

Cultural persistence or change? Gender differences in educational expectations of first and second- generation immigrants in Italy

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This paper analyzes whether cultural heritage determines gender differences in educational expectations of going to university of first and second-generation immigrants in Italy, thus encouraging the transmission of gender inequalities across generations.

The analysis relies on the “Integration of Second-Generation Survey” (INTEG2GEN) carried out by the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) in 2015. INTEG2GEN is a national representative survey of students living in Italy and attending lower and upper secondary school. Our findings suggest that cultural background of parents plays an essential role for their daughters’ and sons’ expectations. Nevertheless, there is a gender difference in the way males and females react to it and adjust to the host country. Females seem more open to changes and opportunities they face in the new country. Males are bearer of their heritage culture more than females and the desire to preserve it appears particularly strong among first-generation immigrants.

Keywords: educational expectations, gender, source country culture

JEL classifications: I20, I29, J16, Z10

Introduction

The debate on whether observed gender differences are determined by nurture or nature has recognized that they can be culture specific and that cultural values matter for gender gaps in dimensions such as education, family formation, fertility, and work (Giuliano, 2020). In particular, the transmission of cultural norms and beliefs across generations fosters the socialization of gender role expectations which shapes educational and occupational choices of adolescent and young adult females (Eccles 1987).

One of the approaches followed to ascertain the relevance of culture is to examine immigrants and their descendants. Immigrant population often comes from countries with different attitudes towards gender roles, which may persist and influence the following generations and fuel the initial immigrant-native gaps over time. Hence, relevant issues concern the channels of cultural transmissions and the factors affecting the persistence of culture. Cultural traits can be transmitted directly by purposeful socialization inside the family-vertical socialization- (Lazear, 1999; Konya, 2005; Bisin and Verdier, 2000, 2001, 2011) or by other forms of horizontal/oblique socialization in society at large based, for instance, on social learning and imitation through neighborhood and peer effects (Bisin & Verdier, 2001; Bisin, Patacchini, Verdier, Zenou, 2016; Giavazzi, Petkov and Schiantarelli, 2019).

A host of empirical studies have recently assessed the impact of beliefs and expectations concerning the appropriate role of women in society on their work, education, and fertility. They tend to isolate cultural influence from the one of the external environment by using variables measured in parents' source countries. Antecol (2000) finds that labor force participation in countries of ancestry influences mainly the gender gap in labor force participation of first-generation in the United States, though individual variables on education and family background are missing. Fernández and Fogli (2009) show that female labor force participation and total fertility rates in the country of ancestry affect both work and fertility outcomes of women born in

the US. Blau, Kahn, Yung-Hsu Liu, Papps (2013) use the information on the characteristics of both immigrant parents' source countries and confirm the intergenerational transmission of women's roles as to education, fertility, and labor supply on to the second generation of the US-born women. Di Miceli (2016) reveals mixed evidence on the effects of vertical and horizontal cultural transmission on fertility choices of second-generation women in the US. He measures the influence of parents through fertility in their source countries at the time of migration and the one of immigrant peers through fertility of the same age-cohorts in source countries.

The influence of home country culture can change because of social learning driven by the adjustment to the new socio-economic context and the assimilation of attitudes of receiving countries (Giuliano, 2020; *authors, year*).

Of relevance here, educational aspirations and expectations can be considered as a significant predictor of attainments over other determinants of education (Jacob and Wilder 2010). They reflect the opportunity structure within society and internalize educational ambitions of significant others (Berrington et al. 2016). In the latter respect, Platt and Parsons (2017) show that in the UK educational aspirations and perception of what one can accomplish are also tied to the intergenerational transmission of gendered norms and gender-role expectations in addition to depending on individual abilities and social structure. This may also fuel the intergenerational transmission of gender role attitudes and therefore gaps in educational attainments and in labor-market performance. *Authors (year)* looking at ethnic minorities in the UK present the evidence of a non-clear-cut difference between educational expectations of girls and boys due either to ethnicity or religion.

Our study considers the aspirations to go to university of minorities in Italy, where migration is a relatively recent phenomenon compared with other countries as it has become a country of destination since the beginning of the eighties. This phenomenon has caused an increase of students from ethnic minorities enrolled in school at the compulsory level (pre-, primary, lower

secondary school), whereas at higher levels of education, some differences between natives and ethnic minorities and among minorities persist (Azzolini, Mantovani, Santagati 2019).

Educational expectations are crucial for these differences and some scholars show that countries of origin-capturing cultural diversity-matter among the determinants of children's expectations (Azzolini, Barone 2013; Minello and Barban 2012).

The study builds upon the previous body of work and contributes to it in several ways.

Differently from the literature on Italy, we explicitly focus on source countries' characteristics by using university enrolment and gender inequality in both parents' country of origin when parents were at the age to start university. They capture cultural traits transmitted through vertical socialization. Relevant for our contribution is the difference between two types of parents' attitudes towards education: the ones measured by their individual level of education and the ones measured by aggregate indicators of home culture. It allows to single out the influence of parents on the base of the importance they individually give to education and of the aggregate effects of their background culture. Moreover, young individuals, if born outside of Italy, can be responsive to contemporary culture in their countries of origin, besides their family influence. Hence, we use enrolment and gender inequality measured in birthplaces when respondents were interviewed and evaluate their impact on first-generation. This reflects horizontal socialization through, for instance, the influence of recently immigrated peers, the exposure to traditional and social media.

In the subsequent part there is the review of how cultural background from countries of ancestry shapes educational expectations. The description of the empirical model and the results along with their discussion follow.

1. Educational expectations and cultural background

When immigrants enter a new country, they tend to bring their lifestyle, attitudes, and values with them, which may be either congruous or in contrast with the culture of the new homeland.

In the latter case, acculturation requiring changes in language and behavior can be rather problematic. Differently from their parents and depending on their age, children can grow up and socialize through schooling in host countries. This makes their acculturation process far easier and may cause an acculturation gap between the first and later generations (Birman, Trickett 2001). Acculturation seems more appropriate for immigrants who learn their home culture first and dominant culture in host countries later. While biculturation concerns later generations of native-born individuals who simultaneously learn ethnic and mainstream culture and negotiate them (Huynh et al. 2011). They tend to selectively preserve cultural values of their ethnic background and selectively adopt values of mainstream culture (Qin 2006). Over time, these aspects can change the influence of cultural heritage and determine further differences between the first and the following generations in the adjustment process.

Differences among minorities are usually determined by socio-economic background; notably the segments of society to which they assimilate, depend on the influence of parents, co-ethnic community, the race and ethnicity of the group (Portes, Rumbaut 2001; Portes, Rivas 2011; Telles, Ortiz 2008).

Cultural background from the country of origin seems to play a relevant role in shaping gender role expectations when girls and boys adjust to receiving societies. They tend to develop a social identity based also on their ethnicity. Behavioral prescriptions via social identity relate self-conception to behavior. Individuals internalize the expectations for the role determined by the social structure, the norms, values and goals underlying the behavior prescribed by social groups in particular situations (Hogg, Terry, White 1995; Postmes, Baray, Haslam, Morton, Swaab 2006). Ethnic groups and parents mold children's identity through the transmission of values and norms on educational achievements that help their development of a self-concept consistent with the expectations of family and groups. Compliance with the behavioral requirements prescribed

by such values and norms is driven by the need to meet expectations for the role assigned by society as a crucial component of self-definition.

The above aspects may lead to a gendered process of identity formation and acculturation due to differences in adjustment, which are partly related to cultural differences usually shaping gender role expectations. They may undermine girls' achievement motivations in school when based on traditional cultures (Sarroub 2001). Expectations tend to maintain the role of women as bearers of tradition so that they often tend to mediate their own and parents' expectations based on traditional culture (Anthias, Yuval-Davis 1992). On the other hand, it is possible that differences between males and females tend to fade away due to the integration into the culture of the receiving society (*authors, year*).

2. The empirical model, data, and variables

2.1 Data

The analysis relies on cross-section data drawn from the “Integration of Second-Generation Survey” (INTEG2GEN) carried out by the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) in 2015.

INTEG2GEN is a national representative survey of students living in Italy and attending lower and upper secondary school in 2015.

The data were collected through a questionnaire that students filled out online in a scholastic room under the supervision of an interviewer. Schools were randomly chosen among those including at least 5 foreign-born students. The sample was drawn from 1400 schools located in 821 municipalities on the national territory and contains observations on 68127 individuals: 32700 attending lower secondary school and 35427 attending upper secondary school.

This work focuses on students enrolled in upper secondary school aged 18 and more¹. In fact, starting from the age 18 onwards, individuals tend to become more focused, which generally affects the awareness of the goals they intend to achieve and concerns the decision on whether to

¹ The dataset reports the age groups 13/14, 15/17, 18 and more.

stay on in education and start university². To check robustness, we also considered the subsample of teens enrolled in the last year of upper school, when the decision to attend university is imminent.

The sample includes foreign-born individuals with at least one foreign-born parent (first generation) and individuals born in Italy with at least one foreign-born parent (second generation), as well as natives with both parents born in Italy (Italians).

We chose this survey since it contains information on youth's and parents' birthplaces, family socio-economic background and migratory periods. A main limitation of the empirical analysis is that the cross-section data do not allow to observe individuals' choices in education over the years. Selection problems might affect our results since the decisions of remaining in school after compulsory education³ and of attending university are likely to depend on same factors; hence to detect possible selection problems, later in the paper (section 3.1), we report further evidence about the decision to attend upper secondary school from the sub-sample of teens enrolled in lower secondary school.

2.2 The model

We assess how parents with immigrant background influence teens' expectations of going to university through their socio-economic characteristics and culture of origin.

Since parental influence may differ between boys and girls, the empirical analysis focuses on gender differences.

Each respondent's expectations are modelled as an unobserved y^* such that:

$$y^* = \alpha'x + \beta'z + \varepsilon$$

² Similarly, previous studies in this context (*Authors, year*; Patt and Person, 2017) focus on teens when they are about to choose whether to continue their studies. In preliminary estimates we considered the whole sample of students in upper secondary school and did not report significant patterns.

³ In Italy, compulsory schooling ends at the age of sixteen.

The observed dependent variable is a binary indicator, y , equal to 1 if respondent plans to go to university in the future, 0 otherwise. The results are based on probit estimates, with standard errors robust to heteroskedasticity⁴.

Vector x contains gender, generational status, parents' education, other socio-demographic characteristics. Generational status is a crucial aspect in our analysis as it reflects the influence of migrants' cultural background but also of their selectivity on later descendants (Abramitzky, Boustan 2017). In the latter respect, people who move for better opportunities are generally characterized by a strong motivation to succeed and to achieve social mobility in the country of destination. For this reason, they might put a great emphasis on their children's education as a means to climb up the social ladder (Berrington et al. 2016). These two types of influence on later generations may become weaker over time. Therefore, in the following we compare first with second-generation students and analyze first generation alone.

As city-living may erode gender-inequality by promoting a growing flexibility in gender division of labor (Evans, 2029), it is introduced **BigMun** among the variables, in addition to dummies for geographical area. The choice of the place to live is usually made by parents, so we consider the relative variables as exogenous.

We include **School Year** as the school leaving age becomes closer, teens tend to become more focused and self-conscious when deciding whether to stay on in education. About 80% of the sample was attending the fourth or the last year of upper school, some teens (about 15%) the third year; grade repetition may be due to teens' ability, family background as well as to migration status, which may increase teens' problems in school.

Vector z includes cultural attitudes towards education and gender roles in source countries.

⁴ The data used in the analysis do not contain information on respondents' schools, thus, the errors cannot be clustered at school level.

In this respect, we follow the epidemiological approach chosen by Fernandez (2010) and use the information on the characteristics of parents' source countries (Fernández and Fogli, 2009; Blau, Kahn, Yung-Hsu Liu, Papps, 2013). In fact, we consider aggregate information on enrolment in tertiary education in parents' country of origin when they were at the age to start university. It embodies cultural orientations molding the decision of parents' generation to stay on in education and vertical transmission within the family.

To assess whether foreign-born individuals are also affected by contemporary culture, we consider enrolment in tertiary education in their birthplace in the same year in which they were interviewed. It captures the influence of contemporary culture through, for instance, social learning from interacting with recently immigrated peers in the new country, the exposure to traditional and social media.

To develop the analysis of cultural influence, we use a more specific indicator embracing aspects of gender inequality in achievement and of the perception of women's role in society; it covers health, empowerment and labor market. Analogously to enrolment in tertiary education, the indicator is measured in parents' country of origin when they were at the age to start university and in the source countries of foreign-born respondents when they were interviewed.

2.3 Empirical specification of the model

Table 1 describes the variables used in the empirical model grouped in respondents' generational status and time of arrival, family characteristics and geographical factors.

TABLE 1 HERE

We distinguish between **second-generation** (those born in Italy and having at least one foreign-born parent) and **first-generation** immigrants. The dummies **2002, 2003-2007, 2008-2014, 2015** identify different groups of first-generation youths according to the time of arrival: those who moved to Italy before 2002 (presumably in preschool age, given that they were aged at least 18 in 2015), those who arrived between 2003 and 2007 (presumably primary-school age), those who arrived between 2008 and 2014 (adolescent immigrants), and in 2015 (young adult immigrants).

As previously specified, it is used information about source countries of respondents and of their parents. The gross enrolment ratios for tertiary education, separately for males and for females (**ENRfemale-90** and **ENRmale-90**), are drawn from the World Bank database and refer to source country of respondent's mother and father; they reflect attitudes towards education in the generation of parents. Parents in the sample were aged about 45 in 2015 so that in the nineties they were at the age to start university.

The Gender Inequality Index (henceforth **GII**) is drawn from the UNDP Human Development Reports in parents' country of ancestry in 1995⁵ (parents' generation-**GII-95**). It refers to inequality in achievement between women and men in the dimensions of reproductive health, measured by maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates; empowerment, measured by proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females and proportion of adult females and males aged 25 years and older with at least some secondary education; economic status, expressed as labor market participation and measured by labor force participation rate of female and male populations aged 15 years and older.

As pupils may have parents with different cultural backgrounds, the above indicators related to each parent's country of origin also allow considering multi-cultural families.

To assess the effect of contemporary culture on first generation teens, we consider the gross enrolment ratios for tertiary education for males- (**ENRmale-15**)-and for females- (**ENRfemale-15**), and the Gender Inequality index (**GII-15**) in respondents' birthplaces in 2015 (teens' generation).

Since enrolment ratios for tertiary education and gender disparities may be correlated with countries' socio-economic conditions, we add capita **GDP** in 1990s and 2015 (**GDP-90** and **GDP-15**) from the World Bank database.

⁵ The GII is available only starting in 1995.

2.4 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 reports main descriptive statistics.

TABLE 2 HERE

Youth with an immigrant background especially if males have lower expectations of going to university, which is probably due to lower family wealth with respect to natives.

Enrolment rates in tertiary education (**ENRFemale90**, **ENRmale90**) display noticeable differences between Italians and first and second-generation students notably for females, which reinforces the motivation for our study aimed to detect possible gender differences.

Table 3 provides further information on the country of birth of first-generation students; the data are grouped by the geographic area j from where the highest number of sampled teens (N_i) comes (in parentheses: $N_j = \sum N_i$). The geographic areas and countries of origin in descending order are Eastern Europe (in particular, Romania), Southern Europe (Albania), Latin America (Ecuador and Peru), North Africa (Morocco), Sub-Sahara (Senegal) and South Asia (mainly Pakistan, India and Bangladesh)⁶. Enrolment rates in tertiary education as well as the Gender Inequality Index are reported both for parents' generation (**ENRFemale-90**, **ENRMale-90**, **GII-95**) and teens' generation (**ENRFemale-15**, **ENRMale-15**, **GII-15**). In the nineties, we note that females are less likely to enroll at university than males in South Asia, East Asia and Pacific, China, Northern Africa, Sub-Sahara. However, female enrolment rate increases from 1990 to 2015 and becomes higher than that of males particularly in Europe, except for East-Asia and Sub-Sahara. Similarly, in the same period gender inequality decreases everywhere. In Africa, South Asia, Middle East, East Asia and Pacific, the **GII-15** is higher than that of Europe in 1990.

TABLE 3 HERE

⁶ The data are consistent with overall statistics on immigration provided by the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) showing that in 2015, the main countries of origin were in descending order Romania, Albania, Morocco, China, Ukraine, the Philippines, India, Moldova, and Bangladesh. Only the share from China in our sample seems lower confirming the evidence of Minello and Barban (2012).

3. Results

Columns I-IV in Table 4 based on the whole sample, allow comparing first and second generations with natives, detecting whether parents' education makes the expectations of females different from the ones of males (column III) and comparing immigrants' females with natives (column IV). Marginal effects are reported to highlight the impact of the variables of interest in this study, parent's education, and cultural values in source countries.

TABLE 4 HERE

Females show higher expectations of going to university than males, coherently with the pattern shown in Table 2 and the results for Italy found by Minello and Barban (2012). Looking at marginal effects, mother's education counts more than father's education; results remain substantially the same controlling for family wealth in column II. Interactions in column III indicate that females more than males are affected by mother's education. First and second-generation female immigrants do not behave differently from natives (column IV).

The last two columns display the results for the subsample of teens with an immigrant background to examine the influence of attitude towards tertiary education in source countries (**ENR-90**). As specified in Table 1, **ENR-90** has been obtained as average between **ENRmale-90** (in father's source countries) and **ENRfemale-90** (in mother's source countries)⁷. We consider the average because of the high correlation between the two ratios (about 0.70); however, in a parallel analysis we consider separately the effects of the two indicators (Table 1A in Appendix). The coefficients on **ENR90** (column V and VI) and on the interactive term (column VI) highlight that source country culture matters and positively influences males' expectations with respect to females.

⁷ The very high correlation (about 0.98) between female and male enrolment rates in the same country makes the inclusion of both unnecessary.

As gender differences can be detected in Table 4, we proceed to split the sample of immigrants in males and females (Table 5 and Table 6).

Table 5 focuses on first and second generation and allows the comparison of first-generation cohorts by arrival period (**2002, 2003-2007, 2008-2014, 2015**) with second generation. Table 6 only focuses on first generation, which is formed individuals more exposed to their home country culture as foreign-born.

TABLE 5 HERE

TABLE 6 HERE

The comparison of first-generation individuals (**2002, 2003-2007, 2008-2014, 2015**) with second generation shows that individuals belonging to the first two waves seem to find adaptation more difficult with respect to second generation, since the coefficients on the dummies **2002** and **2003/2007** are negative and significant (column V). The coefficients on the dummies **2008-2014, 2015**, however, are not statistically significant; this could be due to the ethnic composition of the different cohorts and to the low number of observations of the 2015 wave⁸.

Strong evidence concerns intergenerational transmission of parents' education (**Father's education, Mother's education**) for males independently from generation status (Tables 5 and 6) and for females belonging to the first generation (Table 6); when including second-generation girls, only mother's education counts (Table 5). Marginal effects reveal that overall mother's education matters more than father's education and to a greater extent for girls than for boys – respectively about 0.09 and 0.06 in Table 5.

⁸ A further analysis of male sample revealed that about 60% of respondents living in Italy since 2008 came from Southern and Eastern Europe, and only 13% came from Africa; instead, considering the cohort arrived between 2008 and 2014, the percentage of teens from Eastern and Southern Europe is much lower (about 40%), and the percentage from Africa is higher (about 30%). While the number of observations in the three first cohorts is quite consistent (582, 902 and 853 respectively) the number of teens arrived in 2015 is only 65.

Consistently with the results in Table 4, **ENR-90** significantly affects only males' educational expectations and is also robust to including GDP per capita in 1990, when considering first-generation.

To highlight gender role transmission from mother to daughter and from father to son, in further estimates (Table 1A in Appendix) we plugged the enrolment rate of females in tertiary education in mother's birthplace-**ENRfemale-90**-and the enrolment rate of males in tertiary education in father's birthplace-**ENRmale-90**-separately in the model. No new patterns emerged in that, once again, males seem more affected by source country's culture; this confirmed our decision to rely on the average **ENR-90** in final estimates.

Since expectations are probably influenced by gender disparities in source countries, we also include the Gender Inequality Index in parents' generation (**GII-95**). Higher inequalities in parents' country of origin influence only first-generation females with a negative effect (Table 6). This may mean that females bear the burden of traditional gender roles in education, which undermine their aspirations. Interestingly **GII-95** does not matter when second generation girls are included in the sample (Table 5); in preliminary estimates, the result remained substantially unaffected by excluding ENR-90 from the set of correlates⁹. It is not mistaken to believe that this result is the effect of social learning and that when females integrate into the Italian school, they become less reactive to their parents' culture; this weakens the persistence of traditional gender roles.

When considering first-generation alone (Table 6), we add the enrolment rate (**ENR-15**) and the Gender Inequality Index (**GII-15**) in respondents' birthplace to analyze the effects of greater exposition to home country culture of foreign born. In this respect, we argued that they may be sensitive to the influence not only of their parents' culture but also of contemporary cultural changes by interacting, for instance, with recently immigrated peers. The coefficient of **ENR-15**

⁹ In our dataset the correlation between GII-95 and ENR-90 was about -0.30.

is positive and statistically significant for males only when the **GII-15** is included in the model¹⁰, moreover higher gender inequality (**GII-15**) raises their expectations.

3.1 Checks for robustness

Oaxaca decomposition (Table 2A in Appendix) reveals that culture in parents' countries of ancestry-**ENR-90 and GII-95**- influences the expectations of first-generation men and women in a different way, with men more reactive to source country culture. It also shows that first-generation, men have lower expectations than women because of less educated parents, in particular their mothers. This implies that more educated parents determine females' higher educational expectations.

To check for robustness we also performed parallel analyses on alternative samples. First, we considered only the sample of teens attending the last year of upper secondary school and deciding whether to go to university; the findings¹¹ confirmed that only males are influenced by cultural values in parental generation.

Second, since we suspected sample selection problems, as underlined in section 2.1, we performed a further analysis on the subsample of teens enrolled in lower secondary school from the same survey. It should not be affected by sample selection since teens usually attend lower secondary school until the age of fourteen, while compulsory school ends at the age of sixteen. The outcome variable is the expectation of going to upper secondary school¹²; main statistics are reported in Table 7 while the results are displayed in Table 8.

¹⁰ Preliminary estimates suggested that the exclusion of GDP-90 from the correlates does not influence the results.

¹¹ Results are available on request.

¹² The data do not contain information about the expectations of going to university.

The data in Table 7 show that immigrant parents are less educated than Italian parents whereas the evidence in Table 3 suggests that immigrant students remaining in school after compulsory education have more educated parents. This seems to confirm our suspect of sample selection. Parents' education fosters children's expectations. Respect to natives, marginal effects¹³ indicate that the probability of staying on in school is lower by 2.6% for second-generation students, 5.55% for the cohort 2003/2007, 9% for the cohort 2008/2014 and 9.6% for late movers. Attitudes towards education in parents' country of origin (**ENR-90**) only counts for first-generation females and males; this confirms the effect of the integration process for second generation. Finally, solely males are influenced by contemporary cultural values in their country of birth in that high enrolment rates in tertiary education and high gender inequality foster males' aspirations to continue their studies.

4. Discussion

Our findings highlight the crucial role of parents' education in molding their sons' and daughters' expectations. Educated parents tend to stimulate them to pursue higher education by serving as role models and transmitting behavioral norms (Abada, Frank, Hou 2018).

When one looks at the influence of culture in parents' countries of origin, differences between males and females emerge. First-generation male students whose parents come from countries with higher enrolment in tertiary education show higher expectations and vice versa. This effect extends over second-generation. Moreover, it seems that they tend to maintain gender disparities by aspiring to higher education when affected by conservative orientations expressed by contemporary culture in their country of birth.

¹³ Marginal effects are not reported in our tables but are available on request.

Females seem more sensitive to gender inequality issues. The expectations of first-generation females conform to gender roles deemed appropriate in their parents' source country. It is worth noting that when including second generation, this influence of culture in parents' generation does not matter anymore, though their attitudes change depending on their generation status and, thus, on their integration into the receiving society. A plausible explanation is that over time female children become more responsive to changes, which triggers a declining acceptance of traditional gender roles. The opportunities and necessities of education in the new country may contribute to different gender orientations. This is in line with Bolzendahl and Myers (2004) who show that when individuals become part of societies with progressive attitudes towards gender roles, they tend to accept gender equity issues. The greater ability of females to adjust to the new environment (Portes, Rumbaut 2001) can foster this change.

Our evidence is consistent with the transmission of cultural norms across generations, which shapes the socialization of gender role expectations (Eccles 1994; Platt, Parsons 2017). As immigrants often come from countries culturally diverse, this may fuel gender disparity. In fact, expectations based on conservative culture may weaken first-generation females' achievement motivations in school. Nevertheless, the results points to the possibility that men are bearer of their heritage background transmitted by parents more than women and their attitude to preserving ethnic culture appears particularly strong among first-generation immigrants (Isajiw, 1990).

The positive effect of **Second Generation** compared with the first two waves of immigrants may reflect the optimism of immigrant parents who generally hold high aspirations for their children and urge them to take advantage of the opportunities given by higher education in the new country (Kao, Tienda 1995). It affects children born in Italy, who did not face the same difficulties as foreign-born children and did not have to change their language and behavior thereby going through an effortful acculturation process.

Conclusion

Overall, our findings suggest the importance of parents' education in fostering children's expectations. Mother's education specially for females plays a prominent role. Nevertheless, there is a gender difference in the way males and females react to their cultural background and adjust to the host country, which is reflected in their expectations of going to university. While both are affected by cultural attitudes in their parents' country of origin, males are more sensitive to the enrolment rate in tertiary education, whereas females are more responsive to gender inequality issues. In the family, men independently from their generation status are given the role of preserving cultural orientations towards education. On the other hand, first-generation females tend to conform to gender roles deemed appropriate according to their parents' tradition. This influence no longer matters for second-generation, which may imply that they seem more open to the changes and opportunities they face in Italy by adjusting to the new environment.

An implication of our results is that the persistence of inequality across generations is not only related to limited resources, poor socio-economic background, and individual abilities. It may also be due to cultural persistence fueled by vertical socialization inside the family, and men, more than women, seem to be affected by traditional cultural orientation. Not only can this slow down the integration process of men, but it can also influence women' choices through the roles that men play as fathers, brothers, and partners. This suggests that any public discourse and policy on the issues of integration and gender equality should also recognize the potential role of men in leading cultural and social changes.

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