INSTITUTO
UNIVERSITÁRIO
DE LISBOA

Teachers' Support for Gender Equality in Education: the Role of Religiosity, School Religious and Gender Norms, and Sexism

Elena Bauchiero

Master in Psychology of Intercultural Relations

Supervisor:
Dr Ricardo Filipe Pinto Borges Rodrigues, Assistant Professor,
ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

July, 2025

CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS
E HUMANAS

Department of Social and Organisational Psychology

Teachers' Support for Gender Equality in Education: the Role of Religiosity, School Religious and Gender Norms, and Sexism

Elena Bauchiero

Master in Psychology of Intercultural Relations

Supervisor:
Dr Ricardo Filipe Pinto Borges Rodrigues, Assistant Professor,
ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

July, 2025

Acknowledgements

To Professor Ricardo, I extend my sincere thanks for being much more than an academic guide. Your constant support, guidance, and ability to inspire have shaped not only this dissertation but also the way I approach learning and growth.

To my parents, whose unconditional care has made every step of my academic journey possible. Thank you for believing in me, even more than I did, and for providing the love and strength that carried me through the toughest moments.

To my brother, whose path runs parallel to mine. Though separated by distance, we have remained close in spirit, encouragement, and shared determination.

To my grandmother, whose strength, tenacity, and wisdom have always inspired me. You remain my role model and guiding example of feminist resilience, quietly accompanying me from afar and encouraging the progress I've made.

To everyone who crossed my way and stood by my side, thank you for contributing to making this journey meaningful.

Resumo

O presente estudo examina os factores psicológicos e contextuais que influenciam o apoio dos professores à igualdade de género na educação. Centra-se nos papéis da religiosidade individual, das normas religiosas da escola, que reflectem o clima religioso institucional, e das normas de género da escola, que moldam a forma como as expectativas e preconceitos de género são reforçados ou desafiados nos contextos educativos. O sexismo ambivalente, que engloba componentes benevolentes e hostis, foi investigado como um mecanismo mediador. O estudo contou com a participação de uma amostra de 259 professores de escolas públicas e privadas de Itália. Utilizando uma conceção quantitativa e correlacional, os dados foram recolhidos através de questionários de auto-relato e analisados utilizando modelos de mediação múltipla e de mediação em série. Os resultados indicaram que tanto o sexismo benevolente como o hostil mediam parcialmente a relação negativa entre a religiosidade individual e o apoio à igualdade de género. A nível institucional, a perceção das normas religiosas e de género da escola também previu um apoio reduzido, sendo os seus efeitos totalmente mediados pelo sexismo ambivalente, embora as normas religiosas da escola estivessem ligadas principalmente ao sexismo benevolente. Os modelos exploratórios indicaram ainda que as normas religiosas da escola influenciaram indiretamente o apoio à igualdade de género através das normas de género da escola e da religiosidade individual. Estas conclusões oferecem um quadro integrado para compreender como as forças estruturais e ideológicas operam conjuntamente para dificultar as iniciativas de igualdade de género em contextos educativos.

Palavras-chave: igualdade de género (2910), professores (3500), educação (3500), sexismo ambivalente (2970), sexismo benevolente (2970), sexismo hostil (2970), religiosidade individual (2920), normas escolares (3020), Itália (2930)

Abstract

The present study examines the psychological and contextual factors that influence teachers' support for gender equality in education. It focuses on the roles of individual religiosity, school religious norms, reflecting the institutional religious climate, and school gender norms, which shape how gender expectations and biases are either reinforced or challenged within educational settings. Ambivalent sexism, encompassing both benevolent and hostile components, was investigated as a mediating mechanism. A sample of 259 teachers from public and private schools in Italy participated in the study. Employing a quantitative, correlational design, data were collected through self-report questionnaires and analysed using multiple mediation and serial mediation models. Results indicated that both benevolent and hostile sexism partially mediated the negative relationship between individual religiosity and support for gender equality. At the institutional level, perceived school religious and gender inequality norms also predicted reduced support, with their effects fully mediated by ambivalent sexism, although school religious norms were linked primarily to benevolent sexism. Exploratory models further indicated that school religious norms indirectly influenced support for gender equality via both school gender norms and individual religiosity. These findings offer an integrated framework for understanding how structural and ideological forces jointly operate to hinder gender equality initiatives in educational contexts.

Key words: gender equality (2910), teachers (3500), education (3500), ambivalent sexism (2970), benevolent sexism (2970), hostile sexism (2970), individual religiosity (2920), school norms (3020), Italy (2930)

Index

Index of Figures and Tables

Glossary of Acronyms

BS	Benevolent Sexism
CI	Confidence Interval
H1	Hypothesis 1
H2	Hypothesis 2
H3	Hypothesis 3
H4	Hypothesis 4
HS	Hostile Sexism
M1	First Mediator
M2	Second Mediator
M3	Third Mediator
SDO	Social Dominance Orientation

Introduction

Gender equality remains a pressing global challenge and is recognized as a key priority in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030 (United Nations, 2024). Despite decades of progress, women around the world continue to face systemic barriers that hinder their opportunities and rights. Ongoing gender disparities, including wage gaps, underrepresentation in political and leadership roles, and high rates of gender-based violence, highlight the urgent need for continued efforts toward equality. At the current pace of change, it is estimated that it will take 131 years to close the global gender gap (World Economic Forum, 2023). In the European context, Italy ranks among the lowest in gender equality indices, with women earning on average 10.7% less than men and holding only 27.3% of managerial positions (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022). Projections from the United Nations (2024) further estimate that achieving gender parity in leadership could take over a century, and eliminating all discriminatory laws may require nearly three centuries. This extensive timeline underscores the urgency of identifying and addressing the structural factors that perpetuate gender disparities.

One such factor is sexism, which is central to maintaining gender hierarchies across social, political, and educational domains (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). Specifically, benevolent sexism involves attitudes that appear positive, such as protective or patronizing views toward women, but ultimately reinforces traditional gender roles and inequality (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Unlike hostile sexism, which is overtly negative, benevolent sexism is often socially accepted and even endorsed by women themselves, making it widespread and difficult to challenge (Glick et al., 2000).

Beyond sexism, religion is a powerful yet often overlooked force in sustaining gender inequalities. Both historically and today, religious institutions have played a central role in promoting patriarchal values that affect individual beliefs, cultural norms, and social structures (Klingorová, 2015). Religious texts and teachings across major world faiths frequently contribute to this dynamic by portraying women in stereotypical and idealized roles, thereby legitimizing benevolent sexist beliefs and upholding structural inequalities (Glick et al., 2002). This is especially evident in Italy, where, despite increasing secularization, the Catholic Church continues to shape social norms and behaviours by influencing legal, political, and educational structures, thereby reinforcing gender stereotypes and established power hierarchies (Bentzen & Gokmen, 2023).

Both sexist and religious norms reinforce power imbalances rooted in patriarchal dominance across various social contexts, education included (Corner & Dallavis, 2022; Dildar, 2015; Gallagher & Smith, 1999). Schools are key to transmitting these norms, not only by disseminating knowledge to future generations, but also as social environments where students learn to enact, internalize, and understand gender roles and related beliefs (Connell, 1996). As such, schools have the potential to either challenge prevailing stereotypes and promote gender equality or, conversely, maintain traditional roles. This risk becomes especially pronounced when teachers endorse sexist attitudes, potentially transmitting these biases to students and thereby perpetuating existing inequalities (McKown, 2005). This process becomes more intricate when religion intersects with education. In Italy, approximately 13% of students attend private religious schools, the majority of which are Catholic and operate under Church-affiliated guidelines (ISTAT, 2025). However, religious influence extends beyond private institutions: Catholic traditions are also present in public education, meaning that religious values remain deeply embedded within the educational system (Bentzen & Gokmen, 2023).

Since schools are not neutral spaces but rather cultural environments where both implicit and explicit messages about gender are continuously communicated, teachers' attitudes toward gender equality play a critical role. Not only they shape individual students' experiences, but they also influence the broader socialization processes that either sustain or challenge structural sexism. In this context, gender mainstreaming in education—defined as the integration of a gender-equality perspective into all aspects of teacher training, curricula, and school life—has been increasingly recognized as a vital step toward creating inclusive and equitable learning environments (Moya-Díaz & De-Juanas, 2022). However, the success of such initiatives depends on the active support and engagement of teachers. As such, understanding the factors that shape their attitudes toward gender equality is essential for informing effective policy, designing impactful teacher training programs, and driving meaningful institutional change.

Despite the importance of these dynamics, several gaps in the literature remain. First, the role of religion in shaping gender attitudes has often been studied from an individual perspective, with limited attention to its broader normative or institutional influence. Second, although studies have shown that educational practices can perpetuate gender biases, relatively little is known about what drives support for gender equality initiatives within schools. Finally, the intersection of religion and education, particularly within the Italian context, remains an underexplored area. The present study seeks to address these gaps.

Building on this background, the present study aims to investigate how both individual-level characteristics, such as religiosity, and school-level factors, namely institutional

religiosity and perceived gender inequality norms within the school environment, influence teachers' support for gender equality in education. Central to this investigation is the mediating role of ambivalent sexism, specifically examining how its two components, benevolent and hostile sexism, operate within these relationships. Furthermore, the study explores the interplay among these variables by testing different models of mediation, with the goal of providing a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological and contextual mechanisms that shape attitudes toward gender equality in Italian educational settings.

CHAPTER 1

Literature Review

1.1 Gender Equality in Education

Persistent gender inequality is deeply rooted in patriarchal systems that prioritize male authority and reinforce unequal power relations between men and women (Kabeer, 2010; Walby, 1989). Patriarchy maintains dominance across societal institutions by limiting women's access to resources, decision-making roles, and autonomy, through both structural arrangements and ideological justifications that position women as naturally subordinate (Glick et al., 2001). This patriarchal structure is reproduced within institutions, including the education system, where women are often assigned subordinate positions while men occupy roles of authority (Addi-Raccah & Ayalon, 2002). The ideological justifications for these power relations are transmitted through socialization processes, the mechanisms by which individuals internalize cultural values, norms, and behaviours (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2018; Grusec & Hastings, 2015).

Schools, as sites of socialization, play a crucial role in either reproducing or challenging these norms through curriculum content, teacher-student interactions, and the broader institutional culture (McKown, 2005). Teachers hold significant influence within this dynamic, shaping students' perceptions of gender from an early age through both explicit instruction and implicit modelling (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Grusec & Hastings, 2015). Nevertheless, gender equality is not always an explicit component of teachers training and educational curricula, which allows implicit biases to persist, reflecting and reinforcing existing inequalities (Connell, 1996; Skelton et al., 2010). Yet, schools also hold the potential to challenge traditional gender norms through proactive interventions, ultimately serving as a transformative force in society.

One effective approach to counteract gender inequality in education is the adoption of gender mainstreaming strategies. This method involves integrating gender issues into all aspects of educational processes, ensuring that discussions on gender equality become a fundamental part of learning (Moya-Díaz & De-Juanas, 2022). Research suggests that raising awareness of gender inequality through educational interventions can challenge sexist beliefs and encourage activism in support of gender equality (Lahelma & Tainio, 2019). In particular, raising men's awareness of gender inequality can help them to recognize women's disadvantaged social position, potentially evoking feelings of guilt and a moral conviction to act, leading to greater engagement in collective actions for equality (Mazzuca et al., 2022). By embedding these

principles within the curriculum, schools can reshape gender narratives and break cycles of discrimination.

However, when educators resist gender equality initiatives, they may unintentionally hinder the successful implementation of these efforts and contribute to the reinforcement of gender stereotypes and systemic biases. Conversely, when teachers actively endorse and engage with gender equality, they can be key drivers of inclusive educational practices, helping to promote more equitable learning environments. Considering this, the following sections will examine several key factors that are likely to influence teachers' positive attitudes toward gender equality in education, including ambivalent sexism, individual religiosity, and social norms in the school context.

1.2 Ambivalent Sexism

One of the most pervasive ideological mechanisms sustaining gender inequalities is sexism, defined as discriminatory and prejudicial beliefs and practices based on an individual's biological sex (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2023; Becker & Sibley, 2015).

Glick and Fiske introduced the Ambivalent Sexism Theory (1996), which presents sexism toward women as typically ambivalent, distinguishing between benevolent and hostile dimensions. Hostile sexism involves overtly negative attitudes and beliefs that portray women as inferior, weak, and incompetent. This form explicitly asserts male control by prioritizing power, hierarchy, and by opposing equality (Bereket & Fiske, 2023). Conversely, benevolent sexism is a subtler, paternalistic form of prejudice that reinforces traditional gender roles and perpetuates stereotypes of women as dependent, delicate, and in need of protection, ultimately undermining their confidence in their own competence (Glick & Fiske, 1996). It maintains control by enforcing conventional norms and expectations of femininity and is particularly sensitive to social cues related to gender conformity (Bereket & Fiske, 2023).

Although both forms function differently, they work together to reinforce gender hierarchies: hostile sexism defends male power through overt antagonism, while benevolent sexism maintains women's subordination by discouraging resistance and rewarding conformity (Glick et al., 2001). While both genders can perpetuate sexism, men generally exhibit higher levels of both attitudes, especially hostile sexism. Alternatively, women endorse benevolent sexism more strongly, justifying their subordinate status within patriarchal systems (Glick et al., 2000). Together, these dynamics sustain systemic gender inequalities by legitimizing male dominance and resisting social change.

Research has extensively documented the negative impact of sexism on support for gender equality policies (Beauregard, 2022; Gothreau et al., 2022) Modern sexism, in particular, reflects a denial of systemic discrimination against women and the belief that gender equality has already been achieved (Swim et al., 1995). This perspective fosters resentment toward ongoing efforts to address gender disparities, viewing them as unnecessary and outdated, as threats to male authority, or even as harmful to collective interests (Connor & Fiske, 2019). While most research on this topic centres on employment, income disparities, and women's political representation (Gothreau et al., 2022), there is a notable gap in examining support for gender equality initiatives within the educational sector.

Understanding the role of ambivalent sexism is essential in uncovering how gender hierarchies are maintained, but these attitudes do not emerge in isolation. They are often shaped and reinforced by broader ideological systems, such as religion (Glick et al., 2002). To explore this influence more fully, the following section examines individual religiosity and its relationship to sexist beliefs.

1.3 Individual Religiosity

Religion is defined as an organized system of beliefs, rituals, and symbols which facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent (Koenig et al., 2001). This study draws a distinction between individual religiosity and institutional religious norms, a differentiation that is essential for understanding the nuanced ways religion can function in social contexts. Specifically, personal religiousness does not necessarily imply affiliation with organized institutions, adherence to formal doctrines, or exposure to the normative influence of religion within institutional settings (Philpott, 2007).

The model used to conceptualize individual religiosity in this study is the Four Basic Dimensions of Religiousness which identifies four psychological dimensions of religion: *believing*, *bonding*, *behaving*, and *belonging* (Saroglou, 2011). The believing dimension captures beliefs about an external transcendence, understanding the sacred, and searching the meaning of life. Importantly, this dimension varies from rigid, dogmatic interpretations to flexible, interpretative, or questing approaches. The bonding dimension reflects how individuals emotionally connect with transcendence through ritual practices. The behaving dimension involves adherence to moral rules and norms defined by religious institutions, often offering narratives on gender dynamics that shape perceptions of gender roles. Lastly, the belonging dimension addresses involvement in a religious community or group, reinforcing

social identity, solidifying collective self-esteem, and ingroup identification.

There is substantial evidence that various dimensions of religiosity are associated with the endorsement of sexist attitudes. For instance, extrinsic religious orientation, the instrumental use of religion for personal or social gain (Allport & Ross, 1967), and religious fundamentalism, a rigid adherence to the absolute truth of religious doctrine (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005), have been consistently linked to higher levels of sexual prejudice (Etengoff & Lefevor, 2021). Within many religious frameworks, gender roles are rooted in patriarchal ideologies that position men as the spiritual and financial leaders of the family, while women are expected to assume nurturing roles, supporting and submitting to their husbands (Inglehart & Norris, 2009). These prescriptions of distinct and complementary gender roles often align with benevolent sexism, ultimately reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies and obscuring structural inequalities (Glick et al., 2002). Research on Catholicism shows a consistent association with benevolent, but not hostile sexist attitudes (Glick et al., 2002). Similar patterns have been observed in studies on Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism, though the manifestation of sexism and the gender of those expressing it can vary across contexts (Cotterill et al., 2014; Gaunt, 2012; Hannover et al., 2018; Taşdemir & Sakallı-Uğurlu, 2009). These findings suggest that the relationship between religion and sexist attitudes is more closely tied to levels of religiosity itself than to specific theological doctrines. Supporting this, cross-national research shows that gender equality levels in a country are more closely linked to the proportion of religious adherents than to differences between major world religions—Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism—indicating that more religious countries, regardless of the specific faith, tend to exhibit higher levels of inequality (Schnabel, 2016).

While individual religiosity provides valuable insight into how personal religious commitment shapes gendered attitudes, it does not fully capture the complexity and variation in how people relate to religion. Importantly, religion itself is not inherently associated with sexism; rather, different orientations toward religion—such as spiritual approaches—may promote values of inclusivity and equality (Lockhart et al., 2019). These alternative perspectives are examined in the following section.

1.3.1 Spirituality

The literature presents a paradox regarding the impact of religion on prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes. While religious traditions often promote values such as benevolence, peace, and compassion (Philpott, 2007), empirical evidence frequently links religious involvement to higher levels of prejudice and sexism (Hannover et al., 2018; Yafie et al., 2020;

Lockhart et al., 2023; Gaunt, 2012). A key explanation for this contradiction lies in the distinction between religiosity and spirituality (Lockhart et al., 2019).

Religiosity typically refers to the subjective importance of religious beliefs (*believing*), personal engagement in religious practices (*bonding*), adherence to doctrinal principles (*behaving*), and affiliation with organized institutions (*belonging*) (Huber & Huber, 2012). In contrast, spirituality describes a more individualized and de-institutionalized pursuit of meaning, often centred around a personal connection to the divine, independent of formal religious systems (Chiu et al., 2004; Slater et al., 2001). Although conceptually distinct, religiosity and spirituality frequently overlap, complicating their empirical separation. Even within Saroglou's framework, this overlap becomes evident. When certain dimensions, particularly personal belief (*believing*) and private connection (*bonding*), are emphasized over moral conformity (*behaving*) and group identity (*belonging*), the orientation shifts closer to spirituality, reflecting a more autonomous and less institutionally bound religious experience.

This distinction is essential in understanding that religious commitment is not inherently linked to prejudice. In fact, a spiritual approach to religion, emphasizing personal introspection over dogmatic engagement, negatively correlates with ambivalent sexism and other forms of bias (Batson & Stocks, 2005). For example, Buddhist societies, where religious practice tends to emphasize spiritual development over institutional doctrine, generally report lower levels of gender inequality (Klingorová & Havlíček, 2015).

The present study examines individual religiosity as a unified construct, without disaggregating the potential differences among its subdimensions as outlined in Saroglou's model, and while acknowledging its possible overlap with spirituality. This decision is grounded in both the empirical challenges of clearly distinguishing between religiosity and spirituality, and the limitations of the measurement scale employed, which is not designed to differentiate the two constructs. Moreover, this approach aligns with the study's primary focus on religiosity, particularly in its institutional form encompassing normative expectations and social conformity, rather than on spirituality. This focus is justified by substantial evidence linking institutional religiosity to traditional gender ideologies that reinforce sexism and legitimize conventional gender roles (Inglehart & Norris, 2009). Therefore, the following section examines religious institutional norms, as they represent the dimension of religiosity most strongly associated with sexist attitudes.

1.3.2 Institutional Religiosity

Institutional religiosity refers to the role of religious institutions as organized systems that exert

control by enforcing social norms (Seguino, 2011). Historically, religious authorities have often transformed spiritual teachings into instruments of power, claiming divine legitimacy to serve their interests—a pattern that persists today as formal religious norms can enable privileged groups to uphold social hierarchies (Chukwuokolo, 2011).

Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) offers a useful framework for understanding this dynamic, positing that societies are structured into group-based hierarchies where dominant groups retain power and subordinate groups remain disadvantaged. Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), which reflects an individual's preference for maintaining such hierarchies, is influenced by both individual personality traits and broader socio-structural factors (Duckitt, 2006). Religion, as a dominant social institution, contributes to these structural conditions by promoting submission to authority, preserving traditional norms, and legitimizing existing social systems (Duckitt, 2006). Empirical evidence suggests that individuals high in SDO may adopt religious ideologies to justify social hierarchies (Yafie et al., 2020), thereby supporting practices that perpetuate inequality and systemic discrimination (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Additionally, religion is frequently associated with values such as tradition, conformity, and resistance to change—characteristics closely aligned with SDO and which tend to reinforce hierarchical social orders (Roccas & Schwartz, 1997; Roccas, 2005).

Therefore, religious institutions operate as integral components of wider systems of power that uphold the status quo and maintain social inequalities (Cotterill et al., 2014; Young, 1987). Religion and society exert a reciprocal influence: while religious doctrines shape societal norms and structures, prevailing social values and dynamics also inform religious beliefs (Bentzen & Gokmen, 2023; King, 1995). As a result, religious contexts often mirror broader societal patterns, including gender-based hierarchies, meaning that the status of women reflects their subordinate position within the patriarchal order (Nešpor, 2008).

This framework is instrumental in understanding how religion functions within a patriarchal social system, serving as a mechanism of power that sustains male dominance (Bentzen & Gokmen, 2023). This perspective clarifies how religiosity reinforces sexism through the lens of power maintenance, as religious ideologies frequently legitimize gender inequalities, primarily through benevolent sexist narratives (Glick et al., 2002). While individuals may have personal approaches to religion, it is crucial to recognize its role in reinforcing social hierarchies through institutional norms.

1.4 School Gender Inequality Norms

As a social construct, gender is learned and expressed through interactions and observations within specific relational contexts, making schools central in shaping how students develop gender roles and beliefs (Connell, 1996; Skelton et al., 2010). Educational materials and social interactions within the school environment, such as teachers' differentiated expectations and behaviours based on gender, can implicitly reinforce and perpetuate gender stereotypes (Corner & Dallavis, 2022). However, as key agents of socialization, teachers also have the potential to counteract these dynamics by actively challenging gender norms, thereby contributing to the disruption of sexist attitudes and the promotion of gender equality.

The socialization process within schools is significantly shaped by the hidden curriculum: a set of implicit norms, values, expectations, and beliefs that are not formally stated but are conveyed through institutional practices and teacher behaviour (Dorr & Sierra, 1998). These informal rules not only affect the cultural environment of schools but also guide the attitudes and conduct of both students and educators (Alsubaie, 2015). According to Cialdini's (1990) framework, such norms exert subtle pressures to conform, either through descriptive norms, which reflect perceptions of prevalent behaviours, or injunctive norms, which communicate what is socially approved or disapproved.

This study specifically examines how perceived descriptive gender norms within schools influence the way gender is interpreted, enacted, and reproduced in educational settings. These norms are embedded within the hidden gender curriculum, which encompasses the informal transmission of gender ideologies through everyday school interactions (Dorr & Sierra, 1998; Moya-Díaz & De-Juanas, 2022). In this way, school gender inequality norms contribute to the internalization of dominant gender roles and expectations, often mirroring broader societal stereotypes and reinforcing sexist attitudes by subtly integrating them in the educational experience (Rimal & Real, 2003).

1.5 School Religious Norms

Religious institutions have long played a central role in socialization by shaping moral values and social rules across societies (Klingorová, 2015). Through rituals, practices, and sacred texts, they establish norms grounded in patriarchal ideology, which contribute to the internalization of gender bias (Dildar, 2015). These religious teachings often depict women in benevolently sexist ways, idealizing them in restrictive roles through seemingly positive portrayals, thereby providing individuals with a justification for discriminatory attitudes and behaviours (Etengoff

& Lefevor, 2021).

These narratives are transmitted within the school context, where religious and academic values often intertwine (Ariza et al., 2020). Regardless of whether schools are faith-based or secular, they are influenced by the prevailing religious traditions of the broader society, with religious norms frequently embedded within the educational environment (Bentzen & Gokmen, 2023). The presence of such norms in schools can reinforce sexist beliefs by promoting women's subordinate roles, traditional family structures, and masculinity ideologies that uphold male dominance (Borgogna & McDermott, 2022). Religious influence within educational socialization strengthens the internalization of gender norms (Gallagher & Smith, 1999), which in turn is linked to sexist attitudes and resistance to gender equality initiatives (Valsecchi et al., 2023). Existing studies show that, despite limited research on long-term effects, religious schooling is associated with the adoption of more traditional gender beliefs compared to the attendance of public schools (Bulanda, 2011; Uecker & Hill, 2014).

Given that normative influences are already strong in educational settings (Alsubaie, 2015), and particularly pronounced in religious contexts (Bentzen & Gokmen, 2023), their intersection demands close examination. The perception of institutional religiosity and its influence on school practices, referred to as descriptive religious norms, may further reinforce and justify sexist behaviours, ultimately hindering efforts to implement gender equality in education.

1.6 The Present Study

The general objective of this study is to investigate the psychological and contextual factors that influence teachers' support for gender equality in education, with a particular focus on how individual beliefs and school-level norms interact to shape these attitudes. At the individual level, the study examines religiosity. At the school level, it focuses on two key dimensions: school religious norms, which reflect the perceived religious climate of the school, and school gender norms, meaning how gender expectations and biases are reinforced or challenged in the school setting. The study explores the various pathways through which both individual religiosity and school norms may either support or hinder gender equality in education, by examining the role of ambivalent sexism, namely benevolent and hostile sexism as mediating mechanisms. This study addresses the following research questions:

1. Does individual religiosity influence teachers' support for gender equality in education, and is this relationship mediated by ambivalent sexism?

2. Do school-level norms, specifically perceived school religious norms and perceived gender inequality norms, affect teachers' support for gender equality, and are these relationships mediated by ambivalent sexism?
3. Are there differences in how benevolent and hostile sexism mediate the effects of individual and school-level predictors on support for gender equality?
4. How do these predictors interact with each other, and how do these interactions ultimately influence levels of ambivalent sexism and support for gender equality in education?

Building on the previously outlined theoretical framework, the following hypotheses are proposed, and the conceptual model is presented in Figure 1.1.

H1: Individual religiosity will negatively predict support for gender equality in education, with benevolent and hostile sexism mediating this relationship. Specifically, higher levels of individual religiosity will be associated with stronger benevolent and hostile sexist attitudes among teachers, which, in turn, will be linked to lower support for gender equality initiatives in educational settings.

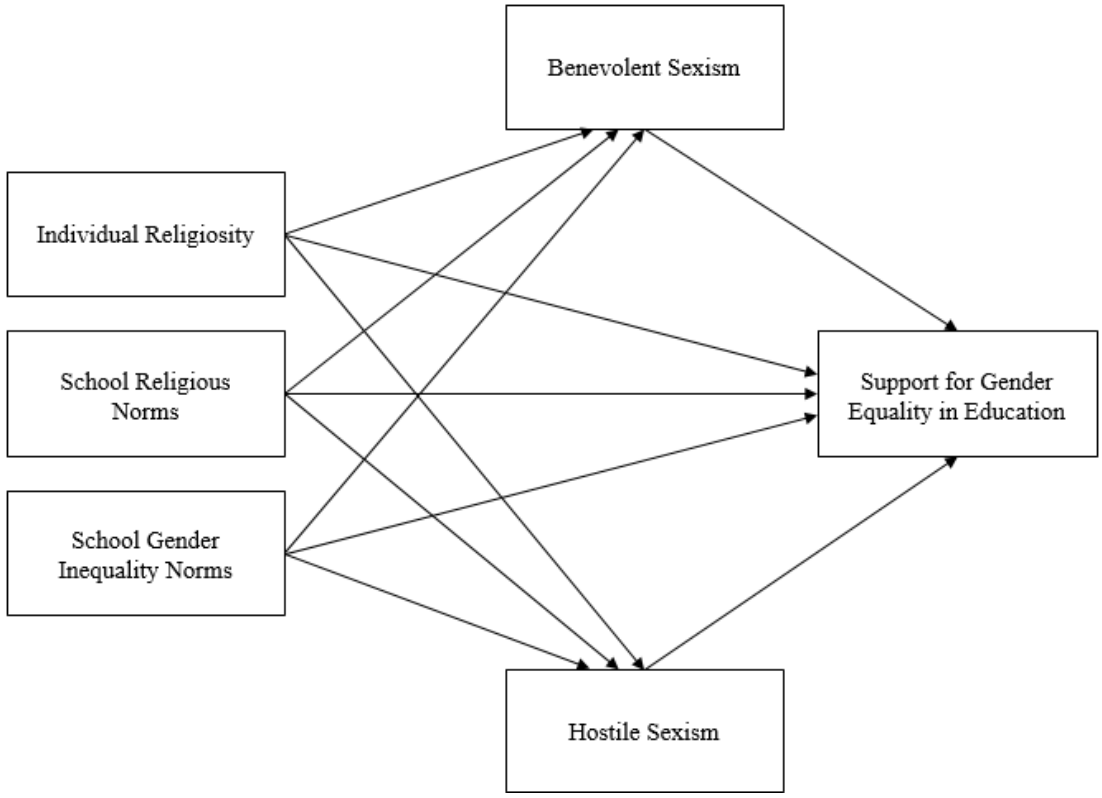
H2: School religious norms will negatively predict support for gender equality in education, with benevolent and hostile sexism mediating this relationship. Specifically, higher levels of school religiosity will be associated with stronger benevolent and hostile sexist attitudes among teachers, which, in turn, will be linked to lower support for gender equality initiatives in educational settings.

H3: School gender inequality norms will negatively predict support for gender equality in education, with benevolent and hostile sexism mediating this relationship. Specifically, stronger gender inequality norms will be associated with higher levels of benevolent and hostile sexist attitudes among teachers, which, in turn, will be linked to lower support for gender equality initiatives in educational settings.

H4: The relationships between individual religiosity, school religious norms, and school gender inequality norms and support for gender equality in education, as mediated by benevolent and hostile sexism, will remain significant when all three predictors are considered together.

Figure 1.1

Conceptual Model



Note. Conceptual model including all predictors.

CHAPTER 2

Method

2.1 Participants

The required sample size for this study was estimated through a power analysis conducted with G*Power software (Faul et al., 2007), using an alpha level of .05, statistical power of .80, and a medium effect size (f^2 = .15). The analysis indicated that approximately 200 participants would be needed to detect an effect of this size with sufficient statistical power. Recruitment was conducted by emailing school principals across middle and high schools in Italy, inviting teachers from their institutions to participate. A total of 259 teachers participated, with 201 (77.6%) from public secular schools and 42 (16.2%) from private religious institutions. The inclusion of both types of schools aimed to ensure a more comprehensive and balanced sample.

The sample included teachers of all genders: 149 (61.6%) identified as female, 80 (31%) as male, and 2 (0.8%) selected "other" option. Participants' ages ranged from 26 to 67 years, with a mean age of 49.4 years (*SD* = 9.84). Religious affiliation was diverse, with 170 (65.9%) participants identifying as Catholic, 64 (24.8%) reporting no religious affiliation, and 5 (1.9%) adhering to other religions. For a complete breakdown of demographic characteristics, see Table 2.1. All participants were employed as teachers within the Italian school system. While no data were collected on ethnicity or nationality, eligibility required current employment in Italy, regardless of national origin.

Table 2.1

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants

	Total	
	N	*%*
Gender		
Female	149	61.6 %
Male	80	31 %
Other	2	0.8 %
Missing items	17	6.6 %
Religion		
Catholic	170	65.9 %
Non-believer	64	24.8 %

Other religions	5	1.9 %
Missing items	19	7.4 %
School Type		
Public secular	201	77.9%
Private religious	41	16.3 %
Missing items	15	5.8 %

2.2 Materials

Except for the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory, for which a validated Italian version was available, all materials were originally developed in English. To address potential language barriers, the survey and related materials were translated into Italian using the back-translation method to ensure both linguistic accuracy and cultural relevance (Beins, 2013). An expert translator first translated the materials into Italian, followed by a back-translation into English by an independent translator unfamiliar with the original text. Discrepancies were reviewed, and minor adaptations were made to align the language with the Italian educational context. Both English and Italian versions of the questionnaire are included in Appendix A and B.

2.2.1 Individual Religiosity and School Religious Norms. Individual religiosity and school religious norms were assessed using the Four Basic Dimensions of Religiousness Scale (Saroglou, 2011), which captures four psychological dimensions of religiosity: believing, bonding, behaving, and belonging. The scale consists of 12 self-report items, with three items assigned to each dimension. For individual religiosity, all 12 original items were used. Sample items for each dimension include: “I feel attached to religion because it helps me to have a purpose in my life” (*believing*), “I like religious ceremonies” (*bonding*), “Religion helps me to try to live in a moral way” (*behaving*), and “Referring to a religious tradition is important for my cultural/ethnic identity” (*belonging*).

For school religious norms, a parallel version of these 12 items was adapted to reflect the perceived religiosity of the school environment. Corresponding items include: “Teachers in my school feel attached to religion because it helps them to have a purpose in their life” (*believing*), “Teachers in my school like religious ceremonies” (*bonding*), “Religion in my school helps teachers to teach in a moral way” (*behaving*), and “Referring to my school’s religious tradition is important for teachers to fully identify with the school’s identity” (*belonging*).

Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate greater endorsement of religiosity. In Saroglou's original validation, the scale demonstrated strong internal consistency (α = .96). Across countries, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each subdimension varied by cultural and religious context: *believing* (α = .77–.91), *bonding* (α = .73–.94), *behaving* (α = .79–.95), and *belonging* (α = .71–.92).

2.2.2 Ambivalent Sexism. Sexist attitudes were measured using Short Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Rollero et al., 2014), which captures both benevolent and hostile forms of sexism. The scale consists of 12 self-report items, with six comprising each subscale. Sample items include: "Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess" (*benevolent sexism*), "Women seek to gain power by getting control over men" (*hostile sexism*).

Participants responded on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate greater endorsement of sexist attitudes. The scale demonstrated strong internal reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .80 for the benevolent sexism subscale and .85 for the hostile sexism subscale. Similarly, the Italian version of the scale showed α = .80 for benevolent sexism subscale and α = .87 for hostile sexism subscale (Manganelli et al., 2008).

2.2.3 School Gender Inequality Norms. School gender inequality norms were assessed using the Hidden Gender Inequality in Education Scale (Moya-Díaz & De-Juanas, 2022). The scale captures teachers' perceptions of the educational environment and their subjective evaluation of which elements and behaviours within the school may transmit sexist attitudes and gender stereotypes. The scale consists of 19 self-report items covering five dimensions. *Male predominance* (4 items) explores beliefs and situations that favour male students within the classroom context. A sample item is: "In class, boys tend to want to receive materials first." *Biological determinism* (4 items) reflects teachers' expectations about gendered behaviour based on perceived biological or genetic differences. A sample item is: "Boys cause more problems in class." *Leadership and gender equality* (5 items) examines perceptions of leadership roles and gender fairness in school practices. A sample item is: "The leadership position in my school is usually held by a man." *Gender situation in the school* (3 items) reflects stereotypes and perceptions of gender roles in both school and society. A sample item is: "In tutoring sessions, more mothers than fathers usually attend." Lastly, *female predominance* (3 items) addresses beliefs and situations that favour female students, reflecting gender trends

within the classroom context. A sample item is: “Girls gather and take care of classroom materials better than boys.”

Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate greater perception of gender inequality in school. The scale demonstrated strong internal reliability, with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .84.

2.2.4 Support for Gender Equality in Education. Teachers’ support for gender equality initiatives within the school was measured using the Sensitive Assessment for Gender Equality Index (Miralles-Cardona et al., 2021). The scale captures perceptions about the implementation of a gender perspective in teaching. The scale consists of 18 self-report items grouped into three subscales. A sample item for *awareness of gender inequalities* is: “Female student achievement is frequently minimized.” A sample item for *gender equality training* is: “Gender issues are important for teachers’ education as those related to other differences.” Lastly, a sample item for *institutional sensitiveness* is: “Gender issues should receive more attention in course content in my school.”

Participants responded on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate greater support for the introduction of gender mainstreaming strategies in education. The scale demonstrated good internal reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .70. Although the scale includes three subscales, all items were analysed together as a single composite score. This approach was chosen to reflect the general level of teachers’ support for gender equality initiatives, and aligning with the original validation study, which allows for both total and subscale-level analysis depending on research goals (Miralles-Cardona et al., 2021).

2.2.5 Demographics. Participants provided demographic information including age, gender, religious affiliation, school type, and, optionally, the name and city of their school. Age was assessed using an open-ended item, while gender was measured using a multiple-choice item with three response options (Male, Female, Other); both variables were included as controls in the analyses. Due to the very small number of respondents selecting “Other” (n = 2), this category was excluded from the main analyses to ensure sufficient group size and statistical power, and gender was dummy coded as a binary variable (0 = male, 1 = female). Religious affiliation (non-believer, Catholic, other religious faiths) was recorded but not used as a control variable due to its conceptual and statistical overlap with individual religiosity, which was a primary variable in the study. School type was coded as a dummy variable to distinguish

between secular and religious schools (0 = secular schools; 1 = religious schools). The name and city of the school were collected solely to track the geographic distribution of responses and to facilitate potential feedback to participating institutions if requested.

2.3 Procedure

The study commenced with obtaining ethical approval from ISCTE's Ethical Committee. Once approved, schools were contacted, and teachers were invited to participate. An informed consent form was provided, detailing the purpose of the study, procedures, and participants rights. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with no financial remuneration offered. Participants were informed that their responses would remain confidential, and their involvement would contribute to the understanding of gender equality in the educational context. The informed consent form is available in Appendix C.

Participants completed a structured questionnaire comprising 79 items, organized into several sections. The survey began with measures of individual and school-level religiosity, followed by assessments of ambivalent sexism, school gender inequality norms, and support for gender equality in education. The final section gathered demographic information. Upon completion, participants received a debriefing outlining the study's purpose (see Appendix D for full debriefing text).

To begin the analyses, composite variables were created by aggregating items within each subdimension of the scales and then combining these subdimensions into overall scale scores

CHAPTER 3

Results

3.1 Overview of Analyses

To test Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, separate mediation analyses were conducted using Model 4 of the PROCESS macro for SPSS (version 4.1; Hayes, 2022). In each analysis, the independent variable varied: individual religiosity (H1), school religious norms (H2), and school gender inequality norms (H3). Across models, the dependent variable was support for gender equality in education, with benevolent and hostile sexism specified as parallel mediators. Each mediation model was tested while controlling for the other two predictors as covariates to isolate unique effects. For Hypothesis 4, results from the individual models were manually combined to represent a comprehensive model including all predictors, as the PROCESS macro does not allow for simultaneous testing of multiple independent variables in parallel mediation.

3.2 Reliability, Descriptive Statistics, and Correlations

Missing data were handled using listwise deletion, as implemented in SPSS. Although all instruments had been previously validated, their reliability had not been assessed within the Italian context. Therefore, internal consistency for each scale was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. All scales demonstrated high reliability, with details reported in Table 3.1.

Descriptive statistics were then calculated for both control and main study variables (see Table 3.1). Following this, bivariate Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationships among all study variables. Results revealed significant correlations across most variables, as detailed in Table 3.1. Notably, all predictors were positively and significantly correlated with both components of sexism: individual religiosity (BS, $r = .68$; HS, $r = .56$; both $p < .001$), school religious norms (BS, $r = .67$; HS, $r = .60$; both $p < .001$), and school gender inequality norms (BS, $r = .68$; HS $r = .65$; both $p < .001$). All three predictors were also significantly and negatively correlated with support for gender equality in education. Similarly, both benevolent ($r = –.67$, $p < .001$) and hostile sexism ($r = –.69$, $p < .001$) were negatively associated with the gender equality support. Finally, significant positive correlations were observed between school religious norms and individual religiosity ($r = .54$, $p < .001$), as well as school religious norms and school gender inequality norms ($r = .39$, $p < .001$).

Table 3.1

Reliability, Descriptive Statistics, and Correlations

		Mean	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.	Individual Religiosity	4.56	1.58	(.96)							
2.	School Religious Norms	3.89	1.53	.54***	(.98)						
3.	School Gender Inequality Norms	2.95	.82	.43***	.66***	(.95)					
4.	Benevolent Sexism	3.09	1.38	.68***	.67***	.68***	(.92)				
5.	Hostile Sexism	2.51	1.19	.56***	.60***	.65***	.80***	(.93)			
6.	Support for Gender Equality in Education	3.03	1.00	-.57***	-.50***	-.49***	-.67***	-.69***	(.95)		
7.	Gender [1]	.67	.47	-.22***	-.42***	-.45***	-.38***	-.38***	.36***		
8.	Age	49.4	9.84	.08	-	-	.06	.00	-.15*	-	
9.	School Type [2]	.17	.38	.37***	.59***	.42***	.40***	.45***	-.35***	-	-

Note. $N = 259$. *SD* = standard deviation. Correlations are Pearson's r. Gender, Age, and School Type are control variables. Reliability is reported in parenthesis.

[1] Gender is dummy coded (0=male, 1=female).

[2] School type is dummy coded (0=secular, 1=religious).

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

3.3 Simple Mediation Models

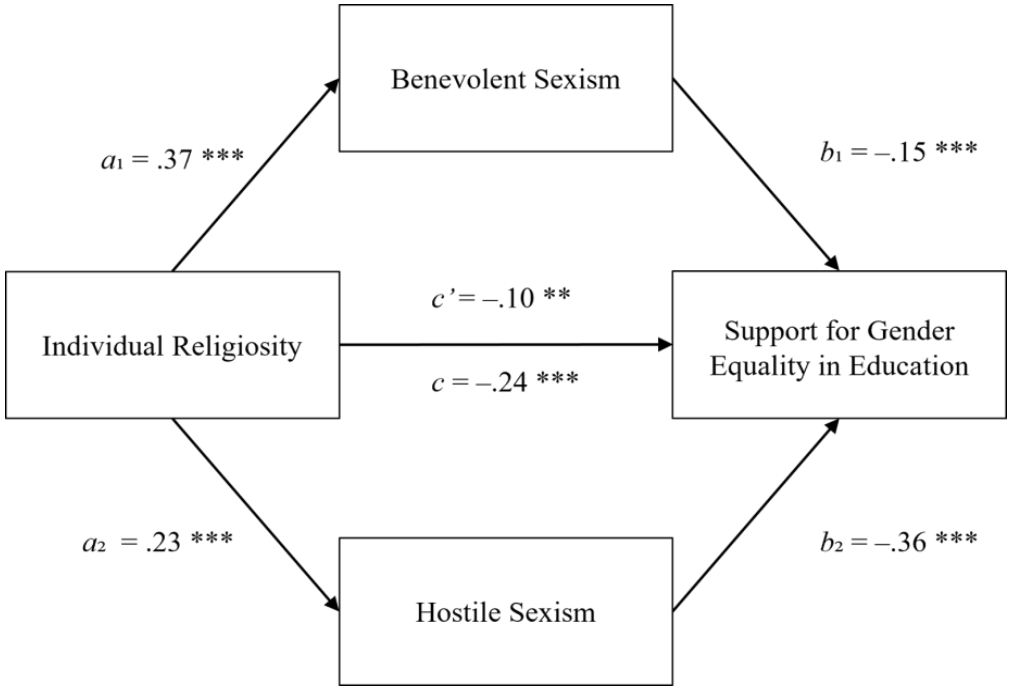
Mediation analyses were conducted using unstandardized coefficients. Table 3.2 provides the full summary of effects. In all models, benevolent and hostile sexism were examined as parallel mediators of the relationship between each predictor and support for gender equality in education. Figures 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 depict the mediation analyses for each individual predictor (individual religiosity, school religious norms, and school gender inequality norms).

3.3.1 Individual Religiosity Mediation Model. The first model, which tested individual religiosity as the predictor, confirmed Hypothesis 1. Path *a*, referring to the relationship between the independent variable and the mediators, was positive and significant:

BS (β = .37, t = 9.32, p < .001) and HS (β = .23, t = 5.69, p < .001). Path *b,* referring to the relationship between the mediators and the dependent variable, was also significant and both mediators were negatively associated with support for gender equality in education: BS (β = –.15, t = –2.40, p < .05) and HS (β = –.36, t = –5.79, p < .001). The total effect of individual religiosity on gender equality support was negative and significant (β = –.24; t = –6.51; p < .001). In further support of Hypothesis 1, the total indirect effect of religiosity on teachers' support attitudes through BS and HS was significant (β = –.14; 95% *CI* [–.20, –.08]). Detailed coefficients for the separate indirect effects via BS and HS are reported in Table 3.2. A significant direct effect was also observed (β = –.10, t = –2.72, p < .05), indicating partial mediation.

Figure 3.1

Individual Religiosity Mediation Model



Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. a_1 = path *a* on BS; a_2 = path *a* on HS; b_1 = path *b* on BS; b_2 = path *b* on HS; c' = direct effect; c = total effect.

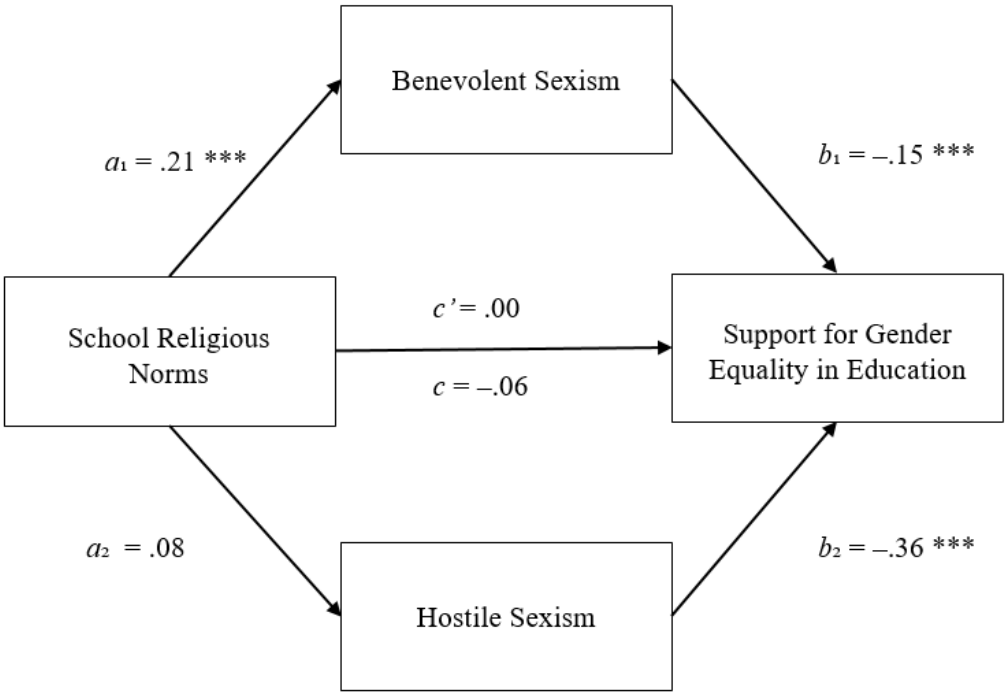
** p < .01. *** p < .001.

3.3.2 School Religious Norms Mediation Model. Hypothesis 2 tested school religious norms as the predictor and was partially confirmed. Path *a* showed that school religiosity significantly predicted BS (β = .21, t = 3.80, p < .001), but not HS (β = .08, t = 1.43, p = .15).

Paths *b* were consistent with the previous model. Partially confirming Hypothesis 2, school religious norms operated an indirect effect on gender equality support only via BS ($\beta = -.06$; 95% *CI* [–.12, –.003]). Detailed coefficients for the separate indirect effects via BS and HS are reported in Table 3.2. Finally, the direct effect was non-significant, indicating full mediation. In this case, the outcome variable cannot be directly regressed onto the predictor, suggesting that the effect is transmitted entirely through the mediators (Von Eye et al., 2009). The total effect of school religious norms on support for gender equality in education was non-significant ($\beta = -.06$; $t = -1.16$; $p = .25$), suggesting that its influence is only apparent when considered through its mediators, and not as a direct or total effect.

Figure 3.2

School Religious Norms Mediation Model



Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. a_1 = path *a* on BS; a_2 = path *a* on HS; b_1 = path *b* on BS; b_2 = path *b* on HS; c' = direct effect; *c* = total effect.

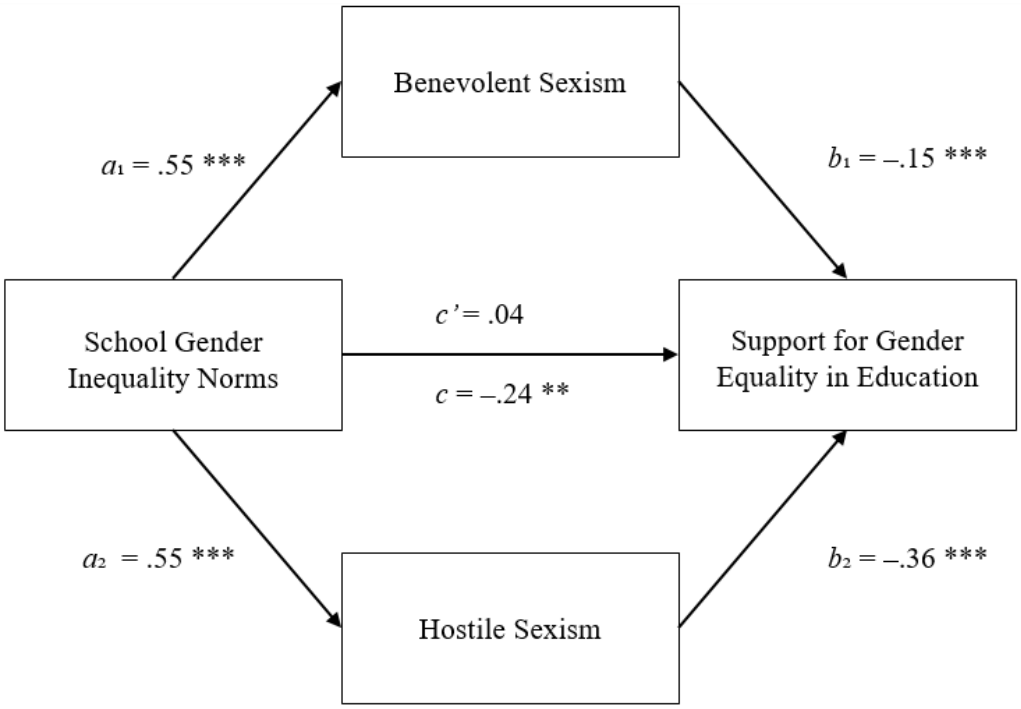
*** $p < .001$.

3.3.3 School Gender Inequality Norms. Hypothesis 3, which tested school gender inequality norms as the predictor, was confirmed. Path *a* showed a significant positive association with both BS ($\beta = .55$, $t = 6.08$, $p < .001$) and HS ($\beta = .55$, $t = 6.05$, $p < .001$). Paths *b* remained consistent with the previous models. The total effect of school gender inequality

norms on support for gender equality in education was significant (β = –.24; t = –2.80; p < .01), indicating an overall negative relationship. Further supporting Hypothesis 3, the total indirect effect of gender inequality norms on teachers' support for gender equality was significant (*β* = –.28; 95% *CI* [–.41, –.16]) through both BS and HS. Detailed coefficients for the separate indirect effects via BS and HS are reported in Table 3.2. Again, the direct effect was non-significant, indicating full mediation.

Figure 3.3

School Gender Inequality Norms Mediation Model



Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. a_1 = path *a* on BS; a_2 = path *a* on HS; b_1 = path *b* on BS; b_2 = path *b* on HS; *c'* = direct effect; *c* = total effect.

** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

Table 3.2

Regression Results for Simple Mediations

	Mediator variable models								Outcome variable models			
	Benevolent Sexism				Hostile Sexism				Support for Gender Equality in Education			
	Coeff.	*SE*	*t*	*p*	Coeff.	*SE*	*t*	*p*	Coeff.	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Individual Religiosity	.37	.04	9.32	<.001	.23	.04	5.69	<.001	-.10	.04	-2,72	<.01
School Religious Norms	.21	.06	3.80	<.001	.08	.06	1.43	.15	.00	.05	.01	.99
School Gender Inequality Norms	.55	.09	6.08	<.001	.55	.09	6.05	<.001	.04	.08	.55	.58
BS									-.15	.06	-2.34	<.01
HS									-.36	.06	-5.79	<.001
Gender [1]	-.20	.13	-1.57	.12	-.15	.13	-1.13	.26	.24	.10	2.30	<.05
Age	.00	.00	.65	.52	.00	.00	-.52	.60	-.01	.00	-2.99	<.01
School Type [2]	-.22	.18	-1.26	.21	.27	.17	1.53	.13	.00	.14	-.05	.96
			$R^2 = .66$				$R^2 = .53$				$R^2 = .56$	

		Bootstrapping effect	*SE*	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
Individual Religiosity	Indirect Effect Total	-.14	.03	-.20	-.08
	Indirect Effect via BS	-.06	.03	-.12	-.003
	Indirect Effect via HS	-.08	.02	-.13	-.04
School Religious Norms	Indirect Effect Total	-.06	.03	-.12	-.003
	Indirect Effect via BS	-.03	.02	-.07	-.002
	Indirect Effect via HS	-.03	.02	-.08	.01
School Gender Inequality Norms	Indirect Effect Total	-.28	.06	-.41	-.16
	Indirect Effect via BS	-.08	.04	-.17	-.01
	Indirect Effect via HS	-.20	.06	-.32	-.10

Note. $N = 259$. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. 5000 bootstrap samples; CI = Confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. Gender, Age, and School Type are control variables.

[1] Gender is dummy coded (0=male, 1=female).

[2] School type is dummy coded (0=secular, 1=religious).

Mediation effects for each predictor remained significant when considered collectively across the full set of models, confirming Hypothesis 4. This indicates that the indirect pathways from individual religiosity, school religious norms, and school gender inequality norms to support for gender equality in education, through BS and HS, are robust even when accounting for the presence and influence of the other predictors within the overall model framework. The full mediation model, incorporating all three predictors, both mediators, and control variables, explained 56% of the variance concerning support for gender equality in education (*Adjusted* $R^2 = .56$). Additionally, the predictors demonstrated strong explanatory power for the mediators, with *Adjusted* $R^2 = .66$ for BS and *Adjusted* $R^2 = .53$ for HS, indicating that they accounted for 66% and 53% of the variance, respectively.

Across models, gender (dummy-coded: 0 = male, 1 = female) was positively associated with gender equality support ($\beta = .24$, $t = 2.30$, $p < .05$), indicating that female participants reported higher support. Age was negatively associated with teachers' support ($\beta = –.01$, $t = –2.99$, $p < .05$), suggesting that older participants expressed lower support. No other control variable significantly influenced any of the model variables.

3.4 Exploratory Models

In addition to the primary hypotheses, this study proposes exploratory models composed of two parallel serial mediations to further investigate the complex relationships among individual religiosity, school religious norms, school gender inequality norms, ambivalent sexism, and support for gender equality in education. The rationale for these exploratory models stems from the observed intercorrelations among the three predictors in the primary analyses, suggesting potential reciprocal influence among variables and highlighting the importance of examining their combined effects.

The first serial mediation explores how school religious norms may shape school gender inequality norms, which, in turn, influence both benevolent and hostile sexist attitudes, and ultimately affect support for gender equality in education. This model is supported by extensive

evidence highlighting how religious teachings often shape gender expectations and prescribe specific gender roles (Glick et al., 2002; Inglehart & Norris, 2009). The second serial mediation examines an alternative pathway. It considers how school religious norms may predict individual religiosity, which subsequently affects benevolent and hostile sexism, and in turn, support for gender equality in education. While religiosity is often considered a personal and subjective experience (Huber & Huber, 2012), it can also be shaped by institutional and normative factors (Seguino, 2011). Although this influence is less frequently supported in the literature, the assumption is that institutional religiosity, especially in school settings, may meaningfully shape individual beliefs and practices, even if these beliefs are also formed independently of external norms.

3.4.1 Overview of analyses. To test this exploratory framework, serial mediation analyses were conducted using PROCESS Macro Model 81 (Hayes, 2022), which allows for a combination of serial and parallel mediators. Each serial mediation was tested independently to compare the distinct contributions of school gender inequality norms and individual religiosity in shaping sexist attitudes and support for gender equality in education.

In the first model, school religious norms were specified as the independent variable, with school gender inequality norms as the first mediator (M1), followed by benevolent (M2) and hostile sexism (M3) modelled in parallel, leading to support for gender equality in education as the outcome variable. Individual religiosity was included as a covariate. In the second model, school religious norms remained the independent variable, with individual religiosity as the first mediator (M1), and benevolent (M2) and hostile sexism (M3) again modelled in parallel, predicting support for gender equality in education. In this model, school gender inequality norms were included as a covariate. The conceptual paths and corresponding results are depicted in Figures 3.4 and 3.5.

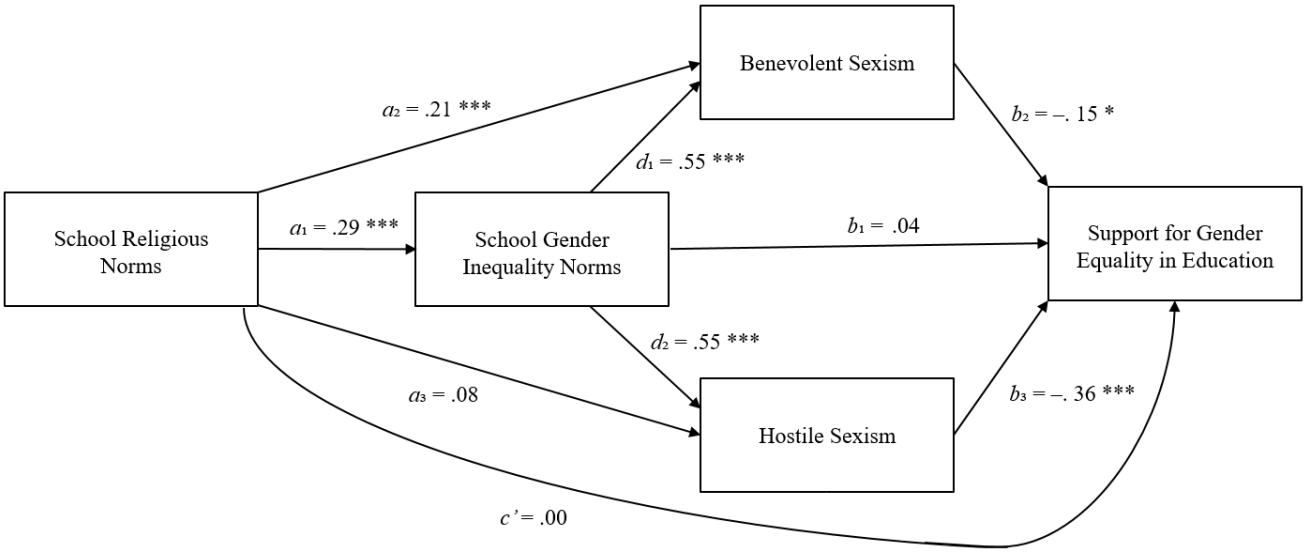
Serial mediation analyses were conducted using unstandardized coefficients and a significance level of $p < .05$ was used to determine statistical significance across all analyses. Tables 3.3 and 3.4 provide a full summary of effects.

3.4.2 First Serial Mediation Model. Paths *a* refer to the relationships between school religious norms and the three mediators. With M1 as school gender inequality norms, path a_1 was significant and positive ($\beta = .29$, $t = 8.46$, $p < .001$), and school religious norms accounted for 49% of its variance (*Adjusted* $R^2 = .49$). The effect of school religious norms on benevolent sexism (a_2) was significant ($\beta = .21$, $t = 3.80$, $p < .001$), while its effect on hostile sexism (a_3)

was not (β = .08, t = 1.43, p = .15), consistent with the findings from the simple mediation models outlined earlier. Paths *d* refer to the effects of school gender inequality norms on the parallel mediators, benevolent and hostile sexism, both of which were significantly and positively predicted (BS: β = .55, t = 6.08, p < .001; HS: β = .55, t = 6.05, p < .001). These results mirror the *a*-paths observed in the previous simple mediation model of school gender inequality norms and further reinforce the earlier findings. Paths *b* refer to the effects of the three mediators on support for gender equality in education, which was significantly and negatively predicted by both benevolent (β = –.15, t = –2.40, p < .05) and hostile sexism (β = –.36, t = –5.79, p < .001), consistent with the findings from the simple mediation models. School gender inequality norms showed no significant association with the teachers' support for gender equality (β = .04, t = –.55, p = .58), aligning with the non-significant direct effect found in the corresponding simple mediation. The total indirect effect of school religious norms on support for gender equality in education, via school gender inequality norms, BS, and HS, was significant (β = –.13; 95% *CI* [–.20, –.06]). The direct effect was non-significant, indicating full mediation. In addition to the full serial pathway, several alternative indirect effects were examined, including those corresponding to the simple mediations tested earlier. Full details are presented in Table 3.3.

Figure 3.4

First Serial Mediation Model



Note. M1 = school gender inequality norms; M2 = BS; M3 = HS.

a_1 = path *a* on M1; a_2 = path *a* on M2; a_3 = path *a* on M3; b_1 = path *b* from M1 to Y; b_2 = path *b* from M2 to Y; c' = direct effect, d_1 = path from M1 to M2; d_2 = path from M1 to M3.

* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001

Table 3.3

Regression Results for First Serial Mediation

	First mediator variable models				Parallel mediators models								Outcome variable models			
	School Gender Inequality Norms				Benevolent Sexism				Hostile Sexism				Support for Gender Equality in Education			
	Coeff.	*SE*	*t*	*p*	Coeff.	*SE*	*t*	*p*	Coeff.	*SE*	*t*	*p*	Coeff.	*SE*	*t*	*p*
School Religious Norms	.29	.03	8.46	<.001	.21	.06	3.80	<.001	.08	.06	1.43	.15	.00	.05	.01	.99
School Gender Inequality Norms					.55	.09	6.08	<.001	.55	.09	6.05	<.001	.04	.08	.55	.58
BS													-.15	.06	-2.34	<.01
HS													-.36	.06	-5.79	<.001
Individual Religiosity	.05	.03	8.46	.08	.37	.04	9.32	<.001	.23	.04	5.69	<.001	-.10	.04	-2,72	<.01
Gender [1]	-.35	.09	-3.91	<.001	-.20	.13	-1.57	.12	-.15	.13	-1.13	.26	.24	.10	2.30	<.05
Age	.01	.00	1.53	.13	.00	.00	.65	.52	.00	.00	-.52	.60	-.01	.00	-2.99	<.01
School Type [2]	-.03	.13	-.24	.81	-.22	.18	-1.26	.21	.27	.17	1.53	.13	.00	.14	-.05	.96
	$R^2 = .49$				$R^2 = .66$				$R^2 = .53$				$R^2 = .56$			

		Bootstrapping Effect	*SE*	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
School Religious Norms	Indirect Total Effect	-.13	.04	-.20	-.06
	Ind1	.01	.03	-.04	.07
	Ind2	-.03	.02	-.07	-.003
	Ind3	-.03	.02	-.08	.01
	Ind4	-.02	.01	-.05	-.002
	Ind5	-.06	.02	-.10	-.03

Note. $N = 259$. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. 5000 bootstrap samples; CI = Confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. Individual Religiosity, Gender, Age, and School Type are control variables.

Ind1 School Religious Norms -> School Gender Inequality Norms -> Support for Gender Equality in Education

Ind2 School Religious Norms -> BS -> Support for Gender Equality in Education

Ind3 School Religious Norms -> HS -> Support for Gender Equality in Education

Ind4 School Religious Norms -> School Gender Inequality Norms -> BS -> Support for Gender Equality in Education

Ind5 School Religious Norms -> School Gender Inequality Norms -> HS -> Support for Gender Equality in Education

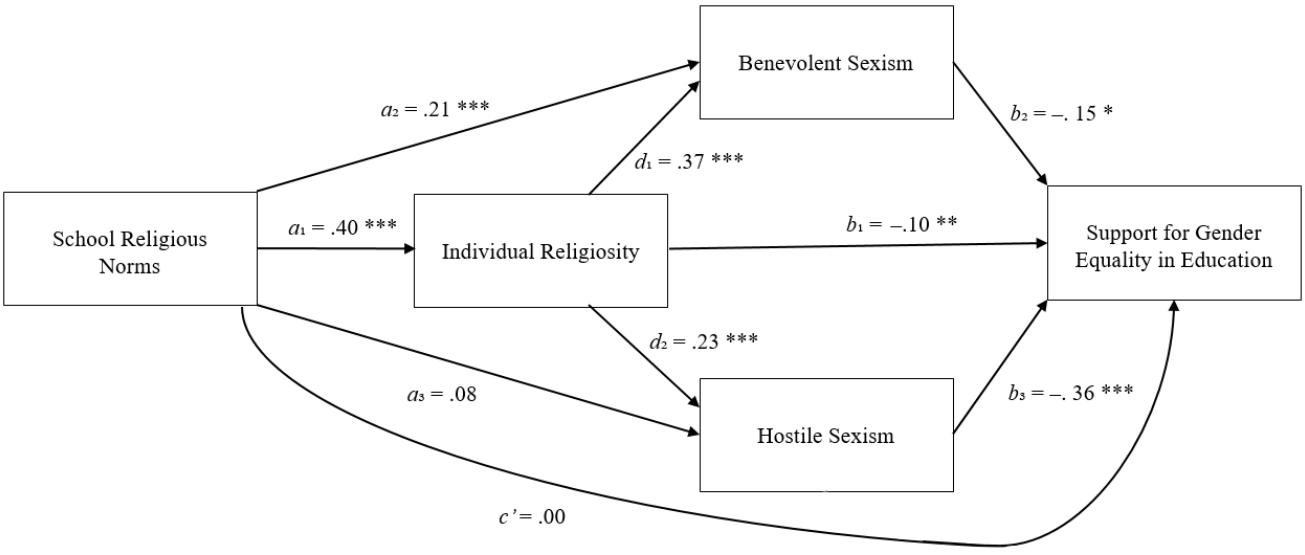
[1] Gender is dummy coded (0=male, 1=female).

[2] School type is dummy coded (0=secular, 1=religious).

3.4.3 Second Serial Mediation Model. School religious norms had a significant positive effect on individual religiosity (β = .40, t = 4.57, p < .001), accounting for 29% of its variance (*Adjusted* R^2 = .29). The relationship with benevolent (a_2) and on hostile sexism (a_3) remained consistent with the previous serial mediation model. Paths *d*, representing the effects of individual religiosity on benevolent and hostile sexism, were also significant and positive (BS: β = .37, t = 9.32, p < .001; HS: β = .23, t = 5.69, p < .001). These results mirror the *a*-paths observed in the corresponding simple mediation model, further reinforcing earlier findings. All three *b*-paths were negative and statistically significant. Specifically, the effect of individual religiosity on gender equality support (β = –.10, t = –2.72, p < .01) mirrored the direct effect observed in the simple mediation analysis. The effects of benevolent (b_2) and hostile sexism (b_3) on gender equality support remained consistent with the previous serial mediation and were once again aligned with the findings from the simple mediation. The total indirect effect of school religious norms through individual religiosity, BS, and HS on support for gender equality in education was significant (β = –.16; 95% *CI* [– .24, –.07]), with a non-significant direct effect, supporting full mediation. In addition to the full serial pathway, several alternative indirect effects were examined. Full details are presented in Table 3.4.

Figure 3.5

Second Serial Mediation Model



Note. M1 = individual religiosity; M2 = BS; M3 = HS.

a_1 = path *a* on M1; a_2 = path *a* on M2; a_3 = path *a* on M3; b_1 = path *b* from M1 to Y; b_2 = path *b* from M2 to Y; c' = direct effect, d_1 = path from M1 to M2; d_2 = path from M1 to M3.

* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.

Table 3.4

Regression Results for Second Serial Mediation

	First mediator variable models				Parallel mediators models								Outcome variable models			
	Individual Religiosity				Benevolent Sexism				Hostile Sexism				Support for Gender Equality in Education			
	Coeff.	*SE*	*t*	*p*	Coeff.	*SE*	*t*	*p*	Coeff.	*SE*	*t*	*p*	Coeff.	*SE*	*t*	*p*
School Religious Norms	.40	.09	4.57	<.001	.21	.06	3.80	<.001	.08	.06	1.43	.15	.00	.05	.01	.99
Individual Religiosity					.55	.09	6.08	<.001	.55	.09	6.05	<.001	.04	.08	.55	.58
BS													-.15	.06	-2.34	<.01
HS													-.36	.06	-5.79	<.001
School Gender Inequality Norms	.26	.15	1.76	.08	.37	.04	9.32	<.001	.23	.04	5.69	<.001	-.10	.04	-2,72	<.01
Gender [1]	.10	.21	.48	.63	-.20	.13	-1.57	.12	-.15	.13	-1.13	.26	.24	.10	2.30	<.05
Age	.02	.01	1.87	.17	.00	.00	.65	.52	.00	.00	-.52	.60	-.01	.00	-2.99	<.01
School Type [2]	.40	.29	1.39	.07	-.22	.18	-1.26	.21	.27	.17	1.53	.13	.00	.14	-.05	.96
	$R^2 = .29$				$R^2 = .66$				$R^2 = .53$				$R^2 = .56$			

		Bootstrapping Effect	*SE*	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
School Religious Norms	Indirect Total Effect	-.16	.04	-.24	-.07
	Ind1	-.04	.02	-.08	-.01
	Ind2	-.03	.02	-.07	-.002
	Ind3	-.03	.02	-.08	.01
	Ind4	-.02	.01	-.05	-.002
	Ind5	-.03	.01	-.06	-.01

Note. $N = 259$. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. 5000 bootstrap samples; CI = Confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. School Gender Inequality Norms, Gender, Age, and School Type are control variables.

Ind1 School Religious Norms -> Individual Religiosity -> Support for Gender Equality in Education

Ind2 School Religious Norms -> BS -> Support for Gender Equality in Education

Ind3 School Religious Norms -> HS - Support for Gender Equality in Education

Ind4 School Religious Norms -> Individual Religiosity -> BS -> Support for Gender Equality in Education

Ind5 School Religious Norms -> Individual Religiosity -> HS -> Support for Gender Equality in Education

[1] Gender is dummy coded (0=male, 1=female).

[2] School type is dummy coded (0=secular, 1=religious).

These exploratory analyses involved the same variables and indirect effects as the simple mediation models outlined earlier in this study but structured sequentially rather than in parallel. As a result, the explained variance in support for gender equality in education remained similar, accounting for 56% (*Adjusted* $R^2 = .56$).

Across models, gender (dummy-coded: 0 = male, 1 = female) was positively associated with gender equality support ($\beta = .24$, $t = 2.30$, $p < .05$), indicating that female participants reported higher support. Age was negatively associated ($\beta = –.01$, $t = –2.99$, $p < .05$), suggesting lower support among older participants. No other control variable was significantly associated with any model variables. In the first serial mediation, individual religiosity was included as a covariate and significantly predicted BS, HS, and support for gender equality in education. These effects align with paths d_1, d_2, and b_1 observed in the second serial mediation, where individual religiosity was instead modelled as the first-level mediator. In this case, school gender inequality norms were included as a covariate and significantly predicted BS and HS, but not gender equality support—again, consistent with the earlier findings. Overall, these patterns reaffirm the results observed in the primary simple mediations.

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

This study investigated the factors that facilitate or hinder teachers' support for the implementation of gender equality initiatives in educational settings. At the individual level, the study examined personal religiosity, while at the normative level, it explored both the school gender inequality norms and its religious environment. The central aim was to determine whether ambivalent sexism—specifically its two components, benevolent and hostile sexism—mediates the relationship between these key predictors and teachers' support attitudes toward gender equality in education. An exploratory analysis considered potential interconnections among the predictors, specifically how school religious norms may influence both broader school gender norms and individual religiosity, ultimately shaping gender equality support.

4.1 Simple Mediation Models

By testing different mediation models, the study revealed several key insights into how individual beliefs and contextual factors shape attitudes toward gender equality in schools.

Individual religiosity was found to negatively predict support for gender equality in education, a relationship partially mediated by both benevolent and hostile sexism. This partial mediation indicates that religiosity influences teachers' endorsement of gender equality both directly and indirectly through its association with sexist beliefs. This finding supports the study's initial hypothesis, suggesting that religious belief systems often reinforce gender stereotypes and expectations through subtle, socially accepted norms (Glick et al., 2002). These norms are frequently expressed through benevolent sexism, which idealizes women as pure, nurturing, and dependent (Glick & Fiske, 1996). While such portrayals may appear positive, benevolent sexism ultimately reinforces systemic gender hierarchies by discouraging women's autonomy and legitimizing patriarchal authority under the guise of protection and care (Bereket & Fiske, 2023). In contrast, hostile sexism, characterized by overt antagonism and denigration of women (Glick & Fiske, 1996), plays a distinct role by directly opposing gender equality efforts. Although it has typically shown a weaker association with religiosity in prior research (Glick et al., 2002), an underlying connection still persists. Religiosity can reinforce dominance-oriented worldviews that prioritize male authority and uphold traditional gender hierarchies (Yafie et al., 2020). When these structures are perceived as being challenged, such as through initiatives promoting women's empowerment, hostile sexism may emerge as a

defensive reaction, actively resisting structural change (Bereket & Fiske, 2023). Together, these findings demonstrate that both forms of sexism significantly mediate the relationship between individual religiosity and support for gender equality in education, though they may operate through distinct psychological and ideological mechanisms.

Turning to the second analysis, school religious norms positively predicted benevolent sexism, which in turn fully mediated the relationship with support for gender equality in education. However, contrary to expectations, school religiosity was not significantly related to hostile sexism. In highly religious school environments, religious norms may be translated into prescriptive gender expectations, reinforcing traditional roles, legitimizing paternalistic attitudes and sexist beliefs (Borgogna & McDermott, 2022). Teachers may adopt these prevailing norms not only to avoid social sanctions but also to gain acceptance and align with collective identities (Cialdini, 1990). Since these norms are typically expressed through benevolent rather than hostile forms of sexism (Glick et al., 2002), this may explain its lack of a significant mediating role in the model.

This divergence underscores a key distinction between the two models—one focusing on individual religiosity and the other on school religious norms—highlighting how these predictors operate at different levels to shape attitudes. Indeed, in the first model, both benevolent and hostile sexism served as mediators. One possible explanation for the difference in pathways lies in the conceptual distinctions between personal and institutional religiosity. Individual religiosity encompasses a wide range of religious expressions, from more rigid and dogmatic to more spiritual and flexible interpretations (Saroglou, 2011). In contrast, school religiosity specifically reflects institutional descriptive norms: social expectations and pressures to conform within the educational setting (Cialdini, 1990). Although distinct dimensions of personal religiousness were not separately analysed in this study, they may contribute to more complex relationships influenced by factors beyond sexism, which likely explains its association with both benevolent and hostile sexism as well as the direct effect on support for gender equality. Conversely, institutional religiosity operates through more constrained but powerful normative mechanisms (Seguino, 2011), restricting its influence primarily to benevolent sexism, which aligns with prevailing normative expressions of religion, while showing little connection to hostile sexism.

Moving to the third model, a full mediation was observed: the relationship between school gender inequality norms and support for gender equality in education was entirely explained by benevolent and hostile sexism. This suggests that perceptions of implicit gender expectations within the school context influence attitudes toward gender equality solely through

the internalization of sexist beliefs, both subtle and overt, rather than through a direct effect. This finding further highlights the powerful role of normative contexts in shaping attitudes. When school gender norms reflect traditional or unequal expectations, they often reinforce seemingly positive yet inherently discriminatory beliefs, particularly those associated with benevolent sexism (Rimal & Real, 2003). When such norms are deeply embedded within institutional culture, they are often perceived as natural, legitimate, and accepted as standard practice (Cialdini, 1990). In this context of apparent stability and the social justification of existing gender arrangements, the absence of overt inequality can create the illusion that gender equality has already been achieved (Swim et al., 1995). As a result, educators may view new initiatives as unnecessary or even disruptive, reducing the perceived need for further intervention (Connor & Fiske, 2019). While this may passively undermine support for change, in some cases, the same institutional climate may also provoke active resistance. Such reactions reflect hostile sexist attitudes, which often emerge in response to perceived threats to male dominance and established gender hierarchies upheld by these entrenched norms (Glick et al., 2001).

In addition to the main findings, gender and age emerged as significant covariates related to support for gender equality in education. Specifically, women were more likely to endorse gender equality initiatives compared to men, aligning with prior research that highlights greater awareness and sensitivity to gender-based disparities among women, as they are more likely to experience their effects directly (Scarborough et al., 2019). Conversely, older individuals demonstrated lower levels of support, suggesting that generational differences may influence openness to gender-related change. Research has shown that younger cohorts tend to espouse more progressive attitudes toward gender roles, likely due to increased exposure to egalitarian norms through education, media, and shifting cultural discourses (Scarborough et al., 2021). These generational shifts suggest that support for gender equality policies may be shaped by broader socio-historical contexts and evolving societal expectations.

Finally, when all three models are considered together, each predictor—individual religiosity, school religious norms, and school gender inequality norms—remains significant through its respective pathways. This indicates that each factor independently contributes to shaping support for gender equality in education, even when controlling for the influence of the others. Personal beliefs, institutional religious norms, and perceived gender expectations within the school environment each play a distinct and meaningful role in influencing teachers' support attitudes, with ambivalent sexism serving as a key psychological mechanism mediating these relationships. These findings underscore the need for multi-level interventions in educational

settings that address both individual attitudes and the broader institutional contexts in which they are formed and maintained (Skelton et al., 2010).

4.2 Exploratory Models

By testing more complex serial mediation models, this study offers a deeper understanding of how school environments contribute to the formation of gender-related attitudes and ultimately influence support for gender equality in education. Specifically, the analysis sheds light on the dynamic interplay between individual religiosity, school religious norms, gender inequality norms, and ambivalent sexist attitudes as interconnected mechanisms shaping teachers' views on gender equality.

The first serial mediation model revealed a clear indirect pathway from school religious norms to support for gender equality in education, mediated by school gender inequality norms and sexist attitudes. Schools characterized by more conservative or traditional religious orientations tended to promote more rigid and stereotypical gender norms, which were in turn associated with higher levels of both benevolent and hostile sexism among educators. This aligns with existing literature emphasizing the role of religious frameworks in prescribing socially accepted gender roles and behaviours, often conveying idealized visions of femininity and sustaining hegemonic models of masculinity (Borgogna & McDermott, 2022). Through these implicit messages and practices, gender inequality norms in such environments reinforce the ideological foundations of sexism (Rimal & Real, 2003). As a result, support for gender equality initiatives tends to decrease, helping to preserve the patriarchal social order (Beauregard, 2022). Importantly, this model highlights a sequential process: religious norms do not directly produce sexist attitudes or opposition to gender equality. Rather, they operate by shaping the broader normative climate of the institution, by reinforcing specific gender expectations and legitimizing traditional gender norms. These norms, in turn, function as cultural conduits through which gender beliefs are internalized, facilitating sexist attitudes that ultimately contribute to ideological resistance against equality.

The second serial mediation model explored the indirect effect of school religious norms on support for gender equality in education, with individual religiosity, benevolent and hostile sexism operating as sequential mediators. As hypothesized, school religious norms positively predicted individual religiosity. While religiosity is typically conceptualized as a deeply personal and subjective belief system (Huber & Huber, 2012), this finding suggests it may also be susceptible to institutional and normative influences. In educational settings where

religious identity is central to the institutional culture, religious values are communicated not only through formal curricula but also through subtle practices, expectations, and shared norms that shape individuals' core convictions over time (Barrett et al., 2007). Though less frequently explored in the literature, the influence of institutional religiosity on personal religiosity highlights how environmental cues and collective norms shape internal commitments (Stark & Finke, 2000). Such influence likely operates through both descriptive and injunctive norms—respectively, perceptions of common behaviours and socially accepted approvals or disapprovals—fostering internalized religiosity that aligns with the dominant institutional culture (Cialdini, 1990). Once internalized, these religious beliefs may shape gender-related attitudes in ways that reflect traditional and hierarchical ideologies, particularly those expressed through ambivalent sexism (Inglehart & Norris, 2009). Crucially, both forms of sexism subsequently act as psychological mechanisms that reduce teachers' support for gender equality initiatives in education.

School type, included as a covariate in the analyses, did not show any significant relationships with the key variables in the model. This lack of significant association suggests that the observed patterns are not limited to religious schools alone, which might be expected given their overt religious orientation. Instead, secular schools also appear to reflect the broader cultural and social context in which they operate, including the dominant religious climate that permeates societal norms and values. Consequently, both religious and secular educational environments contribute to shaping teachers' gender-related attitudes, highlighting the pervasive influence of cultural religious norms beyond explicitly faith-based institutions.

These findings stress the powerful role of educational environments not only in transmitting values but in sustaining systems of inequality through normative and psychological channels. This reinforces the notion that support for gender equality is not only a matter of individual values, but also of broader cultural and institutional climates. Therefore, efforts to promote gender equality in education must move beyond individual-level interventions and consider the broader normative context within which beliefs and attitudes are formed.

4.3 Implications

The implications of this research are significant for both policy and educational practice.

This study importantly distinguishes between institutional religiosity, which often supports hierarchical gender ideologies (Huber & Huber, 2012), and spirituality, which may offer an alternative framework grounded in equity, compassion, and empathy (Chiu et al.,

2004). As a personal and independent source of meaning, spirituality can foster inclusive mindsets and support for gender equality, without being bound by institutional doctrines (Slater et al., 2001). School-based programs that incorporate spiritual values have the potential to facilitate inclusivity, openness, and acceptance—both in secular and religious educational settings. In religious schools, framing gender equality through shared spiritual principles can reduce resistance, especially among teachers who might resist change due to perceived conflicts with their religious identity. Presenting gender equity as aligned with fundamental spiritual teachings, rather than in conflict with religion, can encourage broader support. Nevertheless, institutional influences in religious schools can sometimes limit spiritual ideals (Borgogna & McDermott, 2022; Seguino, 2011). Thus, encouraging critical reflection on gender-sensitive theology and questioning traditional religious interpretations that support inequality becomes crucial.

Another important implication of this study is the need to address gender inequality norms in schools. While institutional change is essential, addressing individual educators' implicit attitudes and behaviours is a critical starting point (Skelton et al., 2010). Efforts should extend beyond revising curricula and teaching materials to actively engage teachers in reflecting on how their own beliefs and assumptions may unintentionally reinforce inequality in classroom practices. Consequently, educational policy should require professional development programs that train educators to recognize and challenge ambivalent sexism, gender stereotypes, and implicit biases. On one hand, changing individual behaviours is fundamental because these collectively shape the school's social environment (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005). On the other hand, these behaviours are embedded within broader institutional norms and practices (Alsubaie, 2015). Therefore, effective gender mainstreaming must also encompass school leadership to foster an institutional culture that prioritizes equity. This includes establishing gender equality as a core school goal and promoting inclusive governance. Additionally, implementing institutional self-assessment tools to regularly evaluate the school's gender climate can facilitate continuous monitoring, promote accountability, and ensure sustained progress toward gender equality.

4.4 Limitations and Future Directions

Despite its contributions, the present research is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged.

First, the correlational design of the study limits the ability to draw causal conclusions

(Pearl, 2009). Although the theoretical model posits directional relationships, these pathways remain hypothetical rather than empirically confirmed. For instance, while the serial mediation model tested whether school religious norms influence individual religiosity, it is also plausible that personal religious beliefs shape individuals' perceptions of the broader school culture. Additionally, alternative models could propose that teachers' sexist attitudes collectively contribute to shaping school gender inequality norms, rather than these norms solely influencing individual sexism as tested here. Therefore, instead of examining only the influence of institutional norms on individual attitudes, future research should also consider how the broader school environment and cultural expectations may emerge from the aggregation of individual teachers' beliefs and behaviours (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005). An important direction for future research is to explore how sexist beliefs might facilitate the development or reinforcement of religious ideologies, functioning as a system of justification for maintaining gender inequality (Jost & van der Toorn, 2012)—rather than the reverse relationship examined in the present study. Longitudinal or experimental designs are necessary to establish the directionality and causality of these relationships more definitively.

Second, the findings are subject to limitations in generalizability. Although the inclusion of both public secular and private religious schools aimed to provide a more comprehensive and balanced sample, the number of participants from private religious institutions was substantially smaller. Consequently, although exploring school type as a moderator could have provided valuable insights, it was included only as a covariate in the analyses because the uneven sample sizes would have compromised the reliability of any moderation results (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). This sampling imbalance limits statistical power to detect meaningful differences between school types and reduces the generalizability of the findings across diverse educational contexts. Moreover, the study was conducted within the specific sociocultural and educational context of Italy, a country strongly influenced by Catholic traditions and characterized by relatively high levels of gender inequality compared to other European nations (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022). These contextual factors may limit the external validity of the findings, particularly in cultural settings with different religious landscapes, educational structures, or levels of gender equity.

Third, the study is limited by potential construct overlap. Individual religiosity was treated as a single, undifferentiated construct, without accounting for its multiple dimensions—believing, bonding, behaving, and belonging (Saroglou, 2011). This limitation prevented an examination of how different expressions of religiosity might differentially relate to sexist attitudes and support for gender equality. The measurement instrument used did not distinguish

between religiosity and spirituality, increasing the likelihood of conceptual overlap between these distinct but related constructs. As a result, the interpretation of religiosity's role in shaping attitudes remains somewhat imprecise. Future research would benefit from employing more nuanced, multidimensional scales that clearly distinguish spiritual orientations from more dogmatic and institutionally driven forms of religiosity. The measure of school religious norms also presents limitations: it was based on an adapted version of the individual religiosity scale, reworded to capture perceptions of the school environment. While this adaptation demonstrated high internal reliability, it may have introduced construct overlap between individual and institutional religiosity. Moreover, it may not have fully captured the complexity of institutional religious expression, such as school policies, visual symbols, religious instruction, or broader organizational discourse. A similar concern applies to the measure of school gender inequality norms, which relied on subjective perceptions of whether various school elements convey sexist messages. Since this measure depends on individual interpretation, it may inadvertently capture participants' own sexist attitudes rather than providing an objective assessment of the institutional environment. This subjectivity introduces potential bias into the model and increases the risk of conceptual overlap with the ambivalent sexism scale.

Finally, the study also has methodological limitations. All variables were assessed using self-report measures, which raises the risk of social desirability bias (King & Bruner, 2000). Given the sensitive nature of topics such as religion and sexism, participants may have been inclined to respond in ways that conform to socially acceptable norms, leading to possible underreporting of prejudiced attitudes or overreporting of support for gender equality. Furthermore, the primary analyses were conducted through three separate simple mediation models, each testing a different predictor. Results from these individual models were subsequently interpreted together to draw conclusions about the combined effect of all predictors. However, no comprehensive parallel mediation analysis that included all three predictors simultaneously was conducted, due to limitations of the PROCESS macro, which does not support simultaneous entry of multiple independent variables in parallel mediation.

4.5 Conclusion

This study explored how individual and institutional factors influence teachers' support for gender equality in education, with a focus on the roles of religiosity, school norms, and ambivalent sexism. Despite ongoing efforts toward gender parity, structural inequalities remain deeply embedded in society. Schools often function as key sites where these

inequalities are reproduced. However, as agents of socialization, educational environments also hold the potential to dismantle harmful gender ideologies. Within this context, identifying the mechanisms that facilitate or hinder gender equality initiatives in education becomes especially important. Italy was chosen as the focal context for this study due to its rooted religious traditions and relatively low rankings on European gender equality indices.

The study integrated psychological and normative predictors, examining how personal religiosity and school-level gender and religious norms influence support for gender equality, mediated by ambivalent sexism, both benevolent and hostile. First, individual religiosity emerged as a strong predictor of reduced support for gender equality in education. This relationship was partially mediated by both benevolent and hostile sexism, indicating that religious commitment may reinforce traditional gender ideologies that undermine progressive educational policies. Second, school religious norms predicted lower support for gender equality exclusively through benevolent sexism. Notably, no direct relationship was found between school religiosity and support for gender equality, suggesting that its influence operates entirely through the ideological mechanisms of sexism, primarily by encouraging protective and traditional views of women rather than overt hostility. Third, school gender norms were found to influence support for gender equality entirely through both forms of ambivalent sexism. When schools are perceived as upholding traditional gender roles, they may subtly socialize teachers to accept or refrain from challenging existing inequalities.

In addition to these primary findings, exploratory serial mediation models examined interactions among the predictors. The first analysis revealed that stronger perceived school religious norms were linked to more traditional gender norms, which increased both benevolent and hostile sexism among teachers, ultimately reducing support for gender equality initiatives. The second analysis showed that the school's religious environment deepened individual religiosity, which in turn fostered sexist beliefs and lowered support for gender equality. Together, these findings suggest that institutional religiosity may indirectly shape the gender culture within schools and reinforce personal ideologies aligned with this culture, thereby challenging efforts to address existing inequalities.

Exploring both structural and psychological influences on teachers' support for gender equality, this study highlights the complexity of addressing gender inequality in education by emphasizing the need to tackle external norms and internal beliefs simultaneously.

References

Addi-Raccah, A., & Ayalon, H. (2002). Gender Inequality in Leadership Positions of Teachers. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *23*(2), 157–177. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425690220137693

Allport, G. W., & Ross, J. M. (1967). Personal religious orientation and prejudice. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, *5*(4), 432–443. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.5.4.432

Alsubaie, M. A. (2015). Hidden curriculum as one of current issue of curriculum. *Journal of Education and Practice, 6*(33), 125–128.

American Psychological Association. (n.d.). Sexism. In APA dictionary of psychology. Retrieved 2025, from https://dictionary.apa.org/sexism

American Psychological Association. (n.d.). Socialization. In APA dictionary of psychology. Retrieved 2025, from https://dictionary.apa.org/socialization

Bandura, A., & Walters, R. H. (1977). *Social learning theory* (Vol. 1). Prentice Hall: Englewood cliffs.

Bareket, O., & Fiske, S. T. (2023). A systematic review of the ambivalent sexism literature: Hostile sexism protects men's power; benevolent sexism guards traditional gender roles. *Psychological Bulletin*, *149*(11–12), 637–698. https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000400

Barrett, J. B., Pearson, J., Muller, C., & Frank, K. A. (2007). Adolescent Religiosity and School Contexts. *Social Science Quarterly*, *88*(4), 1024–1037. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6237.2007.00516.x

Batson, C. D., & Stocks, E. L. (2005). Religion and Prejudice. In J. F. Dovidio, P. Glick, & L. A. Rudman (Eds.), *On the nature of prejudice: Fifty years after Allport* (pp. 413–427). Blackwell Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470773963.ch25

Beauregard, K., Holman, M., & Sheppard, J. (2022). Sexism and attitudes toward policy spending in Australia and the United States. *Frontiers in Political Science*, *4*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2022.892111

Becker, J. C., & Sibley, C. G. (2015). Sexism. In T. D. Nelson (Ed.), *Handbook of prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination* (2nd ed., Chapter 13). Psychology Press. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203361993

Beins, B.C. (2013). Back Translation. *In The Encyclopedia of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, K.D. Keith (Ed.). https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118339893.wbeccp041

Bentzen, J. S., & Gokmen, G. (2023). The power of religion. *Journal of Economic Growth*, *28*(1), 45–78. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10887-022-09214-4

Borgogna, N. C., & McDermott, R. C. (2022). Is traditional masculinity ideology stable over time in men and women? *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, *23*(3), 347–352. https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000393

Bulanda, J. R. (2011). Gender, marital power, and marital quality in later life. *Journal of Women & Aging*, *23*(1), 3–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2011.540481

Chiu, L., Emblen, J. D., Van Hofwegen, L., Sawatzky, R., & Meyerhoff, H. (2004). An integrative review of the concept of spirituality in the Health Sciences. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, *26*(4), 405–428. https://doi.org/10.1177/0193945904263411

Chukwuokolo, J. C. (2011). Towards the Rationalization of the Sacred for More Veritable Societies. *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, *10*(29), 87–111.

Cialdini, R. B., Reno, R. R., & Kallgren, C. A. (1990). A focus theory of normative conduct: Recycling the concept of norms to reduce littering in public places. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *58*(6), 1015–1026. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.58.6.1015

Connell, R. W. (1996). Teaching the boys: New research on masculinity, and gender strategies for Schools. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, *98*(2), 206–235. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146819609800203

Connor, R. A., & Fiske, S. T. (2019). Not minding the gap: How hostile sexism encourages choice explanations for the gender income gap. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *43*(1), 22–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684318815468

Corner, S., & Dallavis, J. W. (2022). Religious schools, home schools, and gender-role beliefs in adulthood. *Review of Religious Research*, *64*(4), 739–769. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-022-00514-0

Cotterill, S., Sidanius, J., Bhardwaj, A., & Kumar, V. (2014). Ideological support for the Indian caste system: Social Dominance Orientation, right-wing authoritarianism and karma. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, *2*(1), 98–116. https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v2i1.171

Cívico Ariza, A., Colomo Magaña, E., & González García, E. (2020). Religious values and young people: Analysis of the perception of students from secular and religious schools (Salesian pedagogical model). *Religions*, *11*(8), 415. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11080415

Dildar, Y. (2015). Patriarchal norms, religion, and female labor supply: Evidence from Turkey. *World Development*, *76*, 40–61. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2015.06.010

Dorr, A., & Sierra, G. (1998). El Curriculum Oculto de Género. *Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Occidente, Centro de Investigación y Estudios de Género, Guadalajara, Jalisco. México*.

Duckitt, J. (2006). Differential effects of right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation on outgroup attitudes and their mediation by threat from and competitiveness to outgroups. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *32*(5), 684–696. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167205284282

Etengoff, C., & Lefevor, T. G. (2021). Sexual prejudice, sexism, and religion. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *40*, 45–50. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.08.024

Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Lang, A.-G., & Buchner, A. (2007). G*Power 3: A flexible statistical power analysis program for the social, Behavioral, and Biomedical Sciences. *Behavior Research Methods*, *39*(2), 175–191. https://doi.org/10.3758/bf03193146

Gallagher, S. K., & Smith, C. (1999). Symbolic traditionalism and pragmatic egalitarianism: Contemporary evangelicals, families, and gender. *Gender & Society*, *13*(2), 211–233. https://doi.org/10.1177/089124399013002004

Gaunt, R. (2012). "Blessed Is He Who Has Not Made Me a Woman": Ambivalent Sexism and Jewish Religiosity. *Sex Roles*, *67*(9–10), 477–487. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-012-0185-8

Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (1996). The ambivalent sexism inventory: Differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *70*(3), 491–512. https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.70.3.491

Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (2001). An ambivalent alliance: Hostile and benevolent sexism as complementary justifications for gender inequality. *American Psychologist*, *56*(2), 109–118. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.56.2.109

Glick, P., Fiske, S. T., Mladinic, A., Saiz, J. L., Abrams, D., Masser, B., Adetoun, B., Osagie, J. E., Akande, A., Alao, A., Annetje, B., Willemsen, T. M., Chipeta, K., Dardenne, B., Dijksterhuis, A., Wigboldus, D., Eckes, T., Six-Materna, I., Expósito, F., … López, W. L. (2002). Beyond prejudice as simple antipathy: Hostile and benevolent sexism across cultures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *79*(5), 763–775. https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.79.5.763

Glick, P., Lameiras, M., & Castro, Y. R. (2002). Education and Catholic religiosity as predictors of hostile and benevolent sexism toward women and men. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, 47*(9-10), 433–441. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021696209949

Global gender gap report 2023. World Economic Forum. (n.d.). https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/

Gothreau, C., Arceneaux, K., & Friesen, A. (2022). Hostile, benevolent, implicit: How different shades of sexism impact gendered policy attitudes. *Frontiers in Political Science*, *4*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2022.817309

Grusec, J. E., & Hastings, P. D. (Eds.). (2015). *Handbook of socialization: Theory and research* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

Hannover, B., Gubernath, J., Schultze, M., & Zander, L. (2018). Religiosity, religious fundamentalism, and ambivalent sexism toward girls and women among adolescents and young adults living in Germany. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *9*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02399

Hayes, A. F. (2022). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach*. The Guilford Press.

Huber, S., & Huber, O. W. (2012). The centrality of religiosity scale (CRS). *Religions*, *3*(3), 710–724. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel3030710

Hunsberger, B., & Jackson, L. M. (2005). Religion, meaning, and prejudice. *Journal of Social Issues*, *61*(4), 807–826. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2005.00433.x

Inglehart, R., & Norris, P. (2003). *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change around the World*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511550362

Jost, J. T., & van der Toorn, J. (2012). System justification theory. In P. A. M. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (pp. 313–343). Sage Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446249222.n42

Kabeer, N. (2005). Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal 1. *Gender & Development*, *13*(1), 13–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/13552070512331332273

King, UM. (1995). Gender and the study of religion. In U. King (Ed.), *Religion and gender* (pp. 1 - 44). Blackwell.

King, M. F., & Bruner, G. C. (2000). Social desirability bias: A neglected aspect of validity testing. *Psychology & Marketing, 17*(2), 79–103. https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6793(200002)17:2<79::AID-MAR2>3.0.CO;2-0

Klingorová, K., & Havlíček, T. (2015). Religion and gender inequality: The status of women in the Societies of World religions. *Moravian Geographical Reports*, *23*(2), 2–11. https://doi.org/10.1515/mgr-2015 0006

Koenig, H. G., VanderWeele, T., & Peteet, J. R. (2001). *Handbook of Religion and Health*. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190088859.001.0001

Lahelma, E., & Tainio, L. (2019). The Long Mission Towards Gender Equality in Teacher

Education: Reflections from a National Project in Finland. *Nordic Studies in Education*, *39*(01), 69–84. https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1891-2019-01-06

Lapinski, M. K., & Rimal, R. N. (2005). An explication of social norms. *Communication Theory, 15*(2), 127–147. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2005.tb00329.x

Lockhart, C., Sibley, C. G., & Osborne, D. (2019). Religion makes—and unmakes—the status quo: Religiosity and spirituality have opposing effects on Conservatism via RWA and Sdo. *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, *10*(4), 379–392. https://doi.org/10.1080/2153599x.2019.1607540

Lockhart, C., Sibley, C. G., & Osborne, D. (2023). Religiosity and ambivalent sexism: The role of religious group narcissism. *Current Psychology, 43*(1), 85–95. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-04243-7

Manganelli Rattazzi, A., Volpato, C., Canova, L. (2008). L'atteggiamento ambivalente verso donne e uomini: Un contributo alla validazione delle scale ASI e AMI. *Giornale Italiano di Psicologia, 35*(1), 261-287 [10.1421/26601].

Mazzuca, S., Moscatelli, S., Menegatti, M., & Rubini, M. (2022). Men's reactions to gender inequality in the workplace: From relative deprivation on behalf of women to collective action. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.999750

McKown, C. (2005). Applying ecological theory to advance the science and practice of school-based prejudice reduction interventions. *Educational Psychologist*, 40, 177–189.

Miralles-Cardona, C., Chiner, E., & Cardona-Moltó, M. C. (2021). Measurement invariance of the sensitive assessment for Gender Equality (SAGE) index across degree: Findings from two teacher education programmes in Spain. *Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research*, *10*(1), 157–174. https://doi.org/10.7821/naer.2021.1.611

Moya-Díaz, I., & De-Juanas, Á. (2022). Construcción de una escala sobre igualdad de género percibida en la escuela [Construction of an equality gender scale perceived in education]. *Revista de Psicología y Educación, 17*(1), 1–20.

Nešpor, Z. R. (2008). Three European sociologies of religion: Beyond the usual agenda of the discipline. *Czech Sociological Review*, *44*(3), 557–578. https://doi.org/10.13060/00380288.2008.44.3.06

Pearl, J. (2009). *Causality: Models, reasoning, and inference* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Philpott, D. (2007). Explaining the political ambivalence of religion. *American Political Science Review*, *101*(3), 505–525. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055407070372

Rapporto annuale 2025. ISTAT - Istituto Nazionale di Statistica. (n.d.). https://www.istat.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/RA-2025-volume-integrale.pdf

Rimal, R. N., & Real, K. (2003). Understanding the influence of perceived norms on behaviors. *Communication Theory*, *13*(2), 184–203. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2003.tb00288.x

Roccas, S., & Schwartz, S. H. (1997). Church-State relations and the association of religiosity with values: A study of Catholics in six countries. *Cross-Cultural Research*, *31*(4), 356–375. https://doi.org/10.1177/106939719703100404

Roccas, S. (2005). Religion and value systems. *Journal of Social Issues, 61*(4), 747–759. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2005.00430.x

Rollero, C., Glick, P., & Tartaglia, S. (2014). Ambivalent Sexism Inventory - Short Version - Italian. *PsycTESTS Dataset*. https://doi.org/10.1037/t33820-000

Saroglou, V. (2011). Believing, bonding, behaving, and belonging. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *42*(8), 1320–1340. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022111412267

Scarborough, W. J., Fessenden, D., & Sin, R. (2021). Convergence or Divergence? The Generational Gap in Gender Attitudes, 1977–2018. *Advances in Gender Research*, 73–94. https://doi.org/10.1108/s1529-212620210000030004

Scarborough, W. J., Lambouths, D. L., & Holbrook, A. L. (2019). Support of Workplace Diversity Policies: The Role of Race, Gender, and Beliefs about Inequality. *Social Science Research*, *79*, 194–210. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2019.01.002

Schnabel, L. (2016). Religion and gender equality worldwide: A country-level analysis. *Social Indicators Research*, *129*(2), 893–907. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-015-1147-7

Seguino, S. (2011). Help or hindrance? religion's impact on gender inequality in attitudes and outcomes. *World Development*, *39*(8), 1308–1321. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2010.12.004

Sharma, A., & Young, K. K. (1987). *Women in World Religions*. State University of New York Press.

Sidanius, J., & Pratto, F. (1999). *Social Dominance: An intergroup theory of social hierarchy and oppression*. Cambridge University Press.

Skelton, C., Francis, B., & Smulyan, L. (2010). *The SAGE handbook of gender and education*. SAGE Publications.

Slater, W., Hall, T. W., & Edwards, K. J. (2001). Measuring religion and spirituality: Where are we and where are we going? *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, *29*(1), 4–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/009164710102900102

Stark, R., & Finke, R. (2000). *Acts of faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*.

University of California Press.

Swim, J. K., Aikin, K. J., Hall, W. S., & Hunter, B. A. (1995). Sexism and racism: Old-fashioned and modern prejudices. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *68*(2), 199–214. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.68.2.199

Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2019). *Using multivariate statistics* (7th ed., Chapters 7–8). Pearson.

Taşdemir, N., & Sakallı-Uğurlu, N. (2010). The relationships between ambivalent sexism and religiosity among Turkish university students. *Sex Roles*, *62*(7–8), 420–426. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-009-9693-6

Uecker, J. E., & Hill, J. P. (2014). Religious schools, home schools, and the timing of first marriage and first birth. *Review of Religious Research*, *56*(2), 189–218. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-014-0150-9

United Nations. (n.d.). *Goal 5 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs*. United Nations. https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5

Valsecchi, G., Iacoviello, V., Berent, J., Borinca, I., & Falomir-Pichastor, J. M. (2023). Men's gender norms and gender-hierarchy-legitimizing ideologies: The effect of priming traditional masculinity versus a feminization of men's norms. *Gender Issues*, *40*(2–4), 145–167. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-022-09308-8

von Eye, A., Mun, E. Y., & Mair, P. (2009). What carries a mediation process? Configural analysis of Mediation. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, *43*(3), 228–247. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-009-9088-9

Walby, S. (1989). Theorising Patriarchy. *Sociology*, *23*(2), 213–234. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038589023002004

Yafie, M. F., Solicha, & Syahid, A. (2020). Muslim prejudice: Study of the effects of religiosity, fundamentalism, religious quest, and Social Domination Orientation. *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Islam, Science and Technology (ICONIST 2019)*. https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200220.017

Appendix A – Questionnaire (in English)

Individual Religiosity – Four Basic Dimensions of Religiousness Scale

Believing (Meaning):

1. I feel attached to religion because it helps me to have a purpose in my life.
2. It is important to believe in a Transcendence that provides meaning to human existence.
3. Religious beliefs have important implications for our understanding of human existence.

Bonding (Emotions/Ritual):

4. I like religious ceremonies.
5. Religious rituals, activities or practices make me feel positive emotions.
6. Religion has many artistic expressions, and symbols that I enjoy.

Behaving (Morality):

7. I am attached to the religion for the values and ethics it endorses.
8. Religion helps me to try to live in a moral way.
9. When I've got a moral dilemma, religion helps me make a decision.

Belonging (Community):

10. In religion, I enjoy belonging to a group/community.
11. Belonging to a religious tradition and identifying with it is important for me.
12. Referring to a religious tradition is important for my cultural/ethnic identity.

School Religious Norms – Four Basic Dimensions of Religiousness Scale

Believing (Meaning):

1. Teachers in my school feel attached to religion because it helps them to have a purpose in their life.
2. For teachers in my school, it is important to believe in a Transcendence that provides meaning to human existence.
3. For teachers in my school, religious beliefs have important implications for the understanding of human existence.

Bonding (Emotions/Ritual):

4. Teachers in my school like religious ceremonies.
5. Religious rituals, activities or practices held in my school make teachers feel positive emotions.
6. My school has many artistic expressions, and symbols from religion that teachers enjoy.

Behaving (Morality):

7. Teachers in my school are attached to religion for the values and ethics it endorses.
8. Religion in my school helps teachers to teach in a moral way.
9. When there is a moral dilemma in my school, religion helps teachers to make a decision.

Belonging (Community):

10. In religion, teachers from my school enjoy belonging to the school community.
11. Belonging to my school's religious tradition and identifying with it is important for teachers
12. Referring to my school's religious tradition is important for teachers to fully identify with the school's identity.

Benevolent Sexism – Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Short Form)

1. Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores.
2. Men are incomplete without women.
3. Women should be cherished and protected by men.
4. Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess.
5. Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility.
6. Men should be willing to sacrifice their own well being in order to provide financially for the women in their lives.

Hostile Sexism – Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Short Form)

7. When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against.
8. Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash.
9. Women exaggerate problems they have at work.
10. Women seek to gain power by getting control over men.
11. Feminists are making unreasonable demands of men.

12. Many women get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances.

School Gender Inequality Norms – Hidden Gender Inequality in Education Scale

Male Predominance:

1. Competitive approaches in the classrooms consolidate gender identity.
2. In class, boys tend to want to receive materials first.
3. Boys are always more motivated in class.
4. Creating a competitive environment in the classroom that encourages participation benefits boys more.

Biological Determinism:

5. Teachers prefer having a tutoring session with a mother rather than a father.
6. Boys cause more problems in class.
7. The problems and difficulties caused by boys are easier to resolve.
8. It is more likely that an obscene gesture will be made by a boy.

Leadership and Gender Equality:

9. The education students receive at home is based on a model that favours boys.
10. The leadership position in my school is usually held by a man.
11. The language used in classrooms is not inclusive.
12. Leadership in class is usually assumed by a boy.
13. The ICT (Information and Communication Technology) coordinator in my school is usually a man.

Gender Situation in the School:

14. In tutoring sessions, more mothers than fathers usually attend.
15. After returning from the sports field, boys tend to be messier and dirtier than girls.
16. Boys use the sports fields more frequently than girls during recess.

Female Predominance:

17. Girls gather and take care of classroom materials better than boys.
18. When teachers need help moving heavy materials, they prefer to choose a boy.
19. Boys are more careless than girls when doing tasks.

Support for Gender Equality in Education – Sensitive Assessment for Gender Equality Index

Gender Equality Training:

1. Mainstreaming gender * in teachers' education is essential to combat sexism.
2. Mainstreaming gender should be mandatory and transversal.
3. Gender issues are important for teachers' education as those related to other differences.
4. At least one course focused on gender studies in teachers' education should be compulsory.
5. All subjects should be taught with a gender perspective.
6. Diversity of sexual identity should receive more attention in study plans.
7. Mainstreaming gender in teachers' education is necessary for learning to teach equality.

* Strategy of gender mainstreaming means incorporating gender issues into the educational processes.

Institutional Sensitiveness:

8. My school would be open to adopting a proactive approach to gender equality.
9. My school would accept the implementation of the current legislation related to gender equality.
10. Gender issues should receive more attention in course content in my school.
11. Instructors in my school should be more sensitive to gender issues.
12. Study plans in my school should include gender competence development.

Awareness of Gender Inequalities:

13. Female student achievement is frequently minimised.
14. Achievements of female students are attributed to effort rather than to ability.
15. Male students receive more attention from faculty than their female counterparts.
16. Faculty has higher expectations about male students.
17. Female faculty find themselves in inferiority compared to male faculty.
18. Power in university continues to be held by male faculty.

Demographic Questions

Age: _____

Gender: [ ] Male [ ] Female [ ] Other

Religious Affiliation: [ ] nonbeliever [ ] Catholic [ ] Other religious faith

Type of educational institution where you work: [ ] State public school [ ] Private religious school

Name of the educational institution where you work: _____

City: _____

Appendix B – Questionnaire (in Italian)

Individual Religiosity – Four Basic Dimensions of Religiousness Scale

Believing (Meaning):

1. Mi sento legato/a alla religione perché mi aiuta ad avere uno scopo nella mia vita.
2. È importante credere in una Trascendenza che dia un senso all'esistenza umana.
3. Le credenze religiose hanno un ruolo importante nella nostra comprensione dell'esistenza umana.

Bonding (Emotions/Ritual):

4. Mi piacciono le cerimonie religiose.
5. I rituali, le attività o le pratiche religiose mi fanno provare emozioni positive.
6. La religione ha molte espressioni artistiche e simboli che mi piacciono.

Behavin0g (Morality):

7. Sono legato/a alla religione per i valori e l'etica che sostiene.
8. La religione mi aiuta a cercare di vivere in modo morale.
9. Quando ho un dilemma morale, la religione mi aiuta a prendere una decisione.

Belonging (Community):

10. Un aspetto che apprezzo della religione è appartenere a un gruppo/comunità.
11. Appartenere a una tradizione religiosa e identificarmi con essa è importante per me.
12. Per la mia identità culturale ed etnica è importante fare riferimento a una tradizione religiosa.

School Religious Norms – Four Basic Dimensions of Religiousness Scale

Believing (Meaning):

1. Gli insegnanti della mia scuola si sentono legati alla religione perché li aiuta ad avere uno scopo nella loro vita.
2. Per gli insegnanti della mia scuola è importante credere in una Trascendenza che dia un senso all'esistenza umana.
3. Per gli insegnanti della mia scuola, le credenze religiose hanno un ruolo importante sulla comprensione dell'esistenza umana.

Bonding (Emotions/Ritual):

4. Agli insegnanti della mia scuola piacciono le cerimonie religiose.
5. I rituali, le attività o le pratiche religiose che si svolgono nella mia scuola fanno provare agli insegnanti emozioni positive.
6. La mia scuola ha molte espressioni artistiche e simboli religiosi che piacciono agli insegnanti.

Behaving (Morality):

7. Gli insegnanti della mia scuola sono legati alla religione per i valori e l'etica che sostiene.
8. La religione nella mia scuola aiuta gli insegnanti a insegnare in modo morale.
9. Quando c'è un dilemma morale nella mia scuola, la religione aiuta gli insegnanti a prendere una decisione.

Belonging (Community):

10. Un aspetto della religione apprezzato dagli insegnanti della mia scuola è l'appartenenza alla comunità scolastica.
11. Appartenere alla tradizione religiosa della mia scuola e identificarsi con essa è importante per gli insegnanti.
12. Fare riferimento alla tradizione religiosa della mia scuola è importante affinché gli insegnanti si identifichino pienamente con l'identità scolastica.

Benevolent Sexism – Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Short Form)

1. Ogni uomo dovrebbe avere una donna da adorare.
2. Gli uomini sono incompleti senza le donne.
3. Le donne devono essere coccolate e protette dagli uomini.
4. Molte donne hanno una qualità di purezza che pochi uomini posseggono.
5. Le donne tendono ad avere una maggior sensibilità morale rispetto agli uomini.
6. Per mantenere economicamente le loro donne, gli uomini dovrebbero essere disposti sacrificare il proprio benessere.

Hostile Sexism – Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Short Form)

7. È tipico delle donne lamentarsi di essere state discriminate, quando perdono in una

competizione corretta con gli uomini.

8. Quando una donna ha indotto un uomo a dichiararsi, generalmente cerca di mettergli il guinzaglio.
9. Le donne tendono a ingigantire i problemi che hanno sul lavoro.
10. Le donne cercano di acquisire potere tenendo a freno gli uomini.
11. Le femministe pretendono dagli uomini cose irragionevoli.
12. Ci sono molte donne che provano piacere a provocare gli uomini mostrandosi sessualmente disponibili e rifiutando poi i loro approcci.

School Gender Inequality Norms – Hidden Gender Inequality In Education Scale

Male Predominance:

1. Gli approcci competitivi in classe rafforzano l'identità di genere.
2. In classe, i ragazzi maschi di solito vogliono ricevere il materiale per primi.
3. I ragazzi sono sempre più motivati delle ragazze in classe.
4. Creare un ambiente competitivo che incoraggia la partecipazione in classe tende ad avvantaggiare maggiormente i ragazzi maschi.

Biological Determinism:

5. Gli insegnanti preferiscono fare ricevimento con una madre piuttosto che con un padre.
6. I ragazzi causano più problemi delle ragazze in classe.
7. I problemi e le difficoltà causati dai ragazzi sono più facili da risolvere rispetto a quelli delle ragazze.
8. È più probabile che un gesto osceno venga fatto da un ragazzo piuttosto che da una ragazza.

Leadership and Gender Equality:

9. L'educazione che gli studenti ricevono a casa si basa su un modello che favorisce i maschi.
10. La posizione dirigenziale nella mia scuola è solitamente ricoperta da un uomo.
11. Il linguaggio utilizzato in classe non è inclusivo.
12. Il ruolo di capo classe è solitamente assunto da un ragazzo.
13. Il coordinatore TIC (Tecnologie dell'Informazione e della Comunicazione) della mia scuola è solitamente un uomo.

Gender Situation in the School:

14. Ai ricevimenti tendono a partecipare più madri che padri.
15. Dopo essere tornati dal cortile, i ragazzi tendono a essere più trasandati e sporchi delle ragazze.
16. I ragazzi usano il cortile più spesso delle ragazze durante l'intervallo.

Female Predominance:

17. Le ragazze raccolgono il materiale in classe meglio e più attentamente dei ragazzi.
18. Quando gli insegnanti hanno bisogno di aiuto per spostare materiali pesanti, preferiscono scegliere un ragazzo piuttosto che una ragazza.
19. I ragazzi sono più disordinati delle ragazze quando fanno i compiti a casa.

Support for Gender Equality in Education – Sensitive Assessment for Gender Equality Index

Gender Equality Training:

1. * L'integrazione della prospettiva di genere nella formazione degli insegnanti è essenziale per combattere il sessismo.
2. L'integrazione della prospettiva di genere dovrebbe essere obbligatoria e trasversale.
3. Le questioni di genere sono importanti per la formazione degli insegnanti tanto quanto quelle relative ad altre differenze.
4. Nella formazione degli insegnanti dovrebbe essere obbligatorio almeno un corso incentrato sugli studi di genere.
5. Tutte le materie dovrebbero essere insegnate con una prospettiva di genere.
6. La diversità dell'identità sessuale dovrebbe ricevere maggiore attenzione nei piani di studio.
7. L'integrazione della prospettiva di genere nella formazione degli insegnanti è necessaria per imparare a insegnare l'uguaglianza.

* L’integrazione della prospettiva di genere si riferisce a incorporare le questioni di genere nei processi educativi.

Institutional Sensitiveness:

8. La mia scuola sarebbe aperta ad adottare un approccio proattivo alla parità di genere.
9. La mia scuola accetterebbe l'implementazione dell'attuale legislazione relativa all'uguaglianza di genere.

10. Le questioni di genere dovrebbero ricevere più attenzione nel contenuto dei corsi della mia scuola.
11. Gli insegnanti della mia scuola dovrebbero essere più sensibili alle questioni di genere.
12. I piani di studio della mia scuola dovrebbero includere lo sviluppo delle competenze di genere.

Awareness of Gender Inequalities:

13. I successi delle studentesse vengono spesso minimizzati.
14. I successi delle studentesse vengono attribuiti all'impegno piuttosto che alle capacità.
15. Gli studenti maschi ricevono più attenzione da parte del corpo docente rispetto alle loro compagne femmine.
16. Il corpo docente ha aspettative più alte nei confronti degli studenti piuttosto che delle studentesse.
17. Le docenti donne si trovano in una posizione di inferiorità rispetto ai docenti uomini.
18. Il potere nelle università continua ad essere detenuto da docenti uomini.

Demographic Questions

Età: _____

Genere: [ ] Maschio [ ] Femmina [ ] Altro

Appartenenza Religiosa: [ ] Non credente [ ] Cattolico [ ] Altre fedi religiose

Tipologia dell'istituto scolastico in cui presta servizio: [ ] Scuola pubblica statale [ ] Scuola privata religiosa

Nome dell'istituto scolastico in cui presta servizio: _____

Città: _____

Appendix C – Informed Consent

English Version

This study is part of a research project being carried out at **Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa**. The aim of the study is to explore dynamics within the school context that contribute to promoting equitable and inclusive educational environments. The study is being carried out by **Elena Bauchiero**, whom you can contact if you have any questions or comments at this email address: eboal@iscte-iul.pt.

Your participation in the study, which will be highly valued, as it will contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this field of science, consists of answering a questionnaire, with an estimated completion time of 10 to 15 minutes. No significant risks are expected in association with participation in the study.

You are eligible to participate if you are employed as a teacher in a middle or high school, whether in a secular or religious institution, across Italy. There are no specific limitations based on age, gender, religious affiliation, or nationality. Participation in the study is strictly **voluntary**: You can freely choose to participate or not to participate, and your decision will have no impact on your professional standing or any other aspect of your relationship with your institution. If you have chosen to participate, you are not obligated to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable, and you can interrupt your participation at any time without having to provide any justification. In addition to being voluntary, participation is also **anonymous** and **confidential**. The data collected is solely intended for statistical analysis, and no responses will be analyzed or reported individually. At no point in the study will you need to be identified.

By selecting **'I accept'**, you confirm that you have read and understood the information provided and that you wish to participate in the study.

[ ] Yes, I accept. I agree to participate in the study.

[ ] No, I do not consent. I do not consent to participate in the study.

Italian Version

Questo studio fa parte di un progetto di ricerca condotto presso **Iscte – Instituto Universitario di Lisbona**. Lo scopo dello studio è di esplorare le dinamiche all'interno del contesto scolastico che contribuiscono a promuovere ambienti educativi equi e inclusivi. Lo studio è condotto da **Elena Bauchiero**, a cui può rivolgersi per qualsiasi domanda o commento a questo indirizzo e-mail: eboal@iscte-iul.pt.

La sua partecipazione allo studio, che sarà molto apprezzata in quanto contribuirà al progresso delle conoscenze in questo campo della scienza, consiste nel rispondere a un questionario, con un tempo di completamento stimato tra i 10 e i 15 minuti. Non si prevedono rischi significativi legati alla partecipazione allo studio.

Si è idonei a partecipare se si è impiegati come insegnanti in scuole medie o superiori, sia in istituzioni laiche che religiose, in tutta Italia. Non vi sono limitazioni specifiche in base a età, genere, affiliazione religiosa o nazionalità. La partecipazione allo studio è strettamente **volontaria**: si può scegliere liberamente di partecipare o meno e la decisione non avrà alcun impatto sulla posizione professionale o su qualsiasi altro aspetto del rapporto con la sua istituzione. Se si decide di partecipare, non si è obbligati a rispondere a domande che possano causare disagio e si può interrompere la partecipazione in qualsiasi momento senza dover fornire alcuna giustificazione. Oltre a essere volontaria, la partecipazione è anche **anonima** e **riservata**. I dati raccolti sono destinati esclusivamente all'analisi statistica e nessuna risposta sarà analizzata o riportata individualmente. In nessun momento dello studio sarà necessario identificarsi.

Selezionando **"Accetto"**, si conferma di aver letto e compreso le informazioni fornite e di voler partecipare allo studio.

[ ] Sì, accetto. Acconsento a partecipare allo studio.

[ ] No, non accetto. Non acconsento a partecipare allo studio.

Appendix D – Debriefing

English Version

Thank you very much for taking part in this study. As stated at the beginning of your participation, the study focuses on gender equality in schools and aims to explore the dynamics within the school context that contribute to promoting equitable and inclusive education. More specifically, it investigates the role of teachers in fostering a fair learning and socialization environment for students, as well as the exploration of religious frameworks and their influence on supporting the introduction of gender equality initiatives in schools.

In the context of your participation, all the information you provided will remain confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this research.

We would like to reinforce the contact details you can use should you have any questions, wish to share any comments, or signal your intention to receive information about the main results and conclusions of the study: eboal@iscte-iul.pt (Elena Bauchiero) and rfprs@iscte-iul.pt (Ricardo Borges Rodrigues).

Thank you again for your participation.

Italian Version

Grazie per aver partecipato a questo studio. Come dichiarato all'inizio della sua partecipazione, lo studio si concentra sull'uguaglianza di genere nelle scuole e mira a esplorare le dinamiche all'interno del contesto scolastico che contribuiscono a promuovere un'istruzione equa e inclusiva. Più specificamente, indaga il ruolo degli insegnanti nel promuovere un ambiente di apprendimento e socializzazione equo per gli studenti, così come l'esplorazione dei quadri religiosi e la loro influenza sul sostegno all'introduzione di iniziative di uguaglianza di genere nelle scuole.

Nell'ambito della sua partecipazione, tutte le informazioni da lei fornite rimarranno confidenziali e saranno utilizzate solo ai fini di questa ricerca.

Le ricordiamo i recapiti da utilizzare in caso di domande, commenti o informazioni sui principali risultati e conclusioni dello studio: eboal@iscte-iul.pt (Elena Bauchiero) e rfprs@iscte-iul.pt (Ricardo Borges Rodrigues).

Grazie ancora per la sua partecipazione.