

Education as a Field of Contention: Feminist and Anti-gender Struggles over Democracy

Giada Bonu Rosenkranz, Anna Lavizzari

Education as a Field of Contention: Feminist and Anti-gender Struggles over Democracy

Giada Bonu Rosenkranz ^{1,*} and Anna Lavizzari²

This article examines education as a contentious field where feminist movements and anti-gender actors in Italy clash over the role of sexuality education. Feminists advocate for educational reforms to dismantle gender stereotypes and promote equality, framing education as a cornerstone of democratic principles and human rights. Conversely, anti-gender actors portray such initiatives as an imposition of “gender ideology,” threatening traditional family structures and moral values. Drawing on Critical Frame Analysis, this study analyzes the competing narratives employed by feminist and anti-gender actors, highlighting their divergent views on the role of state intervention, the relationship between democracy and family, and the interpretation of gender. Overall, the article argues about competing discourses on sexuality education as crucial factors that reshape democratic governance, and that sexuality education embeds larger cultural and social implications which can either enhance or undermine democracy.

Key words: sexuality education; anti-gender politics; feminist movements; democracy; Italy.

Introduction

As a cornerstone of socialization, education shapes values, norms, and identities, offering significant potential for both challenging and perpetuating societal inequalities. Sexuality education has historically been at the center of controversial debates regarding when it should begin, its content, whether it should be taught to children and who should be responsible for delivering it (Robinson, Smith, and Davies 2017; Venegas 2025). From a pedagogical perspective, it

¹Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Scuola Normale Superiore, Palazzo Strozzi, Piazza Strozzi, 50123 Florence, Italy

²Departamento de Ciencia Política y Adm., Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociología, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Campus de Somosaguas, 28223 Pozuelo de Alarcón, Madrid, Spain

*Corresponding author: Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Scuola Normale Superiore, Palazzo Strozzi, Piazza Strozzi, 50123 Florence, Italy. Email: giada.bonu@sns.it

implies an holistic approach which focuses on the biological aspects of sexuality, reproductive health, prevention of sexually transmitted infections, and development of personal skills related to sexual well-being, along with initiatives aimed at addressing societal norms related to gender, promoting gender equality, and challenging stereotypes (Selmi and Tamanini 2012).¹ In line with this conception, feminist movements advocate that education represents a transformative space to dismantle patriarchal structures and promote gender equality through comprehensive sexuality education (Shrewsbury 1987; Weiler 2010). Conversely, anti-gender forces view education as a vulnerable arena for contesting progressive reforms, framing sexuality education as a threat to traditional family values and moral integrity (Kuhar and Zobec 2017). This duality underscores the centrality of education as a field of contention, where divergent visions of the social and cultural order collide. At its core, the contention is not only about education policies but is fundamentally tied to different conceptions of democratic principles, spilling over into fundamental societal debates concerning the construction of national identity, family structures, and the politics of reproduction. Crucially, it is about diverging visions of the future society.

Existing research has documented the opposition of anti-gender movements to sexuality education (Trappolin and Gusmeroli 2021; Kuhar and Zobec 2017; Smrdelj and Kuhar 2025). This opposition rests on the claim that sexuality education would introduce “gender ideology” into schools, posing a significant danger to children through indoctrination and hypersexualization. In contrast, several studies explore feminist perspectives on education as a site of inclusion and for the dismantling of existing gender inequalities (Acker 1987; Arnot and Dillabough 1999; Lenskyj 1990; Selmi 2015; Wrigley 2003). However, less attention has been given to feminist resistance against the recent and continuous anti-gender attacks on sexuality education (Smrdelj and Kuhar 2025; Verge 2025), and how anti-gender actors engage with feminist movements in shaping policy debates over sexuality education (Dalmaso-Junqueira and Moeller 2024). While prior literature analyses education policies from either a feminist or anti-gender perspective, it often remains siloed and seldom investigates how these discourses interact, and the implications of these framing struggles for democratic governance.

This research aims to fill this gap by offering a processual and relational analysis of how feminist and anti-gender actors construct, contest, and transform the debate on sexuality education. Building on Venegas’s (2022) argument that anti-gender actors ultimately seek not only to undermine gender equality policy but also to erode democracy itself, the article examines these struggles by simultaneously considering both sides of the debate and grounding its analysis in the policy development of sexuality education in Italy. It aims to contribute to these debates through two key research questions: how do feminist movements and anti-gender actors frame their arguments for and against the introduction of sexuality education in Italian schools? And, what

do these competing framings reveal about broader ideological and political struggles over democracy, equality, and social change?

Analytically, we operate on two levels. First, we reconstruct the competing frames deployed by the opposing actors, each offering their own understanding of sexuality education and vision of democracy. Second, we engage normatively with these framings to assess their implications for democratic governance. While feminist actors appeal to pluralism, inclusion, and equality as democratic ideals within and through sexuality education, anti-gender actors mobilize a counter-rhetoric that centers parental authority and natural law within a democratic register.

The article is structured as follows. The first section reviews the literature on feminist and anti-gender engagements in the field of education, elucidating its contentious nature. It then presents our case selection, method, procedures for data collection, and application of Critical Frame Analysis (CFA) to analyze competing discourses. The subsequent sections present and discuss the main findings, focusing on the framing strategies of feminist and anti-gender actors and the implications for gender equality and democratic principles.

Sexuality education as a field of contention

As Dewey argues, “the devotion of democracy to education is a familiar fact” (Dewey 2024, 171). The relationship between education and democracy has long been a central concern in academic debates, emphasizing the fundamental role of education in sustaining and advancing democratic systems (Arthur, Hahn, and Davies 2008; Benadusi, Viteritti, and Piromalli 2019). In democratic settings, education is not merely a means of individual advancement but a collective mechanism for fostering critical thinking, civic engagement, and participatory citizenship (Apple 2018; Arnot 1991; Brown 2004). As an example, in Italy, the principle of education as a means to dismantle social inequality and progress equitable society is enshrined in the national constitution (Selmi 2015). However, education and public schools often reflect and perpetuate existing societal inequalities (Buchmann, DiPrete, and McDaniel 2008; Lupien 2022). Scholars have highlighted how educational systems can reinforce social stratification, privilege, and discrimination (Sadovnik and Semel 2010).

Central to contemporary democratic frameworks are principles of gender equality, human rights, and nondiscrimination. Education plays a pivotal role in advancing these pillars by addressing the systemic structures that sustain inequality (Aikman and Unterhalter 2005; Wrigley 2003), challenging oppressive social structures, dismantling harmful stereotypes, and fostering individual and collective empowerment. Sexuality education thus helps individuals to develop their physical and mental health and their well-being, to explore and maintain relationships based on consent and respect, and to connect with

their own self in order to pursue informed choices about their lives (Selverstone 1991). This type of education inextricably leads to reshaping gender norms, which are often considered as a field of domination where prevailing models of hegemonic masculinities are opposed to subordinated forms of femininity (McClain 2006). As an ultimate goal, sexuality education prefigures future citizens who are able to challenge existing power structures, when they are harmful or perpetuate discrimination. In their article, Gilliam and Gulløv (2024) utilize Norbert Elias's theory of civilizing processes to examine how societies invest hopes, fears, and ideals in children, viewing them as embodiments of future societal potential. They argue that these investments reflect deep-seated cultural norms and societal anxieties.

For these reasons, sexuality education emerges as a field of contention in which multiple narratives collide. To understand these debates, several aspects should be considered. First of all, that the moral panic (Morán Faúndes 2019; Robinson 2020; Svatonova 2021) surrounding the diffusion of sexuality education is often linked to the aforementioned idea of children as embodiments of future societal potential. As a result, control over children's education becomes a means of shaping the prefigured society—either one that fosters greater equity and challenges existing power structures or one that seeks to preserve the status quo. Second, these debates center on the role of state intervention and the family, specifically the extent to which the state is legitimized in influencing socialization processes, particularly in relation to gender and sexuality—an area that anti-gender actors argue should remain a strictly private matter. Third, and most fundamentally, these debates ultimately pertain to democratic governance, raising the question of whether public schools, as institutions of democratic participation, should actively promote antidiscrimination principles and social equity or should instead restrict their role to providing basic educational tools without engaging in larger societal transformations.

In the following sections, the article will delve deeper into the existing literature on feminist perspectives on sexuality education and on opposition to sexuality education in anti-gender campaigns.

Feminist movements' fight for sexuality education

Feminist movements—both globally and in Italy—have always focused on sexuality, the body, and affective interactions (Bracke 2012, 2014; Firestone 2015; Friedan 2013; Melandri 2000; Percovich 2005; Taylor and Zald 2010; The Boston Women Collective 1973). Their activism and scholarship significantly shaped international milestones such as the 1995 Beijing Conference, where gender was officially adopted as a policy framework at the UN level (Moser and Moser 2005; Scott 2010). Building on these foundations, feminist perspectives have identified education as a key site where gender norms are either reinforced or contested (Acker 1987; Arnot and Dillabough 1999; Irvine 2004; Selmi 2015). In particular, sexuality education is viewed as a

transformative tool to challenge oppressive socialization processes and promote critical awareness of power in both intimate and institutional contexts (Melandri 2020).

Feminist movements advocate for gender and diversity education with a threefold aim. On the one hand, education serves to acquire a comprehensive understanding of sexuality, the human body, and interpersonal dynamics by providing information about sexually transmitted illnesses, contraception, and consent (Allen 2004; Lenskyj 1990). On the other hand, it serves to modify gender socialization, which entails altering the societal expectations and standards that dictate feminine and masculine behaviors, typically characterized by rigid and discriminating attributions (Acker 1987; Gamberi, Maio, and Selmi 2010). Furthermore, it is crucial to promote and enhance awareness of consent as a fundamental aspect of interpersonal relationships in the intimate and emotional realm (Carmody 2006; Connell and Elliott 2009; Lemke and Rogers 2020).

Moreover, feminist movements have historically advocated for inclusive and comprehensive sexuality education policies as a means of democratizing both intimate and public life (Acker 1987; Arnot and Dillabough 1999; Lenskyj 1990). This entails not only challenging traditional gender roles but also addressing the structural inequalities that shape access to sexual and reproductive rights (Aikman and Unterhalter 2005; Buchmann, DiPrete, and McDaniel 2008). By integrating discussions on sexual citizenship, feminist educators seek to foster a more equitable society in which individuals have the knowledge and agency to navigate relationships, challenge discrimination, and participate fully in democratic life (Selmi 2015).

Despite extensive reflection on sexuality education, Italian feminist groups have yet to achieve legislation explicitly implementing such education in schools (Colombo and Salmieri 2020). In addition to sporadic policy measures, which provide a weak institutional foundation for the numerous but uncertain attempts to implement sexuality education initiatives in schools from grassroots efforts, the absence of legislation has allowed the anti-gender movement to thrive. In fact, anti-gender actors have successfully hindered even the limited number of existing projects on sexuality education in Italy.

Opposition to sexuality education in anti-gender campaigns

In the years since the 2010s, campaigns voicing opposition to “gender” have emerged simultaneously across European countries and around the world (Ahrens et al. 2018; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Roggeband and Krizsán 2018). These campaigns target “gender ideology,” which refers to “an ideological matrix of the different reforms they try to oppose, which pertain to intimate/sexual citizenship debates, including LGBT rights, reproductive rights, and sex and gender education” (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017, 8). These mobilizations also respond to attempts at introducing policy reforms in the realms of human rights, gender equality, and gender diversity norms,

promoted internationally, particularly by the UN, and subsequently at the national level (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017). In this context, the field of education has become one of the most significant arenas in which anti-gender movements have waged their campaigns.

In this field, anti-gender movements advance three core claims: that sexuality education sexualizes children, threatens gender identity by undermining binary norms, and aims to dismantle the traditional family's primacy in education—often using moral panic and fear-based rhetoric to mobilize opposition (Herdt 2009; Robinson 2020; Trappolin and Gusmeroli 2021; Venegas 2022). As mentioned in the introduction, all these claims extend beyond education policy and engage with core democratic principles such as freedom, equality, and state intervention. Research has shown how anti-gender actors often interpret democracy through a majoritarian lens, while making use of a “flipped victimization” logic (Corredor 2021; Lavizzari 2024), arguing that education policies—and all public policies—should reflect the values of the “moral majority” rather than those of a privileged minority (i.e. LGBTQ+). According to this view, pro-gender policies such as sexuality education would be the result of a top-down imposition by the state, or other foreign entities such as the UN or the European Union, rather than democratic expressions of equality (Graff and Korolczuk 2022). In a similar vein, anti-gender actors emphasize freedom in education debates as paramount, arguing that parental rights should be guaranteed to have control over children's sexuality education (Donà and Bellè 2022). This type of argument aligns with a libertarian and neoliberal critique of the state as responsible to ensure equality for all citizens, advocating instead for minimal state intervention (Lavizzari and Pirro 2024). Studies on anti-gender campaigns have also emphasized how these actors appropriate the language of human rights in a selective way, distorting its meaning (Alekseev 2021; Sosa 2021). In the realm of education policies, for instance, it is argued that morally conservative views should be protected under freedom of belief, and that anti-discrimination laws—such as the legal provisions promoting diversity or penalizing hate speech—infringe on individual freedom of opinion and freedom of speech (Dietze and Roth 2020; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Montecchio 2024).

Consequently, various protests have been organized by groups of “concerned parents” against the alleged infringement of their freedom to educate their children in line with their moral, philosophical, and religious beliefs. Research on anti-gender campaigns in Europe has identified three main forms of action to oppose the implementation of sexuality education in schools (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017 cited in Kuhar and Zobec, 2017, 37): “(1) general protests against sexuality education, (2) denunciation of certain textbooks as promoting ‘gender ideology,’ and (3) organized mass protests to keep children home from school” (see Kuhar and Paternotte 2017 for different national examples). More recently, in Italy and elsewhere, legislative proposals for the mandatory use of parental consent have been introduced to effectively

monitor, block, and discourage the teaching of sexuality education activities in schools.

Case selection, data, and method

While the first introduction of sexuality education dates back to the 1950s in Sweden, it gained momentum in the 1970s and 1980s across Western Europe and expanded further in the 1990s and 2000s. International bodies such as the UN, WHO, and UNESCO have been pivotal in shaping the guiding principles for sexuality education. Documents such as the WHO's *Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe* (2010) and UNESCO's *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* (2018) have established comprehensive frameworks, although the European Union itself lacks direct competency in education, leaving implementation to individual member states (Michielsen and Ivanova 2022).

Despite widespread adoption of sexuality education in many EU countries, significant disparities remain. A study by the European Parliament (2022) reveals that while twenty-one member states have laws or policies making sexuality education mandatory, countries such as Italy, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Romania, and Slovakia lack legal regulation or mandatory provisions, leaving such programs to the discretion of local schools. Italy, in particular, stands out as one of the few Western European nations without a legal framework for mandatory sexuality education. Moreover, Italy's anti-gender politics have positioned it as a unique case in Western Europe, resembling trends in Eastern Europe, where anti-gender movements have successfully shaped government policies (Lavizzari 2024).

An historical legislative overview of sexual education in Italy reveals that from 1975 to today, there have been a total of thirty-four legislative proposals, none of which has ever achieved approval (Bruno 2022). Schools can implement activities with the help of experts, but these are limited initiatives that do not always fit into the overall educational program. The current sexuality education in schools is presented in a heterogeneous manner, meaning there is no systematic and equitable provision in terms of content, objectives, and methodologies (Chinelli et al. 2023). Consequently, any initiatives related to sexuality education are typically introduced at the discretion of individual schools or external organizations, leading to variability in content and implementation.

Among the over ten legislative proposals on sexuality education in Italy during the analyzed period, three stand out for sparking significant public and parliamentary debate. The Fedeli (2014) bill proposed integrating a gender perspective across all levels of education without adding new courses. The Costantino (2013) bill went further, introducing a weekly class on affectivity in both primary and secondary schools, and suggesting gender studies courses at the university level. In the context of sexuality education, affectivity courses are designed to promote emotional intelligence, encouraging respectful interactions, and helping students understand their emotional needs and

boundaries. These proposals set the stage for broader legislative reforms. For instance, the reform known as the “Good School,” included a provision on “education for gender equality.” Although the law did not explicitly mention sexuality education, the school autonomy promoted by the reform has allowed schools to integrate these topics into their curricula. Finally, the Zan bill (2018–2021), while focused on penalizing homotransphobic violence, included educational activities to promote LGBTQ+ rights, particularly through a proposed national day against homophobia—an element that generated intense controversy.

Overall, these legislative proposals differ in their objectives and scope. Some aim to integrate comprehensive sexuality education into the national curriculum, ensuring standardized instruction across schools, while others focus on the introduction of specific courses, such as those on “affectivity,” or promoting inclusivity and respect for diversity through educational content. Crucially, all of these proposals have sparked controversy and resistance from anti-gender actors.

The anti-gender movement

Research highlights how anti-gender actors and discourses have evolved to adapt to the political and institutional context (Garbagnoli 2016; Lavizzari 2020; Prearo 2024; Trappolin 2022). Furthermore, the role of the Catholic Church and the Vatican has also been pivotal, leveraging Catholic morality to shape public discourse and influence political debates. An eminent characteristic of the Italian landscape is the Catholic Church’s explicit impact on the political endeavors of right-wing and center-left parties.

To this analysis, we consider as part of the anti-gender movement “ad-hoc” anti-gender groups and nonprofit organizations established in the early 2010s at the onset of the mobilization, such as La Manif Pour Tous Italia (LMPTI), rebranded in 2015 as Generazione Famiglia (Family Generation); ProVita & Famiglia (ProLife & Family—PV&F), founded in 2019 from the merging of the Family Generation and ProLife Onlus; the Comitato Difendiamo i Nostri Figli (Committee to Defend Our Children—CDNF), rebranded Associazione Family Day—Difendiamo i nostri figli (Association Family Day—Defend our children); and Giuristi per la Vita (Lawyers for Life). These groups primarily focus on disclosure, communication, dissemination, lobbying, and advocacy efforts at the national level, while also organizing protest and grassroots events, workshops and conferences on gender ideology, throughout the territory.

The feminist movement

A new wave of feminist mobilizations has been witnessed since the 2010s (Rosenkranz and della Porta 2025). The mobilizations in Italy, known as *Non Una di Meno* (Not One (Women) Less—NUDM), were inspired by the

Argentinean *Ni Una Menos* campaign and focused on tackling the issue of male violence against women. The movement quickly became a diverse and multigenerational coalition, encompassing different sectors of the Italian feminist community such as collectives, squats, NGOs, anti-violence centers, associations, and individuals. The new wave of mobilizations, while primarily focused on gender-based violence (GBV), also addressed interconnected issues such as the labor market, migration, LGBTQ+ rights, and health and reproductive rights. NUDM organizes public demonstrations, including those held on November 25th, the international day against male violence towards women, and March 8th, the global feminist strike day.

To this analysis, we include several actors involved with NUDM, but also beyond it. Since the inception of NUDM, one of the main thematic groups formed within the movement is related to the topic of education. In addition, a network called *Educare alle Differenze* (Educating to Differences), clearly feminist-inspired, has been active since 2014 at the national level, bringing together groups, collectives, movements, experts, and teachers interested in implementing sexuality education.

Methodology and data

To explore these dynamics, the study employs data collected within the framework of the FIERCE project,² using CFA to examine how political and social actors construct and negotiate meaning around sexuality education. In gender studies, CFA is used to analyze different interpretations of gender and gender equality, as well as the mechanisms through which certain individuals gain dominance (Verloo 2007). CFA traditionally focuses on three main elements: diagnosis (problem representation), prognosis (proposed solutions), and voice (actors creating the frames and those given authority) (Dombos et al. 2012). By focusing on frames as interpretative structures, CFA reveals how different groups legitimize their positions and compete to shape public discussions and policymaking processes (Agustín 2013).

The study covers the time frame 2010–2021, a period during which structural transformations triggered by a decade of crises took place, together with the emergence of new cycles of protest in the fields of feminist and anti-gender movements. Our data sources for feminist movements and anti-gender actors include two sets of documents: parliamentary debates and movement-produced materials. The selection of both social movement-produced materials and parliamentary debates is grounded in the need to analyze how competing actors frame sexuality education in different institutional and discursive contexts. By including both, we can capture the interaction between movement discourse and formal policymaking and its processual nature. Social movement documents provide insights into how feminist and anti-gender actors articulate their positions autonomously, addressing their own constituencies and defining the political stakes. Parliamentary debates offer a window into how these discourses are translated into formal political contention,

where movement actors may exert influence through lobbying or public pressure. Movement documents were selected based on their relevance for the topic analyzed in this study, while parliamentary debates were found by searching on the official government database³, using a combination of the keywords “genere” (gender), “educazione” (education), “omofobia/omotransfobia” (homophobia/homotransphobia), “educazione di genere” (gender education), “educazione sessuale” (sexual education), “educazione all’affettività” (education to affectivity).

The selection of documents for both sets of actors included ten movement documents for the feminist and ten for the anti-gender movements, and five voices from parliamentary debates⁴ (see [Supplementary Appendix](#) for a list of all documents analyzed).

For the feminist movement documents, these include reports from the education group of NUDM, reports from the Education to Differences network, and documents from other individual groups against specific laws (such as school reform). The voices come from six parliamentary debates, including discussions of motions, resolutions, and interpellations related to individual news stories (in which, for example, a school is attacked for spreading gender ideology) or bills that would provide for the implementation of sexuality education. The voices include Members of Parliament (MPs) from progressive parties, such as Partito Democratico (Democratic Party), Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Star Movement), Sinistra, Ecologia e Libertà (Left, Ecology and Freedom), together with the centrist Italia Viva (Italy Alive). More specifically, the debates relate to the publication of pamphlets by the National Office Against Racial Discrimination (UNAR) entitled “Educating for Diversity in School,” aiming at implementing guidelines for the education of diversity in schools (with references to prevent homophobic behaviors). The leaflets were subsequently retrieved and censured by the Ministry of Research and University (MIUR), after many protests by the Church, the Italian Episcopal Conference, and anti-gender actors, including family associations.

As for the anti-gender side, the movement documents include press releases, public awareness campaigns, editorial and opinion pieces, letters to MPs and the senate, and calls to action. The three selected parliamentary debates encompass discussions that took place in reference to an urgent parliamentary question, where MP Alessandro Pagano from the Nuovo Centro Destra (New Centre Right, now MP for the League), attacks the production and diffusion of the UNAR’s leaflets. The two additional debates revolve around two bills proposing specific penalties for crimes against LGBTQ+ individuals (draft bill Scalfarotto, 2013 and draft bill Zan 2020, 2021), which failed to secure approval from both Parliament and the Senate, leaving Italy effectively without legislation against homotransphobia. In these latter, voices are represented by MPs from center and far-right political parties, notably the Lega (League), Fratelli d’Italia (Brothers of Italy), and Forza Italia (Go Italy).

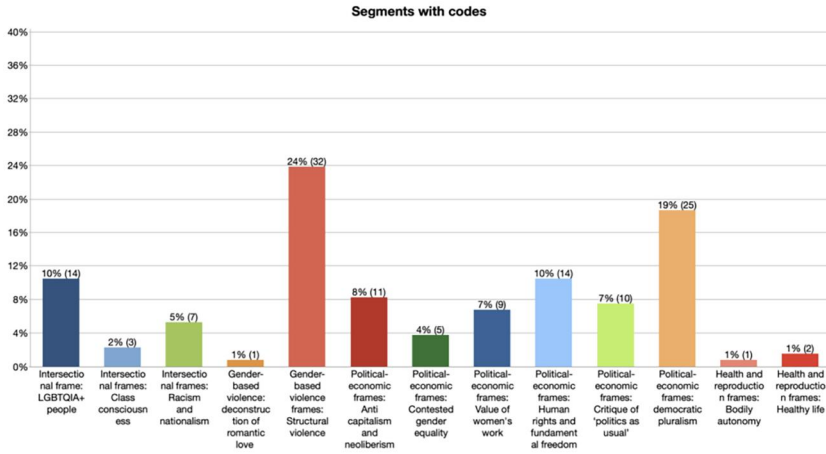


Figure 1. Frequency of coded segments for feminist frames.

Documents were coded into five sections: background information, diagnosis, prognosis, overall interpretation, and frames. Based on the (project anonymized) literature reviews, carried out at country-level as well as for the European Union, we have identified a set of frames which are used as predefined categories in the codebook and in the coding software (concept-driven). Likewise, there is an open option which allows for the coding of other (immediate) frames, not covered by the list but identified through the analysis and the coding of the text in question (data-driven).⁵ The coding was done using MAXQDA 2024 (Verbi Software), with rigorous training and testing to ensure reliability.

Among the predefined codes in the frames section, the most relevant frames for feminist actors were the “Gender based violence frame: structural violence,” the “Political economic frames: human rights and fundamental freedoms” and the “Intersectional frames: LGBTQIA+ people.” The additional code “Political economic frames: democratic pluralism” was also relevant (see figure 1 which shows the frequency of coded segments for each frame). For the anti-gender actors, the most relevant frames were the “Children and family frame: Education,” the “Ideological frames: Colonization and Marxism,” and the “Gender contract frames: Gender binary” (see figure 2).

Framing sexuality education: feminist advocacy and anti-gender opposition

In this section, the article examines how feminist movements and anti-gender actors conceptualize and frame issues about sexuality education,

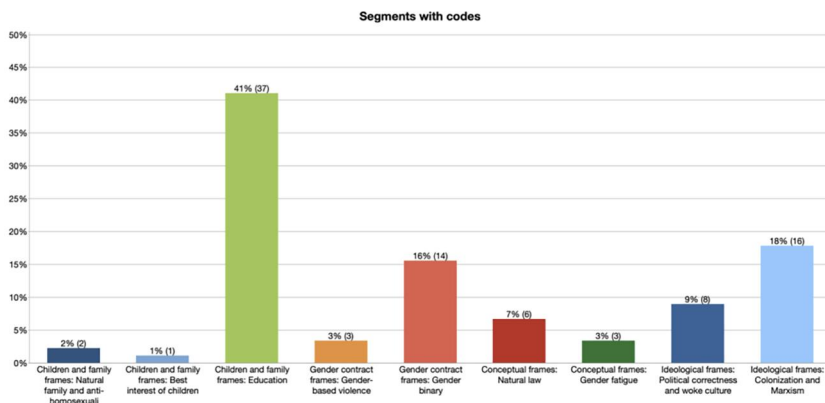


Figure 2. Frequency of coded segments for anti-gender frames.

analyzing their contrasting diagnoses of the underlying problems and the divergent solutions they propose.

Feminist frames

For feminist actors, the most relevant frames when debating the issue of education are “structural gender-based violence” (29 percent) and “democratic pluralism” (19 percent). In addition, the frames “human rights and fundamental freedoms” (10 percent) and “LGBTQIA+ people” (10 percent) are also relevant.

Feminist actors identify the persistence of gender-based violence as a manifestation of entrenched patriarchal structures: this framing emphasizes how educational institutions often mirror the societal norms that condone or even perpetuate violence against women and girls. For feminist actors, sexuality education emerges as the strategy to address and prevent GBV effectively. As evidenced by the following quotes, the diagnostic frame of structural violence is consistently employed in parliamentary debates to justify the implementation of sexuality education:

The only effective response to violence against women is to spread a culture of respect at all levels of society, and that violence against women ... requires the adoption of appropriate educational and social policies aimed at curbing it and then, hopefully, eliminating it altogether. (Gabriele Toccafondi, Italy Alive, FEM_POL_05, 2017)

A significant element of feminist diagnostic framing is the critique of opposition to comprehensive sexuality education: for them, resistance to such education is rooted in conservative ideologies that seek to maintain traditional gender roles and suppress discussions on sexual health and rights. This

opposition often takes the form of legislative measures or school policies that limit or ban comprehensive sexuality education, thereby denying students critical knowledge about gender equality, consent, and sexual health. For example, MP Franco Bordo, responding to the Veneto regional council's 2015 resolution against "gender ideology" in schools, describes it as a reactionary strategy meant to incite fear and resist progress toward equality and LGBT inclusion (Franco Bordo, Democratic Party, FEM_POL_08, 2016).

Feminist actors also invoke "democratic pluralism" to frame these attacks as threats to the school's democratic mission. While they often avoid mainstream rhetoric in other domains, favoring alternative framings to articulate issues that may be perceived as more radical or confrontational toward established institutions—such as the attacks toward traditional family as the source of gender-based violence—in education, they deliberately adopt the language of democracy and human rights to engage broader public audiences:

It is not falsehoods about child masturbation that frighten the detractors of Education to Differences' projects so much, but the fear of the extraordinary possibility that educational action has of transforming gender relations in terms of justice, plurality and inclusion: the fear that in schools free and equal citizens will grow up, in dialogue with their own identity and sexual orientation beyond stereotypes and prejudices, endowed with the critical sense necessary to oppose injustice and discrimination. (Education to Differences, FEM_SOCMOV_10, 2015)

In this quote, sexuality education is interpreted as a means to prefigure future citizens, who are able to negotiate their own life trajectories beyond stereotypes and prejudices, and consequently, how this prefigurative function defines sexuality education as a democratic force. Indeed, feminist actors view the inclusion of sexuality education as a cornerstone of public schools' role as democratic strongholds. They see such education as essential to fostering a culture of nondiscrimination and advancing the principles of human rights, both within the school environment and in society at large. By framing schools as spaces where democratic values are actively practiced and reinforced, feminist actors highlight the transformative potential of education in challenging systemic inequalities and promoting inclusivity. This perspective also foregrounds the inclusion and respect of LGBTQIA+ people as a central goal, emphasizing that education on gender and sexuality is crucial to creating affirming environments where diversity is valued, and all individuals can feel seen, respected, and safe:

The fight against discrimination, the overcoming of stereotypes and prejudices as well as the inclusion of all and everyone at school does not fall within the 'personal opinion' or 'ideology' of individual teachers. It is an integral part of the public school's mandate. The Italian legal framework, therefore, establishes the obligation for schools to

counter stereotypes and prejudices, starting with those related to gender and to implement educational initiatives to prevent male violence against women, bullying, discrimination and racism. (Education to Differences, FEM_SOCMOV_04, 2016)

They argue that anti-gender actors often undermine democratic values by promoting censorship, restricting academic freedom, and stifling open dialogue about gender issues. These attacks can manifest in various forms, including efforts to ban books, limit discussions on gender diversity, and suppress feminist activism on campuses. Feminist framing emphasizes that a healthy democracy relies on an informed and critical citizenry, and that education should foster these qualities by encouraging diverse perspectives and critical thinking about gender and social justice. As the following quote clarifies:

The scandal of sexuality education is that the values provided by parents cannot be questioned by pluralist societal principles. These attacks help to discredit the public school, its authority and autonomy, the secular culture that serves as its foundation, and the community's role in the formation of tomorrow's citizens. (Education to Differences, FEM_SOCMOV_02, 2014)

Feminist actors advocate for a fundamental cultural shift both within society and educational institutions, moving from diagnosing the persistence of gender-based violence and lack of protection of fundamental freedoms and democratic pluralism, to proposing actionable solutions. A key aspect of feminist prognostic framing is the focus on the effective implementation of existing gender equality policies. Feminists argue that many progressive policies already exist but are not adequately enforced or supported. The frame "democratic pluralism" highlights the need for robust mechanisms to ensure compliance with gender equality laws and regulations. This includes adequate funding, teacher training, and the development of gender-sensitive educational materials. Furthermore, feminist movements highlight the need for adequate resources to support their own advocacy and implementation efforts (Education to differences, FEM_SOCMOV_10, 2015).

In response to opposition from anti-gender actors, feminists develop and implement counterstrategies to protect and advance their goals. These include tactics such as public awareness campaigns and legal advocacy to defend gender equality policies and practices. They also engage in grassroots organizing, lobbying, and advocacy to resist attempts to roll back gender rights and to push for progressive educational reforms. As an example, the network Education to Differences edited a guide to help families choose schools that incorporate sexuality education. This initiative explicitly counters a similar but oppositional tool produced by anti-gender groups, which advises parents on avoiding schools they claim promote "gender ideology" (Education to Differences, FEM_SOCMOV_09, 2022).

The feminist prognosis for educational reform encompasses a multifaceted approach that addresses the structural, institutional, and cultural dimensions of gender inequality. By advocating for cultural change, policy implementation, resource allocation, and strategic resistance, feminist movements outline sexuality education as a crucial concern in the implementation of democracy.

Anti-gender frames

Anti-gender actors construct their opposition to the introduction of sexuality education in schools primarily through the frames of “education” (41%), “colonization and Marxism” (18%), and “gender binary” (16%). These frames are predominantly used to articulate their diagnosis of the problem and its underlying causes. In contrast, their proposed solutions, or prognoses, are less developed in the texts and largely focus on preserving the status quo, by abolishing ministerial guidelines and legal provisions. This is particularly evident in the use of the frames “natural family and anti-homosexuality” and “education,” which emphasize safeguarding the traditional family and asserting its primacy in the education of children.

The frame “education” is mainly articulated as the rights of parents to raise their children according to their philosophical and religious beliefs (FIERCE 2023). Within the diagnostic framing, the perceived problem centers on the threat posed to children’s education by proponents of gender ideology—LGBTQ+ associations, the Ministry of University and Research, left-wing parties—who are accused of attempting to indoctrinate children while circumventing parents’ authority to “educate their children based on their family’s beliefs” (AG_SOCMOV_09, 2023). In addition to government and institutional efforts to promote sexuality education, LGBTQIA+ organizations are specifically targeted and blamed for advancing such initiatives. These organizations are accused of forming alliances with the Ministry of University and Research, allegedly taking precedence over family associations and parents. As one statement about the Ministry illustrates:

Which [the Ministry] is credited with the best of LGBTQIA associationism and no parent or family association: we will have Arcigay⁶ in the classroom teaching our children “gender equality” and “emotional education”, which they are also working on in Parliament. LGBTQIA ... associations will be accredited as training bodies to the Ministry of Education! (Committee to Defend Our Children, AG_SOCMOV_03, 2016)

This rhetoric reflects broader concerns over perceived threats to parental authority and traditional values in education.

Another key diagnostic element is developed through the “colonization and Marxism” frame, in which “gender” is constructed as a “Trojan horse” imposed on innocent children and youth through “gender ideology,” namely a form of contemporary ideological colonization by political elites, radical

feminist and LGBTQ+ actors (FIERCE 2023). This narrative plays a central role in the debate on education, as anti-gender actors argue that courses on sexuality in schools represent ideological colonization. Expressions such as “cultural colonization of schools” and “ideological colonization of gender” are mentioned several times, pointing fingers not only at the Ministry of Education but also at “powerful” LGBTQ+ associations that would enter schools to “directly influence the mentality of children” (AG_POL_02, 2020; AG_SOCMOV_08). This rhetoric often pairs the concept of colonization with that of “re-education”: “The UNAR National Strategy 2013–2015 aims to re-educate Italy, rather than eliminate discrimination. We are not willing to make any kind of discount on this. What is contested here, in fact, is precisely gender ideology, Mr Undersecretary, which aims to achieve a new culture, which evidently goes against the nature of things” (Alessandro Pagano, New Centre Right, AG_POL_01, 2014).

Building on the ideological colonization narrative, the “gender-based violence” frame further amplifies opposition by portraying terms such as “gender-based violence” and “femicide” as mechanisms for introducing gender ideology into schools. These expressions are also characterized as Trojan horses, covertly embedding gender theory within educational curricula. Gianfranco Amato, President of Lawyers for Life, reinforces this perspective by linking the Good School reform and its provisions to an alleged hidden agenda, arguing that these measures serve to advance ideological colonization under the guise of addressing violence and discrimination:

Gender-based violence has become what Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, with effectively evocative expression, lucidly denounced as a Trojan horse. The second threat lies in the explicit reference to Article 5 of the so-called “Femicide Law”, an article titled “Extraordinary Action Plan against Sexual and Gender Violence.” In practice, the law on the Good School states that the three-year plan of educational provision must ‘inform and sensitize students, teachers, and parents on the issues indicated in the Extraordinary Action Plan against Sexual and Gender Violence. (Gianfranco Amato, President of Lawyers for Life, AG_SOCMOV_08, 2015)

The third and final diagnostic element employs the “gender binary” frame, which asserts that there are two biological sexes and corresponding gender identities (FIERCE 2023). Anti-gender actors argue that teaching fluid gender identities in schools poses a significant threat by challenging and seeking to dismantle the gender binary. This is characterized as an intentional effort to abolish traditional gender roles, undermine the natural family, and erode heterosexuality:

It’s time to say ENOUGH! Every day, in hundreds of Italian schools, lessons, activities, and courses on “affectivity and sexuality” deeply

imbued with gender ideology take place. Gender ideology confuses children about their sexual identity. It states that male or female biological sex does not determine being men or women because people, even children, can choose their “gender identity” based on their “feelings.” (PV&F, AG_SOCMOV_09, 2023)

A notable example often cited in this context is the introduction of the Alias career⁷ for trans individuals in schools, which is portrayed as emblematic of the dangers of gender education. From a constructivist perspective, anti-gender actors repeatedly highlight the risks associated with promoting the concept of fluid gender identity, framing it as a deliberate assault on societal norms and values (AG_SOCMOV_02, 2023).

The “gender fatigue” frame, while not a dominant element in the education debate, introduces a noteworthy perspective. It posits that gender equality has already been achieved and there is no need for concepts such as “gender equality,” feminism, or pro-choice movements (FIERCE 2023). In Italy, anti-gender actors claim that gender equality has been achieved, as evidenced by the presence of women in schools, administrative roles, and political positions, rendering additional legislative measures unnecessary and detached from contemporary realities. Furthermore, this frame aligns with the notion that homophobia is not a significant issue in the country (or non-existent), and that educational efforts to combat it are therefore meaningless.

Similarly, the “political correctness” frame critiques efforts to introduce inclusive language practices in schools. Measures aimed at promoting a “conscious use of language” such as using feminine forms for professions and other terms, are ridiculed as unnecessary concessions to feminist ideologies. For instance, the following statement highlights the perceived imposition of linguistic change: “It will be appropriate to use the feminine gender for nouns referring to ‘female human beings’ even when the Italian language does not provide for it. Grammar will have to bend to the feminist nostalgia and therefore decline professions and even moods” (AG_SOCMOV_04, 2016).

For anti-gender actors, the prognostic element refers to two main frames. The first is the “natural family and anti-homosexuality” frame, based on the idea of the nuclear family as the only legitimate and safe environment for raising children (FIERCE 2023). At this level, the state is framed as having a duty to support parents in nurturing future generations, rather than acting in opposition to them. This perspective is closely tied to the “best interest of children” frame, which positions parental authority as paramount in ensuring the well-being of children. This alignment is evident in the following statement by Toni Brandi, President of PV&F:

This vital role of education belongs to the family, a natural society recognized by our Constitution, that is, to parents. The role of the State, institutions, and educators is to accompany parents, not to oppose

them. In short, a real alliance is needed for the good of our children.
(Toni Brandi, President of PV&F, AG_SOCMOV_02, 2023)

This framing reinforces the view that educational initiatives should align with and support the values and authority of (traditional) families, presenting any divergence as a threat to the natural order and the human rights of children.

Discussion and conclusion

The field of education has emerged as a major battleground between feminist and anti-gender actors, each presenting starkly contrasting perspectives and solutions regarding the role of sexuality education in schools. This article proposes two key contributions. First, it offers a processual analysis of how feminist and anti-gender actors frame sexuality education. Second, it positions sexuality education as a crucial arena in which democracy is shaped. Rather than being merely an issue of education policy, these debates present public schools as spaces where society is prefigured, with future citizens and democratic principles at stake.

In line with feminist literature on the role of democracy and education (Acker 1987; Arnot and Dillabough 1999; Lenskyj 1990; Selmi 2015; Wrigley 2003), we found that feminist actors frame education as a democratic institution that must uphold constitutional principles, human rights, and anti-discrimination laws. Schools, in their view, are essential for promoting gender equality, dismantling patriarchal norms, and eradicating gender-based violence. Comprehensive sexuality education is seen as a critical tool for fostering equality and justice, ensuring that education aligns with the democratic ideal of reducing societal inequalities. In this framing, democracy is presented as a regime committed to challenging oppressive power structures through laws and institutions, including schools. As the empirical analysis highlighted, in contrast to other feminist claims, regarding education, feminist actors make extensive reference to the frame of democracy and human rights.

In contrast, anti-gender actors prioritize the primacy of the family unit over state intervention. They argue that the right of parents to educate their children according to their beliefs takes precedence over any state-mandated curricula. From their perspective, democracy is not about state-driven equality but about safeguarding individual freedoms, particularly the autonomy of families to make decisions regarding their children's education, as the literature highlighted (Srnrdelj and Kuhar 2025; Verge 2025). They interpret democratic principles as a means to protect parental rights and uphold traditional values, viewing state-imposed educational policies as an overreach that undermines these freedoms. Anti-gender proponents frame such initiatives as a violation of these individual liberties and an intrusion on the family's role as the cornerstone of society. This dynamic underscores a deeper ideological divide: whether schools serve democracy by challenging traditional hierarchies and

promoting equality, or whether democracy should center on preserving the family's authority and autonomy within an ostensibly democratic framework.

Building on Venegas's (2022, 2025) argument about anti-gender actors undermining not just gender equality but democracy itself, we can delve into these competing narratives to understand the democratic implications of sexuality education. The processual analysis of feminist and anti-gender actors' frames suggests that they strategically engage with sexuality education to enhance or undermine the quality of democracy. On the one hand, feminist actors refer to democratic principles of equality and anti-discrimination to highlight the role of sexuality education in prefiguring future citizens that are able to question power structures and develop their own self beyond prejudices and stereotypes. This finding relates to the democratization function performed by sexuality education, something that feminist actors advocate for. On the other hand, the moral panic (Morán Faúndes 2019; Robinson 2020; Svatonova 2021) surrounding the diffusion of sexuality education conceals the de-democratizing intent embedded in the anti-gender framing. By creating phantom fears and moral panic—such as the alleged risks of indoctrination and “homosexualization”—these movements push to shrink democratic space by stripping institutions (such as public schools) of their anti-discriminatory function, opposing the promotion of gender equality, and limiting critical thinking that enables future citizens to make informed choices about their personal and social lives.

In this dynamic, the prefiguration of future citizens—incorporated by today's children—becomes the central battleground for defining democratic principles. The key question is whether future citizens should merely preserve the minimum standards of democratic regimes and existing social structures or challenge those structures when they perpetuate inequalities. Moreover, influencing the content of schooling can be seen as a mechanism of long-term ideological reproduction. Ultimately, a processual analysis of framing strategies reveals how the real outcome of these struggles lies in the contestation of liberal democratic norms and institutional authority.

A second analytical element directly connected to this is the issue of democratic governance and the influence on the policymaking process.

Feminists advocate for state laws that promote equality, justice, and protection from discrimination, viewing democratic and secular institutions as legitimate mechanisms for implementing these principles. Education is framed as a critical tool for fostering social progress and ensuring the rights of marginalized groups. Feminist actors argue that state intervention is necessary to challenge entrenched inequalities and harmful biases, using schools to promote inclusion and the development of environments in which students can thrive free from restrictive norms.

Anti-gender proponents, on the other hand, defend the concept of natural law, which emphasizes an essentialist understanding of gender and sexuality as rooted in immutable biological and religious principles. They argue that state

policies promoting sexuality education infringe upon these natural principles, imposing artificial constructs that conflict with their beliefs. These principles, which include the traditional family, extend to a broader set of fixed norms and values that anti-gender actors see as foundational to societal stability. From their perspective, any state intervention that seeks to alter these norms is viewed as an unjustified intrusion.

This discourse reflects an ambivalent relationship with state interventionism, a hallmark of contemporary populist right-wing forces. On the one hand, there is a form of economic nationalism or welfare chauvinism that calls for an active role for the state in protecting the national economy and regulating migration to safeguard the native community. On the other hand, in moral and sexual matters, anti-gender actors and populist radical right forces adopt an anti-system stance aimed at increasing parental veto power over educational content. They demand a drastic reduction of state intervention, leaving these domains to the private sphere and the guardianship of the traditional family (Trappolin 2022). This double standard highlights how state authority is selectively accepted or rejected depending on whether its intervention aligns with or challenges conservative values.

This finding aligns with broader research on the educational policy preferences of populist radical right parties, which shows that these actors promote education policies that reflect their core ideological pillars—nativism, authoritarianism, and populism, thereby opposing foundational principles of education systems such as open-mindedness, equality, and personal autonomy (Berg, Jungblut, and Jupskås 2023). Similarly, anti-gender actors tolerate state involvement only insofar as it reinforces a social order rooted in the naturalization of gender and sexual hierarchies, opposing policies perceived as threats to this order.

On the contrary, feminist actors embrace state intervention to advance equality and inclusivity, seeing schools as spaces in which democratic and secular principles can be actively practiced and upheld.

Yet, these are not just competing narratives—they produce tangible policy outcomes. As evidenced in the historical legislative overview, anti-gender actors have effectively intervened in the policymaking process, ensuring that no proposal for comprehensive sexuality education has ever been approved (Bruno 2022). While feminist actors engage in advocacy and framing struggles, anti-gender forces have successfully mobilized institutional veto power to obstruct progressive reforms. Even when some incremental advances were made—such as the gender equality provisions in Law 107/2015—the result was a compromise that fell short of establishing a structured and mandatory sexuality education curriculum.

Ultimately, despite ongoing struggles, anti-gender actors have concretely shaped policy outcomes in their favor, maintaining the status quo and blocking comprehensive sexuality education from becoming a structural component of the Italian education system. While discursive contestation is essential

in shaping the public agenda, our findings suggest that such struggles, when not channeled into the decision-making agenda, may fail to generate tangible outcomes (Baumgartner, Breunig, and Grossman 2019). In this light, our findings resonate with and help to contextualize broader arguments in the literature regarding the institutional embeddedness of anti-gender resistance and its effectiveness in influencing policies, particularly when exercised by anti-gender actors appointed in government (Lavizzari 2024). In particular, it highlights the effective interplay between political veto players—such as executive actors aligned with anti-gender agendas—and societal veto players, including anti-gender advocacy groups and the Catholic Church, whose influence can effectively block reforms and entrench policy inertia (Schmitt, Euchener, and Preidel 2013; Prearo 2024). Their success in blocking comprehensive sexuality education in Italy reveals how democratic institutions can be mobilized not only to expand rights but also to restrict them, reinforcing exclusionary visions of democracy (Venegas 2025). Despite sustained feminist advocacy, the legislative trajectory of sexuality education in Italy reveals the persistence of structural and institutional constraints that favor policy inaction or conservative retrenchment. The capacity of anti-gender actors to block reforms and mobilize institutional veto power underscores the importance of analyzing not only framing strategies but also the mechanisms through which discourse translates into policy outcomes.

In conclusion, this study contributes to a broader understanding of the intersection between education policy, democratic theory, and the politics of gender and sexuality. Future research could further investigate the institutional channels and political conditions that facilitate or hinder the expansion of sexuality education, providing a more comprehensive account of how democratization processes intersect with gender equality struggles in education.

Notes

1. There is a multiplicity of terms used to describe “sexuality education” in both national and international spheres. In Italy, common terms include “sexual education” (*educazione sessuale*), “sex education” (*educazione alla sessualità*), “gender education” (*educazione di genere*), and “affective education” (*educazione all'affettività*). Given the lack of a standardized national curriculum, these terms are often used interchangeably, sometimes improperly. We draw upon definitions by international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to adopt “sexuality education” as the most widely recognized term, encompassing biological, emotional, and social dimensions of sexuality.
2. FIERCE—Feminist Movements Revitalizing Democracy in Europe, Grant 101061748.
3. https://banchedati.camera.it/tiap_17/ctrStartPage.asp, https://banchedati.camera.it/tiap_18/ctrStartPage.asp

4. Five voices can represent five different texts or documents, but not necessarily, as more voices can be selected from the same parliamentary debate.
5. Full codebook available upon request. For a description of the codes used in this study, see the Appendix.
6. The leading national LGBT organization.
7. Alias career refers to an administrative provision in educational or professional settings that allows transgender or non-binary individuals to use a name different from their legal name on official documents, such as class rosters, student IDs, or workplace records.

Supplementary material

Supplementary material is available at *Social Politics* online.

Conflict of interest. None declared.

Data availability

The data underlying this article are available in the article.

References

- Acker, Sandra. 1987. "Feminist Theory and the Study of Gender and Education." *International Review of Education* 33: 419–35. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00615157>.
- Agustín, Lise Rolandsen. 2013. *Gender Equality, Intersectionality, and Diversity in Europe*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ahrens, Petra, Karen Celis, Sarah Childs, Isabelle Engeli, Elizabeth Evans, and Liza Mügge. 2018. "Contemporary Crises in European Politics: Gender Equality+ Under Threat." *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 1: 301–06. <https://doi.org/10.1332/251510818X15395099754994>.
- Aikman, Sheila, and Elaine Unterhalter. 2005. *Beyond Access: Transforming Policy and Practice for Gender Equality in Education*. Nairobi: Oxfam.
- Allen, L. 2004. "Beyond the Birds and the Bees: Constituting a Discourse of Erotics in Sexuality Education." *Gender and Education* 16: 151–67.
- Alekseev, Alexander. 2021. "'Defend Your Right!' How the Populist Radical Right Uses References to Rights and Freedoms to Discursively Construct Identities." *New Perspectives. Interdisciplinary Journal of Central & East European Politics and International Relations* 29: 376–416.
- Apple, Michael W. 2018. "The Struggle for Democracy in Education." In *The Struggle for Democracy in Education*. New York: Routledge.
- Arnot, Madeleine. 1991. "Equality and Democracy: A Decade of Struggle over Education." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 12: 447–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142569910120403>.
- Arnot, Madeleine, and Jo-Anne Dillabough. 1999. "Feminist Politics and Democratic Values in Education." *Curriculum Inquiry* 29: 159–89. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0362-6784.00120>.

- Arthur, James, Carole Hahn, and Ian Davies. 2008. *SAGE Handbook of Education for Citizenship and Democracy*, 1–592. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Baumgartner, Frank R., Christian Breunig, and Emiliano Grossman (Eds). 2019. *Comparative Policy Agendas: Theory, Tools, Data*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Benadusi, Luciano, Assunta Viteritti, and Leonardo Piromalli. 2019. “From Democracy and Education, to Education and Postdemocracy. An Introduction to the Special Issue from the First International Conference of Scuola Democratica.” *Scuola Democratica*, no. 4/2019. <https://doi.org/10.12828/96357>.
- Berg, Anne E., Jens Jungblut, and Anders R. Jupskås. 2023. “We Don’t Need No Education? Education Policies of Western European Populist Radical Right Parties.” *West European Politics* 46: 1312–42. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2023.2177010>
- Bracke, M. A. 2014. *Women and the Reinvention of the Political: Feminism in Italy, 1968–1983*. London: Routledge.
- . 2012. “Building a ‘Counter-community of Emotions’: Feminist Encounters and Socio-cultural Difference in 1970s Turin.” *Modern Italy* 17: 223–36.
- Brown, David S. 2004. “Democracy and Gender Inequality in Education: A Cross-National Examination.” *British Journal of Political Science* 34: 137–52. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123403210395>.
- Bruno, Valeria. 2022. “Educazione alla sessualità e all’affettività. Una correlazione possibile con il benessere individuale. *Educazione*.” *Giornale di pedagogia critica* 11: 43–76.
- Buchmann, Claudia, Thomas A. DiPrete, and Anne McDaniel. 2008. “Gender Inequalities in Education.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 34: 319–37. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.34.040507.134719>.
- Carmody, M. 2006. “Preventing Adult Sexual Violence through Education?” *Current Issues in Criminal Justice* 18: 342–56.
- Chinelli, Alice, Maria Cristina Salfa, Andrea Cellini, Luca Ceccarelli, Massimo Farinella, Laura Rancilio, and Rosario Galipò. 2023. “Sexuality Education in Italy 2016–2020: A National Survey Investigating Coverage, Content and Evaluation of School-Based Educational Activities.” *Sex Education* 23: 756–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2022.2134104>.
- Connell, C., and S. Elliott. 2009. “Beyond the Birds and the Bees: Learning Inequality through Sexuality Education.” *American Journal of Sexuality Education* 4: 83–102.
- Colombo, Maddalena, and Luca Salmieri. 2020. “The Education of Gender.” *The Gender of Education. Sociological Research in Italy*. Rome: Associazione “Per Scuola Democratica”.
- Corredor, Elizabeth S. 2021. “On the Strategic Uses of Women’s Rights: Backlash, Rights-Based Framing, and Anti-Gender Campaigns in Colombia’s 2016 Peace Agreement.” *Latin American Politics and Society* 63: 46–68.
- Dalmaso-Junqueira, Bruna, and Kathyrie Moeller. 2024. “An Analytic Framework for Theorizing the Anti-Gender Agenda in Education.” *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 32 (open access journal).
- Dewey, John. 2024. *Democracy and Education*. New York: Columbia University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7312/dewe21010>.
- Dietze, G., and J. Roth (Eds). 2020. *Right-wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives and Beyond*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.

- Dombos, Tamas, Andrea Krizsan, Mieke Verloo, and Violetta Zental. 2012. "Critical Frame Analysis: A Comparative Methodology for the 'Quality in Gender+ Equality Policies'." QUING project.
- Donà, Alessia, and Elisa Bellè. 2022. "Power to the People? The Populist Italian Lega, the Anti-Gender Movement and the Defense of the Family." In *The Gendered Politics of Crises and De-Democratization. Opposition to Gender Equality*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield/ECPR Press.
- Firestone, S. 2015. *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. London: Verso Books.
- Friedan, B. 2013. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Gamberi, C., M. A. Maio, and G. Selmi. 2010. *Educare al genere: riflessioni e strumenti per articolare la complessità*. Milan: Carocci.
- Garbagnoli, Sara. 2016. "Against the Heresy of Immanence: Vatican's 'Gender' as a New Rhetorical Device Against the Denaturalization of the Sexual Order." *Religion and Gender* 6: 187–204. <https://doi.org/10.18352/rg.10156>.
- Gilliam, Laura, and Eva Gulløv. 2024. "Bringing Norbert Elias to School: Education and the Civilizing Process." *International Comparisons in Learning and Education*, 53: 53–80.
- Graff, Agnieszka, and Elzbieta., Korolczuk 2022. *Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis.
- Herd, G. 2009. *Moral Panics, Sex Panics: Fear and the Fight over Sexual Rights*. New York: NYU Press.
- Irvine, Janice M. 2004. *Talk about Sex: The Battles over Sex Education in the United States*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Kuhar, Roman, and David Paternotte. 2017. *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Kuhar, Roman, and Aleš Zobec. 2017. "The Anti-Gender Movement in Europe and the Educational Process in Public Schools." *CEPS Journal* 7: 29–46. [Database][<https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.168>]
- Lavizzari, Anna. 2020. *Protesting Gender: The LGBTIQ Movement and its Opponents in Italy*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- . 2024. "The Anti-Gender Movement and the Radical Right in Italy: A Symbiotic Relationship." *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 8: 207–233.
- Lavizzari, Anna, and Andrea L. P. Pirro (2024). "The Gender Politics of Populist Parties in Southern Europe." *West European Politics* 47: 1473–1502.
- Lemke, M., and K. Rogers. 2020. "When Sexting Crosses the Line: Educator Responsibilities in the Support of Prosocial Adolescent Behavior and the Prevention of Violence." *Social Sciences* 9: 150.
- Lenskyj, Helen. 1990. "Beyond Plumbing and Prevention: Feminist Approaches to Sex Education." *Gender and Education* 2: 217–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0954025900020206>.
- Lupien, Pascal. 2022. "Participatory Democracy, Democratic Education, and Women." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 54: 617–45. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X22000517>.
- McClain, Linda C. 2006. *The Place of Families: Fostering Capacity, Equality, and Responsibility*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674275157>.

- Melandri, Lea. 2000. *Una visceralità indicibile: la pratica dell'inconscio nel movimento delle donne degli anni Settanta*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Melandri, Lea. 2020. *L'infamia originaria: facciamola finita col cuore e la politica*. Roma: Manifesto Libri.
- Michielsen, Kristien, and Olana Ivanova. 2022. *Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Why Is it Important?* Strasbourg: European Parliament. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL_STU\(2022\)719998](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL_STU(2022)719998)
- Montecchio, Laura. 2024. "Italy's Populist Radical Right and Anti-Gender Discourses: Lega, FdI and the Case of the Zan Bill." *International Spectator* 60: 157–75.
- Morán Faúndes, José Manuel. 2019. "The Geopolitics of Moral Panic: The Influence of Argentinian Neo-Conservatism in the Genesis of the Discourse of 'Gender Ideology.'" *International Sociology* 34: 402–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580919856488>.
- Moser, Caroline, and Annalise Moser. 2005. "Gender Mainstreaming since Beijing: A Review of Success and Limitations In International Institutions." *Gender & Development*, 13: 11–22. [Database] <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552070512331332283>
- Percovich, Luciana. 2005. *La coscienza nel corpo: donne, salute e medicina negli anni Settanta*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Prearo, Massimo. 2024. *Anti-Gender Mobilizations, Religion and Politics: An Italian Case Study*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- . 2024. "A Traditionalist Pattern of Morality Politics in the Italian Parliament: The Case of Same-Sex Civil Partnerships." *Contemporary Italian Politics* 17: 336–54. [Database] <https://doi.org/10.1080/23248823.2024.2333628>
- Robinson, Kerry H. 2020. "In the Name of 'Childhood Innocence': A Discursive Exploration of the Moral Panic Associated with Childhood and Sexuality." *Cultural Studies Review* 14: 113–29. <https://doi.org/10.3316/ielapa.601354235410178>.
- Robinson, Kerry H., Elisabeth Smith, and Cristyn Davies. 2017. "Responsibilities, Tensions and Ways Forward: Parents' Perspectives on Children's Sexuality Education." *Sex Education* 17: 333–47.
- Roggeband, Conny, and Andrea Krizsán. 2018. "Reversing Gender Policy Progress: Patterns of Backsliding in Central and Eastern European New Democracies." *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 1: 367–85. <https://doi.org/10.1332/251510818X15311219732356>.
- Rosenkranz, Giada Bonu, and Donatella della Porta. 2025. *Feminist Movements in Time and Space: A European Perspective*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sadovnik, Alan R., and Susan F. Semel. 2010. "Education and Inequality: Historical and Sociological Approaches to Schooling and Social Stratification." *Paedagogica Historica* 46: 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230903528421>.
- Schmitt, Sophia, Eva-Maria Euchener, and Caroline Preidel. 2013. "Regulating Prostitution and Same-Sex Marriage in Italy and Spain: The Interplay of Political and Societal Veto Players in Two Catholic Societies." *Journal of European Public Policy* 20: 425–41.
- Scott, Joan Wallach. 2010. "Gender: Still a Useful Category of Analysis?" *Diogenes* 57:7–14.
- Selmi, Giulia. 2015. "Chi ha paura della libertà? La così detta ideologia del gender sui banchi di scuola." *AG About Gender—International Journal of Gender Studies* 4: 263–68.

- Selmi, Giulia and Chiara Tamanini. 2012. "Educating Students about Gender Relationships to Fight Gender-Based Violence: Reflections from a School Project in the Province of Trento." *Interdisciplinary Journal of Family Studies* 17: 184–92.
- Silverstone, Robert. 1991. "Sexuality Education Can Strengthen Democracy." *Educational Leadership* 49: 58–60.
- Shrewsbury, Carolyn M. 1987. "What Is Feminist Pedagogy?" *Women's Studies Quarterly* 15: 6–14.
- Smrdelj, Rok, and Roman Kuhar. 2025. *Anti-Gender Mobilizations in Europe and the Feminist Response. Productive Resistance*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Sosa, Lorena. 2021. "Beyond Gender Equality? Anti-Gender Campaigns and the Erosion of Human Rights and Democracy." *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights* 39: 3–10.
- Svatonova, Eva. 2021. "'Gender Activists Will Kidnap Your Kids': The Construction of Feminist and LGBT+ Rights Activists as Modern Folk Devils in Czech Anti-Gender Campaigns." In *Modern Folk Devils: Contemporary Constructions of Evil*, edited by M. Frederiksen and I. Harboe Knudsen, 135–55. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- Taylor, V. and M. N. Zald. 2010. "The Shape of Collective Action in the US Health Sector." In *Social Movements and the Transformation of American Health Care*, 300–18. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- The Boston Women Collective. 1973. *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Trappolin, Luca. 2022. "Right-Wing Sexual Politics and 'Anti-Gender' Mobilization in Italy: Key Features and Latest Developments." In *Paradoxical Right-Wing Sexual Politics in Europe*, edited by Cornelia Möser, Jennifer Ramme, and Judit Takács, 119–43. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-81341-3_5.
- Trappolin, Luca, and Paolo Gusmeroli. 2021. "La protesta di madri e insegnanti contro il gender a scuola. Meccanismi di attivazione tra convergenze e disomogeneità." *Polis* 1: 105–29. <https://doi.org/10.1424/100289>
- Venegas, Mar. 2022. "Relationships and Sex Education in the Age of Anti-Gender Movements: What Challenges for Democracy?" *Sex Education* 22: 481–495. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2021.1955669>
- . 2025. "Movilizaciones antigénero, 'ideología de género' y asalto a la democracia: la batalla por la educación para la igualdad sexual y de género en la Europa del Sur." *Revista de Sociología de la Educación-RASE* 18: 47–67. <https://doi.org/10.7203/RASE.18.1.28624>.
- Verge, Tània. 2025. "How Can Governments Respond to Anti-Gender Groups' Attacks against Feminist Policies." *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 18: 698–702. <https://doi.org/10.1332/25151088Y2024D000000070>.
- Verloo, Mieke. 2007. *Multiple Meanings of Gender Equality: A Critical Frame Analysis of Gender Policies in Europe*. Budapest: Central European University Press.
- Weiler, Kathleen. 2010. "Freire and a Feminist Pedagogy of Difference." *Harvard Educational Review* 6: 449–75. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.61.4.a102265jl68rju84>.
- Wrigley, Julia, ed. 2003. *Education and Gender Equality*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203210574>.