Universidade do Minho
Escola de Psicologia

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DESPERTAR PARA APRENDER: Programa De Promoção De School Engagement Em Crianças De Etnia Cigana Do 1.º Ciclo Do Ensino Básico

julho de 2021

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STATEMENT OF INTEGRITY

I hereby declare having conducted this academic work with integrity. I confirm that I have not used plagiarism or any form of undue use of information or falsification of results along the process leading to its elaboration.

I further declare that I have fully acknowledged the Code of Ethical Conduct of the University of Minho.

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RESUMO

Nos últimos 20 anos, a educação tem merecido a atenção dos legisladores europeus enquanto ferramenta para promover o ajustamento da comunidade Roma à sociedade. A par de alguns progressos, a população Roma permanece como um dos grupos mais desfavorecidos, experimentando desigualdades em diferentes domínios, nomeadamente, na educação. Por exemplo, em Portugal, os esforços sociais e educacionais têm-se repercutido no aumento da taxa de matrícula escolar de crianças Roma. Porém, a sua distribuição ao longo dos níveis de ensino permanece praticamente inalterada, e as taxas de analfabetismo e insucesso escolar mostram-se persistentemente mais elevadas para os alunos Roma do que para os seus pares. As trajetórias educacionais dos alunos Roma levam a que se questione a eficácia das políticas e práticas para a inclusão. A presente dissertação apresenta três estudos com o principal propósito de desvendar potenciais lacunas nos esforços educativos que dificultam o envolvimento de famílias Roma na educação. Ainda, pretende-se aprender sobre e com elementos da comunidade estratégias para melhorar o clima escolar e promover o *school engagement* (SE) de alunos Roma. Neste sentido, os dois primeiros capítulos versam sobre a participação da comunidade Roma na educação e impacto nas orientações aculturativas, focando perspetivas de diferentes elementos da comunidade. Enquanto o primeiro estudo aborda as perspetivas de mulheres acerca da influência da participação escolar nas perspetivas sobre a educação e nos comportamentos, atitudes e identidades culturais da comunidade; o segundo estudo volta-se para as perspetivas de uma amostra nacional de alunos Roma para determinar como é que os comportamentos e atitudes das famílias em relação à educação, a par de fatores relacionados com a escola, se repercutem no SE reportado. As evidências formais e informais obtidas, suportam o design do terceiro estudo que apresenta uma intervenção baseada numa história-ferramenta que oferece, por um lado, um 'zoom in' nos padrões de envolvimento parental na vida escolar dos filhos; e, por outro lado, pontos de referência preliminares para suportar a adoção de novas abordagens para alcançar as famílias Roma. À luz dos modelos teóricos de aculturação, os resultados mostram-se congruentes com a literatura existente na área das minorias étnicas, revelando pistas sobre obstáculos e potenciais fatores de sucesso que podem promover abordagens escolares mais inclusivas e que facilitem o SE de alunos Roma.

Palavras-chave: aculturação, clima escolar, educação dos grupos Roma, envolvimento parental, *school engagement*

AWAKENING TO LEARN: Program To Promote School Engagement Of Gypsy Children Attending Elementary School

ABSTRACT

Over the past 20 years, education has been gathering the attention of European policymakers, as a tool to promote Roma's long-term adjustment to society. Alongside some progress, Roma people still lag far behind the rest of the population, experiencing inequalities across different domains, namely, in education. For example, in Portugal, the social and educational investments have been reflected in the increment in enrolment rates of children with Roma background. However, the patterns of students across school levels remain unchanged, and illiteracy and academic failure remains higher for Roma students when compared with their non-Roma counterparts. The poor educational trajectories of Roma students challenge the efficacy of the policies and practices for inclusion. The present dissertation comprises three research works with the ultimate purpose to shed light on potential gaps of the current educational efforts implemented hampering families' engagement in education. Moreover, we aim to learn about and with Roma intervenients' strategies to improve the school climate and to foster children's school engagement. Aligned with these overarching goals, the first two chapters are dedicated to picture the current scenario regarding the participation of Roma in education and its acculturative outcomes, focusing on different sources of information and methodologies. While the first study gathers the voices of different generations of Roma women to depict how school participation has been shaping the perspectives on education and the perceived impact on cultural behaviors, attitudes, and identities; the second study flips the coin and investigates a national sample of children and youth attending school to determine how families' behaviors and attitudes towards education together with school-related factors are recognized and reflected in children and youth self-reported school engagement. Supported on formal and informal evidence gained, the third chapter offers a 'zoom in' on the patterns of parental school involvement on children's school life while learning from the participants engagement experiences in a purposefully designed story-tool based intervention how schools can rethink their strategies to outreach Roma families. Grounded in acculturation theoretical models, results are aligned with international emergent pictures in the literature, offering clues on the current obstacles and potential success factors that can provide a basis for betterments in school inclusive approaches to ensure children's school engagement.

Keywords: acculturation, parental involvement, Roma education, school climate, school engagement

INDEX

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGFI – Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index

AS – Academic Socialization

BE – Behavioral Engagement

CE – Cognitive Engagement

CFI – Comparative Fit Index

ECS – Ethnic Cultural Socialization

ECVI - Expected Cross-Validation Index

EE – Emotional Engagement

EU – Educational Utility

GE – Gender

GFI – Comparative Fit Index

M – Mean

PI – Parental Involvement

RMR – Root Mean Residual

RMSEA – Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

RW – Regression weights

SD – Standard deviation

SE – School Engagement

SE – Standardized Errors

SRW – Standardized regression weights

TI – Teacher Involvement

TLI - Tucker-Lewis Index

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Introduction

"The first step does not take you where you want to go,
but you get out of where you are." (Anonymous)

Following the Council of Europe, the term 'Roma' is used to cover a wide diversity of the groups, such as Roma, Sinti, Kale, Travelers, and the Eastern groups. It recognizes the heterogeneity of lifestyles and cultural backgrounds (Matras et al., 2015) and the need to be sensitive to framings that problematize the minority. In this dissertation, except for the Chapter 1, the term Roma is adopted to refer to Gypsies (the term used nationally), to cover the heterogeneity among Gypsy groups in the national context.

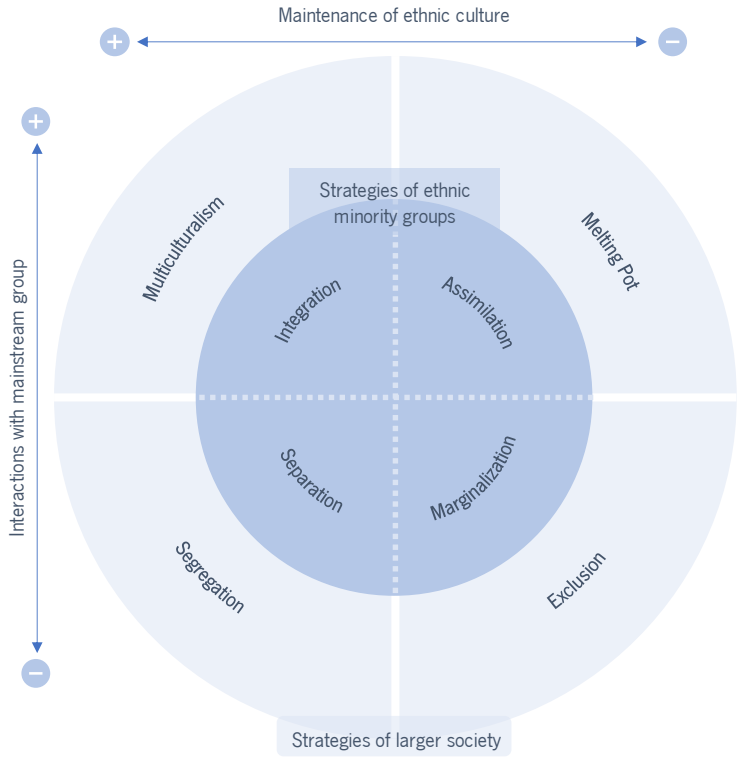
Regardless of the cultural diversity, Roma people are one of the most deprived minority groups, accumulating persistent inequalities in education, employment, health, and housing (Alexiadou, 2019). Grounded in the major contribution of schooling to long-term adjustment to society, the poor educational scenario of children and youth with Roma background is a matter of concern across several European countries (e.g., European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2019; Makarova, 2019). Over two decades, education became one of the most important targeted pillars of European policies to promote Roma inclusion in education (Wauters et al., 2017). Despite the visible signs of progress documented in the literature, students with Roma background still underperform their non-Roma counterparts, even though when compared with other minority groups (Eurostat, 2018; FRA, 2018). This gap is even more pronounced beyond compulsory education. In the national scenario, alongside the promising increment of enrolment rates in compulsory education, data and empirical evidence suggest that a significant number of children fail school years (at least one school year) and drop out early from school without completing the upper elementary school levels (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência [DGEEC], 2019). For instance, data from 2016 picture that while 14% of the general population aged between 18- and 24-years old leave school early, within the Roma population the rate increases to around 90% (FRA, 2019; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2016).

The legal framework for inclusive education calls the education system to find and implement educational strategies likely to promote school participation and success of all the students (DGEEC, 2019). Under this purpose, schools may define strategies to motivate children and to strengthen home-school relationships, particularly working with families which have not close ties with the school, such as Roma families (e.g., Clifford & Humphries, 2018; Jeon et al., 2020; Parsons et al., 2018). Committed to inclusive intentions and acknowledging the contribution of family involvement in promoting children's academic success, school directors and teachers have been focusing their efforts on strengthening home-

school relationships (Jeynes, 2018). These bonds are influenced by acculturation processes underlying the continued contact between both cultures (Makarova & Birman, 2016). Acculturation is a two-way process undergone in the contact between two distinct cultures, whereby acculturation orientations (e.g., attitudes and behaviors) of both cultural groups mutually influence each other (Berry, 2005). Alongside this dynamic process and depending on the ecological context, the extent to which ethnic minority individuals acculturate to mainstream culture and enculturate (i.e., retain) their native culture combine into four strategies (as pictured in Figure 1): integration (participation in both native and mainstream cultures), assimilation (rejection of native culture over the mainstream participation), separation (retention of native culture over the mainstream participation) and marginalization (rejection of both cultures).

Figure 1

Berry's acculturation model. Acculturation strategies followed by ethnic minority groups and the larger society (adapted from Berry, 2005)



For children from ethnic minority groups, school represents the main acculturation context, and school adjustment is the most important acculturative outcome (Schachner et al., 2017). In a tending-assimilative context, students and families with Roma background are expected to assimilate school values and expectations to be successful at school (Henderson et al., 2020). However, individuals from ethnic minorities do not choose the acculturative strategies and orientations they follow (Clifford &

Humphries, 2018). Instead, the intersection of context-related factors (e.g., family acculturation experiences, school climate) influences this process (Ward & Geeraert, 2016).

The phenomenon underlying the education of Roma groups is complex, resulting from the interaction of factors related to both mainstream and ethnic minority contexts (Alexiadou, 2019; Makarova, 2019). For instance, the net of reasons pointed in the literature includes the lack of knowledge on Roma culture (rooted in misguided assumptions of a homogeneous culture, the lack of partaking approaches to identify Roma needs and problems), widespread discrimination against students with Roma background, misguided policy actions (supported by stereotyped narratives), and limited educational experiences of Roma parents (e.g., Berkowitz et al., 2017; Göbel & Preusche, 2019; Gutentag et al., 2018; Kramer et al., 2021; Schachter, 2016). Compartmentalized approaches to Roma educational scenarios may contribute to widespread narratives portraying families and students with Roma background as culturally unfit to operate within or lacking interest in participating in the mainstream systems (e.g., Burchardt et al., 2018; Lauritzen & Nodeland, 2018). Thus, despite the strong focus of policy discourses on promoting inclusive environments, policy guidelines and implemented actions may work under the deficit models approach, losing the ultimate intention of inclusiveness (Myers, 2020; Parsons et al., 2018).

Anchored on literature review, our first project proposal planned a school-based intervention to answer the calls of school practitioners (e.g., school directors and teachers) and address the symptoms of Roma students' poor engagement in elementary school levels, such as truancy and underachievement. Following a preventive approach, the educational intervention planned to target students with Roma background enrolled in the first years of elementary school. However, the 'flow of the project' was interrupted by external constraints related to academic works from other universities targeting the same population. The media coverage of unethical procedures related to those academic works raised concerns among school directors and teachers, compromising their willingness to partake in the project and provide the information needed. Also, media headlines increased the families' resistance to allowing their children to partaking in the project. These constraints raised the need to outreach the Roma communities from other sources (e.g., direct contact with Roma communities). The close and ongoing contact with the Roma groups unveiled that most of the actions implemented and fail to understand contexts, antecedents, characteristics, and roles associated with educational processes (e.g., school engagement) of students with Roma background. Once in an interview, when sharing challenges faced to integrate into the educational system, a college student from an ethnic minority group stated that people's lack of curiosity on and about cultural aspects is the pivotal reason hampering integration. This is, the unified assumptions

portrayed by mainstream people about minority cultures (e.g., based on physical characteristics, ethnicity; their potential needs and problems) shapes the way to which both cultures interact with and adapt to each other. This anecdotal evidence strengthens the 'lessons learned' claiming that 'working for Roma' instead of 'with Roma' breaches the inclusion principles (Lauritzen & Nodeland, 2018). For the reasons detailed above, the way to achieve the major purpose of promoting school engagement of children from Roma communities had to be redefined as described below.

Thesis And Purpose Statements

Early drop-out or non-completion, absenteeism, and academic failure persisting among students with Roma background are the major targets of educational policies (Mendes & Magano, 2021). For instance, by extending compulsory education, policymakers intended to combat illiteracy and early school dropout. According to the frameworks about engagement/disengagement (e.g., Fredricks et al., 2004; Reschly & Christenson, 2012), those targets (e.g., early drop-out) represent behavioral markers of disengagement with the education system and school (respectively) motivated by the poor perceived value of education, beliefs about school as irrelevant to their future and weak bonds to school and teachers. Despite the increasing enrolment rates of children with Roma background, the benefits of education for inclusion and social mobility are not achieved by the obligation to attend school. Instead, children and youth may experience academic success which is closely related to the school engagement experiences and identity development (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Guided by the curiosity and grounded on the idea reflected in the saying above, this project brings together a comprehensive package of efforts, representing the first step to move away from the symptom-based approaches represented in literature and narratives about the Roma educational situation. A set of scientific works were conducted to learn about and with people from Roma background how the proximal contexts interact and shape cultural (e.g., cultural changes) and educational processes (e.g., school engagement) followed by families with Roma background. Together, the knowledge generated through these efforts is expected to shed light on two overarching questions with crucial implications for practice:

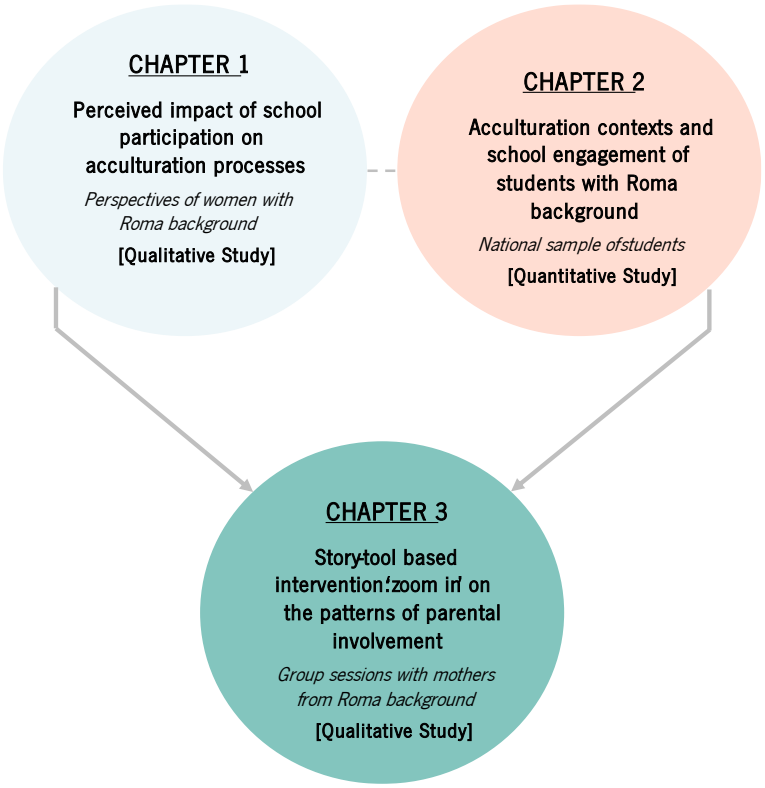
- *'Why the poor educational trajectories of Roma students persist, despite two decades of educational policies and interventions to increase the educational inclusion of Roma children?'*
- *'What can we learn to improve inclusive environments at school?'.*

Thesis Outline

Aligned with these goals, this dissertation is comprised of three chapters with the following general purposes: to picture the current state of affairs regarding the educational participation of Roma in school, as an important acculturation context, and its influence on acculturative outcomes (Chapter 1 and Chapter 2); and to report the outcomes of a story-tool based intervention implemented to explore different forms of parental involvement in children's school life and to enlighten strategies to promote home-school connections (Chapter 3). The chapters offer rich scientific studies presenting qualitative and quantitative data gathered from different sources of information. Despite the different focus, formal and informal knowledge gained from the two studies presented in the first two chapters set the ground to the approach and the design of a story-tool-based intervention presented in Chapter 3 (for an overview see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Structure and interconnection of chapters



Anchored on the claims that (1) schools are a powerful context of acculturation (providing learning and socialization experiences for identity development; Ward & Geeraert, 2016) and (2) women play an important role in children's education, regardless of their level of literacy (Hamilton, 2017; Porter, 2016),

the first chapter presents a multiple case study exploring how different generations of Roma women perceive the influence of school participation on Roma acculturation processes. The women's perspectives were analyzed regarding the perceived value of education and the perceived impact of school participation on trajectories of cultural values, attitudes, and behaviors. Different levels of schooling were considered to tackle the potential influence on the topics approached. The emphasis of this study was placed on the group-level, exploring how the educational experiences are shaping cultural and behavioral patterns and identities.

Along with the women's perspectives on and about schooling and its impact on Roma acculturation processes, the second chapter flips the focus towards the perspectives of Roma children and youth on school adjustment and the contribution of contextual factors. In policy and school narratives, Roma families are still portrayed as the critical source for children's school disengagement (e.g., Derrington & Kendall, 2008; Khalfaoui et al., 2020; Parsons et al., 2018). The difficulty in placing the responsibility for student's school disengagement may compromise school efforts to fight poor educational trajectories of students with Roma background (Jeynes, 2018). Acknowledging the relevance of school adjustment (e.g., school engagement, perceived utility of education) to social mobility (e.g., Alexiadou, 2019; FRA, 2018), the study presented in Chapter 2 focuses on how the micro-level contextual factors (i.e., family and school) are related to school adjustment (i.e., school engagement and perceived utility of education) of students with Roma background. To capture the heterogeneity of national Roma communities, the sample comprises 204 students with Roma background, attending different school levels (from elementary to secondary education) and geographically dispersed across the country (11 schools). Using a survey, this study aimed to picture the perspectives of students from Roma communities regarding the role played by family (e.g., academic socialization) and school-related factors (e.g., teacher involvement) on their self-reported academic adjustment (e.g., school engagement and perceived utility of education).

Informed by formal and informal evidence from the previous studies, the Chapter 3 offers a 'zoom in' on the patterns of parental school involvement in children's school life while engaging with parents with Roma background in a story-tool based intervention. Implementing an intervention-based methodology, the protocol includes eight-sessions with parents from different Roma communities, lasting 90 minutes each and delivered on a weekly basis. A story-tool was purposely designed to promote opportunities for dialogue and reflection while creating knowledge to overcome the inequalities faced by Roma in schools. Based on the roles inside the Roma community (e.g., taking care of their child's education), the sample includes mothers from students attending elementary and middle school. To

assess parental role constructions, patterns of parental involvement in school life, and experiences of participation in the sessions, we implemented semi-structured interviews in two moments in time (pre- and pos. Moving beyond the 'educative' approach, this intervention aimed to shed light on how schools can engage with parents and collaborate as partners in children's education.

The integration of research findings is expected to contribute to *know-what* and *know-how* knowledge to bridge the breach between the inclusion commitments and the actual outputs. In fact, there is an overall lack of data on Roma educational processes and how the actions implemented are favoring their social mobility. For instance, data on school engagement and wellbeing at school of students with Roma background is scarce (e.g., Van Praag et al., 2016). Thus, the knowledge produced is expected to add to the literature and practice by challenging the widely spread views on the causes explaining the poor educational trajectories of Roma groups and supporting the development of sustainable educational policies on the pathway to integration.

CHAPTER I

Living On Double-Edged Sword: Intergenerational Gypsy Women Perspectives About The Impact Of School Enrolment On Cultural Identity[1]

Abstract

European governmental policies are not fully addressing the needs of the Gypsy people, and data regarding inclusion (e.g., education) is below the expected. The negative experiences of social exclusion and prejudice experienced by the Gypsy groups may help explain their strong orientation to preserve cultural heritage and the low success of the inclusion strategies. Gypsy women, as 'safeguards' of cultural heritage, are responsible for promoting children's education. A multiple case study explored the perspectives of eight women regarding the perceived impact of school enrolment on Gypsy acculturation processes. A thematic analysis was conducted on semi-structured interviews. Three themes emerged from the analysis: (1) *Adjusting behaviors to cope with educational challenges;* (2) *Gender constrains to preserve cultural values; and* (3) *Acculturative strategies layered by educational level.* Regarding education, results show a positive attitude towards slight changes on behaviors. However, reports revealed concerns about the erosion of cultural values resulting from the exposure to mainstream values. Gypsy people struggle to cope with pressures to assimilate the wider culture while preserving cultural identity and group belonging. Findings add to extant literature on the acculturation processes followed by Gypsies regarding the formal education impact.

Keywords: acculturation processes, case study, cultural identity, gypsy women education, school enrolment

[1] Submitted to an international peer-reviewed journal

Introduction

Roma is the largest ethnic minority without a nation state, 10 to 12 million Roma live in Europe (Roma Education Fund, 2013). For centuries, Roma groups have been faithful to their traditions and cultural heritage, maintaining their customs and preserving the compliance with the inner group Roma social structure, rather than participating in the mainstream systems(Rosário et al., 2017). However, globalization, European integration frameworks, educational reforms and the increasing participation of Roma students in school have been pressuring Roma people to change their behaviors, values and ethnic identity (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). Ethnic identity is here understood as the sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the attitudes and feelings associated with that membership (Phinney, 1996).

In Europe, welfare gaps for Roma people have been found to persist, and widespread, in health, housing, employment and education (Alexiadou & Norberg, 2017). We follow Alexiadou (2019) on the assumption that education sets the ground to promote a wide range of future life-chances and break the cycle of poverty and social segregation. Regarding education, data from international reports highlight that child from Roma groups are likely to struggle to read and write, showing higher early school dropout rates and academic failure than their counterparts from the non-Roma groups (Eurostat, 2018). The need to improve the situation of Roma communities brings education to the forefront of international debates as a core area for policy actions and interventions (O'Hanlon, 2016; Rosário et al., 2020). As a result of these global efforts, Roma families seems to have improved their awareness of the utility of education to their children development (Smith, 2017; Hamilton, 2017) and to be more willing to improve their attitudes towards children school attendance (Rosário et al., 2017). However, the educational outcomes (e.g., attendance rates, school engagement) are below the expected and people from Roma groups are still underperforming in education. At large, the Roma communities' poor academic skills help maintain the cycle of poverty and social segregation (Avery & Hoxhallari, 2017). While discussing these findings, both scholars and educators have suggested that Roma cultural values, social structure, and gender-specific expectations emerge as barriers to Roma groups educational achievements (Lauritzen & Nodeland, 2018). According to Bhopal and Myers (2016), the cultural practices involving Roma groups entails a set of behavioral and attitudinal expectations organized by gender roles. This social structure defines the ethnic group relationships and the orientation towards the wider society. Literature shows that roles assumed by Roma men and women in Europe, although complementary, are clearly distinct (Myers, 2017). For example, men are expected to assume the role of economic agent and provide for their family, whereas women are expected to assume a domestic role and take care of the family (Hamilton, 2017).

To meet these cultural expectations, children are trained from early ages to behave accordingly to the expected societal and gender roles; what is more, these distinct paths are further accentuated during puberty (Hamilton, 2016). These cultural traditions and values passed down from older to younger generations and shape the social experiences with and the commitment towards the ethnic group (Rivas-Drake & Marchand, 2016).

As children progresses in school, the more the Roma group ethnic identity conflicts with their educational progress which may help explain why so many Roma youth dropout from school early. The net of reasons reported by academic and popular sources is varied and complex, ranging from segregation and discrimination practices to fear of eroding Roma cultural identity due to the exposition of children and youth to mainstream values and improper behaviors (Bophal & Myers, 2016; Rosário et al., 2017). For example, Roma girls are expected to marry young, usually before completing mandatory school grade levels. This cultural practice is perceived as a strategy to reduce the contact with non-Roma counterparts and ensure the virginity of the bride. The compliance with this cultural more preserves the family's honor within the Roma community and strengthen the ethnic group sense of belonging. However, dropping out early from school, prevents Gypsy women from developing the skills needed to further participate in mainstream society and influence future generations pathways to educational success. Roma girls limited contact and involvement with other cultures, combined with poor educational trajectories and poverty, leads to experiences of disadvantage and to systemic inequalities (Levinson, 2015). Traditional gendered social roles within the Roma communities have a clear impact on women's everyday lives, limiting their roles to childrearing and homemaking (Meyers & Bophal, 2016). For example, the attitudes of women from Roma communities towards children education and educational aspirations are strictly constrained by the intragroup pressures to respect the cultural codes, but also by their poor knowledge of the educational system and of the world outside their home.

Literature has been alerting that women from Roma groups, as guardians of the cultural values, fear that formal education may erode their cultural values and mores (Gould, 2017). However, Roma families are being pressured by governmental policies to fit in the mainstream systems (e.g., completing mandatory education) (Sime, Fassetta, & McClung, 2018). Unfolding this tension is the focus of the present research. Our aim is to further understand how distinct generations of women from Roma groups tackle their role under the inner group social pressures and the pressures and challenges raised by the wider society.

Theoretical Framework

Many debates and policies for the integration of Roma communities have been raised across the world in the last decades. However, literature lacks data on the how Roma people tackle their cultural attitudes and behaviors and answer to the permanent intercultural contact resulting from the proximity to the mainstream community.

Acculturation has been defined as a process of cultural and psychological changes (behavior and attitudes) boosted by intercultural contact (Berry, 2006). Intercultural strategies are defined by the extent to which minority-group individuals show interest in engaging in wider society activities while preserving their native culture (Berry, 2006). The acculturation research framework provides a theoretical ground for the present study, guiding our understanding on the dialectical tension between societal factors (e.g., socio-economic environment and governmental policies to integrate), institutional contexts (e.g., school system) and familiar and community forces (Ward & Geeraert, 2016). Berry's model (2006) presents four main strategies for acculturation and examines how individuals orientate themselves to their cultural roots and within wider society. The orientation to seek involvement within the wider society in detriment of the ethnic culture heritage defines the assimilation process, while integration defines the preference to maintain the cultural heritage while also seeking contact with other cultures (Praag, Stevens, & Houtte, 2016). Strategies of marginalization and separation arise with the low involvement and participation of ethnic groups in the larger society. The acculturation process and outcomes depend at large on the country acculturative climate and policies (Schachner, He, Heizmann, & Van de Vijver, 2017). In the permanent contact between cultures, ethnic individuals develop their sense of membership and belonging to a group or culture, while embracing the sense of shared behaviors, attitudes and values (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). We follow Phinney (1989) understanding of cultural identity formation as a developmental task that evolves changes in response to contextual and social factors. What is more, cultural identity is dependent on the socialization experiences within the family, ethnic groups, and wider society. These experiences impact not only on how young people feel about themselves and their families, but also on how they interact with other society systems and individuals (Yeh & Hwang, 2000). For example, an individual who has a strong ethnic identity but does not identify or develop an identity with the new culture grows a separated identity, whereas one who is not identified with their ethnic identity but with the new culture is likely to develop an assimilated identity.

In many countries the policies raised to integrate the community do not favor the development of a bicultural identity resulting from the maintenance of the heritage culture while engaging in the mainstream culture (Praag et al., 2016). Instead, the lack of commitment to multiculturalism set the

ground to an assimilationist pressure to adopt the wider culture. As a result of cultural dissimilarity and strong attachment to cultural heritage, separation unfolds as the acculturation strategy followed by people from Roma groups. Still, Roma groups show a tendency to answer more favorably to regulations and practices from certain wide society systems (e.g., healthcare system, social system) than to others (e.g., educational system, political system) (Ward & Geeraert, 2016). This is worrying because education is key in the European policies for inclusion and provides a barometer of Roma people adjustment to the wider society.

The body of literature on the topic of 'Roma and Education' tends to adopt unidirectional perspectives, and Roma people unwillingness to engage in wider society is often pictured as predetermined by historic patterns and cultural features (e.g., cultural mores that conflicts with the values of formal education) (Lauritzen & Nodeland, 2018). However, studies on acculturation processes stress out the high contribute of contextual factors to the adjustment to the mainstream systems (e.g., school). In fact, according to Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory (1986) the school success is influenced by attitudes of the wider society and the level of support from the ethnic group community. This author alerts to the complexity of the interrelated net of relationships shaping the acculturation processes. For example, the unequal treatment students from ethnic minority groups receive from the educational system and, at large, from society, is likely to promote non-favorable views towards the value of education within the community. Therefore, these students may build low academic expectations, and have poor educational experiences, which is likely to translates in low school engagement and interrupted educational trajectories (Rosário et al., 2014). What is more, beliefs about education are typically handed down from generation to generation, which may help explain the persistent low engagement in school and the poor academic achievement of Roma children (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Taking all together, schools are expected to provide a privileged context for developing acculturation processes (Ward & Geeraert, 2016). However, the educational system recurrently fails to offer equal opportunities for ethnic minority groups to progress in school (Ogunyemi, 2017). In ethnic groups such as Roma, who maintain cultural boundaries and loyalty to family traditions (Dimitrova, Ferrer-Wreder, & Ahlen, 2018), the pressure to assimilate may be sensed as a threat to their ethnic identity and the perceived discrimination may lead to separation (Ward & Geeraert, 2016). As consequence, as Schachner and colleagues (2017) found, the less the community engagement and adjustment to the school context (e.g., early school dropout, unsuccessful school transitions) the more their sense of belonging to the ethnic group.

The Current Study

"Roma" is an umbrella term and it refers to a number of groups, including persons who identify themselves as Gypsies, sharing similar cultural characteristics without denying variations in lifestyles. This term has been adopted as a political replacement for the generic identity 'Gypsy'. In Portugal and in other European countries, groups of Roma people recognize themselves, and are recognized by non-Romani people, as Gypsies. For this reason, in the present study, "Gypsy" was the term chosen to describe our population.

The marginalization of Gypsy children in education is still a major societal problem across Europe (Eurostat, 2018). Even though, some progresses are visible, and the efforts made by governmental bodies towards the inclusion of this minority groups have been affecting positively Gypsy people life in different social areas (e.g., housing, health) (European Commission, 2017). Still, none is so pervasive to their culture as the societal demands regarding formal education. The school climate is likely to be perceived as a threat to the traditional Gypsy people life trajectories because the engagement in school activities seldom compete with their ethnic identities. The strong engagement with native culture prevails over dominant society orientation, and so very often Gypsy children are likely to miss classes and eventually fail in school (Rosário et al., 2016, 2017). In fact, Gypsy children are likely to dropout in the end of the elementary school, when basic of numeracy and literacy skills are expected to be acquired (Rosário et al., 2017). For example, national data indicates that 45,4% of the Roma children is enrolled in elementary school, and only 2% is attending high school (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência [DGEEC], 2017). Regarding gender, the percentage of female students in each school level is lower than that of male counterparts (DGEEC, 2017). Despite of data supporting that female Gypsy students do better in school than male Gypsy students (e.g., lower failure rates); official reports show that the female dropout school rates are increasing from the middle to high school, with an overall percentage of school dropout higher than that of their male counterparts (DGEEC, 2017).

In the Gypsy societal setting, women play an important role in preserving cultural heritage and group identity to the next generations (Bhopal & Myers, 2016). For these reasons, the inner group social expectations for Gypsy women does not include the engagement in education beyond elementary school, or an employment journey (Sime et al., 2018). In fact, and despite Gypsy women's responsibility to prepare the new generations for the future, they are more likely to lack school experiences and educational skills needed to take part in the wider society systems (e.g., fill in a document, use a computer). These poor academic competencies limit Gypsy women in supporting children's educational trajectories and promoting positive ethnic socialization experiences within the community (e.g., positive beliefs about their

ability to master academic work; positive employment prospects; Sime et al., 2018). Moreover, parent-to-child messages regarding the preservation of cultural heritage were found to influence the children's cultural identity formation and the way they handle the mainstream culture (Juang & Syed, 2010). In sum, the following propositions set the ground for the current study: i) family engagement in school is related to school success and to positive outcomes (Wood & Bauman, 2017); the ii) family dynamics influence the sociocultural and psychological adaptation of their members (e.g., Forehand & Kotchick, 2016), and (iii) Gypsy women play a key role raising their child and passing down their culture (Meyers & Bophal, 2016).

Therefore, all considered this research addresses how Gypsy women understand the impact of formal education on the Gypsy acculturative orientations, regarding the preservation of the ethnic culture and the orientation to participate in mainstream-based systems (e.g., school). Findings are expected to help further understand the Gypsy women's conceptualization of their role in the acculturative orientations followed by the community and may shed light on the poor results of the current policies to promote Gypsy people's social and educational inclusion (Lauritzen & Nodeland, 2018). The current study is focused on examining intergenerational perspectives of Gypsy women regarding the acculturation strategies followed by this ethnic group. Our aims are threefold:

1. to explore the acculturative changes in behaviors, attitudes, values, and ethnic identities resulting from the contact of Gypsy communities with education system;
2. the role played by gender on the acculturative processes within the family context;
3. to cluster data to explore to what extent the intersection of categories (i.e., women's literacy levels, age and social status) are influencing behaviors and attitudes towards Gypsy children education;

Consistent with these aims, we explored the following research questions: How do Gypsy women perceive the education of Gypsy children and of its impact on the cultural values, behaviors, and ethnic identity? How do individual factors shape Gypsy women perspectives and attitudes regarding their acculturative answers in different domains?

Method

Participants

A local Red Cross helped recruit participants. Gypsy women were selected based on a snowball sampling process. This recruitment process is particularly useful when it is difficult to access people who can be good informants about the phenomena or when trust is required to establish contact with the community (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). In this process we followed Robinson's four-point approach to qualitative sampling (2014). Following the author approach, the sample universe was defined by specifying the inclusion an exclusion criterion (step 1). Criteria for enrolling in the investigation were as follows: to have been born and raised in a Gypsy community and living on an urban community. Considering the epistemological and practical concerns, the sample size was predefined by the case study methodology (step 2). Members of a population classified in the literature as "hard-to-reach", the Gypsy women were recruited following a snowball sampling technique (step 3). Regarding the sample sourcing, the local Red Cross organization facilitated the first contacts with potential participants. The Gypsy women who enrolled in the research recommended participants meeting the criteria. All participants were informed about the study prior to their participation and provided informed consent. For younger women informed consent was provided by the family patriarch. No financial rewards or incentives were delivered to Gypsy women for taking the interview.

Finally, eight Gypsy women, meeting the inclusion criteria, participated in an interview to share their perspectives on the impact of formal education on Gypsy people cultural traditions. A sample of women of different ages, levels of education and marital status (see Table 1) was gathered. Participants were 33 years old on average (SD = 12, ranging from 17 to 52). The four oldest Gypsy women did not complete the fourth grade; two other participants attended school until sixth grade, but did not complete elementary school; finally, the two youngest Gypsy women were currently attending high school.This sample includes Gypsy women living in a social housing neighborhood within the boundaries of the urban area. The contact with the mainstream systems and people is facilitated by the geographic proximity and by the many opportunities to enroll in programs and initiatives focused on the promotion of social inclusion. Still, Gypsy groups in urban areas with more contact with the mainstream community are more prone to experience social struggles while preserving their heritage culture.

Table 1

Descriptive information about the cases

	Age	Academic Qualifications	Marital Status (Married)
Selina [SL]	17	Attending secondary school (10th grade)	No
Shannie [SA]	19	Attending secondary school (12th grade)	No
Sabina [SB]	23	6th grade	Yes
Shelta [SE]	29	6th grade	Yes
Nareli [NR]	40	4th grade	Yes
Consuleti [CN]	41	4th grade	Yes
Andelia [AD]	45	Illiterate*	Yes
Lennor [LN]	52	4th grade	Yes

Note. *Enrolled in an adult literacy course

Data Collection

To attain our goals, a multiple case study was conducted. An exploratory multiple case study is particularly suitable to investigate the "contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context" (Yin, 2009, pp.2) where the researcher has little control over the events. Findings are expected to help generate hypotheses for later research (Baxter & Jack, 2008).We conducted semi-structured interviews to investigate participants' perspectives and collect information regarding the purposes of our study, inaccessible through other sources (Dane, 2011). The interview guide was developed and reviewed by the co-authors and by the members of local Red Cross. The final interview was piloted with a Gypsy member of the Red Cross' staff and then revised (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The in-depth questions design was aligned with the research purposes and previous knowledge on the sample universe and on the topic under study. A list of open-ended questions is provided to illustrate the lines of inquiry.

- Looking back, can you talk about changes to the Gypsy people's 'way of life'?
- Focusing on school attendance, what is your opinion about the increased enrolment of Gypsy children in school?
- Considering the Gypsy woman's role, what do you think about girls being enrolled in the school?
- Do you think Gypsy girls should complete high school levels?
- Do you think school can change Gypsy traditions and values? Can you elaborate, please?

Detailed community experiences and historical developments perceived by the interviewees were emphasized. The flexible nature of the semi-structured interviews allowed the questions to be adjusted to

accommodate for the distinct literacy levels of the participants and explore information (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). Personal interviews were conducted by a researcher at the Red Cross office in a quiet room. Interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes and were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

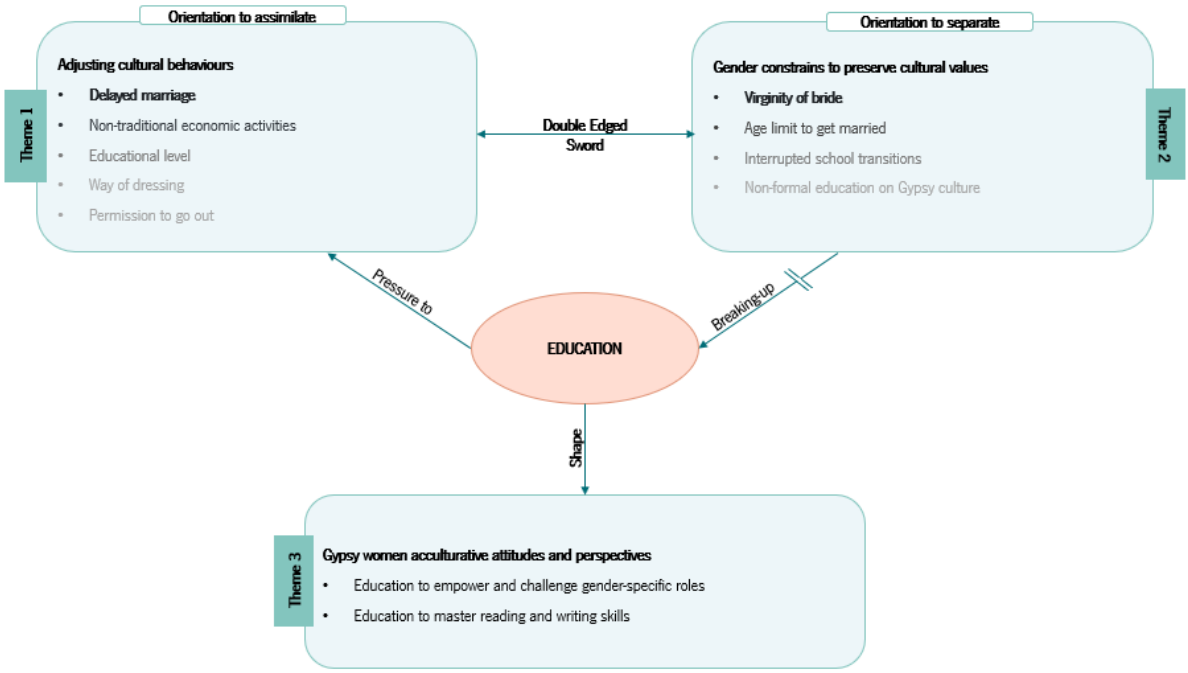
To increase the effectiveness and efficiency in capturing relevant information from the data, QSR International's NVivo 10 software was used to assist in undertaking the data analysis (Bazeley, 2006). A thematic analysis was carried out following the six steps reported by Braun and Clarke (2006). Significant themes were inductively considered based on agreements and contradictions between participants (as a whole) and then, clustered on theoretical groups. Besides, propositions used to develop research questions (e.g., education can help challenge attitudes and behavioral patterns; low literacy levels may result in limited support to child school engagement; women and girls' empowerment is essential to promote social development in Gypsy society) were used to gather and analyze data. The coding process and analysis were primarily conducted at a semantic level (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We explored the process of change in a continuum by considering a multidimensional system of influences. Relationships and repeated patterns of meaning were identified within the women's narrative accounts and across participants by using software tools to search through the datasets (queries, cluster analysis, graphical maps). In specific, cluster analysis, was used as an exploratory technique to support the identification of the associations and to visualize data patterns by grouping participants sharing similarities across categories (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). To aid clarity in the reporting process, the frequency of responses for each category was described using the Rodgers and Cooper's (2006) scoring scheme for qualitative thematic analysis: All = 8 cases, nearly all = 7 cases, most = 5–6 cases, around half = 4 cases, some = 3 cases, a couple = 2 cases, and one = one case. To enhance the trustworthiness of the current findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1986), two researchers coded the full content of the interviews separately and the consensus was reached through discussion. The consistency of coding was assessed by the Cohen's kappa coefficient; kappa coefficient was .93, which is considered very good according to Landis and Koch (1977). Verbatim quotes were included, not only to illustrate data captured and support discussion points, and add validity to results (Smith, 2017).

Findings

Data was analyzed and related with the research questions to find out three themes (see Figure 3). Those themes reflect Gypsy women perspectives about the impact of formal education and pressures to assimilate wider culture on i) cultural trajectories, and ii) attitudes and behaviors adopted to cope with acculturative pressures and challenges. Individual-level characteristics as educational level, age and marital status were considered.

Figure 3

Thematic diagram of key themes and subthemes



Note: The color gradient illustrates the weighting of subthemes, listed in decreasing order, in a relation to the other subthemes. We followed Rodgers and Cooper (2006) in scoring and signaling in darker color the subthemes that appear in "nearly all" interviews (100%-1; n=7), and in clearer color those appearing in "some" (n=3) interviews. In between, there is "around half" (50%+1; n=4) interviews and "most" (50%+1 to 100%-1; n=5-6).

Theme 1: Adjusting behaviors to cope with educational challenges

All participants described Gypsy culture mainly by stressing traditions, moral and social values, likely to preserve group's cohesion and social singularity. For example, there seems to be a consensual agreement regarding which aspects are more valuable in their culture (e.g., respect for the elders, grief,

bereavement and funeral traditions, endogamous marriages); and to what extent their social participation in the activities of the wider society impacts traditional behaviors, attitudes, values, and life's cycle over time.

"Respect for the eldest [...] *in the Gypsy culture there is a lot of respect, it comes from the ancient gypsy tradition, right? We do not need police intervention. When it is time to settle things, the oldest gypsy is called, 3 or 4 older gypsies, talk and there is always that union. For what? To avoid rebalancing between parts." (Lennor, 52 years old)*

"It changed a lot ... now I'm walking more, I'm leaving, I have more freedom; Even now when they are engaged, isn't it, the bride and groom can leave, they are going to take a walk, go to the movies, go to lunch and that, at the time, you could not do that [...] *you already see gypsy women at work, you see gypsy women with studies above average, very intelligent." (Shelta, 29 years old)*

Despite their concerns to safeguard cultural heritage, nearly all Gypsy women have acknowledged the need to pair their traditional 'way of living' with wider society demands. Participants' accounts indicated several challenges to the Gypsy people way of life as follows: the decline of the traditional work activity of the Gypsy community (selling in fairs) due to economic developments (e.g., low-cost shops competing with the local fairs); the implementation of public integration policies to promote better life conditions (e.g., new housing conditions, access to welfare benefits); and the need to improve the education of children and adults.

"[Gypsy men and the eldest] *see that being in the fairs trying to sell as usual, no longer pays back because we have to pay taxes and documents..., now selling is useless." (Selina, 17 years old)*

"I agree [with studying beyond fourth grade], *I have a daughter who is in the 6th grade, and I want to educate her to go forward* [in her studies] *because the fairs don't give you anything now." (Nareli, 40 years old)*

Thus, changes in Gypsy cultural behaviors were referenced as answers to the societal pressures and developments. However, and despite conflicting with traditional trajectories, formal education was

consensually identified as a positive influence on the Gypsy people's empowerment. Most of the participants noticed a growing involvement of the Gypsy community in school activities (e.g., positive disposition to keep Gypsy children in school). Delayed marriages, enrolment in school beyond elementary school, and the transition to professional activities, other than selling in fairs, were presented as examples of positive acculturative changes occurring during last years.

"[Now] *parents want their children to complete elementary school and marry much older* [than the traditional age to marry, approximately 14-16 years old] *... we married much younger, now they marry older. Yes, the Gypsy* [marriage] *tradition is already changing a lot, a lot." (Andelia, 45 years old)*

"School is the future. Without school [education]*, we are not going anywhere. I see by myself. I would like to do other things, but I have finished only up to the 4th grade, I cannot enroll in any course. Nowadays, I would like to take short courses, but I cannot* [due to low school level]*. That´s why I keep my children studying." (Consuleti, 41 years old)*

Theme 2: Gender constrains to preserve cultural values

Despite the openness to behavioral changes emerging from the reports, nearly all Gypsy women decisions were focused on protect and preserve their cultural values. In the community's social structure, Gypsy women assume the responsibility of safeguarding the cultural legacy for the future generations and recognize themselves as playing a crucial role within the family and the ethnic group. Marriage is presented as the most important turning point in a Gypsy woman's life. Marriage is perceived as the shift to a new self in which the woman has the responsibility to honor their roots and safeguard the cultural heritage for future generations. Reproducing gendered positions, girls are the major targets of the home-educational practices and supervision. One of the most important and outstanding aspects of their lives is evidence of the virginity of the bride. This is described as a high point in a Gypsy girl's life, long-awaited by her family and by the nearby community. It is a cultural value and a key gate to earn respect from the Gypsy society, while reflecting personal dignity and the family's trustworthiness.

"The Gypsy woman is born and raised to be married. We were encouraged to be always thinking: "I want to marry", "I will marry one day, and I want to do this and that, I will have children." (Shelta, 29 years old)

"As Gypsy women, we have to marry virgins. And it is good [to marry young]*, because as the world is today, it is not convenient to marry late, because at that age you have already seen so much of the world; now you see non-Gypsy women completely lost, girls and kids are lost; girls naked in the internet that's why I say a Gypsy woman has to marry when she is 17/18 years old." (Selina, 17 years old)*

"I only have one daughter and I say I always tell my daughter that I want her to show her honor [virginity of the bride] *and show honor for their parents. This is a good thing for us so that later my husband and I can go everywhere showing our honor" (Consuleti, 41 years old)*

The culturally based expectations for Gypsy women constrain the educational aspirations and the participation of Gypsy women in the wider society. For example, while explaining Gypsy children early school dropout, some participants identified the conflict between school schedules and the time needed to carry out domestic chores (e.g., help to clean the house, preparing meals, taking care of younger brothers and sisters); and the safeguard of the family honor among the group.

"There are mothers who go sell in the fairs and need their daughters to help. When they become 12, 13, 14, 15 years-old, a few study, but there are mothers who take them from school because they don't have anyone at home to do the housework. I would change the school timetable so that these children when they reached these ages, do not have to drop out from school." (Selina, 17 years old)

"The opportunities I did not have was to continue studying at the PIEF [professionalizing degree]*, which was inserted here at the time and my parents did not allow me to go. These were the opportunities I did not have. Maybe if I had not got married, I'd be working right now and studying." (Sabina, 23 years old)*

Thus, despite of the general agreement and openness to change cultural behaviors, participants focused parental practices on the preservation of the traditional life's cycle expectations (e.g., social, and moral codes).

"Despite most of us not having studies [low educational attainment]*, Gypsy women are very intelligent women, because we know, we were taught and have grown up to walk according to the elders' path. We know how to respect. About this, I think there is no better life than ours..." (Shelta, 29 years old)*

"The Gypsy tradition is followed in my father's house as my grandfather did ... in my house is also the same, my husband and the elder maintain respect at home, my children keep respect, my grandchildren the same and that's it. This is very important? It's very important to us." (Andelia, 45 years old)

In their interviews, participant's reports suggest they might be struggling with a dilemma while deciding which path to choose. On one hand, these women recognize the importance of respecting their gender roles and traditions, but on the other they also recognize the need to promote Gypsy people education to improve future life conditions, regardless of gender expectations.

"But for the Gypsies is like this, the sooner you get married, the better. Many parents like them married early." (Consuleti, 41 years old)

"Today I would say don't get married young. My daughter is 19 and I did not want her to get away [from home] *so early. And she's already 19 years old! I want them, ah, to enjoy life more...* [Gypsy girls] *marry so young and have no life at all, they have no house, they have no job, they have nothing, and then they must stay at their parents' house. Nowadays I say like this: ah ... I want them to enjoy life, like, for example, to have a job, and when they have a life, then to marry." (Nareli, 40 years old)*

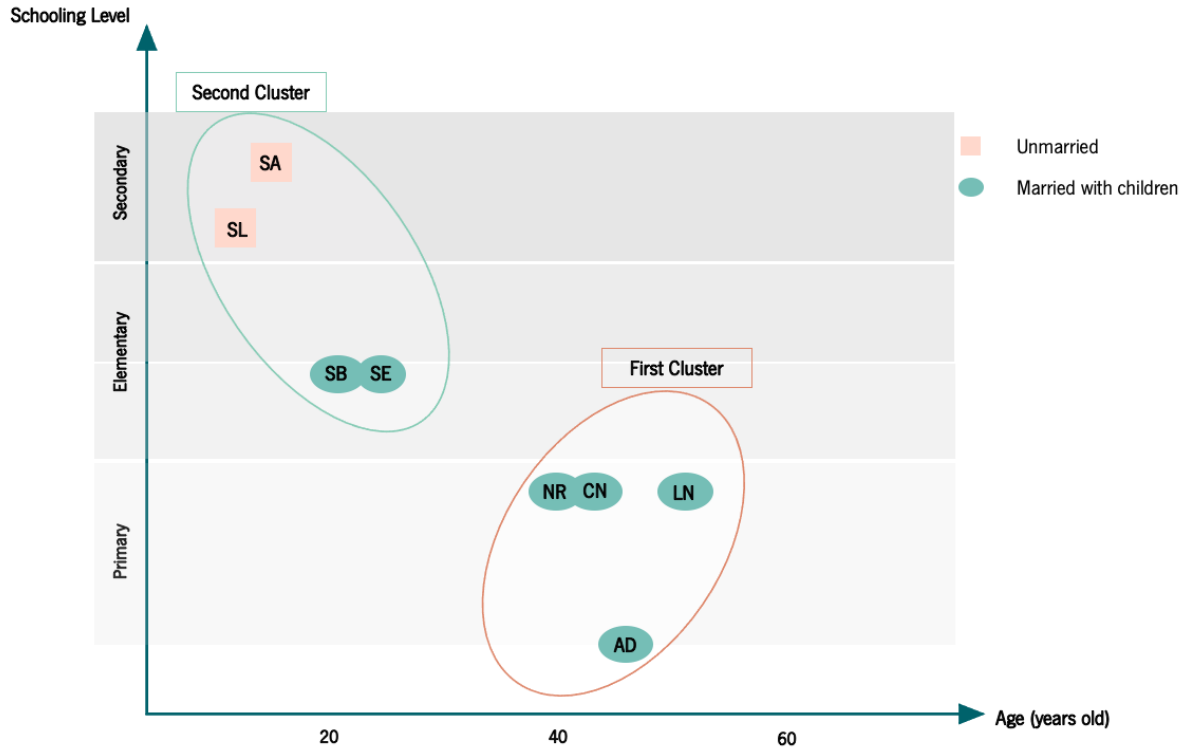
Theme 3: Acculturative strategies layered by educational level.

A cluster analysis was performed based on coding similarity and slight differences were found between two different clusters. The first cluster grouped four Gypsy women, married, with children, low

literacy (the majority struggle to read and write) and ages ranging between 40 and 52 years old. The second cluster grouped four women, married and single, aged from 17 to 29 years which had, at least, completed elementary school (see Figure 4). Due to the heterogeneity presented in this cluster, concerning age and marital status, the education level emerged as the segmentation variable. The age differences between the clusters clearly highlight positive outcomes regarding efforts to promote education among Gypsy communities, despite educational levels still being bellow the expected.

Figure 4

Cluster diagram. Cases clustered by coding similarity.



Note: First cluster, Gypsy women; aged between 40 and 50 years old; married; with children and grandchildren; who have attended school for short periods, mainly, in their adult years. Second cluster: Gypsy women; aged from 17 to 29 years old; married with children (n = 2) and unmarried (n = 2); who have been enrolled in school from childhood to the early stage of adulthood.

When analyzing the two clusters, data patterns have shown that women in the first cluster tended to identify instrumental purposes for school enrolment into advanced grades. These women agreed with the need for modifications on Gypsy people cultural practices (e.g., to delay marriage), allowing girls to master reading and writing skills, get a driver's license and be prepared to find non-traditional economic

activity (e.g., working as hairdresser). This openness seems to result from the expectation that their main source of income, selling in the local fairs, will not provide future generations with economic sustainability.

"[Attending school]*, we learn more* [content than those learned in the community]*, we go to a store, and we know how to make calculations. Knowing how to sign a paper is also good." (Nareli, 40 years old)*

"Being in school is very good [...] *For example, I help my grandchildren, so they are going to study, because now as this is now, there are no jobs for young people, having studies is the best for them. It helps you live better." (Lennor, 52 years old)*

"I wanted them [Gypsy girls] *to continue studying and that they all could have a different future, a job, and not selling in fairs." (Consuleti, 41 years old)*

Despite women in both clusters stress the importance of education to improve future life-conditions (e.g., access to qualified jobs), those who progressed beyond elementary school (second cluster) recognized long-term enrolment in school as an opportunity to improve personal skills and a way to change the Gypsy people "way of thinking". For example, younger participants addressed the need for reconsidering the traditional strict gender roles, particularly regarding wider access to education and professional careers. Data stresses slight changes in the perspectives emerging in the speeches of Gypsy women with high educational level and longer exposure to the mainstream systems and community.

"Any Gypsy child who does not attend school at the age of four, when asked "what do you want to do when you grow up?" will reply: "Sell in fairs". When they attend school, 1st, 2nd year they answer differently: "No, I want to be a doctor, I want to be a doctor!". They think of possibilities other than fairs, why? Because school pushes you to think differently, in a different way." (Selina, 17 years old)

"I think that to change our future, to change our mentalities, the first step is to attend school. It is fundamental." (Shannie, 19 years old)

"The school contributes a lot, it's what I say, school is the most of all, it's the beginning of a life. It contributes to everything, to being a highly- evolved person, a more open mind. It contributes to everything in a lifetime. [School can help to change] *the man's*

way of treating the woman, is very rustic is, still … has already changed a little bit, but not so much. [...] *besides that, I do not wish big changes* [in the Gypsy culture]*" (Sabina, 23 years old)*

Discussion

The present study aimed to learn how Gypsy women, living close to the mainstream society, understand the influence of school attendance on their behaviors, values, and cultural identity, and how they balance their role of safe guardians of the cultural legacy with the assimilationist pressures to take part in mainstream systems. A supplementary aim was to understand how women's literacy levels are influencing gendered perspectives, behaviors, and attitudes regarding the acculturative processes for the next generations. Data was analyzed thematically, and three themes emerged: (1) *Adjusting behaviors to cope with educational challenges;* (2) *Gender constrains to preserve cultural values; and* (3) *Acculturative strategies layered by educational level.*

Regarding the first theme, current findings indicate that cultural trajectories of the Gypsy people are being challenged to assimilate the mainstream culture. According to previous studies (e.g., Schachner et al, 2017), countries with less supportive multicultural policies focused on promoting equity, as Portugal, tend to favor an assimilationist climate, where ethnic minority groups are expected to *"melt into"* the mainstream culture (Berry, 2006). Regarding Gypsy groups, globalized efforts to reduce the educational and societal inequalities (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2015) have been pressuring for changes in Gypsy people attitudes and behaviors towards the engagement in formal education and traditional economic activities (Hamilton, 2016). As Alexiadou (2019) alerted, education is a privileged tool to foster the long-term social adjustment of minority individuals. Notwithstanding, during the last two decades the adherence of Gypsy groups to the mainstream systems (i.e., education) have been reported as bellow the expected with Gypsy groups struggling to protect their cultural identity.

Current data suggest that the educational policies and actions set on the last decade (e.g., mandatory enrolment in compulsory school as a condition to benefit from social income) are impacting on Gypsy cultural behaviors. For example, participants reported examples of cultural traditions that are being delayed (e.g., marriages, motherhood) to allow children enrolment is school beyond elementary school. However, as Schwartz and colleagues (2010) alerted, despite of the interrelation between behaviors, values, and ethnic identity, changes in one acculturation domain does not necessarily entail changes in the others. Supported on current data, the reported acculturative changes at behavioral level

(e.g., school enrolment beyond elementary school) seems to be a strategy that may help reduce their social and economic deprivilege (e.g., social allowances; medical care; social housing; Rosário et al., 2016; Smith, 2017). For example, the increasing enrollment of Gypsy children in schools prior to (i.e., kindergarten) and beyond elementary school emerge as reaction to the governmental policies for compulsory public school. This finding is consistent with the work of Ward and Geeraert (2016) reporting that reasons individuals undergo changes are various depending on the surrounding context, acculturation domain and perceived threat to their cultural identity. These authors alert that cultural behaviors can be easily modified, while cultural values and ethnic identities are resistant to change (Ward & Geeraert, 2017).

Consistent with this last theoretical assumption, the second theme highlight the Gypsy women strategies to preserve Gypsy cultural values and their sense of belonging to the ethnic group. Gypsy women are aware of the negative impact that may arise from the continued contact with mainstream culture on the group ethnic identity. Current reports show that Gypsy women are focused on finding a balance between the ongoing demands of a globalized society (e.g., acquiring a set of skills needed to find a non-traditional job), and the corpus of community values they are expected to maintain and pass down to future generations (e.g., marriage and family support, or thinking as a *community* rather than setting *individual* goals), as a strategy to preserve their ethnic identity. Our participants reported that the community extended their exposition to the mainstream systems and policy actions; however, current data does not support that Gypsy groups are assimilating the mainstream values and expectations or developing a sense of belongingness to the mainstream group. On the contrary, Gypsy groups sense of belongingness to ethnic group, and cultural values seems to be directing their reactions to the mainstream challenges and pressures. For example, currently in Portugal, Gypsy girls due to gender-specific roles and intragroup social expectancies, are likely to dropout from school in the end of elementary school interrupting their educational aspirations. Gypsy communities tend to perceive elementary school as safe and familiar (Bhopal & Myers, 2016), but high school as unsafe and as a threat to Gypsy cultural mores. Reasons for the latter may be due to the close contact with non-Gypsy youth and with their *permissive* behaviors (e.g., "*girls and kids are lost; girls naked on the internet* [...] Selina, 17 years old). Moreover, at this age, girls are expected to assume domestic and familiar responsibilities (Myers, 2017).

Over the last decades, the socialization experiences undertaken in the family and ethnic groups contexts (e.g., supported on poor educational experiences), and supported by the mainstream systems (e.g., Gypsy people perceive themselves as being discriminated) have been reinforcing the sense of belonging to the ethnic group (Phinney, 1989). In fact, prior research (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Solheim,

2009) has found that experiences of perceived ethnic discrimination may lead ethnic minority groups to reinforce bonds with their heritage culture, and distance themselves from the mainstream culture and systems to avoid exposition to systemic discrimination. Gypsy women in their narratives approached education as a double-edged sword: by participating in school, Gypsy children are expected to improve their skills and life conditions (e.g., driving license, non-traditional economic activities, and housing conditions), but at the same time the school system values and expectations threaten the traditional Gypsy group shared values, beliefs, and identities. Thus, Gypsy women seem to be responding to the mainstream demands by assimilating attitudes and behaviors perceived as harmless to their ethnic values and sense of belonging to the ethnic group. These data are consistent with the work of Loyd and Williams (2017) reporting that Gypsy families despite their adjusted behaviors, teach their children how to establish relationships with the ethnic and the mainstream groups. We learned from current data that cultural messages regarding the preservation of cultural values and the belongingness to the ethnic group are embedded in Gypsy women speeches and being directly or indirectly transmitted to children (e.g., Gypsy women focus on preparing girls to marriage as a 'Gypsy woman', and the community clear message that people from the Gypsy community do not favor academic/professional aspirations over the familiar role).

Regarding the third theme, previous studies provided support in favor of the importance of education for social progress as well as economic development (Hinton-Smith, Danvers & Jovanovic, 2018); and of the role of family educational background in predicting educational success in minority groups (Schachner, He, Heizmann and Van de Vijver, 2017). However, educational problems of Gypsy children are pervasive and cyclic across generations. In fact, the poor school experiences of Gypsy parents have been identified as a barrier to their children school engagement and academic achievement (Myers, 2017).

Current findings show that, irrespective of the generation, Gypsy women recognize the great value in school attendance, which is consistent with previous findings (e.g., Rosário et al., 2016). However, slight changes in Gypsy women perspectives about education for future generations and about gender-specific social roles were found to be layered by education level. Data showed that older generations are willing to legitimize school attendance to help children learn basic skills (read, write and to do arithmetic) and acquire the basic training to apply to jobs likely to guarantee economic sustainability. However, education beyond elementary school was perceived as a potential threat to gender-specific roles and their speeches expressed a tendency to support Gypsy girls school dropout. On the other hand, and consistent with Hamilton (2016) findings, the younger participants in our study expressed the desire to enroll in college and their readiness to challenge deep-rooted assumptions about the risks of cultural alienation.

Drawing on the acculturation framework, Gypsy women adherence to ethnic and mainstream cultures seem to be distinctive across acculturation domains (behavioral, values, and ethnic identity). Thus, aged and low educated Gypsy women seem to show a bicultural approach to cultural behaviors (by combining ethnic cultural behaviors with the mainstream expectations) but to follow a separate stance regarding values and ethnic identity dimensions. In turn, young women who have been more exposed to the mainstream systems (e.g., education beyond elementary school), seem to endorse a bicultural approach to cultural behaviors and values (e.g., rethink the gender roles). Prior research of Hamilton (2017) found that younger generations from ethnic groups have reported aspirations to pursue non-traditional pathways. However, as stated by other studies (e.g., Gould, 2017) generational acculturation gaps can raise challenging consequences and intragroup conflicts for youth Gypsies, which may buffer their bicultural approach to values and ethnic identities. In fact, Schachner and colleagues (2017) have reported the strong influence of the family functioning on the process followed by individuals to define their sense of belongingness towards an ethnic group and on how they cope with barriers and challenges in the intercultural contact.

To sum up, our findings add the current corpus of literature by showing that Gypsy women undertake different acculturation processes across dimensions and contexts (behaviors, values and ethnic identity). Besides the bicultural approach to cultural behaviors (combining both cultures) defended by older women, younger women are willing to endorse mainstream values (e.g., gender equality). Current data suggest the farther the progress in school, the more noticeable participants' readiness to endorse a bicultural approach regarding behaviors, values and expectations. However, reports also revealed concerns about the possibility of family disintegration or intra-community conflicts, resulting from the cultural endorsement of the mainstream culture values and expectations. According to previous studies, challenging traditional trajectories entails the risk of remaining excluded from both societies (Hamilton, 2017). Despite the extended exposition to intercultural contact, Gypsy people seem to more committed to Gypsy cultural identity and the pathways needed to preserve cultural heritage (Bhopal & Myers, 2016) than to assimilate the mainstream values and expectations. Current findings extend Ward (2013) data by highlighting that distinct institutional and policy efforts must be followed to address the development of a bicultural identity by promoting positive ethnic socialization experiences. In fact, when individuals experience discrimination and absence of will from the wider society, they are likely to focus on their own ethnic group identity and pursuing separation strategies (Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006).

Limitations And Further Research

Despite the importance of listening to these women's voices, future studies may consider analyzing the perspectives of male elements to further understand the phenomenon. Gypsy men are recognized as the decision-makers inside the family and within the community, and their social roles may be threatened by the growth of their children's education levels. Moreover, and despite interviews are a suitable methodology to study the present phenomenon, the case study format suggests that results should be interpreted with caution and taken as exploratory. We have chosen a convenient sampling to answer our research questions; however, Gypsy communities have their own cultural and social idiosyncrasies (e.g., settled, or non-settled) and to deepen our comprehension, further studies using a maximum variation cases criterion and other data collection methods (e.g., focus group) are needed. For example, our participants were integrated into a community displaying several initiatives encouraging the contact of Gypsy women with formal education. In the current sample, all participants have been enrolled in adult education programs (governmental actions to combat illiteracy, typically with the duration of 6 months). This may have influenced their perspectives on the added value of school for the next generations. Future studies could consider examining the accounts of women from Gypsy communities with distinct experiences of engagement in social integration policies, and researchers could consider analyzing data across groups. In addition, multiple-perspective studies might gain a more nuanced and more comprehensive understanding of how the communities are effectively handling the pressure to increase the education level of their members and provide future generations with economic sustainability without lessening their cultural identity. Life-trajectories of Gypsy families with non-traditional academic and professional pathways could also merit the attention of future researchers. Group discussions with participants from different generations could be an asset to further understand the conflicts between generations and how the cultural socialization could be better promoted by the institutional contexts.

Current findings promote the need to deepen our understanding of Gypsy people acculturation processes across different domains, their way of thinking and ways to overcome their Rubicon's challenge. For example, Gypsy communities are still resistant to societal efforts aimed to reduce the social and cultural gaps between Gypsy people and their counterparts, specifically regarding education. Lawmakers could consider the possibility that governmental policies rooted in dominant cultural codes are being perceived by Gypsy people as a call to renounce their ethnic identity. Moreover, policymakers and practitioners may consider whether assimilation of the mainstream culture leads to advancement rather than add extra barriers for Gypsy communities (e.g., unequal opportunities for employment). Literature lacks studies focused on the interactional systems and life circumstances of the Gypsy people (e.g., the

balance between gender roles in the Gypsy communities; education as a double-edged sword for Gypsy women). Findings are expected to inform societal policies focused on improving the Gypsy education by promoting positive socialization experiences.

Conclusion

Gypsy women recognize themselves as playing an important role in the community: passing along the traditional Gypsy "way of life" to future generations. Therefore, they are expected to meet the social, moral, and cultural Gypsy codes to preserve the ethnic group identity and ethnic loyalty. However, policies and governmental efforts raised to improve Gypsy communities' life and social conditions have been challenging the Gypsy people traditional life trajectories. Still, the pressure to assimilate the mainstream cultural values has not provided the expected changes, and Gypsy people keep focused on preserving their cultural values and ethnic identity. In fact, Gypsy groups seem to be facing a Rubicon: their path of social, economic, and educational disadvantage pressure them to change behaviors as a requirement to get economic support and social allowances, while they struggle to preserve their values and their sense of belonging to the ethnic group. Thus, participants in our study seem to be negotiating changes in behaviors to be able to participate in the mainstream systems (e.g., school enrolment), while still endorsing Gypsy values and/or ethnic identity to preserve Gypsy culture. In sum, future research and policy makers could consider Gypsy women perspectives regarding their acculturation strategies, because their thoughts, feelings and behaviors may help lay the path to reformulate polices and actions aimed to increase the participation of Gypsy groups in the mainstream systems.

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CHAPTER II

Acculturation Contexts And School Engagement: The Case Of Portuguese Students With Roma Background[2]

Abstract

Academic success is one of the most important acculturation outcomes for ethnic minority groups. Regarding Roma groups, data from thematic reports have been pointing out slight positive progress regarding Roma participation in school. In fact, Roma people seem to be expanding their perspective on the value of formal education for their communities. However, school practitioners still report irregular attendance and school dropout of students with Roma background. Drawing on the acculturation framework, this study intends to explore how both main acculturation contexts, family and school, are related to students' school engagement by exploring the underlying process and nature of the relationship. The empirical data for this study draws on a sample of 204 students with Roma background, collected in 11 schools (located in 10 cities from the North to the South of the Portugal). Results show meaningful relationships between the studied variables, and findings are encouraging. Roma parents and teachers seem to be aligning attitudes and practices to promote children and youth school engagement, through increasing beliefs about the utility of education for their future life opportunities. These findings challenge the argument posed by deficit models, explaining the underachievement of Roma students by their families' unwillingness to support education. Findings further stress the power of the school-related variables to promote positive acculturation processes and outcomes for students with Roma background. Finally, data offers insights on what may be happening to prevent participation in school beyond compulsory education.

Keywords: acculturation processes, acculturative outcomes, parental involvement, Roma, school engagement, teacher involvement

[2] Submitted to an international peer-reviewed journal

Introduction

Roma[3] is one of the most multidimensional deprived groups in Europe across many generations (Burchardt et al., 2018). Roma people have been facing multiple severe inequalities over the course of numerous centuries that help to explain their disadvantaged positions in education, labor markets, healthcare, and political life. What is more, these varied disadvantages set the groundwork to maintain, and even grow, the 'cycle of multi-disadvantage' this community struggles with (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2016). Extant research, but also governmental policies, have been emphasizing education as a privileged mechanism to address welfare gaps and promote social mobility of Roma groups (Porter, 2016). In fact, for the last few decades, implementing strategies and social policies to improve Roma education have been a priority in the European government's agenda (Helakorpi et al., 2018). Still, and despite the increasing number of Roma children enrolled in schools, data on their enrollment and progression in school are below the expected. What is more, Roma still prevails as the most unqualified ethnic group, with about 2/3 of Roma youth and young adults struggling to complete training or education or to find work (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2018). These figures may help to explain the overrepresentation of Roma people in the social integration income programs (Hinton-Smith et al., 2018a).

Recent research reported that the Roma community is slowly experiencing changes in behaviors and perspectives towards educational attendance (Kennedy & Smith, 2019). However, the profile of students with Roma background is still characterized by truancy and alienation from school. For example, the number of students with Roma background progressing to college is limited (Alexiadou, 2019). Despite the political and educational efforts made to promote school inclusion of children and youth with Roma background, the outputs are below the expected. In view of this, researchers and school educators still struggle to gain understanding of the low rates of the Roma youth educational success.

Over the past two decades, much has been written about school engagement. This may be explained by reports on school engagement's close relationship with academic achievement (e.g., Wang & Eccles, 2012; Wang et al., 2019). In fact, prior research has been showing that school engagement

[3] According to the European Commission and Council of Europe definitions (2012), the term "Roma is an "umbrella" term widely used to cover a wide diversity of the groups (such as Roma, Sinti, Kale, Travellers, and the Eastern groups), including persons who identify themselves as Gypsies (the national used term). It recognises the heterogeneity of lifestyles and cultural backgrounds and the need to be sensitive to framings that problematise the minority (Matras et al., 2015). As a political term of convenience, the term Roma is used to refer to the national communities, to cover the heterogeneity among the Gypsy groups in the national context.

promotes students' academic skills and competencies, thus helping to reduce school dropout rates (Wang & Fredericks, 2014). Acknowledging reports indicating low academic achievement among children and youth with Roma background, Dimitrova et al. (2017) invited researchers to evaluate and understand factors and mechanisms likely to improve school engagement within the community. Findings from these investigations might provide useful knowledge to inform the decisions and practices of policymakers on the school engagement of children and youth with Roma background (Reyes et al., 2012)

The current research addresses this challenge by investigating Portuguese students with Roma background enrolled in the elementary and high school levels. Drawing on previous research focused on analyzing factors likely to facilitate school engagement among ethnic minority and immigrant students, this study aims to identify how contextual-related variables influence the school engagement of children and youth with Roma background. Against the background of Roma poor education trajectories, we believe that analyzing a set of variables contributing to their school engagement may help to further understand the complex problem of Roma education, as well as to set context-responsive educational practices (e.g., familiar, societal, institutional) likely to promote Roma people school engagement.

National Context Background

There is a lack of robust data on the Roma population in Portugal. Still, governmental data reports 37.000 people identifying themselves as members of the Roma community in the country (Alto Comissariado para as Migrações, 2017). Roma population in Portugal, alike other countries in the EU, is among the most welfare deprived groups across a wide range of social indicators. Education, despite the governmental efforts displayed, shows poor outcomes. For example, national data indicates that 45.4% of the Roma children are enrolled in elementary school, and only 2% are attending high school (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência [DGEEC], 2017). Moreover, academic failure and dropout rates among the Roma community in Portugal are higher than those of other ethnic minorities. In fact, recent data from the National Ministry of Education office indicates that more than 50% of the students from Roma communities surveyed failed at least one school year through elementary school (DGEEC, 2017). Besides that, children in Roma families are likely to dropout from school by the end of elementary school, when it is expected that they would have learned basic numeracy and literacy skills (Rosário et al., 2017). Despite the governmental efforts made, and the positive changes in the attitudes of the Roma community towards education, the high rates of school failure and early school dropouts are still a reason for concern within the school community.

Theoretical Framework

The ecological acculturation model (Ward & Geeraert, 2016) and the body of literature on students' school engagement (see Fredricks et al., 2004) provide a relevant theoretical framework for the current study. Using an integrative approach, we explored to what extent both main acculturation contexts (familiar and institutional) may contribute to provide an explanation on school engagement of students with Roma background.

Acculturation

For the purpose of this research, acculturation is defined as a dynamic process through which the continued contact with other cultures leads to changes in the individual's behaviors, attitudes and cultural identity (Ward & Geeraert, 2016; Ward, 2001). Berry (2005) proposed four strategies to describe how people acculturate to other cultures and how they enculturate (i.e., retain) their own native culture: integration (participation in both native and mainstream cultures), assimilation (rejection of native culture over the mainstream participation), separation (retention of native culture over the mainstream participation) and marginalization (rejection of both cultures). These two dimensions (i.e., acculturation and enculturation) are fundamental for an individual's cultural identity development. For example, during the acculturation process, individuals may identify themselves with their ethnic group (i.e., ethnic identity), develop a sense of belonging to the mainstream society (i.e., mainstream identity), or develop a bicultural identity (i.e., bicultural identity) (Phinney, 2003). Cultural identity comprises feelings of belonging, values, and attitudes toward one's own and others' cultural groups (Phinney et al., 2001); and it is related to school adjustment, including school-related attitudes of children and youth from ethnic minority groups (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014).

The development of cultural identity, as a social and cultural bond process, unfolds in the proximal acculturation contexts of family and school through the preservation and transmission of heritage, as well as in the mainstream cultural content (Berry et al., 2006). Still, as the work of Schachner et al. (2016) shows, the conditions in the school were found to be more relevant for the mainstream orientation, while the family related conditions were more relevant for ethnic orientation.

For ethnic minority children and youth, their schools provide the firsthand context where the process of acculturation unfolds, in result of the close contact with members and values representative of the mainstream society (Makarova & Birman, 2016). As literature has been alerting, school activities introduce the mainstream culture to ethnic minority children, and the school climate (i.e., curriculum

content, multicultural-oriented policies and practices, interpersonal relationships) is expected to impact on children' adjustment to school and society at large (Dimitrova et al., 2018). Particularly for ethnic minority children from communities with strong ethnic orientation, such as Roma groups, the assimilationist school culture may prevent Roma children and youth from developing positive socialization experiences and displaying efforts to engage in school (Poteet & Simmons, 2016).

School Engagement

The experience of school engagement grows in the interaction between students and the educational setting, and is fueled by students' feelings, behaviors, and thoughts about their school experiences (Rosário et al., 2016). The vast body of literature on school engagement describes the construct as a protective factor for long-term academic achievement, especially for disadvantaged students facing an increased risk of early school dropout (Wang & Fredericks, 2014). Extant literature alerts that students actively involved in their own education and willing to build meaningful and positive relationships at school, are likely to do well academically (Motti-stefanidi et al., 2015). Following the approach of Fredericks et al. (2009) we can understand school engagement as a multidimensional concept, encompassing behavioral, cognitive, and emotional dimensions. For example, behavioral engagement involves effort and participation in academic and social activities. Cognitive engagement reflects the degree to which students invest academically in school, regarding the use of self-regulated learning competencies. Finally, emotional engagement refers to the identification students feel with the school setting, including a sense of belonging, enjoyment of school learning, or the valuing or appreciation of school success (Wang & Degol, 2014). Literature has been highlighting the great predictive power of emotional engagement to school success (Eccles & Wang, 2012), while mediating the relationship between positive attitudes towards school and academic achievement (Wang & Holcombe, 2010). Therefore, students who feel accepted, included, and supported by peers in the school setting (emotional engagement), are likely to feel motivated to participate and attend school (behavioral engagement), use self-regulated learning strategies in their school tasks (cognitive engagement), and achieve success in school (Furrer et al., 2014). Extant research has consistently reported that students from ethnic minority groups experience low levels of safety and connectedness in class, find few opportunities for participation in class discussions, and develop poor relationships with both peers and teachers. This scenario could help explain the achievement gap between students from ethnic minorities and their counterparts (Voight et al., 2015).

Acculturation Contexts And Outcomes: The School Engagement Of Students With Roma Background

The model of Ward and Geeraert (2016) proposes that the relationship between acculturation and adjustment to society is shaped by the surrounding contexts. Within this model, contextual factors (e.g., familiar, institutional and societal), more so than intrapersonal resources, influence the process of acculturation and its outcomes (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). For children and youth from ethnic minorities, academic achievement emerges among the most important acculturation outcomes (Schachner et al., 2017).

Regarding acculturation to the school context, previous studies found that attitudes towards school are shaped by family-related variables and the quality of school interactions and relationships (Juang et al., 2018). For example, Gould (2017) alerted that the priorities and perspectives of Roma families towards school might hinder their school engagement. Therefore, the positive messages and beliefs conveyed in the familial context regarding the instrumentality of school for the future of the community, were found to impact positively on children and youth school enrollment (Hughes et al., 2006; Rivas-Drake & Marchand, 2016). These findings are consistent with those of Schachner, Vijver, & Noack, (2014) reporting that the perceived parental school involvement and parents' expectations are strong predictors of adaptive outcomes regarding the acculturation processes. More recently, Archambault et al. (2017) found that these family-related factors play an important role in children's success in school. For example, families are expected to promote strong bonds with education and promote their children's educational attainment (i.e., school engagement), while communicating positive expectations and the utility of education for the future (Rivas-Drake & Marchand, 2016).

Roma families' educational efforts contribute to preserving heritage culture and fostering a strong ethnic identity and a sense of pride in their cultural background (Hughes et al., 2006). In addition, parents' ethnic socialization efforts have been found to play a pivotal role in the children and youth's ethnic identity development process (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2009). Moreover, schools also play an important role when promoting socialization experiences for students of minority groups. These experiences are likely to influence the process of ethnic identity formation and youth experience in school (Camacho et al., 2018). For example, teachers' positive academic expectations seem to play a positive protective role in preventing the dropping out of at-risk students', as well as on their behaviors in class (Vollet et al., 2017). These findings are consistent with the work of Dimitrova et al. (2018), reporting that teacher support may bolster students' feelings of belonging and further reduce the effects of messages embedded in Roma parents enculturative practices. In sum, the more students from minorities feel supported by teachers and are

able to perceive their cultures as recognized and valued, the more they will be drawn to engage in learning activities (Bhopal, 2011; Mooney et al., 2016).

The Present Study

Data on official reports have been pointing out positive progress regarding Roma enrollment in school, including increasing numbers of children attending preschool education and of youth completing the upper secondary education. This is consistent with research reporting that Roma people have been expanding their perspective on the value of formal education, prior to, and beyond, elementary school (Makarova, 2019; Sime et al., 2018). However, the large numbers of students with Roma background failing a year of schooling, as well as their high rates of truancy and early departures from school are still headline targets on governmental European agendas. Researchers and educators' lack of knowledge on Roma school acculturation processes prevent educational policies and strategies from adequately answering to the Roma communities' ongoing needs, and contributes to the accumulation of experiences of multiple disadvantages across generations (Burchardt et al., 2018). This mismatch may help to explain why the efforts displayed to improve children's school engagement and success are not finding fruitful (Matache, 2017). What is more, the school engagement levels of students with Roma background have received limited attention from researchers. Thematic reports and extant data are more focused on school enrollment and dropout rates than on other academic dimensions that may help better explain this data (Lauritzen & Nodeland, 2018).

Taking all together and drawing on the extant research focused on school engagement predictors and academic success among ethnic minority students, the present study aims to improve our understanding on the following aspects: i) the role played by both main acculturation contexts (family and school-related variables) in the school engagement of students with Roma background (i.e., cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement); ii) the mediator role played by the perceived utility of education (educational utility) in the relationship between the predictor variables (Parental Involvement, Academic Socialization, and Teacher Involvement) and school engagement of students with Roma background; and finally iii) the role played by ethnic cultural socialization and gender in the relationship between perceived utility of education and school engagement. This paper adds to the literature by investigating the extent to which a complex net of relations among multiple variables is supported by the collected data. Literature has been investigating the relationships of some of these variables, but to the best of our knowledge, there is no study analyzing their relationships of all within a model. Determining whether the current data is consistent with the model is expected to further work to understand the complex acculturation process

of students with Roma background and the subsequent outcomes in the school context. To this aim, a path model was set with the following hypotheses (see Figure 5):

Hypothesis 1: Predictive power of family and school-related variables on school engagement of students with Roma background. We hypothesized that high levels of perceived parental involvement and academic socialization (family-related variables), as well as teacher involvement (school-related variables), predict high levels of school engagement (e.g., Dimitrova et al., 2018; Göbel & Preusche, 2019; Hill et al., 2016).

Hypothesis 2: The relationship between family and school-related variables and school engagement is mediated by the perceived utility of education. We hypothesized that perceived utility of education mediates the relationship between academic socialization, parental involvement and teacher involvement and school engagement (cognitive, behavioral and emotional dimensions) (Rivas-Drake & Marchand, 2016; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). To analyze whether the perceived utility of education works as a full mediator variable between the predictor variables and school engagement, the initial full mediation model was compared against the non-mediation and partial mediation models (Figure 5).

Accordingly, three possible models were proposed: i) total mediation model, ii) partial mediation model, iii) non-mediation model. These models are described in Figure 5.

Non-mediation model. This model hypothesized that the three predictor variables (Parental Involvement, Academic Socialization and Teacher Involvement) significantly and positively influence the school engagement of students with Roma background (direct effects), but not through perceived utility of education. The greater the involvement of parents and academic socialization efforts displayed, and the involvement of teachers, the greater the children's measured levels of school engagement, at a cognitive, behavioral, and emotional level. In Figure 5, the coefficient "c" is expected to be statistically significant and positive, while the coefficients "a" and "b" are expected to be non-significant.

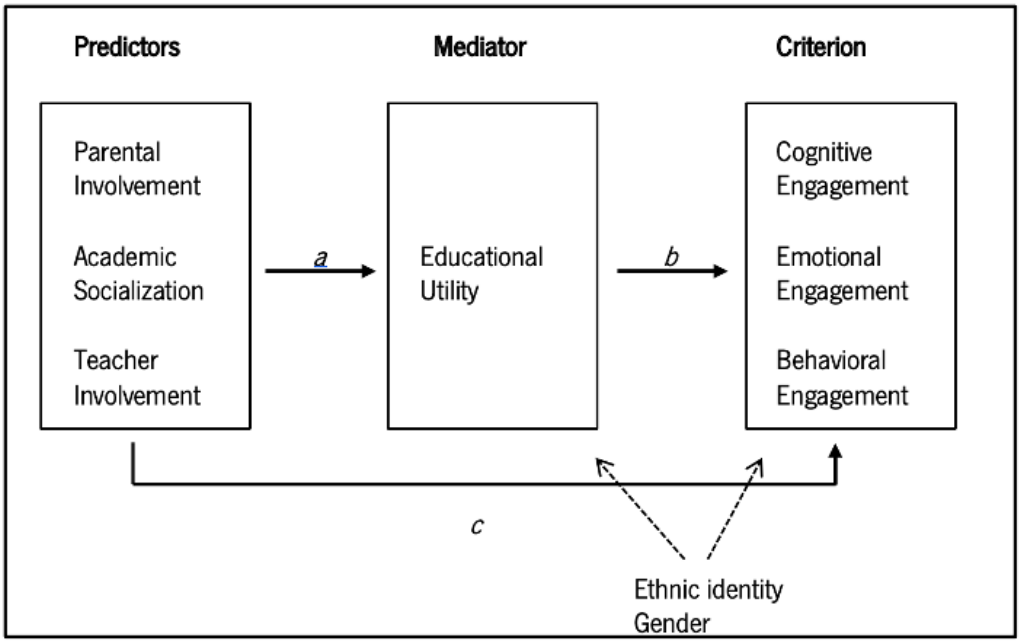
Partial mediation model. This model hypothesizes that there are direct and indirect effects of Parental Involvement, Academic Socialization and Teacher Involvement on students' school engagement. In other words, Parental Involvement, Academic Socialization, and Teacher Involvement predict students' school engagement directly and indirectly (through perceived utility of education). Regarding indirect effects, it is expected that the more Parental Involvement, Academic Socialization and Teacher Involvement, the greater the perceived utility of education, and therefore the more the students' school engagement. Similarly, the lower the Parental Involvement, Academic Socialization, and Teacher Involvement, the lower the perceived utility of education and the lower the student's school engagement. In Figure 5, all coefficients (a, b, and c) are expected to be statistically significant.

Total mediation model. Within this model only indirect effects are hypothesized: Parental Involvement, Academic Socialization and Teacher Involvement are related to students' school engagement indirectly, through their relationship with perceived utility of education. Likewise, this association is expected to be positive. In Figure 5, the coefficient "c" is not expected to be statistically significant, while the coefficients "a" and 'b" are expected to be statistically significant.

Drawing on the cultural and social structure of Roma culture and on prior studies, the variables, gender, and ethnic cultural socialization, were taken as control variables in the model, due to possible interference in results. Gendered-based expectations are expected to impact female students' school engagement over the prioritization of traditional life trajectories (Schachner et al., 2016). Moreover, the perceived level in which parents socialize their children in, and preserve Roma cultural traditions (enculturative practices), is expected to hamper school engagement by means of blurring the perception of the utility of school (Dimitrova et al., 2017).

Figure 5

Prediction model of Roma children's school engagement. Total mediation model (only coefficients a and b are statistically significant); Partial mediation model (coefficients a, b and c are statistically significant); Non-mediation model (only c coefficients are statistically significant). Ethnic cultural socialization and gender were taken as covariates to statistically control their effect.



Method

Participants

Official data regarding Roma communities' distribution across the country was used to gather a representative sample likely to capture the Roma community's heterogeneity. Finally, 28 schools throughout the country, each with a large population of Roma children and youth enrolled, were invited to participate in the present study. From those, 11 schools (located in 10 cities, with a response rate of 39%) accepted to participate. These schools are in the main regions of the country (North, central west coast, and central countryside, and South) and the families of these students live in both urban and rural areas. Overall, the sample includes 204 students with Roma background, 56% male, from the 5th to 10th grade. Of these, 31% of the students attend the regular 5th grade, 20.5% the 6th grade, 11.4% the 7th grade, 4.3% the 8th grade, 3.8% the 9th grade, 1% the 10th grade, and 28.1% are enrolled in professional courses. Student ages ranged from 10 to 19 years old, with a mean of 14 years old (*SD*=2).

Procedures

Information provided by the Ministry of Education helped to build the database with the distribution of students with Roma background enrolled in schools around the country. From that pool, schools were invited to participate in the present study on a random basis. After the authorization to run the study by the Ethics Committee of the Ministry of Education and by the Ethics committee of the University, a brief description was sent to the schools to explain the research purpose and the requirements to participate in the present data collection. Schools that accepted to participate were asked to provide information on the class composition and distribution across each school level of students with Roma background. Moreover, an informed consent was sent to schools to be signed by the legal representatives of each student. The contact information of the first author was provided to parents to clarify any related questions. To better reach Roma communities, the social assistant and social mediators in the schools were available to clarify any parental doubts. The first author, helped by co-authors, ensured the visits and the survey's application in every school. All the expenses regarding data collection were supported by the project. Schools and students were not rewarded. To avoid segregation and discriminatory attitudes, the survey was filled in by the whole class in regular classes, and students without informed consent were instead enrolled in academic activities (e.g., class assignments). Each data collection session lasted approximately 45 minutes. To prevent students from skipping questions required

or to avoid drop-offs, the pages of the survey were delivered one at a time. Moreover, to help students' comprehension, items were read aloud, and all doubts were clarified by researchers.

Measures

Academic socialization. The perceived academic socialization was assessed using 8 items from the effort and future subscales (4 items each) of the Educational Socialization Scale (Bempechat, Graham, & Jimenez, 1999). A sample of items of the effort and future subscales are, respectively, "My parents talk about different kinds of jobs I can have when I grow up" and "My parents say I could do better in school if I worked harder". Students were asked to respond on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (almost every day). In this study the Cronbach's alphas were α = .86 (Future) and α = .81 (Effort).

Parental Involvement. The variable, perceptions about parental involvement in school, was assessed using 5-items related to the school context adapted from the Parental Involvement Scale (Voydanoff & Donnelly, 1999). On a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (all the time), students were asked to rate how much they perceived their parents' involvement and participation in home and school-related activities. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha was α = .67.

Educational Utility. A 5-item scale was used to assess students' reports of their perception on the utility of education and school for their future and the future of the Roma community. The scale was adapted from the student's survey developed by Skinner, E. A., Chi, U., & the LEAG (2012, in press). On a 5-point Likert ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Totally true) students were asked to rate items such as, "I need to learn a lot in school so I can take charge of my future". In this study the Cronbach's alpha was α = .80.

Teacher Involvement. Students rated the degree to which they felt cared for by their teachers using an 8-item scale developed by Skinner and Belmont (1993). Total score reflects the student–teacher relationship quality. Students were asked to answer a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (very true); sample items include, "This teacher really cares about me" and " I can't really count on my teachers". In this study, Cronbach's alpha was α = .83.

School engagement. School engagement was assessed using the 15-item scale developed by Fredricks et al. (2004). The 4-item behavioral engagement, 6-item cognitive engagement and 5-item emotional engagement scale were rated using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never to 5 = all the time). Total scores range from 15 to 75, higher scores indicating greater school engagement. Examples of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional items are respectively, ("I pay attention in class," "I study at home even when I

don't have a written test," and "I feel excited by the work in class". In this study, Cronbach's alpha ranged from .79 (Behavioral Engagement) to .82 (Cognitive Engagement).

Ethnic cultural socialization. Ethnic cultural socialization was assessed using a 12-item scale (Familiar ethnic identity, Umaña-Taylor et al., 2006) scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5(strongly agree). This questionnaire was used to measure the degree to which students with Roma background perceived their parents socializing them to meet the traditional values and pathways of their heritage culture. Higher scores indicated greater family cultural socialization (i.e., greater preservation and transmission of cultural practices and traditions). Sample items include, "My family encourages me to respect the cultural values and beliefs of our ethnic/cultural background," and "Me and my family participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs." Instructions were given to the participants to answer in relation to their own heritage culture. In this study, coefficient alpha was $\alpha = .88$.

Demographic variables. Gender was dummy-coded such that boy=0 and girl=1. Students were asked to choose ethnicity according to their sense of belonging. Age (in years) was calculated based on the date of birth. The school level was also asked in the survey for descriptive statistics.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed in two stages. First, we analyzed the statistical properties of the variables included in the path model (means, standard deviations, asymmetry, kurtosis), as well as the correlation matrix and the missing values. The percentage of missing values was low, approximately 1.02%, and therefore, missing values were treated through the multiple imputation procedure. Secondly, the path model was fit with the AMOS 22 program in SPSS (Arbuckle, 2013), using robust maximum likelihood (RML). The model was fit, and results were evaluated according to the following criteria: Chi-square, RMR, GFI, AGFI, TLI, CFI, RMSEA, and ECVI. While the first seven give us information on the degree of fit of the theoretical model to the collected data, ECVI informs us of the extent to which these results could be replicated in an independent sample. There is evidence of a good fit when χ^2 has a $p > .05$, RMR < .05, GFI, AGFI and TLI ≥ .90, CFI ≥ .95, and RMSEA ≤ .06. On the other hand, data is robust when the ECVI of our model is lower than that of the saturated model. The effect size of the regression coefficients was evaluated using Cohen's (1988) *d* statistic.

Findings

According to the school's reported data, 382 surveys of students with Roma background were expected to be collected. The visits to each school occurred on different days of the week (both morning and afternoon). Festive seasons and peak workload periods in the term (e.g., assessment moments) were avoided. However, just 204 (53%) of the students with Roma background were effectively attending schools during data collection sessions. Teachers and school administrators from the schools enrolled were consistent in their comments about this low attendance rate. They mentioned that this dada on attendance was to be expected. In fact, despite the educational efforts made, students with Roma background show an irregular trend in their attendance to school.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics and the correlation matrix of the variables included in the model are provided in Table 2. Although the Mardia multivariate coefficient was statistically significant (M = 5.623, t = 2.916, d = 0.407), variables present univariate normality (asymmetry and kurtosis show values considered acceptable to prove normal univariate distribution). The correlations between the variables included in the model, except for two, were all statistically significant at p <.01.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations.

	TI	AS	PI	EU	EE	BE	CE	ECS	GE
TI	-								
AS	.084	-							
PI	-.057	.506**	-						
EU	.387**	.414**	.342**	-					
EE	.262**	.193**	.235**	.499**	-				
BE	.197**	.230**	.246**	.545**	.447**	-			
CE	.223**	.278**	.350**	.486**	.557**	.343**	-		
ECS	.155**	.180**	.081	.170*	.129	.006	.133	-	
GE	.016	-.002	-.073	.002	.138*	.058	.148*	.079	-
M	3.284	3.885	2.806	3.936	3.164	3.360	2.593	3.878	1.480
SD	0.752	0.944	0.901	0.877	1.031	0.949	1.021	0.897	0.501
Skew	-0.401	-0.776	0.353	-0.920	-0.230	-0.174	0.290	-0.874	0.009
Kurtosis	-0.365	0.070	-0.444	0.412	-0.627	-0.775	-0.664	0.429	-2.000

Note. TI (teacher involvement), AS (academic socialization), PI (parental involvement), EU (educational utility), EE (emotional engagement), BE (behavioral engagement), CE (cognitive engagement), ECS (ethnic cultural socialization), GE (gender: 1 male, 2 female). Scale Measure: 1 minimum, 5 maximum.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Assessment Of The Path Model

The model shows a good overall fit: $\chi^{2}_{(14)} = 21.827$, p = .082, GFI = .979, AGFI = .931, RMR = .036, TLI = .951, CFI = .981, RMSEA = .051 (.000 - .091). Moreover, as the Expected Cross Validation Index (ECVI) value of our model (default model) was lower than the ECVI value of the saturated model (ECVI = .395 and ECVI = .425, respectively), current data suggests that the model cross-validates across similar-sized samples from the same population. Unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients, as well as their statistical significance, regarding the model fit are provided on Table 3. Three hypotheses were set: i) a total mediation model (the perceived utility of education, totally mediates the effect of parental involvement, academic socialization and the teachers involvement on student's school engagement), ii) a partial mediation model (parental involvement, academic socialization, and teacher's involvement impacts student's school engagement directly, and indirectly through perceived utility of education), and a iii) non-mediation model (parental involvement, academic socialization, and teacher involvement impacts student's school engagement directly, but not indirectly through perceived utility of education).

Table 3

Regression coefficients

	RW	SE	SRW	t	p	d
Structural direct effects						
PI → EU	.224	.063	.231	3.533	<.0001	0.500
AS → EU	.239	.061	.257	3.902	<.0001	0.555
TI → EU	.432	.067	.373	6.495	<.0001	0.994
EU → CE	.557	.070	.478	7.991	<.0001	1.309
EU → BE	.607	.063	.558	9.684	<.0001	1.774
EU → EE	.579	.070	.492	8.276	<.0001	1.377
Covariates effects						
GE → EU	.017	.098	.010	0.170	.865	–
ECS → EU	.045	.056	.047	0.811	.417	–

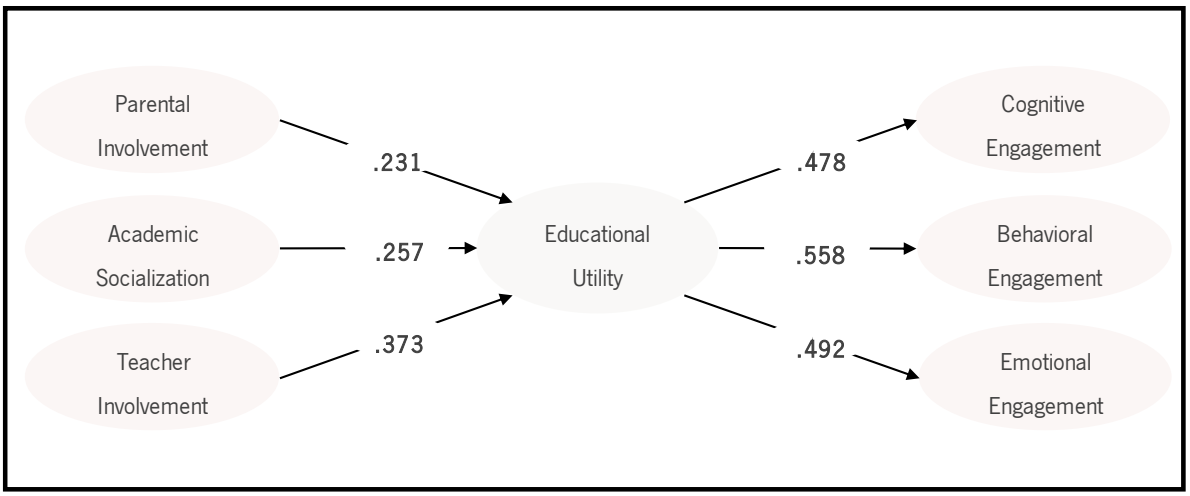
GE → EE	.276	.121	.135	2.290	.022	0.318
GE → CE	.294	.120	.145	2.442	.015	0.339
GE → BE	.122	.108	.064	1.129	.259	–
ECS → EE	.040	.068	.035	0.589	.556	–
ECS → CE	.046	.068	.040	0.672	.502	–
ECS → BE	-.100	.061	-.095	-1.643	.100	–

Note. RW (regression weights), SE (standardized errors), SRW (standardized regression weights), TI (teacher involvement), AS (academic socialization), PI (parental involvement), EU (educational utility), EE (emotional engagement), BE (behavioral engagement), CE (cognitive engagement), ECS (ethnic cultural socialization), GE (gender)

Current data supports a total mediation model. The perceived utility of education mediated the effect of the three-predictor variables (parental involvement, academic socialization, and teacher involvement) on school engagement (emotional, behavioral, and cognitive) of students with Roma background. Main findings are summarized in Figure 6. Specifically, data indicated that parental involvement, academic socialization, and teacher involvement were significantly and positively associated with perceived utility of education. Results showed that the higher the levels of the three variables, the greater the perceived utility of education for participants (.231; .257 and .373, respectively). The effect sizes found were medium for parental involvement and academic socialization and large for teacher involvement. Finally, data showed that 33.2% of the variability in perceived utility of education was because of these three variables. Moreover, perceived utility of education was strongly and positively associated with the three dimensions of school engagement (emotional, cognitive, and behavioral) with a large effect size. Finally, the amount of variance explained for each dimension of school engagement was as follows: emotional engagement, 26.7%; behavioral engagement, 31%; cognitive engagement, 25.8%.

Figure 6

Standardized regression weights of principal effects in the path model.



Indirect effects were all statistically significant. Perceived teachers' involvement was positively associated with emotional engagement (.182), behavioral engagement (.208), and cognitive engagement (.178). Academic socialization was found to be positively associated with emotional engagement (.127), behavioral engagement (.144), and cognitive engagement (.123). Finally, parental involvement showed positive associations with emotional engagement (.114); behavioral engagement (.129), and cognitive engagement (.110).

Table 3 indicates that the covariates, ethnic cultural socialization, and gender, did not strongly impact the perceived utility of education and the three dimensions of student's school engagement. In fact, ethnic cultural socialization did not show significant relationships with the perceived utility of education or any of the three dimensions of engagement in school. In other words, data indicated that family' socialization practices to foster children's pride and value for their heritage do not compete with efforts to inculcate beliefs about utility of education and engagement in school. Regarding gender, a small effect was found for emotional and cognitive school engagement. Data showed that, despite the perceived utility of education being similar for both, girls tended to report higher emotional and cognitive school engagement than boys. Lastly, while analyzing predictor variables, only the relationship between parental involvement and academic socialization was found statistically significant (r = .419, t = 6.536, p <.001, d = 0.923), with a large effect size.

Discussion

The current study analyzed the reported behavior of students with Roma background from different school levels and distinct geographies in Portugal. A path model was tested to investigate how educational utility affects the relationship between contextual variables (i.e., parental involvement, teacher involvement, and academic socialization) and students' school engagement. Finally, gender and ethnic cultural socialization were controlled due to their possible impact in the relationship between perceived utility of education and school engagement of students with Roma background.

Our full mediation model indicates that family and school-related variables are related to school engagement of students with Roma background through the support of student beliefs about the utility of education for their future life and for the community. These data are consistent with previous studies conducted with students from ethnic minority groups. Extant reports show that parental involvement and positive academic socialization practices (Rivas-Drake & Marchand, 2016), as well as perceived support provided by teachers (e.g., Wang & Eccles, 2013), were positive and strongly related to i) beliefs about the utility of education, and ii) the development of children academic beliefs, attitudes, and skills (Wang et al., 2014). Some scholars (e.g., Miškolci et al., 2017) have been alerting to the fact that policy measures and actions may be drawing on the widespread idea that Roma parents do not recognize the merits and value of education for their children future life, and are unwilling to support their children education. However, our data suggest that students from elementary and lower high school reported their parents' will to support school engagement through reinforcing the value of education. Findings are consistent with recent studies (e.g., Boyle, Flynn, & Hanafin, 2018; Sime et al., 2018) reporting the impact of cultural processes and family-related variables (e.g., communicating positive academic expectations) on enhancing beliefs in the utility of education and school engagement (both as indicators of school adjustment). Particularly for children with Roma background who are expected to balance the family's cultural values/expectations with the school culture based on mainstream values and expectations, parental involvement and encouragement provides favorable conditions for positive acculturation processes and adjustment outcomes (Schachner et al., 2014). Besides the relevant role played by parental support and encouragement towards school adjustment, teachers also play an important role while helping children struggling to find a way to live within two cultures.

School-related factors, namely teacher involvement, showed a positive effect on utility of education stronger than that found for family-related variables. This finding is consistent with data of Hoti et al. (2015) reporting that a positive school climate (e.g., perceived teacher support) is even more important than the perceived parental educational support in promoting adjustment to the school context

(e.g., perceived education utility, school engagement) of students from ethnic minority groups. Consistent with findings from previous studies (e.g., Wang & Eccles, 2013), current data highlighted the role played by the perceived teachers' support in fostering beliefs about the utility of education, and therefore, school engagement among students with Roma background. For example, Vollet et al. (2017) found that supportive teacher-student relationships through promoting children and youth's embeddedness in class, communicating positive expectations, and encouraging beliefs about the utility of education, serve as emotional resources favoring students' academic outcomes (e.g., school engagement). In fact, extant literature (e.g., Dimitrova et al., 2017; Makarova, 2019; Teuscher & Makarova, 2018) has been stressing positive relationships between children developing healthy relationships at school, mostly with teachers, and establishing positive school acculturation processes and outcomes (e.g., students' attendance, sense of belongingness, utility of education). This finding was found particularly important for students from minority groups (see Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Göbel & Preusche, 2019; Hamilton, 2013; Makarova & Birman, 2016). A close look at the indirect effects in our model indicated that the higher the perceived teacher support the higher the levels of reported emotional, behavioral and cognitive engagement.

Gender and ethnic cultural socialization did not show a strong impact on the variables in the model. Existing works (e.g., Göbel & Preusche, 2019; Vietze et al., 2019) have been exploring how individual characteristics, such as gender, may influence the school acculturative processes and outcomes of children and youth from ethnic minorities. Our hypothesis for gender differences was grounded on the proposition that women are likely to be more influenced by ethnic socialization efforts because of the gendered expectations set by the Roma community for women (e.g., Dimitrova et al., 2018; Rosário et al., 2017). However, findings indicate that male and female students did not differ significantly in their beliefs about the utility of education. What is more, female students in our sample reported a slightly higher emotional and cognitive engagement than boys, which is consistent with previous research (e.g., Göbel & Preusche, 2019; Wang & Eccles 2012).

Prior literature analyzing ethnic cultural socialization promoted by the family found mixed results. Reports show positive and negative correlations with academic achievement (e.g., Dimitrova et al., 2017; Makarova & Birman, 2015), depending on distal ecological factors (e.g., country educational policies) and the development of children and youth's ethnic identity. In our study, we have hypothesized that cultural messages and practices promoted by families towards the preservation of culture could hamper the perceived utility of education and school engagement of students with Roma background. However, data did not provide significant evidence to support this hypothesis. Parental messages and practices to promote children knowledge about Roma history and culture perceived by students did not seem to affect

their perceived utility of education and school engagement. The work of Juang and Syed (2010) may help explain this finding. These authors claim that ethnic cultural socialization practices provided by parents are more related to the exploration of ethnic backgrounds than to their commitment with ethnic values and expectations.

Taking everything into account, current findings suggest promising progress occurring in both acculturation contexts, family, and school. Data reported by children and youth suggests that Roma families and teachers are supporting their beliefs about the utility of education for future life opportunities, as well as promoting their engagement in school educational trajectories. However, caution is needed while examining current data, because just 53% of students with Roma background were attending school at data collection moments. The high percentage (47%) of non-attendance to school reported in this study and the low number of students with Roma background attending the upper high school raises concerns over what may be 'clipping their academic wings'. Drawing on previous findings, we can conclude that Roma parents are interested on and recognize the value of education for their children life success. However, as Hill et al., (2016) suggested many Roma parents seem to lack implicit or tacit knowledge in the inner workings of school system, and how their behaviors may support children and youth in school, along and beyond compulsory education (e.g., conveying positive academic expectations, encouraging efforts to study and engage in school activities, and helping them to solve academic and acculturation challenges). In fact, Roma people's poor educational experiences (Bhopal, 2011; Burchardt et al., 2018), the lack of role models for educational and professional development within the community (Foster & Norton, 2012; Magano & Mendes, 2021), and lack of opportunities for youth with Roma background after completing compulsory education due to prejudice and discrimination (see Matache, 2017; Hamilton, 2017) may help to explain the parents low literacy skills in the educational system. Anecdotal evidence gathered from Roma parents over this research journey corroborated their lack of literacy in the educational system. For example, some parents from the Roma community reported expecting their children to become an engineer; however, when asked to elaborate, their reports showed inconsistency between expectations and actual children's behaviors. These parents were encouraging their children to finish the compulsory school, then leave school and get an unskilled job (take care of goats), and finally become an engineer. However, they did not mention the need to conclude a college degree to become an engineer, because they lack information on the inner workings of the educational system and the requirements needed to progress in school (*Then* [in the end of the work with the goats] *he will be an engineer"*). Globally, these families' reports supported the value of education without hesitation but were

not grounded on tacit information on the requirements needed to progress in school. Eventually, their educational encouragements were not consistent with their goals.

Furthermore, data indicates that teacher involvement perceived by students increased their beliefs about the utility of education and promoted school engagement. These results are promising and suggest that many teachers may be displaying efforts to help promote the school engagement of children and youth with Roma background. However, further analysis on the efforts displayed in class to foster inclusion of children and youth with Roma background might help understand why so many students show low school engagement, and high early school leaving rates, despite feeling cared by their teachers and encouraged to attend school by their parents. For example, behavioral indicators set by inclusive educational policies and practices (e.g., increase the attendance rate of children with Roma background) may be contributing to lower teachers' expectations for these students. As Rosário and colleagues (2017) claim, attendance in class is relevant. But students who do not participate actively in class or school activities and do not receive support fitted to their educational needs, are likely to follow disengagement school paths (e.g., children with Roma background who skip class or fail to meet the expectations for their grade level are not delivered catch up opportunities), "because making them attend class is in itself, attaining a difficult goal" (Rosário et al., 2017).

To sum up, alongside the explanations under the limited academic socialization efforts displayed in the family context, it is important to consider how the efforts undertaken by teachers in the school context are providing experiences likely to cultivate positive academic identities of students with Roma background (Gummadam et al., 2015; Matthews, 2014). Literature has been alerting that teachers and school administrators may be following educational practices consistent with inclusion principles while adopting a cultural deficit approach (Hamilton, 2018). For example, teachers and school administrators may address the low academic abilities of students with Roma background by setting exclusive practices for them. However, this special educational treatment is likely displaying subliminal stereotyped beliefs among their counterparts (Bhopal, 2011). Moreover, this cultural deficit approach mindset, may translate into setting low-academic expectations for students with Roma background, which is likely to contribute to inhibiting them from aspiring to enroll in high school (Makarova et al., 2019).

Limitations And Future Research

The analysis of the findings should consider some methodological and theoretical limitations. First, despite our model fits well, the current path analysis model did not explain a high percentage of variability. Future studies could consider adding variables likely to increment the explained variance of

the variables in the model. For example, perceived discrimination, acculturation orientations, academic achievement, educational aspirations, and school climate measures are variables that might play a role in the relationships examined, such as ethnic identity. Second, students included in this sample may not be representative of the population of students with Roma background due to their availability to attend school. To further conclude on the robustness of the effects found, researchers may consider surveying students that did not participate, due to their lack of attendance on the data collection days, to analyze whether results found were invariant. What is more, given the great heterogeneity of the Roma groups, a larger sample, i) would have allowed for a more nuanced understanding and greater exploration of the relationships between the selected variables, and ii) understand the weight variables in the statistical analysis for each group membership. Moreover, it would be interesting to survey more students in the upper high school level to learn the effect of schooling in the model fit. Third, though the items of the questionnaires had been read aloud in each class, and comprehensibility had been assured through the explanations of the meanings of difficult words, some students struggled to understand some the items which may have affected responses.

Literature clearly supports the directionality of the model fitted. Family and school related variables are explaining school engagement mediated by positive beliefs about the utility of education. However, little is known about these processes over time. Future works could consider exploring these processes using a longitudinal design to further understand, for example, how parents and teacher's involvement may vary in response to children and youth's school engagement levels, or how teachers and schools tackle students with Roma background school engagement over time. Lastly, the use of self-assessment scales prevents learning actual student behaviors. Therefore, future research could consider using on task measures to assess the variables taken (e.g., diaries to assess student's school engagement or ethnic cultural socialization messages and practices) or interviews to further understand the complex process of Roma groups' acculturation in the school context.

Conclusion And Implications For Practice

The present study offers promising insights into minority students' school engagement as an acculturation outcome. Results show meaningful relationships between the studied variables, and findings are encouraging. For example, parents and teachers of Roma students seem to be aligning attitudes and practices to promote children and youth school engagement through increasing beliefs about the utility of education for future life opportunities. Students reported that parents displayed support in home a school-related activities and delivered positive messages regarding the utility of education. These findings

compete with the widespread approaches for the students' underachievement grounded on Roma families' unwillingness to support children attainment and progress in school (e.g., Zachos & Panagiotidou, 2019) . Those perspectives are likely to neglect the responsibility of the school context in promoting positive acculturation processes and outcomes for students with Roma background. This study found large effects for the relationship between teacher's involvement and the utility of education, which highlights the role played by secondary socializing agents (e.g., teachers) and their socialization practices in promoting the utility of education and school engagement of these children (Praag et al., 2016). Schools are committed with inclusive educational values, but the measures set for students with Roma background may lead to their exclusion. For example, data shows that teachers have been understood by children with Roma background as being caring about their needs and supportive. However, these children's irregular attendance patterns and high dropout rates raises concerns on how schools are responding to these students learning needs, beyond the efforts to enhance their attendance. For example, how are schools preparing and supporting children and youth to achieve formal qualifications likely to help them open career opportunities in the wider society? How do schools help reduce the (un)covered discrimination against students with Roma background? To what extent are schools detaching from deficit approaches and embracing promotional ones, through providing information to parents with Roma background about the school system and opportunities available for their children?

Current findings alert for the need to rethink the use of deficit approaches focused on increasing school attendance of children with Roma background as a goal in itself, while developing approaches focused on responding to students' educational needs and promoting their progress in school. Schools adopting an inclusive approach are expected to identify students' potentialities, difficulties, and needs to deliver educational responses suited to their needs, and to create supportive climates in class to strengthen students' engagement (Celeste et al., 2016). Therefore, to better understand and promote students' engagement and academic achievement, teachers and school administrators need training on how to deal with cultural heterogeneity in school (Hoti et al., 2019). Organizing school-based training on multicultural approaches and acculturation processes may contribute to develop educators' cultural awareness and support inclusive teaching practices, to prevent the reproduction of societal prejudice against ethnic minority groups, such as Roma. Moreover, schools following inclusive practices are expected to set practices likely to overcome students' difficulties or gaps resulting from their engagement in cultural mores and traditions (e.g., skipping classes to accompany parents selling activities in fairs; setting a camp outside the hospital to accompany a family member during the duration of the hospital stay). Finally, schools may consider addressing students' educational needs irrespective of their ethnic

group. For example, by setting catch-up opportunities for students struggling to write, or mentoring activities to help those in need of academic support (e.g., help students set academic goals, manage time, or complete homework). Lastly, as parental involvement in education is crucial for children and youth school success, schools may organize sessions to provide information on the "a, b, c" of the school system, the educational opportunities available and the utility of school for their future lives (Reschly & Christenson, 2012). This paper presents important arguments for a shift in mainstream attitudes towards Roma families and their students' engagement in education, aiming to improve school experiences of children and youth with Roma background.

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CHAPTER III

Parental Involvement Experiences Among Families With Roma Background: Building Partnerships In Education Through A Story-Tool Based Intervention

Abstract

School educators are likely to explain the poor educational trajectories of students with Roma background as being related to the lack of parental support and interest in children's education. Aiming to further understand the patterns of the parental involvement in children's school life and their engagement experiences in school-related activities among families with Roma background, the current research set an intervention supported by a culturally sensitive story-tool. Grounded in the intervention-based research framework, twelve participants (i.e., mothers) from different Portuguese Roma groups participated in this study. Qualitative data was collected throughout interviews conducted pre- and post-intervention. Eight weekly sessions were delivered in the school context, using a story-tool and hands-on activities to generate culturally significant meanings regarding attitudes, beliefs, and values towards children' educational trajectories. Through the lens of acculturation theory, data analysis provided important findings under two overarching topics: patterns of parental involvement in children's school life, and participants' engagement in the intervention program. Importantly, data show the distinct ways through which Roma parents participate in children's education, and the relevance of mainstream contexts providing an atmosphere likely to build collaborative relationships with parents to overcome barriers to parental involvement.

Keywords: acculturation; collaborative intervention; home-school partnerships; parental involvement; Roma

Introduction

Over the past 20 years, the European Union has been setting policies focused on the inclusion of Roma[4] people across Europe. Still, the efforts made on "Education for Roma" have been failing to achieve the expected benchmarks. For example, Portuguese data on Roma groups (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência [DGEEC], 2019) shows that, despite slight improvements (e.g., school failure rate among the community decreased from 48.1% in 2017, to 37.5% in 2019), more than half of the children (68%) attend elementary and only 3% of the youth from the community attend high school levels. These poor education trajectories are likely to be explained by a complex network of factors (Alexiadou, 2019; Alexiadou & Norberg, 2017). The reasons reported in the academic literature include, for example, the discrimination faced in the school context, the lack of future opportunities in labor markets, and the enculturation processes devaluating education beyond elementary school (e.g., Dimitrova et al., 2017; Rosário et al., 2017; Sime et al., 2018).

Schools are educational contexts likely to play a pivotal role in reducing social and educational inequalities while promoting an inclusive school climate (e.g., through developing efforts to encourage the involvement of families and communities) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2016). In fact, there is vast evidence supporting the impact of the family and parental related variables (e.g., parental involvement) on educational outcomes of children and youth with Roma background (Rosário et al., 2016, 2017; Wauters et al., 2017). For example, prior research indicated that positive parental involvement is likely to improve school success and achievement and foster positive attitudes towards school, while decreasing behavioral problems and early school dropout (Bhopal & Myers, 2016; Hamilton, 2017). Consistent with these data, the European headlines on this topic stress the need to set strategies enhancing the relationship between home and school (Wauters et al., 2017) (e.g., literacy classes for parents, Gould, 2017; or interventions to increase the family's participation in educational decision-making processes and school activities, Flecha & Soler, 2013; Khalfaoui et al., 2020.) However, current poor achievement records and high dropout rates within the community

[4]According to the European Commission and Council of Europe definitions, the term Roma is widely used in formal contexts to cover a wide diversity of groups (such as Roma, Sinti, Kale, Travellers, and the Eastern groups), including persons who identify themselves as Gypsies (the nationally used term). As an "umbrella" term, Roma recognises the heterogeneity of lifestyles and cultural backgrounds and the need to be sensitive to framings that problematize the minority (Matras et al., 2015) and replace deprecatory terms (such as Gypsy) associated with a history of oppression. In the national context, people recognize themselves as Gypsies; however, Roma is used to refer to the national communities, as a political term of convenience, aiming to cover the heterogeneity among the different Gypsy groups in the national context.

(Cudworth, 2019) raise questions on the efficacy of these educational interventions (Aguiar et al., 2020). The current study aims to respond to this call by investigating the experiences of parents[5] with Roma background, following their participation in an intervention program tailored to expand parental involvement in children's education.

Theoretical Framework

Family dynamics and relationships influence the process through which individuals cope with the intercultural contact and acculturative challenges the mainstream contexts (Ward et al., 2010; Ward & Geeraert, 2016). The continued contact between two cultures pushes individuals to undergo a broad range of individual and cultural changes regarding their behaviors, attitudes, and identities (Berry, 2005). This process, known as acculturation (Berry, 1997), is fundamental for cultural identity development (Phinney et al., 2001). In fact, prior research found that the extent to which individuals adopt the mainstream culture and/or maintain their ethnic culture yields distinct acculturation paths. Berry's model (2005) describes four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Accordingly, individuals may identify themselves with their ethnic heritage group (i.e., ethnic orientation), develop a sense of belonging to the majority in their society of settlement (i.e., mainstream orientation) or develop a bicultural identity (i.e., bicultural orientation). Ward and Geeraert (2016) contributed to this discussion by stressing that surrounding contexts affect the dynamic process by which individuals orientate themselves towards (maintaining or rejecting) heritage, mainstream, or both cultures. This complex process starts at an early age within the most influential contexts for the acculturation processes (i.e., family and school) (Makarova, 2019). These two contexts are closely intertwined.

The family sets the foundation for identity development by transmitting values, norms, and traditions of the ethnic culture while providing a system of social support (e.g., sense of belonging to the group) (Hughes et al., 2006; Phinney et al., 2001; Ward et al., 2010). In fact, children and youth' acculturative orientations and sociocultural outcomes are related to their families' cultural orientations and expectations for children (e.g., maintain the cultural heritage or adopt the mainstream culture) (Schachner et al., 2016). Therefore, parental involvement and positive attitudes towards school are likely to encourage children's socialization in the mainstream culture (Dimitrova et al., 2017; Schachner et al., 2014) and favor positive acculturation outcomes, such as school success. However, and flipping the coin,

[5] 'Parents' stands for the parental figure (mothers or fathers) in charge of children's education at home and at school.

the family acculturation processes may be largely influenced by the school (Ward & Geeraert, 2016). For many ethnic groups such as Roma, school provides an important source of intercultural contact (Berry et al., 2006; Makarova et al., 2019; Ward & Geeraert, 2016). Hence, as found in prior research, school climate-related factors (e.g., school norms, values, interracial relationships, teacher support) influence parents and student's acculturation processes and outcomes (e.g., parental involvement, school engagement; ; Göbel & Preusche, 2019; Gutentag et al., 2018; Kramer et al., 2021). As an example, families from minority groups perceiving strong assimilationist pressures and attitudes of prejudice and exclusion from the mainstream culture are likely to feel discouraged to participate in the mainstream systems (Ward et al., 2010; Ward & Geeraert, 2016).

Parental Involvement In Education

The literature on the relationships between parental involvement and children's school success reports mixed data, showing positive, negative, or non-significant results (for an overview, see Day & Dotterer, 2018; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). This variability could be explained by the different operationalization (e.g., attend parent-school conferences, support children on their homework) and measurement approaches used for parental involvement (Hill et al., 2016, Garcia & Guzman, 2020).

Following Hill and Tyson (2009), parental support and participation in children's education includes beliefs, attitudes, and actions categorized into a tridimensional model: home- and school-based involvement and academic socialization. Home-based involvement refers to activities such as helping and supporting children in their schoolwork, promoting a learning environment at home (e.g., encouraging reading), and communicating with children about school and standard school behaviors (Hill & Tyson, 2009). School-based involvement includes the communication between parents and teachers, and active participation in school events (e.g., volunteering to organize parents' seminars) (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Finally, academic socialization refers to parents' direct and indirect messages likely to influence children's school-related outcomes (e.g., parents' beliefs, educational expectations, and the value and utility of education) (Benner et al., 2016; Hill & Tyson, 2009). Each expression of parental involvement contributes differently to children's school success (Fan & Chen, 2001). For example, parental efforts to communicate positive expectations on the value and utility of education for the future (academic socialization) was found to be more related to children's school achievement than overt strategies of home and school-based involvement (e.g., homework help or participation in school meetings) (Benner et al., 2016; Hill & Tyson, 2009). However, patterns of parental involvement vary across cultures, being influenced by acculturation processes and individual factors (e.g., personal experiences, perspectives about parenting and

childrearing goals) (Hinton-Smith et al., 2018; Khalfaoui et al., 2020; Kramer et al., 2021). For example, literature reports that among ethnic minority groups, the potential barriers to traditional forms of parental involvement are multifold (e.g., lack of resources, mismatch between home and school culture, values and expectations, language barriers, mistrust in the school staff and perceived discrimination in schools; Hill et al., 2016; Reynolds et al., 2015). Not surprisingly, as Clifford and Humphires (2018) report, families with ethnic minority backgrounds facing difficulties complying with mainstream traditional forms of parental involvement (e.g., help in homework, attend to school events), such as Roma, are frequently misunderstood as lacking interest in children's education (Araújo, 2016; Lauritzen & Nodeland, 2018). Both the ecological model of acculturation (Ward & Geeraert, 2016) and the tridimensional conceptualization of parental involvement (Hill & Tyson, 2009) underpinned the current qualitative research on the processes and experiences of Roma parental involvement in children's school life.

The Present Study

International data indicate that policies to promote school engagement in Roma people are not meeting the goals set (e.g., over 80% of students with Roma background aged from 16 to 24 are not attending education, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2018). As alerted by some scholars (e.g., Alexiadou & Norberg, 2017; Hamilton, 2017, 2018), this worrying educational picture is often explained by deficit models portraying Roma as unable to cope with educational challenges. Still, and importantly, these deficit models are likely to reinforce community exclusion (e.g., Lauritzen & Nodeland, 2018).

Supported by extant data showing the positive relationship between the involvement of ethnic minority families and students' academic achievement, policymakers, school administrators, and teachers have been focusing their attention on promoting parents' involvement in education (Flecha & Soler, 2013; Hill et al., 2016, 2017; Jeynes, 2018). However, educational efforts focused on promoting typical parental involvement behaviors (e.g., attending school events, checking homework) are not likely to match the livelihood singularities of most parents with Roma background (e.g., Clifford & Humphries, 2018). For example, these families may fail to meet typical parental involvement expectations due to aspects as follows: logistic issues (e.g., taking care of their children and of their neighbors' children, household chores, a lack of transportation to school), lack of awareness regarding the educational benefits of parental involvement, parental role constructions, perceived discrimination, and lack of perceived parenting competencies and skills (Day & Dotterer, 2018; Parsons et al., 2018). Barriers such as these may prevent Roma people from complying with the traditional forms of parental involvement, which may

support general and widespread misperceptions about their low involvement in children's education (Clifford & Humphries, 2018).

Driven by the theoretical frameworks presented, while rejecting deficit approaches as explanations for the high underachievement rates of students with Roma background, the present study draws on data from intervention-based research. Aiming to understand the patterns of parental involvement in children's school life and the engagement process in school-related activities among families with Roma background, we designed an intervention program supported by a culturally sensitive story-tool (see methodology section). This study contributes to the literature while analyzing the voices of parents with Roma background and presenting a broad perspective on the patterns of parental involvement in children's school life. Moreover, we analyzed the parents' experiences of engagement in the program. We believe that these experiential insights, albeit preliminary, may shed light on how schools can develop partnerships with parents with Roma background and improve their children's school success. Hopefully, the knowledge generated will help policymakers, school practitioners, and stakeholders in setting policies and making effective decisions to promote the inclusion and school success of Roma communities.

Contextual Setting

This study was conducted in two public elementary schools in disadvantaged areas. Both schools are in the outskirts of two cities in the north of Portugal. Reasons to select these two schools are twofold: the high number of students from the Roma groups enrolled in each school, and the diversity of Roma groups in both schools. Despite being portrayed as a homogenous group, in Portugal, Roma groups distinguish themselves by their cultural traditions and values, economic activities, and housing. The schools targeted in this study include families from three main Roma communities: those settled in social housing, whose principal economic activity is selling garments in fairs; those settled in social housing, whose principal economic activity is selling balloons and toys in traditional markets and popular fairs; and those living in tent camps. The latter community has even fewer resources than the other two, and practice subsistence agriculture and earn their livelihood from selling scrap metal.

Method

The current study is grounded on the intervention-based research framework, widely used in the education field as a powerful tool to conceptualize, assess, and intervene in the participants' lives (see Hu et al., 2021). In the current study, this design was used to gain understanding on the patterns of parental involvement in children's school life among Roma families, while promoting opportunities to support and expand parental role constructions and their forms of involvement in children school life. The intervention protocol was submitted and approved by the Ministry of Education and the Scientific Ethics Committee of the University.

Story-Tool Based Intervention

A collaborative intervention using a story-tool was developed with two groups of parents with Roma background.

The Story-Tool

Storytelling is a powerful educational tool providing opportunities to generate culturally significant meanings regarding attitudes, beliefs, and values (e.g., Greenfields et al., 2015; Rosário et al., 2010, 2016). Listeners can identify themselves with settings and characters, which may prompt reflection experiences and encourage behavior change (Lee et al., 2016; Palacios et al., 2015). Moreover, prior research has been suggesting that storytelling is most effective when it is used with cultures with a strong oral tradition, such as Roma groups (see Haigh & Hardy, 2011; Visconti, 2016). Grounded on these reasons, a narrative was purposefully created with meaningful elements related to cultural traditions and values and to the roles played by the parents on younger individuals' life trajectories. The initial version was discussed with researchers and social work assistants with experience working with this population, and with members from the community (cultural mediators). The suggestions made were incorporated in the final version. The narrative comprises a frame story (Matryoshka Stories), where the main narrative subsumes a set of shorter stories. The current narrative depicts the story of Musca, a little and thin arctic swallow with approximately 120gr, who, following her family tradition, flew from the Artic all the way to the Antarctic. Musca ran from the harsh cold of the artic to meet the summer season on the other side of the Earth. Along this long journey, Musca stopped to rest in a branch of an old tree somewhere in Africa. While resting, Musca meets local birds, tells stories from her journey around the Earth, and learns games and local stories from her new friends. The narrative provides listeners with an opportunity to

discuss a broad repertoire of cultural meanings and reflect on the merits of distinct education contexts, educators' roles, life expectations, and cultural challenges. The discussion of the adventures of Musca allows participants to discuss the story plot while reasoning on their own life circumstances and challenges (e.g., discuss how the little and fragile artic swallow managed to overcome the challenges and difficulties found along the way and attain her goal; or how the family history and tradition shaped Musca's pathways). This experiential closeness and cultural sensitiveness are likely to foster parents' engagement with the discussion and enhance the development of positive attitudes towards the strategic contents introduced by the narrative (Rosário et al., 2016).

Procedure

A meeting was organized in both communities to inform parents about the program. The aim was to connect with the community and familiarize researchers with their cultural aspects while establishing trusting relationships. Two sets of eight 90-minute weekly sessions took place in schools, using rooms prepared for small group discussions. No rewards or payments were offered for participation. Two experienced implementers delivered the program in both groups (with six and seven mothers, respectively). The sessions followed a script as follows: i) implementers read a small chapter of the narrative (once or twice, as needed) related to the target topic to be covered. From the first session onwards, the sessions started with an initial recap of the story and the insights from the last session. To ensure understanding, participants were encouraged to retell the story in their own words, and all the unfamiliar words and concepts were clarified and translated to everyday language. ii) The discussion on the session's topic (e.g., building a shared understanding of the role of formal education in their child's life, reflecting on parental roles and life expectations and their influence on children's positive pathways) was promoted with questioning. The discussion began with descriptive narrative-grounded questions (e.g., Who are the characters of the story? What is this chapter about? How did the characters overcome their barriers/ difficulties?), shifting to real-life related questions (e.g., How can this story apply to our life? In what circumstances do we face similar problems or conflicts in our life? What can we learn from this story?). iii) Sessions included hands-on activities (e.g., plasticine, origami) to complement participants' reflections on the session topic. Besides, the activities (e.g., process and outputs) were discussed using the same reasoning approach. Finally, iv) sessions ended with a summary and a brief 'take-home message'.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the intervention, procedures were adopted as follows: sessions were fully scripted in a detailed protocol of the intervention (e.g., program purposes, topics to cover,

strategies to check participants' understanding, session activities and a set of key questions to introduce and explore the topic), conveyed to the implementers. These researchers received a two-day training for delivering this intervention. Training covered the program's theoretical framework, objectives and procedures, and information on the Roma culture and groups targeted. Moreover, weekly debriefing meetings with a senior researcher were held to review the intervention script and to monitor protocol adherence; additionally, intervention sessions were audio-recorded and reviewed against the protocol by two researchers. The overall fidelity of delivery (fidelity to structure and process; Mowbray et al., 2003) ranged from 85% to 95% across sessions for both groups.

Data Collection

To assure diversity within the target population, a purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit participants (Robinson, 2014). The project was presented to school directors and social work assistants; afterwards a meeting was held with parents (mothers and fathers) from the Roma community to invite them while providing all the program related information. Like in other cultural groups, in Roma groups mothers play a major role in children's education. Therefore, our sample included mothers with children attending from the last years of elementary school onwards. The participants were invited to collaborate with the research team as active partners, rather than as passive participants who are expected to learn how to educate their children. Finally, an individual informed consent was provided to mothers who accepted to participate.

Two of the authors collected data through semi-structured interviews in two waves. The first data wave was collected prior to the start of the intervention. This interview initiated with general information about the program with the aim of overcoming mistrust and cultural and linguistic barriers, and to help establish relationships with the participants (Lyberg et al., 2014). The interview included a list of open questions focused on participants' educational beliefs and the value of education, academic expectations, parental practices at home and school regarding their children's schooling, and cultural beliefs related to parenting. Sample questions included: *"How is school important for your child's future life?"*; *"What do you know about your child's school behavior and school grades?"*; *"How do you know school-related information?"*; *"How do you imagine your child's future life? For example, what do you think could happen to your child in two years?"*; *"Tell me about your child's routine on a typical school day"*; *"At home, do you talk with your child about their school activities and school routines?"*. Follow-up questions about their expectations regarding the parenting program and feedback on the interviews were also included in the interview script. The second data collection interviews added a set of questions about participants'

experiences in the intervention program. The questions' wording was adjusted to overcome language barriers (i.e., some participants often used Romani language), misunderstandings, and expression gaps as needed. Interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim ensuring anonymity and confidentiality.

Participants

School directors and social work assistants facilitated contact with the community. Finally, 17 mothers agreed to participate in the program. Five participants missed several sessions and were not interviewed in the second data collection wave. Reasons were related to sickness and medical appointments (e.g., cancer diagnosis), problems at home (e.g., the apartment burned down, family resettlement), and overlap of household chores. Finally, data analysis drew on a sample of 13 participants who attended seven or eight program sessions (see Table 4); these women were interviewed in the two data collection waves (24 interviews). Participants' ages ranged from 27 to 51 years old (M = 36.4, SD = 7.2). Regarding education, half of the sample (50%) had never attended school during childhood (women with ages between 27 and 43 years old). From those, some participants attended adulthood basic literacy courses to develop reading and writing skills. The majority of participants who attended school as a child completed elementary school (67%).

Table 4

Descriptive information about the cases

	Age	AcademicQualifications
Toya	27	Illiterate
Charani	31	6th grade
Ashila	31	4th grade
Samara	32	4th grade
Eldra	32	Illiterate
Dorelia	33	3rd grade
Masilda	34	Illiterate
Deloreni	38	1st grade
Mary	42	Illiterate*
Analetta	43	Illiterate
Everilda	44	6th grade*
Ostelinda	50	Illiterate
Selesia	51	3rd grade*

Note. *Attended an adult literacy course

Data analysis

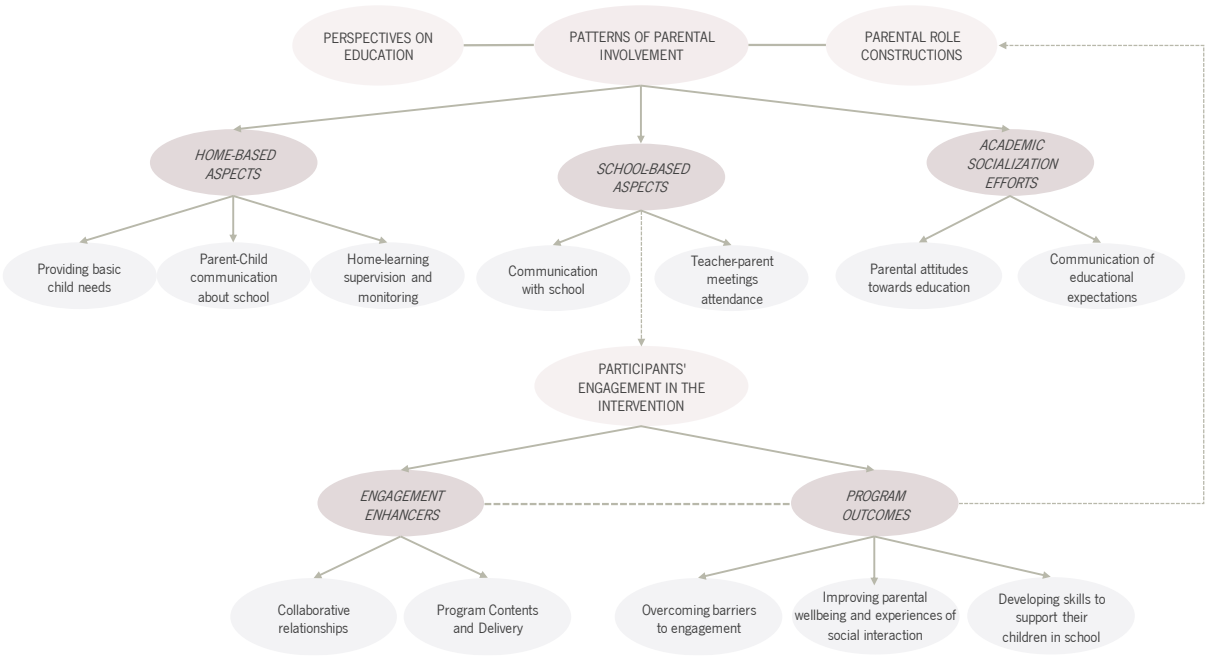
Data analysis focused on (1) patterns of parental involvement in children's schooling and (2) participants' experience in the program. Following the recursive process by Braun and Clarke (2012), a thematic content analysis was performed helped by the NVivo software. Interviews were coded using a "hybrid approach" (e.g., Swain, 2018). First, data was explored in an inductive way to identify emergent codes, then a deductive logic was added to group codes into priori domains of interest (parental expectations, home communication, parents-school communication, parental practices and participation in school, barriers, benefits, challenges). Analyses were conducted between and within cases, using a constant comparative method to identify potential relations. Relationships and repeated patterns of meaning were identified within the women's narrative accounts and across participants by using software tools to search through the datasets (i.e., queries, cluster analysis, graphical maps). Subsequently, codes assigned to specific domains were grouped into themes previously found in the literature. Demographic data and family characteristics related to parents (e.g., age; education level; Roma group) and children (e.g., gender, age) were considered in data analysis. To aid clarity in the reporting process, the frequency of responses for each outlined subtheme followed Rodgers and Cooper's (2006) scoring scheme for qualitative thematic analysis: 'All' = 100%, 'nearly all' = 100% - 2 participants, 'most' = 50%+1 to 100%-2, 'around half' = 50%+1 participants, 'some' = 3 to 50%+1 participants, 'a couple' = 2 participants, and 'one' = one participant. To enhance the trustworthiness of the current findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1986), a random selection of 10 interviews was coded by two researchers independently and the consensus was reached through discussion. The kappa coefficient ranged from 0.87 to .98, which is considered very good according to Landis and Koch (1977). Verbatim supporting quotes were included to illustrate themes and subthemes, to provide a rich description of participants' representations and experiences, and to add validity to results (Smith, 2017). Pseudonyms were used to identify participants.

Findings

Results were organized in two sections: (1) patterns of parental involvement in children's school life and (2) participants' engagement in the intervention program. A visual depiction of results containing key themes, subthemes, and relationships among them is presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Visual map of the themes, subthemes, and emerging relationships developed through thematic analysis



Section 1. Patterns Of Parental Involvement In Children' School Life

Participants were asked about their views on education and their role in supporting and helping children to succeed in school. When comparing reports on parental involvement in children' school life across both data collection moments, no meaningful differences were found. All participants stressed the importance of children's education as a tool for social upward mobility; moreover, all agreed that children need to master basic literacy and numeracy skills to create opportunities for a better future, in particular, getting a driving license and/or having a job.

"[school] *is important to read and write, I never knew how to read and write, I have never been in school." (Ostelinda, 50 years old)*

"[Attend school is important, offers] *many opportunities... get a job, get a driving license, many things. If he* [her child] *fails to learn, he cannot get a job or get the driving license." (Ashila, 31 years old)*

Nearly all the participants agreed that school plays an important role while socializing children in social norms. Participants shared that by attending school and socializing with non-Roma peers and staff,

children are likely to show respect towards authority figures, responsible behaviors, and adequate social communication.

"[school is important] *To have a better future, to read, to know how to be with others, to respect the others, and interact will all..." (Charani, 31 years old)*

"To go to the school, it is the best thing in the world... they are educated. School helps, changes children into better persons." (Everilda, 44 years old)

Besides, some participants mentioned the developmental opportunities created by the school as positive alternatives to youth risk-taking behaviors.

"[attend school] *helps him have a future, move away from bad things, to have knowledge.* [school helps him run from] *Bad ways, from deviating others to ... smoke, you know, smoke." (Deloreni, 38 years old)*

"[outside of school] *he can do bad things. Yes, bad things, like stealing." (Toya, 27 years old)*

Participants' descriptions of their support and involvement in their children's school life fell into three major themes: (1) home-based aspects, (2) school-based aspects, and (3) academic socialization efforts. The reported parental practices seem to be responding to the protocols and demands provided by the institutional bodies (e.g., school, social security). These influences are likely to be shaping parental role representations, and therefore the way and the extent to which parents involve themselves in children's education.

Theme 1. Home-Based Aspects

This theme, which includes participants' attitudes and practices geared to contribute to their children's educational outcomes (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Benner et al., 2016; Jeynes, 2018), divides into three subthemes: *providing basic child needs, parent-child communication about the school,* and *home-learning supervision and monitoring.*

Providing basic child needs. Participants' parenting representations translate to educational practices oriented to promote independence from early ages. Nearly all participants reported that children

wake up on their own and prepare themselves to be at school on time. However, all participants mentioned efforts displayed to supervise children in meeting the school schedule (e.g., making sure children wake up, preparing breakfast, ensuring that children get to school safely). Participants considered these behaviors as important responsibilities of their role in children's education.

"Sometimes I wake her up, and sometimes she wakes up alone. At six [in the morning] *I prepare lunch* [breakfast] *to be close to my daughter and she have* [enough] *time to eat. She is afraid of going alone* [to the bus stop] *and I walk to the bus with her." (Analetta, 43 years old)*

"He wakes up alone, and he do everything alone. Wash teeth, put the books in the backpack with the things to the school. He eats breakfast, take the bus, and goes. Sometimes when is late [classes that end at 18,00h]*, we came here to the school to catch him.* [When is dark] *I am afraid for him, and we came here* [school]*." (Masilda, 34 years old)*

Parent-child communication about school. Some participants declared that they do not encourage children to talk about daily school events; still, most participants referred to talk with their children about their behaviors and activities in school.

"Don't know [what happens in the school]*, because I never asked." (Toya, 27 years old)*

"They know that I ask everyday what they do, and don't do, at school. The routine is we seat in the sofa, I turned off the television and they start to talk saying what they have in the head." (Samara, 32 years old)

Despite showing interest, some participants added that adolescents resist talking about school activities.

"He doesn't talk much. At home he is silent, I ask him: '[did you] *behave well?' When he leaves to school I say: 'behave well, stay away from troubles'. He is quiet, like his grandfather." (Everilda, 44 years old)*

These communication dynamics may contribute to explain participants' lack of information about their children's school activities, preferences, school tasks, difficulties to progress, or school grades records.

"What she likes more in school? Don't know, she never told me that." (Ostelinda, 50 years old)

"She never talked about that [preferences and difficulties to solve school tasks]*" (Deloreni, 38 years old)*

Home-learning supervision and monitoring. Nearly all participants noted that they do not have the literacy skills needed to support their children while completing home-learning activities or even to check whether they have completed their homework (most of the participants struggle to read and /or write). Still, pressured by the school staff, some participants reported asking their children whether they have homework or to check their notebooks to learn if they did homework. These reported behaviors suggest efforts to monitor their children's homework and study time.

"When he arrives home, I ask if he has homework... He tells me that he did homework and I ask him to show me the notebook to see if it is true... but I don't know how to read." (Eldra, 32 years old)

"Yes, they [children] *study. They study together. My girl is in the 7th grade and my son is in the 5th grade. She helps him study. Every day I tell them to study a little bit." (Samara, 32 years old)*

Most of the parents reported their children to be enrolled in after-school community projects where they are expected to complete homework or study with supervision. Nearly all the participants mentioned that they do not set time at home for their children's homework and study. Notably, when describing children's daily routines, nearly all the participants reported that, at home, they do not spend time on school activities.

"She does [homework] *in the community center* [after school community projects]*. Sometimes, when she has homework, she goes there." (Dorelia, 33 years old)*

"After school she goes to the Red Cross [to do the homework and study]*. When she arrives home, eats, and uses the mobile phone all the time." (Analetta, 43 years old)*

Theme 2. School-Based Aspects

School-based aspects include participants' reported practices regarding the communication with and participation in school-promoted activities and parent-teacher meetings (Benner et al., 2016; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2018). Nearly all participants reported taking a passive role in the communication flow with the school, responding to requests made by the school (e.g., sign authorizations, attend parents-teacher meetings). Participants' reported behaviors and practices fall under the two outlined subthemes: *communication with school*, and *teacher-parent meetings attendance.*

Communication with school. When questioned about how they learn their children's behaviors in school, all participants answered that school staff communicates by phone call when there is a need to alert them about their children's problem behaviors (e.g., class non-attendance), and material or homework shortages. Almost all the participants stated that they usually communicate by phone with the school social work assistants rather than with the teachers.

"Anything [problem behaviors] *that he does in the school, they let me know* [the social work assistant communicates]*. I learn what he has done or what he did not do. The social work assistant calls me and tells me the news. When is serious, they call us to the school." (Eldra, 32 years old)*

"When he behaves badly, they [the social work assistant] *call me or send a letter." (Ashila, 31 years old)*

Nearly all participants reported relying on the school educators to update them about their children's behavior in school; however, some of them reported initiating contact with the school representatives (e.g., teacher, social work assistants) to address their concerns about their children's or peers' behaviors.

"Yes. Sometimes, I call the teacher. When he [child] *doesn't want to go to school, I talk with her* [teacher] *to ask her to talk with him, to give him some advice, and she does it" (Everilda, 44 years old)*

"[I attend parent-teacher meetings] *When she* [social work assistant] *calls me. I have been here once* [at the school] *to ask how he was going* [learn the child school behavior and achievement]*. Yes, I like to know how everything is going." (Charani, 31 years old)*

Parent-teacher meetings attendance. Around half of participants referred to attend in-person meetings when invited by teachers. Participants added that the in-person teacher-initiative meetings' agenda usually includes serious problem behaviors, poor grades, or administrative tasks (e.g., fill in or sign papers).

"When he misses class or has bad grades, the teachers call me to a meeting." (Toya, 27 years old)

"Sometimes the teacher wants to talk with me, and I came here [school]*. When they don't know what to do with him* [child]*, they call me." (Dorelia, 33 years old)*

Theme 3. Academic Socialization Efforts

Participants also reported practices related to communicating with children about the value of education for their future and career plans. This theme includes *parental attitudes towards education* and *communication of educational expectations*.

Parental attitudes towards education. Nearly all participants reported focusing their educational efforts on setting conditions to help children attend school and denying their will for dropping out early from school.

"I take care of my children, checking if she wakes in the morning, giving breakfast and sending her to school. No, she does not stay at home; she goes to school. It is better to stay in the school." (Mary, 42 years old)

"I send my daughter to school, why? Because in the future, I don't want to hear: 'my mother did not push me to learn how to read and write'. She wants to leave school, but I do not allow." (Ostelinda, 50 years old)

"(...) He tells me that we will leave [school] *in the end of the 9th grade* [in Portugal education is mandatory until the 12th grade]*.* [However, that will not happen] *I am the boss (...)" (Charani, 31 years old)*

Nearly all participants reported conveying educational messages regarding the importance of education, and to encourage children to attend school. In addition, these participants mentioned making efforts to socialize children into school norms and values (e.g., to be respectful with teachers and colleagues, to comply with the rules).

"I think, we have to encourage them to go [to school]*, because it is good for their future. If we support them, they will not quit. I always tell them to behave well and respect the teacher. My children have to obey and behave well, that's what I teach them." (Samara, 32 years old)*

"I tell them [children] *before they leave to school 'behave well, if anyone beats you do not respond, tell the teacher, she is the one who can punish them." (Everilda, 44 years old)*

When children misbehave, nearly all the participants referred to use punishment strategies (e.g., verbal reprimands) or withdrawal of privileges (e.g., take the mobile phone away) to control their behaviors.

"The phone distracts her [in class]*. Sometimes I keep the phone at home, she can only use it back in home. I do that* [to help her be focused on the class]*." (Analetta, 43 years old)*

"I punish him. He likes to play games on his phone, so I take the phone." (Toya, 27 years old)

Communication of educational expectations. When asked about their educational expectations regarding their children, nearly all participants mentioned wanting their children to be enrolled in school beyond elementary school. However, participants' statements reflect their poor literacy skills and lack of

knowledge on how the school system is organized. The academic expectations set for their children are vague or unrealistic.

"Humm, I don't know how many grades they can study in school; I don't know. I want him to study until the end. How can I explain, until 18 years old [mandatory education age] *...* [study] *to have a better future. Yes, study in the school until 18 and complete hummm the 8th grade." (Eldra, 32 years old)*

"I don't know [the expected age for every school grade]*. When he completes 15 years old, what grade could he have completed?" (Charani, 31 years old)*

"I would like him to stay [in the school] *up to 20 years old. At that age he would be a veterinarian* [her child is 14 years old and attending the 5th grade]*. I would like that. He could be called by people with animals and earn money. He has animals and he needs a veterinarian, as he would be a veterinarian, he would not need to call one." (Deloreni, 38 years old)*

Some participants shared that they aspire for their children to complete high school or college; however, the traditional pathways of Roma people emerge in speeches as a barrier to successful school progression.

"I cannot answer that [academic expectations] *because we* [Roma community] *think differently, when we reach the age of majority, then we leave school. I would like him at 18 to be in school* [completing high school]*." (Toya, 27 years old)*

"I would like him to be a lawyer. I will oblige him to stay until the 12th grade, and then it is up to him." (Samara, 32 years old)

Overall, participants' expectations are focused on two major achievements shared by all the participants: to get a driving license and to have a job or be enrolled in a funded professional training course.

"Yes, I want them to read and write, get a driving license and have a job. It is very important that my children get a job and know how to read and write (...) to know how to make a curriculum, he needs to study... to go to a course [funded training courses]*, I don't know, a course to tinkering in cars" (Ashila, 31 years old)*

"[attend school] *to have a better future, to know how to read, live in society, respect the others. Have a future, get a driving license and a job. Now many jobs ask the* [completion of the] *12th grade" (Charani, 31 years old)*

Nearly all the parents expect their children to work and be economically independent of their family at the age of eighteen. Most participants mentioned aspiring for their children to have unskilled jobs or semi-skilled jobs over the traditional economic activities in which the community is typically involved (e.g., selling in fairs or popular festivals, selling scrap metal) or the social security inclusion income.

"I would like her [child] *to get a job. She could choose the job she wants it is up to her. She could work in a restaurant, as a waitress tacking costumers orders.* [I want her] *To be happy." (Analetta, 43 years old)*

"I would like her to have a future like painting nails. She could be a hairdresser. She could even open a hairdresser salon. A salon that is hers... It might happen, only God knows her future." (Dorelia, 33 years old)

To sum up, participants' reports show that their parental involvement behaviors are focused on aspects and tasks that they believe meet their ability and fall under their responsibility (e.g., control the conditions for their children to attend school, prevent tardiness and absences from classes). In addition, all participants mentioned talking with their children about future expectations, stressing the benefits of education beyond elementary school. Parents present themselves as supporters of their children's trajectories, but lack information about their children' expectations, interests, or fears for the future. For example, when questioned, parents were not able to identify children' expectations or aspirations about their future. Finally, parents recognized their lack of influence on life decisions when children reach the age of adolescence.

"[when she reaches age of 15] *I don't know, she knows her future." (Ostelinda, 50 years old)*

"I don't know... When they arrive 15 years old, we don't have a say in their future." (Samara, 32 years old)

Section 2. Participants' Engagement In The Intervention Program

Participants were asked about their expectations for and experiences during the sessions. Participants shared that their participation in the program helped them improve their awareness of the parenting roles and strategies to support children in school. Overall, participants reported positive evaluations of their experience in the program sessions. Two themes emerged: *engagement enhancers* and *program outcomes.*

Theme 1. Engagement Enhancers

Participants' positive evaluation was mostly related with the quality of the relationships developed within the group, the program contents, and the instructional methods followed to convey the contents. Participants' answers fall into the following outlined subthemes: *Collaborative relationships* and *Program Contents and Delivery.*

Collaborative relationships. All participants shared very positive perspectives regarding their participation in the sessions. The quality of the relationships built was one of the most positive aspects highlighted by all the participants.

"I liked everything; [talked with] *the people. Being in group was good, I liked everything" (Mary, 42 years old)*

"It was very good. I liked her [the implementer]*. She is nice, I liked her. I believe we all did... We learned many things with each other" (Charani, 31 years old)*

"What I liked the most was of being together [Roma and non-Roma people]. *Being together was good" (Toya, 27 years old)*

Despite the barriers identified by some participants, such as the long distance they had to walk to attend the sessions and the overlap with household chores, most participants mentioned that the quality of the sessions (i.e., the relationships built, content discussed to help with their children's education), contributed positively to their weekly participation.

"I had to walk... Only God knows that I left everything behind to come [to attend the sessions]*. I arrived all sweaty and tired of the things of the house* [household chores]*. But I walked with them* [other participants] *and was good." (Deloreni, 38 years old)*

"I liked very much of these sessions. We had fun, we played and learned many good things, it was good. Next year we should return again." (Charani, 31 years old)

In addition, some participants' highlighted features of the program that helped them engage in the sessions and develop their competencies: the opportunity to learn new things, express their opinions and concerns, and improve the quality of the interactions with their children.

"Yes, I felt good in the sessions. Each time I learned a new thing." (Toya, 27 years old)

"What I learned was very important, helped me talking with my children, and helped not only my children, but help me very much." (Deloreni, 38 years old)

Furthermore, one participant added to this list the collaborative mode followed to deliver content. This overall positive experience was in contrast with previous ones where participants were treated as passive recipients of information on how to better educate their children. The community members tend to resist enrolling in meetings and training courses to avoid 'how to parent' approaches.

"People that do not attend or quit from these courses [parenting programs] *do it because they listen 'this is to give education to our children' and they think, but we do not give education to our children already? They* [Roma people] *think what do they* [social educators] *know of how we educate our children? They think like this. In my opinion, the others quit from these sessions because they thought that will be the same... but not!" (Samara, 32 years old)*

Program Contents and Delivery. The story tool plot and hands-on activities (e.g., modeling plasticine, origami) were used to elicit discussion over the topics of the sessions. Participants considered the discussions pleasant and very useful to help them learn and reflect on the topics discussed.

"The sessions were excellent, helped me think a lot; helped me to give more value to things [in my life, with my children]*. I want more sessions." (Samara, 32 years old)*

"Very good [the sessions]*. Sometimes I was sad at home, but when I was here, I smiled. Was good, talk about our children* [education and future] *was good, distracted of my sadness. You did me well." (Deloreni, 38 years old)*

Most participants valued the non-directive approach followed to deliver content. The content meanings were co-constructed and tailored to meet the specific needs of the participants. For example, the program activities attended the participants' literacy level and reasoning abilities (e.g., the story was told with pictures and the meaning of potential non-common words were explained in a simple way) which helped them overcome obstacles related to poor literacy and to engage in the discussions.

"[in the sessions] *each one said what was in her head, the best she could do" (Toya, 27 years old)*

"I was not expecting, it was a good surprise [the sessions]*. Like a little box full of surprises... If I read the story for myself, it was a normal story; but no, her discussion was completely different, I understood everything, beautiful, surprising." (Samara, 32 years old)*

For illustrative purposes, participants were invited to shape a small patch of plasticine, in one of the sessions. The purpose of this activity was to elicit participants' reflection on the roles parents may play in children's lives. This activity was very insightful to these participants; all referred that modeling of plasticine provided opportunities to discuss and (re)build their parenting representations.

'[first] *We didn't know why we were working the plasticine and what was the result. Then we were told that the plasticine were our children. I started thinking. I have to*

model them. I think this is a way to help us think what we are doing with and for our children." (Toya, 27 years old)

"[then I learned that the] *Plasticine were our children and we had to make something with them* [like we were doing with the plasticine]*.* [I thought that] *We need to put efforts and do this beautiful thing* [education] *for them." (Deloreni, 38 years old)*

Furthermore, the story tool used in the sessions was comprised of short stories that were very useful as starters of the discussions. After listening to these stories, participants were invited to build personal and cultural meanings and present them to the whole group. Importantly, the topics discussed (e.g., the role of formal education in their child's life, parental role representations, life expectations) were expected to be translated to their personal lives and parenting representations. In the interview, nearly all the participants were able to remember and evoke some story passages and related activities. In fact, nearly all the participants remembered at least one important meaning ascribed to their favorite story passages.

"The [story of the] *goat that had no value* [was old and was going to be sold to a local butcher]*, but because she saved the boy, then she was very valuable. That, I never forget* [this story]*, because sometimes there are things that we do not value and then.... we do.* [This story] *It was very important, because* [throughout the sessions] *we gave many examples of things in our lives that had no value, and then were* [valuable]*. I told this story to my son, and I always tell him, 'Son do you remember the goat?' If you don't listen to me* [e.g., attend school on time, do homework]*, afterwards you will lose." (Samara, 32 years old)*

"I liked the story that tells that when you fall you need to get up and continue. For example, when we, for example want a job, to work doing anything, we have to fight for that. We cannot sit and wait, we must look and fight, fight. We have to fight for our children; we want what is good for them." (Masilda, 34 years old)

"The rooster was searching for food in the chicken coop [looking for fresh corn]*, but instead found a precious stone. That was not good for him, but he didn't quit. That's*

what we have to do. Never give up, help the children [she sighted]*, give them support, we learned that." (Charani, 31 years old)*

Theme 2. Program Outcomes

While sharing their initial expectations, nearly all participants reported to have looked at the sessions as opportunities to grow as educators. Particularly, most participants reported expecting to receive support in helping their children understand the relevance of school for their future life. Moreover, around half of the participants also reported perceiving their participation in the program as an opportunity for closer contact with people from other cultural groups (e.g., other Roma groups and mainstream people).

"Help better my son. Help him understand that education is important." (Ashila, 31 years old)

"[these sessions] *put Roma and non-Roma to talk." (Selesia, 51 years old)*

All the participants shared an array of positive outcomes resulting from their enrollment in the sessions. This theme includes data on the participants' perspectives about the program's impact on themselves or their livelihood, and on aspects learned along the sessions. Program perceived outcomes fall into three outlined subthemes: *overcoming barriers to engagement, improving parental wellbeing and experiences of social interaction, and developing skills to support their children in school.*

Overcoming barriers to engagement. Some participants assumed their initial reservations to participate in the program sessions. Still, this disposition shifted along the program; eventually, they reported efforts to engage in the program and overcome the barriers to participation.

"Sometimes I left home angry [due to family problems]. *But just 5m here* [in the sessions]*, and I am feeling happy and laughing." (Ashila, 31 years old)*

"Yes, sometimes I arrived nervous [in the sessions] *because I had to make food to my husband* [prepare lunch before leaving the house] *because when I arrive home* [in the end of the session] *I had a few time* [to do house chores] *... Still, I never missed* [a session]*." (Everilda, 44 years old)*

"God knows, I always left everything behind to come [to the sessions]*. I had to run to do the things at home* [household chores], *but I always told to myself 'She* [researcher] *is waiting for me' I cannot miss." (Deloreni, 38 years old)*

Improving parental wellbeing and experiences of social interaction. Most participants mentioned that participating in the program was an opportunity to experience different social experiences; for example, socializing with people from other cultural background.

A closer look at the reports revealed differences between those of participants living in tent camps and those of their counterparts living in social housing. The former perceived their participation in the sessions as positive for their wellbeing while providing opportunities to leave their homes, helping to distract them from family problems and improve their mood.

"These [sessions] *helped distract my head* [put away the problems and worries]*. Was good because I am a woman that never leave the house, I' am always closed in my life. My head was happy here." (Analetta, 43 years old)*

"The sessions helped me many times when I was sad [family problems]*. When you saw me crying, you asked me if I was sad. I said, no, but I was very sad with things of my son. It was good to talk about our sons* [in the sessions]*; it was good and distract me from my worries. It* [the sessions] *help me much." (Deloreni, 38 years old)*

Developing skills to support their children in school. Nearly all participants mentioned that the topics addressed helped them acquire new skills and reinforce the existing ones regarding parenting, such as parent-child communication about the school, parental roles, and influences on children's academic success.

"We learned ways to educate our sons differently, following other ways. To encourage them to attend classes because it is important. [In the sessions, I] *Learned ways to help our sons and increase their interest in the school. We need more* [sessions] *to learn and educate better our sons." (Toya, 27 years old)*

"This [my participation in this course] *was for our sons, to help them... they need to know that the mothers came* [to the sessions] *to help them, we came for them." (Masilda, 34 years old)*

Discussion

The current study aimed to deepen our understanding on the experiences of parental involvement in children's school life among families with Roma background, and to build evidence likely to help support school efforts and future interventions on this topic.

Patterns Of Parental Involvement In Children's School Life

In line with studies targeting ethnic minorities (e.g., Garcia & de Guzman, 2020; Grace & Gerdes, 2019; Strataki & Petrogiannis, 2020), current findings show that participants' parental representations affect the ways by which they engage in children's school life. For example, participants focused their role on tasks and activities prior to and after school time important in setting the conditions for the learning process (e.g., providing children basic needs and ensuring attendance and punctuality to school; and picking them up at school or the bus station, and supervising that they organize their backpacks for the following school day; respectively), while relying the responsibility of their children's learning on school educators (e.g., children learning difficulties in reading or writing; difficulties to understand the content of the homework exercises). In general, parents understand the school learning activities as confined to the school time. Therefore, they expect school and educators to support children on their instructional needs to progress.

Nevertheless, building on the multidimensional conceptualization of parental involvement proposed by Hill and Tyson (2009), participants' narratives reflect parents' efforts and attempts to take part in different activities and practices to support children in education. Consistent with previous findings (Sime et al., 2018; Strataki & Petrogiannis, 2020), participants described efforts to help children understand the utility of education for the future and to foster children's school attendance, for example. In addition, and in response to assimilative school pressures (Schachner et al., 2017), participants also reported efforts to conform with prevailing forms of parental involvement. For example, participants illustrated attempts made to monitor their children's behaviors at home (e.g., check children's homework) as a response to school demands to adopt traditional forms of parental involvement within the community (e.g., social work phone calls reporting missed homework). However, as parents mentioned, the efficacy

of these efforts are limited because the parents lack the basic literacy skills needed to support children on their study or to check homework completion.

Overall, our data are consistent with previous findings stating that school efforts focused on promoting traditional forms of parental involvement do not fit the difficulties and limitations faced by many families with Roma background (Clifford & Humphries, 2018). Moreover, these school messages are likely to reinforce the families' lack of ability to support children's learning processes (Yamamoto & Sonnenschein, 2016) whilst undermining parents' motivation to take part in and support their children's education (Hill et al., 2016; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Literature on the acculturation models may help explain current and previous data. According to prior research, the participation of individuals with ethnic minority backgrounds in mainstream systems conveys challenges such as adjusting to novel cultural mores and norms for social interactions and unfamiliar rules and regulations (Berry et al., 2006; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2009). Therefore, schools play a central role in shaping parenting responsibility beliefs and identities regarding the involvement of parents from ethnic minority groups in children's education. As Mapp et al. (2008) warned, families need to perceive involvement in school as a part of their parental role and be sure of their ability to cope with these tasks. For example, in the present study, participants' poor educational levels (e.g., most participants lack of basic literacy skills, such as read and write) and lack of knowledge on the inner workings of the educational system emerges as a barrier to their involvement in children's education. Still, and importantly, their lack of information on children's educational process and progress, suggests important shortcomings in the school's "modus operandi" to encourage and foster parental involvement. Extant research has already documented the relevance of school-parents communication in fostering parental involvement (e.g., Grace & Gerdes, 2019; Hill et al., 2016; Jeynes, 2018). Still, current data show that the school communication with families with Roma background followed protocols distinct from those of the mainstream families. For example, participants reported that social assistants rather than teachers were likely to deliver information or set school-parents' meetings. Furthermore, these meetings were primarily focused on children's problems in the school, rather than on opportunities to help them grow and progress. As noted in prior literature (e.g., Bophal & Meyers, 2009; Hill et al., 2016), these approaches stressing dysfunctions may represent a threat to school-family positive relationships. What is more, current findings suggest that educators may be missing opportunities to discuss with parents the inner workings of the educational system, and to expand and encourage parental practices fit to their realities (e.g., parent-child communication about educational benefits; set realistic academic expectations for their children; create parent-teachers' partnerships). These propositions are consistent with literature

(e.g., Clifford & Humphries, 2018; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014) alerting that educators tend to fail to tackle the most efficacious aspects of parental involvement developed by the families, which may merit educators' and researchers' attention. For instance, participants mentioned communicating with children about the utility of education and educational expectations; however, they are likely to set unrealistic educational expectations for children due to their limited perspectives on the educational process (e.g., enroll in school until 18 years old and complete the 8th grade; leave school, work with animals, and then act as a veterinarian without further education). In fact, parents limited information on the organization of the educational system and grade-level expectations, along with their poor perceived efficacy to take part in children's school life, may help explain their tendency to reproduce the expectations conveyed by the educational institutions for Roma people (e.g., Battaglia & Lebedinski, 2015; Burchardt et al., 2018; Flecha & Soler, 2013; Grace & Gerdes, 2019). For example, unlike the general expectations set for students from the mainstream groups, those for students from Roma backgrounds are likely to be focused on the mandatory age of school attendance (e.g., 'for your family to receive social allowances, your child must be enrolled in school until the 18 years old.') rather than on the general expectations for high school (e.g., 'your child, like their counterparts, is expected to complete the 12th grade before reaching the age of majority, which matches the school leaving age').

Overall, participants' narratives show willingness to engage in activities set by the school and showed forms of parental involvement while answering the school system's demands. Data also show the limited efficacy of these efforts displayed either by the school or by the parents and suggest the need to rethink and change the school-parents protocols aimed to foster parents' involvement. Together our findings add to the scarce literature by providing evidence against deficit model approaches portraying families with Roma background as lacking interest or willingness to support their children's school life (e.g., Lauritzen & Nodeland, 2018; Parsons et al., 2018; Sime et al., 2018).

Participants' Engagement In The Intervention Program

Consistent with prior research on ethnic minority parents (e.g., Garcia & de Guzman, 2020; Hill et al., 2016), present data show the participants' willingness to better understand how to support their children and youth in school. In fact, despite the non-positive previous educational experiences, participants' enrollment in this program without economic rewards (as it is usual in educational programs set for families with Roma background) demonstrates families' interest and willingness to participate in children's education.

Despite participants' high engagement in the sessions and the positive experiences reported, at the end of the program no meaningful differences were found in the reported practices of parental involvement. This finding is not surprising, given the complexity of the processes underlying parental involvement and the brief time frame for the intervention. In fact, as stated by Hill et al. (2016), to gain knowledge on how to support their children, families with ethnic minority backgrounds need to develop a shared identity, goals, and values with the school system. This acculturative process is developed over years through concerted and continued efforts of both schools and families (e.g., Jeynes, 2018; Kramer et al., 2021). Still, even though changes in practices have not been noted, participants' statements provided evidence that enrollment in the sessions was useful to extend their parental role constructions regarding school participation, gain insights on the inner-system workings of the educational system, and expand academic socialization efforts (e.g., parent-child communication about school). This tacit information is crucial for developing parents' support and involvement practices in their children's school life (Grace & Gerdes, 2019; Jeon et al., 2020). Most of the families from mainstream society hold this tacit information because they shared attitudes, values, and identities with school system. However families from ethnic minority groups are less likely to own this knowledge, and are therefore less skilled to engage in the traditional forms of parental involvement (Clifford & Humphries, 2018; Parsons et al., 2018). For illustrative purposes, current findings evidenced that perspectives on parenting roles regarding education (e.g., the influential role parents may play in children's academic and future life), which may be commonly held as a commodity by mainstream parents, were described by participants as a striking outcome of the intervention program. These findings may help school administrators and educators consider setting opportunities for mutual information sharing among families, as a tool to engage parents in the school and promote inclusive education (e.g., Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Henderson et al., 2020). Moreover, current data provided evidence on the benefits of setting activities for families with Roma background to learn their perspectives and understand their difficulties and cultural barriers, while sharing tacit and explicit information likely to help them support their children and youth in school.

The session's climate is likely to have favored participants' engagement in the intervention program. Participants stressed aspects that helped them feel welcomed and valued; for example, the gentle weekly remainders to attend the session, the sense of openness about their cultural perspectives, experiences, and parenting concerns and difficulties, and the perceived support of their problems. Furthermore, each participant was encouraged to collaborate actively in the sessions while suggesting ways to promote children's school engagement. This strategy may have fostered parents' sense of participatory partnership and their positive involvement in the sessions. The current findings support the

literature claims on the relevance of the role played by teachers and school directors in building opportunities to communicate with families and establish collaborative relationships (e.g., Grace & Gerdes, 2019; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Jeynes, 2018; Parsons et al., 2018).

Finally, this study stresses the relevance of addressing the acculturation processes of both contexts - school and families – when analyzing the patterns of parental involvement of families with Roma backgrounds. Consistent with previous data (e.g., Clifford & Humphries, 2018; Hill et al., 2016; Jeynes, 2018; Strataki & Petrogiannis, 2020), current findings emphasize the relevance of providing training for school' staff (e.g., teachers, school administrators) to help them create partnerships with families with Roma background, likely to promote their involvement in children's education.

Limitations And Future Directions

Along with the valuable contributions of this study, some limitations must be acknowledged. For example, despite including participants from different Roma groups, our sample may not reflect the heterogeneity of Roma communities' realities or even the distinct home-school relationships patterns across the country. Attending to the complexity of this phenomenon (i.e., acculturation and parental involvement) and the participants' reported difficulties, the duration of the intervention may have been limited. A longer duration of the program could have strengthened the impact of the intervention. Moreover, despite the efforts undertaken to reduce language and understanding barriers, participants hold a limited verbal repertoire to express their perspectives and thoughts, which might have prevented capturing the nuances of the changes from pre- to post-interviews. Finally, the current study focused on mothers' perspectives and their relationships with education. Despite of the central role played by mothers on children's education, fathers are recognized by the participants and among the communities as figures of parental authority. Thus, future research may add relevant knowledge while addressing the perspectives, role constructions, and forms of involvement in children's education of fathers with Roma background.

Conclusions And Implications For Practice

Globally, the findings provide insights on the ways and extent by which parents with Roma background are involved in children's education. Moreover, participants' engagement experiences in a school-based intervention shed light on how schools can encourage and support parental involvement within families with Roma background.

The efforts displayed by parents with Roma background to participate in children's education are often invisible to educators, and parents' practices are portrayed as an important source of children's disengagement (Clifford & Humphries, 2018; Parsons et al., 2018). However, the current study provides evidence that participants with Roma background are willing to engage in children's education, and value education as a tool for social mobility. Furthermore, parents have shown interest in improving their information and developing skills in supporting children in education. These findings challenge the prevailing deficit perspectives and may help school staff become aware of the forms of parental involvement used by Roma people, as well as their willingness to participate in children's education. Still, current findings suggest that school efforts to promote parental involvement are misaligned with realities of families with Roma background. Despite the initiatives to open avenues for communication, families still lack skills and information on the school system and on how to be involved in children's education. This may be setting the ground for a consensus among the mainstream educators that parents with Roma background play a passive role in children's school life. Finally, findings emphasized the relevance of setting collaborative relationships to promote parents' effective participation in children's education. Authentic and trustful relationships built with and between participants favored engagement in the program, which *per se* should be considered a form of parental involvement in children's education. Participants' experiences and outcomes are expected to help expand policymakers, school administrators, and educators understanding and practices on how to reach families and build partnerships likely to promote the school success of children and youth with Roma background.

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GENERAL CONCLUSION

Conclusion

"It's curious that we can always learn new things as long as we have the eyes of the heart wide open." (Musca)

The research works comprising the current dissertation aimed to contribute to the scarce literature on Roma education. Efforts were made to unveil the national picture of Roma families towards education and to identify potential strategies to overcome challenges and barriers associated with home-school relationships. Through the lens of the acculturation processes, the use of qualitative and quantitative designs provided a more holistic picture on how the proximal contexts (i.e., family and school) intersect and shape the cultural and educational processes followed by families with Roma background. By calling Roma women (both, as representatives of the community and as mothers) to the debate, the qualitative designs focused on small groups allowed us to better explore the dynamic processes through which school setting influences acculturation processes and outcomes (e.g., school engagement, parental involvement). In turn, quantitative data gathered from Roma students' perspectives provided a broad picture of the relevant relationships between contextual-related factors and school engagement. What is more, engaging with parents in a culturally tailored intervention allowed us to deepen our exploration of the processes followed by Roma families in interaction with the school. The analysis of these experiences provided insightful information to include in recommendations for school practices on how to outreach families with Roma background. Together, the integrated understanding of findings may help to shed light on potential pitfalls of political and educational efforts and the processes underlying the prevailing exclusion of Roma groups.

Overall, the findings are broadly in line with emerging literature targeting the educational processes of ethnic minority groups, including Roma, at the national and international levels. Alongside the findings depicted in each research work, there are important core ideas that should be taken into consideration when addressing the educational scenario of families with Roma background. The key findings are summarized and integrated below considering the overarching research questions.

Regarding the acculturation processes of Roma families, findings (Chapter 1) showed shifts in cultural behaviors and attitudinal patterns towards education as well as their willingness and interest in using education as a tool to achieve better life conditions. Through the voices of Roma women (Chapter 1 and 3), as agents of social and cultural change, we learned that families with Roma background value education and make efforts to answer according to the pressures of mainstream systems and to facilitate children's school attendance. Actually, while zooming in on the parental involvement practices (Chapter

3), we identified in narratives distinct efforts raised to ensure that children attend compulsory school, despite their educational level or age. Parents emphasized their role in activities related to providing for the child basic needs (outside the school gates) and socialization in social and cultural norms (e.g., respect to the elders, follow the school rules, attend school), while laying on school the responsibility to guide and control children and youth on their learning and developmental processes. Parents awareness of their poor skills and efficacy to act and to support children and youth in mainstream-expected values and behaviors (e.g., how to behave, how to talk) seems to limit their parental role representations on their involvement in children's school life. Still, the efforts and attitudes displayed by families towards education are broadly recognized and supported by students from distinct Roma communities taking part in a large-scale data collection (Chapter 2). Quantitative data has shown that positive messages towards schooling conveyed (academic socialization), and the practices geared by families to take part in school (home- and school-based activities) are associated with an increasing student's awareness of educational utility, which is related to higher self-reported levels of school engagement. As an important achievement, and aligned with previous literature (e.g., Hamilton, 2017; Myers, 2020), data from different sources of information provided significant evidence against the prevailing approach in the educators' narratives and policy roots supported on and supporting the unwillingness of families with Roma background to take part in education. In fact, beyond their willingness and interest to support children's education, these families have shown willingness to share their parenting difficulties regarding the forms to socialize children towards their participation in school (Chapter 3).

Furthermore, concerning the school setting, findings supported the key role of educators on acculturation processes undergone by families with Roma background. As illustrated by data (Chapter 2 and 3), perceived teacher support and school practices to outreach Roma parents shape the way and the extent through which families (parents and children) take part in education. Beyond the family-related factors (e.g., parental participation, academic socialization), and with a larger effect, the perceived teacher support is highly related to school engagement by fostering children's awareness of the utility of education (Chapter 2). This finding depicts two important ideas: first, it reflects teachers' positive attitudes supporting children with Roma background; second, it draws attention to the accountability of school staff (e.g., teachers, school directors) while important agents of socialization for Roma families. Anchored on cultural mismatch and deficit model approaches, school initiatives to outreach Roma families seem to neglet the school-based socialization practices hampering the engagement with and in education. As a result, despite the increasing number of students with Roma background attending school, there is still a significant number of children absent from school and a few students attending upper elementary and/or

high school levels (Chapter 2). This worrying finding provides support for data found in Chapter 1. Indeed, despite the orientation to assimilate behaviors and attitudes to answer the pressures to 'melt in' mainstream society, the scarce opportunities to develop their identities within the school context are likely to reinforce their orientation to adopt separation strategies to preserve their ethnic values and belongingness (Chapter 1). This reflects, later, on the parents' lack of tacit knowledge of the inner workings of education systems and poor or unaware educational expectations for their children (Chapter 3). Notwithstanding acknowledging the complexity of the phenomenon and the long way to go, the intervention-based outcomes (Chapter 3) provided evidence on how school staff can intentionally support Roma families' participation in education, by shifting to a collaborative approach while providing opportunities to expand cultural and academic socialization practices.

The synopsis of the findings and the integration with theoretical frameworks suggest that notwithstanding the positive impact of social and educational efforts and interventions (e.g., the requirement of attending school to receive social allowances; social workers as mediators of home-school relationships) on behavioral disengagement symptoms (e.g., truancy, early dropout, children misbehavior), education structure and practices are likely to threaten their social identity formation, therefore reinforcing the segregation of Roma identities. Based on formal and informal evidence (self-reported and parents' narratives), children and youth like to attend school but not as much to be a student. The emotional bonds to school were found to be linked to the inner-group social interaction outside the classroom. This finding alerts for potential pitfalls in how educational settings encourage and cultivate children and youth academic identities, which have been linked to school success in ethnic minority groups (e.g., Oyserman & Dawson, 2021; Ransaw & Majors, 2016). As an ongoing and dynamic process, starting at an early age, the development of individuals' identity depends on the socialization practices within the micro-level influential contexts: family and school (Ward & Geeraert, 2016). As a pivotal context, the family raises efforts to transmit Roma cultural values and behaviors and to foster the sense of belonging to one's ethnic group, influencing children and youth identities (Hughes et al., 2006). However, for ethnic minority groups, such as Roma, who may live accordingly both cultures, schools play a crucial role in the overall identity formation process by providing experiences to familiarize with practices of schooling and intentionally or unintentionally communicating messages regarding the beliefs and expectations about and for Roma identities (Camacho et al., 2018). Thus, despite schools are more committed to inclusive principles and making efforts to outreach Roma families, subliminal biased messages towards Roma students embedded in school staff attitudes and practices influence families' identification as belonging to or in educational settings (Verhoeven et al., 2018). For illustrative purposes,

formal and anecdotal evidence gathered from this set of works supports that messages conveyed by educators and reproduced in Roma families' narratives emphasize the idea that Roma children may attend school up to eighteen years old, regardless of their school progress or achievement (Chapter 3).

Offering and analogy, education is for Roma families as the medication is for a health condition: you need to take it to get better. Depending on the resources and on the literacy about the medical condition (e.g., the information provided by the doctor about the condition, the treatment options, the role owns may play), the patient may be aware and monitor the treatment process and assume a more active role on the treatment (for example, control the lifestyle, diet, looking for other medical opinions); or a prevailing passive role while following the medical prescription and wait until the treatment to finish. The perceived self-efficacy and the role constructions as 'agents of treatment' influence the extent to which someone engages and persists in treating the health condition. Backing to education, supported on current findings, Roma families seem to follow the school prescriptions, lacking on skills and tools to find a place for their ethnic group in education and, at large, in society.

To sum up, the research designs and the introduction of the acculturation framework provided a broad perspective on the dynamic and complex processes underlying Roma's poor educational trajectories. Policymakers' and educators' efforts are grounded in the idea that education facilitates the acculturation process of ethnic minority groups and, by consequence, the long-term adjustment to society (e.g., Schachner et al., 2017). However, education goes beyond school attendance, and acculturation is needed to engage with the traditional school structures and culture (Andriessen & Phalet, 2010). Supported on the mutual influence nature of acculturation (Berry, 2008), educative efforts may be leveraged both at mainstream and ethnic minority levels to foster positive acculturation processes. For example, the intervention-based data provided evidence on the relevance of opening avenues in schools to create partnerships with parents, recognize their culture, and provide support and guidance on how to handle children's academic challenges and trajectories. Thus, schools are expected to equip educators (e.g., teachers, school directors, psychologists, social workers) with scientific and cultural knowledge and strategies to outreach families from deprived groups (e.g., create opportunities to provide tacit information and support children to engage and persist in school, mentoring programs for teachers to work with families on how to fit school in life plans whilst being Roma); and raise educators' awareness while providing training on covered forms of discrimination embedded in attitudes and practices.

Limitations And Future Research

Along with the scientific contributions, there are some limitations to consider. These limitations are expected to open new research avenues under this topic. First, regardless of the efforts raised to increase the variability within the samples used, the heterogeneity of the Roma groups in Portugal (different social and educational profiles) needs to be acknowledged. This limitation to capture the heterogeneity of Roma individuals is also exacerbated by the prevailing qualitative methodology with small samples, because of the increased challenges to outreach Roma participants and to collect data using large-scale designs (e.g., high illiteracy, geographical dispersion).

Moreover, we missed the perspectives of those participants who did not accept or were unavailable to take part in the research. For instance, a significant number of students who were expected to be at school were absent from school on the data collection days. In fact, exploring the profiles of those students who may have lower school engagement levels would have added valuable input to the data. Accordingly, future research may explore other ways to collect data beyond the school gates.

Given the gender roles played within the Roma society, the perspectives of Roma families were transmitted in the voices of women. Despite the crucial role played by women in raising children, it would be insightful to add male perspectives on child's education, whilst authority figures in the family and with longer experiences in the school system.

Regarding the story-tool-based intervention, despite the added value of the knowledge gained, because of the brief time frame, the small sample, and the lack of a control group, the findings should be taken as preliminary evidence for the effectiveness of the intervention. To provide solid evidence on the effectiveness, future research should include both experimental and control groups.

Finally, there are reasons to believe that to further understand how the school climate is aligned with the inclusion commitments, more investigation targeting school practices and acculturation perspectives is needed. Findings provided evidence on the relevance of acculturation-related factors to facilitate the commitments with ‘education for all’. Therefore, future research focusing on acculturation experiences inside and outside school, from both Roma and non-Roma, may contribute to better understand educational-related behaviors and outcomes and to clarify the role played by acculturation while an antecedent, mediator, or outcome.

Social Impact

The papers in this dissertation gather efforts made to inform the educational picture, and ultimately to organize evidence-based advocacy for Roma people. These data may be used to sway stakeholder opinion, identify policies that require revision, and develop recommendations for interventions with the community. The intervention and the scientific knowledge produced aim to contribute to social betterment at both levels: within the Roma community and the society at large. For instance, engaging with mothers with Roma background in an intervention translates to changes in attitudes or skill levels within the target group. Furthermore, the scientific production and its dissemination may contribute to inform and advocate educational policies to respond to society's needs, in particular, reducing bias in policies and actions addressing Roma issues. By delivering the results and identifying elements likely to affect the Roma groups, schools can benefit from the knowledge generated to redefine action plans addressing the educational situation of Roma groups; for instance, management plans for the home-school relationships, or the support provided to teachers.

At the research level, the road paved by this dissertation contributes to highlighting the impact of work with Roma communities. In fact, emergent literature (for an overview see, for example, Gómez et al., 2019) has stressed the add-value of communicative methodologies to address problems with vulnerable groups to achieve the maximum impact at social, political, and scientific levels.

Final Remarks

Considering the purpose statement and the current findings produced, an alternative title to this dissertation is: 'SINA: Learning with Roma families how to improve their educational trajectories'. Sina means destiny or fortune, and it represents an activity performed by some Roma women in the streets, consisting of reading one's sina (destiny) through "palm reading". Applied to this context, SINA stands for school inclusive approaches. Despite efforts raised in the last two decades, "SINA" still drives Roma families to the margins of education, and society, at large. Findings gathered contribute to depict the current scenario of Roma families' involvement with education while unveiling potential pitfalls embedded in educational policies and school practices. The efforts raised by educators to outreach families are widely acknowledged. Notwithstanding, also the attempts and distinct efforts made by Roma families to take part in the mainstream systems, such as school, are important to be recognized among scholars and educators. Policies and educational interventions have been targeting Roma stakeholders (e.g., parents, children, and youth, cultural mediators) to teach them to be "proper" parents or students, while suppressing their identities. However, to the best of our knowledge, low efforts have been made targeting

educators and, at large, the traditional structure of the educational system. The findings produced alerts for the need to give steps towards new directions, to help us get out from where we are.

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