

KINDERGARTEN CONTROVERSIES: THE CASE OF GENDER THEORY IN ITALIAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

In Italy, gender theory has rapidly infiltrated various corners of public life, including media, education, and political spheres. Its influence manifests increasingly across television, radio, newspapers, the internet, schools, universities, science, and even within political parties. This progressive-liberal framework posits that biological distinctions between men and women are non-existent, instead viewing them as societal constructs. It proposes that individuals' gender identification stems from societal education and that they possess the freedom to not only choose their sexuality but also modify it at will. Gender theory is intricately linked with the concept of gender identity, a nuanced personal understanding some people develop regarding their sexuality. This framework is actively implemented in Italian kindergarten and elementary schools, fostering an inclusive environment where the rights of non-binary, transgender, LGBTQIA+, gender fluid, and queer individuals are not only respected but prioritized. This qualitative research delves into the fundamental question: is gender theory grounded in scientific evidence or is it purely ideological? The research further examines its impact on school children. Findings reveal a complex political ideology within gender theory, one striving to erase any differentiations between men and women. This ideology, steadily spreading across Western Europe, finds backing from powerful entities seeking to reshape the character of Italian and other Western societies. The paper concludes that this ideology will likely have detrimental effects on the well-being of young students and the broader community. Data for this research primarily originated from contemporary Italian news articles, aiming to provide an accurate portrayal of life within Italian kindergarten and elementary schools.

Key words: Gender theory, Italian elementary schools, Progressive-liberal ideology, Social change

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the term “sex” has served as a convenient shorthand for the binary distinction between men and women. However, a shift in perspective emerged in the latter half of the 20th century, spearheaded by scholars like Lévi-Strauss (a French anthropologist and philosopher, 1908-2009) and Foucault (a professor of Human Science, 1926-1984). This shift aimed to differentiate “sex”, rooted in biological attributes, from “gender”, encompassing the complex social and cultural constructions surrounding those attributes. Consequently, gender theory challenges the long-held notion of the family as the cornerstone of society, built upon the presumed naturalness of the male-female union. This paper delves into the multifaceted realm of gender identity, distinct from sexual orientation. Emerging as early as childhood, around ages three and four, gender identity forms a core element of self-perception, independent of sexual desires. It refers to how individuals internalize and express their gender as male, female, a combination of both, or neither. While some individuals experience a stable gender identity, others navigate a more fluid landscape, subject to personal evolution throughout life. Sexual orientation, in contrast, pertains to the direction of one’s romantic and/or physical attraction, manifesting during puberty and encompassing a spectrum ranging from same-sex attraction to non-attraction (Antera, 2023).

The conflation of these two concepts often arises from linguistic nuances, as in Italian where a single term translates to both gender identity and sexuality. Gender theory, however, rejects the rigid binary of male and female, acknowledging the existence of diverse identities that may not map neatly onto biological sex. Similarly, sexual orientation transcends fixed labels, embracing the possibility of evolving attractions throughout a lifetime, influenced by various factors. Notably, the right to experience attraction towards any or all genders, irrespective of personal identification, is fundamental. Sexual fluidity, therefore, does not equate to predetermined categories but rather signifies freedom from rigid categorization, recognizing the dynamic interplay of social, cultural, and individual influences in shaping sexuality (Proietti, 2023). This fluidity is reflected in the evolving language surrounding identity, evidenced by the expansion of the LGBTQIA+ acronym to encompass the myriad experiences beyond the initial LGBT categories. The traditional heterosexuality-bisexuality-homosexuality paradigm no longer fully captures the spectrum of human experience, acknowledging the possibility of individuals embracing diverse attractions over time (Mutino, 2022). Within the overarching domain of gender theory, two distinct currents emerge: political activism and theoretical exploration. The former leverages gender theory as a framework for social change, while the latter delves into the intricacies of sexuality and new experiences that challenge pre-conceived notions of femininity, masculinity, and the very foundation of natural law. It is undeniable

that gender theory carries considerable influence, both through strategic marketing and its impact on educational systems, legal frameworks, and cultural perspectives (Amendolara, 2023). The vocabulary surrounding gender identity has seen a dynamic evolution in recent years, with terms like “cisgender”, “androgynous”, “bigender”, and “non-binary” finding their place in the lexicon. These terms provide nuanced interpretations of individual experiences, enabling recognition of a spectrum that extends beyond the male-female binary. Similarly, “genderfluid” individuals reject fixed categorization, embracing a dynamic sense of self that may encompass elements of both masculinity and femininity, while terms like “genderqueer” and “abrosexual” highlight the fluidity of both gender identity and sexual attraction. Other terms like “agender”, “asexual”, and “polygender” further enrich the tapestry of human experience, offering a language for those who find themselves outside traditional categories (Stefanelli, 2021). Ultimately, gender theory seeks to deconstruct the limited world we have come to know, a world confined to the binary of male and female. By acknowledging the vast array of gender identities and the intricate web of factors that shape them, we open the door to a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of human experience. The outdated binary perspective gives way to a kaleidoscope of identities, enriching our world with its vibrant diversity and challenging us to embrace the multifaceted reality of gender (Hildreth, 2024).

RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS

While gender theory has permeated Italian society, its specific impact on younger students, their cognitive processes, and overall development remains largely unexplored. This research project aims to fill this critical gap by systematically investigating the inclusion of gender theory in elementary school curricula with a focus on student well-being and educational effectiveness. Through a multi-pronged approach, we seek to answer the following fundamental questions:

1. Epistemological Foundations: Is gender theory primarily grounded in scientific evidence, or does it function predominantly as a political ideology shaping the perspectives of young generations?
2. Student Experiences: Does the inclusion of gender theory demonstrably benefit Italian students in terms of cognitive, social, or emotional development?
3. Parental Consent and Engagement: To what extent do parents of students endorse and engage with the inclusion of gender theory in their children's education? Are there concerns regarding potential impacts on student development or well-being?

Scope and Future Directions: While this research focuses on the specific context of Italian elementary students and the educational system, it acknowledges the broader societal implications of gender theory. Future studies could further explore its impact in social, cultural, economic, political, and legal domains, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of its influence on contemporary Italian society.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research takes a multi-faceted approach to analyze the inclusion of gender theory in Italian elementary schools. The study primarily focuses on three key data sources:

Policy Analysis: Examining official documents and guidelines on gender theory issued by the Italian Ministry of Education since their initial implementation.

Field Observations: Attending and directly observing events related to the implementation of gender theory in numerous Italian schools, alongside collecting relevant documentation and materials. This allows for a nuanced understanding of how the theory is translated into practice within educational settings.

Textual Analysis: Analyzing a comprehensive set of newspaper articles published between 2017 and 2024, focusing on their portrayal and discussion of gender theory in schools. This provides insights into public discourse and potential societal impact.

Interdisciplinary Approach: In this research, an interdisciplinary approach is adopted to enrich the analysis of the inclusion of gender theory in Italian elementary schools. Drawing insights from disciplines such as education, sociology, biology, neuropsychiatry, and gender studies, the study aims to offer a holistic understanding of the complex dynamics involved. By incorporating diverse perspectives, the research sheds light on the multifaceted nature of gender theory within the educational context. This interdisciplinary lens allows for a nuanced examination of the societal, cultural, and educational factors that influence the reception and adaptation of gender theory in Italian schools.

Practical Implications: The methodology adopted in this study is not only geared towards contributing to academic discourse but also holds practical implications for educational policymakers, practitioners, and the broader community. By analyzing policy documents, engaging in field observations, and scrutinizing public discourse through textual analysis, the research aims to unearth practical insights that can inform the development and refinement of policies related to gender theory in educational settings. Additionally, the findings provide educators with valuable perspectives on the implementation of gender theory, offering practical recommendations for fostering inclusive and equitable educational environments.

To supplement the primary data sources, the research draws upon several academic books and research papers, exploring various aspects of gender theory. Among them, Judith Butler's “Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity” holds significant influence for its role in introducing the theory to Italy and Western Europe. While acknowledging the richness of existing literature, the selection prioritizes works directly relevant to the research questions.

List of newspapers employed in this paper

Names	Website
Il Giornale	https://www.ilgiornale.it
Mediaset	https://mediasetinfinity.mediaset.it
Il Fatto Quotidiano	https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/
Il Mattino di Padova	https://mattinopadova.gelocal.it/padova/
L'Opinione	https://opinione.it/home/
Dagospia	https://www.dagospia.com/
Antera	https://www.consultorioantera.it/
Bologna Today	https://www.bolognatoday.it/
Le Figaro	https://www.lefigaro.fr/
Secolo d'Italia	https://www.secoloditalia.it/
Universo Scuola	https://www.universoscuola.it/
Unobravo	https://www.unobravo.com/
La Voce della Scuola	https://www.voicedellascuola.it/
TAG 24	https://www.tag24.it/
L'Opinione	https://opinione.it/
Micro Mega	https://www.micromega.net/
Istituto A.T. BECK	https://www.istitutobeck.com/
Vanity Fair	https://www.vanityfair.it/
Fanpage	https://www.fanpage.it/
La Nuova Bussola	https://lanuovabq.it
Il Primato Nazionale	https://www.ilprimatonazionale.it/
Quotidiano Libero	https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/
The New York Times	https://www.nytimes.com/
La Notizia	https://www.lanotiziagiornale.it/
The Wom	https://www.thewom.it/
New Straits Times	https://www.nst.com.my/
State of Mind	https://www.stateofmind.it/
ProVita	https://www.provitaefamiglia.it/
L'Unione Sarda	https://www.unionesarda.it/
Le Devoir	https://www.ledevoir.com/
Scienza in Rete	https://www.scienzainrete.it/
Cirsde	https://www.cirsde.unito.it/
Roma Today	https://www.romatoday.it/

LITERATURE REVIEW

The works cited within this section serve as valuable resources enabling readers to enhance their comprehension and expertise in the particular domains encompassed by gender theory ideology. It is noteworthy that a substantial portion of publications and television programs predominantly align with and endorse gender theory.

However, it is important to recognize that there exists a minority of individuals who perceive, interpret, and critique gender theory as a potentially harmful ideology with adverse consequences for Western societies. These dissenting voices often find themselves branded as fascist, homophobic, and regressive. They are frequently subjected to punitive measures merely for expressing viewpoints that deviate from the ostensibly predominant Western ideological paradigm. Few independent researchers examined the psychophysical consequences on boys and girls when their brain is continuously bombarded by gender theory topics.

Gender Theory in primary and elementary schools has been the subject of scholarly investigation, as evidenced by studies such as *L'educazione di genere tra teoria e prassi: itinerari di ricerca per l'infanzia* (Gender education between theory and practice: Research Itineraries for Children) by Buccini (2020), *Stereotipi di genere e prima infanzia* (Gender Stereotypes and Early Childhood) by Fantin (2022), and *La genderizzazione nei luoghi di apprendimento infantile* (Kids' education) by Garelli et al. (2022). These inquiries delve into the psychological and psychiatric repercussions of imparting gender theory to children. The potential hazards associated with exposing young minds to images, videos, and literature concerning various aspects of sexuality are underscored, as such exposures may pose a significant threat to their mental development. Even engaging in discussions about sex has the potential to impact their overall growth. Determining the appropriate age for individuals to broach discussions within the expansive realm of sexuality is challenging, as each person has their unique timeline. Nevertheless, scientific investigations have revealed the advisability of avoiding discussions related to sex or sexuality before the age of six. While children at an early stage may harbor numerous curiosities about their bodies and sexuality, it does not necessarily signify readiness for open discourse with adults or peers. Medical research has elucidated instances of children experiencing adverse reactions, such as fainting, vomiting, or mental distress when exposed to explicit scenes or discussions about sex. The potential consequences of sharing pictures, videos, or engaging in discourse on these topics with young children may manifest as latent or inconspicuous acts of violence, with serious repercussions in the future. Consequently, school educators, who lack specific medical expertise, should exercise caution and abstain from involving young children in gender theory activities.

Within the expansive field of gender theory, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) stands as a seminal work. It critiques prevailing notions of heteronormativity and the role of gender in contemporary society. This groundbreaking approach has propelled Butler to the forefront of gender studies, not only in Italy but across Western Europe. *Gender Trouble* dismantles the binary construction of man/woman and asserts the social construction of gender. Drawing upon French Theory, specifically the ideas of influential philosophers Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan, alongside psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, Butler challenges the concept of an innate sex characteristic. She asserts that understanding this aspect is not inherent but rather a product of historical processes that engender a diversity of identities. Butler deconstructs the binary framework of man/woman and contends that gender is a socially constructed concept. She poses pivotal inquiries such as: "What does it mean to belong to a specific gender?" and "Is it possible to assign identity solely based on biological sex?" Butler provides negative responses to these questions, underscoring that gender is not limited to a binary system but encompasses numerous possibilities, including those considered anomalous or deviating from socially imposed norms. This perspective opens avenues for fostering inclusivity, advocating for equal rights, and enriching democratic practices. Through its nuanced analysis and critical engagement with established discourses, *Gender Trouble* remains a foundational text for anyone interested in exploring gender, queer theory, and the politics of sexuality.

Giulio Meotti, the author of 2023 *Gender. Il Sesso degli Angeli e l'Oblio dell'Occidente* (Gender. Angels' Sex and the Oblivion of the West), contends that gender is a byproduct of a societal drive to wage a comprehensive war against nature, thereby rendering everything artificial. The suppression of sexual differences between men and women under the pretext that such distinctions represent inequality is seen as an endeavor to construct a new human being liberated from inherent sexuality. Gender theory, in Meotti's perspective, strives to emancipate individuals from any form of constraint. However, he argues that this ideology has transformed into dogma, diminishing freedom of thought and expression as its influence expands. Meotti likens gender ideology to a new religion, complete with dogmas, precepts, rites, adherents, and apostates. Its foundational tenets involve the negation of biological data and sexual differences. Despite the undeniable existence of physical disparities determined by nature, a powerful minority seeks to alter laws and mentalities through ideological discourse. Dissent from this increasingly pervasive ideology results in punishment and demonization. He warns against the emergence of a neo-inquisition, describing it as a dictatorship of a singular thought that undermines the fundamental pillars of our civilization.

Laura Schettini, the author of 2023 *L'ideologia gender è pericolosa* (Gender ideology is dangerous), asserts that Gender theory, owing to its ideological nature, fails to provide students with the opportunity to engage with diverse perspectives and opinions. Within school curricula, emphasis is placed on endorsing the tenets of gender theory, encompassing topics such as rainbow families, same-sex marriages, the aspirations of the transsexual movement, and the lifestyle of the LGBTQIA+ community. The absence of a platform within Italian schools for students to encounter individuals critical of this theory, supportive of so-called traditional values, and engage in open dialogue raises questions about the inclusivity of the educational approach. Teaching that follows a unidirectional approach, wherein only one perspective is emphasized, fails to merit the designation of comprehensive education and contradicts the principles of free and democratic discourse.

Fernando Savater, a distinguished Spanish intellectual, authored the bestselling book *Etica per un Figlio* (Ethics for a Son), published in 2023. Despite his association with the liberal, left-progressive political sphere that advocates for the prominence of gender theory in Europe, Savater posits that Western countries frequently enact new laws to alter the lifestyle of the majority of citizens. In emphasizing the importance of respecting minorities within a liberal democracy, Savater contends that such respect should not come at the cost of undermining the established rights of the majority. He asserts that gender theory is influenced by economic interests and aims to disrupt the existing fabric of society. Savater argues that individuals undergoing sex reassignment treatments essentially become lifelong customers for pharmaceutical companies. Additionally, he raises concerns about relentless advertising campaigns on social media targeting children, portraying sex change as an appealing and fashionable choice.

In Marcello Florita's book *Divenire Genitori e Divenire Figli* (To Become Parents and to Become Children), released in October 2022, the author delves into the legal challenges confronting families with same-sex parents in Italy. Referred to as "rainbow families", these households often resort to legal measures to secure the recognition of their parental rights. They may also seek the intervention of mayors to officially record both parents' names and their children's details, particularly when the children are born abroad through surrogacy. The intricate interplay between surrogacy and same-sex couples, integral to gender theory, will be

scrutinized in an upcoming research paper. Notably, this aspect is sometimes wielded as a political tool by the radical left, exploiting it to criticize the current Italian government through tactics such as disseminating false information. A case in point is The New York Times' erroneous reporting that "Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has instructed municipalities to cease certifying foreign birth certificates for same-sex couples who used surrogacy, leaving some babies in legal limbo" (Horowitz, 2023). Contrary to this claim, both parents of the same sex can be legally recognized, as affirmed by the Court of Rome - Section XVIII, in a verdict dated 11 March 2022 (Tribunale, 2022). The dissemination of such inaccuracies by an internationally renowned US newspaper, lacking both knowledge of the Italian legal system and adherence to proper fact-checking, raises concerns.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

GENDER THEORY: SCIENCE OR IDEOLOGY?

Gender theory poses a direct challenge to established scientific principles. By delineating the distinctions between "sex" and "gender", it becomes uncontroversial to assert that only two sexes exist, supported by comprehensive worldwide biological and neurological studies (Louis 2022, Matteotti 2023, Leone 2018, Osservatorio 2023). In contrast, gender theory suggests the potential identification of numerous genders, possibly numbering in the tens or hundreds, based on subjective, arbitrary, and undefined criteria. This perspective introduces a differentiation between the sex assigned at birth and the gender chosen throughout one's lifetime. According to this viewpoint, the categorization of men and women, or males and females, is not an objectively and scientifically determined reality but rather a consequence of cultural and social construction. Consequently, one's sexual identity is not dictated by nature but is instead solely predicated on subjective perception. Individuals are advocated to possess the freedom to designate their gender in alignment with their perceived identity, guiding their sexuality according to personal instincts and fluctuating impulses, thereby allowing for the adoption of various genders over time. As a result, sexual identity is posited to be determined by gender, rendering the traditional notions of males and females obsolete (Favotto, 2023).

This theory contends that the natural categories of male-female and the dichotomy of man-woman should be discarded as they are fundamentally inadequate in representing the complexities of modern society. Consequently, there is a perceived necessity to deconstruct the concept of nature to transcend a thought system deemed antiquated and irrelevant. To establish scientific credibility for gender theory, an Italian university has instituted a degree program in gender studies, culture, and politics for media communication, intending to explore the framework of the new socio-economic society (Labarile, 2022). This degree program strives to enlighten students about the intricate facets of gender in contemporary society, placing a particular emphasis on legal and philosophical studies.

Gender theory can be viewed as a fundamentalist political ideology, comparable to other ideologies such as Marxism-Leninism, White supremacism, Economic liberalism, American wokeism, Nazi-fascism, Europeanism, No-borders movement, and EU green extremism. This characterization is based on several discernible characteristics: 1) a reluctance to engage in dialectical discourse with opposing viewpoints; 2) an intent to mobilize the masses and alter the existing societal status quo; 3) exclusive support from radical left-wing factions at both national and supranational levels; 4) a tendency to resort to violence to suppress dissenting opinions; and 5) an exacerbation of existing societal divisions, resulting in heightened social resentment and mistrust (Favilli, 2023). While proponents of gender theory assert their commitment to safeguarding LGBTQIA+ individuals, this protection is seemingly contingent on alignment with specific ideological frameworks and affiliation with left-wing political parties. The case of Alessio Bertolacci, a gay member of *Fratelli d'Italia* (an Italian political party), is illustrative, wherein he has faced considerable insults and frequent intimidation due to his conservative political beliefs (Consoli, 2022). Consequently, he has been marginalized by all LGBTQIA+ organizations. It is imperative to acknowledge that not all LGBTQIA+ individuals endorse gender ideology. In Italy, for instance, the artistic drag queen Priscilla vehemently denounced gay marriages and all other aspects of gender theory's agenda, contending that the commercialization of homosexuality is evident, and gay individuals are being treated as commodities (Barnabi, 2022). Conversely, LGBTQIA+ activist organizations and their affiliated left-wing political parties disavow the existence of Gender theory. Educating the younger generations entails fostering respect and comprehension of gender diversity comprehensively.

The scope of Gender theory extends beyond matters of sexuality or personal sexual identities. Instead, it should be perceived as a discipline designed to guide students in rejecting and condemning racism, all forms of intolerance, hate speech, and homophobia. Nonetheless, the educational system should not overlook the field of "gender studies", grounded in scientific principles, which interweave biology with other natural sciences, as well as social and cultural elements. It is noteworthy that in the natural world, numerous species exhibit homosexual behavior, engage in infanticide, and even commit rape, including instances of same-sex interactions. Various animal species demonstrate natural homosexuality, with same-sex couples actively participating in the rearing of their offspring (Turco, 2023). Moreover, sexual orientation is not unequivocal but constitutes an inherent and innate aspect of human existence. Variability exists in different facets of human characteristics, such as height, cholesterol levels, and skin color, encompassing a broad spectrum of possibilities. Homosexuality is a natural phenomenon, akin to the existence of individuals whose gender and gender identity may not align. The concept of gender encompasses two distinct categories, namely male and female, along with a myriad of subtle distinctions leading to diverse behaviors that may vary across cultures or epochs. Given the complexity of the subject, it is both a fundamental right and an obligatory responsibility to ensure the integration of this rationale into educational institutions and society (Pellegrini, 2023).

LGBTQIA+ activist groups, while hesitant to label their beliefs as a genuine "theory", can be justified in such categorization due to two distinct principles underlying their arguments. The primary tenet of gender theory asserts the existence of diverse sexualities, referred to as "biological data", and a distinct gender, termed "psychological data". Cisgender identification occurs when there is a congruence between biological sex and gender. Conversely, a misalignment between biological sex and gender allows

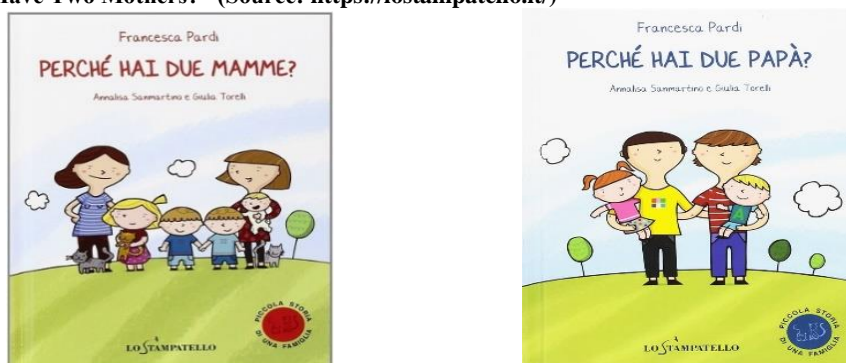
identification as a male woman or a feminine man. The term “normal” is consistently employed in LGBTQIA+ discourses to foster acceptance within the broader population. The second proposition of gender theory contends that individuals can autonomously select their “preferred” or “felt” sexual gender, irrespective of biological factors. However, proponents of gender theory advocate for a paradigm shift, urging society to raise children without imposing gender stereotypes (Tintori, 2023). This approach strives to empower individuals, enabling them to autonomously and freely ascertain their gender identity through an education system that is devoid of gender biases. The LGBTQIA+ community, encompassing both homosexuals and supportive heterosexuals, has noted that when a sizable segment of the population strongly adheres to a particular “theory”, it becomes increasingly challenging to effectively integrate these ideas into educational curricula and shape future societal attitudes. Interestingly, these individuals simultaneously disclaim the existence of gender theory while elucidating its contents. Scientific studies assert that the differentiation between males and females is dictated by the presence of specific chromosomes in each cell, with females possessing XX chromosomes and males having XY chromosomes from conception. These disparities manifest in physical, cerebral, hormonal, and relational variations before any social or environmental influences. Gender theory is strategically employed in politics and various other domains, including elementary and secondary education, by the radical left in their pursuit of “civil rights” and engagements in “equality” battles (Scalea, 2021).

GENDER THEORY AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PUPILS

In 2015, the Italian Ministry of Education implemented directives necessitating the inclusion of gender theory instruction across all educational levels, spanning from primary to secondary school. These directives delineated several objectives: A) cultivating awareness among students, educators, and parents regarding matters of sexuality, sexual orientation, and gender identity; B) promoting the embracement of diversity through the formulation of specific initiatives; C) discouraging the utilization of inappropriate and offensive expressions; D) aiding students in the development of their self-identity; E) recognizing and eradicating ethnic, social, and cultural stereotypes and biases prevalent in mass media, research, and educational materials; F) advancing education, combating all manifestations of discrimination, and nurturing a culture of respect for individual differences (Ministero, 2015). Despite the explicit stipulation in these directives that the teaching of gender ideology should be avoided, empirical observations reveal a contrasting reality. These courses diverge from imparting information on preventing venereal diseases or unwanted pregnancies and, instead, concentrate on subjects such as gender identities, discrimination, and self-stimulation, employing explicit materials. Certain students’ parents have expressed a desire to exempt their children from these instructional sessions. However, their requests have been rebuffed by school administrators who cited the Ministry’s approval of the curriculum, thereby allowing educational institutions to impart knowledge that may not entirely align with the convictions of the parents (Masini, 2015). Following the year 2015, subsequent guidelines issued by the same Ministry demonstrated increased explicitness regarding gender theory, leading to the ascendancy of this ideology (Frullone, 2017). The advocacy for gender theory has gained greater prevalence, necessitating teachers to undergo specific training to seamlessly integrate this theory into their instructional practices. These training sessions are mandatory for all educators working with students aged between three and sixteen. Teachers receive instruction on broaching sensitive topics, such as non-binary identities, gender dysfunctions, and sex-reassignment guidelines, which typically require medical expertise (Bellumori, 2023).

The question arises: how can educators attain such a level of competence without being medical professionals? In their instructional approach, educators are mandated to eschew a solely heteronormative perspective, which presupposes heterosexuality as the norm (see Schettini, 2023).

Figure 1. It illustrates two textbooks widely adopted by elementary schools, titled: “Why Do You Have Two Fathers?” and “Why Do You Have Two Mothers?” (Source: <https://lostampatello.it/>)



Additionally, educators are directed to use specific textbooks that guide them in identifying and combating homophobia while portraying homosexuality on an equal footing with heterosexuality or bisexuality. In various educational institutions, 14-year-old students are mandated to peruse openly gay-themed literature. For instance, *Cibo Supersonico* (Supersonic Food) narrates the tale of the affectionate relationship between two young girls, and *Lo capisce anche un bambino* (A Child Can Understand) depicts a family composed of two married men who became parents through surrogacy. Through these means, young children are exposed to discussions surrounding sexuality and diverse manifestations of love (Valeri, 2023). Selected movies and TV series featuring adolescent same-sex couples (e.g. *Chiamami con il tuo nome*, *Un Professore*, *Estate 85*) are incorporated into extracurricular activities. As a result, some contend that students are exposed to what they interpret as a form of indoctrination (Esposito, 2023).

Another initiative focused on advancing gender theory within public schools is the “LGBTQIA+ Community Dance” program, adopted by various schools

Figure 2. It depicts a six-year-old boy wearing a tutu at school. (Source: <https://lanuovabq.it/it/altro-che-ormoni-e-bimbi-trans-la-colpa-e-degli-adulti>)



In this program, young male students are mandated to attire themselves in female clothing, and vice versa, in the pursuit of fostering gender inclusivity. When some pupils requested exemptions from this performance or some parents wished their children not to participate, the school headmaster informed them that the course was mandatory for everybody, constituting one of the final assessments at the end of the school year (Gauri, 2022). In kindergartens, educational cartoons are oriented towards gender-related themes. An illustrative example is “Peppa Pig”, wherein a young girl is portrayed as having two lesbian mothers, constituting a “special family” that contributes to her happiness. (Pizzimenti, 2022).

Figure 3. It illustrates the well-known educational cartoon “Peppa pig”. Source (<https://www.open.online/2022/09/09/elezioni-politiche-2022-peppa-pig-fdi-rai/>)



Classic children’s tales such as Little Red Riding Hood, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and Cinderella have been omitted from the primary and elementary school curriculum because they are now deemed incongruent with the principles of contemporary society. These tales are perceived to perpetuate unacceptable gender stereotypes, highlight distinctions between males and females, and consistently portray conventional families composed of a man and a woman who naturally conceive children. In contrast, the contemporary societal narrative emphasizes families where parents share the same gender (Boezi, 2024). The issue does not lie in the cartoon itself but in the perceived indoctrination and one-sided educational approach imposed on young students. Proponents of gender theory argue that young children should be exposed to diverse family structures, recognizing that there should be no distinction between families comprising heterosexual or homosexual parents (see Florita, 2022). Consequently, the latter should not be marginalized, with scientific research indicating that same-sex couples can offer exceptional education and protection to their children. They assert that a family is founded on love and respect, acknowledging the existence of various family models in contemporary society (Bertossi, 2023). Nevertheless, when certain parents voiced their apprehensions by signing a petition calling for the removal of the cartoon with a gay-oriented theme, their plea was met with silence, and they were accused of harboring a medieval and obscurantist mindset. In reality, these parental protests seem justified, as it is deemed inappropriate to shape and perplex young minds by conveying the idea that having two mothers is a natural occurrence, which is biologically implausible (Iovane 2022). The only means for two women to conceive a child is through either sperm donation from a third party or artificial insemination. These practices involve the commercialization of human gametes and encroach upon a child’s fundamental right to have a father.

In educational institutions, the use of inclusive language is mandated, and the perpetuation of specific gender stereotypes is prohibited. Consequently, elementary schools adopt posters incorporating the *schwa* - the inverted letter “e” designed to eliminate any reference to masculine or feminine gender, making the Italian language more inclusive towards individuals who do not identify with either male or female sex (Fatone, 2023).

Figure 4: Illustration of a poster, adopted by many elementary schools to welcome young students, featuring an unconventional approach. Instead of the standard Italian greeting “Ciao a tutti” (Hello everybody), the poster incorporates the use of the schwa. (Source: <https://www.valigiablu.it/linguaggio-inclusivo-dibattito/>)



Numerous educational institutions have opted to forego the observance of Father’s Day, traditionally marked on March 19, expressing concerns about potential disrespect to students with two mothers or two fathers. Even in kindergartens, Father’s Day is now deemed “discriminatory” due to the acknowledgment that traditional families, composed of one father and one mother, are not the exclusive family structure.

Figure 5: Illustration of a kindergarten’s announcement about the cancellation of Father's Day at school, made to respect gay parents. (Source: <https://www.butac.it/la-festa-del-papa-abolita/>)



This decision, viewed by some parents as an attempt to undermine a long-standing cultural tradition in favor of a perceived “left-progressive” gender ideology, has sparked disagreement (Mariani, 2023). Conversely, several educational institutions partake in celebrating “skirt day”, a recently introduced festivity in Italy occurring on March 10, just two days after International Women’s Day. During this event, male students are mandated to wear skirts as a symbol of solidarity with women and a stance against discrimination related to homophobia, transphobia, and sexism (Rafaschieri, 2022). Boys are encouraged to play with dolls in numerous elementary schools. The underlying rationale for this initiative is to nurture creativity, instill positive emotions such as empathy, and mitigate perceived notions associated with toxic masculinity (Lombardo, 2022). Additionally, LGBTQIA+ association members are regularly invited to conduct seminars in various schools, delving into topics related to gender theory.

Figure 6: Illustration of a lesson being conducted by a transgender individual in an elementary school. (Source: <https://www.tempi.it/drag-queen-a-scuola-esistono-73-generi-genitori-in-rivolta/>)



School administrators argue that such lessons provide valuable learning experiences and enjoyment for students, while some individuals express dismay at what they perceive as a form of brainwashing. Critics argue that these practices sideline parents from crucial discussions. They contend that conversations on these matters should be entrusted to families or medical professionals, who can address them at an appropriate developmental stage (Palladini, 2023). Presently, Italian educational institutions witness a proliferation of gender theory initiatives, financially endorsed by both governmental allocations and LGBTQIA+ associations. For a comprehensive understanding of the initiatives' scope, locations, participating institutions, and detailed program information, kindly consult the following website: <https://www.provitaefamiglia.it/blog/progetti-gender-nelle-scuole-ecco-il-dossier> (updated 31 December 2023). The integration of gender theory permeates all educational levels, from primary to secondary schooling.

Figure 7: Illustration of the event called “The Unmatched Socks Day”. (Source: <https://www.informatorevigevanese.it/magazine/2023/01/30/news/calzini-spaiati-venerdi-3-febbraio-sara-la-decima-giornata-internazionale-555492/>)



Moreover, consideration must be given to the potential psychological repercussions following participation in *La giornata dei calzini spaiati* (The Unmatched Socks Day), an annual event held in every primary school on the first Friday of February. This event is designed to foster diversity and inclusivity, with students wearing two socks of dissimilar colors, patterns, and fabrics, conveying the notion that rules are non-existent and everything is permissible (Bonomo, 2023). Schools should ideally function as hubs for cultural enrichment and open discourse, rather than platforms where impressionable students in their developmental phases are subjected to indoctrination. Conversations about sexuality ought to be approached from a scientific standpoint, devoid of ideological biases. Furthermore, educational curricula should actively engage and respect the perspectives of students' families, aligning with legal principles outlined in:

- 1) Art. 26, third paragraph, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Parents have the right to choose the kind of education to be given to their children”.
- 2) Art. 2 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: “The State must respect the right of parents to choose, for their children, the best education, according to their religious and philosophical convictions”.

- 3) Art. 30 of the Italian Constitution: “Parents possess both the duty and the right to provide maintenance and education to their children”.

Regrettably, these norms are frequently overlooked, as parents find themselves unable to articulate their perspectives or influence the decisions of school administrators. Conversely, influential LGBTQIA+ lobbies, endowed with political strength, actively seek to disseminate their ideology within public school systems, endeavoring to “re-educate” younger generations. Those who dissent against these lobbies often hesitate to voice their concerns, apprehensive of being stigmatized as regressive or prejudiced individuals and facing potential repercussions. In numerous instances, high school educators have encountered consequences such as suspension, career termination, or more severe penalties for opposing gender ideology. In a notable case from 2023, an elementary school teacher faced a twenty-day suspension for permitting some Catholic students in her class to engage in prayer the day preceding Christmas (Corlazzoli, 2023). Importantly, her actions did not involve religious proselytism or coercion of any students, yet she encountered what appeared to be persecution merely for allowing her pupils to engage in prayer within the classroom. In contemporary society, the prevailing ethos embraces the tolerance of drug use, acknowledges the legal status of same-sex marriages, and recognizes families with same-sex parents. Paradoxically, it remains prohibited for Catholic children to express their faith through prayer within a public school setting (Balsamo, 2023).

A critical examination of the impact on students consistently exposed to this ideology is imperative. Gender theory introduces potential risks to the psycho-physical development of every child and adolescent. The human mind at the ages of six or twelve is not sufficiently equipped to comprehend the intricacies of gender identity, sex reassignment, sexual desires, and related concepts. During adolescence, individuals may experience mental and/or physical disturbances; however, these issues typically resolve naturally with the aging process. Neuro-psychiatry science underscores the uniqueness of each individual’s growth path, emphasizing the importance of allowing it to unfold freely and naturally, devoid of external indoctrination. Adolescents, with a nucleus accumbens twice as developed as that of adults, lack inhibitory signals due to the incomplete development of the cortex in their brains (see Buccini, 2020; Fantin, 2022; Garelli et al., 2022). Gender theory can exert significant effects on adolescents, impacting brain structures, prefrontal cortex thickness, and neuron development, potentially influencing personality (Town, R et al., 2021). Children and adolescents, highly susceptible to influences in their school environment, can have their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors shaped by external pressures (Cimino, 2023). The educational system should not be monopolized by ideology; instead, it should prioritize educators rather than activists (see Meotti, 2023). It should foster discussions on a wide range of topics, including homosexuality, discrimination, violence, respect for others, and integration. However, it is unacceptable for these discussions to be solely focused on:

- A) meetings with prominent figures from the LGBTQIA+ community
- B) reading works by LGBTQIA+ authors (e.g., novels, fairy tales, and cartoons)
- C) exclusively featuring same-sex marriages and rainbow families

CONCLUSION

Gender theory is widely critiqued for its perceived lack of scientific validity, its highly ideological nature, and potential harm. It advocates the notion that gender is exclusively a social construct, proposing that individuals should determine their gender identity based on personal feelings and perceptions. This ideology has proliferated across Western European countries (see Savater, 2023). In France, both public and private schools are mandated to strengthen their partnership programs with prominent LGBTQIA+ associations and amplify cultural and educational events aligned with gender theory principles (Payette 2023, Boilait 2023). In Germany, mandatory gender theory lessons are imposed on students ranging from primary to high school levels. Parents who resist enrolling their children in these classes may confront imprisonment. A recent contentious incident transpired in *Eslohe*, a town situated in the North Rhine-Westphalia region, where a 37-year-old married couple was detained for forty days. The cause of their imprisonment was their daughter’s decision to abstain from participating in gender theory lessons (Della Sala, 2023).

Figure 8: Illustration of the new *Bibbia Queer* (Queer Bible). (Source: <https://www.ibs.it/bibbia-queer-commentario-libro-vari/e/9788810978054>)



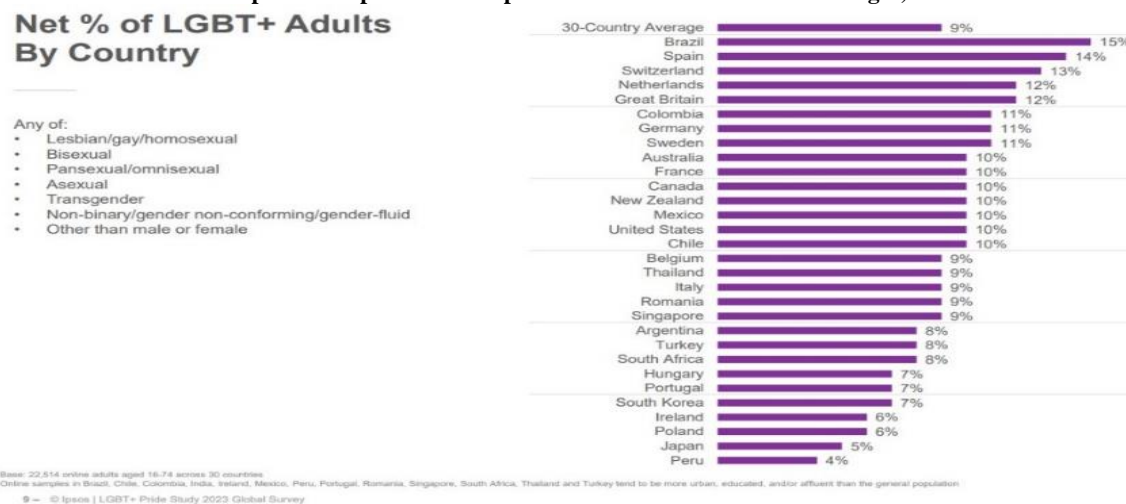
BIBBIA
Queer

UN COMMENTARIO

Gender theory has penetrated numerous facets of Western culture, seeping into domains such as fashion, television programs, political debates, the entertainment industry, art, journalism, and even religion. In December 2023, a “Queer Bible” was released, aiming to reinterpret the Old and New Testaments from an LGBTQIA+ perspective (Caroselli, 2023). Remarkably, there was no extensive protest against this perceived act of blasphemy, considering that it is not deemed a criminal offense in all EU countries. Gender theory is often seen as emblematic of what is termed the “dictatorship of the minority”. Here, the collective interests of the majority are overshadowed by the ideological fervor of a few individuals seeking to impose their doctrines on the broader populace (Paolini, 2023).

Despite the overwhelming and disproportionate media attention given to Gender theory, a recent census, conducted in 2023 across 30 countries on the entire population aged 18 and above, revealed that individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ constitute only 9% of the overall population in Italy (Ipsos, 2023).

Figure 9: Illustration depicting the percentage of LGBTQIA+ adults in Italy and other 29 countries. (Source: <https://www.ipsos.com/it-it/pride-month-2023-italia-comunita-lgbt>)



In a survey conducted in Italy in September 2022 among five million parents of children attending elementary schools, the results revealed that the majority do not support gender theory teaching. Furthermore, they expressed a desire to be informed about any gender theory program, lesson, or event taking place in their children’s school (Noto, 2022).

Table 1. Should parents be granted the authority to determine the method of educating their children about subjects related to sexuality? Here are the outcomes of the survey, conducted in Italy in September 2022. (Source: <https://www.provitaefamiglia.it/blog/gender-sondaggio-pro-vita-famiglia-80-italiani-per-liberta-educativa-prossimo-governo-difenda-famiglia-e-minori>)

ANSWERS	GENDER		AGE		
	MALES %	FEMALES %	18-34 %	35-54 %	55 AND ABOVE %
YES	76	83	74	82	80
NO	11	9	13	9	10
DON'T KNOW	13	8	13	9	10
TOTAL %	100	100	100	100	100

Table 2. Do you believe parents should receive advance notification from school administrators regarding lessons or activities related to sexuality? Here are the results of the same survey, as the one of Table 1. (Source: <https://www.provitaefamiglia.it/blog/gender-sondaggio-pro-vita-famiglia-80-italiani-per-liberta-educativa-prossimo-governo-difenda-famiglia-e-minori>)

ANSWERS	GENDER		AGE		
	MALES %	FEMALES %	18-34 %	35-54 %	55 AND ABOVE %
YES	78	83	71	81	85
NO	15	11	22	13	9
DON'T KNOW	7	6	7	6	6
TOTAL %	100	100	100	100	100

Nevertheless, notwithstanding these statistics, gender theory persists in gaining prominence within schools and society overall. This is primarily due to political and financial backing from European institutions, led by left-wing political forces, whose decisions carry binding implications for all EU countries, including Italy. In 2021, the Parliament declared the European Union an

LGBTQIA+ “Freedom Zone” (Lecoç, 2021). In one of its final sessions in Strasbourg in 2023, it reaffirmed its commitment to recognizing parenthood across all European Union (EU) member states, irrespective of the circumstances surrounding a child’s conception, birth, or the composition of their familial structure. Through this resolution, the European legislative institution unequivocally expressed its political determination to validate the practice of surrogacy, a method frequently employed by married couples comprising two male individuals (Leardi, 2023). It appears that all EU countries have veered away from the concept of “Democracy” and, instead, shifted toward what is colloquially termed “Gendercracy”.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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