ROLE AND PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY ITALY

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Italian women between familism and feminism: an introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss some aspects of the changing role of women in Italy. These changes will be analysed taking into account the peculiarities of the Italian cultural system. Italian culture may be defined as *familistic*. By *familism* we mean a set of normative beliefs that: describes a strong attachment and loyalty to one’s family, emphasises the centrality of the family unit and stresses the obligations and support that family members owe to both nuclear and extended kin (see, for example, Saraceno, 2003; Rossi, 2009). The norms and traditions of the family are transmitted to the younger generation, and people usually perceive these norms to be fair and legitimate. If family is seen as the crucial foundation of society, a sense of society is not very strong, nor is a sense of the state (Ginsborg, 1989 and 1994; also Chapter 2 in this volume).

The survival of the familistic cultural system depends heavily on ‘traditional’ gender relations. Familism requires and encourages a specific, two-gender model, where the gender categories ‘woman’ and ‘man’ carry with them specific expectations about how to act, what to do, whom to love and so on. The familistic culture also tends to assume that all family members experience family life in the same basically positive ways. This assumption persists despite considerable evidence that women and men often experience the rhythms of family life together from quite different perspectives (See for example Rubin, 1976; Code, 1987).

Familism has its good sides: in Italy (the same is true, for example, for Spain, Greece and Mexico: Gérman et al., 2009) family has acted as an informal support network (a social security cushion), offering care services for children, the elderly and sick people – services provided by the welfare state in other countries. This has contributed to reinforce family solidarity between generations, as well as to create broad family networks. The negative compensation of this family economy model has affected the female collective: familism implies a prioritisation of the needs of the family over those of women (Saraceno, 1994). Familism thus influenced the visibility of women in history: in not acknowledging what women contribute to society overall, women were rendered invisible and marginalised. According to Valentini (2012), familism is one of the key elements that may explain why in Italy the question of women’s rights and roles is probably the ‘last thing’ to be dealt with.
The familistic culture influenced the Italian feminist movement, which has some unique characteristics. Feminism and the cultural revolution of the late 1960s and 1970s played a key role in Italy in reconfiguring women’s lives. The discourse of the second wave of feminism put women’s identity and the search for the feminist consciousness at the centre of reflection. It is also true that, just like the American feminist movement, the second wave of Italian feminism began with primarily upper- and upper-middle-class women, but expanded to include women of different educational and socio-economic levels, primarily through the organised labour movement. As Bianca Beccalli (1994) writes, this may be attributed to the social basis of Italian feminism: in most phases of its history, the movement has included women from different social backgrounds, both intellectuals and working-class activists. Through the practice of consciousness-raising (autocoscienza), the women’s movement spread across the North and South of the country – starting in the large cities of the North and Centre, where the politics of 1968 had originated and been most influential. Small workshop collectives were organised in large and smaller cities and it is necessary to mention the diffusion of autonomous women’s cultural centres and of feminist journals and magazines, most of which were self-funded and self-distributed (Longo, 2003). If the national scale of the movement was a significant achievement, we should not underestimate the persistence of regional peculiarities and differing rates of development (Adler Hellman, 1987; Beccalli, 1994). As other chapters in this Handbook show (see Chapter 2 for details), Italy has a high degree of territorial heterogeneity and territorial conflicts.

As we have said, the feminist message had to confront the familistic culture and to compromise with it. According to Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Bono and Kemp, 1991; on this topic, see also de Lauretis, 1989) one of the most distinctive features of Italian feminism is its non-institutional basis. This reflects the need to adapt to the coexistence of both a strong Catholic and a socialist culture, both of which give the family a central role (Guadagnini and Donà, 2007). As Dalla Zuanna (2001) writes, Catholic values are filtered by the familistic way of thinking. As the Catholic Church has emphasised some values easily compatible with familism in Italy, Catholicism has reinforced familism, and to some extent the latter has reinforced the former. Another key feature of the Italian feminist movement is the focus on sexual difference. As Dalla Torre (2010) writes, at the start of the 1970s Italian feminism went from being a feminism of equality and emancipation to a separatist politics articulated by women for women and emphasising sexual difference (see also Cavarero, 1993). According to Pravadelli (2010), both its non-institutional basis and separatist orientation may explain the late institutionalisation of women’s studies (see also Bono and Kemp, 1991). Indeed, only in the late 1990s did such studies become institutionally formalised. However, as Chiara Saraceno argues (2010), the weak institutionalisation of gender studies was mainly the consequence both of the Italian institutional framework and of the weak position women academics had within it. It is also true that the gender perspective is increasingly present in Italy, in sociology, economics, linguistics, psychology and literature, and within the ‘hard sciences’ as well (Saraceno, 2010; also Magaraggia and Leone, 2010).

Today the situation is becoming more complex. As we will see later on, male and female life courses appear to be converging: this convergence challenges the polarisation of gender roles and thus the familistic culture. Moreover, the Millennial generation is becoming more numerous. Currently including young people up to 30 years of age, the Millennials have surpassed the Baby Boomers (those born during the years 1946 and 1964, in the post-Second World War period) as the larger and more influential generation worldwide. These young women and young men are politically and socially independent, and they are spearheading a period of sweeping change around the world (Greenberg and Weber, 2008). This is primarily because of individual and family change (for example, divorced families, single-parenting, LGBT parenting, etc.), and the revolution of advanced Internet technologies.
There is thus a strong need to understand and manage the generation turnover. Starting from these premises we will look at the relationship between familism and women’s roles (the next section of this chapter); in the third section, we will discuss some of the challenges posed by the postmodern turn (Lyotard, 1979; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990; Bauman, 1992; Beck and Grande, 2010).

The ‘pleasure’ of living in Italy: familism and gender discriminations

Italian women had to grow up in, adapt to, and make compromises in a very patriarchal and misogynistic culture: the familistic one. As we will shortly see, not an easy task, indeed.

As we have said, familism discourages individual autonomy and takes women’s moral obligation to care for granted. In a familistic culture there is a strong belief that family members’ behaviours should meet with familial expectations. Lugo Steidel and Contreras (2003) identified four components of familism, namely family honour, respect for family elders, family interdependence, and subjugation of the self to the family.

Connected to familism is a strong emphasis on the quality of intra-family care. This is seen in the ‘dramatisation’ of the investment of personal resources in family life, in hostility towards forms of externalisation of family care (that is, the transfer of care tasks to institutions/outside the home: Mingione, 2001) and in the difficulties of adopting strategies to redistribute care duties between men and women. Indeed, Italian men contribute very little to housework and childcare. The Harmonised European Time Use Survey (HETUS),\(^5\) shows that Italian men perform the second-lowest amount of domestic work among men in the countries considered,\(^6\) with only Spanish men doing less, while Italian women stand out as the least active in the labour market. However, a study by Bloemen \textit{et al.}\,(2010) found that Italian fathers’ childcare time increases significantly when there are young children in the household. Gender differences are still present in how sons and daughters are expected to help with the housework. Boys are asked and expected to do less housework, and are given greater freedom by parents than are girls (Facchini, 2002; Ruspini, 2012). The redistribution of domestic responsibilities to men is fairly limited even in young couples with a high level of education.

In order to balance the limitations of formal care services and cultural resistance to externalisation, migrant women today replace family carers and thus play a very crucial role in the maintenance of Southern European care systems (Lyberaki, 2008; Ambrosini and Beccalli, 2009; Wall and Nunes, 2010). Some authors talk about a distinctive Southern European immigration pattern (King, 2001; Bettio \textit{et al.}, 2006), where a new ‘migrant-in-the-family’ care model emerges.

As Dalla Zuanna (2001) explains, familism is not only a general attitude toward the ‘traditional family’, based on marriage and children, with the breadwinner-father and the housewife-mother. Familism and the traditional family are certainly linked, but familism can persist even where traditional family life declines. This is what happens in contemporary Italy, where fertility is low and where ‘new’ marital and reproductive behaviours (divorce, cohabitation, extramarital fertility) are spreading.

Familism (and the gender differences tied to it) may indeed explain why the Italian fertility rate is falling (Livi Bacci, 2001) and also account for the low levels of women’s participation in the labour market. The Italian fertility rate – 1.33 children per woman in 2004; 1.39 in 2011 – has been one of the lowest in the world for some years now. As we have said, in Italy the experience of parenthood implies a strong specialisation of gender roles, with an increase in female time spent on housework and childcare (as well as a reduction in their time for paid...
work and free time), and an increase in men’s time dedicated to paid work (Tanturri and Mencarini, 2009). As Tanturri and Mencarini (2008) wrote, recent fertility theories have taken into consideration gender inequality as a possible explanation of lowest low levels of fertility in Southern Mediterranean countries (McDonald, 2000a and 2000b; Cooke, 2003).

Because care work still remains the responsibility of women, women’s job opportunities can be seriously compromised by having children (Pacelli et al., 2007; Istat, 2007). Maternity forces many women to retire from their professional life. In Italy, the employment rate among mothers with children is one of the lowest in Europe. If the employment rate for women decreases as the number of children increases in a majority of member states, in Italy the employment rate for women aged 25–54 with one child was, in 2009, 59 per cent (EU27: 71.3 per cent); with two children 54.1 per cent (EU27: 69.2 per cent) and with three children or more 41.3 per cent (EU27: 51.7 per cent) (Eurostat, 2011a; Istat, 2011a).

Not surprisingly, the situation of women and work in Italy is one of the worst in Europe in terms of employment. The target set by the European Union (‘Strategy for Development and Employment’) calls for 75 per cent of the population aged 20–64 to be employed by 2020. In 2010 the value of the indicator in Italy (61.1 per cent) was 14 percentage points below this target and summed up an extremely large gender imbalance (72.8 per cent for men and 49.5 per cent for women: Istat, 2010b).

The gender imbalance with regard to employment rates is accompanied by a strong regional divide. Higher employment rates characterise the Northern regions, particularly the North-East, where the employment rate for the population aged 20–64 (70.1 per cent) exceeds the average national value by 9 percentage points (Istat, 2010b). In the Southern regions, only 20.7 per cent of women between the ages of 18 and 29 are employed, compared with 45.7 per cent in the North (Italian Labour Force Survey data, second quarter of 2012). Moreover, in the Italian labour market flexible working hours and part-time work are still rare: less than 30 per cent of mothers with children under six work part-time (Reyneri, 2007). In the EU rankings, Italy, with lower-than-average values, comes eleventh for the incidence of female part-time employment and twentieth for the incidence of male part-time employment (Istat, 2010a).

Familism also means a strong reliance on the family as a provider of social protection, with minimum state intervention (see, for example, Trifiletti, 1999; Saraceno, 2003; Moreno Minguez, 2007; see also Chapter 21 in this Handbook). Familism has led to a distinctive gender regime (with informal rules) in which females are considered caretakers in a traditional family role and a single-earner family is promoted.

Italian governments lag behind other European countries in the resources they provide for family policies (around 4 per cent of overall expenses in Italy compared with a European average of 8 per cent; Eurostat, 2005). Childcare services for children under three offer only an 11 per cent coverage at the national level, with a range of variation from 24 per cent in Emilia Romagna to less than 5 per cent in Sardinia and Basilicata (Istat, 2008). Childcare for preschool children is also expensive. Moreover, access to childcare in Italy varies a lot by region. Empirical evidence shows that Italian children are much more likely to be cared for by their parents, grandparents, relatives or friends between the ages of 0–2 years than children in the majority of other OECD countries (OECD, 2007). The work of grandmothers appears crucial to solving the problem of insufficient state childcare services in Italy, which reinforces the central role of the family as an institution that provides for social welfare (Saraceno, 2003; Oppo and Perra, 2008).

According to Dalla Zuanna (2001), thanks to family support, Italian society can bear high youth (between 15–24 years) unemployment rates: in 2013, more than 50 per cent in some Southern areas of the country (male unemployment rate: 46.7 per cent; female unemployment rate: 56.1 per cent), in the absence of public unemployment benefit and social upheaval. While,
on the one hand, the role played by the family ensures greater flexibility for those entering the labour market, on the other hand, many young people are not actively encouraged to seek employment. It is often considered preferable for the young to stay at home, unemployed, rather than accept a low-status occupation. As we have said, familism discourages individual autonomy, and parents find it hard to accept a ‘low-status’ child.

Familism is also at the root of the very common attitude that considers young people in perpetual need of care and assistance. The tie binding parents and children is a peculiarity in the Italian model. This relates to the heightened importance attributed to children and the intense support given to them – continuing even after they have married – in terms of emotional support, closeness and availability of time and money. In Italy, young adults of both sexes live with their parents until they get married and are provided for by them as long as they stay within the family – even in families with a single breadwinner – whether the young person has a separate income or not. Children, after leaving home to establish new families, still maintain strong relationships with their parents. Usually they live very near to one of the two parental families and visit them regularly (often weekly) (see Chapter 6 in this Handbook for details). In other words, there is a lengthening of the time span that people spend in their family of origin. This phenomenon has come to be known as the *famiglia lunga* (Scabini and Donati, 1988).

In sum, the Italian cultural system and welfare model are still constructed on a rigid polarisation of gender roles; on the moral duty of family subsidising (according to which the family, enlarged to include the network of relatives, is always obliged to protect its members); on women’s unpaid care work; on the indefinite prolonging of financial bonds between generations. The lack of public family and care measures to reconcile work and family life in Italy is the result of a political context based on a consensual democracy characterised by a unique ideological cleavage. As we said in the introductory section, the coexistence of both a strong Catholic and a socialist culture affected the type of gender equality that emerged in Italy, which had to maintain a central role for the family (Guadagnini and Donà, 2007). The cultural and political influence of the Catholic Church as an institution, together with the low priority that family policies have had for left-wing parties and trade unions, reduced the possibility of changing not only the legal definition of the family, but the system of social protection focused on core (mostly male) workers, particularly in the face of tight budget constraints (Knijn and Saraceno, 2009).

The Italian cultural system and welfare state based on familism have proven difficult to change, also as a result of the persistence of a strong male domination of political life, with a low percentage (11 per cent) of women’s representation in Parliament over the last decade, and the political culture, with a widespread idea that women’s main role is in the private sphere of the family rather than in the public, political and professional arenas (Guadagnini and Donà, 2007).

Italy’s inertia in achieving gender equality seems to have been enhanced by its recent political leadership. Berlusconi’s actions and statements, media support for those actions and statements, and official insensitivity, if not hostility, to women, ‘has made the workplace an unwelcoming if not downright hostile environment for women with even moderately serious ambitions’ (Turesky et al., 2011).

Today, the Italian political sphere is showing some positive signs. In November 2012, the Italian government (led by Prime Minister Mario Monti) approved a Decree-Law (Decreto Legge no. 215/2012) to promote a more balanced gender representation in the legislative and executive bodies of Italian local entities (Municipalities, Provinces and Regions). Specifically, the law introduces stricter rules for the protection of gender equality in municipal and regional representative assemblies, governing councils (i.e. Giunte) and selection committees. The law
stipulates that during elections for representative assemblies both sexes must be represented on the electoral list. In fact, neither sex must be represented by more than two-thirds of the candidates. Furthermore, it is envisaged that voters can express a ‘gender preference’: electors can express up to two preferences (instead of the single-preference system previously in effect) only if they vote for two candidates of different genders; otherwise, the second preference will be considered void. The law also provides for equal access for both women and men to the media during election campaigns and for stricter rules to enforce gender equality on selection committees (one third of the seats should be reserved for women). In order to make these provisions effective, the law strengthens the role of the so-called ‘equality advisors’, with powers to ensure compliance with the principle of equality on the selection committees.8

Recently the Italian government has seen other changes, as Prime Minister Enrico Letta appointed seven women, the highest proportion to date. Italy’s new government has been active on the reform front, introducing key legislation to achieve gender equality. One of the first major reforms, passed in late May 2013, was to approve the adoption of the Istanbul Convention on combating violence against women. The convention would create an international framework to provide protection for women by encouraging prevention, assistance, cultural awareness and education on the issue. The Italian government also passed a new law (Decree-Law 14 August 2013) that will make it easier to protect women against domestic violence. The new legislation includes mandatory arrest for stalking and family abuse, with the abusive spouse subject to immediate removal from the home when there is any risk of violence. In Italy, gender violence is still a widespread phenomenon. The joint research report by EURES and ANSA9 found that between 2000 and 2012, more than 2,200 women were murdered in Italy, an average of 171 per year. Of these women, 70.8 per cent were killed by family members and 79.7 per cent of the femicides were committed at home.

However, a legislative process cannot be disconnected from the long-term planning of gender change. In other words, legislative measures should be supported, preceded and followed by gender-sensitive, comprehensive education and training programmes. Education is especially needed to rethink the traditional male identity in an anti-sexist logic, converging with feminist and women’s thought.

Converging life courses and the Millennial generation

As we have just said, the situation of women in Italy is slowly changing. Women’s policy agencies began to develop in the 1980s and 1990s. The main institutions set up to develop gender equality policies in Italy are the National Commission for Equal Treatment (Comitato Nazionale di Parità), established in 1983 as part of the Ministry of Labour to deal with employment matters; the National Committee for Equal Opportunities in the Labour Market (Comitato Nazionale di Parità e Pari Opportunità nel Lavoro), established in 1991; and the Ministry for Equal Opportunities (Ministero per le Pari Opportunità), created in 1996. These institutions, which have contributed to the promotion of gender policies in Italy, were influenced by the political leaning of the party in government, with greater progress coming from centre-left than from centre-right governments (Guadagnini and Donà, 2007).

The rate of women’s employment (between 15–64 years) has recorded a gradual rise over the last ten years: from 39.6 per cent in 2001 to 46.1 per cent in 2010 (Eurostat, 2011b). Working mothers declare themselves more satisfied than housewives and mothers, although they are weighed down by an enormous amount of work when one adds the work in the house to that outside it. Women’s traditional role of wife and mother is no longer appealing, and young housewives perceive their situation more as a necessity than a choice (Sabbadini, 2004).
This decline in motivation is consequent upon more extensive education and growing schooling rates. Not only do more women attend secondary school, but they are also more successful there than their male counterparts. At the university level women outnumbered men in 1990–1 (Istat, 2011b). Today young women place work and financial independence at the top of their priorities and see them at the core of their identity. Interviews and research conducted among women in their late twenties and thirties in Italy present quite a different picture from that of the past (Piazza, 2003). These women feel no sense of inferiority with regard to their male contemporaries and expect equal treatment. They tend to see family, work and education primarily in terms of self-fulfilment (Piazza, 2003). Empirical evidence also shows that Italian young women (aged between 18 and 34) appear to be more likely to achieve their goals and become autonomous if they spend a period of time outside the parental home (Ferrari et al., 2013). Also the choice to remain childfree – that is, when women and men have made a personal decision not to have children – is growing (Tanturri and Mencarini, 2008). In the 2001 Eurobarometer survey 6 per cent of Italian women aged 20–34 express an ‘ideal’ number of children of zero (Goldstein et al., 2003).

Changes in female identities increasingly have implications for male partners, workers and fathers. Younger men are beginning to claim a greater share in bringing up their children although, in the father–child relation, playing dominates the other dimensions (see for example Rosina and Sabbadini, 2005; Zajczyk and Ruspini, 2008). The number of men willing to question the stereotyped model of traditional masculinity is also growing (Ruspini et al., 2011).

Men’s and women’s life courses seem to be converging in terms of delayed transitions to adulthood. Research evidence (Toulemon, 2010; Mencarini and Solera, 2011) shows that in Southern European countries the differences between men and women are declining. Leaving the parental home is delayed until after the first job, for men as well as for women. Similarly, the proportion of men and women having a first child before having worked full-time is declining. The proportion of women who leave the parental home before cohabiting for the first time is increasing, and the large gap present in the cohorts born in the 1940s is no longer visible for the cohorts born in the 1970s.

The convergence of life courses is strengthened by the generation turnover. In recent years, the Millennial generation has emerged as a powerful political and social force. The Millennials are a group of young people born from 1980–2 onwards. The Millennial generation has been defined as a generation that is ‘competent, qualified, technological, and in search of a new form of citizenship’ (Balduzzi and Rosina, 2009). This is so for various reasons. First, they are the most ethnically and racially diverse cohort of youth in history. Second, the Millennials grew up with the Internet and thrive in a multimedia, highly communicative environment. Learning online is ‘natural’ to them – as much as retrieving and creatively creating information on the Internet, blogging, communicating on mobile phones, downloading files to iPods and instant messaging. Third, they feel empowered, have a sense of security and are optimistic about the future. Unlike the generations that came before them (Baby Boomers and Generation Xers), these young women and men are not left to make key decisions on their own; their parents are involved in their daily lives. Their parents helped them plan their achievements, took part in their activities and were very confident about their children’s abilities. A book by Greenberg and Weber (2008) that explores the values, dreams and potential of the Millennial generation shows that they are poised to change the world for the better, and lays out a powerful plan for progressive change that today’s youth is ready to implement (see also Taylor and Keeter, 2010; Rainer and Rainer, 2011). The Millennials are more tolerant than adults in other generations of a wide range of ‘non-traditional’ behaviours relating to marriage and parenting: from mothers of young children working outside the home to unmarried adults living together. The Millennials
are also distinctive in their social values; they stand out in their acceptance of homosexuality, interracial dating and expanded roles for women and migrant people.

With regard to gender equality and women’s mobilisation, the emergence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has changed feminist organising, writing and networking. The feminist movement can find support and community online: today there are multiple online feminisms and feminist communities (Del Greco, 2013; Rossi, 2013). Fourth-wave feminism allowed young women (and men) to raise issues and express opinions (and to organise) in a way that print publications never afforded. In Italy, the women’s and men’s movement Se Non Ora Quando? (If Not Now, When?), born in February 2011, was helped and inspired by social networking. The movement aims to protect the rights of women, including the right to work, promote a gender-sensitive culture and mobilise public opinion in favour of (gender) equality. The movement has been spreading its message via email, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Through the use of these tools, Se Non Ora Quando? has organised marches and protests against Berlusconi, his misogynistic regime and conservative politics. Besides protests, Se Non Ora Quando? has also organised flash mobs and forums in various Italian cities to bring to light the situation of Italian women, and plans on how to move forward.11

Within this evolving context, the cultural gap between second-wave feminists and today’s feminism seems to be increasing (Cirant, 2005). For example, the close association between feminism and the Left and the exclusion of men are increasingly problematic matters. Contemporary feminism has been described as the ultimate acceptor of diversity: multiple truths, multiple roles and multiple realities are part of its focus. The field of women’s studies – formed in the wake of the feminist movement – indeed finds itself in a precarious position in what is now called a ‘postmodern’, ‘postfeminist’ society. Are the aims and goals of feminism still relevant in the twenty-first century? How must the field adjust its goals and methods to continue to effect change in the future (Lapovsky Kennedy and Beins, 2005)? This raises challenging issues for universities, students and administrators.

Some conclusions, hard challenges

In Italy, empirical evidence also shows a trend of convergence between women and men in their behaviours, desires, and in their gender attitudes and roles, in and out of the home. These changes could effectively challenge sexism and gender stereotypes. The new women’s and men’s lifestyles, attitudes and roles may promote trends that encourage gender equality, a crucial element for social justice.

However, the interplay between the past and present raises the key question of how contemporary modernity relates to and interacts with the ‘old’ institutions, norms, rules and values, and with the familistic culture. This question is especially crucial for the Italian context. One of the biggest challenges for Italy and its culture is indeed how to support the positive convergence of gender identities, perceptions and roles, the generational turn, women’s empowerment, but also men’s changes. This in order to prevent generational and gender conflicts.

Gender education has a key role to play in raising public awareness of gender biases in society and promoting change. The future of gender education and gender studies seems, however, uncertain. Education on gender is still lacking in Italy, both in the process of primary socialisation and in educational programmes. On the one hand, the topics of gender and sexuality continue to be taboo subjects in Italian families. People outside the family (often friends) seem to be the main vehicles of information on these issues, which is, however, often inexact, distorted or in any case insufficient. On the other hand, in Italy there is no national legislation regulating gender
and sex education in schools and the prevalent forms of learning in school and professional training systems are still constructed to highlight values and behaviours linked to traditional masculine and feminine roles (Boffo et al., 2003). Moreover, gender education is undergoing severe budget cuts; this is also because most people think that gender studies has no tangible educational or job outcomes. The lack of information and education opportunities arising from this lack of funding, together with the many prejudices and stereotypes with regard to gender and sexuality, offers fertile ground for a definite increase in phenomena such as bullying, femicide and violence against women, sexual harassment, homophobia and transphobia.

The role of gender education in fighting bullying, femicide and gender violence, sexual harassment, homophobia and transphobia is indeed crucial. Gender education would also mean encouraging both young women and young men to place themselves at the centre of their lives and to acquire knowledge that releases them from traditional social identities such as those of masculinity and femininity, as well as ethnic, regional and local and national identifications (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Fennell and Arnott, 2009).

Notes

1 By the concept of culture we may refer to all the symbols, beliefs, meanings, behaviours, values and objects shared by member of a particular group, in contrast to other groups. Through culture, people and groups define themselves, understand meanings and social expectations, and conform to society’s shared values.

2 There is an implicit assumption in the existing literature that familism is primarily applicable to Italian or Hispanic people. However, as Schwarz (2007) notes, there is some evidence that familism may apply to other cultures and ethnic groups as well. For example, Papadopoulos (1998) speaks about a ‘Greek familism’. Cooley (2001) found that familism was protective against child abuse for both Hispanics and non-Hispanic Whites.

3 Second-wave feminism differentiates the women’s movement that began in the late 1960s from the suffrage movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (or ‘first-wave’ feminism). First-wave feminism arose in the context of the industrial society and liberal politics but was connected to both the progressive women’s rights movement and early socialist feminism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the United States and Europe. Third-wave Feminism began in the late 1980s as a response to the perceived failures of the second wave. It is a theoretical perspective that is both a continuation of, and a break with, second-wave feminisms. It shared many of the interests of the first two waves, i.e., the empowerment of women, but it was also attributed to the desire of women to find a voice of their own and to include various diverse groups like women of colour, lesbian, bisexual and trans women. Fourth-wave feminism (also ‘first-wave equalism’) is, or will be, a child of the Internet (see note 11 for details).

4 According to Magaraggia and Leone (2010), before that period women’s studies was forced to adapt to existing university structures, ‘hidden’ inside single courses and single disciplines.


6 Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Estonia, Spain, France, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, Finland, United Kingdom and Norway.

7 On the basis of data of the first wave (2004–6) of the SHARE-Project (Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe) it appears that Scandinavian countries have the least traditional family structure, whereas Mediterranean countries, in particular Spain and Italy, have the most traditional one: more co-residence and late ages of leaving the parental home among adult children (Moor and Komter, 2008).


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