Developing Inclusivity from Within: Advancing Our Understanding of How Teachers' Personality Characters Impact Ethnic Prejudice and Homophobic Attitudes

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Abstract

Introduction Understanding how internal characteristics of teachers impact their teaching practices can shed light onto ways to promote inclusivity. Specifically, teachers' personality traits and social anxiety could influence their acceptance of others, influencing student acceptance and achievement, yet minimal research has explored these relationships.

Method The role of personality characteristics and social anxiety related to ethnic prejudices and homophobic attitudes were investigated in a sample of 551 Italian secondary school teachers (76% female, age range: 20–70; $M = 46.20$) using the teachers' attitudes towards the representation of homosexuality in film and television scale, the big five questionnaire short form, the subtle and blatant prejudice scales, and the Social Phobia Inventory.

Results The first model suggested that higher levels of conscientiousness combine with lower levels of agreeableness and extraversion are related to blatant prejudice. As participant age increased, those with lower levels of agreeableness and higher levels of conscientiousness expressed subtle prejudice. Increased age combine with lower levels of agreeableness was also linked to negative attitudes towards lesbian and gay topics. Similar results were found in the second model, which included social anxiety; however, social anxiety was found to impact negative attitudes towards lesbian and gay topics only, while the effect of age towards subtle prejudice disappeared.

Conclusions Personological characteristics such as personality and social anxiety were found to impact ones attitudes and acceptance towards ethnic groups and lesbian and gay populations.

Policy Implications Our findings highlight key areas of focus to help raise awareness and address socio-emotional through school supports, teacher trainings, and policy aimed at promoting inclusive education systems.

Keywords Prejudice · Teachers · Social anxiety · Personality · Homophobic attitudes

Introduction

Prejudice can be understood as a negative attitude or predisposition to perceive, judge, or act unfavourably towards ethnic groups other than one's own, or to people perceived as different (Mazzara, 2005). Prejudices often involve arbitrarily generalizing and or oversimplifying views of others based on superficial, incorrect, and poorly articulated knowledge (Allport, 1954). Prejudices are not only those expressed directly, through hostile, visible, and explicit behaviours, but can also be manifested more subtly, through non-verbal, automatic, and even unconscious attitudes and actions. The later can be more difficult to grasp or recognise, but still lead to increased detachment and discomfort towards an individual or a specific group of people (Pruett & Chan, 2006).

Ethnic stereotypes and prejudices, whether subtly or overtly displayed, can cause tension, discrimination, or conflict, and so too can homophobic stereotypes. Intraindividual homonegativity refers the discriminatory stereotypes and prejudicial beliefs held by non-heterosexual people about LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender/transsexual) people (Petruccelli et al., 2015). These negative attitudes and belief systems towards LGBT, which can result in discriminatory regulations, acts of hate, and unjustified labels, are the result of generalisations, falsehoods, and lack of awareness.

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The level of diversity and multiculturalism within the world today is currently expanding due to massive social change, population movements, and increased social media influence. There are more opportunities to move abroad and more prospectus to encounter new cultures, combined with increased importance around self-expression. We are surrounded by greater levels of diversity than ever before, yet prejudices such as anti-immigrant feelings and homophobic sentiments still exist. Understanding how social biases shape our social interactions with out-of-group members is crucial to build fair and inclusive communities. This research aims to better understand factors that impact the genesis of ethnic prejudice and homophobic attitudes among one highly impactful group in society, teachers, while also providing evidence to help develop prevention policies and best practices.

Studies exploring the etiological factors that shape our social biases and attitudes towards diversity are interested in a variety of demographic and social characteristics such as age, gender, education, religion, and political orientation (Baiocco et al., 2013; Jäckle & Wenzelburger, 2014; Pacilli et al., 2011; Parrott et al., 2002), and personality (Flynn, 2005; Duriez & Soenens, 2006; Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007; Sturmer et al., 2013; Hodson & Dhont, 2015; Crawford & Brandt, 2019). While these studies provide benefit around factors associated with prejudices, unique to this study, is the focus on teachers. Teachers pose a unique role, where their social biases and attitudes can impact how they choose to teach, grade, and interact with students. Negative attitudes held by teachers can pose huge obstacles for students and society, as their work is so delicate and crucial for the well-being of future generations. Therefore, it is relevant to highlight the etiological factors related to teacher prejudice in order to stimulate the attention and awareness of teachers, provide direction to help manage and overcome these negative attitudes (e.g., homophobia and racism), and to create more inclusive teaching practices (Bhana, 2012; D'Urso et al., 2017; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Msibi, 2012; Pérez-Testor et al., 2010).

The literature highlights how internal characteristics of teachers can improve the quality of teaching, spreading an empathetic atmosphere that frames inclusive educational actions (Hachfeld et al., 2015). Teachers with open-mindedness and multicultural beliefs reported higher motivational orientations, and, above all, more positive values (lower level of agreement with negative stereotypes related to cultural diversity), as well as greater declared willingness to adjust and revise their teaching strategies (*Ibidem*). Teachers' beliefs free of racial bias have been negatively linked to a reported willingness to tailor teaching to culturally diverse students.

Transversally, one's reported closure towards gay and lesbian people can amplify prejudice against them (Petruccelli et al., 2015). Similarly, Lingiardi and colleagues (2016) found that higher homonegative attitudes were dictated by poorer levels of contact experience with lesbian and gay (LG) populations.

In studies that sought to highlight the impact of personality on the genesis of prejudice found that the personality factors of openness to experience, which includes curiosity, imagination, and a desire for new experiences, have been associated lower levels of prejudice and higher levels of tolerance (e.g., Flynn, 2005; Duriez and Soenens, 2006; Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007; Sturmer et al., 2013; Crawford & Brandt, 2019). These findings indicate that individuals higher in openness have been consistently linked with lower levels of prejudice.

In general, the literature suggests that homophobic prejudice is characterised by higher levels of right-wing authoritarianism, closure, and mental rigidity (Cramer et al., 2013; Lingiardi et al., 2005; Miller et al., 2012; Whitley et al., 2000). In the Italian context, which is the setting of the current study, prejudices sometimes convey the social actions of teachers, which to denial towards minority groups (D'Urso & Petruccelli, 2022). This may happen due to lack of contact with diverse groups and individuals, creating obstacles to inclusion that one might not even be aware of (Petruccelli et al., 2015). Using a sample of 731 Italian participants, Lingiardi and colleagues (2016) found that participants with higher levels of homonegativity were more emotionally unstable, more easily upset, and more likely to have a submission-dominance personality style, indicating that they were more conformity-oriented and more likely influenced by others' views. More recently, Ng and colleagues (2021), conducted a scoping review and meta-analysis on 17 studies exploring the impact of the personality factor of openness to experience on prejudice and tolerance. The review found that the personality facets of values, feelings/emotionality, and fantasy/imagination strengthened one's ability to understand the perspectives of others resist rigid attitudes, and stive for friendly intergroup relationships, therefore promoting tolerance and reducing prejudiced attitudes among these individuals. Corroborating this, Flicker and Sancier-Barbosa (2022) found that prejudicial attitudes were best predicted by personality facets that were characterised by higher levels of conformity.

In addition to personality characteristics, social anxiety has also been linked to ethnic prejudice and homophobic attitudes, as the fear of being in social situations may generate states of closure, fear of not fitting in, and aversion to diversity (Finchilescu, 2010). Social anxiety may, together with specific personality characteristics, be a risk factor for the aetiology of negative attitudes and prejudices. In this sense, social anxiety could accentuate the perception that diversity is something that should be avoided, consequently leading one to distance oneself in order to feel comfortable. For example, Bernat and colleagues (2001) found that people with higher levels of social anxiety traits reported high levels of homophobic prejudice. Cullen et al. (2002) highlighted how anxiety can generate negative feelings towards what people fail to understand.

It is evident that personality characteristics have an impact on one's prejudice and homonegative attitudes as well as their
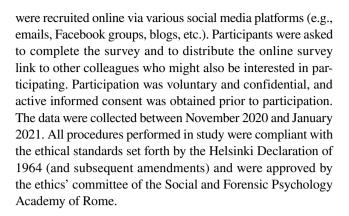
tolerance for diversity, and moreover how one interacts with others different from them. Minimal research explores the role of teachers' personality on prejudice, which could impact student achievement and acceptance in school. While there has been research looking at how teachers' personality traits predict their performance (e.g., Kell, 2019), minimal research looks at how such traits impact their interactions with, views of, and acceptance of students. van den Bergh and colleagues (2010), touched on this, when they found that teacher prejudice impacted their expectations of students, which explained ethnic achievement gap variation between classrooms. These findings highlight the possible impact of teacher personality characteristics and prejudices, yet more research is needed if we want to better understand how to create a more inclusive education system.

The Current Study

The present study aims to explore the personal characteristics of teachers in relation to forms of two forms of prejudices, subtle, and blatant ethnic prejudice and homonegativity. In particular, the study is summarised in two research questions (RQs). In line with the literature (e.g., Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007), the first RQ is: which personality traits of teachers are most connected to ethnic prejudice and negative attitudes towards LB topics (controlling by age and gender)? The rationale of RQ1 is to try to define the personality profiles of teachers in order to better structure training to create more inclusive education systems. Given the strong association between social anxiety and homophobic prejudices (e.g., Folkierska-Żukowska et al., 2022), the second RQ is: Are personality traits and social anxiety connected to ethnic prejudice and negative attitudes towards LG topics (controlling by age and gender)? In line with the concept of vulnerability (Carson, 2011), this research question aims to verify whether personality and psychopathological-environmental characteristics can play a role, and how, in relation to the aetiology of ethnic prejudices and homophobic attitudes. The rationale of RQ2 is to further expand on our understanding of how personality characteristics — which are known to impact behaviour — together with social anxiety — that it leading to avoidance — could be a vulnerability factor for prejudice. Studying both characteristics of teachers can help to structure teacher training and continued professional development, policy to help create more inclusive education systems, and the monitoring of teachers' well-being.

Participants and Procedure

The sample consisted of 550 teachers (76.4% identified as female) aged 20 to 70 years old ($M_{age} = 46.18$; $SD = 9.80$) from primary and secondary schools across Italy. Participants were recruited online via various social media platforms (e.g., emails, Facebook groups, blogs, etc.). Participants were asked to complete the survey and to distribute the online survey link to other colleagues who might also be interested in participating. Participation was voluntary and confidential, and active informed consent was obtained prior to participation. The data were collected between November 2020 and January 2021. All procedures performed in study were compliant with the ethical standards set forth by the Helsinki Declaration of 1964 (and subsequent amendments) and were approved by the ethics' committee of the Social and Forensic Psychology Academy of Rome.

Measures

Demographic Information

Teachers were asked to provide information related to their gender, age, current relationship status, country of birth, and city of residence.

Homophobic Attitudes

The Teacher Attitudes Towards the Representation of Homosexuality in Film and Television scale (D'Urso & Symonds, 2021) is a self-report questionnaire that comprised 15 items used to measure homophobic attitudes. The items cover a range of emotional and social aspects of teachers' homophobic attitudes regarding film and television (e.g., feel anger when I see a film or advertisement featuring homosexuals, same-sex families and/or references to them; homosexual issues should never be referred to, as they are morally wrong). Each item was measured using a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha suggests good reliability ($\alpha = 0.88$).

Ethnic Prejudice

The Subtle and Blatant Prejudice Scale (Arcuri & Boca, 1996) is a self-report questionnaire that comprised 20 items measuring two subscales: blatant prejudice and subtle prejudice. The blatant prejudice subscale includes items related to threat, rejection, and anti-intimacy with ethnic minorities (e.g., I would be annoying if a loved one or a relative would get married to a non-EU person). The subtle prejudice subscale measured attitudes related to defence of traditional values, exaggeration of cultural differences, and denial of positive emotions towards ethnic minorities (e.g., foreign people who live in our country pass on to their children values and skills that are not those necessary to be successful in Italy). Each item was measured using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (absolutely disagree) to 6 (absolutely agree). The

Table 1 Pearson' correlations among key variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Blatant prejudice	1								
2. Subtle prejudice	.345**	1							
3. Negative attitudes toward LG	.246**	.331**	1						
4. Extraversion	−.128**	−.123**	−.108*	1					
5. Agreeableness	−.149**	−.206**	−.146**	.158**	1				
6. Conscientiousness	.145**	.039	.021	.081	.284**	1			
7. Neuroticism	−.040	.022	.019	−.047	−.321**	−.236**	1		
8. Openness	−.109*	−.153**	−.141**	.241**	.284**	.182**	−.058	1	
9. Social anxiety	.004	−.017	.121**	−.097*	−.042	−.139**	.182**	−.102*	1

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

Cronbach's alpha suggests good reliability in both subscales (blatant prejudice $\alpha = 0.90$); subtle prejudice $\alpha = 0.87$).

Personality

The Big Five Questionnaire Short Form (Rammstedt & John, 2007) is a self-report tool that comprised 10 items exploring five personality factors. Each factor is evaluated using two and is measured on a continuum that consists of opposite poles, or personality characteristics related to each factor. The five factors are as follows: (1) Extroversion refers to a dynamic, active, and dominant mode of behaviour(s). An extraverted person prefers social situations, interpersonal exchanges, and with a general enthusiastic predisposition towards various circumstances. Conversely, an introverted person tends to be reserved, not very talkative, and engaged in solitary and quiet activities. (2) Agreeableness describes a person characterised by a friendly, cordial, and altruistic attitude. They are considered cooperative and often provide support, including emotional support. Conversely, and antagonistic person is characterised by hostility, selfishness, little interest, and indifference towards others. (3) Conscientiousness describes a person who has characteristics such as precision, attentiveness, and accuracy. Such person will often be successful at bring their goals to fruition. Those opposite in this factor are disorganised, unreliable, careless, and lack of responsibility. (4) Emotional stability involves the degree of control over one's emotions. A person who has emotional stability is characterised as having low anxiety, low vulnerability, and high control of emotional and behavioural reactions. Opposite to this are those considered to be neurotic, which includes weak moods and poor emotional control, and general restlessness are placed in the opposite pole. (5) Openness describes a person with various interests, are open to different cultures, and have strong sense of curiosity and are open to new experiences. Its opposite, closed-mindedness, describes individuals who are comfortable with

what they know, and may be unwilling to change and try new things, and have limited interests to know other people's ideas, thoughts and values. Respondents use a 5-point Likert scale from 1 ("absolutely true to me") to 5 ("absolutely false to me"). The Cronbach α of these five factors ranged between 0.82 to 0.91.

Social Anxiety

The Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN; Connor et al., 2000) is a 17-item self-report questionnaire. SPIN is used to screen for, and measure, the severity of social anxiety or social phobia (e.g., I avoid doing things or speaking to people for fear of embarrassment; Talking to strangers scares me.). Respondents can use a 4-point Likert scale from 0 ("Not at all") to 5 ("extremely"). For the present study, we used a single score generated by the mean of the items. The Cronbach α of the scale is 0.87.

Analysis Plan

All data was uploaded to SPSS version 27 for analysis. First, a Pearson correlation analysis between the keys variables was computed (Table 1). Subsequently, to test our two hypotheses, two models were computed using multivariate analysis. The first model was aimed at evaluating the effects of the 5 Big-Five factors towards subtle and blatant ethnic prejudice, as well as negative attitudes towards lesbian and gay topics, controlling by gender and age of the participants. In the second model, social anxiety was included as a predictor towards the two forms of ethnic prejudice as well as negative attitudes towards LG topics.[1]

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[1] We also tested moderation effects by social anxiety with the 5 Big Five personality factors on the outcome variables. The results do not show a significant effect, and we did not report them.

Results

Multivariate analyses suggests that agreeableness ($\Lambda = 0.94$ with $F = 11.05$; $p < 0.001$), conscientiousness ($\Lambda = 0.97$ with $F = 6.60$; $p < 0.001$), extroversion ($\Lambda = 0.98$ with $F = 4.05$; $p < 0.05$), and age ($\Lambda = 0.90$ with $F = 19.10$; $p < 0.001$) have a statistically significant effect in Model 1. Specifically, univariate analyses highlighted that higher levels of conscientiousness combined with lower levels of agreeableness and extraversion were factors related to blatant prejudice, while increased age, higher levels of conscientiousness, and lover levels of agreeableness were factors related to subtle prejudice, as seen in the model summary in Table 2. Furthermore, increased age and lower levels of agreeableness were factors related to negative attitudes towards LG topics. Neuroticism, openness, and gender did not have any significant effects across all three forms of prejudice.

When social anxiety was inserted into Model 2, multivariate analysis suggest agreeableness ($\Lambda = 0.94$ with $F = 11.41$; $p < 0.001$), conscientiousness ($\Lambda = 0.95$ with $F = 6.60$; $p < 0.001$), extraversion ($\Lambda = 0.99$ with $F = 3.05$; $p < 0.05$), age ($\Lambda = 0.88$ with $F = 20.42$; $p < 0.001$), and social anxiety ($\Lambda = 0.97$ with $F = 5.04$; $p < .05$) have a significant effect on the outcomes. Specifically, the univariate analysis highlights that, much like Model 1, significant effects can be seen from lower levels of agreeableness across all three forms of prejudice, and from higher levels of conscientiousness across both subtle and blatant prejudice, as seen in Table 2. However, higher levels of social anxiety only explained negative attitudes towards LG topics. Along with this, when social anxiety was included, the effect of increased age on subtle prejudice disappeared. As seen in Model 1, neuroticism, openness, and gender did not have any significant effects across all three forms of prejudice in Model 2.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore how the personality characteristics of teachers may impact ethnic prejudices and negative attitudes towards LG topics. Furthermore, this study aimed to verify if a teachers' social anxiety had an effect on negative prejudices and attitudes. The study, consequently, sought to explore teacher personality characteristics in order to provide direction on areas where inclusive school sentiments can be improved. Considering previous literature, which highlights

Table 2 Summary of models predicting ethnic prejudice and negative attitudes toward lesbian and gay topics

	Subtle ethnic prejudice		Blatant ethnic prejudice		Negative attitudes toward LG topics	
	F	B (SE)	F	B (SE)	F	B (SE)
Model 1						
Corrected model	9.002	/	7.227	/	11.185	/
Intercept	14.524	2.008 (.527)	15.774	2.070 (.521)	38.997	2.233 (.358)
Gender (male)	.365	.072 (.119	.008	.010 (.118)	.141	−.030 (.081)
Age	19.032	.023 (.01)***	3.420	.009 (.005)	50.324	.025(.01)***
Extraversion	2.745	−.096 (.058)	5.203	−.130 (.057)*	1.471	−.047 (.039)
Conscientiousness	4.931	.160 (.072)***	18.679	.308 (.071)***	.539	.036 (.049)
Agreeableness	20.77	−.293 (.06)***	17.71	−.267 (.06)***	10.70	−.143 (.04)**
Neuroticism	1.203	−.064 (.058)	2.604	−.093 (.058)	.797	−.035 (.040)
Openness	2.461	−.088 (.056)	1.514	−0.68 (.056)	1.261	−.043 (.038)
R^2 (adjusted)	.04		.07		.12	
Model 2						
Corrected model	7.873	/	6.394	/	11.714	/
Intercept	14.288	2.043 (.540)	14.123	2.008 (.534)	28.786	1.943
Gender (male)	.308	.067 (.120)	.027	.020 (.119)	.026	.013 (.081)
Age	18.716	.023 (.005)	3.540	.010 (.005)	55.142	.030 (.01)***
Extraversion	2.801	−.097 (.058)	4.970	−.128 (.057)*	.859	−.036 (.039)
Conscientiousness	4.755	.158 (.072)*	18.922	.312 (.072)***	1.188	.053 (.049)
Agreeableness	20.437	−.310 (.06)***	17.915	−.31 (.06)***	12.717	−.155 (.04)***
Neuroticism	1.067	−.061 (.059)	2.815	−.098 (.058)	2.233	−.059 (.040)
Openness	2.517	−.090 (.057)	1.391	−.066 (.056)	.668	−.031(.04)
Social anxiety	.282	.033 (.06)	.085	−.018 (.04)	13.54	.160 (.04)***
R^2 (adjusted)	.11		.10		.20	

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

that prejudices can hinder action (D'Urso & Petruccelli, 2022) and can create negative views around the benefits of diversity and inclusive strategies (Merlin-Knoblich & Chen, 2018; Jones et al., 2013), such research can be beneficial in helping to direct future interventions aimed at creating inclusive education systems. Based on the findings of this study, several personal characteristics of the teachers, such as age, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and levels of social anxiety, can therefore help us to understand their prejudices and attitudes. This is in accordance with Bandura's social learning model (2002, 2006, 2018), which postulated that personality patterns can influence prejudices and attitudes, and as results can converge in didactic actions that are not inclusive. The study highlights how open-mindedness towards new experiences and low levels of neuroticism, contrary to expectations, did not reduce prejudice or homophobic attitudes. These findings indicate that the other personality traits were more predominant in the group of teachers.

Indeed, the results highlight how increased conscientiousness is connected to subtle and blatant ethnic prejudice. Those high in consciousness tend to appear more controlled, goal driven, and self-disciplines, while those low in this scale might be considered more messy and forgetful and may try to take on less duties. When applying these characteristics to the results, there are several possible explanations for why those higher in this personality trait might have greater levels of prejudice. First, teachers high in conscientiousness are those who take their job very seriously, yet when face with accepting those who are ethnically different from themselves, they may feel that their training has not prepared them to understand or know how to meet the various needs of an ethnically diverse group of students. Teachers have several roles already, and they may see trying to adapt lessons to meet numerous skills, languages, and cultural differences might go beyond their training, professional scope, and time. This also shed light onto why a conscientiousness might not have a significant impact on attitudes towards LG issues, as teachers may not feel that they need to adapt their lesson plans to meet these needs, or that they know how to do so, and therefor do not find it a challenge. In line with the big five model (Crawford & Brandt, 2019), teachers who are more oriented towards their own goals and their own internal emotional states may not have inclusive impulses and therefore maintain more prejudices. Second, teachers who have a greater sense of duty and are very focused on the task may not be open to considering the foreigner as a resource, and therefore may not experience positive emotions towards them. In other words, exacerbating extreme concentration on meeting strict teaching requirements becoming almost a filter for not considering or wanting to accept diversity and therefore might refuse contact with them. Consequently, it could represent an obstacle to the social inclusion of cultural diversities. A critical reflection on the role and task of teachers, as well as training on how to adapt lessons to meet a various cultural difference, may help in the creation of positive attitudes and emotions towards foreigners.

Furthermore, the results found that teachers who have little agreeableness are more prone to subtle and blatant ethnic prejudices as well as negative attitudes towards LG topics. Those who score high on the agreeableness scale are generally considered to be kind and generous, and will try to create compromise, while those scoring low on this scale tend to me more focused on themselves, might be more sceptical of others, and are less concerned about the wellbeing of others. The possible reasons as to why one who has high consciousness has increased prejudice, as discussed above, can shed light on possible reasons why one who scores low in agreeableness might also. First, teachers may feel that they are being forced to change their practices as new students enter, and they might feel that they do not have to tools to make such change, leading them to disagree with the change. Second, teachers might be thinking about the stability of their job, the pressure to cover a certain amount of material in specific time periods, and the importance of standardised exams, and therefore, they might not see the intrinsic benefit of adapting their lessons to others who "don't fit the mould." Third, they could not understand or visualise the needs of others unlike them, and therefore, they do not know how to show positive intimacy and emotions towards those unlike them. At the same time, deficiencies in this trait can define a person who is unable to understand the importance of LG topics for their teaching as well as feeling negative emotions towards gay and lesbian people (Fredrickson, 2013; Quoidbach et al., 2015). Social and cultural diversity needs to be accommodated in terms of emotional needs first and foremost, and it is important to provide teachers with the supports to understand how the meet such needs.

The results also suggested that low levels of extraversion were related to blatant ethnic prejudices. Those who score high in extroversion are more outgoing, social, and engaged with the world around them, while those scoring low on this scale are generally more introverted and may appear more quiet and less social. In this sense, teachers emotionally cold and less sociable can do not have any positive attitudes towards others, especially people who belong to minority groups. Considering that these introverted individuals were also low in agreeableness and high in conscientiousness, it could be that this combination of personality traits leads to more open forms of ethnic prejudices. It could also be these individuals are less concerned with the issues of others, or maybe even unaware of various conversations within the school regarding teaching practices or conversations around diversity and inclusion and are therefore acting out of a level of naivety or unawareness of the issue. These teachers are taken more by their own internal world and can therefore leave out salient aspects concerning the context and therefore include attitudes of hostility and aversion towards groups that consider themselves as out-groups.

This can hinder an inclusive vision of society which could also affect one's own teaching actions when intercultural curricula are proposed (Pace et al., 2022).

Our results also suggested that as the age of the participants increased, the levels of subtle prejudice and homophobic attitudes also increased. These findings are in line with previous research (e.g., Raabe & Beelmann, 2011), which highlights that teachers who have more deeply rooted subtle prejudice do not consider cultural diversity as something to be embraced or perceived as part of one's group. From a more historical perspective, age can also lead to negative views of homosexuality, which could hinder the use of inclusion practices around sexual minorities.

When social anxiety was inserted into the model, the significant personality aspects obtained in the first model remain unchanged, even though explained variance increased. However, the age effect disappeared for subtle ethnic prejudice, and could act as a buffer. The effect of age did still exist on homophobic attitudes. While social anxiety did not have an effect on subtle and blatant prejudices, it did have an effect on homophobic attitudes of teachers. Therefore, increased age and decreased agreeableness combined with increased fear of experiencing social anxiety can arouse negative feelings or fear of negative judgment. This represents a risk factor towards openness towards alterity, characterised by a fear of experiencing positive emotions towards gay and lesbian people. In line with the literature (Adams et al., 2016), traits of social anxiety can lead teachers to stifle their anxieties by avoiding diversity, positioning themselves negatively towards gay and lesbian people. The fear of facing social situations leads to a closure towards what, being perceived as different, may scare. In this sense, social anxiety could increase the defences against diversity.

Although the study extends the literature, it should be considered in light of its limitations. First, the use of self-report questionnaires may increase the social desirability of teachers who may attempt to show themselves in a more positive and socially acceptable way. To address this issue, future studies could use structured interviews and implicit measures (e.g., Implicit Association Test and the Implicit Relational Assessment Procedure) to reduce the social desirability bias. Building on the present findings, additional research is also needed that includes other potentially important individual and social variables (e.g., relationships with out-groups) that may be configured as predisposing and/or protective factors for the aetiology of prejudices, also considering the particularities of different national contexts.

Conclusion

Personological characteristics (personality and social anxiety) impact ones attitudes and acceptance towards ethnic groups and lesbian and gay populations, and consequently it is important that researchers, practitioners, and educational systems seek to explore where these prejudices exist and how to target them in order to promote inclusion of social and cultural minorities. The non-acceptance of diversity — which generates discrimination — can be the behavioural expression of tension towards the outgroup, which generates an obstacle to an inclusive education. Indeed, training courses for teacher are necessary to raise awareness and to address socio-emotional resistance towards issues that might create fear around being "contaminated" by interacting with those from other groups (cf. Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014). Along with this, schools and educational systems need to recognise the stress related to increased diversity within the classroom and should seek to provide support and training for teachers so that they can alleviate any anxiety or insecurities the teacher might have in their own skill set. Critical reflection on prejudices and negative attitudes can be a starting point for deconstructing a limited worldview, as well as considering a new teaching that takes into account the needs not only of those who are perceived as different, but also of all students who they must come into contact with diversity and must know how to welcome it without hesitation. Teachers are the first bearers of inclusive messages, and therefore, they hold a critical role around ensuring that students are witnessing positive attitudes towards, and instead of seeing the world through differences, looking at it as a world that accepts and represents the identity of each person.

Declarations

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent An informed consent was obtained for all participants.

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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