultural identity development among ethnoracial majority and minoritized youth in the United States as well as in recent receiving countries like Italy (Ceccon et al., 2023b; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a). Furthermore, youth who took part in the original IP implementation exhibited long-term positive outcomes (e.g., greater global identity cohesion, self-esteem, academic engagement, and lower depressive symptoms) one year after receiving the intervention (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018b). However, varied trajectories of change in these processes as a function of the intervention have not been examined. Using a person-centered approach, this study aimed to (1) identify longitudinal profiles of cultural identity exploration and resolution over a year among youth participating in the Italian IP, (2) explore differences among profiles in terms of immigrant background and family ethnic socialization, and (3) examine whether the emerging patterns were associated with adolescents' psychosocial outcomes. Due to the waitlist control design, 1-year follow-up data were available only for the intervention group. Thus, the sample comprised 173 adolescents (M_{age} = 15 yrs, *SD* = 0.62, 58.4% girls, 39.3% boys, 2.3% non-binary, 26% with an immigrant background) attending 10th grade who had been randomly assigned to the intervention group. They completed surveys 1 week before the intervention (T0), and 9 weeks (T1), 13 weeks (T2), and 54 weeks (T3) after baseline. Longitudinal latent

profile analysis identified one exploration profile and four resolution profiles ("stable low", "stable average", "increase low-to-average", "increase high-to-higher"). Exploration increased from T0 to T1, decreased at T2, and returned to initial levels at T3. Resolution showed a more nuanced pattern, with students in the first and second profiles showing stability, and those in the third and fourth profiles substantially increasing over time. Participants with an immigrant background and the highest level of family ethnic socialization were overrepresented in the fourth profile. Finally, youth in the latter two profiles reported overall better psychosocial outcomes at T3. The findings highlight the heterogeneity of resolution trajectories among students participating in the IP, with those who increase their sense of awareness concerning their heritage culture(s) having predominantly an immigrant background and high levels of family ethnic socialization, and benefiting the most in terms of psychosocial adjustment in the long run.

5.2 Introduction

During adolescence, exploring and gaining a sense of clarity regarding one's own ethnic-racial/cultural identity is an important developmental task, especially in globalized societies where both minoritized and majority youth are called upon to define their identity and learn how to approach cultural diversity (Erentaitė et al., 2018; Umaña-Taylor, 2023). Abundant evidence indicates that a positive and strong ERI is linked to better outcomes in terms of socio-emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, and academic functioning (Umaña-Taylor & Rivas-Drake, 2021). Hence, engaging adolescents in a process of search and reflection upon their cultural membership (i.e., exploration) is crucial to support them understanding what role this part of their identity has in their life and forming a cohesive sense of self (i.e., resolution) which, in turn, helps them perform well in school, build more positive relationships with others who are different from them, and have better emotional health (Umaña-Taylor, 2023).

To promote these processes, Umaña-Taylor and Douglass (2017) developed the *Identity Project* (IP), a school-based intervention that provides adolescents with a protected space to reflect upon, and engage with, their own and others' cultural origin(s) over 8 weekly sessions. Randomized controlled trials conducted in the United States and Italy confirmed the efficacy of the program in increasing students' exploration (Ceccon et al., 2023b; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a), although the cascading effect of exploration on resolution was found only in the United States. Moreover, the increase in resolution 18 weeks after the intervention predicted better psychosocial functioning one year later (Umana-Taylor et al., 2018b). A subsequent extension of this work demonstrated that trajectories of exploration and resolution (based on four assessments over one year) differed as a function of adolescents' baseline levels of perceived family ethnic socialization and ethnoracial minoritized/majority status (Sladek et al., 2021).

Although these findings provide important insights into how processes of ERI (i.e., exploration and resolution) are associated with adjustment over time, variable-centered

approaches impede the identification of specific developmental configurations of these processes and their potentially different associations with adolescent outcomes (Wantchekon & Umaña-Taylor, 2021). Moreover, few studies have longitudinally examined the individual components of exploration and resolution, mostly focusing on composite scores of ERI (see Miller-Cotto & Byrnes, 2016; Smith & Silva, 2011). Addressing these limitations, the current study used a sample of students who participated in the IP in Italy (see Ceccon et al., 2023b) to identify latent profiles of cultural identity exploration and resolution trajectories assessed four times over a school year, evaluate whether immigrant background and/or family ethnic socialization (at baseline) were associated with the emerging profiles, and examine if the profiles were linked to adolescents' psychosocial adjustment one year after pretest.

5.2.1 Ethnic-racial identity and psychosocial adjustment in adolescence

Identity formation is a key developmental task in adolescence, prompted by cognitive maturation and increases in social autonomy that allow individuals to reflect on and practically explore different sets of values, goals, and potential identities (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980). Gaining deeper awareness and understanding of various identity components through an exploration phase fosters a definition of and cohesion within one's general identity, reducing role confusion, contributing to psychological well-being, and ultimately enabling youth to cultivate healthy relationships and nurture a positive self-concept (Erikson, 1968). The two differential processes of exploration and resolution have also been applied to the development of ERI (Phinney, 1989; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004).

ERI as a composite score of exploration, resolution/commitment, and affirmation (i.e., the degree of positive feelings toward one's ethnoracial group; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004) has been found to be a predictor of positive adjustment (Miller-Cotto & Byrnes, 2016; Smith & Silva, 2011). Specifically, ERI is linked to better self-esteem, academic functioning, and

positive intergroup attitudes, as well as fewer depressive symptoms (Umaña-Taylor & Rivas-Drake, 2021). Despite empirical evidence suggests that ERI process components are closely related, these components have been shown to be differentially associated with adjustment (e.g., Yip et al., 2019) and may have distinct developmental pathways, uniquely contributing to various outcomes. For instance, exploration was positively associated with life satisfaction, whereas resolution was linked to self-esteem and psychological well-being among adolescents of Turkish descent (Cavdar et al., 2021). Moreover, a longitudinal study found that growth in exploration increased the risk of depressive symptoms, while resolution was not significantly associated with this outcome variable in Mexican-origin adolescent girls (Gonzales-Backen et al., 2016). An explanation is that engaging in exploration and self-questioning involves uncertainty about one's identity and making choices and can lead to a heightened awareness of stereotypes against one's ethnoracial group (Gonzales-Backen et al., 2018), generating distress and feelings of social exclusion. In contrast, resolution involves a greater sense of clarity and confidence with respect to one's ethnoracial background, which, especially in the case of minoritized youth, can boost their adjustment by helping them better understand and cope with experiences of marginalization (Umaña-Taylor, 2016). Hence, a separate examination of these dimensions is important to shed light on potential differences in associations between ethnic-racial identity processes and psychosocial outcomes (Yip et al., 2019).

ERI formation is shaped by individual and contextual factors (Phinney, 1989; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Among these, membership in a minoritized group is particularly relevant in contexts characterized by a socially constructed ethnoracial hierarchy that determines differential access to resources and life opportunities (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014a; Umaña-Taylor, 2016). As posited by self-categorization theory, the salience of a certain group membership increases when the representation of one's group in a certain context is low and there is unequal distribution of resources and power according to group membership (Turner et

al., 1987). Family ethnic socialization, i.e., the implicit and explicit messages communicated within the family context on the importance of race and ethnicity and the implications of being member of an ethnoracial minoritized group, also influences adolescents' ERI formation (Hughes et al., 2006; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020). Indeed, several studies reported a positive association between this variable and level of youth's engagement in ethnic-racial identity processes (Gartner et al., 2014; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2013). A longitudinal study conducted with Latinx adolescents found that, while more family ethnic socialization experiences at baseline predicted stability of ethnic-racial identity exploration over time, they predicted less resolution development as participants progressed through adolescence (Constante et al., 2020). Thus, more research is warranted to investigate potential effects of minoritized status and family ethnic socialization on how exploration and resolution processes unfold.

5.2.2 The Identity Project as a way to promote ethnic-racial identity processes

Given the benefits of ERI exploration and resolution for the achievement of a coherent sense of self and psychological well-being, researchers developed the IP intervention (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2017) to provide youth of any cultural background in the United States with tools and strategies to support them as they explore and seek to understand their constantly evolving identity in relation to race and ethnicity. Across 8 weekly sessions at school, trained facilitators engage participants in activities and reflections concerning personal and social identities, stereotypes and discrimination, meaningful cultural symbols, and family heritage. A randomized controlled trial demonstrated the efficacy of the program in enhancing students' exploration from pre- to post-test, as well as a ripple effect of exploration on resolution at follow-up (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a). A subsequent study reported that increased resolution predicted higher levels of global identity cohesion, self-esteem, and academic engagement and fewer depressive symptoms one year after pretest (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018b). Moreover,

adolescents in the intervention group whose families had engaged in ethnic socialization practices to a greater extent prior to the intervention reported higher exploration. Furthermore, different patterns of change emerged for resolution among majority youth compared to their peers with a minoritized background, such that they ended up at the same levels of resolution at the end of the study, but it took longer for White youth to achieve the same levels as youth of color (Sladek et al., 2021).

In light of these results, and given the increasing relevance of cultural identity-related topics in countries outside the United States, the program has recently been adapted to and piloted in various multicultural societies in Europe (see Juang et al., 2022). A randomized controlled trial conducted in Italy has proven the efficacy of the curriculum in enhancing adolescents' exploration (Ceccon et al., 2023b), although the cascading effect of this variable on resolution (assessed one month after post-test) was not found. A possible explanation is that, in Italy, the commonly observed postponement of adult commitments (Crocetti et al., 2012) and the limited emphasis on cultural socialization practices (especially in the majority group) may result in heightened identity instability during adolescence, requiring more time for youth to gain a sense of clarity concerning their cultural identity (Ceccon et al., 2023b). Hence, more research is needed to better understand the development of cultural identity processes – especially resolution - among adolescents who attend multiethnic classrooms in more recent-receiving societies like Italy, where structured learning opportunities concerning ethnicity and culture occur less frequently within students' microsystems compared to countries with a longer history of immigration (Ceccon et al., 2023b).

5.2.3 Person-centered approaches to the study of ethnic-racial identity

So far, most studies focusing on ethnic-racial/cultural identity – including those related to the IP - have used a variable-centered approach to assess the unique association of its

processes with youth outcomes. Albeit useful, this approach may not fully capture the complexity of adolescents' everyday life experience of these processes and how they develop over time. A person-centered approach may be more appropriate to identify subgroups of individuals who share similar characteristics in terms of how their exploration and resolution evolve, as well as to better understand the relations between such subgroups and other predictors or outcome variables (Hickendorff et al., 2018; Howard & Hoffman, 2018).

The available literature on person-centered analyses of ethnic-racial/cultural identity is largely based on cross-sectional data to identify configurations of exploration and resolution and their associations with psychosocial adjustment (Meca et al., 2023; Wantchekon & Umaña-Taylor, 2021), while much less is known about the developmental trajectories of these processes in adolescence. Moreover, the few extant longitudinal studies have mostly used latent class growth modeling to identify distinct groups (or classes) of individuals who exhibited similar starting points and rates of change in cultural identification over time (Jugert et al., 2020). A study focusing on ERI (exploration and commitment) among minoritized adolescents in the United States found six classes based on their growth trajectories during a four-year period (Huang & Stormshak, 2011). The largest class displayed growth in ERI, followed by a high-stable class and by youth who experienced moderate decreases; the other three classes were characterized by a significant decline, a significant increase, and low stability, respectively. Class membership differed as a function of ethnoracial group, and adolescents with increasing-high levels of ERI reported better outcomes in terms of family relationships at the final assessment. A research conducted among Latinx adolescents in the United States found three classes of trajectories of ERI exploration and resolution considered in *tandem* across four years: high and increasing exploration and resolution, low and stable exploration and resolution, and low exploration and moderate resolution. Youth in the first class also reported the highest levels of family ethnic socialization (Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2015b). One study used latent

profile analysis to analyze patterns of change in ERI content (i.e., individuals' beliefs and attitudes about their ethnoracial group membership) among Black freshmen students in the United States over the first year of college (Chavous et al., 2018). The results evidenced both stability and change (decrease or increase) profiles concerning the different dimensions of ERI content, with membership in the change (vs stability) profiles varying as a function of contextual factors. Moreover, students who were in the high-stable and the increase clusters showed more positive academic motivation at the end of the year compared to their peers in the lower and decreasing clusters.

Despite their heterogeneity in terms of conceptualization, measurement, and analysis of ERI, these studies highlight that there is variability in the development of this construct over time, that individual and environmental characteristics shape these trajectories, and that subgroups of individuals may exhibit different adjustment outcomes. However, a dearth of research has examined these issues including both minoritized and majority youth, despite the evidence for different developmental pathways (Sladek et al., 2021). Furthermore, even though identities can exhibit significant fluctuations over time at the individual level (Spiegler et al., 2019), variation in how high school students change in their exploration and resolution of ethnic-racial/cultural identity and how this variation may influence psychosocial well-being is still understudied. Addressing this gap, the current study used latent profile analysis to observe patterns of developmental trajectories of cultural identity process components and obtain a more nuanced description of their unique associations with psychosocial outcomes. In doing so, the study focused on a sample of adolescents who participated in the IP intervention and who were assessed four times over a year.

5.2.4 The present study

The present study had three main aims. The first aim was to examine unique configurations of exploration and resolution trajectories among adolescents who had participated in the IP in Italy. Latent profile analysis was used to identify subgroups of adolescents based on their exploration and resolution levels assessed at four time points over a year. Considering prior theoretical and empirical work, the expectation was to find subgroups of adolescents showing increase, decrease, and stability in exploration and resolution processes. The second aim was to examine whether the emerging profiles would differ in terms of adolescents' immigrant background and family ethnic socialization. Students with an immigrant background and those with higher levels of family ethnic socialization were expected to be more likely represented in profiles characterized by high-stable and/or increasing levels of exploration and resolution. The third aim was to study the associations between the emerging profiles and psychosocial functioning in the areas of global identity cohesion[5], self-esteem, academic engagement, depressive symptoms, other group orientation, and prosocial behavior. It was hypothesized that profiles with high-stable or increasing levels of resolution would exhibit the best psychosocial adjustment and, conversely, that profiles characterized by low-stable or decreasing levels of this variable would report the lowest levels of adjustment. As regards exploration, no hypothesis was made in light of theory suggesting that an increase in resolution (but not exploration) is linked to adolescents' long-term psychological well-being within the IP.

[5] In the theory of change underpinning the IP (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2017), achieving greater global identity cohesion is described as the mechanism explaining the relation between cultural identity processes and adolescents' adjustment (see Figure 1.1, p. 10). However, in the current study we considered this variable namely as an outcome and not as a mediator following previous studies on the intervention conducted in the United States (Sladek et al., 2021; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018b).

5.3 Method

5.3.1 Participants and procedure

After obtaining the approval of the Ethic Committee of the School of Psychology at the University of Padova (protocol n. 4502), we reached out to the principals and teachers who had served as contact people during the main IP implementation in the previous school year 2021-2022 (see Chapter 4.3.1). Out of the six public upper secondary schools originally involved in the project, one did not respond, one declined due to a lack of time and resources supporting the logistics of data collection, and one had a specific academic organization in which students chose their preferred specialization at the beginning of the school year, thus resulting in a completely new classroom composition that rendered it difficult to trace back participants from the intervention group of the previous year. The remaining three schools were available to take part in the study. Next, participants were recruited among those students who had been randomly assigned to the intervention group in these three schools (n = 268). Written informed consent forms to be signed by parents and adolescents were distributed to 219 students in total; 49 eligible students had either failed the year or changed class/school, and therefore could not be involved. For ethical reasons (see Chapters 3.3.1 and 4.3.1), one student with an immigrant background whose Italian proficiency was insufficient to complete the survey was nonetheless invited to participate in the assessment with the help of a facilitator/support teacher, but responses were not considered for subsequent analyses. Two-hundred fourteen out of the 219 students who had received consent forms agreed to participate in the follow-up study, with a participation rate of 98%. Questionnaires measuring the variables of interest (see Measures section) were completed during school hours by a total of 206 students (8 were absent from school on the day of survey administration) in the presence of the teacher and two facilitators. The participants filled in the survey via an online platform (i.e., Qualtrics) and could choose

among Italian, Chinese, and English language (these specific versions were made available based on participants' previous requests).

For analytic purposes, the final sample was composed of students in the intervention group whose data were available for all four assessments: Time 0 (T0; baseline), 1 week prior to the intervention; T1 (9-week post-test); T2 (13-week post-test) and T3 (54-week post-test), resulting in $N = 173$ adolescents ($M_{age} = 14.99$, $SD = 0.62$, 58.4% female, 39.3% male, 2.3% non-binary). Data from this sample are available in the OSF at the following link: https://osf.io/maf4q/?view_only=d71fd907bb3c4dbe804b926b7cfa1c08

To test whether participants in the intervention group who attended ($n = 173$) and who did not attend all the survey administrations ($n = 332$) differed at baseline, a logistic regression model was performed including sociodemographic characteristics (i.e., gender, immigrant background, and socioeconomic status) and the main variables of interest (i.e., cultural identity exploration and resolution) as predictors, and having participated in the four assessments as the dependent variable. The analysis of deviance showed that no predictors had a significant effect except for gender ($\chi^2 = 8.257$, $df = 1$, $p = .004$), with the group of students who participated in all assessments including more girls (60%) than the group of students who missed at least one assessment (46%)[6].

With respect to sociodemographics, 26% of the participants had an immigrant background, i.e., were born abroad or in Italy from at least one parent born abroad; of these, 75% were born in Italy (i.e., second-generation). First-generation youth had lived in Italy for 6 years on average ($SD = 2.87$, range = 2-10 years). Overall, adolescents reported 18 different countries of origin (also including their parents' birth countries), the main ones being Moldova, Romania, Albania, Morocco, and Tunisia. One percent of parents had completed primary school, 18% had completed lower secondary school, 53% had completed upper secondary

[6] In logistic regression analysis, the 11 participants (6%) who identified themselves as non-binary were removed to ensure a more reliable and robust estimate of gender effects.

school, 27% attended university, and 1% were missing or preferred not to answer/did not know. As regards socioeconomic status, the mean score on the Family Affluence Scale (see Measures section) was 6.43 (*SD* = 0.62, range = 2-9).

5.3.2 Measures

Sociodemographics. Students reported on their age, gender, country of birth (both their own and their parents'), length of residence in Italy (for students born abroad), and parental educational level. Immigrant background was coded as 0 (born in Italy from Italian-born parents) or 1 (born in Italy or abroad from at least one parent born abroad) following previous research (see Schachner et al., 2016).

SES. SES was assessed through the Family Affluence Scale (Currie et al., 2008), which comprises 4 items measuring family wealth (e.g., "Does your family have a car?"): the total score is calculated by summing scores given to each item and ranges from 0 (lowest affluence) to 9 (highest affluence). This instrument had been previously used among Italian adolescents, showing good construct validity (Boyce et al., 2006).

Cultural identity exploration and resolution. We used the exploration (e.g., "I have participated in activities that have exposed me to my culture of origin") and resolution (e.g., "I understand how I feel about my culture of origin") subscales from the Ethnic Identity Scale (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004) to measure our two main variables of interest. This instrument includes 17 items with responses ranging from 1 (does not describe me at all) to 4 (describes me very well); total scores are obtained by averaging item responses of each subscale, with higher scores representing higher levels of each dimension. Before answering this questionnaire, students had to write down their culture of origin (i.e., cultural background prevalent in their family) and answer the subsequent questions referring to that specific cultural group. The Ethnic Identity Scale has been previously used among multiethnic youth in the

United States and Italy, demonstrating good validity and invariance across adolescents from majority and minoritized groups (Ceccon et al., 2023b; Sladek et al., 2020a; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). In the present study, Cronbach's Alphas and McDonald's Omega were α = .77, 95% CI [.71 - .82] and ω = .79, 95% CI [.73 - .83], for the exploration subscale, and α = .82, 95% CI [.76 - .86] and ω = .82, 95% CI [.78 - .87], for the resolution subscale.

Family ethnic socialization. This variable was measured through the Familial Ethnic Socialization Measure (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). The 12 items (e.g., "My family teaches me about our cultural background") are scored on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = not at all to 5 = very much, with higher scores indicating higher levels of family ethnic socialization. This scale has shown good reliability and validity across ethnic-racial diverse adolescent samples (e.g., Sladek et al., 2021; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). In this study, Cronbach's Alpha was α = .88, 95% CI [.84 - .90], and McDonald's Omega was ω = .88, 95% CI [.85 - .91].

Global identity cohesion. This construct was assessed via the identity subscale of the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (Rosenthal et al., 1981), comprising 12 items (e.g., "I've got a clear idea of what I want to be") with responses ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, with higher scores indicating greater cohesion. This instrument has been widely used among diverse adolescent samples from various countries, including Italy (Dimitrova et al., 2018; Sugimura et al., 2018). In this study, Cronbach's Alpha was α = .85, 95% CI [.81 - .88], and McDonald's Omega was ω = .85, 95% CI [.82 - .88].

Self-esteem. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979) was used to measure participants' self-esteem. This scale includes 10 items (e.g., "I feel that I have a number of good qualities") rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree); total scores are obtained by summing scores for each item (range = 10-40). This instrument has been validated in Italy (Prezza et al., 1997) and has shown good internal consistency, external validity, and invariance across cultural groups, including Italian adolescents, in previous studies

(Confalonieri et al., 2008; Li et al., 2015). In this study, Cronbach's Alpha was α = .91, 95% CI [.89 - .92], and McDonald's Omega was ω = .92, 95% CI [.90 - .93].

Depressive symptoms. We used the brief version of the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977), which comprises 10 items (e.g., "My sleep was restless") rating the frequency of depressive symptoms from 0 (rarely or none of the time) to 3 (most of the time). Scores assigned to each item are then summed to obtain the total score, which ranges from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 30. The factorial validity and psychometric properties of the brief version of this instrument have been previously demonstrated in studies involving adolescent samples (Bradley et al., 2010). In this study, Cronbach's Alpha was α = .86, 95% CI [.82 - .89], and McDonald's Omega was ω = .86, 95% CI [.83 - .89].

Academic engagement. Participants' behavioral and emotional engagement in school activities was assessed via the Engagement vs. Disaffection with Learning: Student Report Scale, which exhibited a strong correlation with teacher reports, supporting its construct validity (Skinner et al., 2008). This measure includes 10 items (e.g., "When I am in class, I listen very carefully") rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 0 (never) to 4 (all the time). In this study, Cronbach's Alpha was α = .92, 95% CI [.89 - .93], and McDonald's Omega was ω = .92, 95% CI [.90 - .94].

Other group orientation. Attitudes toward other cultural groups were measured by the 6 items (e.g., "I like meeting and getting to know people from cultural groups other than my own") of the Other-group Orientation subscale of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992). Response options ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Previous studies with ethno-racially diverse samples provided evidence for reliability and validity for the Other-group Orientation subscale (Sladek et al., 2020a; Umaña-Taylor et al.,

2018b). In this study, Cronbach's Alpha was α = .74, 95% CI [.66 - .79], and McDonald's Omega was ω = .75, 95% CI [.69 - .82].

Prosocial behavior. Students completed the Friends subscale from the version adapted by Padilla-Walker et al. (2018) of the Kindness and Generosity Inventory of Strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This subscale includes 9 items (e.g., "I tell my friends how much they mean to me") rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me). In this study, Cronbach's Alpha was α = .85, 95% CI [.81 - .88], and McDonald's Omega was ω = .85, 95% CI [.82 - .88], in line with previous research showing good internal validity of this instrument (Mesurado et al., 2022; Padilla-Walker et al., 2018).

5.3.3 Data analysis

All statistical analyses were performed using *R* software (*R* Core Team, 2018). Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations are shown in Table 5.1. To address the first aim, a model-based longitudinal latent profile analysis was conducted using the *mclust* package of the *R* software (*R* Core Team, 2018; Scrucca et al., 2016). For each dependent variable, i.e., cultural identity exploration and resolution, several clustering models were tested (for a detailed explanation of the clustering models, see Scrucca et al., 2016). The best fitting model was selected using the BIC index, which indicates the plausibilty of a model based on the observed data (Raftery, 1995). Specifically, when using the package *mclust*, the BIC index is calculated so that the best model is the one with the highest score (e.g., between two models with scores -95 and -100, the best would be the one associated to the -95 score; see also Giofrè et al., 2019). To address the second aim, Pearson's chi-squared test was used to examine whether adolescents' immigrant background was associated with profile membership, whereas a linear regression model was used to evaluate whether the emerging profiles differed in terms of family ethnic socialization. To address the third aim, separate multiple linear regression models were

performed for each of the six psychosocial outcomes (i.e., global identity cohesion, self-esteem, academic engagement, depressive symptoms, other group orientation, and prosocial behavior), including profile membership as the predictor and each psychosocial outcome measured at T3 (1-year follow-up) as dependent variable, controlling for the same variable at T0 (baseline). In all above-mentioned models, when a significant effect of profile membership emerged, pairwise comparisons between profiles were conducted using the Tukey method in order to control for Type I error via the *emmeans* package (Lenth, 2023; *R* Core Team, 2018). Partial eta squared was used as a measure of effect size and interpreted according to Cohen (1969) and Funder and Ozer (2019).

Table 5.1 Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables ($N = 173$)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	.12	.13	.14	.15	.16	.17	.18	.19	.20	.21	.22	.23	.24	.25
1. T0 EXPL		.58***	.54***	.44***	.53***	.35***	.33***	.32***	-.01	.06	.09	.08	.05	-.03	.28***	.23**	.23**	.19*	.16*	.23**	.56***	.18*	.22**	.01	-.03
2. T1 EXPL			.70***	.57***	.28***	.38***	.28***	.30***	-.05	.06	.05	.07	.13	.11	.09	.20**	.25***	.26***	.17*	.12	.52***	.16*	.21**	.01	.02
3. T2 EXPL				.67***	.36***	.33***	.45***	.40***	.02	.08	.08	.15	.06	.06	.16*	.24**	.23**	.23**	.13	.21**	.49***	.32***	.14	-.01	-.06
4. T3 EXPL					.35***	.40***	.44***	.56***	.10	.24**	.19*	.30***	-.01	-.08	.08	.26***	.25***	.39***	.13	.23**	.49***	.35***	.09	.03	-.02
5. T0 RES						.52***	.56***	.52***	.16*	.27**	.20**	.22**	-.13	-.20**	.17*	.19*	.17*	.14	.05	.09	.39***	.19*	.03	.12	-.02
6. T1 RES							.64***	.55***	.25***	.32***	.27***	.32***	-.13	-.13	.03	.22**	.08	.13	.12	.21**	.29***	.15*	-.03	.01	-.01
7. T2 RES								.65***	.16*	.35***	.20**	.35***	-.14	-.20**	.10	.22**	.07	.10	.07	.19*	.35***	.17*	-.01	.06	.01
8. T3 RES									.20**	.39***	.19*	.36***	-.12	-.19*	.05	.31***	.18*	.28***	.11	.30***	.38***	.29***	.03	-.02	.01
9. T0 GIC										.61***	.72***	.52***	-.62***	-.38***	.07	.31***	-.03	-.02	-.13	-.02	.06	-.04	-.30***	-.01	.16*
10. T3 GIC											.57***	.79***	-.47***	-.58***	.10	.37***	.02	.15*	-.06	.01	.06	.05	-.14	-.01	.08
11. T0 S-E												.65***	-.76***	-.53***	.01	.24**	-.04	.05	-.17*	-.10	-02	-.05	-.36***	-.03	.14
12. T3 S-E													-.52***	-.59***	.04	.36***	.02	.13	-.05	.05	.08	.14	-.19*	-.02	-.09
13. T0 DEPS														.65***	.07	-.14	.16*	.07	.29***	.16*	.06	.11	.46***	.05	-.13
14. T3 DEPS															-.04	-.27**	-.01	-.04	.20**	.10	.01	.07	.28***	-.08	.01
15. T0 ENG																.48***	.09	.04	.21**	.25***	.11	.02	.31***	.09	-.05

16. T3 ENG																	.19*	.19*	.19*	.26***	.07	.17*	.18*	-.01	-.05
17. T0 OGO																		.50***	.17*	.25***	.15*	.23**	.23**	.02	-.08
18. T3 OGO																			.03	.12	.15	.25***	.23**	-.09	-.11
19. T0 PROSB																				.53***	.16*	-.01	.22**	-.18*	.13
20. T3 PROSB																					.17*	.09	.20*	-.08	.02
21. FES																						.26***	.11	.08	-.03
22. IMMIGR																							.18*	.17*	-.33***
23. Gender																								.04	-.07
24. Age																									-.25**
25. SES																									
M (SD)	2.62	2.73	2.67	2.64	2.79	2.92	2.92	2.95	3.25	3.20	25.73	26.67	14.15	12.50	2.28	1.75	3.34	3.24	3.88	3.78	2.97	0.26	1.60	14.99	6.43
	(0.56)	(0.51)	(0.55)	(0.59)	(0.62)	(0.60)	(0.59)	(0.61)	(0.65)	(0.50)	(6.88)	(6.10)	(6.38)	(5.63)	(0.61)	(0.51)	(0.46)	(0.55)	(0.59)	(0.72)	(0.69)	(0.44)	(0.49)	(0.62)	(1.72)

Note. Immigrant background was coded as 0 = without immigrant background (i.e., born in Italy from Italian-born parents) and 1 = with immigrant background (i.e., born in Italy or abroad from at least one parent born abroad). Gender was coded as 1 = boys and 2 = girls. T0 = pretest, T1 = 9-week posttest, T2 = 13-week follow-up, T3 = 54-week follow-up.

EXPL = cultural identity exploration. RES = cultural identity resolution. GIC = global identity cohesion. S-E = self-esteem DEPS = depressive symptoms. ENG = academic engagement. OGO = other group orientation. PROSB = prosocial behavior. FES = family ethnic socialization. IMMIGR = immigrant background. SES = socioeconomic status.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

5.4 Results

5.4.1 Preliminary analyses

In preliminary analyses, missing data in the analytic sample (N = 173) across the four time points were screened; overall, missing data ranged from 0.00% to 0.53% (mean = 0.27%) across study variables. The missing values were imputed for each participant based on each subject's mean score on the considered measure (see Miconi et al., 2019).

5.4.2 Longitudinal profiles of cultural identity processes

For cultural identity exploration, the most plausible model (BIC = -903.1184) identified one single profile. A visual representation of the trend over time of cultural identity exploration is depicted in Figure 5.1: students in this profile showed an increase in exploration from T0 to T1, a decrease at T2, and returned to initial levels of exploration at T3.

For cultural identity resolution, the most plausible model (BIC = -1007.337) identified four different profiles. A visual representation of the trend over time of each of these profiles can be found in Figure 5.2. Participants in profile 1 ("stable low", n = 60, 35%) remained stable at low levels of resolution; participants in profile 2 ("stable average", n = 55, 32%) also remained stable, but at medium levels of resolution; participants in profile 3 ("increase low-to-average", n = 28, 16%) increased over time in their levels of resolution, starting from a low level and reaching an average level; participants in profile 4 ("increase high-to-higher", n = 30, 17%) started from a high level of resolution and showed a further increase. Given the presence of only one profile for exploration, subsequent analyses exclusively focused on the four resolution profiles.

Figure 5.1 Profile of cultural identity exploration using standardized means.

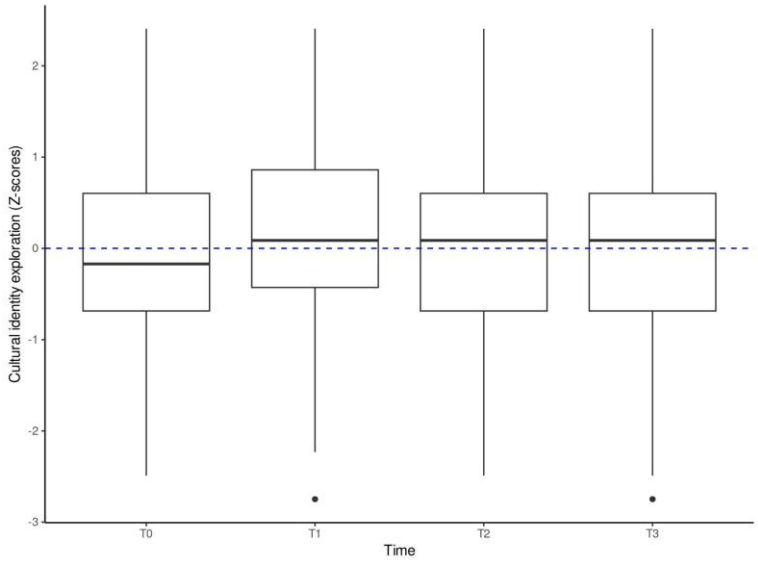
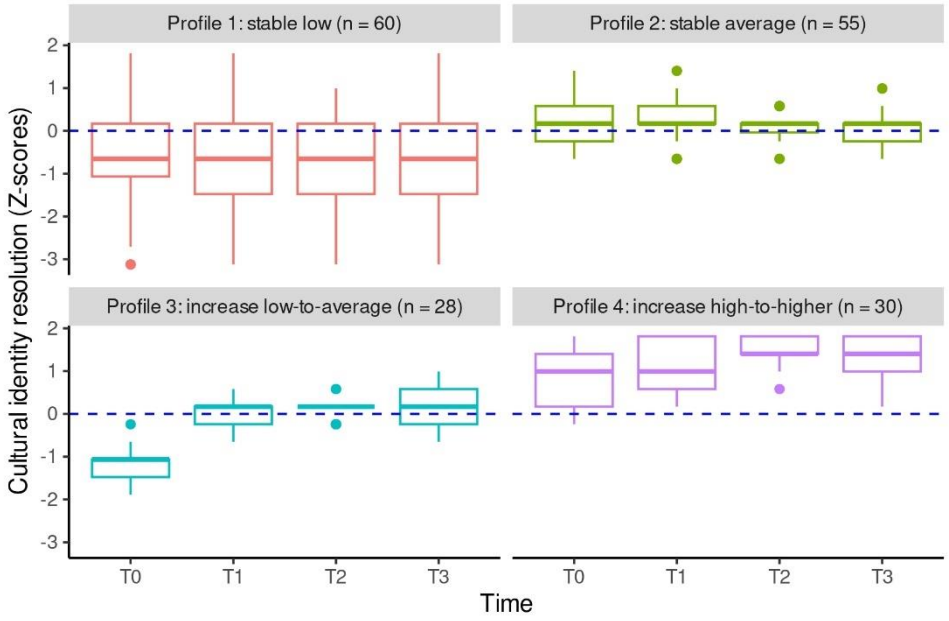


Figure 5.2 Profiles of cultural identity resolution using standardized means.



5.4.3 Associations of immigrant background and family ethnic socialization with resolution profiles

The chi-square test revealed a significant association between immigrant background and membership in the resolution profile, $\chi^2 = 18.179$, $df = 3$, $p = .0004$. Specifically, students with an immigrant background were overrepresented (57%) in the "increase high-to-higher" profile,

and slightly underrepresented (17%) in the "stable low" profile; the ratio between students with and without an immigrant background in the "stable average" (22% vs 78%) and "increase low-to-average" (21% vs 79%) profiles mirrored the one in the general sample (26% vs 74%).

The linear regression model showed a significant association between profile membership and family ethnic socialization, $F(3,169) = 12.475$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$. Detailed results of the model are presented in Table 5.2.

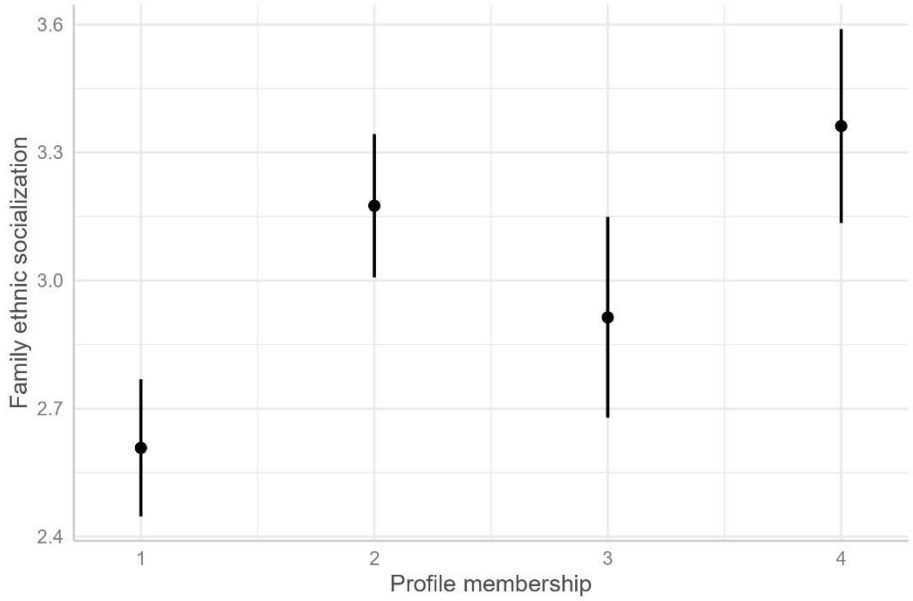
Table 5.2 Multiple linear regression model with family ethnic socialization as dependent variable.

Variable	*B (SE)*	*Omnibus F (df)*	η_p^2
Profile membership		12.47 (3,169)***	.18
Profile 2 (stable average)	0.57 (0.12)		
Profile 3 (increase low-to-average)	0.31 (0.14)		
Profile 4 (increase high-to-higher)	0.75 (0.14)		

Note. $N = 173$. Baseline category for profile membership was profile 1 (stable low). $R^2 = .18$.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Specifically, pairwise comparison between profiles via the Tukey method showed that adolescents in the "increase high-to-higher"profile reported significantly higher levels of family ethnic socialization than their peers in the "stable-low" ($t(169) = -5.348$, $p < .0001$) and in the "increase-low-to-average" profile ($t(169) = -2.705$, $p = .0374$). Moreover, students in the "stable-average" profile reported significantly higher levels of family ethnic socialization than their peers in the "stable-low" profile ($t(169) = -4.820$, $p < .0001$). As shown in Figure 5.3, participants in the "increase high-to-higher" profile exhibited the highest level of family ethnic socialization, whereas the ones in the "stable low" profile reported the lowest level of this variable.

Figure 5.3 Levels of family ethnic socialization at T0 across resolution profiles.



Note. Profile 1 "stable low" (n = 60), profile 2 "stable average" (n = 55), profile 3 "increase low-to-average" (n = 28), profile 4 "increase high-to-higher" (n = 30).

5.4.4 Associations between resolution profiles and psychosocial outcomes

All detailed results of each of the six multiple regression models are presented in Tables 5.3 to 5.8.

Multiple linear regression models showed a significant and large effect of profile membership on global identity cohesion ($F(3,168) = 9.2211$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$) and self-esteem ($F(3,168) = 9.0374$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$), a significant and medium effect on academic engagement ($F(3,168) = 3.6625$, $p = .014$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$) and prosocial behavior ($F(3,168) = 5.014$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$), a significant and small effect on depressive symptoms ($F(3,168) = 2.7347$, $p = .045$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$), and no significant effect on other group orientation ($F(3,168) = 0.8856$, $p = .450$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$).

Table 5.3 Multiple linear regression model with global identity cohesion at T3 as dependent variable.

Variable	*B (SE)*	*Omnibus F (df)*	η_p^2
Global identity cohesion (T0)	0.40 (0.04)	104.34 (1,168)***	.38
Profile membership		9.22 (3,168)***	.14
Profile 2 (stable average)	0.06 (0.07)		
Profile 3 (increase low-to-average)	0.20 (0.08)		
Profile 4 (increase high-to-higher)	0.41 (0.08)		

Note. $N = 173$. Baseline category for profile membership was profile 1 (stable low). $R^2 = .46$.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 5.4 Multiple linear regression model with self-esteem at T3 as dependent variable.

Variable	*B (SE)*	*Omnibus F (df)*	η_p^2
Self-esteem (T0)	0.57 (0.05)	133.86 (1,168)***	.44
Profile membership		9.04 (3,168)***	.14
Profile 2 (stable average)	0.65 (0.82)		
Profile 3 (increase low-to-average)	2.87 (1.00)		
Profile 4 (increase high-to-higher)	4.62 (0.98)		

Note. $N = 173$. Baseline category for profile membership was profile 1 (stable low). $R^2 = .50$.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 5.5. Multiple linear regression model with depressive symptoms at T3 as dependent variable.

Variable	*B (SE)*	*Omnibus F (df)*	η_p^2
Depressive symptoms (T0)	0.56 (0.05)	121.36 (1,168)***	.42
Profile membership		2.73 (3,168)*	.05
Profile 2 (stable average)	-1.45 (0.79)		
Profile 3 (increase low-to-average)	-1.42 (0.97)		
Profile 4 (increase high-to-higher)	-2.58 (0.95)		

Note. $N = 173$. Baseline category for profile membership was profile 1 (stable low). $R^2 = .44$.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 5.6 Multiple linear regression model with academic engagement at T3 as dependent variable.

Variable	*B (SE)*	*Omnibus F (df)*	η_p^2
Academic engagement (T0)	0.37 (0.06)	41.81 (1,168)	.20
Profile membership		3.66 (3,168)*	.06
Profile 2 (stable average)	0.10 (0.08)		
Profile 3 (increase low-to-average)	0.18 (0.10)		
Profile 4 (increase high-to-higher)	0.32 (0.10)		

Note. $N = 173$. Baseline category for profile membership was profile 1 (stable low). $R^2 = .25$.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 5.7 Multiple linear regression model with other-group orientation at T3 as dependent variable.

Variable	*B (SE)*	*Omnibus F (df)*	η_p^2
Other-group orientation (T0)	0.59 (0.08)	55.54 (1,168)***	.25
Profile membership		0.89 (3,168)	.02
Profile 2 (stable average)	0.07 (0.09)		
Profile 3 (increase low-to-average)	0.04 (0.11)		
Profile 4 (increase high-to-higher)	0.17 (0.11)		

Note. $N = 173$. Baseline category for profile membership was profile 1 (stable low). $R^2 = .26$.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 5.8 Multiple linear regression model with prosocial behavior at T3 as dependent variable.

Variable	*B (SE)*	*Omnibus F (df)*	η_p^2
Prosocial behavior (T0)	0.64 (0.08)	71.22 (1,168)***	.30
Profile membership		5.01 (3,168)**	.08
Profile 2 (stable average)	-0.03 (0.11)		
Profile 3 (increase low-to-average)	0.26 (0.13)		
Profile 4 (increase high-to-higher)	0.41 (0.13)		

Note. $N = 173$. Baseline category for profile membership was profile 1 (stable low). $R^2 = .34$.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

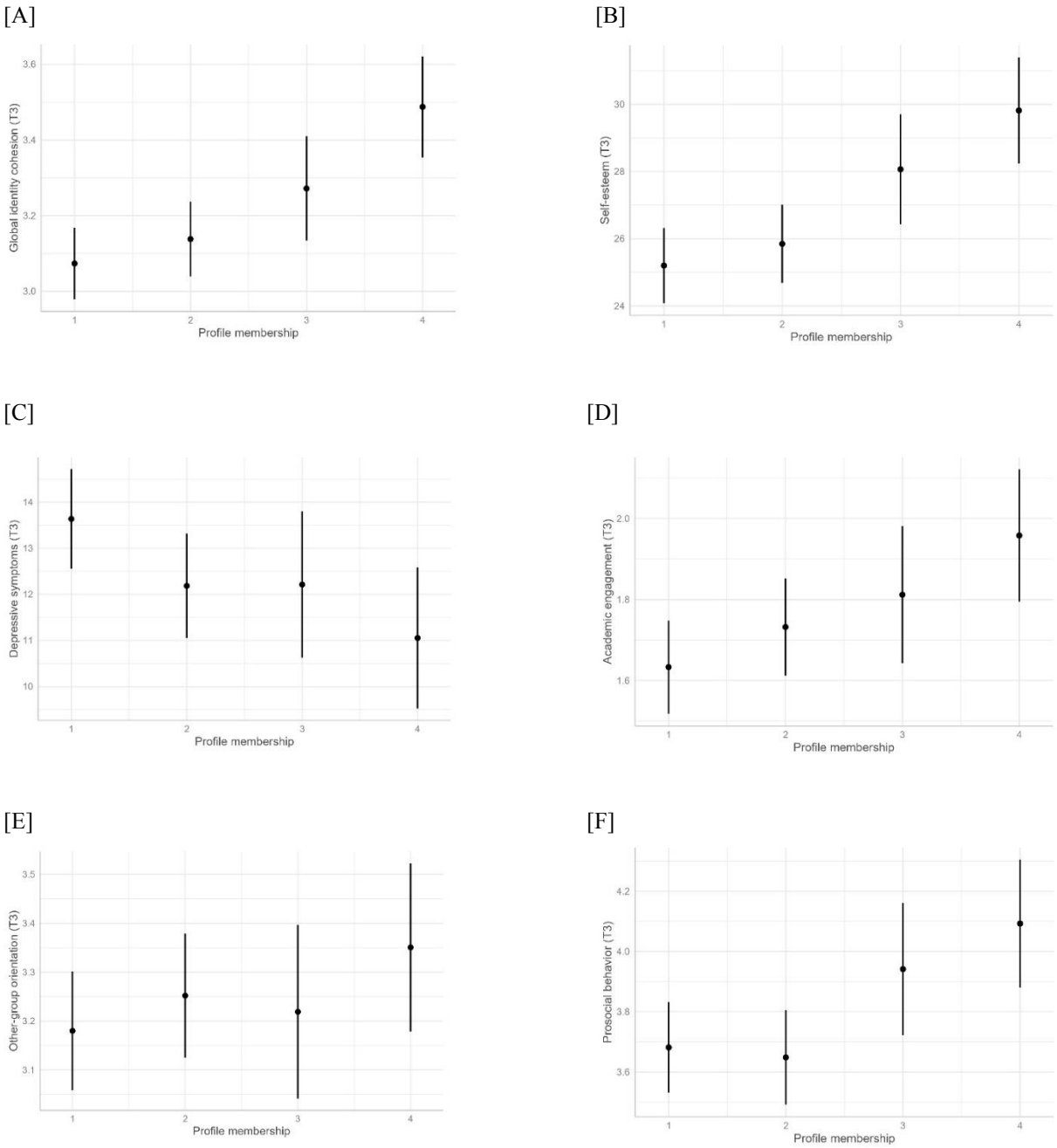
Follow-up pairwise comparisons via the Tukey method indicated that students in the "increase high-to-higher" profile scored significantly higher on global identity cohesion than their counterparts in the "stable-low" ($t(168) = -4.981$, $p < .0001$) and "stable-average" profiles ($t(168) = -4.169$, $p = .0003$); these students also reported greater self-esteem than their peers in the "stable-low" ($t(168) = -4.706$, $p < .0001$) and "stable-average" profiles ($t(168) = -4.001$, $p = .0005$). Adolescents in the "increase low-to-average" profile reported significantly higher self-esteem compared to their peers in the "stable-low" profile ($t(168) = -2.863$, $p = .0242$). Youth in the "increase-high-to-higher" profile scored significantly lower on depressive symptoms than their counterparts in the "stable low" profile ($t(168) = 2.720$, $p = .0359$), reported more academic engagement than youth in the latter profile ($t(168) = -3.210$, $p = .0086$), and engaged in more prosocial behavior than their peers in the "stable-low" ($t(168) = -3.120$, $p = .0113$) and "stable-average" profiles ($t(168) = -3.332$, $p = .0058$).

Overall, As shown in Figure 5.4, participants in the "increase high-to-higher" profile reported the best psychosocial outcomes for all outcomes one year after participating in the intervention, followed by participants in the "increase low-to-average" profile (except for depressive symptoms, with participants in this profile reporting approximately the same levels as their peers in the "stable-average" profile). Conversely, participants in the "stable-low" profile exhibited the worst psychosocial outcomes for all indicators except for prosocial behavior (the lowest levels of this variable were observed in the "stable-average" profile).

To account for the interrelatedness of exploration and resolution processes (Erikson, 1968), we replicated all the models including exploration at posttest (T1) and its interaction with profile membership among the predictors to test whether this variable had a main or interactive effect on the psychosocial outcomes of interest at the 1-year follow-up (T3). No main or interactive effects of exploration at T1 emerged on any of the psychosocial outcomes variables (i.e., global identity cohesion, self-esteem, depressive symptoms, academic

engagement, other group orientation, prosocial behavior). All detailed results of each of the six multiple regression models are presented in Appendix E.

Figure 5.4 Levels of global identity cohesion [panel A], self-esteem [panel B], depressive symptoms [panel C], academic engagement [panel D], other group orientation [panel E] and prosocial behavior [panel f] at T3 across resolution profiles.



Note. Profile 1 "stable low" (n = 60), profile 2 "stable average" (n = 55), profile 3 "increase low-to-average" (n = 28), profile 4 "increase high-to-higher" (n = 30).

5.5 Discussion

This study set out to identify profiles of trajectories of cultural identity exploration and resolution among youth who had participated in the IP in Italy (Ceccon et al., 2023b). In doing so, the aim was to address a gap in the literature by offering novel evidence concerning the unfolding of cultural identity processes during adolescence, focusing on students who had been administered a school-based intervention especially designed to boost these processes. A design with multiple assessments was adopted to answer the professed call for longitudinal studies in the realm of person-centered, profile-based research with respect to ethnic-racial/cultural identity (Wantchekon & Umaña-Taylor, 2021). Specifically, latent profile analysis was used to identify subgroups of students differing in how their levels of exploration and resolution changed across four time points over the course of a year. Moreover, potential associations of immigrant background and levels of family ethnic socialization with the emerging profiles were examined, as well as the links between profile membership and adolescents' psychosocial adjustment (i.e., global identity cohesion, self-esteem, academic engagement, depressive symptoms, other group orientation, and prosocial behavior) one year after baseline. Overall, the findings revealed that there was substantial heterogeneity in how adolescents evolved in terms of resolution, but not exploration. Students with immigrant background and high levels of family ethnic socialization were more likely to belong to the group characterized by an increase in resolution over time starting from high levels of this variable. Furthermore, adolescents in the latter group were those who showed the highest levels of psychosocial adjustment in the long run, followed by their peers who increased from low to average levels of resolution.

In relation to the first aim, longitudinal latent profile analysis identified one exploration profile and four resolution profiles. Exploration increased from T0 to T1, decreased at T2, and returned to initial levels at T3. Hence, no subgroups of students emerged in relation to how this cultural identity process evolved over time. This finding was somewhat unexpected in light of

prior research identifying different trajectories of exploration in adolescence. However, it should be noted that the results from the current study are not directly comparable with previous studies using different statistical approaches (e.g., parallel process group-based trajectory modeling; see Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2015b) or cross-sectional data (e.g., Meca et al., 2023). Moreover, the current sample was composed of youth who had participated in a school-based intervention. In this perspective, the fact that all participants exhibited the same developmental trajectory in terms of exploration might indicate that the intervention was equally salient and efficacious in stimulating an in-depth search and observation of their heritage culture(s) for all youth, regardless of their background. Hence, the identification of a single profile supports the "universality" of the IP, as intended and specifically designed by its developers (see Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2017). The increase in exploration from pre- to posttest further confirms the results of efficacy studies of the IP conducted in Italy and the United States (Ceccon et al., 2023b; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a).

As regards resolution, latent profile analysis revealed a more nuanced pattern, with students in the first and second profiles showing stability (at a low and average level, respectively), and those in the third and fourth profiles substantially increasing over time (one from a low to average level, and one from a high to higher level). The identification of four profiles for resolution characterized by both stability and change is consistent with recent findings from the German and Swedish implementations of the IP (Abdullahi et al., 2023; Hölscher et al., 2023), and resembles previous research on profiles of trajectories of ERI content among Black college students in the United States (Chavous et al., 2018). The heterogeneity of resolution profiles emerging from the current study supports the notion that achieving a sense of clarity of one's cultural identity and the meaning assigned to it is an introspective and private process that might be more subject to individual differences. Notably, the absence of profiles with a decreasing trend among students who had participated in the IP suggests that the

intervention encouraged, or at least sustained, an ongoing reflection and awareness around cultural identity. It is also worth mentioning that, for the two increasing profiles, only participants in the "increase high-to-higher" profile exhibited the highest levels of resolution at T2 (first follow-up), while the ones in the "increase low-to-average" profiles showed an increase already at T1 (post-test). This might help explain why the ripple effect on resolution was not found in the Italian study (Ceccon et al., 2023b). On the other hand, employing a person-centered approach enabled us to discover that this effect indeed occurred for a subgroup of participants, following the original theoretical model and the US implementation of the IP (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a).

In relation to the second aim, associations of adolescents' immigrant background and levels of family ethnic socialization with profile membership were examined based on previous research showing how both variables often predict a stronger cultural identity (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014a; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020). In the first three resolution profiles ("stable low", "stable average", "increase low-to-average"), the ratio between students with and without immigrant background roughly mirrored the one in the general sample, with the relative highest percentage of students without immigrant background being in the "stable low" profile. Conversely, youth with an immigrant background were overrepresented in the fourth profile (i.e., "increase high-to-higher"). Interestingly, almost half of this subgroup was composed by majority students, lending further support to the universality of the curriculum for adolescents from both minoritized and ethnoracial majority backgrounds. Regarding family ethnic socialization, an association with profile membership emerged, with youth in the "increase high-to-higher" profile reporting the highest level of family ethnic socialization at baseline. Hence, it is possible that the increase in resolution over time was driven by participation in the IP program. As regards the two stability profiles, students in the "stable low" profile reported less family ethnic socialization than their peers in the "stable average" profile. Given that family

ethnic socialization has been shown to be promotive for ethnic-racial identity (Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020), it is possible that the different baseline levels of resolution (low vs average) characterizing the two profiles were due to the higher level of family ethnic socialization exhibited by participants in the "stable average" (vs "stable low") profile. Overall, the overrepresentation of adolescents with an immigrant background and who had experienced the highest levels of ethnic socialization in the family prior to participating in the program in the profile marked by high initial levels of resolution and a further increase (i.e., "high-to-higher" profile) aligned with our expectations, supporting previous evidence that these two variables are linked to adolescents' cultural identity. Indeed, this type of social identity is especially meaningful and salient for youth from ethnoracially minoritized backgrounds (Umaña-Taylor & Rivas-Drake, 2021), and is modeled by the messages individuals receive within the home environment in relation to their cultural traditions and heritage (Hughes et al., 2006). This finding further implies that the IP intervention, in combination with high levels of family ethnic socialization, still played an important role in supporting youth to gain clarity with respect to their cultural background(s), as shown by the increase in resolution over time. Of note, the importance of familial support for adolescents in making sense of this part of their identity and lowest levels of this variable among students without a migration history suggests a call for further family involvement in the IP program, in addition to already existing activities (e.g., interviewing a person from one's own cultural background). This is paramount for majority youth, whose socialization might have been characterized by the parents' tendency to situate themselves into a "White normativity", a color-evasive approach, and the reluctance to discuss race and racism (Kaiser et al., 2023). Such messages received within the family environment may hinder the effects of the IP intervention for majority adolescents, by reducing the perceived salience of cultural identity for all youth and the need to openly address dynamics of power and privilege based on ethnoracial differences.

The third aim concerned the associations among resolution profiles and a host of psychosocial outcomes (i.e., global identity cohesion, self-esteem, academic engagement, depressive symptoms, other group orientation, and prosocial behavior) assessed among participants one year after they had started the IP intervention. Profile membership emerged as a significant predictor of all outcomes, except for other group orientation. In particular, youth in the "increase high-to-higher" profile exhibited the best psychosocial adjustment at the one year follow-up, followed by those who were in the "increase low-to-average" profile. On the contrary, adolescents in the profile showing a low stable trajectory of resolution were the ones exhibiting the worst outcomes in terms of adjustment. These findings are in line with previous studies demonstrating the promotive role of ethnic-racial identity in academic and psychological adjustment (see Umaña-Taylor & Rivas-Drake, 2021). Specifically, the results mirror those emerging from the longitudinal study conducted in the United States among youth participating in th IP, where increases in ERI processes predicted better psychological and academic adjustment (i.e., greater global identity cohesion and self-esteem, lower depressive symptoms, and higher grades) at the follow-up assessment one year later (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018b). In the current study, no long-term effects on students' attitudes toward people from other cultural groups emerged (see also Sandberg et al., 2023a). However, in the original efficacy study, ERI was positively associated with attitudes toward outgroup members, but only when global identity cohesion was examined as a mediator of program effects (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018b). Thus, future research might investigate possible indirect effects of ethnic-racial/cultural identity on intergroup attitudes through its impact on adolescents' overall sense of self-concept and synthesis/cohesion of their global identity.

5.5.1 Limitations and directions for future research

Despite the study's strengths, such as adopting a longitudinal design in combination with a person-centered approach, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the relatively small sample size may have influenced the number of extracted profiles, especially in the case of cultural identity exploration, as well as the comparisons across subgroups of adolescents. Relatedly, the modest size of the profiles and the heterogeneity of nationalities in the current sample did not allow to further examine whether the profiles were differently characterized based on students' national origin or generational status (i.e., first vs second generation). Future longitudinal studies with larger samples of adolescents are needed to provide a more nuanced picture of individual differences in exploration and resolution processes over time, accounting for other relevant individual and contextual factors that may influence such processes. Second, the waitlist control design prevented us from comparing students in the intervention and control group, because the latter had received the IP after the first follow-up (T2). Nevertheless, the current study's focus on adolescents in the intervention group provides important insights into how specific profiles are linked to long-term psychosocial outcomes, and the identification of varied resolution profiles can inform on the potential need and best timing for the implementation of booster sessions to keep youth at high levels of this process. Third, this study reflected participants' identity only in terms of heritage culture identity. Following extant research considering both national and ethnic-racial identity (Meca et al., 2023), future studies should explore whether, for bicultural or multicultural adolescents, their national identity follows a different developmental trajectory and is differently associated with psychological and academic outcomes. This might particularly apply to youth, like those in this study, who participate in interventions designed to promote the understanding of cultural identity as multifaceted, supporting them in the harmonization process of their various identities (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2017). Fourth, the focus on

Italian youth attending specific types of schools (i.e., technical and vocational) and living in a geographical area characterized by economic wealth, high population density, and a high proportion of immigrant-origin citizens (ISTAT, 2023) limits the generalizability of results. Hence, further research is needed to replicate the study across socio-cultural and geographical contexts with different demographics and migration patterns, including other Italian regions as well as other European countries.

CHAPTER 6

General discussion

"Everything is culture, but culture is not everything."

Peter Ventevogel (2002)

6.1 Lessons learned from the implementation of the *Identity Project* in Italy

Findings in the current dissertation provide novel evidence on the adaptation process and efficacy of the IP, and highlight the relevance and usefulness of intervening in cultural identity development among diverse adolescents also in the Italian context. Furthermore, the empirical studies helped to shed light on the influence of some individual and contextual factors (e.g., immigrant background, environmental sensitivity, family ethnic socialization) in boosting intervention efficacy, also with respect to psychological and academic adjustment in the long run. Finally, the identification of distinct pathways for cultural identity exploration and resolution calls for future research on socialization processes involved in these dimensions, as well as to practical implications on spot interventions to continue promoting their development. In this chapter, some of the lessons learned throughout this doctoral project will be discussed, in light of the experience gained researching and personally conducting the IP in the classrooms.

A starting point, answering to the question that sparked this research project, is that cultural identity is indeed a salient construct also for youth living in recently receiving societies like Italy. Addressing issues of multiculturalism, ethnic heritage, and racism is highly needed within the school contex, and students themselves reported during focus group discussions (see Chapter 3.4.2) how these topics were relevant for them, but had never or rarely been mentioned in the classroom. Indeed, sharing their cultural heritages in this setting made students feel seen, understood, and valued by their classmates: this was especially true for minoritized students.

Importantly, this heightened sensitivity and awareness among adolescents on issues of cultural belonging seemed to prompt teachers to incorporate these contents within their standard lessons. Therefore, we argue that the active engagement of teachers as participants, together with their students, in such interventions might be extremely beneficial for at least two reasons. One, to provide educators with opportunities to reflect upon what their their cultural majority membership means to them, also in relation with potential implicit bias they might hold toward students from backgrounds other than their own and alarming cascading effects on youth's maladjustment (Civitillo et al., 2023; Vezzali & Giovannini, 2010). In this sense, the development of a positive, anti-racist and anti-xenophobic cultural identity for majority teachers represents itself a fundamental component of culturally responsive teaching (Utt & Tochluk, 2020). Two, given that school is a major socialization environment (Schachner et al., 2018), teachers constitute a significant role model for adolescents. Hence, the adoption by Italian teachers of equal treatments and pluralistic practices has a great potential to encourage positive attitudes toward cultural diversity also among students (Costa et al., 2023; Karataş et al., 2023). In sum, creating more collective "safe spaces" where both majority and minoritized adolescents can critically discuss these issues and learn how to overcome stereotypes with the help of their classmates and educators is pivotal to change the current polarized narrative of "us vs them" spread in the national context (Ferrari, 2022).

Beyond cultural identity being salient for adolescents in Italy, the significant differences between the US and Italian context in the emphasis given to issues of ethnic-racial/cultural identity within the public discourse and socialization environments must be acknowledged. Indeed, this factor possibly impacted on the different timing and pathways exhibited by Italian participants with respect to cultural identity processes. Specifically, our main study failed to replicate the cascading effect of exploration at posttest on resolution at follow-up (see Chapter 4.4.2) found in the United States (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a). Indeed, only two out of four

subgroups of participants identified with longitudinal latent profile analysis showed an increase in resolution and, even in these subgroups, the growth in resolution occurred at different time points (see Chapter 5.4.2). This might also be related to the "delay syndrome" that appears to characterize identity development among Italian youth (Livi Bacci, 2008). Existing research, in fact, shows that adolescents in Italy display lower levels of identity commitment in comparison to other European countries (Crocetti et al., 2012b). Furthermore, reconsideration of this commitment is particularly high among youth from immigrant families, possibly due to the additional challenge of having to negotiate between the family's cultural heritage and perceived pressure to assimilate within the majority culture (Crocetti et al., 2011). As reported also by our participants, youth living in Italy are less used to reflect upon and talk about their cultural memberships. In this respect, they greatly differ from youth growing up in the US, where messages about race and ethnicity permeate all spheres of everyday life, from politics to media and art (Sladek et al., 2022). In Italy, politicians and the public discourse still perpetuate a rhetoric of emergency management and "invasion", instead of recognizing immigration as a normal and structural phenomenon with several positive consequences. However, the "second generations" are starting to embody and promote an idea of Italy as a multicultural country, also thanks to public figures, well-known artists, and athletes who challenge the image of the "conventionally-looking" Italian person (Camilli, 2022).

Another distinctive feature emerged from the IP Italian implementation is the great heterogeneity in terms of cultural origins, that mirrors the national situation (ISTAT, 2023). Hence, to stimulate identity formation processes among all students it is paramount to offer activities that effectively represent all backgrounds, including the majority Italian-origin group, that constitutes the majority also numerically speaking. Literature on ethnoracial/cultural socialization among members of the White/majority group indicates that these youth are usually less socialized with respect to this identity domain and that parents usually adopt an egalitarian,

color-blinded approach (Loyd & Gaither, 2018). Lacking these opportunities, majority youth often have limited awareness of the personal meaning their ethnoracial status has to them or they may express strong positive feelings toward their ethnoracial membership, leaning into a "White pride" sentiment (Satterthwaite-Freiman et al., 2023). Similarly, also the Italian youth and general population seem to be stuck in this dychotomy between disowning their national heritage or, on the contrary, embracing nationalist views and rejecting diversity (Dixon et al., 2018; Save the Children, 2022). Our hope is that programs like the IP might disrupt this dynamic, by supporting majority students in finding a balance between the extremes and creating a more flexible and nuanced picture of their Italian membership.

In addition to a variety of cultural backgrounds, our participants also presented multifaceted identities, structured on several levels related to both geographical (e.g., local, regional, national, continental) and cultural domains (e.g., language and religion). These multiple affiliations were shared during the "relationships' trees" activity (i.e., when students wrote their cultural identities under their names) and in the session about meaningful cultural symbols. Moreover, when enlisting all their self-identifications in the open-ended question in the survey, many students included their religious identity ("Muslim", "Catholic", "Christian orthodox"), their continental identity ("African", "European", "South American"), and their bicultural identity ("Albanian-Italian", "Sometimes Nigerian, sometimes Italian, sometimes both"). Of interest, city and regional identity ("Paduan", "Venetian", "Sicilian") were recurrent among students from both majority and minoritized backgrounds. Finally, some seemed to refuse to identify themselves within a fixed category (e.g., "citizen of the world", "culture-fluid"). These promising findings suggest that, on a certain level, adolescents already grasped and internalized the idea that nobody is completely "monocultural", since we all draw from a plurality of cultures in constant evolution, that individuals can participate in and contribute to (Morris et al., 2015; Rogoff, 2016). This shift from "belonging to" to "participating in" a culture

could help adolescents to harmonize the coexistence of multiple cultures within them, without this meaning betraying or abandoning one for the other. Moreover, it could also foster the understanding of diverse others who are going through the same process, even if they differ in the content of their cultural identity, and thus promote respect, empathy, and a sense of community among youth.

Encompassing all previous reflections, it should be stressed that the systematic and thorough adaptation of the original intervention was essential to make the IP appropriate and accessible to students in the Italian school context, and ultimately to ensure its efficacy. In doing so, surface and deep structure modifications had to be made (Resnicow et al., 2020), while also tackling the "fit vs fidelity dilemma" that characterizes cultural adaptations of evidence-based interventions (Marsiglia & Booth, 2015). Our Italian-based experience lends support to recommendations included in international guidelines focusing on the adaptation process (Knight et al., 2009; Barrera Jr & Castro, 2006). Among the most important insights gained from the Italian cultural adaptation, some deserve particular attention. For instance, the implementation of a pilot study was fundamental to preliminarly field-test the logistics of the prospective large-scale randomized controlled study (see Kistin & Silverstein, 2015; Pearson et al., 2020). Specifically, the pilot implementation greatly informed us with respect to key organizational aspects (e.g., expected vs real duration of the sessions), methodological concerns (e.g., randomization procedure, reliability of measures), as well as theoretical and practical implications for the content of the intervention itself (e.g., inclusion of activity about multilingualism and use of digital tools). Moreover, acquiring continuous circular feedback by all figures involved (i.e., students, teachers, facilitators, linguistic-cultural mediators) also proved to extremely valuable, not only to improve the curriculum but also to build positive and long-lasting relationships within the research team and with the stakeholders. Finally, in our adaptation process (see Chapter 2.2.2) we deemed important to take into account the structural

and contextual differences between the US and Italian educational system, e.g., lower percentage of students from cultural minoritized groups, predominance of frontal lectures. Interestingly, the implementation of the program confirmed the usefulness of some of these modifications (e.g., always showing examples that students of the majority group could also relate to), but in addition led to unexpected, positive results. In particular, the decision to simplify or reduce some activities while still maintining the original participatory pedagogical approached was highly appreciated by students, as reported in focus group discussions conducted afer completion of both pilot and main study. Of note, teachers expressed appreciation for this modality too, and used it to design homework activities to grade students in their own disciplines (e.g., recording videos about their cultural backgrounds and sharing them through the creation of an online platform; see Chapters 3.4.2 and 4.4.4).

6.2 Limitations, future directions, and implications for practice and policy

The present research project relied on a rigorous methodological approach, including the cultural adaptation process, the waitlisted pre- and posttest design with follow-up assessments, the a priori power analysis, the large sample size, the engagement in open science practices (e.g., submission of a registered report, availability of data), the examination of potential moderators of intervention efficacy, the adoption of both variable-centered and person-centered perspectives, and finally the combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection to better nuance our findings. However, throughout this doctoral work, we encountered several limitations that have already been mentioned in the empirical chapters and need to be further acknowledged, but that have also sparked numerous ideas for future studies and potential practical implications.

First, in our studies we specifically assessed cultural identity exploration and resolution, replicating the original theoretical model (see Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a) that focuses on these

processes in light of their universality (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2017). It would be interesting, however, to take into account also content dimensions (such as centrality, affirmation, and public regard) that might impede or encourage youth to engage in such processes, especially when it comes to highly stigmatized groups. For example, Wantchekon et al. (2021) found that centrality (i.e., the extent to which individuals view their ethnic-racial/cultural identity as central to their overall self-concept) moderated the effects of the IP intervention, with participants having average and higher (vs low) ERI centrality benefiting more in terms of exploration. Indeed, other European scholars part of the IP consortium are already investigating some of these content dimensions (e.g., Abdullahi et al., 2023).

Second, beyond the process/content domains, other group distinctions and identity-related components might be relevant in the European context (Verkuyten, 2016), particularly considering that in the quantitative assessments administered in our studies "cultural identity" was equated to "nationality". However, as clearly demonstrated by the answers students gave to the open-ended question about their cultural identity self-identifications, although nationality was the most frequently reported indicator of culture, it was hardly the only one (see Syed & Kathawalla, 2017). Indeed, in contemporary Europe, meaningful sources of identity are religious affiliation, especially among Muslim youth (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2018); ethnicity, for instance among the Roma minoritized group (Dimitrova et al., 2017); and finally, as confirmed by our participants' responses, region of origin within the Italian context (Inguglia et al., 2009). Future studies could incorporate measures of these various identity facets, as well as measures of biculturalism (e.g., Bicultural Identity Integration Scale; Huynh et al., 2018), in light of the multilayered and hyphenated identities enlisted by our participants.

Third, due to the heterogeneous sample composition, with our participants reporting 55 heritage cultures, we lacked statistical power to ascertain differential effects based on national origin, generational status (i.e., born in Italy or abroad), as well as citizenship status, a factor

that also impacts on the adjustment students of immigrant descent living in Italy (Save the Children, 2022). Following extant research conducted in the United States (e.g., Rivas-Drake et al., 2014a), future studies are warranted to explore whether the Italian IP program could be more efficacious or salient for certain cultural groups, especially considering the unique migration and reception experiences that distinguish cultural minoritized groups in Italy and the heavy stigmatization of visible minorities (Ambrosini, 2013; Musso et al., 2018). This gap could partially be filled by employing further qualitative methodologies (e.g., inclusion of more open-ended questions in the survey, individual interviews, focus groups) to better nuance quantitative data (Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012). Qualitative data collection could explore topics such as discrimination, perceived cultural distance between majority and specific minoritized groups, as well as socialization environments (e.g., peers, family, social networks) where youth form their ideas with respect to cultural identity (see Jones & Rogers, 2022; Sandberg et al., 2023b; Sladek et al., 2022). Indeed, qualitative methods are often advocated as an essential tool to fully comprehend participants' experiences, especially during developmental periods characterized by major life transitions like adolescence and emerging adulthood (Lewis-Smith et al., 2021; Schwab & Syed, 2015).

Finally, as previously mentioned, in the empirical chapters of this thesis the term "immigrant background" was used, following extant research (e.g., Schachner et al., 2016), to refer to youth from cultural minoritized backgrounds who had either lived first-hand a migration experience or were children of individuals who had migrated to Italy. Despite being a common and socially acceptable way to frame ethnoracial and cultural diversity in Europe, this definition is controversial and should be questioned, if not abandoned, for at least three interconnected reasons (see Juang et al., 2021; Jugert et al., 2022; Vietze et al., 2023). The first reason is a purely terminological one: indeed, "immigrant background" is a rather vague and inaccurate term that comprises youth who migrated themselves as well as youth of immigrant descent (i.e.,

whose parents or grandparents were immigrant), from all national origins other than the host country. In doing so, this term fails to differentiate among very different experiences, such as being born abroad or in the same country as the majority group, having or not national citizenship, and being part of a highly stigmatized group as opposed to a group that is perceived as similar or close to the majority one in terms of cultural or phenotypic traits. Moreover, "immigrant background" is usually a post-hoc variable assigned by researchers based on the birth country of participants and their parents. The methodological flaw in this process is supported by a growing number of studies, showing that many individuals with an ascribed "immigrant background" did not in fact identify as such (Nesterko & Glaesmer, 2019) and that, if given the opportunity to self-identify, described themselves as not having a cultural minoritized background (Civitillo et al., 2021; Vietze et al., 2023). The third reason is of conceptual and ethical nature. The use of this binary categorization by the scientific community risks to somehow align and give basis to similar polarized positions in the public discourse. By minimizing differences within the group "with immigrant background" and maximing differences with those without (implicitly, the "true" natives), this socially constructed division lends support to the idea of "perpetual foreigners" and to an "us vs them" narrative (Ferrari, 2022; Will, 2019). While reasons not to use this categorization are abundant, the creation of more just but feasible alternatives is a challenge that some scholars have started to address. For instance, Vietze et al. (2023) recommend a transparent selection of other meaningful and social justice oriented categories, such as family heritage, religion, citizenship, and generation status, also based on the research questions and focus of the study. Jugert et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of using subscribed definitions of cultural group membership (i.e., ethnoracial/cultural self-identification) to center participants' subjective experiences. However, the authors also point out how self-identification may change across time and context,

especially when identity development is still an ongoing process, and suggest, for example, the use of experience sampling methods to reflect this dynamic construct.

In addition to the aforementioned limitations and suggestions for future research, various practical considerations arise from the present research project in relation to next implementations. A possible development is the teacher-delivery of the IP curriculum. Indeed, the IP was originally designed to be administered by one single leader, aiming to have the program ultimately delivered in the school context by a teacher or other school personnel (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2017). A teachers' implementation of the program has already been conducted in the US, yielding promising results with respect to students' ERI exploration (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2023). Whereas most of the research teams from the IP consortium (i.e., Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden) had the program delivered by external facilitators (see also Abdullahi et al., 2023; Day et al., 2023; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2023), the Norwegian team trained schools' minority advisors (Oppedal et al., 2023). Finally, the German team has been developing a training focused on the IP, critical consciousness, and culturally responsive teaching for educators to eventually implement the program (Pevec et al., 2022). At the moment, various factors point against the feasibility and acceptability of a teacher-delivery in Italy, mainly due to the overwhelming organizational burden this would put on teachers and the reluctance expressed during focus groups by our participants in having teachers as facilitators. However, it likely represents the only viable option to ensure sustainability and the passage from intervention efficacy to effectiveness "in the real world" (see Flay et al., 2005),

Furthermore, despite our large sample size, the recruitment of Italian youth exclusively enrolled in technical and vocational schools and residing in an urban area within a Northern region (MIM, 2023) offers valuable insights, but only with respect to this very specific context. In order to extend and assess generalizability of the IP within the broader national context, future implementations should replicate these results in other geographical areas (e.g., Central

and Southern Italian regions), less urbanized environments as well as other types of schools characterized by different sociodemographics in terms of wealth and cultural composition (ISTAT, 2023). For instance, in the upcoming academic year our research team will implement the IP program in an upper secondary International School[7], where students from the majority group account for 50% of the school population and the other half has non-Italian origins, mainly from Asian countries (China, South Korea, Sri Lanka), South America (Colombia, Brazil), and finally Central and Eastern Europe (France, Russia, Czech Republic). In addition to the different ratio of youth with non-Italian cultural backgrounds, this school is also characterized by an overall higher SES among students' families as compared to the average among immigrant-descent population in Italy. This latter factor could be relevant to disentangle the "immigrant background vs SES" issue with respect to the psychological and school adjustment of students from cultural minoritized groups. In other words, because being of immigrant descent often overlaps with lower levels of familial SES, differences between minoritized and majority students that are often ascribed to cultural origin might be, in fact, better explained by socioeconomic disadvantages (OECD, 2019; Schleicher, 2019).

Another possible direction to be explored in future research is the implementation of the IP in non-formal educational contexts. Whereas great emphasis was placed by the original developers on the school-based setting as a key design element to involve a large number of adolescents (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2017), the implementation in non-formal educational settings would enable researchers to reach underrepresented populations, such as asylum seeking and refugee minors, who do not always have access to standard education (Palaiologou et al., 2019; Wiktorin, 2017). To this aim, over the course of the last year, we adapted the IP to the target population of unaccompanied immigrant minors, who are individuals aged less than

[7] International schools are primary or secondary schools that follow programs from a different country than the host country and where lectures are delivered in the native language of the country of reference (e.g., English). Originally established to provide education to diplomats' children or to the expat community, many of these schools are now relatively common in Italy and enroll a certain percentage of Italian students.

18 years who arrive in a foreign country not accompanied or cared by an adult responsible for them (UNHCR, 1997). The pilot implementation in a non-formal educational setting, i.e., residential care communities where these youth were hosted, received positive feedback from both participants and practitioners (i.e., social workers, linguistic-cultural mediators) in terms of salience of the topics and activities. However, a main implementation trial involving a larger number of participants is needed to evaluate the efficacy of the program, albeit feasibility reasons will constitute a determining factor in the choice of our sample size (Lakens, 2022). While the possibility of including underrepresented populations serves scientific purposes and even more ethical responsibilities (Bernal et al., 2009), this new adaptation process was characterized by several conceptual and logistical challenges, that lead to a number of consequent modifications. Hence, particular caution is needed when adapting interventions to target populations that are substantially different from the original one, to avoid arising questions of lack of fidelity and, in turn, validity of the intervention.

Similarly, and thus with equal caution, it would be particularly interesting to adapt and implement the IP intervention in geographical contexts other than the American and European one. Indeed, the current international research group (i.e., US, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden: see Juang et al., 2022) includes countries that greatly differ among themselves with respect to cultural composition, migration history, and policies toward multiculturalism (European Commission, 2018), but that are all enlisted among the so-called WEIRD countries, whose citizens are strongly overrepresented in psychological research (Apicella et al., 2020; Henrich et al., 2010). Preliminary evidence suggests that the IP intervention might be salient and possibly soon delivered among youth in Colombia (Sladek et al., 2020b; Umaña-Taylor, 2023). In addition, future collaborations to be added to the international research consortium could include also low and middle-income countries that have recently been affected by large migration flows (UNHCR, 2023b).

Coming back to the Italian context, based on the initial evidence provided by this research project and in line with recent national guidelines (MIM, 2022), it appears important to incorporate within the school curriculum structured opportunities, such as the IP, to discuss issues of diversity and multiculturalism, and continuously stimulate adolescents' cultural identity development. Extant research already indicates that school-based interventions that support identity formation and promote cultural pluralism have overall positive effects on classroom climate (Juang et al., 2020; Schachner et al., 2023) and interethnic relationships (Phinney et al., 2007; Schwarzenthal et al., 2017). In addition, interventions like the IP can potentially promote a greater sense of belonging to the school environment and ultimately prevent phenomena, such as school dropout, which still disproportionately affect youth from cultural minoritized backgrounds in Italy (Fondazione ISMU, 2023).

6.3 Conclusions

The present work was guided by research questions revolving around the feasibility and salience of an Italian adapted version of the IP intervention, and whether its replication in a very different geographical and social milieu would still prove to be efficacious in stimulating cultural identity exploration and resolution processes, possibly with cascading effects on adolescents' psychosocial adjustment in the long run (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a, 2018b). While acknowledging significant differences with the US context in terms of emphasis given to issues of identity and diversity within the public discourse and socialization environments, our findings supported the relevance of creating protected spaces for youth in Italy to engage with these topics. Indeed, the preliminary adaptation test (i.e., pilot study) confirmed the feasibility, acceptability, and cultural appropriateness of the Italian IP. Subsequently, the large-scale implementation study, designed as a randomized controlled trial at the classroom level, demonstrated the efficacy of the adapted IP in increasing levels of cultural identity exploration

in the intervention (vs control) group. This study also shed light on potential moderators of intervention efficacy, with students being more sensitive to environmental stimuli, in a combined fashion with immigrant background, benefiting the most from participation in the program. Finally, the longitudinal study adopting a person-centered approach to identify profiles of cultural identity processes confirmed the promotive role of resolution with respect to positive psychosocial adjustment also among adolescents who participated in the Italian IP.

This research project provided valuable conceptual and practical insights to be integrated in future intervention implementations, as well as some next steps to be taken, including the ongoing adaptation to non-formal educational settings to reach underrepresented youth such as unaccompanied immigrant minors. Despite the promising work done so far, many limitations need to be addressed to better comprehend and depict our participants' subjective experiences with respect to their plural and multifaceted cultural identities. Moreover, the limited generalizability of our results call for further replication studies in different geographical areas and sociocultural settings to extend ecological validity. Finally, to ensure sustainability of the IP intervention in Italy, it is paramount that schools incorporate the program within the standard educational curriculum. To this aim, the teacher-delivery should be considered a a future viable option, also to move from efficacy to real-world effectiveness.

To conclude, in the present work and throughout three years of intervention implementations, we tried to give a theoretical and practical contribution to the promotion of adolescents' cultural identity development in a country, like Italy, that still struggles to value diversity. In doing so, the fundamental lesson learned is to always come from a place of respect and (personal and scientific) curiosity when approaching the way adolescents see themselves and their participation in multiple cultures, letting them define their own identifications as a way of expressing their authentic selves. Indeed, everything is culture, but we all are much more than our cultures.

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Appendix A

In order to analyze the measurement invariance of our two main measures (Ethnic Identity Scale [EIS] and Highly Sensitive Child Scale [HSCS]), we compared at the descriptive level the posterior distributions of factor loadings separately in the two groups (i.e., students with and without migration background). More in detail, we computed the overlapping area (η; Pastore & Calcagnì, 2019) between the pairs of posteriors to quantify their degree of similarity. Note that, because EIS items are scored on a 4-point Likert type, we considered them as ordinal. Figure A.1 shows the posterior distributions of factor loadings for the 17 items of the EIS questionnaire.

The average percentage of overlap was 40% and ranged between 11% (item 15) and 89% (item 17). The average percentage of overlap was about 34% [11%; 59%] for the exploration factor, about 65% [42%; 89%] for the resolution factor, and about 30% [18%; 45%] for the affimation factor.

Figure A.2 shows the posterior distributions of factor loadings for the 12 items of the HSCS questionnaire. The average percentage of overlap was 53% and ranged between 8% (item 10) and 76% (item 7). The average percentage of overlap was about 54% [31%; 74%] for the Ease of Excitation (EOE) factor, about 40% [8%; 71%] for the Aesthetic Sensitivity (AES) factor, and about 70% [65%; 76%] for the Low Sensory Threshold (LST) factor.

Figure A.1 EIS factor model. Posterior distributions of factor loadings (8000 MCMC replicates)

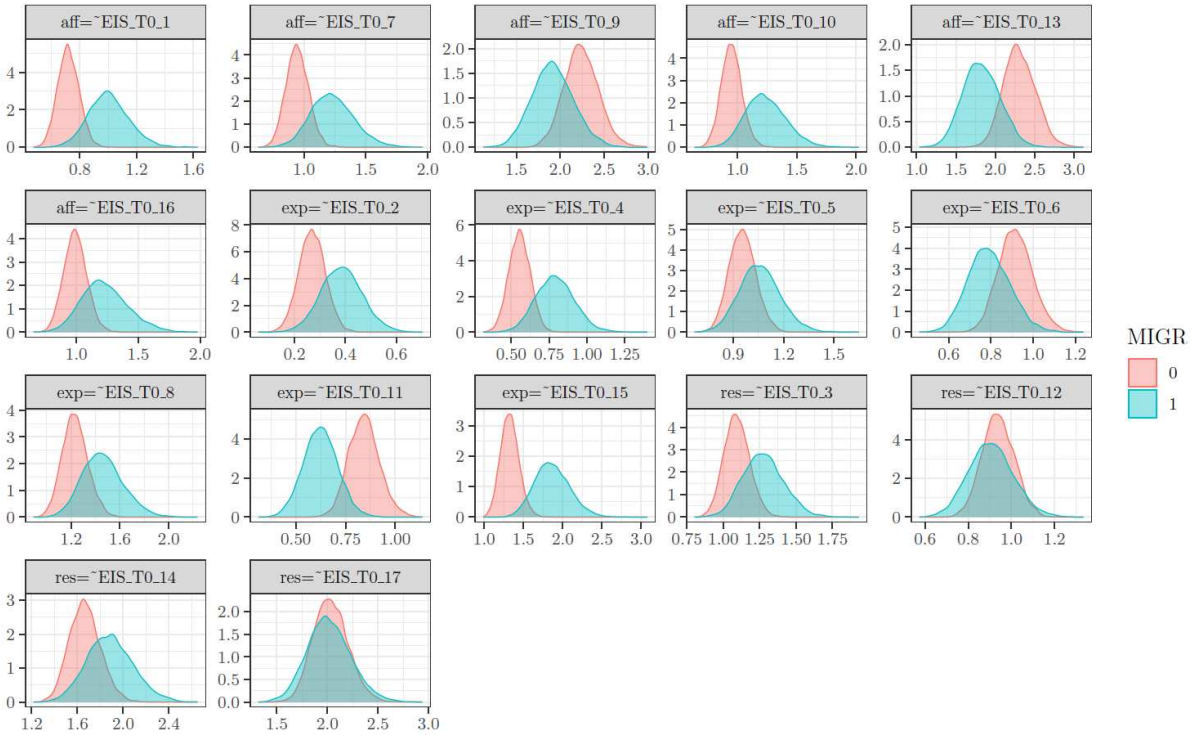
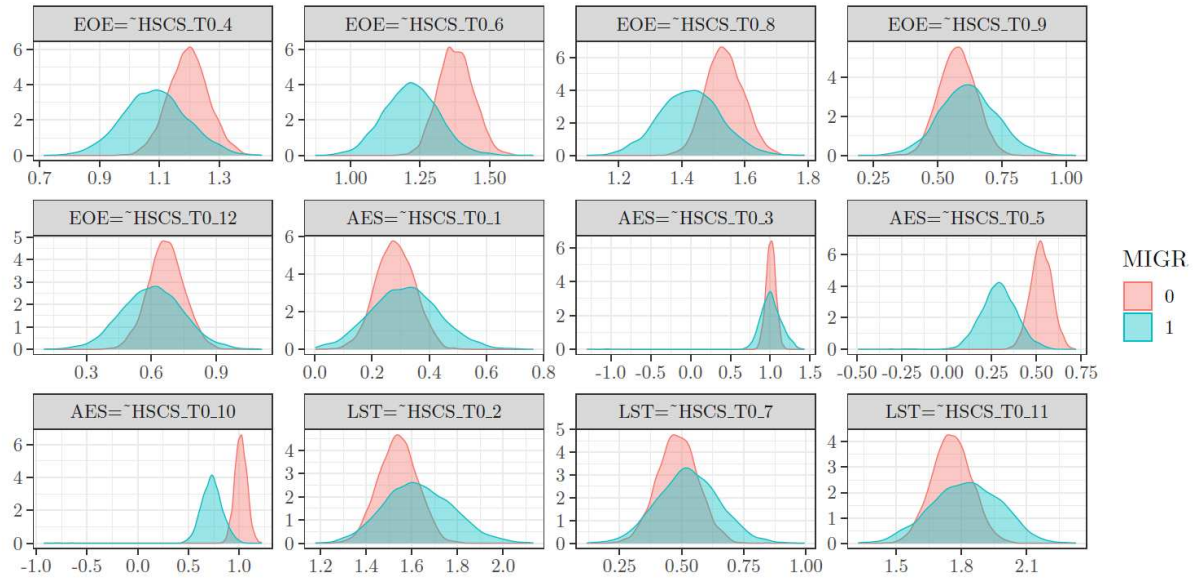


Figure A.2 HSCS factor model. Posterior distributions of factor loadings (4000 MCMC replicates)



We followed up these analyses with a traditional multigroup invariance test, which supported invariance in the two groups for both our measures. For each of the two scales we defined factorial models with four degrees of invariance: 1) configural invariance, estimating the parameters of the models simultaneously in the two groups but without constraints; 2) weak measurement invariance, by constraining the factor loadings to be equal in the two groups; 3) strong measurement invariance, by constraining intercepts/thresholds and loadings to be equal in the two groups; 4) structural invariance, constraining factor loadings, intercepts/thresholds, and covariances among factors. Table A.1 shows the indices for the models evaluated on the EIS scale. Given that the comparisons between Model 1 and Model 2 and between Model 2 and Model 3 were not statistically significant (p = .179 and .12, respectively), and that the differences between CFIs are less than .01 (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002), we can conclude in support of the strong measurement invariance. With respect to structural invariance, we found that it was supported based on differences between CFIs, but not based on comparison between 2. Table A.2 shows the indices for the models evaluated on the HSCS scale. With respect to invariance tests, for this scale data supported all types of invariance.

Table A.1 EIS model multigroup analysis, DWLS estimator

Model	n. par.	χ^2	*df*	Δ_{χ^2}	Δ_{df}	*p*-value	CFI	Δ_{CFI}	RMSEA
a. MIGR = 0	71	500.6	116				0.966		0.077
b. MIGR = 1	71	337.2	116				0.951		0.090
1. $\mathcal{M}_0 = \mathcal{M}_1$	142	837.8	232				0.960		0.081
2. $\Lambda_0 = \Lambda_1$	128	873.6	246	18.6	14	0.179	0.962	0.003	0.076
3. $(\Lambda_0, \tau_0) = (\Lambda_1, \tau_1)$	97	901.1	277	40.4	31	0.120	0.959	-0.003	0.075
4. $(\Lambda_0, \tau_0, \Phi_0) = (\Lambda_1, \tau_1, \Phi_1)$	94	1199.5	280	30.4	3	0.000	0.953	-0.006	0.080

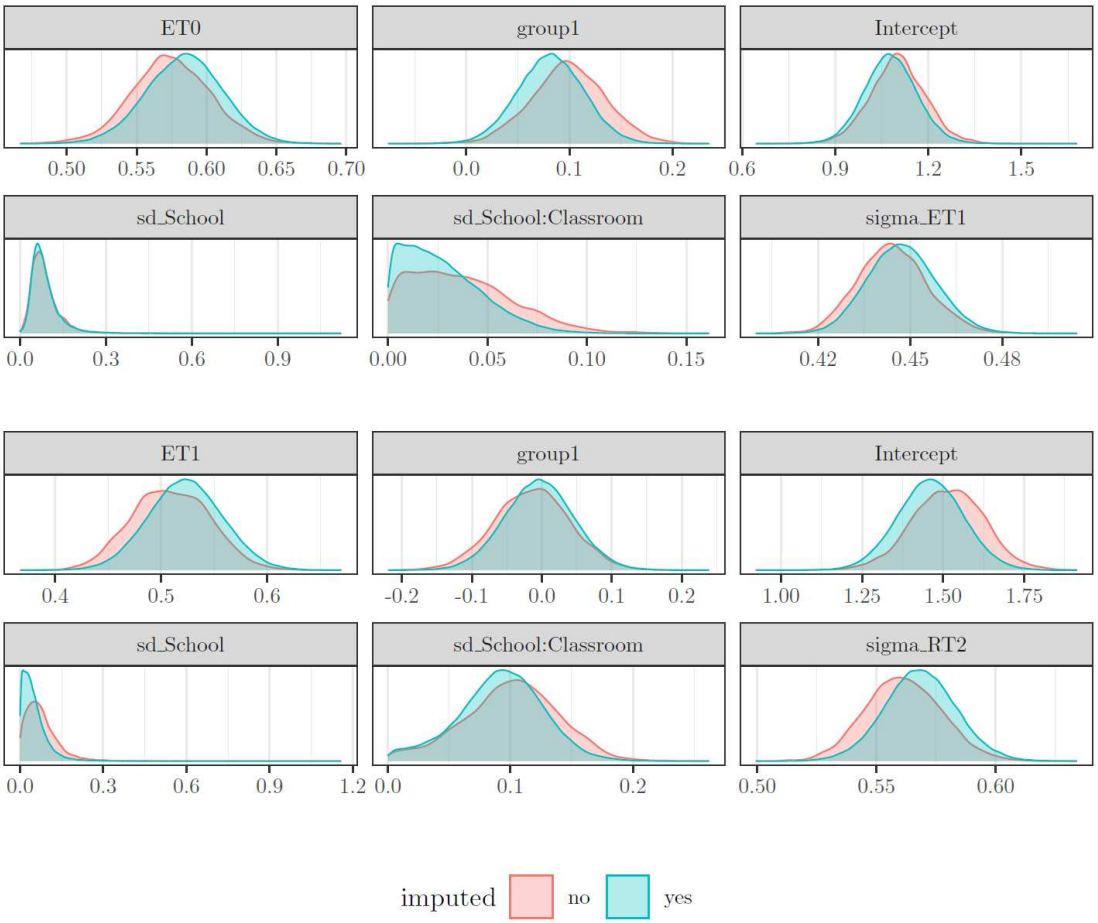
Table A.2 HSCS model multigroup analysis, DWLS estimator

Model	n. par.	χ^2	*df*	Δ_{χ^2}	Δ_{df}	*p*-value	CFI	Δ_{CFI}	RMSEA
a. MIGR = 0	27	175.8	51				0.938		0.064
b. MIGR = 1	27	115.8	51				0.907		0.067
1. $\mathcal{M}_0 = \mathcal{M}_1$	174	273.6	102				0.986		0.062
2. $\Lambda_0 = \Lambda_1$	165	286.5	111	8.7	9	0.464	0.986	-0.000	0.060
3. $(\Lambda_0, \nu_0) = (\Lambda_1, \nu_1)$	108	327.5	168	64.0	57	0.246	0.987	0.001	0.046
4. $(\Lambda_0, \nu_0, \Phi_0) = (\Lambda_1, \nu_1, \Phi_1)$	105	339.6	171	3.0	3	0.384	0.986	-0.001	0.047

Appendix B

Analysis testing our main hypothese were rerun with an imputed dataset applying a Bayesian estimation method to ensure that the findings were not influenced by missing data (i.e., 210 participants excluded from the analytical sample because they had missed at least one survey administration). Specifically, we imputed missing data using the Multivariate Imputation by Chained Equation (MICE) package (van Buuren & Groothuis-Oudshoorn, 2011). We produced 20 new datasets on which we repeated the process of fitting the best model (i.e., model 2, see Table 4.2) by adopting the same priors previously used (see Data Analysis section). Firstly, parts of the model with imputed data did not converge (some Rhats were a little greater than 1.05 - i.e., the maximum value was 1.14). Secondly, the mean difference of model parameters estimates between non-imputed and imputed data was 0.01 (SD = 0.03) and the overlap mean index of all parameters' posteriors (η; Pastore & Calcagnì, 2019) averaged .75 (SD = .09). In conclusion, results obtained after the imputation were comparable to those obtained with non-imputed data (see Figure B.1).

Figure B.1 Comparison of the posteriors (4000 MCMC replicates) of the model 2 parameters obtained on the analytical sample ($N = 747$) and the 20 imputed data samples ($N = 957$).



Note. ET0 = Exploration at pretest; ET1 = Exploration at posttest; RT2 = Resolution at follow-up; group1 = difference between groups.

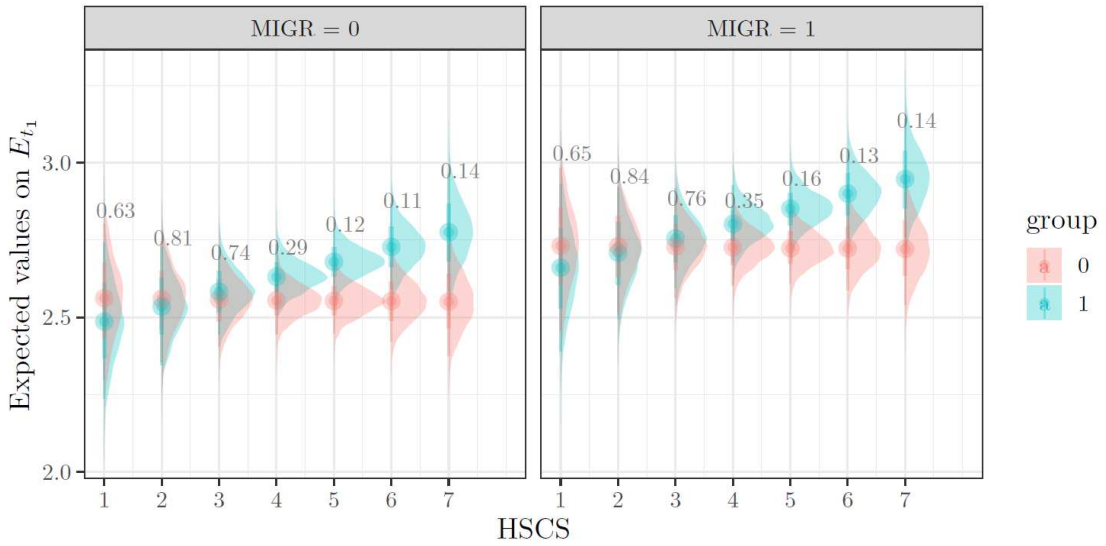
Appendix C

To better understand moderation effects, we calculated effect sizes for models 14 and 10 related to different student subgroups, i.e., for students (1) with an immigrant background and higher levels of sensitivity, (2) with an immigrant background and lower levels of sensitivity, (3) nonmigrant background and higher levels of sensitivity, and (4) nonmigrant background and lower levels of sensitivity. In doing so, we proceeded as follows. First, we chose 7 possible levels of the Highly Sensitive Child Scale measuring environmental sensitivity (i.e., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7). Second, for each environmental sensitivity level x immigrant background x group (control vs intervention) interaction, we sampled 4000 posterior draws of the expected values from Posterior Predictive Distribution (PPD; Gelman et al., 2014) of model 14 and 10. Third, we represented the obtained posteriors in Figures 4.6 and 4.7 and for each pair (control vs intervention), we computed the overlapping index (η; Pastore & Calcagnì, 2019) and Cohen's *d*. The η index measures the degree of overlap between two empirical densities and ranges between 0 (when the distributions are completely disjoint) and 1 (when the distributions completely overlap). Values within this range quantify the similarity/difference of the values in the two groups.

Figure C.1 represents the PPD of the expected values in model 14 as a function of environmental sensitivity level (x-axis), immigrant background (panels), and group (colors). Among students without an immigrant background, those with lower (1) environmental sensitivity scores showed a medium overlap (0.63) and consequently a medium difference in means (Cohen's $d = 0.54$), while those with higher (7) environmental sensitivity scores showed a small overlap (0.14) and Cohen's *d* was 2.37, indicating a large difference in means. Among students with an immigrant background, those with lower (1) environmental sensitivity scores showed a medium overlap (0.65) and a medium difference in means (Cohen's $d = 0.52$), while

those with higher (7) environmental sensitivity scores showed a small overlap (0.14) and Cohen's *d* was 2.34, indicating a large difference in means.

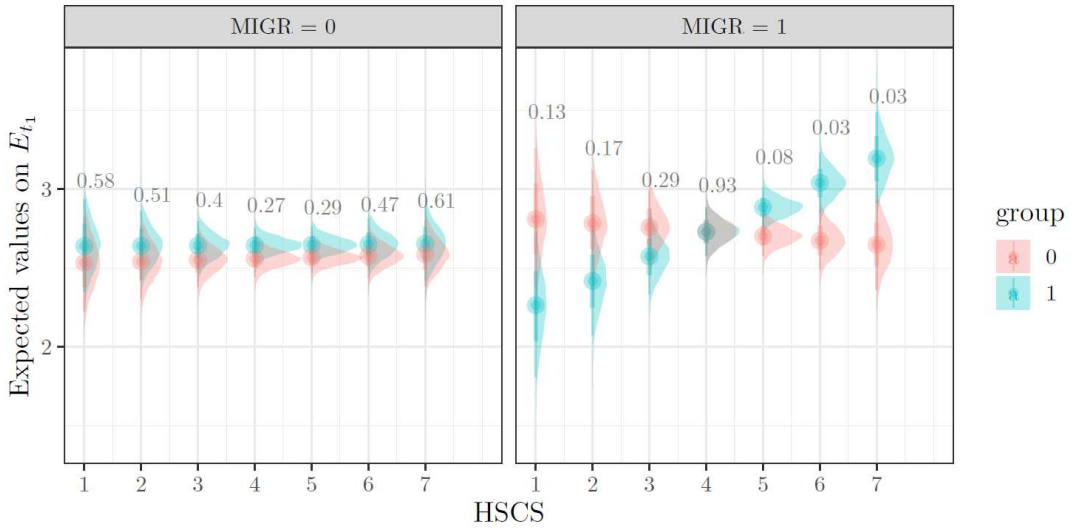
Figure C.1 Model 14 expected values of the Posterior Predictive Distribution (PPD).



Note. E_{t1} = exploration at T1; group = experimental condition (0 = waitlist control, 1 = intervention); MIGR = immigrant background (0 = no, 1 = yes); HSCS = environmental sensitivity. The x-axis represents possible selected scores of environmental sensitivity. For each environmental sensitivity score, the expected values of PPD as a function of immigrant background (panels) and group (colors) are represented. Numbers indicate the proportion of overlap between each couple of distributions.

Figure C.2 represents the PPD of the expected values in model 10 as a function of environmental sensitivity level (x-axis), immigrant background (panels), and group (colors). Among students without an immigrant background, those with lower (1) and higher (7) environmental sensitivity scores showed a medium overlap (0.58 and 0.61, respectively), and consequently a medium difference; the respective Cohen's *d*s were 0.7 and 0.57, also indicating a medium difference in means. Among students with an immigrant background, those with lower (1) and higher (7) environmental sensitivity scores showed a small overlap (0.13 and 0.03, respectively), and consequently a large difference; Cohen's *d*s were 2.41 and 3.76, indicating a very large difference in means.

Figure C.2 Model 10 expected values of the Posterior Predictive Distribution (PPD).



Note. E_{t1} = exploration at T1; group = experimental condition (0 = waitlist control, 1 = intervention); MIGR = immigrant background (0 = no, 1 = yes); HSCS = environmental sensitivity. The x-axis represents possible selected scores of environmental sensitivity. For each environmental sensitivity score, the expected values of PPD as a function of immigrant background (panels) and group (colors) are represented. Numbers indicate the proportion of overlap between each couple of distributions.

Appendix D

For exploratory purposes, we subsequently replicated the best performing model in terms of weight (i.e., model 14) controlling for exploration at baseline. Specifically, we fitted the following two alternative models: model 14, the best fitting model from our previous exploratory model comparison (see Table 4.3); and model 15, which also included the effect of exploration at T0 as predictor of exploration at T1. The equations representing the two models are shown below.

Model 14
ET1 ~ MIGR + group * HSCS + (1 | School/Classroom)
RT2 ~ HSCS + group + MIGR + (1 | School/Classroom)

representing the interaction of group, immigrant background, and environmental sensitivity on exploration at T1, and the main effects of exploration at T1, group, immigrant background, and environmental sensitivity on resolution at T2. The term (1 | School/Classroom) specifies the hierarchical data structure - i.e., classrooms nested in the schools - in order to obtain the random effects parameters.

Model 15
ET1 ~ ET0 + group * MIGR * HSCS + (1 | School/Classroom)
RT2 ~ ET1 + group + MIGR + HSCS + (1 | School/Classroom)

with also the effect of exploration at T0 as predictor of exploration at T1 included.

Table D.1 summarizes the results of model comparison, including the null model. Model 15 was the best, with higher R^2 - 0.38 and 0.36, respectively for exploration at T1 and resolution at T2 - and a plausibility about 168 log-times higher than model 14. In conclusion, when controlling for exploration at T0 the two-way interaction effect is not evident anymore, most likely due to the high correlation between levels of exploration at T0 and T1.

Table D.1 Comparison of multivariate multilevel linear models for exploratory analyses including exploration at T0 as predictor of exploration at T1.

Model	R2ET1	R2RT2	LOO	SE	Weight
Model 15	0.38	0.36	2179.671	65.657	1.00
Model 14	0.06	0.06	2516.604	61.067	0.00
Model 0	0.02	0.03	2534.392	60.363	0.00

Note. $N = 747$. R2ET1 = Bayesian R^2 for exploration at T1; R2RT2 = Bayesian R^2 for resolution at T2; LOO = Leave-one-out cross-validation information criterion; SE = standard error; weight = model weights.

Appendix E

Table E.1 Multiple linear regression model with global identity cohesion at T3 as dependent variable, including main and interactive effect of cultural identity exploration at T1.

Variable	*B (SE)*	*Omnibus F (df)*	η_p^2
Global identity cohesion (T0)	0.44 (.04)	99.41 (1,164)***	.38
Profile membership		8.36 (3,164)***	.13
Profile 2 (stable average)	-0.30 (0.37)		
Profile 3 (increase low-to-average)	0.40 (0.64)		
Profile 4 (increase high-to-higher)	-0.17 (0.45)		
Exploration (T1)	-0.06 (0.09)	0.10 (1,164)	< .01
Exploration x Profile membership		0.85 (3,164)	.01
Exploration x Profile 2	0.14 (0.14)		
Exploration x Profile 3	-0.07 (0.23)		
Exploration x Profile 4	0.21 (0.16)		

Note. $N = 173$. Baseline category for profile membership was profile 1 (stable low). $R^2 = .47$.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table E.2 Multiple linear regression model with self-esteem at T3 as dependent variable, including main and interactive effect of cultural identity exploration at T1.

Variable	*B (SE)*	*Omnibus F (df)*	η_p^2
Self-esteem (T0)	0.56 (0.05)	132.36 (1,164)***	.45
Profile membership		9.09 (3,164)***	.14
Profile 2 (stable average)	-2.25 (4.39)		
Profile 3 (increase low-to-average)	1.81 (7.52)		
Profile 4 (increase high-to-higher)	-7.48 (5.22)		
Exploration (T1)	-1.70 (1.08)	0.29 (1,164)	< .01
Exploration x Profile membership		1.94 (3,164)	.03
Exploration x Profile 2	1.18 (1.61)		
Exploration x Profile 3	0.52 (2.70)		
Exploration x Profile 4	4.34 (1.83)		

Note. $N = 173$. Baseline category for profile membership was profile 1 (stable low). $R^2 = .52$.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table E.3 Multiple linear regression model with depressive symptoms at T3 as dependent variable, including main and interactive effect of cultural identity exploration at T1.

Variable	*B (SE)*	*Omnibus F (df)*	η_p^2
Depressive symptoms (T0)	0.55 (0.05)	112.08 (1,164)***	.41
Profile membership		3.23 (3,164)*	.06
Profile 2 (stable average)	0.93 (4.29)		
Profile 3 (increase low-to-average)	4.76 (7.32)		
Profile 4 (increase high-to-higher)	-5.75 (5.10)		
Exploration (T1)	1.17 (1.07)	1.71 (1,164)	.01
Exploration x Profile membership		0.61 (3,164)	.01
Exploration x Profile 2	-0.96 (1.57)		
Exploration x Profile 3	-2.31 (2.63)		
Exploration x Profile 4	0.92 (1.79)		

Note. $N = 173$. Baseline category for profile membership was profile 1 (stable low). $R^2 = .46$.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table E.4 Multiple linear regression model with academic engagement at T3 as dependent variable, including main and interactive effect of cultural identity exploration at T1.

Variable	*B (SE)*	*Omnibus F (df)*	η_p^2
Academic engagement (T0)	0.36 (0.06)	39.98 (1,164)***	.20
Profile membership		2.64 (3,164)	.05
Profile 2 (stable average)	0.19 (0.46)		
Profile 3 (increase low-to-average)	0.39 (0.78)		
Profile 4 (increase high-to-higher)	0.07 (0.54)		
Exploration (T1)	0.11 (0.11)	2.30 (1,164)	.01
Exploration x Profile membership		0.14 (3,164)	< .01
Exploration x Profile 2	-0.04 (0.17)		
Exploration x Profile 3	-0.09 (0.28)		
Exploration x Profile 4	0.07 (0.19)		

Note. $N = 173$. Baseline category for profile membership was profile 1 (stable low). $R^2 = .26$.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table E.5 Multiple linear regression model with other-group orientation at T3 as dependent variable, including main and interactive effect of cultural identity exploration at T1.

Variable	*B (SE)*	*Omnibus F (df)*	η_p^2
Other-group orientation (T0)	0.55 (0.08)	46.18 (1,164)***	.22
Profile membership		0.45 (3,164)	.01
Profile 2 (stable average)	0.09 (0.48)		
Profile 3 (increase low-to-average)	-0.03 (0.82)		
Profile 4 (increase high-to-higher)	-0.42(0.57)		
Exploration (T1)	0.10 (0.12)	3.25 (1,164)	.02
Exploration x Profile membership		0.39 (3,164)	.01
Exploration x Profile 2	-0.02 (0.18)		
Exploration x Profile 3	0.01 (0.29)		
Exploration x Profile 4	0.19 (0.20)		

Note. $N = 173$. Baseline category for profile membership was profile 1 (stable low). $R^2 = .28$.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table E.6 Multiple linear regression model with prosocial behavior at T3 as dependent variable, including main and interactive effect of cultural identity exploration at T1.

Variable	*B (SE)*	*Omnibus F (df)*	η_p^2
Prosocial behavior (T0)	0.63 (0.08)	66.21 (1,164)***	.29
Profile membership		0.05 (3,164)	< .01
Profile 2 (stable average)	0.82 (0.59)		
Profile 3 (increase low-to-average)	2.12 (1.01)		
Profile 4 (increase high-to-higher)	0.22 (0.71)		
Exploration (T1)	0.12 (0.15)	5.00 (1,164)*	.08
Exploration x Profile membership		1.91 (3,164)	.03
Exploration x Profile 2	-0.32 (0.22)		
Exploration x Profile 3	-0.68 (0.36)		
Exploration x Profile 4	0.05 (0.25)		

Note. $N = 173$. Baseline category for profile membership was profile 1 (stable low). $R^2 = .37$.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Acknowledgments

Despite my name being on the cover, this thesis, like my whole PhD, is the result of a passionate and unceasing team work. I have specifically chosen to define it "unceasing" and not "tireless", because tiredness was a predominant feeling throughout this whole experience, which has been, nonetheless, one of the most fulfilling of my life.

First of all, I want to acknowledge the people who really made the Italian *Identity Project* possible: our participants. Although they will never be aware of this – because, ugh, reading something for a period longer than an Instagram reel or a Tik Tok video – I deeply thank all 1,800-something of them unpredictable teenagers who were active protagonists in the program over the last three years and who let us enter their world even for an hour a week over the span of a few months. Although it is always hard to accept criticism, especially about a project you believe so much in, I feel grateful also to those who complained about the sessions being "boring" or "unuseful" and explaining us why and helping us better the *Identity Project* for the participants to come. I will be honest, I do not feel very grateful to those students who almost set a classroom on fire with my fellow facilitators inside or to those who physically or psychologically tried to hurt their classmates or my colleagues…but there is always room for improvement. One important, core message that we learned first hand from the program is not to guilt or shame youth (or ourselves) when they make mistakes addressing sensitive topics, but make sure that they can learn from these mistakes and make different choices in the future, while also protecting those who might feel hurt or threatened by their words or actions. So, here's to the many more different and more respectful choices in the future, that we can contribute to build together.

Alongside the first-hand participants, I am also very grateful to all those adult figures (teachers, school principals, linguistic cultural mediators, parents, legal guardians, …) who

vicariously participated in this project and helped us make it become a reality. Amidst many (COVID-related and non) challenges, you gave a unique contribution to this program and I am hopeful that accompanying the youth you care for along this path was also beneficial to you, in terms of clarity and awareness with respect to your own cultural identity.

Now, a heartfelt acknowledgment goes to my academic family, who enriched my relationship tree in so many ways. First and foremost, my supervisor, Ughetta Moscardino, who is so much more than a supervisor that I dare to call her my "super-super-visor". You are THE mentor, and I wouldn't be here if it weren't for you (quite literally). Thank you for your patience, kindness, but also honesty, in showing me the direction and rules of this job, even while allowing me to follow and create my own. I will stop here because, let's face it, we are both quite emotional – and that's what makes us passionate and committed "career women", so no reason to feel ashamed of it, quite the opposite, we should celebrate it.

Beside her (also quite literally), I want to thank my co-"super-super-visor", Gianmarco Altoè, who many times made this PhD journey funnier and lighter than what one would expect. I do actually understand statistics when you explain them to me and I see you value even my smallest achievements (e.g., three hours to change the color of a graphic in *R*), which speaks of your skills as a teacher as much as of your goodness of heart.

And the time has come to bring in all the undergraduate students and interns who, throughout the years and project's editions, have been fondly known as "Team Moscardino" (still waiting for the t-shirts). In alphabetical order: Adriana Jabbour, Anita Maria Rollando, Anna Pangrazzi, Caterina Rompianesi, Claudia D'Agostini, Daniela Bossi, Diana Curtolo, Elena Salvia, Elisa Cervi, Finicia Milan Mutombo, Francesca Bennato, Francesca De Sensi, Fulvia Iadanza, Giorgia Boccon, Mari Diana Anttila, Michela Forcella, Noemi Baino, Sandra Sosnierz, Sarah Rodini, Serena Miloni, Silvia Pescatore, Silvia Zampieri, Valentina Catalano, Valentina Molinaro, Virginia Barchetti, Xiwei Zhang. The "*Progetto Identità*" is what it is

thanks to you all and I will never really be able to fully reward you for that. I have learned, and keep learning, so much from you, and you should be proud of the difference you have made in many youth who will become more aware, sensitive, and open-minded citizens of our world. You should be proud also of the times you felt like you failed at it, because facing our limits is something we all need to do on our way to whatever adulthood is. I know that you, unlike me, have a life outside of the *Identity Project* and thus our ways have already parted or will part at some point. But I do hope the memories of our team will stay with you for a long time, when you will be established professionals in your field and somebody will ask advice about a digital tool to engage participants and you will instinctively recommend Mentimeter.

In homage to my cultural identity, I have started from my Italian-based network, but the relationship tree just keeps growing in this and other continents. My endless thanks to Adriana Umaña-Taylor, for creating and nurturing the *Identity Project*, thus making it possible for so many more of us to follow you in this "search and work toward social justice". On a more personal note, thank you for welcoming and guiding me during that overseas stay that challenged me, but also built me so much as a researcher, a psychologist, and a human being. The same deep thanks go to all the AERID lab members and IP fellows, who helped me navigate with courage and compassion my first conversations about race and ethnicity (in these terms, at least) and never let me feel alone during my (privileged) immigrant experience.

I want to acknowledge all the amazing scholars who are part of the "Global IP" team, from the United States as well as Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden (so far). Because our group continues to grow, I won't be able to mention each one of you, but I want you all to know that the work you are doing in your respective countries and our opportunities for exchange (personal, professional, semi-professional, via email, Slack, in-person, imaginary conversations in my head) are a valuable and constant source of inspiration. Looking at the pictures of our annual meetings makes me feel a bit more trustful and confident

of what we can do as a community, in a world that looks increasingly dark. Special thanks go to Maja Schachner, who first made me discover the wonders of the *Identity Project* and provided so many suggestions and help along the way. And to Sophie Hölscher, for sharing with me a very special and not-so-stereotypical Italian experience: and because every time we talk, I think I want to be like you when I grow up (although I'm older than you, so I'll see how that works) and you make me dream of a fairer and braver Academia, a place where all us young scholars could really feel they belong.

I also want to thank my co-authors, Francesca Lionetti and Massimiliano Pastore, for their invaluable work, insights, and guidance in the analyses and environmental sensitivity field. That Registered Report has been the most ambitious (and rigorous) research venture I have been part of yet, and I'm grateful to you both for being there with and for me.

Finally, you. I saved you for (almost) last because the best things always come at the end (maybe that wasn't the saying). You who decided that 2020, the year of the pandemic, would be a great year to apply for a PhD scholarship in Psychological Sciences (what were we thinking?). Honestly, I have no words to describe how precious and fundamental the relationships we built in the last three years were to get me safe and sound to the end of this PhD. I will treasure the laughters, the birthday parties, meeting in piazzetta, figuring out how to apply for a "missione" together, nodding and smiling for the entire School Lunch to make each other feel supported. Also, I will always cherish that moment when your computer breaks the week before the thesis deadline and your amazing colleague and friend lends you hers (I promised, F). So, as many of us do when we're too moved, I'm going to joke about it and share with you that today is the last day to upload the final version of the doctoral thesis and UNIPD has announced "disruptions to UNIWEB". I completed the thesis and acknowledgements yesterday, but there was one thing that was left to do: writing this part about you. And that was so important to risk running into the disruptions. This is how much you matter to me. Finding

you and acknolewdging you, in the end, feels more important than the the PhD itself. Though, I really hope UNIWEB will start working again anytime soon, so that we can add the post-defense celebration to all the beautiful memories we already have.

Finally (for real), I want to thank my reviewers, for devoting their time and patience to go through this long, long work. I hope you got to the end and noticed this acknowledgment, and that you enjoyed the reading surely not as much as I enjoyed being involved in the *Identity Project*, but at least a little bit.