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The Challenges and Experiences of Transgender Students in Italian High Schools: Alias Career and Normalisation

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Abstract

The experience of transgender students in Italian upper secondary education is an ignored field with a severe lack of data, a total lack of school policies by the Ministry of Education and training for teaching and non-teaching staff. As of 2019, some schools have started to adopt the alias career, a device created by the University of Turin to guarantee a gender-affirming school life for trans students. To explore the school experience of transgender people in Italy, the regulations of the alias career of 92 high schools were analysed. In addition, ten trans students, who had access to the device or fought for its introduction at their school, were interviewed.

The analyses show that the Italian school system is not ready to address the needs of transgender people and that even schools that have adopted the alias career are not equipped to deal with their needs, mostly due to the pathologisation of gender incongruence, the propagation of “gender ideology” and lack of training and knowledge regarding trans issues. Moreover, in most schools, we can find a strong presence of binarism, cisnormativity, the pathologisation of gender incongruence and control over students’ bodily autonomy, for example by requiring a diagnosis of gender dysphoria to activate the alias career and prohibiting access to bathrooms and changing rooms.

JEL codes: I20, I21, I29

Keywords: transgender students, carriera alias, normalisation, inclusive education, queer pedagogy

1. Introduction

Between April 2019 and the 11th of January 2023, approximately 173 Italian schools introduced and regulated the alias career (*carriera alias*), intending to recognise and support trans pupils within K-12 schools (see AGEDO, 2023). The alias career is an agreement between the school and the transgender¹ student—in the case of a minor, their family/caregiver(s) which allows the change of the youth’s birth name with a chosen name within the school’s unofficial documentation, such as the online grade book and school e-mail address, for who has not legally changed their name and gender marker. Moreover, some schools also consider access to gender-segregated facilities, such as bathrooms and changing rooms, and educate students, teaching, and

¹ The definition of the term “transgender” used in this work describes the various subjectivities whose sex assigned at birth is not congruent with their gender identity. This umbrella term includes people with a binary gender identity, such as trans men and trans women, and non-binary people who do not identify within binary genders.

non-teaching staff about gender incongruence (World Health Organization, 2019) and the LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, plus other gender identities, and sexual orientations) community.

This exploratory study aims to describe and analyse the alias career and the experiences of transgender pupils within Italian high schools through a mixed-methods approach (Amaturo & Punziano, 2016).

1.1 Trans childhood, adolescence, and education

In many societies, childhood is a conceptual framework that delimits a time-space in which the human transits from an indistinct and unfinished entity to a complete being. This transitional period also concerns gender identity; children's gender is assigned before or at birth through their genitals, chromosomes, and hormones. Children must incarnate said gender during their development to adulthood—through socialisation and the system of normalisation (Castañeda, 2014). Since children are perceived as incomplete and incapable of recognising and understanding their gender, it can be difficult for transgender children to assert their being. Indeed, they can be considered a threat to normative gender development and cisgenderism (*Ibidem*). Similarly, adolescence is socially constructed as a determined period of fluctuation and turbulence in which the individual finally “becomes” gendered and a stable adult (Owen, 2014). Transgender childhood and adolescence threaten normativity and cisgenderism by challenging the “normal” development of gender identity, gender itself, and the very categories of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (Meadow, 2018). Moreover, because of their age, adultism (Bell, 2003) comes heavily into play in trans youths' lives (Singh *et al.*, 2014), namely attitudes and actions that position adults as superior to young people; this is primarily linked to adults' beliefs that youths are not mature enough to understand their gender identity and that their lived experiences are “just a phase” (Castañeda, 2014).

The vast literature on transgender K-12 students, which is mainly based on studies within the anglosphere, indicates that their school experience is generally characterised by transphobic bullying, marginalisation, victimisation, systemic microaggressions and a cisnormative school environment (McGuire *et al.*, 2010; Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017; Mayo & Blackburn, 2019; McBride & Neary, 2021; McBride, 2021). Thanks to the gender minority stress model, we can learn that violence against trans pupils can have adverse effects on their mental health (Scandurra *et al.*, 2017, 2020; Johnson *et al.*, 2020), their school performance and concentration in the classroom (Council of Europe, 2018) and, in addition, can lead to decreased class attendance and school dropout (McGuire *et al.*, 2010; Grant *et al.*, 2011). Most of the difficulties faced by trans students are related to the invalidation and invisibilisation of their gender identity (Johnson *et al.*, 2020), but also the disrespect and denial of their name and pronouns (Council of Europe, 2018; McBride, 2021; Paechter *et al.*, 2021) by peers, teaching and non-teaching staff, and exclusion from gender-segregated spaces and activities such as bathrooms, locker rooms (Ingrej, 2018; Davies *et al.*, 2019), and sports (Ingram & Thomas, 2019). Further issues are related to the absence of education and training for teaching and non-teaching staff and their peers, but also the lack of adequate policies and action plans to support this population (Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017; Council of Europe, 2018; Meyer & Keenan, 2018; Mayo & Blackburn, 2019; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020; Omercajic & Martino, 2020; Mayo, 2022).

Transgender students' status in the European Union (EU) differs from country to country; not many have policies and action plans to improve the school experience of LGBTQIA+ people (IGLYO, 2022). Generally, transgender students in Europe report higher levels of violence and harassment than their cisgender LGB counterparts (Council of Europe, 2018; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020).

1.2 The alias carer

In the EU, the University of Turin was the first to design a plan to counter the issues faced by transgender university students by instituting in the 2002/2003 academic year the *doppio libretto*² and in the academic year 2012/2013, it was substituted by the alias career (Russo & Valerio, 2019). The latest mapping of universities with these two devices reports that of the 64 Italian public universities, 6 offer the *doppio libretto* and 32 the alias career (Universitrans, 2018). The first adoption of the alias career in K-12 schools only occurred in the 2018/2019 school year because of the demands from below (Stryker, 2006) by trans students, families/caregiver(s), trans and LGBT organisations and gender clinics. As in universities, schools formalise the device through a confidentiality agreement between the institute and the transgender student and, in the case of a minor, the family/caregiver(s). The primary purpose of the alias device is to allow students who still need to have their names legally changed to use their chosen names on all unofficial documentation. In some schools, the alias career has additional purposes, such as supporting and recognising the needs of trans students; giving them access to toilets and changing rooms according to their gender or needs; recognising transphobic bullying; training and educating the school community on transgender issues; offering further support for the transgender student according to individual needs.

The adoption of the alias career is based on School Autonomy, which gives principals independence in teaching, organisation, research and development, and administration (Benadusi *et al.*, 2020). If there were political will, the Italian Ministry of Education (MIUR) could impose the device nationwide and provide best practices concerning the well-being of transgender and gender diverse children, preadolescents, and adolescents. The MIUR has not taken a stand on the alias career and has not adopted the numerous recommendations the Council of Europe has provided to its Member States on transgender youth. In 2010 and 2015, the Council of Europe suggested that Member States ensure the well-being of transgender pupils in education, promote respect and inclusion, provide teachers with training on gender identity and sexual orientation, and include transgender people in data collections on bullying, cyberbullying, and discrimination. In 2019, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) also gave similar recommendations to Italy. Although there are no recommendations and good practices from the MIUR regarding the regulation of the alias career (Bourelly *et al.*, 2022), there are available rule books proposed by several organisations, such as the one offered by Genderlens (2021) and Agedo (2021) and another by Rete Lenford (2022).

² They gave trans students a second student's record book with their chosen name, allowing them to take exams without disclosing their trans status to professors and students.

2. Normalisation, pastoral power and binarism

Foucault (1975) refers to the power of normalisation as how power and knowledge intersect first to regulate and then control individuals and societies. To this end, norms and standards are imposed to define what may or may not be acceptable within societies and set through social and institutional mechanisms such as surveillance, discipline, and punishment. The ultimate goal is to create a population within these norms and standards, including cis-heteronormativity³. Indeed, the alias career can be considered a normalisation device; through the said device, it is possible to maintain the status quo from a gender perspective and to determine, through gatekeeping, who is worthy of support, especially when a diagnosis of gender dysphoria is imperative. Therefore, if and only if a person falls within the standards dictated by the school administration, they are supported. In addition, school authorities play a pastoral role, a power through which they can “rescue” the transgender student (Foucault, 1982). The youth is not seen as an active subject who can recognise and communicate their needs, but it is the authority that decides what these needs are and to what extent to allow recognition of their identity (Foucault, 1982; Ingrey, 2018) because of their youth (Bell, 2003; Castañeda, 2014) and because their embodied experiences are not recognised; this is also what Stryker defines as (de)subjugated knowledges:

«What Foucault describes as ‘a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges, naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity’, is precisely the kind of knowledge that transgender people, whether academically trained or not, have of their own embodied experience, and of their relationships to the discourses and institutions that act upon and through them. Such knowledge may be articulated from direct experience, or it may be witnessed and represented by others in an ethical fashion. In either case, Foucault contends, the reappearance ‘from below’ of ‘these singular local knowledges,’ like the knowledge of the psychiatrised or the delinquent, which have been ‘left to lie fallow, or even kept at the margins’, is absolutely essential to contemporary critical inquiry», (Stryker, 2006, 13).

Therefore, providing school policies that consider transgender youths’ experiences, needs and demands without putting the onus of requesting support on the pupils (Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017; Omercajic & Martino, 2020) but can also undermine the prevailing institutionalised cis-heteronormativity is one of the first steps needed to improve the school experience of transgender students. Indeed, recent literature suggests that changes aimed at improving the circumstances of the individual student cannot be considered sufficient (Meyer & Leonardi, 2017; Mayo & Blackburn, 2019; Ferfolja & Ullman, 2020; Omercajic & Martino, 2020). Schools need a subversion of the pedagogical approach, introducing an authentic pedagogy of difference (and thus including trans subjectivities) and strategies to reduce the impact of cis-heteronormativity on students, hence not just viewing trans pupils as subjects in need of care in the guise of “accommodation” (Ingrey, 2018, 781).

³ Cisnormativity is the assumption that all individuals are cisgender, i.e., people whose sex and gender are congruent with that assigned at birth. While heteronormativity is the assumption that all individuals are heterosexual until proven otherwise.

Binarism may significantly impact the well-being of non-binary students, who, unlike their binary counterparts, may find it more difficult to experience their selves within a strongly binary system such as schools (Johnson *et al.*, 2020; Paechter *et al.*, 2021). Finally, these norms and standards are not only part of school life and *curricula* (e.g., division by gender during PE activities), but they are also highlighted by the hidden curriculum (Mariani, 2000) — the imposition of (and exposition to) personal beliefs, attitudes, and norms of teaching and non-teaching staff, including cis-heteronormativity, homophobia and transphobia, racism, and ableism.

These issues related to binarism, normalisation, pastoral power and bodily control are not unique to the alias career; transgender people encounter them both in their daily lives and during gender transition. For example, through the law 164/82, which regulates gender transition in Italy, it is only possible to change one's gender marker to another binary gender marker. Only in 2022 a non-binary person was able to obtain a ruling for gender rectification that did not involve the need to undergo a medicalised transition with hormone replacement therapy (Ruma, 2022).

3. The method

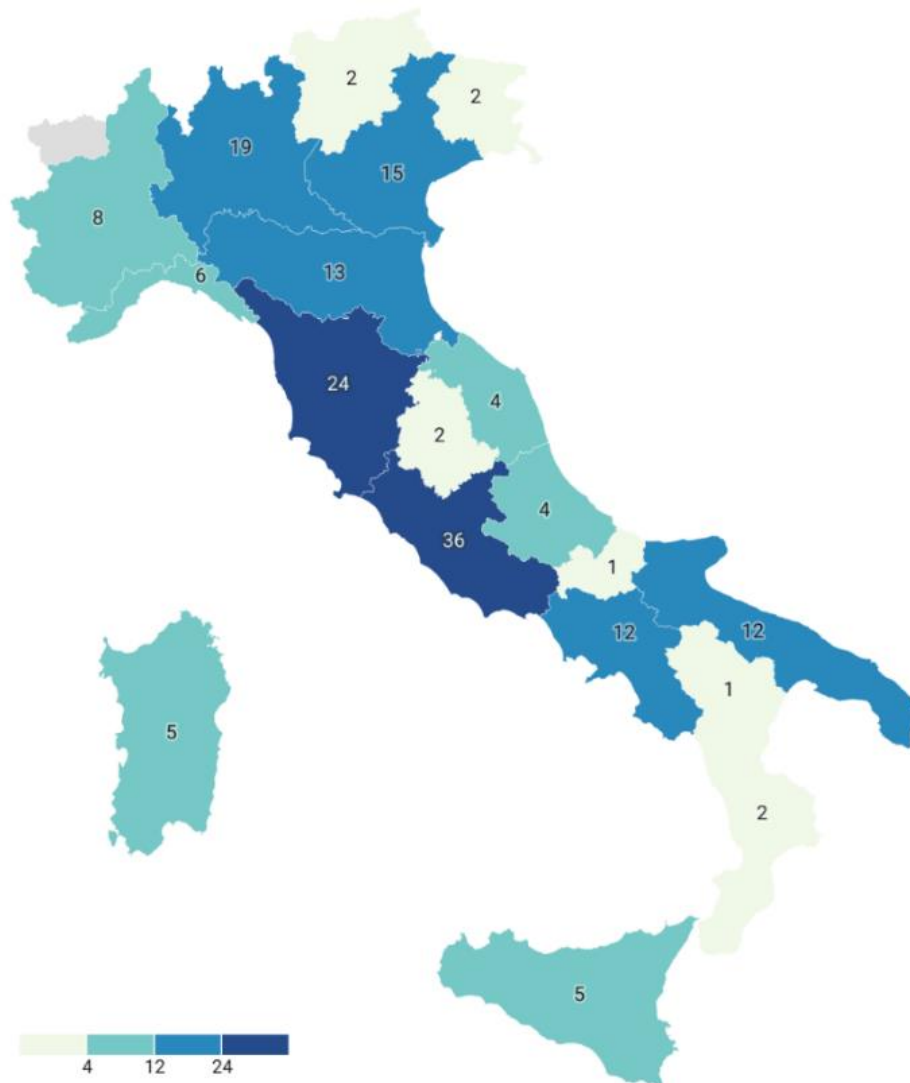
The MIUR, as of February 2023, has yet to map the schools that have adopted the alias career. Because of this, a necessary first step was to start mapping the schools. For this purpose, four sources were used;

- web searches with Google and Yahoo, using the keywords: “*carriera alias*,” “*carriera alias scuole*,” “*carriera alias liceo*,” “*carriera alias scuole superiori*,” and “*regolamento carriera alias*”⁴
- News articles on the phenomenon, which often named schools that adopted the alias career.
- Student associations within and outside of schools.
- Trans-led organisations, LGBTQIA+ organisations, transgender activists, and transgender students.

The mapping (Figure 1) resulted in 173 K-12 schools that adopted and regulated the device between April 2019 and the 11th of January 2023. The alias device was present within 19 regions (out of 20) where at least one school had the alias career. The Lazio region has the most schools (36), followed by Tuscany (24), Lombardy (19), and Veneto (15).

⁴ Tr. Alias career, alias career schools, alias career liceo, alias career high school, alias career rule book

Alias career per Region



Map: Richard Bourelly • Source: Alias career mapping, 173 schools K-13 from April 2019 to the 11th of January 2023 • Created with Datawrapper

FIGURE 1. *Mapping results*

Source: AGEDO (2023)

When finding a school without a rule book on their website, their principals were contacted via e-mail by Fiorenzo Grimelli, president of Agedo Nazionale, or the author, to obtain the rule book, if available, or to provide information and support.

Between April 2019 and July 2022, approximately 98 schools regulated the device, of which 92 offer upper secondary education. This study focuses on high schools; therefore, schools that do not provide upper secondary education were excluded from the analysis. Two reasons guided this decision: 1) some attributes (Table 1) do not apply to lower grades, such as the autonomy of adult students

and support during their PCTO internships⁵, and 2) due to the low number of preschools, primary schools and lower secondary schools that have adopted the alias career.

This exploratory study aims to describe and analyse the alias career rule books and registration forms, as well as the experiences of trans pupils, through a mixed-methods approach (Amaturo & Punziano, 2016). The review and analysis of the rule books and registration forms detected 21 positive and negative attributes within the text. In addition, three other attributes were encountered during the documentation search on the schools' websites, such as the accessibility of the files. The attributes were recorded within absence/presence (0/1) matrices and aggregated thematically within five categories (Table 1).

Categories	Attributes
1) Self-determination	Gender identity self-determination. Need for diagnosis of gender dysphoria. Access to the alias career for pre-transition students. Gender-neutral language within the rule book. Mention chosen pronouns. Adult students can request the alias without parental permission.
2) Bodily autonomy	Access to bathrooms. Access to changing rooms. School trip accommodations.
3) Education and training	Training for teachers. Training for janitors. Education for classmates. Education for the school body. Involvement of the school psychologist/doctor when educating students. Inclusion of LGBTQIA+ themes in the curricula. Disclosure to substitute teachers. Disclosure to graduation exam external examiners.
4) School's support to the students	Workgroups Support outside of school during extracurricular activities and PCTO Disciplinary sanctions against transphobia and transphobic bullying Special educational needs
5) File accessibility	The Rulebook is on the school's website. The Registration forms are on the school's website. The files are easily searchable on the school's website.

TABLE 1 Rule books and registration forms characteristics

To explore what transpires *de facto* within schools and to learn about the pupils' experiences, ten privileged witnesses were interviewed between the 18th of February 2022 and the 14th of April 2022. The students were interviewed using the semi-structured method (Bichi, 2002) with questions based on, and guided by, the five categories that transpired from the rule books and registration modules (Table 1) and, in addition, their general school experience as trans students. At the time of the interviews, the pupils were aged 14-18; nine trans boys and one trans girl (Table 2). They were selected because they had access to the device or promoted its introduction within their school. The interviewees

⁵ Tr. Pathways for transversal skills and guidance. A form of cooperative education that is mandatory for all high school students. It can differ based on the type of upper secondary education; liceo, technical school, and vocational school.

were reached with the help of LGBTQIA+ and trans-led organisations, gender clinics and snowballing.

Alias	Gender	Age	School year	School location	Rule book
Leonardo	Male	14	First	North	No
Mattia	Male	16	Second	Centre	Yes*
Liam	Male	17	Fourth	Centre	Yes
Marco	Male	17	Fourth	Centre	Yes
Eleonora	Female	17	Fourth	South	Yes
Daniele	Male	17	Fourth	South	Yes
Filippo	Male	18	Fourth	Centre	Yes
Alessio	Male	18	Fourth	North	No
James	Male	18	Fifth	Centre	No
Damiano	Male	18	Fifth	North	Yes*

**Adopted after the interview*

TABLE 2. *Transgender students' generalities*

3.1 Methodological limitations

Many schools still need to regulate the alias career, and because of this, they only provide support on an informal level. Others have not published the rule book on their site, and news articles and activists have not mentioned the institute's name within their circles. Often, only the trans pupil, the principal, and some teachers know that their school adopted the alias career.

Furthermore, some principals prohibit students from disclosing their school's name and agreeing to interviews. For example, in March 2022, a trans girl from the North of Italy refused an interview about her school experience.

«I talked about this with the school, and they pointed out that the clauses included in our agreement prohibit any interview or publicity; this would cause the annulment of our agreement».

Unfortunately, she was also afraid to name her school. However, she confirmed that her school was absent from the list of institutes available at the time, thus establishing the existence of schools that still needed to be mapped. Additionally, the mapping is still in progress and will continue for the foreseeable future. Indeed, the findings are related only to the 92 examined high schools since other variables may emerge from other rule books. Moreover, this paper does not analyse differences between regions, cities, and towns or the presence of a gender clinic within the school's vicinity. Further analyses are needed to understand the mentioned differences through multiple correspondence analysis or synthetic indices.

There is slight variation within the sample of interviewees; from an intersectional point of view, trans girls and non-binary people's experiences would most likely differ from the experiences narrated by the nine trans boys. These differences can be associated with the higher societal value assigned to masculinity and maleness, which translates to fewer restrictions towards "boyish girls" compared

to “feminine boys” in terms of gender normativity (Meadow, 2018, 46-47) and the non-recognition of non-binary gender identities (Johnson *et al.*, 2020). Lastly, since all interviewees are white and able-bodied, other characteristics such as race, ethnicity and physical disabilities are, at this moment, not considered.

4. Findings

From the perspective of regulations and interviews of the ten students (Table 2), the categories that will be presented in this paper are "Self-determination," "Bodily autonomy," "Training and education," and "School's support" (Table 1).

From the quantitative and qualitative analysis, it emerged that the schools gatekeep the alias device from youths due to pathologisation of gender incongruence (81.5% of rule books), geographical location, family/caregiver recognition and support, and economic status. This exclusion also extends to those who do not want to undergo medical transition or have reservations about transitioning; as a consequence, non-binary individuals are often not able to have access to the alias career or other forms of support (Omercagic & Martino, 2020; Bourelly, s.d.).

By playing a pastoral role, the school's authorities determine the pupils' needs and necessities without consulting the concerned parties; this often leads to students not being recognised and believed until they provide a psychological diagnosis of gender dysphoria, thus eroding their right of self-determination, reiterating a pathologised narrative of gender incongruence and denying support and recognition to whom they consider undeserving (Foucault, 1982). The reasonings stem from a lack of consideration towards trans youths' knowledge about their embodied experiences (Stryker, 2006), adults' tendency to undermine their capability to comprehend their gender identity because of adultism (Bell, 2003; Castañeda, 2014; Singh *et al.*, 2014) and non-recognition of their gender identities (Johnson *et al.*, 2020) due to normalisation and binarism (Foucault, 1975).

«They wanted concrete evidence that I was transitioning. Thus, after they had all the evidence [...] only at that moment they, in quotes, believed me», (Eleonora, trans girl).

	Frequency			Valid Percent		
	No	Yes	Total	No	Yes	Total
Self-determination	75	17	92	81.5	18.5	100
Require diagnosis of gender dysphoria	17	75	92	18.5	81.5	100
Alias for pre-transition youths	74	18	92	80.4	19.6	100
Respect of pronouns	68	24	92	73.9	26.1	100
Neutral pronouns/options within the text	91	1	92	98.9	1.1	100
Adult students' autonomy	2	89	92	2.2	97.8	100

TABLE 3. *Students' Self-determination*

In Italy, especially in the south, there are several regions without public gender clinics and other resources for transgender people (Istituto Superiore di Sanità, 2020); many youths cannot access gender care and, thus, the alias career. Most principals and teachers are not knowledgeable about transgender issues. As a result, students and parent(s)/caregiver(s) must inform and guide the school. Students and their families/caregiver(s) often send of their own volition the diagnosis of gender dysphoria to the principal, leading the school administration to believe that it must be a requirement and a barrier to access.

«We wanted to send it [the diagnosis]. When I went to [psychologist], she asked if I wanted it, so she gave it to me to help me. It was my choice whether to do it. The school did not ask for it», (James, trans boy).

Moreover, pathologisation is also used strategically to avoid backlash from trans-agonistic families, political parties, and catholic organisations. The lack of official directives from the MIUR gives political parties and catholic organisations excuses to denounce the device as illegal and adopted to subject youths to “Gender ideology” (Prearo & Garbagnoli, 2018; Selmi, 2015). Not recognising who is not diagnosed with gender dysphoria allows the school’s administration to describe the alias career as an accommodation based on medical needs. In November 2022, the catholic organisation Provita & Famiglia sent to 150 schools that at the time had regulated the alias device a notice to request its elimination (Provita & Famiglia, 2022). However, some schools have publicly responded that they will not acquiesce to these threats (De Falco, 2022). In recent years, Provita & Famiglia has been vocal about its displeasure with the alias device by assiduously posting online about it (www.provitaefamiglia.it) and, as recounted by Damiano, distributing leaflets in front of schools that adopted it or were considering its adoption.

«On April first [2021], it was on a Friday, I was supposed to teach, during the co-management week, a class on the alias career. When I was about to start, some friends of mine came in to give me these leaflets, and they said: ‘There was a guy from Provita who was handing them out outside of school.’ These leaflets practically demonised the alias career; they included some of the usual things you can find in the Fratelli d’Italia’s articles», (Damiano, trans boy).

These attacks on the alias device may lead principals not to consider its introduction in their school, thus allowing trans youths’ needs and necessities to be set aside for the benefit of trans-agonistic parents, political interests, and catholic organisations (Selmi, 2015), as well as further reinforcing the practice of requiring psychological diagnosis to safeguard the school. The prioritisation of trans-agonistic parents also emerges from the rule books of two high schools in Padua (Liceo A. Cornaro, 2021; Liceo P. Selvatico, 2021). In both schools, adult students must inform their parent(s) to obtain the alias career (Table 4), accentuating to a greater extent the administration’s disregard towards young people, their agency and their capability to self-determine their gender identity (Bell, 2003; Stryker, 2006; Castañeda, 2014).

Both bathrooms and locker rooms can be a source of anxiety, particularly for those who have not yet, or do not intend to, undergo medical gender affirmation. This also applies to students who have not come out as trans at school. Teachers and janitors often consider themselves gatekeepers (Davies *et al.*, 2019; Ingrey,

2018) who must examine and decide who can enter which restroom and locker room (Foucault, 1975, 1982; Ingrey, 2018).

«There have been misunderstandings with the janitors while I went into the women's bathroom... since they told me I could not use the men's one. Misconceptions such as they see me coming out of the toilet and they ask me, 'What are you doing there?'. Thus, I had to explain everything again», (Damiano, trans boy).

«They stopped me a few times; they would say, 'Excuse me, why are you going into the girls' bathroom?' And I would have to explain, 'I am a transgender boy, I'm putting on a chest binder.' Although, the janitors on my floor have learned that by now», (Alessio, trans boy).

Almost all schools have only binary bathrooms, which leads trans people who cannot access bathrooms based on their gender identity or preference to use the bathroom based on their sex assigned at birth or avoid them altogether (James *et al.*, 2015). For some trans pupils, accessing binary bathrooms based on gender identity or preference can lead to euphoria and validation. Instead, when their preference is not considered or, particularly for non-binary students, gender-neutral bathrooms are not provided, they may feel unwelcome and not recognised (Davies *et al.*, 2019). The rule books also address bathroom and locker room usage, although only 14% mention bathroom access, and 13% mention locker rooms based on the student's gender identity or preference (Table 4).

	Frequency			Valid Percent		
	No	Yes	Total	No	Yes	Total
Access to Bathrooms	79	13	92	85.9	14.1	100
Access to Locker rooms	80	12	92	87.0	13.0	100
School trips sleeping arrangements	90	2	92	97.8	2.2	100

TABLE 4. *Bodily autonomy*

Sometimes principals impose on trans students the use of a gender-neutral bathroom or other options, such as teachers' or the principal's bathroom. Instead, in some schools, students are introducing gender-neutral bathrooms accessible to the whole school body by re-appropriating spaces or negotiating with the school's authority (Liceo Di Cavour, 2023; Liceo Elio Vittorini, 2023). The authority determines where trans bodies, who do not fit into cisnormative and binary standards, are worthy to enter (Foucault, 1982; Ingrey, 2018). Indeed, within the rule books, we can find the othering of trans pupils, such as in S. Di Giacomo's (2022) high school in Naples. The Neapolitan school has made its gender-neutral bathroom accessible only to those with the alias career. Since the restroom is not accessible to the entire student community, but only to those who have the alias device, by entering, trans youths could potentially put their safety and privacy at risk (Ingrey, 2018). Decisions that result in trans youth's forced removal from student spaces in favour of "other" options, often also deemed inappropriate by the student, undermine the student's gender identity legitimacy, agency, and bodily autonomy (Ingrey, 2018).

«So, the error [of the principal] was saying that I ‘must’ have to use those bathrooms and not ‘could’ freely decide and that she never gave me access to them. So, I do not know (laughs). Regardless, I would not have used them...», (Liam, trans boy).

Caregivers’ advocacy, support and involvement in trans pupils’ school lives are strongly related to better accommodations and outcomes for academic performance and their psycho-physical well-being (Simons *et al.*, 2013; Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017; Mariotto, 2020; Wilkinson *et al.*, 2021). As emerged from the interviews, when the parent(s)/caregiver(s) advocate for their child’s best interests, there can be improvements to the alias career’s regulations. Liam’s parents requested the inclusion of a section regarding school trips’ sleeping arrangements (present only in 2.2% of schools; Table 4) since the rule book his school intended to adopt did not address the issue.

«They [the school] probably were not even thinking about them. However, let us say that under the advice and request from my parents, they wrote this thing within the rule book», (Liam, trans boy).

From Table 5, we can learn that in 89% of the rule books and modules, schools do not require training for teachers on LGBTQIA+ and transgender issues. The onus to better the school’s environment mainly falls on trans pupils and their parent(s)/caregiver(s) (Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017), indeed there is an almost total disregard for the training of the teaching staff, who are supposed to offer support students according to the regulations of the alias device. As there is a lack of information about the transgender population, the enforcement of the regulation and respect and recognition of trans students is neglected — adopting the device is perceived as sufficient, indeed. When teachers decide to inform themselves, they will obtain the necessary information and be (but not always) able to support and have a gender-affirming relationship with transgender students. Unfortunately, the presence of a welcoming teacher is wholly left to chance. A lack of training on trans subjectivities may lead to transphobic bullying, violence, and non-recognition by the teaching staff (Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017; Mayo & Blackburn, 2019; McBride, 2021) but also exacerbate the disqualification of non-binary subjectivities (Johnson *et al.*, 2020) and of those who do not conform to the teachers and the community’s beliefs and values (Foucault, 1975; Mariani, 2000). In addition to the lack of training, the interviews revealed a lack of information about the alias device.

«In my opinion, this is a severe lack of the school system because, from the moment you introduce the alias career, you should also inform the teachers about what it consists of. [...] Many of my teachers do not know what the alias career is», (Filippo, trans boy).

Many teachers do not feel comfortable discussing gender-related issues with their pupils and may show hostility towards transgender students and their families/caregivers (Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017; O'Donoghue & Guerin, 2017). Despite this, their support is vital in creating and promoting a truly inclusive school and fostering a peaceful environment within the classroom, since the constant stigmatisation of trans people leads them to experience higher stress levels than their cisgender counterparts (Scandurra *et al.*, 2017, 2020;

Hatchel *et al.*, 2019). This phenomenon may also contribute to the high dropout and absenteeism rates (Grant *et al.*, 2011; McGuire *et al.*, 2010).

«I am realising that they [the teachers] are all very sociable and that they care about their pupils. I talked to my teacher a lot at the beginning when I did not feel comfortable with the class [...] she also spoke to the class a little bit, giving them some information», (Mattia, trans boy).

The reason why principals refuse to offer training and best practices to teaching and non-teaching staff needs to be clarified, especially when they decide to adopt the alias career. The reasons could be linked to disinterest on the part of the school administration once they believe students are satisfied with the adoption of the device, as stated by Filippo «I think that after a while, I mean once they have adopted it [the alias career], it kind of goes into oblivion», (Filippo, trans binary boy). Other reasonings could be linked to demands from the teaching staff, the principals' lack of training, and pressure from trans-agonistic parents, political interests, and catholic organisations (Selmi, 2015; Meyer & Keenan, 2018; Omercajic & Martino, 2020). To explore this further, however, it would be necessary and appropriate to interview teachers and principals of multiple schools.

Although parent(s)/caregiver(s) involvement is significant, changes within the school can also be led by trans students with the support of the school body. This is particularly relevant for adopting the alias career, changes within the rule book, and help in case of transphobia. Indeed, although the alias career can mainly be described as a normalisation device (Foucault, 1975) with which the school's authority discredits and does not recognise the demands and needs of trans pupils (Foucault, 1982; Stryker, 2006), when trans students can introduce it in their institutes through strategies, advocacy, and support, it can become a device to fight against cisnormativity and binarism within schools (McBride & Neary, 2021; Bourelly & Santambrogio, 2023).

«Last year the student representatives held a small meeting open to all students, where they could propose projects. I attended and asked for the alias career. They immediately accepted the idea, and then I spoke to the student representatives of other schools who had organised the adoption of the alias career; we collected all the documentation and some testimonies from principals of schools where it was activated. And this year, finally, it was approved», (Damiano, trans boy).

Even though classmates can be good allies and support transgender students by getting their school to adopt the alias career and fight against school authorities in cases of bullying and non-recognition (Singh *et al.*, 2014; Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017; Bourelly & Santambrogio, 2023), just as for teaching and non-teaching staff, the school does not raise awareness about trans issues or offer them specific education on LGBTQIA+ topics. Indeed, from the rule books and modules, 91% of schools do not educate trans pupils' classmates, and 90% do not extend this education to the entire student body.

Classmates and other students can be the source of bullying and cyberbullying. Due to a lack of good practices and training on how to support trans pupils, transphobic bullying can go unnoticed or be ignored by teachers as they are unable to recognise the seriousness of the situation, do not know how to act in

cases of transphobic bullying and due to the lack of policies that address LGBTQIA+-phobic bullying (O'Donoghue & Guerin, 2017).

	Frequency			Valid Percent		
	No	Yes	Total	No	Yes	Total
Training for teachers	82	10	92	89.1	10.9	100
Training for janitors	84	8	92	91.3	8.7	100
Education and support to classmates	84	8	92	91.3	8.7	100
Education and support to the school body	83	9	92	90.2	9.8	100
School psychologist/doctor involvement	91	1	92	98.9	1.1	100
Inclusion of LGBTQIA+ topics within the curriculum	88	4	92	95.7	4.3	100
Inform substitute teachers	74	18	92	80.4	19.6	100
Inform external examiners	74	18	92	80.4	19.6	100

TABLE 5. *Education and training*

Since the device is valid only for unofficial documentation, whenever students need official documentation and must apply for extracurricular activities or attend PCTO internships, they regrettably need to use their birth name. Only 5.4% of schools (Table 6) support their students outside of the institute and try to ensure the use of the alias career outside of school, even though PCTO is part of their education and is mandatory to graduate.

Most of the characteristics (Table 1) were absent within the students' rule books and experiences, such as the variables present in Table 5; the involvement of the school's psychologist to bring awareness about trans issues (1.1%), the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ topics within the *curricula* (4.3%), and in Table 6 disciplinary sanctions due to transphobic bullying (3.3%) and the possibility of obtaining special educational needs based on trans status and dysphoria (2.2%). However, it also transpired that there are aspects present within most rule books that the students were unaware of, such as the workgroup (supposedly in 94.6% of schools; Table 6). This workgroup should consist of support from the staff that addresses issues such as bullying and diversity. However, it is unclear whether these teachers have received training on the transgender community and trans youths' issues.

	Frequency			Valid Percent		
	No	Yes	Total	No	Yes	Total
Support from the school's workgroup	19	73	92	20.7	79.3	100
Support outside the school	87	5	92	94.6	5.4	100
Disciplinary sanctions against transphobia	89	3	92	96.7	3.3	100
Special Educational Needs	90	2	92	97.8	2.2	100

TABLE 6. *Schools' support to the students*

5. Conclusions

The analyses from both the interviews and the rule books show that to recognise and support trans pupils, schools that have already adopted the alias career should modify their regulations with a self-determination approach, thereby removing barriers to access. Schools' administrations must not discredit trans youths because of their age (Bell, 2003; Castañeda, 2014) and must pay attention to their situated knowledge (Foucault, 1975; Stryker, 2006). When writing regulations, it is necessary to involve transgender students and family/caregiver(s), asking them what kind of support they expect from the school and how to meet their needs (Stryker, 2006) — but keeping in mind that the youth is not the spokesperson for all transgender students. Precisely for this reason, regulations like those already proposed by various organisations (AGEDO, 2021; Genderlens, 2021; Lenford Network, 2022) can offer valuable insights and perspectives to ensure a truly inclusive and accessible device for all subjectivities.

A necessary step to improve the school experience of transgender pupils is to support the individual and bring about real change within the educational institution. Cisnormativity, binarism and normalisation (Foucault, 1975), whether explicit or veiled (Mariani, 2000), can damage trans people's psycho-physical well-being, especially when their gender identity and experience are invalidated, and their names and pronouns are not respected and taken for granted due to cis-heteronormative values and transphobia (Bower-Brown *et al.*, 2021; Johnson *et al.*, 2020; Omercajic & Martino, 2020; McEntarfer & Iovannone, 2022). Strategies to improve and change the school environment to dismantle the cisnormative and binary system, like introducing best practices such as the use of broad (inclusive) language (Manera, 2021) in communications with the whole school community, offering gender-neutral toilets and changing rooms accessible to all, irrespective of gender identity, introducing LGBT-related activities into the *curricula* to normalise differences and encourage mutual respect, and, finally, change the structure, relationship and pedagogical approach, both in content and in the very forms of knowledge construction and the type of knowledge that is considered valid (Stryker, 2006; Mayo & Blackburn, 2019; Paechter *et al.*, 2021; Mayo, 2022; Bourelly *et al.*, 2022)

In conclusion, the alias career should be adopted nationwide, not only because it is necessary to support all subjectivities, but also to support pupils who cannot, or do not want, to independently advocate for the introduction of the device within their school. Indeed, requesting the alias career often forces students to come out to the whole school body and set their lives in the limelight, which can put in jeopardy their psycho-physical well-being, privacy, and safety (Ingrey, 2018). In addition, support should not be provided only upon request and require the student to come out as trans to gain access (Omercajic & Martino, 2020). Furthermore, introducing the device in K-12 schools can correct the perception that the necessary support for trans students is not only a form of “accommodation” (Ingrey, 2018; Omercajic & Martino, 2020) to be offered only to those who comply with the arbitrary requirements of the individual institute (Foucault, 1975, 1982; Ingrey, 2018; Omercajic & Martino, 2020) and are thus concessions by the school administration, but changes aimed at supporting all youths regardless of their differences, needs, geographical location, family support and financial means. In addition, it is necessary to remark that to date, because of the need for parental permission for minors, the alias career is

conceded only to pupils who live in a welcoming and gender-affirming family. Many are excluded because of transphobia and non-recognition by their family/caregiver(s) or because they have not come out for fear of repercussions on their psycho-physical safety and for fear of becoming homeless (Council of Europe, 2018; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020). Therefore, the aim of the educational institution should also be to support those who are in a more fragile condition due to their homelife, since they can experience higher rates of poor mental health and emotional distress (Simons *et al.*, 2013), by adopting best practices for all students such as respecting their name and pronouns.

Guidelines and best practices from the MIUR, specific to the alias career, would also legitimise the device and the demands of transgender pupils, their families and LGBTQIA+ organisations (Bourelly *et al.*, 2022). Since the alias device's legitimacy is based only on school autonomy laws (Benadusi *et al.*, 2020) and thus on the judgment of singular principals and not on ministerial resolutions, trans-agonistic parents, political interests, and catholic organisations claim its illegality.

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