

# Italy's Thrusting Gender Theory: Teaching in Schools and Effects on Young Students

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**Abstract:** In recent years, in Italy, the concept known as gender theory has permeated various aspects of public life. It spans across TV, radio, newspapers, media, the Internet, schools, universities, science, and political parties. This ideology, also referred to as progressive-liberal ideology, posits that there are no inherent biological differences between men and women; rather, such differences are considered cultural or socially constructed. The theory suggests individuals identify as male or female based on societal education, and they have the freedom to not only choose their own sexuality but also to change it as desired. Gender theory is closely intertwined with the concept of gender identity, which refers to the intimate self-perception that some people might feel about their sexuality. This topic is now being taught to Italian students attending public elementary and high schools. These institutions aim to cultivate an inclusive environment where the rights of non-binary, transgender, LGBTQIA+, gender fluid, and queer individuals must not only be respected but also given the utmost consideration. Public schools are encouraged to adopt the so-called 'free gender registers,' which allow students to select their own sexual identity. The primary objective of this qualitative research is to investigate whether gender theory is based on scientific evidence or if it is purely ideological. Additionally, the research aims to examine its impact on teachers, students, and their parents. The research draws mainly from current Italian newspaper articles (2017-2023) to provide an accurate portrayal of life in Italian schools and the implications for the Italian educational system.

**Keywords:** Gender theory, ideology, Italy, LGBTQIA+, public schools

## Introduction

Gender encompasses personal identity and sexual orientation. Historically, "sex" denoted the distinctions between men and women. However, since the 1950s, primarily in the United States and Europe, scholars such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, a French anthropologist and philosopher (1908-2009), and Michel Foucault, a professor of Human Science (1926-1984), began to differentiate between "sex" and "gender". "Sex" refers to biological attributes, while "gender" relates to complex mechanisms between men and women. Gender theory seeks to challenge the traditional notion of family as the union between a man and a woman, which has long been considered the fundamental unit of society, as well as the established rules of nature. This research focuses on the theory related to gender identity, which differs from sexual orientation.

Gender identity is one of the earliest factors influencing self-identification in children, typically emerging between the ages of three and four. It is unrelated to one's sexuality. Gender identity refers to how individuals perceive and define themselves as male, female, a combination of both, or neither.

It is not always immutable, but it can be subject to change based on personal experiences (Battaglia, 2022). On the other hand, sexual orientation pertains to one's sexual attraction to others. Only during puberty do individuals begin to experience feelings of sexual attraction, which may be directed towards the same gender, the opposite one, both, or none of them. Therefore, adolescence marks the period when individuals begin to comprehend their sexual orientation and, in this context, we can discuss sexuality. It is a common misconception that gender identity and sexuality are inherently linked. This confusion partly arises from the Italian language, which employs the same word - "sex" - to refer to both gender identity and sexuality (Caputo, 2019). Gender theory rejects the binary division between males and females and posits that numerous gender identities may not align with biological sex.

Sexual orientation does not adhere to rigid frameworks but allows for the possibility of shifting attractions throughout one's life, influenced by various factors such as time, circumstance, and individuals involved. Everyone has the right to feel attraction towards any or all genders, irrespective of his or her self-declared sexual orientation. Sexual fluidity does not equate to being gay, lesbian, or bisexual. In fact, the strength of this definition lies in not categorizing oneself. Sexuality is not fixed but can be shaped by social, cultural, and situational factors. Young people are increasingly rejecting labels when it comes to their sexuality. This is reflected in the expansion of the original acronym for the LGBT community (which stood for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) to LGBTQIA+, the "+" sign encompassing all other gender identities or sexual orientations beyond the previously mentioned categories. The clear distinction between heterosexuality, bisexuality, and homosexuality is no longer prevalent. One can fall in love with a girl today and feel attracted to a man tomorrow. Each individual's choice is unique and cannot be confined to predefined boxes (Giudice, 2023). The expression "sexual identity", which relates to the psychobiological dimension of the human being, should be replaced by "gender identity" which pertains to the sociocultural dimension (Di Iorio, 2022). Every individual possesses sexual variability and self-reference, free from environmental, religious, and sociocultural influences, and is capable of changing multiple times throughout life, based on personal and transient impulses. Therefore, sexuality transcends the limitations of any singular hegemony and gives rise to a sexual pluralism that allows for diverse identities and alternative sexual experiences. The complex realm of gender theory can be divided into two major aspects: political and theoretical elaboration. The former employs gender theory as an ideology for political battles, while the latter involves discourse on sexuality and new experiences that challenge nature's rules and the dichotomy between masculinity and femininity. Gender theory is driven, on one side, by a meticulous commercial and marketing strategy and, on the other side, by its political influence in education, legal frameworks, and cultural perspectives (Avvenire, 2015).

New terms have emerged in recent years to define different gender identities (Saia, 2022). "*Cisessuale*" (Cisgender) is used to describe cases where an individual's biological sex aligns with their gender identity. "*Persone androgine*" (Androgynous) refers to individuals who exhibit elements of both femininity and masculinity in their appearance. "*Binari*" (Bigender) identify themselves with both sexes and can assume male or female roles. "*Non binari*" (Nonbinary) is a term that encompasses individuals who do not exclusively identify as male or female but instead define their gender identity and experiences outside of these binary terms. "*Persone di genere fluido*" (Gender fluid) are those individuals who do not feel exclusively male or female and do not wish to fit into any specific sexual orientation category, be it heterosexual, bisexual, or transgender, as their gender and sexual identity are fluid and constantly evolving. "*Stravaganti*" (Genderqueer) is a term that describes individuals whose gender identity does not always align with their sexual identity. Genderqueer individuals typically reject the notion of fixed gender categories and embrace fluidity in both gender identity and, often but not always, sexual orientation. Those who identify as "genderqueer" may see themselves as both male and female, neither male nor female, or as existing completely outside of these categories. "*Novosessuali*" (Abrosexuals) are individuals who experience fluid and rapidly changing sexualities that fluctuate between different orientations. "*Persone senza genere*" (Agenders) are individuals who do not identify with any gender. "*Asessuati*" (Asexuals) are individuals who do not experience sexual attraction, and asexuality should not be confused with celibacy or sexual abstinence, as it is an inherent orientation. "*Persone bisessuali*" (Bisexuals) experience attraction - sexually, romantically, or emotionally - to individuals of both the same and different genders or gender identities as themselves. "*Demisessuali*" (Demisexuals) are similar to asexual individuals as they do not

experience initial sexual attraction but may develop it once they form a strong (typically romantic) bond with someone. “*Poligenere e pangenera*” (Polygender and pangender) are people who identify themselves with multiple genders. “*Genere onnicomprensivo*” (Omnigender) refers to a person who identifies as and encompasses all genders. “*Persone intersessuali*” (Intergender) individuals possess various genetic/chromosomal, gonadal/hormonal, and/or anatomical sex characteristics that do not align with the typical binary notions of male or female bodies. Finally, the term LGBTQIA+ collectively refers to individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, or asexual. The “Q” can also represent “questioning”, encompassing those who are still exploring their sexuality and/or gender. Gender theory seeks to challenge the world we have known thus far, which has been composed solely of males and females (Cassi, 2022).

Today, it is crucial to acknowledge the diverse nuances of gender identity, which open the doors to a more inclusive and complete world. The outdated binary perspective is counterbalanced by a multitude of individuals belonging to the aforementioned categories (Damiani, 2022). According to gender theory, contemporary society must learn to appreciate and acknowledge the complex world of gender identities, their diverse aspects, and the broad spectrum that extends beyond a simple binary division of men and women. Gender is not synonymous with biological sex, as evidenced by the numerous identities that individuals can possess. Being born with male or female genitalia does not automatically determine a specific gender identity. One thing is biological sex, while another is the gender someone feels to belong to. While some individuals’ gender identities may remain fixed, others may evolve and change over time. Gender theory strives for greater inclusiveness by shedding light on the many facets that constitute the subject of gender. Our world is in constant flux and growth, with the emergence of new terms that empower more people to explore and embrace their identities (Carosi, 2022).

## Research Aims and Questions

While gender theory permeates Italian society comprehensively, a significant aspect remains underexplored: its repercussions on young students, their cognitive processes, and overall development. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct a thorough examination to ascertain whether the inclusion of gender theory in elementary and high school curricula prioritizes the well-being and interests of Italian students. The primary objectives of this study are to investigate the following research inquiries regarding the fundamental nature of gender theory and its incorporation into both public and private educational institutions. The examination aims to discern whether gender theory is underpinned by scientific principles or, conversely, if it merely serves as a political ideology. Thus, the research questions can be expressed as:

- i. Is gender theory rooted in scientific principles, or does it predominantly serve as a political ideology shaping the perspectives of younger generations?
- ii. How do young Italian students experience the impact of gender theory as taught in their schools?
- iii. To what extent do parents of students endorse gender theory as a subject of instruction?
- iv. Does the inclusion of gender theory in the Italian educational system yield discernible benefits?

The scope of this research is limited to the consequences of gender theory on Italian students and the educational system, but future studies could explore its effects in social, cultural, economic, political, and legal contexts.

## Literature Review

There is copious literature on gender theory, mostly advocating for this ideology. Few authors dare to oppose gender theory and they are often accused of being modern fascists and homophobes. After all,

like any ideology worthy of this name, gender theory does not tolerate a different thought and those who profess it are labelled as enemies of progress and societal advancement.

In her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, American philosopher Judith Butler presents a groundbreaking perspective on gender, sexuality, the body, and language. She is widely recognized as a pioneer of gender theory, which has gained popularity not only in Italy but also in other Western European countries. *Gender Trouble* offers a compelling critique of heteronormativity and the role of gender in the modern world. It has become a seminal work in contemporary gender theory and is essential for anyone interested in studying gender, queer theory, or the politics of sexuality. Butler draws on French Theory, particularly the ideas of Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Claude Levi-Strauss, Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, and Monique Wittig. Her thesis challenges the notion that sex is an inherent characteristic and argues that it is a product of historical processes in which various identities emerge. Butler dismantles the binary construction of man/woman and asserts that gender is socially constructed (Nucci, 2014). She raises fundamental questions 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 answers these questions negatively, emphasizing that there are not only two genders but numerous possibilities that encompass those deemed anomalous and/or deviating from imposed social norms. Individual identities are fluid and cannot be reduced to stereotypical models. This perspective presents a challenge that ensures access to rights and fosters the quality of democratic practices.

*God Save the Queer. Catechismo femminista* (God Save the Queer: Feminist Catechism) by Michela Murgia (2022) explores the relationship between the Catholic religion and LGBTQIA+ individuals. The author ponders the question of how to reconcile Catholic faith and feminism. This dilemma also applies to LGBTQIA+ believers and others who find themselves compromising between their conscience and doctrinal precepts, particularly regarding topics such as abortion, euthanasia, and assisted fertilization. Murgia argues that it is indeed possible to believe in God and be a good Catholic while embracing a queer, transsexual, gay, or lesbian lifestyle. Certain teachings of the Gospel need to be reevaluated in the context of a modern society that has undergone significant changes. Murgia suggests that even God, as perceived by Christians, embodies contradictions: divine yet human, singular yet Trinitarian, omnipotent yet sacrificed on the cross. Therefore, human contradictions do not hinder a complete and conscious Christian faith. The author aligns with Michel Foucault’s theory that sexuality is not solely a biological sphere but rather a construct of a patriarchal and closed society. Gender theory emerged precisely to challenge the dominance of heterosexuality (Iannicello, 2022). Murgia considers Jesus as a “queer” Messiah, as Christ did not categorise, or judge people based on their sexual orientation. In recent years, Christians have faced various forms of attack across different sectors of society, ranging from issues related to the family, ethics, and respect for traditions to the delegitimization of Christian symbols (Giubilei, 2022). These attempts aim to undermine the Christian religion at multiple levels and with varying degrees of intensity, from growing instances of Christianophobia to efforts to erase Europe’s Christian roots.

*Il sogno del padre* (The Father’s Dream), a book written by Massimiliano Fiorin in 2022, recounts the story of a man who returns to his hometown in search of an ideal father figure. This father figure, not necessarily his biological father, could impart important life lessons for mental and physical growth. During his journey, Fiorin encounters numerous individuals, both men and women, who are constantly at odds with each other. The book alludes to Friedrich Nietzsche’s prediction of an imminent and ruthless war between the sexes that would engulf European society. It is undeniable that, one hundred and forty years later, such a war has indeed erupted and has become fully manifested, even bloody, throughout the Western world. Its consequences include evident phenomena such as family and social disintegration, widespread psychological distress, collective impoverishment, and, regrettably, physical violence. This ongoing and violent war between the sexes has given rise to a petty world populated by lobbyists and unscrupulous individuals who prioritize their own self-interests. The disintegration of the societal fabric is a result of an alarming ethical void present in too many people, particularly in those who, by societal role, should serve as guides (Sari, 2023).

Samuele Briatore, the author of *Il nuovo galateo di genere* (The New Gender Etiquette), published in 2022, examines real-life situations and highlights the challenges faced by individuals who have come out with their gender identities. Briatore asserts that many people encounter

difficulties and prejudices from friends and family members when revealing their gender identity. The book aims to promote the avoidance of stereotypes and non-inclusive behaviours towards LGBTQIA+ individuals (Mazza, 2022). Coming out and disclosing one's sexual orientation or gender identity is never easy. Sometimes, even friends may struggle to react appropriately, turning what should be a joyful and proud moment into an awkward and complicated one. After enduring a journey often marked by stigma, fears of rejection, and discrimination, one's identity is finally affirmed. In a society that is constantly evolving with new realities and social sensitivities influenced by gender theory, it becomes crucial to know how to behave most appropriately. *Il nuovo galateo di genere* not only seeks to dismantle outdated male chauvinist norms and notions of gallantry, but also promotes inclusivity by providing practical examples and everyday scenarios. The book introduces a new and more inclusive language, offering guidance on what to say and what to avoid when engaging with individuals who are sharing their sexual identity. The following expressions should be avoided in front of someone who is coming out: 1) "I knew it already", which undermines the significance of the moment and makes the person feel like his/her sexuality or gender identity is insignificant. 2) "Are you sure?" implies doubt about the individual's gender identity, suggesting it may not be accepted wholeheartedly. 3) "Your parents will feel terrible". 4) "Have you experienced any trauma?" 5) "I will pray for you". These expressions are offensive, and those who use them appear outdated and regressive. Everyone needs to be aware of the appropriate language to use when interacting with LGBTQIA+ individuals (Zuccari, 2022).

Another book that supports gender theory is *Intersex. Antologia Multidisciplinare* (Intersex. Multidisciplinary Anthology) by Michela Balocchi, published in 2019. The anthology explores the concept of intersexuality and questions the socially recognized sex categories of female and male as being just two among the many sexualities that exist within human beings. Balocchi delves into why intersex people undergo surgical and medical interventions when there are no health issues present and without obtaining a fully informed consent. The book also examines the existence of human rights for intersex individuals. *Intersex* compiles and analyses numerous research studies conducted by various authors across different disciplines who have made groundbreaking contributions to the field. Balocchi acknowledges the crisis faced by the binary model of sex in contemporary biology and genetics, which has given rise to the intersex movement. The book examines the changes in the understanding of human sex by comparing biological data with social realities. Additionally, Balocchi offers reflections on the legal aspects of the rights of intersex individuals.

In *Padri e Figli* (Fathers and Sons) by Mariolina Migliarese, published in 2023, the author explains the importance of the father figure in a child's upbringing using scientific and sociological elements. Migliarese argues that the absence of a father figure negatively impacts the psycho-physical development of a child. This perspective challenges gender theory, which asserts that children can be raised happily and grow up normally even with same-sex parents. The cognitive development of children requires the presence of a male adult who can guide them, impart the ability to understand and balance different perspectives throughout life, and serve as a role model. Children observe their father's behaviour, both positive and negative qualities such as honesty or dishonesty, fidelity or infidelity, and tenacity or discouragement. They also observe how their father interacts with them, their mother, and others, how he speaks about his work, and whether he has interests in literature or sports. They notice whether he contributes to domestic chores or prioritizes his own needs. Furthermore, children observe their father's friendships, how he interacts with others, and how he speaks about them at home. Children absorb and retain these experiences, which serve as references for their own behaviour and choices as they grow older.

Fernando Savater, a prominent Spanish intellectual and former philosophy professor with over thirty years of experience in the Basque region and Madrid, authored the bestselling book *Etica per un figlio* (Ethic for a son), which was published in 2023. Despite being associated with the liberal, left-progressive political sphere that advocates for gender theory to become the dominant ideology in Western European countries that frequently pass new laws that aim to change the lifestyle of the majority of citizens. While respect for minorities is crucial in a liberal democracy, it should not come at the expense of undermining the established rights of the majority. Savater affirms that gender theory is influenced by economic interests and seeks to disrupt society as it currently is. Individuals who undergo sex reassignment treatments become lifelong customers of pharmaceutical companies, and children are subjected to relentless advertising campaigns on social media that present sex change

as an appealing and fashionable choice (Vivaldelli, 2023). Savater strongly criticizes the fervour of LGBTQIA+ associations, who now regard Spain as a “model” for the entire EU world following the passage of the “trans law” by the Spanish Parliament in 2023. This law grants the right to “gender self-determination” to individuals over the age of 16. Spain stands out as one of the few Western countries that allow gender changes on legal documents solely based on self-identification, without requiring the opinion of doctors or parents (Nesi, 2023).

In Nicola Carone’s book *Le famiglie omogenitoriali* (Same-sex Parenthood), published in September 2021, the author explores the legal challenges faced by families with same-sex parents in Italy. Currently, Italy lacks a law regulating the registration of children born to same-sex couples. As a result, “rainbow families” have resorted to legal action to have their parental rights recognized or have sought the intervention of mayors to officially record the names of both parents and their children, particularly when the children were born abroad through surrogacy (Fiechter, 2023). Surrogacy and same-sex couples are important aspects related to gender theory that will be examined in an upcoming research paper. They are often exploited as political tools by the radical left to try to discredit the current Italian government, using tactics such as spreading fake news. For instance, The New York Times falsely reported 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). This claim is entirely untrue, as both parents of the same sex can be legally recognized as such, as confirmed by the Court of Rome - Section XVIII, which handles personal rights, in a decision made on September 9, 2022 (De Santis, 2023). It is concerning that an internationally renowned US newspaper publishes news about the Italian legal system without conducting proper fact-checking.

## Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative research approach, involving the observation and interpretation of the following key elements:

- a. The original formulation of gender theory guidelines by the Italian Ministry of Education over the past years, supplemented by interviews conducted with prominent politicians, scientists, and educators featured on various media platforms.
- b. Events related to the implementation of gender theory in Italian elementary and high schools.
- c. Contemporary newspaper articles, primarily from Italy, spanning the period from 2019 to 2023.

**Table 1.** Newspapers employed in this paper

| Names               | Website   |
|---------------------|---|
| Secolo d'Italia     | <a href="https://www.secoloditalia.it">https://www.secoloditalia.it</a>                     |
| Il Giornale         | <a href="https://www.ilgiornale.it">https://www.ilgiornale.it</a>                           |
| Il Fatto Quotidiano | <a href="https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it">https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it</a>             |
| La Nazione          | <a href="https://www.lanazione.it">https://www.lanazione.it</a>                             |
| Avvenire            | <a href="https://www.avvenire.it">https://www.avvenire.it</a>                               |
| La Repubblica       | <a href="https://www.repubblica.it">https://www.repubblica.it</a>                           |
| Libero Quotidiano   | <a href="https://www.liberoquotidiano.it">https://www.liberoquotidiano.it</a>               |
| Verona Sera         | <a href="https://www.veronasera.it">https://www.veronasera.it</a>                           |
| Nicola Porro        | <a href="https://www.nicolaporro.it">https://www.nicolaporro.it</a>                         |
| Il Manifesto        | <a href="https://ilmanifesto.it">https://ilmanifesto.it</a>                                 |
| The New York Times  | <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/international/">https://www.nytimes.com/international/</a> |

The books referenced in the Literature Review section provide readers with an opportunity to deepen their understanding and knowledge of the specific domains covered by the gender theory ideology. The literature review encompasses eight distinct books, including the 1990s classic *Gender*

*Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, which played a pivotal role in introducing gender theory to Italy and other European countries. While the selection is confined to eight books, it is acknowledged that numerous other engaging and insightful publications have emerged in recent years. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the majority of publications and TV programs tend to support gender theory, even though there are individuals who perceive, interpret, and critique it as a detrimental ideology with adverse consequences for Western societies.

## **Results and Discussion**

### *Gender Theory is Just a Political Ideology and Cannot be Considered a Science*

Gender theory, or gender ideology, directly challenges scientific principles. By distinguishing between the terms “sex” and “gender”, it is uncontroversial to assert that there are only two sexes, as evidenced by worldwide biological studies and exemplified by German biologist Marie-Luise Vollbrecht (Ercolani, 2022). Conversely, gender theory posits that there could be numerous genders, possibly in the tens or hundreds, identified through subjective, arbitrary, and undefined criteria. Its objective is to supplant biology and other related sciences, as acknowledged by Adriana Cavarero, a professor at the University of Verona, Italy (Redazione, 2022). Proponents of gender theory try to use the science of anthropology, philosophy, and psychiatry to affirm that there are more than two sexes, identified as a synonym of gender. They differentiate between the sex assigned at birth and the gender chosen during one’s lifetime. According to this perspective, the distinction between men and women, or males and females, is not an objective and scientifically determined fact, but rather a result of cultural and social construction. Consequently, one’s sexual identity is not determined by nature but is solely based on subjective perception. Individuals should have the freedom to assign themselves a gender that aligns with their perceived identity, directing their sexuality based on personal instincts and fluctuating impulses, allowing for the adoption of various genders over time. Sexual identity would then be determined by gender, rendering the notions of males and females obsolete concerning certain physical attributes, and instead reliant on self-identification. Hence, there would no longer be males or females but only individuals who are free to choose the gender that best suits them (Ruggiano, 2021).

This theory argues that the natural categories of male-female, and the dichotomy of man-woman, should be abandoned because they are substantially unsuitable to represent modern social complexity. Consequently, it is necessary to deconstruct the notion of nature in an attempt to overcome a thought system considered outdated and irrelevant. While this ideology has sociological and legislative implications, it lacks scientific validity. However, expressing this viewpoint is often deemed politically incorrect, and scientists are frequently prevented from presenting their theses in public due to violent protests by organized and politically influential minority groups (Vietti, 2022). To establish scientific credibility for gender theory, the University of Rome “La Sapienza” has introduced a degree program in gender studies, culture, and politics for media communication, aiming to explore the structure of the new socio-economic society (Tomassi, 2022). The purpose of this degree program is to educate students about the intricate aspects of gender in contemporary society, with a focus on law, philosophy, and sociology. One must question whether this program fosters cultural formation or merely reinforces mainstream thinking (Cannone, 2022). Gender theory is essentially a political ideology, akin to other ideologies such as Marxism-Leninism, white supremacism, American wokeism, anti-militarism, anti-feminism, pacifism, Nazi-fascism, Europeanism, illegal mass immigration, and Greta Thunberg’s environmental movement, as it exhibits the following characteristics: 1) it does not tolerate dialectical discourse with opposing viewpoints; 2) it seeks to mobilize the masses and transform the status quo of society; 3) it is exclusively supported by the radical left and not by other political factions at the national and EU levels; 4) it exhibits violence and anti-democratic tendencies by suppressing dissenting opinions; 5) it exacerbates existing divisions, leading to social resentment and mistrust (Ideologia, 2023). Supporters of gender theory claim to protect LGBTQIA+ individuals, but only if they align with ideological frameworks and belong to left-wing political parties. The case of Peter Thiel, the founder of PayPal and a supporter of former US President Donald Trump, is noteworthy, as he has been labelled as “a

man who has sex with other men but not an activist gay” due to his conservative political beliefs (Robiati, 2020). Consequently, he has been ostracized from LGBTQIA+ left-wing political organizations. It is important to recognize that not all LGBTQIA+ individuals endorse gender ideology. In Italy, for instance, renowned drag queen Platinette has criticized gender theory, stating that “homosexuality has become a business” and that “gay people are being commodified” (Oliverio, 2023).

### *Schools’ Gender Theory; Its Effects on Students, Their Parents, and the Educational System*

In 2015, the Italian Ministry of Education introduced guidelines mandating the teaching of gender theory in all schools, from elementary to high school. These guidelines outlined several objectives: A) raising awareness among students, teachers, and parents regarding sexuality, sexual orientation, and gender identity; B) fostering acceptance and embracing diversity through the development of specific projects; C) discouraging the use of improper and offensive expressions; D) assisting students in the process of self-identity formation; E) identifying and eliminating ethnic, social, and cultural stereotypes and prejudices prevalent in mass media, researches, and textbooks; F) promoting education, combating all forms of discrimination, and fostering respect for individual differences. These values are further reinforced by the European Union’s Fundamental Rights Charter, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Discrimination (Ministero, 2015). Despite the explicit statement in these guidelines that gender ideology should not be taught, the reality has unfolded differently, as evidenced by factual observations. In the town of Piacenza since 2015, a school not only adopted textbooks that promote same-sex couples and ridicule traditional mother figures who care for the household and children, but also introduced mandatory courses on “education, sexuality, and affectivity”. These courses did not provide information on how to prevent venereal diseases or unwanted pregnancies, but instead focused on topics such as gender identities, discrimination, and masturbation, utilizing explicit materials. Some parents of students expressed a desire to exempt their children from these courses, but the school headmaster denied their requests, citing that the curriculum had been approved by the Ministry, thereby allowing schools to provide an education that may not align entirely with the parents’ convictions (Massini, 2015). Subsequent guidelines issued by the same Ministry, following the year 2015, displayed even greater explicitness regarding gender theory, resulting in the dominance of this ideology (Frullone, 2017). The promotion of gender theory has become increasingly pervasive, leading to a demand for teachers to undergo specific training on how to incorporate this theory into their teaching. Not only are teachers expected to refrain from insulting or excluding gay students, but they are also required to avoid portraying situations solely from a heteronormative perspective, which assumes heterosexuality as the norm. In addition, teachers are instructed to utilize specific textbooks that teach how to identify and combat homophobia, while portraying homosexuality on an equal footing with heterosexuality or bisexuality. Extracurricular activities are encouraged to be inclusive and “gay-friendly”, offering games where heterosexual students can explore and empathize with the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals, and selected TV series should feature same-sex couples. Consequently, some argue that students are subjected to what they perceive as a form of indoctrination (Curridori, 2017).

Another initiative aimed at promoting gender theory in schools is the program implemented by the Virgilio Institute of Empoli, known as “LGBTQIA+ dance”; male students are required to dress as females, and vice versa, in the name of gender inclusivity. This course is compulsory for all students, including minors, and serves as one of the final assessments at the end of the school year (Leonardi, 2022). Even in kindergartens, educational cartoons are centred on gender themes. One example is “Peppa Pig”, where a young girl is depicted as having two lesbian mothers, a “special family” that brings her happiness (De Vico, 2022). Young children should learn about the existence of diverse family structures, such as rainbow families, and understand that these should not be disregarded (Alberti, 2022). However, when some parents expressed their concerns by signing a petition for the removal of this cartoon (Petizione, 2022), their plea went unanswered, and they were accused of having a medieval obscurantist mindset. In reality, these parents’ protests appear to be well-founded, as it is not appropriate to influence and confuse young children’s minds by leading them to believe that it is natural to have two mothers, which is biologically impossible. The only way for two women

to have a child is through sperm donation from a third party or through artificial insemination. Such practices involve the commodification of human gametes and infringe upon a child's fundamental right to have a father. School textbooks must not include terms deemed "politically incorrect" and should not discriminate based on gender (Peluso, 2022). Inclusive language must always be used, and it is prohibited to perpetuate certain gender stereotypes. Additionally, many proverbs with a long-standing cultural tradition should be abandoned. When the Saint Louis School in Milan decided to introduce LGBTQIA+ topics to students over the age of eleven and discussions on gender identity to students over the age of fourteen, some school principals refused to comply with these guidelines because they believed that education should not be limited by students' age (Bernacchia, 2023). Even private schools, which have independent control over their curriculum, are not free to design their educational programs. The Marconi School in Florence, for example, adopted so-called "cultural programs", organized and promoted by the "Queer Community Self-Managed Center" association, where boys are assigned female roles and vice versa. Some parents at this school argued that these "sexually sensitive" projects inflict unbearable psychological harm on children as young as eight years old (Baldi, 2020). Introducing gender-related topics to eight-year-olds in a school setting is considered highly inappropriate. Discussions on such subjects should be left to the families, who can address them when the time is deemed appropriate. Glossaries designed for nine-year-olds contain questions and answers regarding gender identity and sex education. They aim to explain the meanings of specific terms like cisgender, non-binary, genderqueer, transgender, gender fluid, and gender neutral. However, these glossaries also include ideological phrases such as "you do not have to feel male or female now, you will choose once you have grown up, without being influenced by society's stereotypes" (Barlozzari, 2022). This presents a significant issue as these glossaries for underage students promote and spread unscientific theories, which can have dangerous effects worldwide. In numerous schools, 14-year-old students are required to read openly gay-themed books. For example, John Boyne's *My Brother's Name is Jessica* portrays a minor undergoing sex change surgery, and Melania Mazzucco's *You Are as You Are* revolves around a homosexual relationship between two soccer players. Through these means, young children are exposed to topics of sexuality and different forms of love (Perrotta, 2022). Unfortunately, in such cases, the opinions of parents who disagreed with these initiatives were disregarded. At Monza's "Zucchi" High School, some male students, advocating for gender equality and gender fluidity, attended school wearing skirts. Surprisingly, the teachers and headmaster praised this initiative (Corlazzoli, 2021). The situation at Zucchi High School was not an isolated case, but rather exemplified a fundamental concept of gender theory: the belief that sexes do not exist, and that sex is an individual's autonomous and fluid construct (Franza, 2021). On November 5, 2021, eighty male students from Milan's "Bottoni" High School attended classes dressed as females, as gender theory promotes the freedom to choose one's attire. Nowadays, skirts are considered "unisex", and it is common to see men wearing them and other gender-neutral garments during prestigious fashion shows by brands like Armani, Gucci, and Jean Paul Gaultier. However, on that occasion, a history teacher sent the boys back home after observing their attire, deeming it indecent. Unfortunately, the poor fellow faced suspension for going against the teachings of gender theory. This serves as an example of a school that claims to be democratic and respectful but punishes a teacher for seeking decorum and decency (Parise, 2021). Many schools have chosen to cancel the celebration of Father's Day, traditionally observed on March 19, due to concerns that it may be disrespectful to students who have two mothers or two fathers as parents. In one of Viareggio's kindergartens, Father's Day was labelled as "discriminatory" because traditional families (consisting of one father and one mother) are no longer the only structure (Leardi, 2023). Today, there are "rainbow families" that must be respected and protected (Palumbo, 2023). Many parents did not appreciate or agree with this decision, as they saw it as an attempt to erase a centuries-old culture in favour of a concerning "left-progressive" gender ideology (Garau, 2023). The concept of gender theory has allowed schools to implement "gender-free registers" or career alias, which enable students to register with the name and gender of their choice, disregarding their biological sex (Imperiali, 2022). Advocates for the rights of transgender individuals argue that gender-free registers are crucial for respecting and promoting personal gender identity. Supporters of gender theory cite legal backing for career aliases in the Student Statute of June 24, 1998, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the European Parliament Resolution on Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity of September 28, 2011, and the Council of Europe's deliberation on the promotion and protection of

LGBTQIA+ rights on June 24, 2013 (Buscaglia, 2023). Currently, over two hundred schools, forty-five universities, and numerous businesses have adopted gender-free registers as an important tool to safeguard and support young transgender individuals (Veli, 2023). In certain Italian schools, the ideology of gender neutrality has led to the introduction of so-called “neutral” or “genderless” bathrooms. These restrooms are not labelled for males or females, allowing all students to use them without distinction. Italian schools align with the prevailing belief that eliminating gender is necessary to prevent discrimination. They strive to be inclusive and embrace all forms of diversity, acknowledging that some individuals may not identify with the gender assigned to them at birth based on biological sex (Mariani, 2023). Currently, there are numerous gender theory projects in Italian schools, often financially supported by government funds or LGBTQIA+ associations. To obtain information about the extent, locations, participating schools, and offerings of these projects, please visit the following website: <https://www.provitaefamiglia.it/blog/progetti-gender-nelle-scuole-ecco-il-dossier> (updated March 2023). Gender theory has become prevalent in all schools, ranging from primary to high school. It is crucial to investigate the effects on students who are constantly exposed to these messages. How can children under the age of ten comprehend complex concepts like gender identity, sex change, and hormonal disorders? What traumas might they experience as a result of a program that celebrates events like *La giornata dei calzini spaiati* (Unmatched Socks Day) every first of February, aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion? This event was initially introduced in a primary school in Friuli Venezia Giulia in 2010 and is now observed in many schools across the country (Scognamiglio, 2023). Young children are encouraged to wear two socks of different colours, patterns, and fabrics, creating the impression that rules do not exist and that everything is allowed. Schools should serve as centres for cultural development and open discussions, rather than places where young students in their formative stages are indoctrinated. Discussions about sexuality should be approached from a scientific perspective, free from ideological biases. Additionally, school programs should involve and consider the opinions of students’ families, in accordance with the following legal principles:

- a. 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”;
- b. art. 2 of the European Convention on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “The State must respect the right of parents to choose, for their children, the best education, according to their religious and philosophical convictions”;
- c. art. 30 of the Italian Constitution: “It is the duty and right of parents to maintain and educate their children”.
- d. 2010’s Council of Europe Ministers’ Recommendation, which explicitly urges Member States to “take into account the right of parents to take care of their children’s education”.

Unfortunately, these norms are often disregarded, as parents are unable to voice their opinions or influence decisions made by school administrators. On the other hand, influential and politically strong LGBTQIA+ lobbies seek to propagate their ideology in schools, aiming to “re-educate” the younger generations. Those who oppose these lobbies often hesitate to voice their concerns, fearing being labelled as retrogressive or bigoted individuals or facing potential sanctions. Several high school teachers have faced suspension, dismissal, or even worse, for opposing gender ideology.

In 2022, a high school teacher was arrested because he refused to use a name for one of his students that did not correspond to his biological sex (Di Vito, 2022). In 2023, an elementary school teacher was suspended for twenty days after granting permission to some Catholic children in her class to recite the Ave Maria and the Pater Noster the day before Christmas (Zoccheddu, 2023). She did not engage in religious proselytism or coerce any children, yet she faced what seemed like persecution for allowing her pupils to pray in the classroom. We live in a world where drugs are accepted, same-sex marriages are legal, and children can have same-sex parents, yet it is forbidden for Catholic children to say a prayer in school (Sgarbi, 2023). Piergiorgio Dellagiulia, a high school teacher in Bra (Cuneo), was fired after sixteen years of teaching for expressing his personal opinion about the rights of homosexuals on Facebook (Guzzo, 2021). It is not coincidental that an increasing number of teachers wish to leave their profession because it is truly demeaning to carry out their educational duties under the constant threat of severe sanctions if they do not conform to the dictates

of gender ideology (Intravaia, 2023). It poses a risk to the psycho-physical development of every child and adolescent. At the age of six or fourteen, the human mind is not yet equipped to comprehend the complexities of gender identity, sex reassignment, sexual desires, and similar concepts. During adolescence, mental and/or physical disturbances may arise, but they often dissipate with age. Neuropsychiatry science teaches us that each individual has a unique growth path, which should be allowed to develop freely and naturally, without external indoctrination. Young people have a nucleus accumbens that is twice as developed as that of adults, and they lack inhibitory signals because the cortex of their brains is not yet fully developed. Gender theory can have significant effects on adolescents such as altering their brain structures, the thickness of their prefrontal cortex, and influencing the development of their neurons, which can impact their personality. Children and adolescents are highly susceptible to influence from their school environment, which can shape their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. Although they may have their own opinions, they are easily swayed by external pressures (Montemurro, 2022). Often, to conform to school trends, they may adopt dangerous and self-destructive behaviours, such as self-inflicted “French scars” (Delfino, 2023), taking antihistamines without medical supervision to achieve a thin physique and slim waistline (Damiata, 2023), or engaging in perilous challenges like the “planking challenge” (Fiorentino, 2022).

The Italian school system, heavily influenced by gender theory, fails to provide students with a well-rounded education because it restricts open debates. It is influenced by certain left-wing political parties that seek to proselytize. The educational system should not be monopolized by ideology; instead, it should prioritize educators rather than activists. 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
- d. organizing “gender swap” days, dedicated to role reversals
- e. promoting methods of changing one’s sex

## **Conclusion**

Gender theory is widely regarded as lacking scientific validity, being highly ideological, and potentially harmful. It promotes the idea that gender is solely a social construct and suggests that individuals should determine their own gender identity based on personal feelings and perceptions. Advocates of Gender theory often refuse to engage in discussions with those who hold different viewpoints and label anyone who challenges their ideas as homophobic. This moral and social imposition can have a significant impact on children and young people who are still developing their critical thinking abilities. The most extreme manifestations of this theory involve administering drugs to prepubescent children to delay their growth until they can choose their gender. Gender theory has permeated various aspects of Western culture, including fashion, television programs, political debates, the entertainment industry, art, and journalism. Gender Theory epitomizes what is referred to as the “dictatorship of the minority”. While a liberal democracy recognizes and protects the rights of minorities, it does not grant them the authority to disrupt the balance and security of society. As Sallusti (2023) argues, this “dictatorship of the minority” asserts rights solely in its own interest and imposes its principles on a society that does not share the same values. Consequently, the “dictatorship of the minority” is more disdainful than the lack of respect shown towards minorities. Contemporary European Western society demands that everything be regulated according to the interests of minorities, from sexual behaviour to literary preferences, communication styles, clothing choices, writing styles, dietary habits, and even child-rearing practices. The collective interests of the majority are supplanted by the ideological fanaticism of a few individuals seeking to impose their dogmas on everyone else. Despite the overwhelming and disproportionate media attention given to Gender theory, a recent census, conducted in 2021 on the entire Italian population aged 16 and above, revealed that individuals who identify as “transgender”, “queer”, “nonbinary” or “gender fluid” constitute a very small minority (Vivaldelli, 2023).

**Table 2.** Results of a census conducted in Italy in 2021 on the entire population aged 16 and above

| <b>First Question:</b> Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?                  |      |
|--|------|
| RESPONSES  | %    |
| A) Straight/Heterosexual   | 89.4 |
| B) Gay or Lesbian  | 3.2  |
| C) Bisexual  | 1.3  |
| D) Other (with the option to write in a response)  | 0.3  |
| <b>Second Question:</b> Does the gender you identify with align with your sex assigned at birth?       |      |
| RESPONSES  | %    |
| A) Yes   | 93.5 |
| B) No (with the option to then write in the term that best described the respondent's gender identity) | 0.5  |

A survey conducted in 2022 among two million parents of children attending Italian schools revealed the following results (Curridori, 2022).

**Table 3.** Results of a survey conducted in 2022 among two million parents of children attending Italian schools

| <b>First Question:</b> Do you agree with teaching gender theory?  |    |
|---|----|
| RESPONSES   | %  |
| A) Yes  | 32 |
| B) No   | 48 |
| <b>Second Question:</b> Should parents be the primary source of education regarding sexuality for their children? |    |
| RESPONSES   | %  |
| A) Yes  | 79 |
| B) No   | 12 |

These findings indicate that the majority of parents do not support LGBTQIA+ courses and other initiatives implemented in schools. However, despite these statistics, gender theory continues to gain prominence in schools and society at large. Moreover, it receives sponsorship from European institutions, whose decisions are binding for EU countries, including Italy. In 2021, the European Parliament declared that the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals fall within the protected human rights category, and all EU countries must become “LGBTIQIA+ Freedom Zones” (Parliament, 2021). The European Parliament also appointed an LGBTQIA+ ambassador who introduced the concept of the “transgender Virgin Mary” as a new representation and celebration of Christmas (Zurlo, 2021). The following year, the Council of Europe ruled in favour of facilitating sex changes for both adults and minors and eliminating gender specification (male or female) on official documents (Galici, 2022). Each year, the European Commission allocates €500 million to finance numerous pro-LGBTQIA+ projects (Aloisi, 2018). Additionally, it promotes Gender theory in schools through the European Network of Young Advisors (Delli Colli, 2023).

In 2022, the European Commission declared that same-sex parents and their children should be recognized as families by all EU member states (D'Ascenzo, 2022). Furthermore, in the same year, the European Commission filed a lawsuit against Hungary in the EU Court of Justice because this country passed a law in 2021 that prohibited the dissemination of topics and images related to pornography, gender reassignment, and homosexuality in Hungarian schools attended by minors. The President of the European Commission deemed this law “shameful” as it infringes upon the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals and contradicts the values of the European Union (Pons, 2023). Italy and Europe appear to be moving towards a state of “Gendercracy” which stands in contrast to true

“Democracy”. However, many prominent figures in the Western world now demonstrate support and compliance with Gender theory issues to be perceived as “modern” and in tune with the times. The recent coronation of HM Charles III and HM the Queen consort, held at Westminster Abbey on May 6, 2023, symbolized inclusivity, with an LGBTQIA+ choir delivering a performance (Rossi, 2023).

## 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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