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Mizrahi-Ashkenazi educational gaps in the third generation

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes gaps in rates of obtaining higher educational degrees (B.A or higher) between third generation Ashkenazim and Mizrahim (the two major ethnic groups among Israeli Jews), in comparison to the same gaps among members of the second generation. The empirical analyses were performed using the 7th and 8th rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS). The data include information on the country of birth of parents and grandparents of respondents, thereby allowing identification of the ethnicity of the second and third generation (including the identification of persons of mixed ethnicity) for a representative sample of 775 men and women, 26–42 years of age in 2015–2017. The results suggest that the educational gaps between the two major ethnic groups are smaller in the third generation than in the second generation, especially among women. Academic education of persons of mixed ethnicity are in between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, but closer to Ashkenazim, especially in the third generation. Multivariate analyses suggest that parental background has a large effect on the probability of obtaining higher educational degrees, yet even when controlling for parental characteristics, Mizrahi men of either the second or third generation, are less likely to hold academic degrees than second generation Ashkenazim. We discuss the implications of these results for the future of ethnic based stratification in Israel.

1. Introduction

Israeli Jewish society is characterized by an ethnic cleavage between Jews who immigrated to Israel from Europe and America (henceforth, Ashkenazim), and those from Asia and Africa (henceforth, Mizrahim). There are persisting socioeconomic gaps between Ashkenazim, who have achieved high levels of education and earnings, and their Mizrahi counterparts, who have never caught up with them. Moreover, the gaps between the two immigrant groups with respect to the main socioeconomic measures, university graduation and earnings, seem to be as persistent among the immigrants' offspring (henceforth, second generation immigrants) as among the immigrants themselves.

Ethnic origin is defined by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) strictly by one's country of birth, and for the Israeli-born, based on father's country of birth. Consequently, members of the third generation (Israeli-born with Israeli-born fathers) – close to one half of the Jewish population in 2015 (Cohen, 2015) – are defined in official statistics as being of 'Israeli origin.' The reliance on parents' country of birth as the sole indicator of ethnicity, together with the decision to trace it back only one generation, results in the elimination of ancestry and ethnicity from official statistics within two generations, or about fifty years. Moreover, relying on the country of birth of one parent only

(usually the father) dictates a binary ethnic classification, whereas increasing numbers of Israeli-born Jews are of mixed ethnicity (i.e., one of their parents is Ashkenazi and the other Mizrahi). Eliminating ethnic groupings among Jews (and with them ethnic gaps) and adopting an unequivocal 'Israeli' identity has been a central goal of the Israeli "melting pot" policy (Cohen & Gordon, 2018; Prewitt, 2013). However, this kind of administrative 'Israelization' limits the ability of researchers to test whether or not the socioeconomic gaps in the third generation have indeed disappeared, or at least narrowed. This being the case, there is a dearth of studies on the gaps in the third generation. The few studies that analyzed the socioeconomic fortunes of the third generation were based on data that were collected 23 years ago (in 1995) and focused on persons 25–34 years old in 1995 (born in the 1961–1970). Due to lack of data, there are no contemporary studies on the educational gaps among recent cohorts of the third generation, the fastest growing group of Jewish Israelis (Cohen, 2015).

Fortunately, the 7th and 8th rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS), fielded in late 2015 (round 7) and late 2016 to early 2017 (round 8) included additional questions for Israel that enables the identification of the ethnic origin of third generation Israelis. This paper utilizes these data sets to describe and analyze the schooling levels among the cohort of Israeli Jews who were born in Israel between 1973 and 1991

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(26–42 years old in 2015 or 2016–17), according to their ethnic origin. Specifically, the paper presents analyses of the gaps in schooling levels between third generation Ashkenazim and Mizrahim in Israel, in comparison to the gaps among members of the second generation. In addition, the ESS data enable us to study a third group of Israeli-Jews, those of mixed (Ashkenazi-Mizrahi) ethnic origin. Although interethnic marriages are considered the ultimate indicator for immigrants' assimilation (Gordon, 1964; Waters & Jimenez, 2005), the implications of such marriages for the socioeconomic mobility of their children has been somewhat neglected, in large part because of lack of suitable data. The ESS data available for Israel enables us not only to answer the outstanding question about the ethnic gaps among third generation Israelis, but also to contribute to the growing literature of third generation immigrants more generally.

The paper is organized as follows: the next two sections (2&3) briefly review the literature regarding the development of ethnic gaps in Israel as well as available studies regarding the socioeconomic progress of third generation immigrants in Israel and other countries. The fourth section presents the data and measures used in the analyses. The fifth section presents descriptive statistics regarding the gaps in university and college graduation between the three ethnic groups (Mizrahim, Ashkenazim and persons of mixed ethnicity) of the second and third generations. The sixth section presents multivariate analyses aimed at identifying the factors contributing to gaps in educational attainment between the ethnic groups. The final section discusses the results and their implications for ethnic stratification in Israel as well as in other immigrant societies.

2. The ethnic cleavage in Israeli-Jewish society

The ethnic cleavage in Israeli-Jewish society dates back to the pre-State years in the first half of the 20th century (Khazzoom, 2003; Shenhav, 2006). In 1948, the newly established state of Israel had a population of about 650,000 Jews, mostly Ashkenazim with a sizable minority of about 20 percent Mizrahim. During the next three-and-a-half years, this relatively small Jewish population base actively attracted nearly 700,000 Jewish immigrants that “replaced” the same number of Palestinians who were forced out of Israel during the 1948 war. About half the Jewish immigrants were survivors of the Jewish Holocaust in Europe. The other half of this immigration wave, known as the ‘mass immigration,’ consisted of Jewish residents of Arab countries in Asia (the majority) and North Africa. Following a short-lived decline in 1952–1953, immigration continued, albeit at a slower pace. During the next 35 years, until 1988, an additional 1.1 Million Jews immigrated to Israel (Cohen, 2002). About 57 per cent of them came from Europe, America and Australia (two-thirds of them arrived after 1970), and 43 per cent from Arab countries in Asia and especially North Africa (three-quarters of them came before 1970).

The social, economic, and cultural assimilation of most Ashkenazi immigrants in Israeli society was rapid and complete. By 1975, their schooling, occupations and earnings were no different than those of native-born Israeli Jews or of veteran immigrants who arrived in Israel during the pre-state period (Boyd, Featherman, & Matras, 1980). By contrast, Mizrahi immigrants failed to achieve parity with the Jewish native population. Thus, while in the US the earnings differences between white immigrant groups arriving in the US in the post-1945 period and natives of similar characteristics disappeared after 11–14 years (Chiswick, 1978), Mizrahi immigrants, both those who arrived during the pre-state years and those who arrived in later waves, have failed to close the socioeconomic gaps between them and the other groups of Jewish Israelis – Ashkenazi immigrants and native-born Jews.

Bad as the experience of first-generation Mizrahi immigrants was, it could be explained by the relatively low level of economic development of the countries of origin from which they came (Perlmann & Elmelech, 2012; Semyonov & Lerenthal, 1991), as well as by the institutional discrimination to which they were subjected in Israel (Shenhav, 2006;

Shohat, 1988). But the persistence of socioeconomic gaps among the Israeli-born children of these immigrants (i.e. the second generation) is more difficult to explain. It is beyond the scope of this paper to review all the studies providing macro-sociological explanations for the persistence of the ethnic cleavage in the second generation (e.g., Khazzoom, 2003; Lamont et al., 2016; Mizrahi, Goodman, & Feniger, 2009; Spilerman & Habib, 1976; Smootha, 1978; Swirski, 1999;). More important for our purpose are the empirical findings of studies tracing and documenting developments in socioeconomic gaps across time and generations (e.g., Cohen & Haberfeld, 1998; Friedlander, Okun, Eisenbach, & Elmakias, 2002; Haberfeld & Cohen, 2007; Mark, 1996; Nahon, 1987; Smootha & Kraus, 1985; Semyonov & Lerenthal, 1991; Yaish, 2001; Yaar, 2005).

Despite the many differences between these empirical studies, regarding methodology, measures of socioeconomic success, data sets, and the researchers' discipline, there is a consensus that in many spheres of life – labor force participation, marriage patterns, fertility rates, political representation, and rates of high school graduation – the ethnic gap narrowed significantly or disappeared in the second generation (Yaar, 2005). However, the few studies that focused on academic education and labor market earnings – arguably the two most important indicators for social standing in contemporary Israel – found that the gaps between the Israeli-born of Mizrahi and Ashkenazi origin had not been significantly attenuated, as compared to the differences found among their Mizrahi and Ashkenazi parents. Despite expectations that the gaps would narrow over time, university graduation rates and earnings gaps within the second generation are not much smaller than the gaps observed in the first generation, nor have the ethnic gaps within the second generation appreciably attenuated over time (Cohen & Haberfeld, 1998; Dahan, 2016; Haberfeld & Cohen, 2007; Mark, 1996).¹

Previous research identified several factors responsible for the failure of the second generation to close the ethnic gap in higher education, and hence in earnings. These include individual factors, most notably parents' socioeconomic standing (Adler, Lewin Epstein, & Shavit, 2005) but also students' aspirations for occupations requiring higher education (Ayalon, 1992). There are also structural factors, such as the lower quality of schools in peripheral towns (and poor neighborhoods in the cities) where the vast majority of students are Mizrahim. Equally important is the tracking system in high school education, that included, in addition to the academic track leading to matriculation, a vocational track which practically prevented students from obtaining matriculation diploma (which is a prerequisite for university enrollment). Previous research reported that Mizrahim of the second generation were not only overrepresented in the vocational track (Shavit, 1984), but at times were sent there due to various types of discrimination – individual, statistical or institutional (Swirski, 1999).

3. Progress of third generation immigrants in Europe, the US and Israel

While the literature on the second generation in Israel and other countries is extensive (e.g., Heath, Rethon, & Kilpi, 2008; Perlmann, 2005; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Waters & Jimenez, 2005; Waters & Pineau, 2015), fewer studies have focused on the progress of third generation immigrants in Israel, Europe and North America. Moreover, due to the lack of data, in most US studies, third generation immigrants also include higher generation immigrants, and compare these “third-plus” generation immigrants to the first and second generations (Waters & Pineau, 2015).

¹ Focusing on income, Dahan (2016) reported the most optimistic results: net income gap between households headed by first or second generation Ashkenazim and Mizrahim declined from 40 percent in mid 1990s to 27 percent in 2011.

Economists were the first to study this group of third-plus generation, focusing on their earnings. Carliner (1980) found a decline in the earnings of third-plus generation US immigrants relative to the second generation, attributing it to the fading motivational and ability advantages enjoyed by first and second generation immigrants by virtue of the positive selectivity of the first generation. A similar explanation, focusing on the selectivity on unobserved traits of first generation immigrants that was transmitted to their children but not to their grandchildren, was offered by Hammarstedt (2009) studying the “true” third generation in Sweden. Based on data from the population registrar, he reported a decline in the earnings of third generation immigrants in Sweden compared to earlier generations.

The growing number of third generation immigrants in Europe and America led to more studies in the past decade. Due to the young age of third generation immigrants, educational researchers focused on their achievement in primary and secondary schools, reporting more optimistic results in the US (e.g., Murnane 2013 and other studies cited in Waters & Pineau, 2015) than in Germany (e.g., Becker, 2011). Stratification sociologists, on their part, developed models of multi-generational mobility, irrespective of ethnicity, trying to estimate effects of grandparents’ traits on grandchildren achievements (Chiang & Park, 2015; Møllegaard & Jæger, 2015).

Perhaps more relevant to the Israeli case are the recent studies reporting on the progress of third (or third-plus) generation Mexican Americans. Much like Mizrahi, Mexicans (and other Hispanics) came to the US with relatively low educational levels and faced various forms of discrimination (though Mizrahi in Israel have never suffered from being “undocumented”), and therefore have attracted much research attention, including a few studies on the third generation. These studies generally reported impressive rates of progress (from the second to third generation) on some indicators including English usage (Alba, Logan, Lutz, & Stults, 2002) and the characteristics of households third generation children reside in (Jimenez, Park, & Pedroza, 2017). However, other indicators, including educational attainment, show that the progress of third generation (or third-plus generation) Mexican immigrants has been slower than that of other immigrant groups, both contemporary (e.g. Asians) and those arriving from Southern and Eastern Europe at the turn of the 20th Century (Alba, 1985; Borjas, 1994; Bean & Stevens, 2003; Ortiz & Telles, 2017; Perlmann, 2005). Indeed, it is not clear if the educational level of third generation Mexican immigrants is higher than that of the second generation. Most studies that analyzed the third-plus generation detected little or no educational (or economic) progress among Mexican Americans, possibly due to ethnic attrition, namely the tendency of highly educated third-plus Mexican Americans not to identify their ancestry as Mexican (Duncan & Trejo, 2011). The two studies that focused on the educational level of “true” third generation adults relative to the second generation, reached different conclusions, reporting either no progress or even a decline in the third generation (Telles & Ortiz, 2008), or modest progress (Bean, Brown, & Bachmeier, 2015). Evaluating the entire literature on the third and third-plus generation, as well conducting its own analysis, a comprehensive study of the American Academy of Sciences concluded that “In the end, the current data do not allow the panel to project with confidence what the long-term pattern of educational advance will be for Mexican Americans and others of Hispanic Ancestry” (Waters & Pineau, 2015).

In Israel, a small number of studies were able to examine educational ethnic gaps in the third generation in 1995 using the merged 1995-1983 census data file (Cohen, Haberfeld, & Kristal, 2007; Dahan, Mironichev, Dvir, & Shye, 2002; Friedlander et al., 2002). While the conclusions of these studies are not always consistent, the weight of the evidence seems to be that educational gaps in high school matriculation and higher education between Ashkenazim and Mizrahi persist even in the third generation. At the same time the attainment of persons of mixed ethnicity places them between the two ethnic origin categories, but closer to that of the Ashkenazi group (Cohen et al., 2007; Dahan

et al., 2002; Okun & Khait-Marely, 2008).

Although the ESS samples are smaller than samples used in previous studies that were derived from the Central Bureau of Statistics in 1995, the ESS datasets have fuller ancestry details and include a wider age group. Moreover, while previous studies based their conclusions regarding the third generation on data from 1995, when the third generation was relatively young and the grandparents arrived in Israel before statehood, the current study is based on 2015-17 data (henceforth “2016 data”). By that time, third generation Israelis were older (and hence completed their higher education) and most of their grandparents came to Israeli in the first decade after statehood when the differential treatment of Mizrahi and Ashkenazi immigrants was most pronounced.

4. Data and measures

Data for the 7th and 8th rounds of ESS were collected in Israel between May and November 2015 and between September 2016 through February 2017, respectively. The samples are multi-stage probability samples of all individuals age 15 and above living in households in Israel. Households were randomly selected from 250 statistical areas that were clustered on the bases of social and economic characteristics to ensure representation of the population. Within each household one person was randomly selected for interview. To increase sample size, we pooled the data from the 2015 and 2016-17 rounds. The resulting sample includes 5119 Jews and Arabs 15 years of age and over (with a response rate of over 70 percent). The data are weighted to ensure representation of the Israeli population.² The present study focuses on Israeli-born Jews, 26–42 years old. Consequently, we exclude several groups, large and small, from the analysis. Thus, first generation Jewish immigrants, namely, foreign-born Jews, are not included in the analysis. Likewise, Israeli Palestinian-Arabs are not included in this paper because they are neither immigrants nor the children of immigrants; and since there are virtually no Arab-Jewish marriages in Israel, there are no persons of mixed Arab/Jewish ethnicity in the sample. We also excluded from the analysis a few cases whose grandparents were born in Israel (hence it is not possible to ascertain their ethnicity), as well as a few respondents with missing values on education or ethnicity. Finally, we excluded second generation Jewish immigrants from Ethiopia since their particular origin and immigration history sets them apart from other Mizrahi Jewish communities. Their exclusion did not affect the results since there are six second generation Ethiopians Jews (and no third generation) aged 26–42 in our sample.

After all exclusions, our sample includes 775 individuals 26–42 years old. 471 of them are second generation immigrants, namely, their parents were born abroad (including 200 where one of the parents was born abroad and one in Israel – a group we refer to in this paper as the “2.5 generation” [Ramakrishnan, 2004]), and 304 are third generation (both parents were born in Israel). We set the upper age limit of our sample at 42, in part because most third-generation persons, our main interest, in the ESS data (and in Israel) are relatively young.³ In

² ESS has two weighting variables that are relevant when working with a single country. One correcting for inclusion probabilities (design weights) and another aimed at adding corrections for post-stratification errors such as non-response or sampling. Both yield similar results with respect to the dynamic of the ethnic gaps in education. Since the design weights make the ESS results on the educational levels of Israeli-born Jews, 26-42 years old very similar to those obtained by analyzing the larger 2013 expenditure survey of the CBS, we trust them more than the post-stratification weights. We therefore present below results based on the design weights, also used by Lewin Epstein and Cohen (2018).

³ In the pooled sample of the ESS there are only 55 third generation persons who are 43 to 54 years old, and only around 27% of them are men, a proportion which is too low to assume this small number of cases represents the older third generation population or to conduct reliable analysis for three ethnicities.

addition, the experience of this younger cohort is more suggestive of third generation Israeli Jews than the experience of older (and smaller) cohorts, especially if we care about recent trends in educational attainment. Had we included persons over 42, we would be comparing older members of the second generation to younger members of the third generation (because most third generation persons are young). Among the sample persons 26–42 years old, the mean age is about two years older in the second- than in the third generation (see [Appendix A](#)). The younger age threshold is set at 26 taking into account that in Israel most Jews serve in the military, and do not begin their higher education before they are 21 or 22 years old.

Overall our sample seems to represent the Jewish second and third generation in Israel, with the exception that the proportion of women is somewhat higher in our samples (52.9%) than in the population.

4.1. Variables

4.1.1. Ethnic origin

The ESS questionnaire regularly collects information on country of birth of respondents and their parents. A supplement added to the questionnaire in Israel asked respondents to provide the country of birth of their mother's and father's parents (the 4 grandparents). We then collapsed country of birth into a 3-category variable: Europe or America (including Oceania and South Africa), Asia or Africa, and a third category comprising those born in Israel.

Based on place of birth and family migration history we assigned origin and generation codes according to the following algorithm, which is similar to that used by [Cohen et al. \(2007\)](#): The second generation consists of those born in Israel to immigrant parents. They were classified into 3 origin groups: Mizrahim, if both parents were Mizrahim (born in Asia or Africa); Ashkenazim, if both parents were Ashkenazim (born in Europe or America); and Mixed if one parent was born in Asia or Africa (Mizrahi), and the other in Europe or America (Ashkenazi). The 2.5 generation, which we combine in most analyses with the second generation, consists of offspring of parents, one of whom was Israeli-born and the other an immigrant. In this case, we use the grandparents' information to determine the origin of the Israeli-born parent. Here too we identify 3 population groups, Mizrahim, if the origin of one parent is Asia or Africa and that of the grandparents (in the case of the parent born in Israel) is also Asia or Africa. Respondents are classified as Ashkenazim, if the origin of one parent is Europe or America and that of the grandparents (in the case of the parent born in Israel) is Europe or America. If one or both grandparents (on the side of the Israeli-born parent) were born in Israel, the assigned ethnicity was according to that of the foreign-born parent. Finally, we define as mixed origin those with one Mizrahi and one Ashkenazi parent (or grandparent).

The third generation includes respondents whose parents are Israeli-born. Their ethnic origin is determined by that of their grandparents. The classification rule that we used in this case is that if at least one grandparent was born in Asia or Africa (Mizrahi) and no grandparent was born in Europe or America (Ashkenazi) the respondent was classified as Mizrahi. If at least one grandparent was born in Europe or America (Ashkenazi) and no grandparent was born in Asia or Africa (Mizrahi), the respondent was classified as Ashkenazi. All other cases (at least one grandparent from each ethnic group) were classified as Mixed.⁴

⁴ As expected, the main source countries for respondents are the top source countries sending the largest number of immigrants to Israel between 1948 and 1988. Morocco is the country of origin for nearly half of second generation Mizrahim, followed by Iraq, Iran, Yemen and Tunisia. Likewise, among second generation Ashkenazim, the top source countries, together accounting for nearly one half of them, are Romania, Poland and the European republics of the former Soviet Union. In the third generation, the top Ashkenazi source

In most data sets, including those created by the Israeli CBS, parents' continents of birth are available only for the foreign-born, and grandparents' data, which are available only in the matched 1983–95 census data, are limited to Israeli-born whose parents were born in Israel. Such a procedure ignores the possibility of intermediate migratory moves. One of the unique features of the ESS is that it includes country of birth for all parents and grandparents, regardless of the country of birth of respondents. We used this feature to re-assign respondents into the ethnic classification schema based solely on grandparents' continent of birth. Using this method, to take one example, an Israeli born person whose parents were born in France, but her grandparents in North Africa, was classified as Mizrahi (in the traditional classification, such a person would be classified as Ashkenazi). We shall later see that the two methods of ethnic classification produce very similar results.

4.1.2. Education

Our measure of educational attainment is a dummy variable coded '1' if a respondent has at least a first university or college degree (usually B.A.). It is based on responses to the question, "what is the highest level of education you have successfully completed?" In some analyses, we distinguish between graduating from a college and graduating from a university. We focus on higher education because in the labor market, the critical certificate for success has increasingly become the first academic degree (B.A or its equivalent) rather than non-academic post-secondary education. The economic returns of academic degrees have increased sharply in the past three decades ([Kristal, 2013](#)), and by 2013 the average earnings of Israeli-born, Jewish high-school graduates, 25–54 years of age, was only about two thirds of the average earnings of their university graduate counterparts (our analysis of the 2013 expenditure survey). This being the case, the present study focuses on ethnic gaps in obtaining at least a BA degree between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim of both the second and third generations, as well as between these two ethnic groups and the growing group of persons of mixed ethnic origin.

4.1.3. Controls

The independent variables for explaining differences in educational levels are respondent's gender and parental characteristics when respondent was 14 years old available in the ESS. These include two dummy variables for parental education and occupation, coded as 1 if at least one parent had at least a B.A. degree, and if at least one parent held a professional technical or managerial (PTM) occupation.

5. Descriptive results

The left panel of [Fig. 1](#) presents the percent of respondents with at least a first academic degree among the three ethnic groups by generation. The results regarding the second generation confirm what we know from numerous previous studies: Ashkenazim are much more likely than Mizrahim to have academic degrees. Specifically, 63.9 per cent of Ashkenazim have at least a B.A. degree, compared to 30.5 per cent among Mizrahim and the difference is statistically significant.⁵ In the third generation, 56.4 per cent of Ashkenazim and 36.0 per cent of Mizrahim are university or college graduates. Evidently, the ethnic gaps are considerably narrower in the third generation than in the second generation. The gap, measured in percentage points, is about 33 points

(footnote continued)

countries are Poland (about one-third of Ashkenazim) and Romania; the top Mizrahi source countries are Morocco (about 25 percent of Mizrahim) followed by Yemen and Iraq.

⁵ All Figures show 90 per cent confidence intervals. See also columns 1, 3 and 5 of [Table 1](#) and [Appendix B](#) for levels of statistical significance in rates of having an academic degree between the benchmark group of second or third generation Ashkenazim and the other ethnic groups by generation and gender.

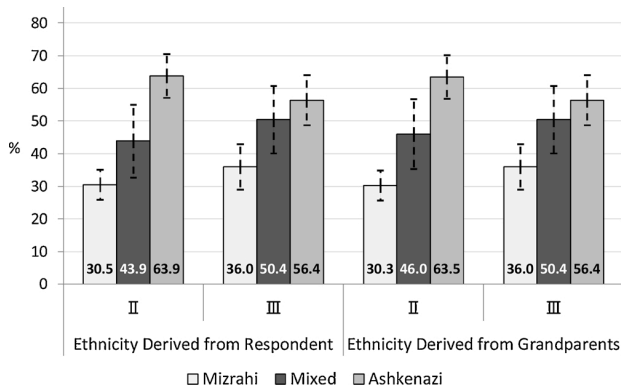


Fig. 1. Percent with at least a B.A. degree: Israeli-born 26–42 years old by generation, ethnicity and ethnic definition. 90% Confidence intervals. 2.5 generation included with second generation. N = 775.

in the second generation (64–31), and about 20 points in the third generation (56–36), a decline of about 13 points. However, over half of the decline in the ethnic gap is due to a decline in the educational levels of third generation Ashkenazim compared to the second generation. The decline in educational level of privileged members (i.e. Ashkenazi) of the third generation is not unique to Israel. In the US, [Waters and Pineau \(2015\)](#) reported declines over 0.5 year in the mean years of schooling among Non-Hispanic White and Asian third-plus generation compared with their second-generation counterparts.

Persons of mixed ethnicity are located between the two ethnic groups in the second generation, but are closer to Ashkenazim in the third generation, a finding which is consistent with previous research on various dimensions comparing persons of mixed ethnicity to Mizrahim and Ashkenazim ([Cohen et al., 2007](#); [Okun & Khait-Marely, 2008](#)).

These findings are robust. As shown on the right Panel of [Fig. 1](#), they are replicated when the ethnicity of all members of the sample is determined solely by grandparents' continent of birth, rather than by the traditional way that uses grandparents' continent of birth only if both parents were born in Israel. Recall that this method enables us to classify second generation persons whose parents were born in Europe as Mizrahi if their grandparents were born in North Africa, or as Ashkenazi if their parents were born in the Asian Republics of the Former Soviet Union, but their grandparents were born in one of the European Republics.⁶

Moreover, the same pattern of results is also observed in [Fig. 2](#), where members of the 2.5 generation (one parent was born in Israel) are classified together with the third generation (middle panel), rather than with the second generation (as is the case in [Fig. 1](#) and in the left panel of [Fig. 2](#)), or when the 2.5 generation is excluded from the analysis, or is included as a separate category (right panel).

[Fig. 3](#), however, shows that there are notable gender differences in trends in the ethnic gaps. Between the second and third generation, university or college graduation rates slightly declined among Ashkenazi women (from 71 to 65 percent), while they increased from 33 percent to 43 percent among Mizrahi women. Consequently, among women, the ethnic gap dropped from about 38 percentage points (71–33 = 38) in the second generation to about 22 points (65–43 = 22) in the third generation.

Among Mizrahi men, rates of BA graduation have hardly changed between the second (27.4 percent) and third (28.0 percent) generation, while among Ashkenazi men, graduation rates of the third generation

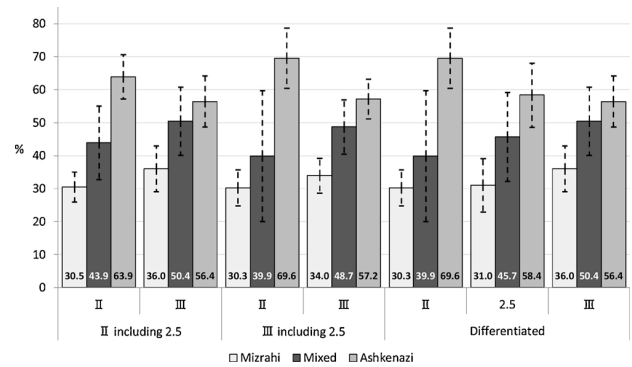


Fig. 2. Percent with at least a B.A. degree: Israeli-born 26–42 years old by generation, ethnicity, and assignment of the 2.5 generation. 90% Confidence intervals. N = 775.

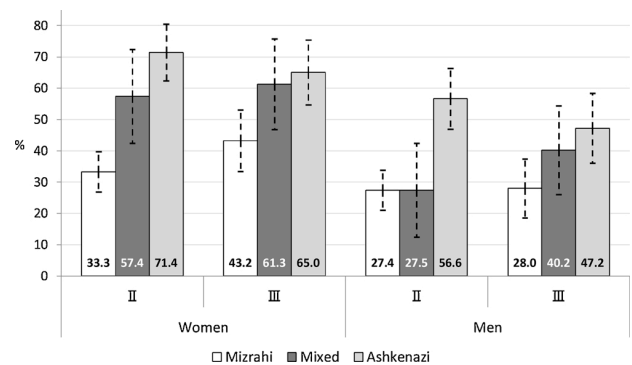


Fig. 3. Percent with at least a B.A. degree: Israeli-born 26–42 years old by generation, ethnicity and gender. 90% Confidence intervals. 2.5 generation included with second generation. N = 775.

(47.2 percent) are appreciably lower than among members of the second generation (56.6 percent). Consequently, the ethnic gap in higher education declined from about 30 points in the second generation (57–27 = 30) to 19 points in the third (47–28 = 19). Yet this narrowing of the ethnic gap among men is solely because Ashkenazi men of the third generation have lower B.A. rates relative to their second-generation counterparts. Given that the schooling level of third generation Mizrahi men has not improved between the second and third generation, there is not much to celebrate in this narrowing of the ethnic gap among men.

During the post-1995 period, over 50 B.A.-granting colleges were established, enabling more students to attend higher education. It is possible that Mizrahim disproportionately study in these less selective colleges, while Ashkenazim tend to obtain their academic degrees in one of the more selective and established Israeli research universities. [Fig. 4](#), presenting the proportions of those graduating from a college (as opposed to a university) among all respondents with an academic degree, suggests that it is indeed the case among women, but not among men. Among women with higher education, a higher proportion of Mizrahim than Ashkenazim received their degrees in a college, implying that Mizrahi women, of both the second and third generation, have benefited more than Ashkenazi women from the expansion of the higher education system. One possible reason for this result (which is not statistically significant) – that received some support in our data (not shown) – is that a large proportion of the new educational institutions are teachers colleges with higher enrollment of Mizrahi than Ashkenazi women seeking teaching certificates. It is important to emphasize, however, that the narrowing of the ethnic gap among women between the second and third generation, observed in [Fig. 3](#), is

⁶ Since the two methods of classifying ethnicity yield very similar results, we use the traditional procedure in the remainder of the analyses.

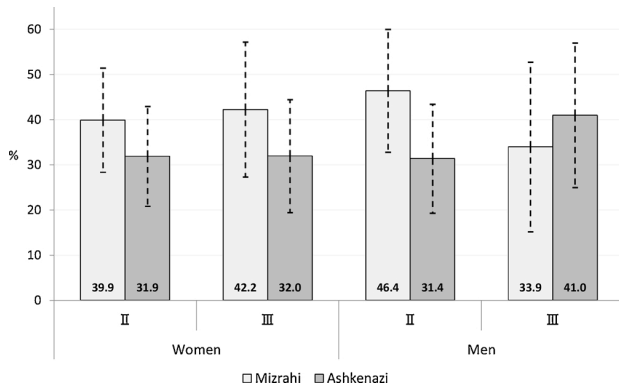


Fig. 4. Percent with a B.A. degree from a College (as opposed to a degree from a University) among Israeli-born 26–42 years old with at least a B.A. degree. 90% Confidence intervals. 2.5 generation included with second generation. Persons of mixed ethnicity are not included due to small number of cases. N = 344.

unrelated to the establishments of the new colleges, since the new colleges helped *all* Mizrahi women, not only those of the third generation.

No such pattern is observed among men, where in the second generation highly educated Mizrahim were more likely than their Ashkenazi counterparts to receive their degrees in a college, but the opposite is the case in the third generation, whereby a higher proportion of highly educated Ashkenazim than Mizrahim received their degrees in a college.

In sum, the results reported in Fig. 1 through 4 lead to the conclusion that the ethnic gaps in schooling between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim have narrowed between the second and third generation and this narrowing was unrelated to the expansion of the higher education system. Rather, the narrowing of the ethnic gaps in higher education in the third generation was due to rising college/university graduation rates among Mizrahim on the one hand, and declining rates among Ashkenazim on the other. Persons of mixed ethnicity are between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim, and in the third generation they are closer to Ashkenazim. The results by gender, however, tell a more complex story. Among women they reveal a decline of 16 percentage points, from about 38 to 22 points, or a 42 percent decline (16/38) in the ethnic gap between the second and third generations, most of it, though not all, due to rising rates of academic education among third generation Mizrahi women. On the face of it, the trend in the ethnic gap among men is as positive as among women, as the Mizrahi/Ashkenazi gap between the second and third generation men also narrowed by about 37 percent (11/30 percentage points). However, among men, the narrowing of the ethnic gap in higher education occurred *entirely* due to the decline in academic education among third generation Ashkenazim compared to their second-generation counterparts, while graduation rates of third generation Mizrahi men remained relatively low, at the same level of their second generation counterparts. Evidently, Mizrahi men did not make any progress with respect to higher education between the second and third generations.

6. Multivariate analysis

In Israel, as in other countries, one's educational attainment is known to be affected by parental characteristics (Cohen et al., 2007; Dahan et al., 2002; Shavit & Pierce, 1991). The primary question we would like to answer in this section is whether persons of Mizrahi and mixed ethnic origin are less likely to hold at least a B.A. degree than Ashkenazim of similar measured parental characteristics. To this end we estimated logistic regressions where the dependent variable is whether respondents have at least a first academic degree. The

Table 1

Odds ratios for attaining at least a B.A. degree: second- and third generation Jews, 26–42 years old.^a

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
	ALL		Men		Women	
Constant	2.139***	0.966	2.335***	0.541	2.460***	0.885
[2nd Generation Ashkenazi]						
2nd Generation Mizrahi	0.264***	0.454***	0.252***	0.407**	0.210***	0.422**
2nd Generation Mixed	0.468**	0.483*	0.312**	0.230**	0.516	0.748
3rd Generation Mizrahi	0.360***	0.549*	0.262***	0.441*	0.335***	0.493
3rd Generation Ashkenazi	0.75	0.612	0.625	0.596	0.694	0.513
3rd Generation Mixed	0.594	0.613	0.447	0.552	0.663	0.54
Age (1 = 35–42)		1.511**		2.060**		1.259
Men		0.451***				
Parent with B.A		3.545***		2.594***		4.758***
Parent in PTM ^b		2.222***		3.275***		1.810**
Model fit						
Adj. Walt test F Value	7.801	23.23	3.888	13.53	5.43	10.56
Pseudo R ²	0.051	0.171	0.076	0.195	0.062	0.159
N	737		351		386	

*** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.1. Our analyses of pooled 2015 and 2016–17 ESS samples (Rounds 7 and 8) for Israel.

^a All regressions control for year of survey. 2.5 generation included with second generation.

^b PTM: Professional, Technical, and Managerial workers.

independent variables are all dummy variables: parental education and occupation, as well as the six combinations of ethnic origin and generation: second generation Ashkenazim (the benchmark group, omitted from all regressions), second generation Mizrahim, third generation Mizrahim, second generation mixed, third generation mixed, and third generation Ashkenazim.

Column 1 of Table 1 presents the results for the entire sample, showing the effects of ethnicity on graduation rates with no controls. The odds ratios and level of statistical significance for the ethnic groups tell us what we have seen in Fig. 1 – Mizrahim of both the second and third generation, as well as persons of mixed ethnicity of the second generation are less likely to hold a B.A. degree than second generation Ashkenazim. While the probabilities for third generation Ashkenazim and persons of mixed ethnicity to be graduates are also lower than that of second generation Ashkenazim, the coefficients for these two groups are not statistically significant.

The question, however, is if ethnicity exerts an independent effect on educational level, or whether the Mizrahi disadvantage is entirely due to their less advantageous family background. Column 2, which adds parental education and occupation (as well as controls for gender and age) to the model, is designed to address this question.

Clearly, parental background has a large effect on the probabilities of B.A. graduation among respondents. The pseudo R squared, which is an indication for the goodness of fit, increases from 0.051 in column 1 to 0.171 in column 2. Specifically, having at least one parent with a B.A. degree, and at least one parent with a professional, technical or managerial occupation when the respondent was 14, dramatically increases the likelihood of respondents to become B.A. graduates. These effects of parental background are consistent with the results of previous research in Israel and in other countries. However, the effects for Mizrahi ethnicity are still statistically significant among persons of the same parental education and occupation. That is, even when controlling for parental background, Mizrahim (and persons of mixed ethnicity) are less likely to be graduates than Ashkenazim (Column 2).

Ethnicity appears to be more consequential for men than for women. Among women, the effect of being a third generation Mizrahi is

not statistically significant when parental background, especially education, is added to the model (Column 6). By contrast, among men, the odds ratios for the both Mizrahi groups, as well as for second generation persons of mixed ethnicity remain statistically significant when parental background and age⁷ is added to the model (Column 4). We wish to stress, however, that some of the regression results are driven by the choice of the benchmark group of (very highly educated) second generation Ashkenazim. When we used the less educated third generation Ashkenazim as the benchmark group and control for family background, the odds ratios for the ethnic groups are in the expected magnitudes (i.e., less than 1 for the Mizrahi groups), but are statistically insignificant for both gender groups (Appendix B). Apparently, the educational gaps between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim in the third generation are largely explained by the less advantageous family background of Mizrahim.

7. Discussion and conclusions

Ethnic gaps between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim is arguably the most debated topic in Israeli sociology. There are studies on the historical origin of the ethnic cleavage, its development in the second generation, as well as its impact on various spheres of life. Yet, very little is known on the socioeconomic gaps between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim in the third generation – the fastest growing group of Jews in contemporary Israel.

A handful of articles studied the third generation in 1995, when this group was small and young. Friedlander et al. (2002) reported of narrowing the gap in entry into post-secondary schooling in the third generation, while other studies found that educational gaps in high school matriculation (Dahan et al., 2002) and B.A. graduation rates in 1995 (Cohen et al., 2007), were not smaller in the third generation than in the second generation. Evidently, the results reported in this paper indicate that there has been an improvement since 1995: in 2016 the ethnic gaps in higher education among third generation immigrants, while still large, are about 40 percent narrower than among the second generation.

The narrowing ethnic gaps across generations are more meaningful among women, where third generation Mizrahi women made substantial progress in graduation rates relative to their second generation counterparts. Among men, the gaps in the third generation have narrowed not because third generation Mizrahim are more likely to receive a B.A. than their second generation counterparts, but because third generation Ashkenazi men are doing worse than second generation Ashkenazim.

Although the results regarding gender differences in the third generation are based on a relatively small sample of the third generation, they are most likely suggestive of real trends. Similar results were reported by previous research. Cohen et al. (2007) reported that third generation Mizrahi women improved their schooling levels more than Mizrahi men, whose graduation rates were virtually unchanged between the second and third generations. Stagnation or even slight decline in the educational level of third generation men (relative to the second generation) was also found among Mexicans in the US. Bean et al. (2015) reported greater educational progress among third generation Mexican women than men, a finding that is also obtained when comparing second generation Mexicans with the third-plus generation (Ortiz & Telles, 2017; Perlmann, 2005; Waters & Pineau, 2015).

Evidently, it will take Mizrahim more than three generations to reach educational parity with Ashkenazim, and this is despite the fact that individual discrimination against Mizrahim has most likely

declined in recent decades (Haberfeld & Cohen, 2007; Lamont et al., 2016). The results reported above suggests that it may take Mizrahim four or even five generations to reach educational parity with their Ashkenazi counterparts, similar to the ‘optimistic’ estimate for the full integration of Mexican Americans (Bean & Stevens, 2003; Perlmann, 2005). What may explain the long time it takes Mizrahim to reach parity in higher education with Ashkenazim? To be sure, some of the advantage of Ashkenazim in higher education is rooted in their more advantageous family backgrounds. But this is not the entire explanation for the failure of Mizrahim to reach the same university/college graduation rates as Ashkenazim in either the second or third generation. Another possibility, supported by past research, puts the blame on schools and neighborhoods. Specifically, schools in neighborhoods and towns with large concentration of Mizrahim were found to offer fewer advanced courses (Ayalon, 1994) and are disproportionately geared towards vocational degrees (or low-quality matriculation diplomas) as opposed to academic matriculation diplomas which are required for attending selective majors in colleges and universities (Ayalon & Mcdossi, 2016; Ayalon & Shavit, 2004; Mizrahi et al., 2009). Thus, factors that were found to be responsible for the gaps in the second generation are likely to be responsible for the gaps in the third generation, too. Although we cannot test this hypothesis (the ESS does not include data on the types of neighborhoods and communities in which respondents grew up) this explanation is plausible, given that we studied a cohort of the third generation born between 1973 and 1991. Most likely, these members of the third generation were subject to the same structural factors affecting their same-age counterparts of the second generation. Their parents, for the most part, were born in Israel in the throes of the great adjustments after statehood in 1948, with all its adverse implications for Mizrahi immigrants.

In the US, early 20th century non-Hispanic immigrant groups closed socioeconomic gaps with the native born within three generations (Alba, 1990), in large part because there was no immigrant replenishment (Waters & Jimenez, 2005). In Israel, by contrast, members of the Mizrahi third generation, much like Mexicans and other Hispanics in the US, were connected to the immigrant generation and the immigration experience. Protracted Mizrahi immigrant replenishment until the early 1970s and the experience of the Mizrahi second generation maintained the ethnic cleavage in Israeli society across birth cohorts and generations. In their own eyes as well as in the eyes of relevant actors – state agencies, educational professionals, employers and the public at large – these members of the third generation were most likely indistinguishable from their same-age counterparts of the second generation (Lamont et al., 2016).

One aim of the Israeli melting pot has been to reduce the proportion of the two main ethnic groups of Mizrahim and Ashkenazim and supplant them with persons of mixed ethnicity of unequivocal ‘Israeli origin’ of relatively high educational levels. This has indeed occurred to some extent: in our sample, the proportion of persons of mixed ethnicity, whose graduation rates are in between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, increased from about 12 percent in the second generation (including the 2.5 generation) to about 21 percent in the third generation (see Appendix A). But contrary to popular beliefs, the growing proportion of persons of mixed ethnicity had most likely slowed down the decline of the ethnic gap in the third generation. As demonstrated by Okun and Khait-Marely (2010), for a variety of reasons including educational selectivity, mixed marriages tend to produce greater polarization between the educational levels of more homogeneous Mizrahi and Ashkenazi couples (who did not intermarry), thereby exacerbating the ethnic gaps in education among their offspring. Although this effect is not large, it is important to recognize that the effects of ethnic intermarriages on the ethnic cleavage in Israel are complex and do not necessarily attenuate educational and other socioeconomic gaps between third generation Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews.

Finally, we join the recommendation of the American National Academy of Sciences regarding the need for data that will enable to

⁷ Men (but not women) 35–42 years old, are more likely than men 26–34 years old to have at least a first academic degree, an effect which is most likely due to the tendency of some Israeli men to attend higher education at a relatively older age (Cohen et al., 2007).

identify third generation immigrants (Waters & Pineau, 2015). Although we were able to provide credible figures for an important measure of educational attainment of third generation Jewish immigrants in Israel, we were unable to explore other dimension of ethnic inequality such as earnings and labor market performance for both lack of data and small sample size. Adding just four questions on birth country of grandparents to large surveys such as the American Community Survey in the US and the Census in Israel, will enable researchers to study the progress of third generations immigrants, addressing additional dimensions of integration.

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Appendix A. Number of cases (weighted number) and Mean Age (S.D.), by ethnicity and generation, 26–42 years old.

Gen.	Ethnicity	Number of cases (Weighted)			Mean Age (S.D.)		
		Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
2 nd	Mizrahi	126 (132)	150 (146)	276 (278)	34.2 (5.3)	35.9 (4.8)	35.1 (5.1)
	Ashkenazi	68 (70)	70 (68)	138 (138)	34.2 (5.6)	35.4 (4.5)	34.8 (5.1)
	Mixed	27 (24)	30 (30)	57 (54)	33.1 (4.5)	34.1 (3.9)	33.7 (4.2)
	Total	221 (227)	250 (243)	471 (470)	34.1 (5.3)	35.5 (4.6)	34.8 (5.0)
3 rd	Mizrahi	63 (61)	70 (69)	133 (130)	31.7 (4.8)	32.0 (4.5)	31.8 (4.6)
	Ashkenazi	50 (54)	57 (58)	107 (112)	32.0 (4.7)	35.0 (5.2)	33.5 (5.2)
	Mixed	31 (33)	33 (31)	64 (63)	32.6 (4.9)	32.6 (5.1)	32.6 (4.9)
	Total	144 (148)	160 (157)	304 (305)	32.0 (4.8)	33.2 (5.0)	32.6 (4.9)
Total		365 (374)	410 (401)	775 (775)	33.2 (5.2)	34.6 (4.9)	33.9 (5.1)

2.5 generation included with second generation.

Appendix B. Odds ratios for attaining at least a B.A. degree: second- and third generation Jews, 26–42 years old.^a

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
	All		Men		Women	
Constant	1.605**	0.591*	1.459	0.322***	1.706*	0.454*
[3rd Generation Ashkenazi]						
2nd Generation Ashkenazi	1.333	1.634	1.600	1.678	1.442	1.951
2nd Generation Mizrahi	0.352***	0.743	0.402**	0.683	0.303***	0.822
2nd Generation Mixed	0.624	0.789	0.498	0.386	0.744	1.459
3rd Generation Mizrahi	0.480**	0.897	0.420*	0.74	0.483*	0.962
3rd Generation Mixed	0.792	1.001	0.715	0.927	0.955	1.054
Age (1 = 35–42)		1.511**		2.060**		1.259
Men		0.451***				
Parent with B.A		3.545***		2.594***		4.758***
Parent in PTM ^b		2.222***		3.275***		1.810**
Observations	737		351		386	

*** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.1. Our analyses of pooled 2015 and 2016–17 ESS samples (Rounds 7 and 8) for Israel.

^aAll regressions control for year of survey. 2.5 generation included with second generation.

^bPTM: Professional, Technical, and Managerial workers.

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