Explaining Differences in Perceived Threat: Why Education Matters

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Abstract: Recently, Italy has seen a dramatic increase in violent attacks on immigrants, suggesting that anti-immigrant attitudes are rising in Italy. It has often been found that especially the lower educated tend to be unwelcoming towards immigrants. Moreover, an important reason for people to be unwelcoming towards immigrants is that immigrants are perceived to be a threat. Following socialization theory, this paper explores the possibility that the more educated perceive less threat because education socializes them into a culture of openness towards others, whereas the less educated are socialized into a culture in which national identification and traditions are central. The eighth round of the European Social Survey is used and mediation analyses are conducted by means of the process-macro. We find partial mediation, with the more educated perceiving less threat because they attach more importance to openness and less importance to traditions. Whereas we expected the higher educated to be less emotionally attached to Italy, we find them to be higher identifiers. However, national identification did not influence the level of perceived immigrant threat.

Keywords: education, perceived threat, socialization theory, attitudes towards immigrants

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Introduction

Matteo Salvini, leader of the Italian right-wing Lega-Nord party, has frequently been accused of holding fascist and racist views when it comes to immigrants. In response to these accusations, he claimed that "the wave of racism is simply an invention of the left" (Gastoli, 2018, August 7; Tondo & Giuffrida, 2018, August 3). Ironically, he later added a well-known quote of former fascist leader Mussolini to his twitter-account: 'many enemies, much honour'. However, such flirts with fascism do not seem to make him any less legitimate among his followers. On the contrary, as the rise in racist violence against immigrants suggests, some of his followers seem to take Salvini's move towards a more radical and racist stance as an example. That is, whereas there were 'only' nine attacks on immigrants in the summer of 2017, this figure had already become three times as big in the same period of the following year, in which Lega Nord and the Five Star movement, another populist party, had just won support in the national elections. Even more worrying is that, as The Guardian has reported on its website (Tondo & Giuffrida, 2018, August 3), these incidents have also become more violent, with several immigrants being killed in 2018. This happened to a Moroccan man in Aprilla, close to Rome, for example. He was killed by two young Italians that accused him of being a thief. Indeed, as also stated on the website of The Guardian (Tondo & Giuffrida, 2018, August 3) the migrants feel that the discourse of both right-wing parties has led to a normalization of racism and anti-immigrant sentiment among certain parts of the Italian population. This seems to be a legitimate explanation, as the violence is sometimes accompanied by the shouting of Salvini's name. Of course, not all Italians are attracted to such ideas or engage in such violent actions. Also, not everyone who is attracted to such ideas will approve the violence towards immigrants.
What is particularly interesting is how such differences might be explained. Why do some people feel anti-immigrant sentiment whereas others do not? It has been found that education could play a big role, as especially those who are lower educated tend to hold anti-immigrant sentiments, both in Italy (e.g. Hello, Scheepers & Gijsberts, 2002; Panichella & Ambrosini, 2018), and in other countries (e.g. Carvacho et al., 2013; Gusterson, 2017; Hjerm, 2001; Salmela & von Scheve, 2017; Schmuck & Matthes, 2015; Spruyt, Keppens & van Droogenbroeck, 2016). Understanding why this is the case could offer important insights into the main causes of such unfavourable attitudes, especially since it has been argued that attitudes towards immigrants do not seem to become more unfavourable overall, but that they seem to be polarizing. That is, attitudes among the higher educated become more and more favourable, whereas attitudes among the lower educated become more and more unfavourable (Ford, 2017, June 19). If we are able to disentangle what

it is that education offers people that improves their attitudes towards immigrants, this might be a first step towards policy-implications which could not only reduce the racist violence against immigrants, but which could also stop the more general polarization between higher and lower-educated that mainly manifests itself in debates on immigration. This study aims to test possible explanations for why higher educated tend to hold more favourable attitudes towards immigrants. More specifically, following socialization theory, we will examine whether education socializes people into those values that make them less likely to perceive immigrants as a threat, whereas the less educated are socialized into values which make them *more* likely to perceive immigrants as a threat.

Theoretical Framework

Individual-level threats

According to integrated threat theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000), a major reason why people oppose immigrants is that they perceive them as a threat. This theory has typically been used in the field of social psychology for studying the relationship between migrants present in the state and its national majority. In particular, it has been used to examine which factors are involved in explaining the attitudes of the national majority towards immigrants. This theory discerns four different factors that could lead to unfavourable attitudes towards immigrants: negative stereotypes, intergroup anxiety, perceived realistic threat and perceived symbolic threat (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). First, negative stereotypes could lead to more unfavourable attitudes because they lead people to anticipate on unpleasant interactions with culturally distinct others, which creates fear among people even before contact has taken place (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). A second factor could be intergroup anxiety, which means that people "are concerned about negative outcomes for the self, such as being embarrassed, rejected, or ridiculed" (Stephan & Stephan, 2000, p. 27). Whereas negative stereotypes and intergroup anxiety are threats on the personal level, immigrants can also be perceived as a threat on the group level through perceived realistic or symbolic threat (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Indeed, following the social identity tradition (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 2010), the group to which one belongs can become a very important aspect of the self, in such a way that threats to the group can actually be perceived as threats to the self.

The social identity tradition and the importance of the group

In the social identity tradition, which comprises self-categorization theory (Turner, 2010) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), it is emphasized that people's identities are defined on different levels of inclu-

siveness. On the lowest level of inclusiveness, called personal identification, we perceive ourselves merely as individuals and the focus is on what makes 'me' different from 'him/her' (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). It is on this level that negative stereotypes and intergroup anxiety seem to be working (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). However, our identity can also be defined on the group-level. If this is the case, we focus on what makes 'us' different from 'them', and the consequence could be that one perceives group-membership as a defining element of oneself (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). As each person can be part of different groups (e.g. based on one's age, gender or national identification), group-membership connects us to some and distinguishes us from others. In this way, group-memberships can be useful in fulfilling both the psychological need for belonging and the psychological need for distinctiveness (Verkuyten, 2018). However, we do not merely want to be distinct from others, we also want to be distinct in a positive way. We want to give our group-membership a positive meaning (Verkuyten, 2018). Indeed, in line with the social identity tradition, especially if group-membership is important to one's self-concept, associating positive meanings with that group is likely to enhance one's self-esteem (Verkuyten, 2018). Therefore, it would not be surprising that we do not like people who we perceive as threatening our in-group. According to integrated threat theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000), out-group members can be perceived as threatening to our in-group in two ways: in a realistic and a symbolic way.

Group-level threats

Levine & Campbell (1972) were the first to point to the possibility of seeing members of out-groups as a threat. In their realistic group conflict theory, it is predicted that a feeling of group-threat will arise if there are a limited number of resources available, because immigration will lead to more competition over these resources. That is, the inflow of migrants is perceived to be threatening the in-groups' possibility to get these resources (Levine & Campbell, 1972). This type of group-threat was called realistic threat by Stephan & Stephan (2000). Furthermore, Stephan & Stephan (2000) also proposed that *perceived* realistic threat predicts unfavourable attitudes towards immigrants, not so much objective realistic threat, as realistic group conflict theory (Levine & Campbell, 1972) seemed to propose (Stephan & Stephan, 2000).

What is more, Stephan & Stephan (2000) also added a second aspect to realistic group conflict theory. That is, group-members not only perceive group-competition over tangible resources, but also over intangible resources, such as the culture or language of their groups. Importantly, and in line with the social identity tradition, people perceive the "morals, values, standards, beliefs, and attitudes" (Stephan & Stephan, 2000, p. 25) of their own in-

groups to be most valuable. Since immigrants do not share these, we might feel that the existence of our groups' worldviews is threatened as a result of the inflow of out-groups with different worldviews. Stephan & Stephan (2000) have called perceived threat over such intangible resources as one's own culture and language perceived symbolic threat.

Stephan & Stephan (2000) called their elaboration of realistic group conflict theory the integrated threat theory. In support of integrated threat theory, several studies have found a positive relation between perceived threat and unfavourable attitudes towards immigrants (e.g. Verberk. Scheepers & Felling, 2002; Scheepers, Gijsberts & Coenders, 2002; Savelkoul et al., 2010), something that has also been found in the Italian context (Caricati, Mancini & Marletta, 2017; Vezalli & Giovanni, 2010). The question then becomes how we can predict perceived threat itself (Hello, Scheepers & Sleegers, 2006). Most studies have found education to be an important predictor, but it is typically added as a control variable (Hjerm & Nagayoshi, 2011; McLaren, 2003; Schlueter, Meuleman & Davidov, 2013) or as operationalization for social economic status (Schneider, 2008). As a consequence, the reasons for the association between education and perceived threat have not often been examined.

Education, values and perceived threat

The role of values in predicting unfavourable attitudes towards immigrants has often been disregarded, whereas it can be an important predictor (Davidov & Meuleman, 2012). Since education plays a crucial role in shaping the values which people find important (Hjerm, 2001), it seems reasonable to expect that people who have enjoyed more education tend to hold different values as important from people who have enjoyed less education. We hypothesize that those values that are more often perceived to be important by people who have enjoyed more education will lead them to perceive less immigrant threat. Furthermore, we also identify those values that people with less education tend to hold, and hypothesize that these values will make them *more* likely to perceive immigrant threat. For doing this, we turn to socialization theory.

According to socialization theory, every nation has both an 'official culture' and an 'unofficial culture' (Selznick & Steinberg, 1969). Education socializes people into the 'official culture', consisting of the norms and values that are supposed to be important for the national imagined community (Anderson, 2006). In particular, by means of education, governments try to socialize people into an enlightened culture in which people are expected to be open-minded instead of falling back on stereotypes (Selznick & Steinberg, 1969). Indeed, in general, education tends to increase people's cognitive capabilities, which might make them automatically less prone to prej-

udice (Coenders & Scheepers, 2003). Furthermore, in countries that have a democratic political system, education should also socialize people into the democratic norms of equality that should be part of the 'official culture'. Several studies have found support for socialization theory. For instance, Hjerm (2001) found cross-national evidence for the claim that "multicultural values of respect and knowledge about other cultures, ethnic groups and countries" (p. 55) are enhanced as a result of education. Thus, following socialization theory, we expect that education will socialize people into the 'official culture' that policy-makers want to achieve, an 'official culture' in which it is important to be open towards others. Since open-minded people should not *a priori* be afraid that Italian culture will be undermined by immigrants, we expect that those people who have enjoyed more education will perceive less immigrant threat because education has socialized them into an 'official culture' in which open-mindedness is perceived to be an important value.

> H1: *Because people with more education are socialized into seeing openness as more important, they are less likely to perceive immigrants as a threat.*

Next to the 'official culture' every nation also has an 'unofficial culture', that is not shaped by the educational system (Selznick & Steinberg, 1969). What will be perceived as important in this 'culture'? One thing could be nationalism, understood as strong emotional identification with the nation. That is, it has been found that especially lower educated tend to be nationalistic, although the mechanisms behind this are not completely clear (Hjerm, 2001). One explanation could be that rationalism is perceived to be less important in the 'unofficial culture' than it is in the 'official culture', which allows emotions to play a more central role in the former than they do in the latter (Hjerm, 2001). Additionally, education likely socializes people into being cosmopolitan 'citizens of the world', instead of citizens of the nation (Gunesch, 2004; Hansen et al., 2009), for which reason the national group might become a less important part of the identity of higher-educated. If this assumption is right, we might expect that especially the lower educated tend to be strong national identifiers as they are less socialized into the values of rationalism and cultural diversity by education, and will therefore also be more concerned about immigrant threats against this specific group.

> H2: *Because people who are less educated tend to be more emotionally attached to Italy, they are more likely to perceive immigrants as a threat.*

What is more, it seems likely that especially high national identifiers are concerned about immigration, as this might be perceived as threatening the national culture and traditions that are so important to them for defining who they are (Roccas et al., 2008). After all, they will be more likely to perceive the different cultures and traditions that immigrants bring to Italy as

problematic. That is, if people from different cultural backgrounds, to whom being Italian might mean something totally different (f.e. being Muslim instead of Christian) enter Italy, Italians might fear that the Italy they are so emotionally attached to will become a 'different' Italy, and in their views a 'worse' Italy. In that case, national identification would become less suitable as a source of positive distinctiveness (Verkuyten, 2018). Since we expect especially the less educated to be emotionally attached to Italy and the traditions that are currently in place in Italy, we expect especially the less educated to perceive immigrants as threats to the Italy they are so strongly attached to, and to the traditions in that country.

> H3: *Because people who are less educated tend to see traditions as more important, they are more likely to perceive immigrants as a threat.*

Methods

Data

In order to test these hypotheses, the data from the European Social Survey (ESS, 2016) were used. The ESS had three main purposes, namely to interpret the changes in public attitudes and values within Europe, to develop cross-national survey measurement, and to derive different European social indicators. Furthermore, up to the point of writing, the ESS consisted of eight rounds, taken in two-year intervals starting in 2002 (ESS, 2018). For this study, we chose the most recent round of 2016 that was collected in a context of the European 'refugee crisis' that is often said to have started in 2015. We used the statistical package SPSS to analyse the data. The mediations were analysed using the process-macro as developed by Hayes (2016).

The total number of Italian participants in the eighth round of the ESS was 2,626. A total number of 2,311 respondents remained in our analytical sample after performing listwise deletion of missings. The advantage of this method for dealing with missing values is that it allows us to use the same cases in all our analyses. However, the disadvantage of listwise deletion as compared to pairwise deletion is that more information is lost as more cases will be dropped (Field, 2014b). Since, in our case, the additional loss of data for listwise deletion (*N* valid= 2217), as compared to pairwise deletion (*N* valid= 2613) was rather small, we chose to perform listwise deletion of missings. It can be seen that the percentage of missings for all the five variables is around 12 per cent.

All the selected respondents were fifteen years or older, were Italian, and were living at a private address in Italy at the time of the interview. The electoral register was used as the sampling frame. A four-stage probability sample strategy was applied in order to ensure a representative sample. All

interviews were conducted in a face-to-face context, with all questions being translated into the Italian language. On average, the respondents in our analytical sample were 48 years old and 48.4 per cent of them were male.

Table 1 - Descriptive statistics (N = 2217)

Variables	Min	Max	Mean/ Proportion	SD
Perceived threat	0	30	17.77	7.26
Importance of traditions	1	6	4.73	1.11
Openness towards others	3	18	13.90	2.31
Years of full-time education	1	39	11.71	4.29
National identification	0	10	7.91	2.06
Male	0	1	48.4%	
Age of respondents	15	94	48.48	18.73
Religious (yes/no)	0	1	74.7%	

Measures

In order to examine the role of education in explaining perceived threat, in our model, we include education as independent variable, perceived threat as dependent variable, and attachment to traditions, openness towards others and national identification as mediators. Table 1 contains the descriptives for all variables that are relevant for testing our hypotheses.

Perceived threat was measured with the item: 'Italy's cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries'. Participants could respond on an 11-point scale that ranged from undermined (0) to enriched (10). Furthermore, there were also two measures for perceived realistic threat. First, respondents were asked to indicate whether 'Immigrants make country a better or worse place to live', to be answered on an 11-point scale from 'worse place (0)' to 'better place (10)'. Secondly, they were asked 'Do you think immigration is bad or good for a country's economy, also to be answered on an 11-point scale from 'bad for economy (0)' to 'good for economy (10)'. For interpretational reasons, we re-

verse coded the scale of all three items so that higher scores indicated more perceived threat. Furthermore, those refusing to answer (77), those who did not know the answer (88), and those who did not give an answer for another reason (99) were treated as missing. The Cronbach's Alpha between these three items measuring threat was very high with .897, for which reason we computed a scale-variable called *perceived threat*, which is our dependent variable.

Focusing on *education*, we used a continuous variable referring to the years of full-time education that had been completed by the participant. We chose education in years instead of the highest achieved education, which was also available in the dataset, because following socialization theory, we are primarily interested in how long one has been socialized in the education system. From Table 1, it can be seen that the minimum number of years of education was 1 and that the maximum was 39. Three respondents enjoyed at least 30 years of education. It was checked that these outliers did not significantly influence our results. It can be seen that, on average, Italians have followed 11.7 years of education (*SD* = 4.26).

For the importance attached to openess and traditions, participants were given descriptions of a person and then had to indicate to which extent that person was like the participant him/herself. This was done on a 7-point scale from 'very much like me' (0) to 'not like me at all' (6). Participants could also refuse to answer (7) or could indicate that they did not know the answer (8). The latter two categories were treated as missing values. Furthermore, the variables were recoded so that a higher score indicated that the participant saw him/herself as more similar to the described person, and therefore, saw the specific value that was described as more important. For measuring the *importance of traditions*, we used one item of this human-value scale which describes a person who finds traditions important: 'Tradition is important to him. He tries to follow the customs handed down by his religion or his family'.

Three items with the same answering scale as the tradition-value measured the importance of caring for others, understanding others and treating others equally. That is, a person was described as seeing these values as important, and the respondent had to indicate how much that person was like him/herself. The descriptions for respectively caring, understanding and equal treatment were: 'it is very important to him to help the people around him. He wants to care for their well-being', 'it is important to her to listen to people who are different from her. Even when she disagrees with them, she still wants to understand them', and 'it is important that people are treated equally and have equal opportunities'. Once again, the participant had to indicate how much the described person was like him/herself on a 6-point scale. As a score of 6 indicated that the described person was not at all like

the participant, and therefore that the value was not important to the respondent, we reverse-coded the variable. Also, those who refused to answer or did not know the answer were treated as missing.

In order to see whether our values measured different latent variables, we performed an Explanatory Factor Analysis in SPSS. The values caring for others, understanding others and treating others equally all loaded on the same factor that explained 28.1% of the variance. Furthermore, the factor analysis indicated that the importance attached to traditions loaded on a different factor. Therefore, we chose to use importance attached to traditions as a single item and to sum up the scores on caring for others, understanding others and treating others equally to create a variable which we interpreted as *openness towards others*. The Cronbach's Alpha for this variable was 0.688. For a scale-variable that measures a psychological construct like openness towards others with only three items, this seems to be a respectable level of reliability (Field, 2014a). The last mediator we used was *national identification*. This variable was not measured on the same scale as the values described above. Instead, people were asked 'How emotionally attached do you feel to Italy?'. People could rate their national identification on a ten-point scale ranging from 'not at all emotionally attached' (0) to 'very emotionally attached' (10). Once again, those refusing to answer (77), those who did not know the answer to this question (88) or did not respond for another reason (99), were treated as missing.

As a first univariate analysis, we performed a one-sample T-test for all scale-variables in which we compared the mid-point of the scale to the mean of the scale. With regard to our dependent variable, our data indicated that Italians tend to perceive immigrants as a threat ($t=17.975$, $df=2216$, $p<0.001$). With regard to the mediators, we found that Italians tended to be emotionally attached to Italy ($t=66.363$, $df=2216$, $p<0.001$), and that they tended to hold both traditions ($t=73.398$, $df=2216$, $p<0.001$) and openness towards others ($t=99.707$, $df=2216$, $p<0.001$) as important values.

Control variables

In these analyses, we used three control variables. First, we controlled for *gender* (coded as '1' for males and '0' for females) as it has been found that males tend to be less tolerant towards ethnic minorities (Hello et al., 2004), and perceive different values as important as compared to females (Jacobs et al., 2002). Secondly, previous studies have found that older people are more likely to be lower educated (Hjem, 2001), and it might also be expected that they attach more importance to traditions. Therefore, we decided to control for the *age* of the respondents. Thirdly, it has been found that religious people might find some values, such as caring for others well-being, more important than non-religious people (Davidov & Meuleman, 2012),

for which reason we also decided to control for *religion*. As the religious denomination was not asked for Italy in the eighth round of the ESS, we used the dichotomous variable asking whether one sees him/herself as religious in order to rule out the possible effects of religion on perceived immigrant threat. Participants received the question 'have you ever considered yourself as belonging to any particular religion or denomination', and could indicate 'yes' (1) or 'no' (2). They could also refuse to answer (7) or could indicate that they did not know the answer (8). Once again, we treated the last two options as missing. For ease of interpretation, we also recoded the variable into a dummy in which a score of '1' indicates that one is religious, and '0' that one is not religious. A one-sample T-test indicated that Italians more often tended to be religious than non-religious (t=26.804, df=2216, p<0.001).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

We will start by looking at the bivariate Pearson correlations between our main variables, which can be found in Table 2 below. In line with our general assumption that more years of education was associated with less perceived threat, we found a significantly negative relationship between education and perceived threat, with every additional year of education being associated with a decrease of .245 on our threat-scale (p<0.001). Furthermore, in line with our first hypothesis that the higher educated would perceive less threat because they attach more importance to openness, we found a significant positive relationship between education and importance attached to openness, with every additional year of education being associated with an increase of .138 (p<0.001) on our openness-scale. Also, there was a significant relationship between importance attached to openness and perceived threat, with a one-point increase on our openness-scale being associated with a decrease of .091 on our threat-scale (p<0.001). Our second hypothesis was that people who are less educated would be more emotionally attached to Italy and therefore would perceive more threat. However, we did not find a significant relationship between education and national identification with Italy (p=.198), nor between national identification with Italy and perceived threat (p=.942). We also found support for our third hypothesis that people who are less educated would perceive less threat because they see traditions as more important. That is, every additional year of education was associated with a decrease of .149 on our traditions scale. (p<.001). Furthermore, an increase of 1 on our tradition-item was associated with an increase of .130 on our threat-scale.

Table 2 - Pearson Correlations of Main Variables (N=2217)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Threat							
2. Education (in years)	-.245**						
3. Traditions	.130**	-.149**					
4. Openness	-.091**	.138**	.299**				
5. National identification	-.001	.006	.194**	.128**			
6. Male	.012	.038	-.089**	-.064**	-.035		

Mediation Analyses

In order to examine the role of education in explaining perceived threat, we ran a multiple mediation regression analysis by means of the process-macro as developed by Hayes (2016). The total effect of education can be broken down into three indirect effects (i.e. one for each mediator) and one direct effect (i.e. the effect of education on perceived threat that is not explained by the mediators). The results can be found in Figure 1 and Table 3 below.

Figure 1 - Main results
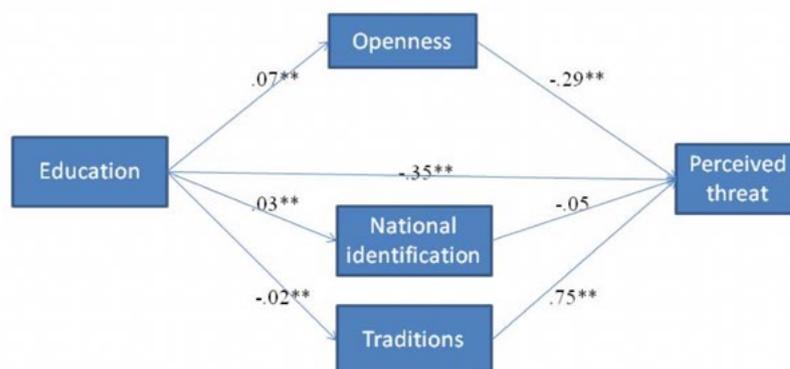
* Significant (p<0.05)

** Highly significant (p<.01)

As Figure 1 shows, if we include all mediators and control variables to the model, education had a significant effect on all three mediators includ-

ed in the model, not only on openness towards others and the importance attached to traditions, but also on national identification. The relationship between education and openness remained positive, and the relationship between education and importance attached to traditions remained negative. Furthermore, the relationship between education and national identification had become significantly positive in this model.

Table 3 - Mediation Analysis with threat as an outcome in the form: unstandardized coefficient (standard error)

	Openness towards others	Importance of traditions	National identification	Perceived threat
A. Independent variable				
Education (years)	.0680 (.0122)**	-.0183 (.0056)**	.0315 (.0109)**	-.3549(.0379)**
B. Mediation scales				
Openness towards others				-.2856** (.0694)
Importance of traditions				0.7516** (.1524)
National identification				-.0489 (.0738)
C. Control variables				
Male	-.3305 (.0975)**	-.1318(.0446)**	-.1091(.0872)	.4202(.2985)
Age	-.0042 (.0028)	.0071(.0013)**	.0150(.0025)**	-.0003(.0088)
Religious (yes/no)	-.0812 (.1141)	.6453(.0522)**	.2947(.1021)**	.9740(.3621)**

* Significant (p<0.05), ** Highly significant (p<.01).

As reported in Table 3, we found that more education was related to more openness towards others, which is in line with our first hypothesis. Each additional year of education was associated with an average increase of .068

on our openness-scale. Also in line with our first hypothesis, we found that people who were more open towards others tended to perceive less immigrant threat, with every scale-point increase on openness being associated with an average decrease of .286 on the threat scale. However, just as in the bivariate analysis, the results for national identification were not in line with our second hypothesis. Indeed, while we hypothesized that the more educated would be more emotionally attached to Italy, we found evidence for the reverse relationship. That is, after adding openness towards others, importance attached to traditions and age, religion and gender to the model, more years of education was associated with *more* national identification. More precisely, each additional year of education was associated with an average increase of .032 on the national-identification scale. Finally, we did find evidence for the third hypothesis that people who enjoyed more years of education would attach less importance to traditions and therefore would perceive less immigrant threat. More precisely, we found that every additional year of education was associated with an average decrease of .0183 on the traditions-item, and that a one-point increase on the traditions-item was associated with an increase of .752 on the threat-scale.

With regard to our control-variables, we see in Table 3 that males differed from females in terms of the values they saw as important. That is, males attached less importance to openness and traditions. More precisely, on average, males tended to score .331 points lower on the openness-scale and .132 points lower on the tradition-item as compared to females. However, there were no gender-differences with regard to national identification or perceived immigrant threat. With regard to age, it can be seen that there were no significant associations with importance attached to openness and perceived threat. However, older people were more emotionally attached to Italy and did attach more importance to traditions. More precisely, with each additional year, respondents tended to score .015 points higher on the national identification-item and .007 points higher on the tradition-item. Our last control-variable was religion. It can be seen in Table 3 that there was no association between religion and openness. However, those who were religious were more likely to see traditions as important, were more likely to be emotionally attached to Italy, and were more likely to perceive immigrant threat. As compared to the non-religious, the religious tended to score .645 higher on the tradition-item, .295 higher on the national identification item, and .974 higher on the threat-scale.

After taking the mediators (national identification, traditions and openness) and the control variables (age, religion and gender) into account, we also found that there remained a direct effect of education on perceived immigrant threat. That is, overall, each additional year of education was associated with an average decrease of .3549 on the perceived threat scale. The

total effect of education that was explained by our mediators was -.0347, and was significant. Eventually, our model could only explain around 9.8% of the relationship between education and perceived immigrant threat. However, we did find that two of our mediators could significantly explain perceived immigrant threat. More precisely, the indirect effect of education via openness (b= -.0194) and via traditions (b=-.0138) were significant, whereas the indirect effect via national identification was not (b= .0015). This indicates that we found partial mediation, in which the association between education and perceived threat was partially explained by differences in the importance attached to openness and traditions.

Robustness check

To conclude, we performed a robustness check in order to examine whether the number of years of education or the level of education mattered in explaining perceived immigrant threat. In order to do this, we used the highest level of education achieved as independent variable, by creating a dummy variable for being higher educated (understood as went to university). In this way, we could discern the effects of general education from the effects of higher education. After all, it might be the case that the process of socialization is different in different parts of the education system.

In comparison to the model with number of years of education as independent variable, two major changes occurred in this model. First, the effect of education on national identification, which we unexpectedly found to be significantly positive in the previous model (b=.315, p=.004), was no longer significant when we looked at the level of education (b=.244, p=.067). Thus, whereas people who have enjoyed more years of education surprisingly did tend to be more emotionally attached to Italy, the higher educated did not differ in national identification from the lower educated. It looks like high national identification is more viable in the earlier and lower stages of education than in the academical stages. However, the effect is only slightly insignificant and very close to positive, which further suggests that education is associated with more, and not less emotional attachment to Italy.

Secondly, the effect of education on importance attached to traditions, which in the first model was found to be significantly negative (b= -.0183, p= 0.001), was no longer significant when we looked at the level of education (b=-.0495, p=.467). Thus, just like with national identification, only the number of years of education seemed to matter for the importance attached to traditions.

These findings indicate that, as socialization theory seems to suggest, it is mostly the duration of education that seems to matter for the values that are held important. Of course, this is not too surprising as the values which people hold as important are unlikely to change. In a way, it is also not surpris-

ing that national identification and importance attached to traditions, which we both assumed to reflect the 'unofficial culture', became insignificant in this robustness check. After all, by operationalizing education only in terms of whether one did or did not enjoy higher education, we lose the socializing effects of non-academical education. In a way, we lump together people who have barely followed any education with those who did follow a significant degree of education, although it was not academically. As we found that those who followed higher education were still more open, and therefore perceived less immigrant threat, we may conclude that the part of our model which relates to the 'official culture' is very robust. That is, education is associated with more openness and therefore less perceived threat, irrespective of whether education was operationalized in terms of level of education or in terms of years of education. The fact that we still find the higher educated to be more open as compared to those who did not follow academic education (even though this group also consists of people who supposedly did experience the socializing effects of non-academic education), suggests that academic education in particular might be important for socializing people into an open official culture.

Conclusion and discussion

This study has contributed to the literature on unfavourable attitudes towards immigrants by focusing on the possibility that education forms a socializing force which highlights only those values which reduce the extent of perceived immigrant threat. In doing this, we followed socialization theory, which proposes that education can socialize people into an 'official culture' in which openness is an important value (Selznick & Steinberg, 1969). We argued that seeing immigrants as threats would not be in line with such open-minded 'official culture', and perceived threat should therefore be lower among the more educated. Furthermore, we also expected that those who were not socialized into the 'official culture' by the educational system actually constituted an 'unofficial culture' in which people would not only be more emotionally attached to Italy, but would also attach more importance to Italian traditions (Selznick & Steinberg, 1969). In turn, we expected people who were more emotionally attached to Italy and who valued the Italian traditions more, to be more likely to perceive immigrants as a threat. That is, immigrants might bring different cultures to Italy which might change the traditions and national identity of Italy which we expected to be important to the less educated. We found mixed support for these hypotheses. That is, people who have enjoyed more education indeed tended to be more open towards others and, therefore, tended to perceive less threat than the lower educated. Furthermore, we also found evidence for the claim that the less-ed-

ucated consituted an 'unofficial culture' in which traditions are perceived to be important (Selznick & Steinberg, 1969), and for this reason perceived immigrants as a threat more often. However, we did not find the same for national identification. In fact, we found that the more educated tended to be *more* emotionally attached to Italy compared to the less educated, although this did not affect the extent of perceived threat. The fact that the more educated tended to identify more strongly with Italy indicates that national identification might be part of the 'official culture' instead of the 'unofficial culture'. However, since previous cross-national research has found that the more educated tend to have less nationalist sentiments (Hjerm, 2001), it is possible that Italy is actually an exception in this respect. Following socialization theory, a possible explanation could be that the Italian curriculum actually stresses the importance of national identification, whereas this is not the case in other countries.

Overall, our results do not seem to challenge the core claim of socialization theory that education socializes people into an 'official culture' (Selznick & Steinberg, 1969). After all, we found differences in the values which are perceived to be important with the more educated finding openness towards others more important, and the less educated finding traditions more important. Also, we found that the more years of education one has followed, the more emotionally attached one became to Italy. However, one major limitation of this study has been that it has not been able to test the actual content of the education system directly. Previous studies in other contexts have already hinted that the content of the curriculum indeed matters for which values students choose to adopt (Stubager, 2008), as well as for how prejudiced they are towards racial minorities (Hogan & Mallott, 2005). In order to test socialization theory more properly in the Italian case, it would be necessary to also study the specific content of the Italian curriculum, and link this to the values which students in Italy find important. Therefore, we encourage future research to examine the content of the Italian curriculum, for instance by means of a content analysis or through more qualitative methods such as participant observation. Combined with the current findings on the importance of openness, national identification and traditions for students' perceptions of immigrant threat, this would give us a more complete picture of the importance of socialization in explaining differences in threat perceptions along educational lines. Another limitation of this study is that the cross-sectional nature of our data does not allow us to make any causal inferences. Theoretically, it is possible that those people who perceive less immigrant threat, who attach more importance to openness and less importance to traditions, and who identify more strongly with Italy are more likely to be involved in the Italian education system in the first place (see for instance, Lancee & Sarrasin, 2015). This is yet another reason

why we would need more insight in the content of the Italian curriculum. If values such as openness towards others are barely emphasized in the Italian curriculum, the current findings are most likely due to selection effects rather than socialization effects.

A final limitation of this study is that it has been very concise in what the 'official culture' entails (that is, valuing openness towards others) and what the 'unofficial culture' entails (that is, valuing traditions and identifying with the nation). Needless to say, there might be more values and identities into which education socializes people, and which influence perceived immigrant threat. This is also reflected in the fact that our mediators could only explain 9.8% of the relationship between education and immigrant threat. However, there might also be other reasons for the relationship between education and perceived immigrant threat. For instance, the higher educated might perceive less threat of immigrants because they have more contact with immigrants (Nukaga, 2006; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Savelkoul et al., 2010), because of a broader worldview and more cognitive abilities (Coenders & Scheepers, 2003), because they are more empahtic (Vogt, 1997), or because they enjoy a higher socio-economic status (Hello et al., 2004). We encourage future research to test these possibilities, preferably in the same model so that it can not only be tested whether each single mediator can explain why the more educated perceive less threat, but also how important each mediator is and how much of the education-threat association is explained by the combination of these mediators.

Despite these limitations, the current study has provided evidence that the higher educated attach more importance to openness and less importance to traditions, which inhibits their perceptions of immigrants as threatening. The mediating role of openness towards others was particularly robust, as those who enjoyed academic education attached more importance to openness than people who did not enjoy academic education. However, this also signals that there may not be enough attention to openness towards others at the non-academic stages of the Italian curriculum already. Paying more attention to the importance of openness towards all people, irrespective of ethnicity or race, may therefore be an important step to take for Italian policy makers in preventing further educational polarization on issues related to immigration.

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