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Educating New Generations: Standpoints in Women's and Gender Studies and Implications for the Inclusion of LGBTQ Studies in Italian University Courses

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ABSTRACT

It should not be surprising that in Italy, one of the latest European countries to recognize same-sex couples, LGBTIQ+ concerns are not included in students' academic curricula. Therefore, following the historical path of gender studies (GS) and women's studies (WS), this article explores the current feminist and gender dis- course in order to catch a glimpse of what will be needed to fill this gap. To clarify which women's and gender studies stand- points are taught to new generations in Italy, lexicometric and correspondence analysis were performed on the descriptions of universities courses teaching WS and GS perspectives. Although the international spread of these two perspectives in academia is still wide, the results indicate a consistent lack of these courses in Italian institutions of higher education and, moreover, separate viewpoints associated with the two perspectives.

KEYWORDS: Gender and women's studies; LGBTQ studies; Italian academia; Italian feminism; lexicometric analysis

Whereas non-recurring workshops or training courses on LGBTQ+ topics can be found inside and outside the formal Italian academic frameworks, the only university course on related themes, *Storia dell'omosessualità* (History of homosexuality) held at University of Turin, first started in 2017 (Willan, 2017). This undergraduate-level class is currently the only one that allows Italian university students to have access to masculinities, LGBTQ+ and sexual orientation content within a formal university framework. However, it should not be surprising that in Italy, one of the latest European countries to recognize same-sex couples, LGBTQ+ are not included in academic curricula, reflecting both a national political and cultural situation of stasis in relation to these topics, and an international resistance to integrate gender equality perspectives into the university programs (Cassese, Bos, & Duncan, 2012; Verge, Ferrer-Fons, & González, 2018). Apart from one publication covering from ancient times to the post–World War II period (Dall’Orto, 2015), up till now an extensive historiography on the Italian history of homosexuality from the protagonist’s point of view is still missing (Benadusi, 2007; Scaramella, 2016). As a matter of fact, although young researchers and scholars are increasingly paying attention in order to fill this lack, “what seems to fail in the Italian environment is perhaps the institutional awareness” (Scaramella, 2016, p. 3), which, along with a traditional reluctance to address sexuality and the topic’s innate complex multidisciplinary area of competence, contributed to determine this Italian delay. Following the historical path of gender studies and women’s studies,¹ this article will explore the current feminist and gender discourse in order to catch a glimpse of what will be needed to fill this gap. First, for the purpose of tracing the cultural, historical, and political processes that failed to provide a favorable foundation for the advance of LGBTQ+ studies and the spread of women’s and gender studies inside Italian academia, the history of national feminist movements and LGBT standpoints will be outlined, since the issues addressed and their subsequent greater diffusion played a crucial role in shaping the current scenario. Second, a text analysis of the Italian university courses focused on gender and women’s studies will be presented in order to analyze the manifest and underlying related topics currently taught to new generations in Italy and, in wider terms, to investigate the different views that still shape the Italian academic situation on the matter. More broadly, the investigation of students’ access to gender and women’s perspectives will allow us to outline if and how young citizens understand the intersections between gender, sexual identity, ethnicity, race, and class and, consequently, how Italian youth’s problematize and contest gender norms, models, and stereotypes (Verge et al., 2018).

[Feminism in Italy: A historical perspective](#)

While the spread of the feminist thought in Europe had been extensive,

the Italian context was less permeable. The impact of the Suffragettes' movements of the First Wave (1848–1918), pursuing legal recognition and economic equality through the calling for the right to vote and equal education, remained constrained within the borders of United States and United Kingdom, as well as to the heterosexual, cultured, and upper-middle-class women they were speaking to (Cavarero & Restaino, 2002). An actual literature on First Wave movements in Italy cannot in fact be identified (Giozza, 2017; Tarnopolsky, 2011), despite a law supporting women's suffrage introduced in parliament in 1922. The massive—but systematically marginalized—participation of women in the different national political contexts (e.g., political groups, trade unions, student movements) started to diminish after the settlement of the fascist regime. Stripped of their freedom, women were only allowed to cover the role of mothers and wives, as contraception and abortion became prohibited and their mobility, personal correspondence, and social conduct were legally subjected to the husband. Additionally, “the persecution of any behavior that did not conform to state-imposed rules, [was] the basic instrument that fascism implemented in its attempt to completely regenerate Italian society” (Benadusi, Dingee, & Pudney, 2012, p. 111). Although no explicit law declared homosexuality as a crime, the dictatorship took strong actions against the “vice,” affirming that Italians were too virile to be homosexual (Dall'Orto, 1999) and proclaiming homosexual behavior punishable as public indecency (Royal Decree 773/1931). Consequently, anyone could be condemned for indecent behavior or solicitation, two crimes and terms that had acquired a very broad meaning during the regime. Whether the person was actually homosexual or not did not really matter; the accusation and the practice of homosexuality became a common deterrent for attacking political adversaries, when needed to eradicate an opposing radical voice or to dismiss, threaten, or blackmail thorny public figures (Benadusi et al., 2012). In this scenario, the first attempts to create a movement for gay freedom in Italy were actually put in place by Aldo Mieli, founder of the journal *Rassegna di studi sessuali* in 1922. However, after a few years of struggle to preserve the journal, he was forced to emigrate (Dall'Orto, 1988), as many radical supporters of women's rights did during those years, leaving behind their political projects.

At the end of the war, formal equality between the sexes (Art. 3) as well as the moral and legal equality of the spouses were first recognized in the Constitution, yet most forms of legal discrimination were not debated until the following decades. Starting from the 1970s, the emergence of the Second Wave movement, mostly in Europe and United States, shifted the feminist agenda on women's subjectivity and on the maintenance of a subordinate position—domestic labor and role of

caring especially—to which neither the legal regulation nor the progressive movements were able to cope with (Davis, 1981). After a first common separatist approach, linked to the diffusion of the practices (Cavarero & Restaino, 2002), the spread of different directions of thought became more evident (Offen, 1988). In North America authors began to consider the multiplicity and fragmentation of different forms of oppression against identities not conforming to the heterosexual wealthy, cultured White male ideal prototype: ranging from lesbianism and “deviant” sexuality matter (Rich, 1980; Rubin, 1984), through the debate on gender and ethnicity (Davis, 1981; Hooks, 1981; Lorde, 1984), to the origin of queer studies (Butler, 1990, 1993; De Lauretis, 1999). Moreover, Stonewall riots in 1969, the rise of the LGBTQ+ movement, the Black Panther party inception in 1966 and the Black rights movement activism contributed to an everchanging feminist debate during a 30-year period, leading to continuously expanding the conversation on different topics. During the same years in France, the theory of sexual difference became established. Starting from the work of Irigaray (1974), the French authors focused on the criticism and the deconstruction of psychoanalysis, deemed to be responsible for the alleged natural inferiority of women.

The Second Wave experience in Italy, on the other hand, was characterized mainly by the foundation of the first feminist groups emphasizing women’s difference, more than equality, in order to emancipate them from men’s dominion. As a consequence, these groups promoted women’s estrangement from traditional politics, harshly criticizing an established model of hierarchization and distribution of power grounded in a socially shared androcentric premise according to which the *res publica* is supposed to be men’s dominion. The pursuit of the peculiar feminine difference through the individual accounts, however, clashed with the specific narrative of lesbian subjectivity. Whereas the encounter of these collectives with lesbian women brought, on the one hand, new forms of expression and different awareness, on the other it has raised numerous issues leading to a breakdown. This fracture caused a division between feminists and lesbians into distinct political movements (Mercandino, 2013), losing the chance to start a narration of the Italian homosexual point of view, in tune with a reality grounded in the grassroots experience. This detachment is to be considered even more relevant as these women shared a common antipatriarchal, anticapitalist, and antifascist foundation (Danna, 2010) and since the lack of willingness to debate the sexualized experience was clearly declared: “being a community of women was an extraordinary experience, the greatest discovery of which was that there was an intense eroticism. It was not lesbianism, but sexuality not imprisoned in male desire” (Libreria delle donne di Milano, 1987).

The establishment of the *Società delle Storiche* and *Società delle Letterate* in 1989 and 1995, and of the Libreria delle Donne (founded in 1975), can be considered particularly relevant mainly for their original training and divulging intent, formally linked to history, literature, and philosophy. While *Società delle Storiche* aims to promote historical, educational and documentary research in the field of women and gender history, *Società delle Letterate* aspires to produce, disseminate and spread female knowledge; whereas *Libreria delle Donne* is a feminist group cherishing women's difference, nurtured by the practice of relationship and the attention given to poetry, literature, and philosophy. *Libreria* is the place where politics is discussed and conceived differently. This group prefers to use the "start from oneself" politics, considered as a careful consideration on one's own experience. It is from this theoretical and practical standpoint that Muraro and Cavarero² founded the philosophical community of *Diotima* in 1983. In retrospect, the essentialist current has had great resonance in Italy, starting in particular from Gilligan's psychological studies on the "female morality" (1982, 1989, 1992) and psychoanalytical studies by Irigaray (1974, 1977, 1984). The perspective that states an innate quality of femininity was taken by *Diotima* and spread nationally along with the view of an irreducible natural difference between man and woman. This consideration also seems to be sustained by Catholicism, as Pope Benedict XVI in 2004 (Ratzinger & Amato, 2004) took up what was previously declared by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1983) and Pope John Paul II (1988, 1995), reiterating the idea that women are naturally and essentially devoted to love and care, in a specific and irreducible way.

Meanwhile, the 10 years' span between the 1960s and 1970s was also characterized by the emergence of the first LGBT groups, finally able to express themselves, once one of the major Italian political forces—Christian Democratic Party—was no longer able to oppose these groups' attempts to freely associate. At the same time, sexual liberation groups, such as the pioneering group Fuori!, planned to develop an autonomous revolutionary political subjectivity in order to achieve public visibility (Cavarocchi, 2010). The importance placed on the countercultural, ludic, and irreverent movement, and the attention to body and sexuality, promoted the development of new LGBT groups, culminating in the "Three Days Against Repression" Conference held in Bologna in 1977.

In the following years, part of Italian feminism became established in government institutions, and its cooptation led to the almost total disappearance of generations of activists and to the rejection of the term *feminist* by many young people (Biglia, 2006). However, writing

the history of Italian feminism continued to be complicated: “compared to what has been published and is being published about the women’s movement in other European countries [...] the Italian production of the 1990s has been and is, in fact, non-existent” (Di Cori, 2004, p. 104). On the other hand, during the 1980s the LGBT movement started to advocate for the legalization of homosexuality and the granting of protection rights as a symbolic starting point for changing the collective mindset (Rossi Barilli, 1999), finding a strong opposition in the representatives of the Christian Democratic Party, who sought to defend the “traditional family.” At the end of the decade, the political instability obstructed the debate on gender-related violence, sexual assault, and LGBT rights. While the path toward the promotion of women’s rights in Italy has reached important milestones in the last 60 years, the national recognition of LGBTQ+ rights has only just begun. The fight to introduce legislation that would protect the LGBTQ+ community against discrimination and homophobic violence has led to the adoption of a few specific regional regulations. An attempt to extend the main legislative instrument that the Italian legal system offers for the repression of hate crimes—the Mancino law (2015/1993)—to homophobia and transphobia is still ongoing. The proposal was approved by the lower house of the Italian Parliament in September 2013 and is still to be discussed by the Senate. On the other hand, the legal recognition of civil unions and cohabitation between same-sex couples was promulgated only in 2016.³

In relation to the academic path, even though Italian stances can be considered consistent with themes and claims that characterized the standpoints of Second Wave internationally, the development of contents linked to the queer and the Third Wave movements have assumed peculiar and atypical characteristics in Italy. First, women’s studies courses were introduced belatedly,⁴ and, second, new theories, epistemologies, and research methodologies are still not wholly accepted or established in the country (Cori, 2013). Moreover, still today the tendency is to consider feminist and gender issues as an exclusively female field,⁵ and the absence of shared languages and definitions has led to a confused situation, especially when “gender studies” and “women’s studies” labels are used in an arbitrary manner, depending on the theoretical and political positions of the lecturers (Cori, 2013; Nussbaum, 1997). Indeed, the academic preference for the term *gender* might be due to the recall of an apparent scientific rigor, if compared to the more provocative “feminist/women studies” (Taronna, 2004), which led Di Cori to declare that teaching gender studies “under disguise” is the legacy of a long Italian tradition started in the 1970s (2013).

Finally, it seems that the current and future Italian situation of gender studies and women’s studies is also linked to student’s

motivation to participate: “what worries the most is the decline in interest of first cycle degree students for feminist or gender issues” (Giorgio, Chemello, Crivelli, & Wood, 2010, p. 258). Chemello also confirmed this matter, adding that to many Paduan university students the existence of gender studies, but also of feminism and women’s literature, is a real discovery. This tendency is also corroborated outside the Italian academic context, as highlighted by Spoor and Lehmilller’s recent study (2014) showing that students are generally more interested in taking gender-titled courses than women-titled courses, and underlining the mainly female interest around these topics.

The Italian spot: Good practices and social initiatives

Recent years seemed to be more positively oriented, as attempts to mainstream women’s, gender, and LGBTQI+ perspectives in lower and higher levels of education have been pursued by various national efforts that were, however, poorly implemented or failed to reach the desired effect. Indeed, the Italian government has attempted to include a gender perspective in the different levels of education, aiming at aligning the country with the equivalent European policies. The 2004 proposition to introduce advanced graduate-level courses of “Women, Politics, and Institutions” into 35 Italian universities is emblematic (Magaraggia & Leone, 2010). Although this was the most massive attempt to create a shared background among the experts of the subject, 10 years later the majority of these courses are not active. Furthermore, it is still not possible to offer homogeneous programs in gender and women’s studies⁶ among the different levels of education, including universities, allowing the retention of a partial vision on the subjects.

Other attempts to introduce a gender perspective specifically in primary and high school have instead led to more complex consequences. A series of booklets were written by the A.T. Beck Institute on the UNAR⁷ mandate to implement specific teaching modules for preventing and contrasting homophobia and homophobic bullying in schools, adopting a scientific, not ideological, perspective (A.T. Beck Institute, 2014). The booklets have never been used in schools and are currently available only on the A.T. Beck Institute Web site, as the ministry suspended their employment following the public accusation of carrying out a “homosexualist” propaganda aimed at manipulating children and adolescents. Although these publications were prompted by the need to bring into the schools the debate on gender violence, violence against children, child pornography, and all forms of bullying, including homophobic and transphobic ones (Montano, 2014), the

media campaign, promoted primarily by the Episcopal Conference of Italy (CEI), conveyed the message that the introduction of gender studies in the compulsory educational years could be interpreted as a “persecutory strategy against the family, an attack aimed at deconstructing the person and, therefore, society” (Bagnasco, 2014).

Alongside this serious episode of obstruction against national antidiscrimination policies, numerous initiatives were disseminated by minority groups tied to the Catholic environment, starting from the homosexuality cure promoted by the Lot Group, to the “anti-gender” material distributed by religious high school teachers, affirming that “being gay is a psychological problem” and that the opening to gay rights is the prelude of polygamy and pedophilia (Marzano, 2015). Considering the state of gender and women’s studies, the reaction of the academic contexts before such situations has been tepid and not very incisive. While there still is no legitimation of gender and women’s studies within universities, structured courses dedicated to gender studies and women’s studies and LGBTQI+ issues are missing, and attempts to inform through educational texts, such as Marzano’s (2015), are welcomed with controversy and boycotting attitudes. Moreover, it seems that an academic position on these topics is late in coming, leaving the Italian public without an academic point of view on the matter.

Aims and methods

This research was developed thanks to a broader project involving Italy, Spain, and the UK, aimed at exploring the state of the art of university education regarding feminist epistemology and methodology and gender studies.⁸ Starting from this joint research, the authors decided to deepen the theme in the Italian context by setting more definite objects. The very first aim of this research was to explore the occurrence of university courses on gender and women’s studies in Italy, paying specific attention to epistemology and methodology courses. Starting from this purpose, this article intends to investigate the matter in the most recent years, aiming, in particular, to (1) underline how women’s and gender studies are presented to today’s students in higher levels of education, and (2) compare the descriptors of the courses held in the two interdisciplinary fields to examine if they are similarly or differently conveyed. The initial research was focused on finding how gender studies and women’s studies are framed inside the Italian higher education system. Italian university programs are mainly divided in two cycles.⁹ The first one corresponds to undergraduate degree programs, lasting three years and providing students a preliminary education on a subject. The second cycle lasts two years, corresponding to

master's degree programs, where a first-cycle degree or comparable foreign degree is required in order to access. These programs provide students with higher theoretical and practical preparation. Specific trainings, such as architecture, law, construction engineering/architecture, pharmacy, veterinary, and primary education are based on a single-cycle program lasting five years, or six years in the case of dentistry or medicine and surgery. Undergraduate and master's degree programs sharing common topics and objectives are grouped into so-called *Classi di laurea* (classes of degree). A series of requirements are set for each class, allowing universities to choose different teaching and practical activities provided that they respect the national requirements and a set number of *Crediti Formativi Universitari* (CFU or ECTS).¹⁰ Additionally, each discipline of the Italian university system is formally coded into one of the 367 *Settori Scientifico Disciplinari* (SSD; scientific disciplinary sectors), and they are regulated by the Italian Ministry of Education and grouped into 188 *Settori Concorsuali* (sectors), 88 *Macrosettori* (macro-sectors), and 14 *Aree* (areas).¹¹ Gender studies and women's studies are not considered specific SSD, whereas only a gender-related focus can be found in the description of three SSDs included in the area of historical, philosophical, educational, and psychological sciences (M-STO/01 Medieval History; M-STO/02 Modern History; M-STO/04 Contemporary History) and one SSD related to the area of economical and statistical sciences (SECS-S/05 Social Statistics). In addition, no class of degree is exclusively related to women's studies or gender studies, while the development of a gender-sensitive perspective is mentioned among the educational objectives of six first-cycle programs and 11 second-cycle programs (Table 1), confirming previous research (Antonelli, Sarra, & Sorrentino, 2013). It is therefore clear that one of the main reasons for the absence of specific programs or courses majoring in gender studies and women's studies is the lack of a formal disciplinary area or class of degree.

Table 1. Classes of undergraduate and master's degree courses showing a gender-sensitive perspective among the training objectives.

Cycle of degree		Class code	Class name
First Undergraduate	cycle	L-19	Education sciences and teacher education
		L-22	Physical education and sport
		L-33	Economics
		L-37	Social sciences for co-operation, development, and peace
		L-39	Social work
		L-42	History
Second Master's	cycle	LM-1	Cultural anthropology and ethnology
		LM-36	African and Asian languages and literature
		LM-41	Medicine and surgery
		LM-56	Economic sciences

LM-64	Religion studies
LM-65	Performing arts and multimedia production
LM-67	Sport science for prevention and rehabilitation
LM-68	Sport science
LM-78	Philosophical sciences
LM-81	Cooperation and development studies
LM-84	Historical sciences

Starting from this understanding of the Italian university system, the first two authors looked for undergraduate and master's courses and programs focused on gender and women's studies. The search for relevant material was conducted online, first by looking for Italian programs started in the 2014–2015 and 2015–2016 academic years in both public and private Italian universities. The very same parameters were subsequently used to focus the research on gender studies and women's studies undergraduate and master's-level courses held in all the Italian university programs.

Specific research keys were set through brainstorming between the first and the second author, leading to two lists of words, both in Italian and in English, related to the research paradigm (metodologia, methodology, method*, epistemology, epistemol*, ontology, ontol*) and the broad topic (gender; genere, difference, differenza, donn*, wom*, fem*).¹² The keywords were initially used to conduct extensive research through the Google search engine, and the results were then refined using specialized Web sites (Osservatorio della differenza, iaph Italy, Società delle Storiche, and Milly Villa Center), national institutional databases (Almalaurea, Cineca and Cestor), and the educational offer section of university Web sites. As a result, one master's degree program and 69 courses (14 undergraduate and 55 master's) presenting a semantic reference to gender/women's studies were found. The reliability of these results was guaranteed by the employment of institutional Web sites (e.g., Cineca, Almalaurea) linked to the Italian Ministry of Education database. However, this initial exploration was based mainly on the titles of the courses, possibly leaving other courses addressing gender studies and women's studies issues out of the results. It is important to underline some preliminary aspects: only 24 out of 91 public and private Italian universities¹³ offer gender studies and women's studies related courses, and the University of Bologna by itself offers 30 of the 69 courses. This high number is certainly influenced by the presence in this university of GEMMA, the only master's degree program in women's and gender studies in Italy, and the first one in Europe. GEMMA includes 18 of the 69 resulting courses on language and literature (12), history (4), sociology (1), and law (1). Formally, GEMMA is part of the master's

degree program in modern, comparative, and postcolonial literature. This element, along with the disciplinary areas of the 69 courses, underlines that the academic viewpoint on gender studies and women's studies is currently framed in the language and literature area of knowledge (Table 2), hence confirming that literature still is the main mean used to teach these topics.

Table 2. Disciplines of WS/GS undergraduate and master's courses.

	Included	Excluded	Total
Language and literature	21	11	32
Human sciences	10		10
History	6	3	9
Education	6	1	7
Political sciences	3		3
Law	2	1	3
Sociology	2	1	3
Cinema	1		1
Anthropology	1		1
Total	52	17	69

The subsequent phase of the research involved the use of the course descriptions, retrieved online from university Web sites, aiming at understanding which themes related to gender and women's studies are taught in Italy. The course descriptions have been chosen not only because they are the course presentation, but also because a description holds the main topics and methods that lecturers refer to during classes, and its examination can reveal both the explicit and underlying themes related to the course. In order to conduct a coherent analysis of the texts, specific inclusion criteria were set. Specifically, 52 of the 69 course descriptions were included, following a selection based on language,¹⁴ uniqueness, and presence of an actual description.

Analysis procedure and results

The set of all the course descriptions (text corpus) was initially explored using the Lexical and Textual Automatic Treatment for Content Analysis (TaLTaC²) software to highlight the text content and to analyze the lexicometric characteristics of the corpus and evaluate its adequacy for the analysis. The first step of this analysis consisted in the corpus normalization¹⁵ and in a subsequent assessment of its lexicometric characteristics. Once it was confirmed that the resultant characteristics (Table 3) were acceptable (Tuzzi, 2003), we conducted a manual selection of the most informative sequences of words, producing a list containing multi-words and sequences of words

that were later used to conduct a basic lexicalization¹⁶ procedure. Following this preparatory phase, we could proceed with the two main analyses of the corpus.

N	Total occurrences 10598
V	Different word types 2861
$(V/N)*100$	Type/Token Ratio 26.996
$(V_1/V)*100$	Percentage of hapax 61.272
N/V	3.704

Analysis of the distinctive lexicon

The analysis of the lexicon started with the identification of the main segments, using TaLTaC² software (Bolasco, 2010), which subsequently allowed us to reduce synonyms and to fix the inclusion frequencies threshold, using Spad software (Lebart, Morineau, Becue, & Haeusler, 1989). This process permitted us to highlight words showing a high probability of being overused in relation to a specific variable. In this case, the analysis was conducted on the lexicon characteristics of the two fields of studies taken into account: women's and gender studies (two modalities). The lexical (or thematic) profile of each of these variables was therefore analyzed, and, as a result, it was possible to extrapolate those words that are under or overrepresented in a specific variable if compared to the whole corpus. In order to fulfill the purposes of the current research and to be able to address properly the research questions, only overused lexicon was examined.¹⁷

The application of this procedure offers further support in the critical reading of a text, since the investigation of the distinctive words allows researchers to examine the profile of each category related to the corpus, starting from a probabilistic hypothesis of equidistribution of the forms in the text.¹⁸ While conducting this research, it seemed useful to determine the thematic references represented in the two groups of courses, mainly because this type of analysis can be used to distinguish otherwise hardly perceptible differences, allowing an interaction between extra-text variables with the textual ones, therefore going beyond a simple sequential reading of the text. The following results are divided by the two disciplinary fields of study taken into account (Table 4). In the first approach, the one concerning the vocabulary used in the descriptions of women's studies courses, the lexicon appears to refer to historical, juridical, and literary aspects.

Table 4. Specific graphic form related to Women's and Gender studies ($\alpha \leq 0.050$).

Women's Studies	Prob.	Gender Studies	Prob.
Women	0.000	Media	0.000
Feminine	0.000	Social	0.000
Legal	0.001	Sexuality	0.000
Voices	0.001	Gender	0.001
Female Writers	0.001	Gender*	0.001
History	0.001	Science	0.003
Practices	0.002	Debate	0.003
Civilization	0.003	Cultural	0.005
Novel	0.003	Kinship	0.005
Memory	0.003	Socialization	0.005
International law	0.003	Institutions	0.010
Law	0.003	Familiar	0.010
Writing	0.004	Knowledge	0.015
Women's history	0.004	Kinship anthropology	0.019
War	0.006	Semiotics	0.019
Rights	0.006	Texts	0.024
XX century	0.013	Educational	0.024
Literary text	0.013	Family	0.026
Comparison	0.015	Section	0.037
Literature	0.018	Politicization	0.037

The historical side concerns not only a general and generic attention to the temporal context of reference (*civilization, memory, XX century, war*), but also the precise evolution of women's movements, which were conducted by *women*, aimed at enhancing the *feminine* and, especially in Italy, based on the use of actual *practices*, as previously outlined, in order to enhance *comparison* between experiences (e.g., personal events, forms of knowledge, emotions). The juridical aspects of the lexicon, on the other hand, are linked both to the informal forms of feminist activism, such as the public demonstrations for women's rights recognition (*war, rights*), and to the subsequent development of policies and practices designed to change the *legal* framework, on the basis of the support offered mostly by *international law*, which provide legal instruments to protect certain social groups, rather than national emanations, which have been proven to be fallacious in several occasions. Finally, as extensively highlighted in the introductory part of this article, a major aspect of women's studies is reconfirmed to be that of *literature*, the field that has mostly endorsed the way of feminist thought in Italy, through the establishment of groups of women that have used *writing* and the women's *voice* as a way to convey a message of equality or detachment from the masculine (*writers, novel, literary text, literature*).

The core aspects emerging from the analysis of gender studies course descriptions are the ones linked to a cultural and social identity, allowing us to frame the descriptions in two main themes: the first one concerning *sexuality* and the second one regarding *gender* and

*gender**.¹⁹ Both of these topics led to the entrance of the gender studies discourse into the political environment (*debate, institutions, politicization*) and the individual and collective sociocultural context (*media, socials, cultural, kinship, socialization, educational, family, kinship anthropology*). Lastly, references to literature and philosophy (*semiotics, text, science*) can be found even in the gender studies course descriptions.

Correspondence analysis

In line with the aim of the research, a second investigation was conducted to identify the underlying dimensions between the texts and to grasp the core “networks of meaning” (Nencini, Sarrica, Romaioli, & Contarello, 2008, p. 286). Correspondence analysis allows us to identify dimensions underlying the data that summarize the multiple relationships between the original variables and the words of the corpus. These dimensions are called “factors,” while the original variables are “active variables.” Factors are synthesis variables, aimed at reproducing the variability of the matrix, which can reveal latent dimensions of sense. Spad software was used to identify underlying thematic categories and the implicit references used by lecturers to articulate women’s and gender studies in an academic context. For this second analysis, the nine disciplinary areas of the courses were used as original variables.

Through the analysis of simple correspondences, performed using the words \times disciplines matrix (dimensions 2861×9), it was possible to highlight and consider the first factor, which explains 13.95% of the total inertia, and the second factor, explaining 13.37% of total inertia.

The first factor, related to the disciplinary areas of sociology, educational sciences, and languages and literature, is defined by different aspects that mainly concern the question of women and the female world. The second factor, instead, moves away from the philosophical question of the feminist identity path to carry out the gaze in favor of the educational and sociological side, represented by the media world (cinema, film) and the cultural and family aspects that have characterized the Italian scenario in the debate between sexuality, gender, and genres (Table 5).

A deeper analysis of the factors allowed a more detailed interpretation thanks to the examination of each factor’s constitutive elements (Table 6). Factor 1 can be explained using the opposition between movement and activism. The positive semi-axis is defined by the discipline area of language and literature and by words that can be related to the concept of movement. Whereas literature has been the main means through

which feminist movements were able to spread in Italy, attention toward *history analysis, literature, and feminine knowledge* can be seen as a form of intellectual engagement, a “movement” based on and safe-guarded by the group, where individuals share experiences and interests toward the cultural involvement, promoting group actions based on structures and strategies that may help oppressed groups to join together to face different challenges (Glasberg & Shannon, 2010). Equally, the negative semi-axis of the factor, defined by educational sciences and sociology disciplines, was labeled “activism,” referring to all the forms of sociological and educational efforts that are moved by the need to conquer a form of recognition (*rights, gender*) through the acknowledgment of different *perspectives*.

Similarly, the poles of Factor 2 oppose forms of “progressive knowledge” (*education, processes, and science* on the negative semi-axis), to the ones related to a more “reflective knowledge,” based on a *feminist* view that is grounded on *differences* and is aimed to *understand* and *analyze* contexts. Whereas specific attention is paid to different ways of achieving knowledge, it is important to underline that Factor 2 is defined by the disciplines of educational sciences on the positive semi-axis and by law and sociology on the negative semi-axis; therefore, the main aim of this factor seems to be the reaching of a form of understanding that helps to educate individuals and society.

Discussion

This research investigated the characteristic and the dimensions of gender and women's studies in undergraduate and master's courses in Italy as they offer a unique interdisciplinary perspective on the construction of gender and its intersections with other relations of power, such as class, race, sexuality, age, nationality, and religion. More broadly, gender and women's studies exploration is here intended also as a means to explore how issues related to sex, sexuality, sexual orientation, and similar identity-based academic fields are disseminated and discussed inside Italian academia.

The results showed varied aspects and trajectories. First, this research confirmed an unbalanced distribution of gender studies and women's studies courses in the diverse disciplines starting from the initial analyses of the Italian university system, which underlined a lack of generalized disciplinary openness in adopting a gender perspective, while the attachment to those disciplines that have facilitated Italian feminism is still strong. On the one hand, there is a lack of gender studies and women's studies courses in the economic, sports, and medical and surgical fields, despite the fact that the national university system establishes a specific indication of gender-sensitive training in these areas (Table 1). More broadly, the widespread absence of gender studies and women's studies courses in diverse disciplines is also manifest in those fields that are internationally recognized for the employment of gender, women's, and LGBTQ+ studies, such as psychology, but which are not recognized as such by the SSDs description provided by the Italian university system. On the other hand, most of the courses fall within the language and literature field, maintaining a stable thematic link with those first Italian institutions openly directed at feminist teaching (*Società delle storiche* and *Società delle letterate*). However, the courses are largely held at the University of Bologna mainly as part of the GEMMA master's program. The fact that an international master's program influences the results to such an extent is an important detail and could point out that the international frame is currently the only way to establish and maintain a degree course solely dedicated to women's and/or gender studies in Italy.

Second, the two fields of interdisciplinary studies are only apparently separated. In fact, results suggest that, while adopting different lexical vocabularies, the areas of interest and the underlying themes remain the same in both gender and women's studies, just as approaches, aims, and perspectives. However, it is interesting to underline that *sexuality* emerges only in the lexicon of gender studies

courses, showing a deviance in the gender studies and women's studies common path mainly traced by literature. Following this hint, the lexicon in gender studies courses presents references to political and sociocultural contexts, giving a dynamic image, if compared to the more established historical, juridical, and literary focus of the lexicon used in women's studies courses. This characterization is also confirmed by the analysis of the correspondence, where the first factor reflects such core duplicity, as the underlying issues support the link between the enduring saliency of the traditional standpoints related to a cultured historical movement and those forms of activism based on social recognition of diverse identities. Coherently, the second factor enriches the characterization of gender studies and women's studies courses subtext, on the basis of the relation between two connected forms of knowledge, characterized by different shades of meaning. While progressive knowledge is connected to the traditional advancement path followed by sciences in order to advance and develop their areas of expertise, reflective knowledge is related to forms of deep and considered understanding, through the employment of specific lenses, here feminism and difference.

Lastly, when looking at gender studies and women's studies courses' common aspects, it is interesting to note that sociology contributes to explain both the observed factors (negative semi-axis), underlining the strong link between the interdisciplinary fields of academic study, such as women's and gender studies, and the sociocultural context in which they are immersed. The other disciplines that define the factors, educational sciences and language and literature (regarding the movement-activism pole) and law and educational sciences (with respect to the knowledge poles), do confirm a prevalence of an educational, intellectual, and statutory point of view in this matter, emphasizing the educational aim of the courses.

Starting from these results, women and gender studies courses seem to convey both the topics related to Italian Second Wave feminism and their distinctive perspectives, methods, and epistemologies. Additionally, the results' references to sexuality and gender express an encouraging focus that might help to discuss not only women's stands, but also other identities, histories, and perceptions, consistent with the ones studied by men's and LGBTQ+ studies. However, this message is still confined due to the small number of the courses and the difficulties that women's and gender studies have encountered and still face both inside and outside the Italian universities, missing the potential benefits of an open dialogue between academia and society and expanding the discrepancies between theory and practice. Women's condition in Italy can set an example on this matter.

Feminist theories have certainly influenced the egalitarian policies of the last centuries, but they have not been able to transform these regulations into coherent forms of social awareness and community behavior. Despite the development of many social interventions, the systematic estrangement of Italian women from social and political national power persists, resulting in forms of discrimination. If we consider basic gender equality parameters, it seems that social consideration and treatment of women in Italy are not equal to men's, leaving the gender gap issue still open both inside and outside academia (Anzivino & Vaira, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2016). Widening this line of reasoning to related issues, the emergence of queer theory, cyber and cyborg feminism, transgender and genderqueer politics, and cultural post-humanism, post-sexualism, and advanced biotechnology, including contraception and assisted reproduction techniques that freed women from the determinism of nature, resulted in the rejection of the gender binary that classifies humanity into two different and irreducible forms: masculine and feminine. These theories have opened the path for contemporary society to the possible guarantee of self-determination rights for all the citizens, although concretely the consequential social practices are not equally certain. Moreover, the isolation of the only course conveying an LGBT perspective is the result of a historical absence of an academic and public discourse on the representations and the narratives of a free sexuality, which established a scenario where citizens do not have the instruments to narrate their own experiences, producing a "real mutilation [...] both for those young people who have taken the feminist path, and for those who, although external, have not been able to grasp the influences hidden in the public conversation (Mercandino, 2013). However, the analysis of the lexicon shows that the absence of a discussion on sexuality is only apparent, confirming that a discourse on such a fundamental topic is inevitable both in the individuals' private lives and in the cultural and social actions of the citizens. While recognizing the central role played by second-wave feminism in the Italian social context, the call to change must go beyond female subjectivity, taking into account sexualities and the sexual roles in order to understand their underlying meanings and the role they play as tools that maintain social order or promote societal change (Zemon Davis, 1976). Acting in this perspective and given the widespread resistance encountered by the most recent attempts to include a gender perspective in social and educational policies, the reforms of the university curricula can be seen as one of the most solid means to alter tacit social rules.

This research therefore underlines that gender and women's studies

can be valid allies in the debate concerning equality, social recognition, and self-determination of all citizens, especially in Italy, where women's, lesbian, and gay people's rights have been addressed belatedly. In order to do so, Italian academia must emerge from the detached world of university teaching and research and must promote the adoption of gender and LGBTQ+ perspectives in multiple disciplines, aiming to intensify a continuous dialogue with society regarding the different issues related to sex, gender, and sexuality.

Notes

1. Women's studies is referred to here as the set of studies and research built on the different declinations of feminist thought and on the need to read and document contexts from women's (mainly cisgender) point of view (Taronna, 2004). As claimed by Kimmich, "Women's studies is an outgrowth of the feminist movement. It is its academic arm" (as cited in Maher, 2007, p. 1552). Instead, gender studies is "a field of inquiry that explores how femininity and masculinity are integral part of how people think about social organizations and institutions, dispositions of power, interpersonal relationships, and understandings of identity, sexuality, and subjectivity. An enlargement of what was initially known as women's studies, gender studies identifies, analyzes, and often critiques the disparate effects of patriarchal organizations on women and men" (Roof, 2007, p. 324).
2. Muraro is still involved in the management of the Diotima group, while Cavarero distanced herself in the early 1990s.
3. Law 76/2016 was promulgated on May 20, 2016 (Ansa, 2016). Full text: <http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2016/05/21/16G00082/sg>.
4. The first gender studies and women's studies degree program was founded in Italy in 2006, at the University of Bologna (<http://www.lilec.it/gemma/>), whereas women's studies university courses first appeared in the U.S. in the late 1960s (Buhle, 2000; Ginsberg, 2008).
5. As underlined by Antonelli et al. (2013), "there is a feminization of lecturers: 87% are women and only 13% men, [...] almost all researchers (34%) and associates (27%). Full professors are only 23% while 16% are unstructured (non-tenured)" (p. 21).
6. Gender and women's studies are here separated on the bases of the differences explained in note 1.
7. National Anti-Discrimination Office of the Ministry of Equal Opportunities.
8. The project "Boosting Methodological Accuracy in Gender Studies Through International Learning" was funded by the Europa investigación Programme, Programa Estatal de I + D + I Orientada a los Retos de la Sociedad, en el marco del Plan Estatal de Investigación Científica y Técnica y de Innovación 2013–2016. BOE, 86 Viernes 10 de abril de 2015 (<http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2015/04/10/pdfs/BOE-A-2015-3879.pdf>) PI Barbara Biglia.
9. For a comprehensive account of the Italian university system, see http://attiministeriali.miur.it/media/211300/the_italian_university_system.pdf.
10. 180 CFU/ECTS for undergraduate degrees, 120 CFU/ECTS for master's degrees, and 300/360 ECTS/CFU for 5–6 years single-cycle programs.
11. A presentation of SSDs, sectors, and macro-sectors is available at: http://attiministeriali.miur.it/media/265754/allegato_a.pdf, while a detailed description

of the SSD can be found at <http://www.miur.it/UserFiles/116.htm>. Both the documents are available in Italian only.

12. Keywords related to men and masculinities or LGBTQ+ were excluded due to the lack of university courses on these topics and the consequent impossibility to perform an analysis due to insufficient text. In particular, preliminary research showed that the only course on an LGBTQ+-related topic (History of homosexuality) first started in 2017–2018, subsequently to the academic years taken into account in this research. Coherently, non-recurring academic workshops or training courses on these topics were excluded as this research focuses on undergraduate and master's-level courses/programs only. Therefore, the authors decided to keep the research on gender studies and women's studies related keywords in order to maintain a broad and inclusive point of view, focused on those original perspectives that originated and inspired more recent fields of study related to sexuality and gender, such as LGBTQ+ and men's studies.
13. See <http://anagrafe.miur.it/index.php>.
14. As the majority of the courses were held in Italian, we chose to use only the descriptions written in Italian in order to meet the analyses criteria of language homogeneity.
15. Normalization is “the procedure of standardization of graphical forms aimed to eliminate irrelevant graphic differences and preserve relevant ones” (Bolasco, 2012, p. 11).
16. As defined by Bolasco (2012), “lexicalisation represents a new parsing, through which one individuates an entire locution as a single occurrence (multiword). This entails that the occurrences of the entire vocabulary must be calculated anew” (p. 13). Lexicalization allows one to treat composed words sequences as single forms that, without this process, would get lost throughout the automatic analysis of the textual data (Bolasco, Morrone, & Baiocchi, 1999).
17. setting $\alpha \leq 0.05$.
18. When a word is equally distributed in all the subtexts, it is considered banal; when, on the other hand, a word is overrepresented in one of the subtexts, it is considered characteristic or specific (della Ratta-Rinaldi, 2002).
19. The use of the asterisk here is motivated by the presence of the English word *gender* instead of the Italian word *genere* in the course descriptions written in Italian. The use of the English word is usually due to the preservation of specific English word expressions in preference to an Italian translation (e.g., gender studies, gender sensitive). In few course descriptions, the use of the English word *gender* was not linked to a specific word expression, but rather to the lecturer's choice to use the English word instead of the Italian one.

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