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READINESS FOR AGGRESSION AND ETHNIC PREJUDICE AMONG ITALIAN ADOLESCENTS

*Giovanni PIUMATTI, Davide MARENGO, Cristina MOSSO,
Emanuela RABAGLIETTI**

University of Turin, Department of Psychology, Turin, Italy

ABSTRACT

The current research examined the relationship between individual readiness for aggression and perceived social distance from ethnic out-groups in adolescents. Marked social distance towards an out-group was considered as a sign of greater prejudice towards that group. Results showed that (a) social distances revealed ethnic out-groups hierarchies; and (b) having higher scores on readiness for aggression traits that stand for socially determined aggressive acts predicted higher social distance from the most rejected ethnic out-group (i.e., Roma out-group). The findings suggest that individual traits of readiness for aggression may influence the willingness to engage in contact with ethnic out-groups among adolescents.

KEYWORDS: *readiness for aggression, prejudice, social distances, ethnic hierarchies, adolescence*

Too often in our modern multiethnic societies we assist to episodes of perpetuated discrimination and violence towards out-groups fostering prejudice in the name of national, cultural or religious differences. Among youths, these episodes can be ascribed to other phenomena such as bullying where aggressive and antisocial behaviors are especially directed towards who is considered “different”. Indeed, prejudice such as other forms of negative intergroup attitudes, is associated to many social problems from the exclusion of ethnic minorities, immigrants, or other groups, to ill health, or even a more generally negative quality of life (see, Paradies, 2006). Negative attitudes are multifaceted and normally distinguished into three components: cognitive (attributing negative characteristics such as being mean or aggressive to members of the out-group), emotional (e.g., liking them less), and behavioral (e.g., exhibiting negative behavior such as discrimination) (Brewer, 1999). In line with the broad range of different operationalization, recent social-developmental research has studied prejudice within a broader framework of

* Corresponding author:
E-mail: giovanni.piumatti@unito.it

intergroup attitude development and clearly indicated that prejudice and other forms of biased intergroup attitudes start in early childhood as soon as the basic processes of social categorization and identification emerge (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011).

This has led to the identification of important individual and social developmental factors and processes. For example, it has been proposed that the development of abilities such as social identity (Nesdale, 2004), and moral decision making (Killen & Rutland, 2011) are crucial contributors to intergroup attitude development in children. Other research has focused more on social variables such as social norms (Rutland, 2004), and intergroup threat (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). However, although all this research documents major scientific progress in understanding the emergence of prejudiced attitudes, there is an ongoing debate over when individual and social factors might crystallize in adolescence favoring the formation of steady prejudice (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2012; Verkuyten & Slioter, 2007). In fact, we know that adolescence is a critical phase of active identity development that includes increasing exploration and formation of one's own social (ethnic) identities (Crocetti, Rabaglietti, & Sica, 2012; Degner & Wendura, 2010; French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006). During these years, adolescents deliberately face their ethnic, cultural, and national identities and begin to more consciously identify with their in-groups. Therefore, identification processes taking place during this age period may accentuate the perceived differences between one's own group and other groups. For example, some studies have shown that interracial behavior is related to individual aggressiveness and racial attitudes of the family and peers in adolescents (Patchen, Davidson, Hofmann, & Brown, 1977). Others evidenced a positive relation between ethnic and national identity from one side and prejudice from another side (Verkuyten, 2001). However, the underlying developmental processes of prejudice among younger populations (i.e., adolescents) have not yet been fully investigated. Thus, given the rapid changes in the racial and ethnic composition of our societies it is crucial to focus on the age period of adolescence to evidence sources of individual differences that may lead to significant variation in the extent to which forms of prejudice are manifested. Hence, in this present study we looked at the social development of prejudice during adolescence, contending that individual traits of readiness and endorsement for aggression may predict prejudice towards ethnic groups.

Social distance as a measure of prejudice

Significant prejudice research has considered social distance as an attitudinal element of prejudice that is more easily measured (e.g., Jackman, 1994; Parillo & Donogue, 2005). Indeed, according to the seminal Bogardus's work (1958) on social distance as research technique for measuring interpersonal as well as intergroup ethnic attitudes, social distance remains an extensive tool to study prejudice by evaluating perceived similarity as well as self-serving bias towards dissimilar out-group (Warner & Kiddoo, 2013). More specifically, it measures the

willingness of an individual to interact with group members on different levels of intimacy (Bogardus, 1958). A measure of social distance toward a group conceptualizes the desired level of intimacy in relations with group members as an indicator of attitudes or prejudice toward that group (Crandall & Warner, 2005). More social distance toward a group is a sign of greater prejudice and less positivity toward that group (Biernat & Crandall, 1999).

Such in-group preferences, together with stereotyping, favor the formation of ethnic hierarchies in multiethnic societies (e.g., Lange, 2000). Ethnicity in addition to the socio-economic status of the out-group and the perceived threat from the out-group are among the most accessible criteria for constructing such in-group versus out-group distinctions (Pepels & Hagendoorn, 2000). Accordingly, ethnocentrism or cultural superiority beliefs and stereotypes locate out-groups closer or further away from the in-group depending on how socially desirable the out-group is perceived by the in-group (e.g., Hagendoorn, Drogendijk, Tumanov, & Hraba, 1998). Such tendencies play an important role in forming racial and ethnic prejudice already during adolescence (Snellman & Ekehammar, 2005).

Aggression and prejudice

Few studies have associated the out-group membership with likelihood of being addressed by aggression-related thoughts (Miller, Pedersen, Earleywine, & Pollock, 2003; Reijntjes, Thomaes, Kamphuis, Bushman, Reitz, & Telch, 2013). In general, those results showed that the stronger the dissimilarity between target of displaced aggression and aggressor, the higher the level of displaced aggression. Indeed, prejudice and aggression share many common characteristics such as the involvement of negative reaction to a target and behavioral consequences that might lead to reactions such as harming others (Grossarth-Maticcek, Eysenck, & Vetter, 1989). Yet, other findings suggest that ethnicity can be associated with patterns of peer aggression. For example, Kiesner, Dishion, and Poulin, (2000) pointed out that if an individual is prone to behave in an aversive way towards others, he or she will have attitudes predicting the same pattern. Moreover, Lickel, Miller, Stenstrom, Denson, and Schmader (2006) argued that aggression, predicated on the basis of group membership, has the potential to result in socially shared and enduring hostilities. Thus, it might be hypothesized that a correlation exists between individual traits of readiness for aggression and ethnic prejudice.

Readiness for aggression

Anderson and Bushman (2002) defined aggression as “*any behavior directed toward another individual that is carried out with the proximate (immediate) intent to cause harm*” (p.28). The term readiness for aggression describes a preference for aggressive behavior based on the same mechanism of aggression (Frączek, 1992). In particular, the readiness for aggression is defined as a set of specific psychological processes and structures that make a necessary internalized condition

of aggressive act activated by internal and/or external stimulation (Mummendey, Linneweber, & Löschper, 1984).

Readiness for aggression is a stable construct and contributes to the stability of aggressive behavior over time (McConville & Cornell, 2003). In fact, although it can certainly be assumed that changes due to maturing and learning processes influence individual aggressive traits during the life span, readiness and reaction tendencies play an important triggering role (Zumkley, 1992). Indeed, several studies have found that youth who endorse aggressive beliefs and youth who believe aggressive behavior will achieve positive results are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior (Perry, Perry, & Rasmussen, 1986; Slaby & Guerra, 1988). Previous research has described different dimensions of readiness for aggression according to individual levels of social-moral approval/disapproval of restrained (i.e., irony), extreme (i.e., torturing) violent/aggressive acts that appear in social context (Ramirez & Andreu, 2006) and individual normative beliefs about aggression (physical, verbal, etc.) that appear in an interpersonal, gender related context (Huesmann & Guerra, 1997). All these dimensions represent a constellation of various phenomena and intrapsychic processes responsible for the aggressive behavior regulation (Frączek, 2010). Similar to the work of Frączek, Konopka, and Smulczyk (2008), in the current study we looked at three individual traits of readiness for aggression: Emotional Impulsive Readiness, characterized by functions that are responsible for number and intensity of short-term aggressive responses to provocations (natural and conditioned annoying stimuli, frustration, distress, etc.); Habitual Cognitive Readiness, defined by specific habits, scripts/schemata of behaviors and beliefs both implemented into social roles as moderator of quality, number and intensity of habitual as well as planned aggressive acts in response to requirements and/or role oriented tasks; and Personality Immanent Readiness, a trait for stable and immanent need to hurt others accompanied by positive emotions (satisfaction) for the realization of the aggressive acts.

Hypotheses

First, we hypothesized that participants would have reported a hierarchical list of ethnic groups preferences in terms of perceived social distances towards specific ethnic groups with the in-group (Italian) listed as the closest. Second, we hypothesized the existence of a positive association between adolescents' readiness for aggression and their self-reported social distances from the least accepted ethnic out-groups observed in this study.

METHOD

Sample and procedures

Four hundred ninety-nine high school students – 164 boys (33%) and 335 girls (67%) – living in the Northwest of Italy¹ took part into this study. The average age was 17.65 (*Range* = 15-21; *SD* = 1.15). Questionnaires were submitted once in an anonymous form during regular class hours in the presence of the researchers and previous teachers' consensus. In addition, informed consensus was obtained from the parents of the students who were less than 18 years old at the time the research took place. Each questionnaire consisted of three parts (in order): backgrounds information, the Readiness for Interpersonal Aggression Inventory (Frączek, Konopka, & Smulczyk, 2009) and the Bogardus Social Distance Scale (Bogardus, 1958). The Italian versions of the scales included in the questionnaire were created by translating and back translating them by English native speakers.

Measures

Readiness for Aggression

We adopted an Italian version of the Readiness for Interpersonal Aggression Inventory to measure adolescents' individual readiness for aggression. Participants were asked to answer “yes” or “no” to thirty statements after being asked to consider if these statements corresponded to their personal attitude towards feelings of anger and aggressive states of mind or behaviors. Three patterns of readiness for aggression were measured through this inventory by grouping the items and summing the scores of each one of them (“yes” corresponds to a score equal to “1” and “no” corresponds to a score equal to “0”) so that participants scored on each pattern on a 0 to 10 scale. Patterns of readiness for aggression are (1) Emotional – Impulsive Readiness for Aggression (E-IRA) (e.g., “I have sudden angry outbursts”); (2) Habitual – Cognitive Readiness for Aggression (H-CRA) (e.g., “I think that some people don't deserve to be treated very nicely”); and (3) Personality – Immanent Readiness for Aggression (P-IRA) (e.g., “I sometimes feel like hurting someone without any obvious reason”). A confirmatory factor analysis using Mplus 6.11 (Muthén & Muthén, 2007) was performed hypothesizing the presence of these three factors in our Italian sample. The data fit the model well: $\chi^2(63, N = 499) = 473.5, p < .01$; RMSEA = .035; CFI = .92. The freely estimated parameters were all significant (see Table 1). In addition, the analysis of internal consistency was also satisfactory, with Cronbach's alphas equals to .64, .79, and .71 for E-IRA, H-CRA, and P-IRA respectively.

¹ Although socio-economic status was not directly measured, these schools included students from a wide range of social classes (low and working classes through upper-middle class).

Table 1.

Confirmatory factor analysis standardized loadings for the Readiness for Interpersonal Aggression Inventory

Item	Loading	S.E.	Est./S.E.	P-Value
<i>Factor 1. Emotional – Impulsive Readiness for Aggression (E-IRA)</i>				
1. I get angry easily, but it passes quickly.	.578	.074	7.793	< .01
2. It happens that I lose control of myself during a heated argument.	.702	.055	12.811	< .01
3. After a failure I feel angry.	.511	.070	7.321	< .01
4. When I'm angry I slam doors.	.504	.065	7.748	< .01
5. Sometimes I have bouts of anger.	.561	.063	8.956	< .01
6. When somebody provokes me I can scream and offend.	.708	.062	11.469	< .01
7. When I'm angry I raise my voice.	.551	.076	7.241	< .01
8. When I am irritated I use profanity and blasphemy.	.511	.063	8.126	< .01
9. I get easily angry when someone accuses me.	.547	.064	8.562	< .01
10. It happens to have attacks of rage during which I throw away stuff.	.675	.06	10.302	< .01
<i>Factor 2. Habitual – Cognitive Readiness for Aggression (H-CRA)</i>				
11. I think there are people who deserve a nice little treat.	.647	.045	14.466	< .01
12. I think in certain situations the use of violence is essential.	.738	.039	18.973	< .01
13. We need to give a lesson to those who deserve it.	.716	.038	18.932	< .01
14. I think it's fair to treat people the same way they treated you.	.593	.042	14.077	< .01
15. I have the right to behave badly towards those who bothered me.	.595	.046	12.950	< .01
16. I think one can avenge those who deserve it.	.699	.039	18.083	< .01
17. I think you can use violence to defend others.	.767	.032	23.665	< .01
18. Causing problems to who annoy us is acceptable.	.638	.047	13.645	< .01
19. I can use violence to defend someone.	.716	.037	19.351	< .01
20. I think that using force against others is acceptable.	.744	.046	16.037	< .01
<i>Factor 3. Personality – Immanent Readiness for Aggression (P-IRA)</i>				
21. I find pleasure in watching scenes of violence.	.632	.066	9.541	< .01
22. To achieve something important I am willing to injure someone.	.623	.068	9.200	< .01
23. It happens that I enjoy more intense quarrels.	.558	.057	9.715	< .01
24. When I bother others I improve my mood.	.512	.086	5.937	< .01
25. Sometimes people get scared of me and this makes me feel good.	.780	.059	13.232	< .01
26. Even if someone is suffering because of my behavior it does not bother me much.	.516	.074	6.929	< .01
27. Sometimes, without good reason, I would like to displease someone.	.525	.081	6.487	< .01
28. It happens that ridicule someone causes me pleasure.	.625	.060	10.389	< .01
29. I know how to scare others to control them.	.778	.053	14.789	< .01
30. I happen to sow discord between one person and the others when I dislike him/her.	.522	.069	7.570	< .01

Social distance

As a measure of prejudice and ethnic stereotyping we adopted a translated and adapted version of the Bogardus Social Distance Scale (Bogardus, 1958). Each participant was asked the extent to which they would be accepting of each group in a specific relationship. Types of relationships included: “Marriage” – Score = 1; “Family members” – Score = 2; “Close neighbors” – Score = 3; “Classmates” – Score = 4; “Street neighbors” – Score = 5; “Fellow citizens” – Score = 6; “Immigrants” – Score = 7; “Tourists” – Score = 8; “Excluded from my country” – Score = 9. The Bogardus Social Distance Scale (1958) is a cumulative scale as the agreement with any item implies the ones with all preceding items (a score of “1” for a group is taken to indicate no social distance). Participants were asked to assign to the above mentioned relationships cases each group out of the following list: Italian, German, Roma, Ukrainian, Spanish, Arab and Polish. These groups were chosen to provide a variety of out-groups who experience varying degrees of stereotypes and prejudice in the Italian culture in comparison with the original in-group. In particular, Roma, Ukrainian, Arabs and Polish are among the most representative immigrant ethnic groups in Italy². On the other hand, German and Spanish (control groups) are present in Italy more often as temporarily guests (e.g., tourists, work).

RESULTS

First, descriptive analyses were performed to explore correlations among study variables. Subsequently, in order to test the hypothesis of the existence of ethnic hierarchies, we conducted a repeated measure ANOVA and post hoc tests between ethnic prejudice/stereotyping scores using Bonferroni correction for family wise error. Finally, to test the hypothesis of a relationship between readiness for aggression and ethnic prejudice in our sample of adolescents, we ran a series of hierarchical regressions with the predictors of social distance scores from each ethnic group entered in this order: first the variables age and gender; secondly readiness for aggression patterns (E-IRA, H-CRA and P-IRA).

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 reports the results of descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among all the variables of the study. Figure 1 depicts means of social distance regarding each ethnic group. Correlations among scores of social distances from ethnic groups ranged from $-.17$ to $.14$. Correlations among readiness for aggression patterns ranged from $.22$ to $.41$. The highest positive correlation between social distance

² Roma (130.000); Ukrainian (223.782); Arab (668.848); Polish (112.000) (Source: IDOS, 2012: Dossier Statistico Immigrazione Caritas/Migrantes).

scores and readiness for aggression was found to be between H-CRA with social distance from Roma ($r = .15; p < .01$) and E-IRA with social distance from Roma ($r = .10; p < .05$). That is to say that individuals willing to engage in less social contacts with Roma ethnic group correlated with higher scores of readiness for aggression describing habits and believes implemented into social roles (H-CRA) and anger proneness and lack of emotional control (E-IRA).

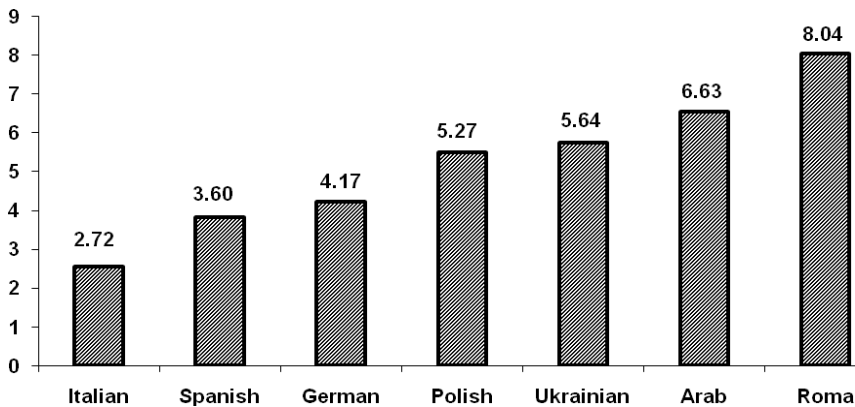
Table 2.
Results of descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among study variables ($N = 499$)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	<i>M (SD)</i>
1. Age	--											17.65 (1.15)
2. Gender (335 females, 67%)	.02	--										
Rediness for aggression												
3. E-IRA	.07	.03	--									5.75 (2.23)
4. H-CRA	.04	-.33**	.26**	--								4.62 (2.76)
5. P-IRA	-.03	-.16**	.22**	.41*	--							1.58 (1.88)
Social distance												
6. Italian	.05	-.05	.01	.02	.07	--						2.55 (2.29)
7. Spanish	.01	.07	-.02	-.02	.03	.14**	--					3.83 (2.19)
8. German	-.08	.02	-.04	.00	-.01	.02	.07	--				4.23 (2.06)
9. Polish	.04	.10*	-.10	-.07	-.03	-.08	-.03	-.04	--			5.48 (1.63)
10. Ukrainian	.01	.05	.00	.02	.02	-.07	-.06	-.06	-.15**	--		5.75 (1.52)
11. Arab	-.05	-.03	.01	.03	-.01	-.17**	-.07	-.13**	-.13**	-.09*	--	6.55 (1.73)
12. Roma	-.06	.02	.10*	.15**	.02	-.15**	-.08	-.07	-.07	.05	.07	8.09 (1.74)

Note. Gender was coded 0 for male and 1 for female.

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

Figure 1.
Means social distance regarding each ethnic group



A repeated measures ANOVA with a Greenhouse-Geisser correction determined that social distance scores differed statistically significantly between ethnic out-groups, $F(5.53, 2755.49) = 447.91, p < .001$. In addition, post hoc tests confirmed our first hypothesis stating about the existence of ethnic hierarchies. In fact, social distance scores were all statistically significantly different between ethnic groups. P-values were corrected for family-wise error such that statistical significance required a p of $0.05/6 = 0.008$ ($p < .01$). The means and standard deviations of social distance for the total sample were (in ascending order): Italian, $M = 2.55, SD = 2.29$; Spanish, $M = 2.19, SD = 3.83$; German, $M = 4.23, SD = 2.06$; Polish, $M = 5.48, SD = 1.63$; Ukrainian, $M = 5.75, SD = 1.52$; Arab, $M = 6.55, SD = 1.73$; Roma, $M = 8.09, SD = 1.74$.

Regression models predicting ethnic prejudice and stereotyping

In order to test the hypothesis regarding the correlation between readiness for aggression patterns and social distances, we conducted seven hierarchical regressions, one for each ethnic out-group (see Table 3). In each model predictors were entered in this order: first the variables age and gender (coded 0 for female and 1 for male), secondly, readiness for aggression (E-IRA, H-CRA and P-IRA).

Table 3.
Hierarchical regressions models. Age, gender, and readiness for aggression predicting social distance scores from target ethnic groups

Predictors	Ethnic groups													
	Italian		Spanish		German		Polish		Ukrainian		Arab		Roma	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.01		.01		.01		.01		.00		.00		.0	
Age		.05		.02		-.07		.05		.01		-.05		-.07
Gender		-.05		.08		.03		.09		.07		-.03		.07
Step 2	.00		.00		.00		.01		.00		.00		.03**	
E-IRA		.003		-.04		-.04		-.11		-.02		.01		.07
H-CRA		-.02		-.00		.03		-.03		.04		.03		.18*
P-IRA		.07		.06		-.01		.02		.02		-.03		-.07

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

Among the three measures of readiness for aggression only H-CRA significantly predicted social distance scores from one of the listed out-groups, namely the Roma out-group ($\beta = .18, p < .01$). This result was underlined by a significant contribution of E-IRA, H-CRA and P-IRA as a whole when entered simultaneously at Step 2 in the analysis ($\Delta R^2 = .03, p < .001$, β s ranging between $-.07$ and $.18$). Thus, the high individuals approved aggressive acts implemented into social roles and in response to requirements and/or role oriented tasks the high they rated their social distance from the most rejected ethnic out-group, namely Roma. Such results support our second hypothesis regarding the existence of a positive association between readiness for aggression and the perceived social distance from the most rejected social out-group.

DISCUSSION

This study provides further evidence for the existence of perceived ethnic hierarchies within the same national social group among Italian adolescents. Such results are aligned with previous research conducted in Italy (Mancini & Panari, 2010) and others European countries (Kleinpenning & Hagendoorn, 1993; Verkuyten & Kinket, 2000) which have shown how within members of the same nationality representatives of others ethnic out-groups are listed according to the willingness to engage in various degrees of social contact with them. The strong, almost consensual Italian attitude towards the European Union (EU) (Risse, 2003) can explain why Spanish and German out-groups are listed as the closest to the Italian in-group comparing to the others out-groups. Indeed, Spain and Germany represent two of the major partners of the EU. Moreover, although Spain and Germany are both nested in the EU group together with Italy, we can interpret the different positions they occupy in the hierarchy in terms of similarity and dissimilarity with the Italian attitude towards the EU. In fact, Ruiz Jiménez,

Górniak, Kotic, Kiss, and Kandulla (2004) found that Italy and Spain are among the European countries where national and cultural based identities are most compatible, while according to the November 2003 Eurobarometer, Germans appear to be still ambivalent towards the EU (European Commission, 2003). On the other hand, among immigrants ethnic groups in Italy, Polish and Ukrainians were listed by the participants of this study as more desirable than Arabs and Roma. Previous research found that in Italy East European out-groups are preferred to North African and Balkan out-groups (Mancini & Panari, 2010), and these two latter geographical regions are known to be major areas of migration flows to Italy of Arab and Roma groups respectively (ISTAT, 2013). Nevertheless, Arab ethnic groups are addressed by various degrees of discrimination – such as in the labor and in the rental housing markets – by Italian native population (Baldini & Federici, 2011), while the last position occupied by the Roma ethnic group confirms the widespread and deeply rooted anti-Roma sentiments among Italians from all social backgrounds (Cammarota, Petronio, Tarsia, & Marino, 2009).

Our second research hypothesis stated that readiness for aggression could be associated to individual levels of prejudice among adolescents. Results showed that readiness for aggression was partially associated with social distance, specifically only towards the most rejected out-group, namely Roma. On one hand, we can comment on such result stating that among readiness for aggression patterns those describing habitual and socially determined aggressive acts better correlated with prejudice than others kinds of traits responsible for impulsive actions and lack of appropriate emotional control. In fact, reading from past research (Gottfred & Hirshi, 1990; Jessor & Jessor, 1977), we know that prejudice towards ethnic and racial out-groups may associate with developmental maladjustment or general problem-behavior syndrome. Accordingly, manifestations of extreme prejudice could be correlated to a larger pattern of antisocial behavior (Kiesner, Maass, Cadinu, & Vallese, 2003) in which high levels of cognitive intentional aspect of aggression may as well be included (Shaffer, Meyer-Bahlburg, & Stokman, 1981). Moreover, hostility and aggression are often directed towards out-group members especially when one is experiencing frustrating life circumstances (Berkowitz, 1981). This can be especially true in contexts characterized by high rates of immigration, such as in the North-Western Italian context. That is to say that such correlation between hostility, habitual aggression and prejudice can be more pronounced or easily detectable when directed to immigrant out-groups (Schnieders & Gore, 2011). In fact, unlike others minority groups (e.g., religiously or gender defined) immigrant outsiders are the ultimate out-group in the eyes of the citizenry. Especially during times of crisis, they can become easy targets for hostility if, for example, they are considered one of the reasons for the lack of employment opportunities. Therefore, this social aspect can in part explain how individual aggressive traits, even when considered only as internalized, can be externalized in prejudice against certain social out-groups.

On the other hand, our results indicate also that prejudice is target-related. An explanation is that it may reflect the influence of the normative context, which is crucial during adolescence (Raabe & Belmann, 2011), and an important element of the Social Identity Developmental Theory (Nesdale, 1999). In fact, in Italy as well as in the rest of Southern Europe, nationalism is mobilized around the idea of protecting the nation from the immigrant invasion anti-Roma racism is both woven into xeno-racism and runs in tandem with it (Fekete, 2014). As a result, the historically rooted prejudice against the Roma is now combined with a very modern disgust with the destitute, as austerity digs deeper into the lives of the working and workless poor.

Concluding, it is important to point out that this study was not without limitations. First, the strict correlational nature of our data does not allow us to report on any specific effects between the variables but it rather represents a descriptive attempt to draw on the relationship between individual traits of readiness for aggression from one side and measures of prejudice from another side. Second, a further main limitation of this study is the fact that individual differences in prejudice were examined only pertaining to ethnic groups. Although looking at individual differences across ethnic out-groups is crucial for detecting risk factors for prejudice development in adolescence, we recognize the need for studying prejudice in a cross-domain manner.

Conclusions and final remarks

Overall, the present study provides evidence that indicates how prejudice during adolescence could be related to cognitive traits of aggression. Specifically, the main contribution of this research is to have highlighted how in the cognitive spectrum of prejudice, readiness for aggression may play a significant triggering role. Reading from our results, future research should consider cognitive predispositions to behave aggressively when studying the phenomenon of high prejudice towards ethnic and racial out-groups. In particular, interventions aimed at reducing specific types of readiness for aggression and aggressive related thoughts in adolescents may in turn reduce in them the formation of ethnic prejudice. Last, our results can contribute to the understanding of how and why certain groups in our modern societies are more than others repeatedly addressed by hate and discrimination.

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