

WHEN THE ALIAS CAREER IS NOT ENOUGH **Youth Resistance in Cavour High School, an Italian Case Study**

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Abstract

This exploratory study examines the power dynamics and resistance strategies surrounding adopting the alias career (*carriera alias*) in Italian schools and the lack of teacher training, focusing on Cavour High School in Rome. Through semi-structured interviews with two trans* students, Andrea and Marco, and two student representatives, the research highlights how students resist cisnormative practices. The results shed light on the interplay between youth agency and vulnerability within cisnormative educational settings. The paper also provides recommendations to schools, arguing for prioritising trans* students' well-being and promoting structural change to make schools safer and supportive environments.

Keywords

cisnormativity, high schools, alias career, trans students, resistance

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1. INTRODUCTION

National and international scientific literature has consistently demonstrated that schools often create hostile and unwelcoming environments for trans*¹ students (Bartholomaeus et al., 2017; Bourelly, 2023; Lorusso et al., 2024; McBride et al., 2020).

These educational contexts replicate broader societal cisnormative² hierarchies that privilege cisgender identities over trans* ones and reinforce essentialist, binary, and biologically deterministic understandings of gender and sexuality. As a consequence, school settings have a normalising effect that reinforces cisgender identities and privilege while simultaneously denying, marginalising, and rendering invisible trans* students (Enke, 2012; Martino, Cumming-Potvin, 2018; Martino, Omercajic, 2021).

In response to the discriminatory experiences they face, many trans* pupils engage in various forms of resistance to challenge the cisnormative school culture and advocate for a more respectful and supportive learning environment (Francis, 2023, 2024; Iskander, Shabtay, 2018; McBride, Neary, 2021).

In the Italian school system, a cisnormative culture is also fostered by the absence of ministerial and regulatory provisions aimed at recognising and supporting trans* students (Bourelly, 2024; Ohchr, 2019). As a consequence, from the 2019/2020 school year, trans* students, parents, gender clinics, and activist groups started pressuring schools to adopt the alias career (*carriera alias*) (Bourelly et al., 2022). As for the latest mapping, 419 schools of all levels have implemented the alias career (Agedo, 2025).

The alias career was first implemented by the University of Turin in 2012 as part of the digitalisation of academic transcripts. This initiative replaced the “doppio libretto”, first implemented in 2002, which provided trans* university students with a second physical academic transcript featuring their chosen names (Russo, Valerio, 2019). With regard to secondary schools, the alias career was informally adopted from the

¹ In this paper, we use the term “trans*” as an umbrella term referring to individuals whose gender identity and/or expression differs from the gender they were assigned at birth (Halberstam, 2018), while “cisgender” refers to those who are at ease with their gender assigned at birth.

² Cisnormativity refers to the social hierarchy between cisgender and trans* people (Simmons & White, 2014). It is based on an essentialist, biologist, and binary understanding of gender, considered fixed, immutable, and coincident with the sex assigned at birth. This idea, called cisgenderism, produces the systematic erasure of trans* people (Kennedy, 2013).

2018/2019 school year, and formally from the following year, after the mobilisations of families, trans* students and Lgbtqia+ associations (Bourelly, 2023). In both universities and schools, the alias career is a confidentiality agreement between schools, trans* student and their family (if minor). Within its regulations, the institution allows students to use their chosen name on all internal documentation, have a new email address, and, when present, a new school badge.

Furthermore, within the text, some schools also address other critical needs, such as gender-affirming access to gendered facilities (e.g., bathrooms, locker rooms) and provide comprehensive training on trans* issues for all school staff (Bourelly, 2024). One example of such regulations is the one proposed by GenderLens and Agedo associations (GenderLens, 2022). Most schools also have measures to prevent access to support, such as the necessity to provide a diagnosis of gender dysphoria or gender incongruence. Some of these institutes have more stringent requirements, such as having started gender-affirming hormone therapy (Istituto Via delle Sette Chiese, 2022) or the legal procedure to change one's gender marker and legal name (Liceo Benedetti-Tommaseo, 2023).

In the Italian context, therefore, activating the alias career and, more generally, recognising one's rights as a trans* person may become an issue of intergenerational conflict between students and scholastic institutions. An emblematic case of such conflict is that of Cavour High School in Rome, which made the headlines for its refusal to activate the alias career to a requesting trans* student and for the discrimination suffered by another trans* pupil at the hands of a teacher (Berterame, 2021; Lupia, 2021, 2022; Marchese, 2021).

In this paper, we look at Cavour High School as an exploratory case study to provide a reflexive analysis (Iskander, Shabtay, 2018) of resistance strategies employed by its trans* students to tackle cisnormative school culture, to gain access to the alias career, and to obtain respect and effective protection from discrimination. We aim to explore the links and dynamics between scholastic institutional power and situated forms of trans* youth resistance (Hillier et al., 2020). The results shed light on the interplay between youth agency and discrimination within cisnormative educational settings (McBride, Neary, 2021) and provide important insights and recommendations to schools. We argue that it is crucial to listen to trans* students, prioritise their needs and well-being, and promote structural change to make schools safer and supportive environments.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Formal education institutions operate according to a binary framework based on dimorphic logics of gender regulation (Malatino, 2015; Miller, 2020), which is evident in various aspects of school life. These include the prevalence of cisgender assumptions that shape teaching practices (e.g., the use of gendered language), the binary division of school facilities such as toilets and locker rooms, and the significant underrepresentation of trans* experiences and identities within the curriculum (Ingrey, 2023; McBride, Schubotz, 2017; O'Flynn, 2016; Phipps and Blackall, 2023).

Furthermore, scientific literature highlights that schools frequently fail to address the systemic nature of cishnormative power by adopting tokenistic and individualised intervention approaches rather than addressing the root causes of trans* exclusion (Martino and Omercajic, 2021; Neary, 2018). This often results in reactive measures, with schools primarily intervening when students have come out and/or are being bullied (Paechter et al., 2021).

The ad-hoc and individualised nature of this approach thus fails to disrupt structural inequalities, which contribute to the erasure of trans identities in the first instance. Discourses of individualisation result in inclusive practices being applied only in response to trans pupils being visible, i.e., being 'out' and comfortable declaring their gender identity to others. This is problematic, as schools arguably need to be set up with trans pupils in mind, with inclusive practices already embedded in the system (Phipps and Blackall, 2023: 1106).

The failure to act on the systematicity of cishnormativity is also found in school policies, which may emphasise gender binarism (e.g., regulations on school uniforms) and reiterate victimising and pathologising discursive devices (Ingrey, 2018; McBride and Neary, 2021; McGlashan and Fitzpatrick, 2018). Moreover, while anti-bullying and anti-aggression policies are intended to protect trans* students, their effectiveness is often limited. In fact, as noted by Greytak et al. (2013), anti-bullying and anti-aggression policies do not consistently achieve their purpose, and this limitation is further exacerbated by a top-down approach that fails to meaningfully engage with the experiences and perspectives of trans* students themselves (Sinclair-Palm and Gilbert, 2018).

In addition to ineffective policies, a critical factor contributing to the exclusion of trans* students is the lack of adequate training for school staff, particularly teachers, on gender identity and expression, including trans* identities. This lack of training often fails to critically examine and

address gender biases within educational practices. For instance, teachers may perpetuate gender segregation through classroom activities (e.g., dividing students into ‘males’ and ‘females’ during group work or physical education). Moreover, they may invalidate or deny the identities and needs of trans* students, such as access to gendered facilities and recognition of their gender identity. Furthermore, untrained school staff may perpetuate cisgenderist and trans-negative prejudices, thereby contributing to a climate of fear and marginalisation within the educational environment (Bower-Brown et al., 2021; McBride et al., 2020; Phipps and Blackall, 2023).

Consequently, schools function as sites of power where normalising dynamics, particularly concerning students’ sexuality and gender, are actively enforced (Mayo and Rodriguez, 2019). Thus, educational institutions operate as gender dimorphic devices (Santambrogio, 2022) that organise and regulate identities, ratifying the existence of only two genders with which students must identify (McBride and Neary, 2021).

The cisnormative school culture affords Tgd [Transgender and Gender Diverse] youth differential social value and inclusion. The analysis of schooling reveals how cisnormative bodies are more protected while Tgd youth are more exposed to precarity [...] The intersections of precariousness and the cumulative impact of social inequality characterise Tgd youth as illegitimate and outside the realm of belonging (Francis, 2024: 26).

Within these exclusionary environments, trans* youth face social invisibility, aggression, bullying (Bartholomaeus et al., 2017), misgendering, and deadnaming³ enacted by both school staff and peers (Evans and Rawlings, 2021; McBride et al., 2020; Paechter et al., 2021). This climate has significant and detrimental impacts on the mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being of trans* students, potentially affecting their educational attainment (Hatchel et al., 2019; Kosciw et al., 2022).

However, trans* students are not passive victims of educational gender-normative devices; in fact, they can enact strategies of resistance. Trans* pupils often engage in processes of self-education that can be viewed as acts of resistance against the prevailing cisnormative system within both the educational and broader societal contexts. These processes of self-discovery and self-affirmation enable them to recognise, name and ultimately disclose their gender identities (Miller et al., 2018;

³ Deadnaming is addressing a trans* person by using their birth name (deadname), while misgendering means referring to a trans* individual by using their gender assigned at birth.

Paechter et al., 2021). Communicating one's trans* identity within the school environment can be viewed as a powerful act of self-determination that challenges cisnormative assumptions, affirms the existence of trans* individuals, and expands the understanding of gender within the educational context (Francis, 2023). Indeed, as noted by Francis, «[i]n school contexts where cisnormativity goes unquestioned, the participant's identification as transgender or non-binary is itself a significant act of resistance against cisnormative power structures» (Ivi: 694).

The scientific literature has identified various resistance strategies employed by trans* students to assert their identities and advocate for their needs within the educational context. These resistance tactics encompass teaching adults and peers about trans* identities; intervening during class time through which to break the curricular invisibilisation of trans* subjectivities; participating in activism and protest actions; advocating for themselves; challenging cisnormative school practices (e.g., binary bathroom segregation); explicitly reporting discrimination experiences, including involving the media; and creating of supportive Lgbtqia+ spaces (Bower-Brown et al., 2021; Francis, 2023; 2024; Hillier et al., 2020; Iskander and Shabtay, 2018; McBride and Neary, 2021; McGlashan and Fitzpatrick, 2018).

The analysis of the scholarly literature shows how resisting school cisnormativity is a deeply contextualised, multifaceted phenomenon. The resistance tactics implemented by trans* students, therefore, are intricately intertwined with the unique challenges faced by trans* students within their school environment. According to Hillier et al. (2020), the resistances enacted by trans* pupils can be interpreted as expressions of situated agency, resulting from the negotiation between individual actions and social factors. The situated agency is a useful conceptual tool for understanding the interplay between individual choices and contextual mediation. It also helps to critically address the dichotomous understanding of the relationship between oppression and resistance, overcoming a polarised and rigid interpretation of victim and agent roles (Hillier et al., 2020).

By engaging in specific forms of situated agency, these students actively defy cisnormative power dynamics, seek and create support networks, and open up new possibilities for themselves and others (Gooding et al., 2023). «In doing so, they resisted internalised as well as externalised oppression. [...] the choices that trans students faced in school were constrained and socially mediated [...] and their experiences defied the victim/agent dichotomy» (Hillier et al., 2020: 398).

While resistance strategies are crucial for challenging cisnormativity, they can also increase the visibility and may make trans* students vulnerable within schools (McBride & Neary, 2021). Thus, resistance, vulnerability, and visibility can be understood as intertwined and ambivalent realities that manifest within the context of the unequal power dynamics inherent in the school environment (Singh et al., 2014; Santambrogio, 2024).

3. THE ITALIAN SCHOOL CONTEXT AND THE ALIAS CAREER

It is crucial to examine the characteristics of the Italian school system to effectively address the unique challenges faced by trans* students within the educational context. This discussion will help to understand the contextual factors that have led to the recent emergence of the alias career as a necessary regulatory measure for safeguarding the well-being and educational rights of trans* students. Consistent with the topic of this paper, the following commentary will focus exclusively on the secondary school level.

Studies conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (Fra, 2020; 2024) and Ilga Europe (2024) indicate that Italy exhibits a high level of discrimination against the trans* population compared to other European countries. Tgeu (Trans Europe and Central Asia) has analysed the 2019 Fra survey data (2020), focusing specifically on the experiences of 20,933 trans* respondents. The results reveal that trans* individuals, particularly adolescents, face significant levels of discrimination, aggression, and denial of rights, particularly within educational and healthcare settings (Calderon-Cifuentes, 2021). Italy is also characterised by a lack of specific policies and guidelines aimed at promoting the well-being of trans* students within the Italian school system (Bourelly, 2023; Ohchr, 2019), which contributes to increased vulnerability for trans* students, who are more likely to experience scholastic malaise and discrimination compared to their cisgender peers (Hatchel et al., 2019).

Law 105 of 2015 is the only normative reference that thematises the valorisation of differences and the fight against discrimination within schools. It mandates that schools implement the principles of equal opportunities through their Three-Year Formative Offer Plans (*Piano Triennale dell'Offerta Formativa* - Ptof). However, neither Law 105/2015 nor the subsequent 2018 implementation guidelines, *Educating for respect: for gender equality, the prevention of gender-based violence and*

all forms of discrimination (Ministry Of Education, University and Research, 2018), explicitly address gender identity and sexual orientation as specific forms of discrimination requiring targeted educational interventions. Gusmano and Selmi point out that this absence «is not accidental and can be read as the result of the delegitimisation campaigns of educational interventions against discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation» (2023: 72) promoted by anti-gender groups and movements, which in recent years have particularly targeted schools and educational initiatives committed to promoting trans* students' rights (Ponsiglione, 2023).

The absence of policies and guidelines aimed at promoting the educational well-being of trans* students is also joined by the lack of adequate training for teaching staff, stemming from the absence of comprehensive ministerial planning for pre-service and in-service teacher education. The dearth of compulsory courses on gender, sexuality, and Lgbtqia+ issues for the educational professions is absent in university courses and in-service training (Bourelly et al., 2022). The lack of comprehensive ministerial guidance on teacher training has led to significant disparities in teacher preparedness. Teachers with a personal interest in Lgbtqia+ issues are more likely to seek out independent training, while others may lack the motivation or resources to do so, potentially contributing to a divide within the teaching profession (Bochicchio et al., 2019; Bourelly, 2023). Consequently, implementing the alias career within schools is likewise largely dependent on the advocacy of students and parents, as well as the individual sensitivity and initiative of teachers and school principals. Moreover, due to the lack of guidance and policies, the alias career is currently governed by School Autonomy laws, granting autonomy to individual institutes (Benadusi et al., 2020). As a result, to be adopted, the alias career must be voted on by the School Council, which is formed by teachers, janitors, parents and students' representatives (Dradi, 2024).

The case of Cavour High School in Rome is a prominent example of the challenges and complexities surrounding implementing the alias career in Italian schools, primarily due to significant media attention. In December 2021, during a student occupation at Cavour High School, Andrea, a trans* student, supported by the *Rete degli studenti medi del Lazio*, publicly denounced the school principal's discrimination and refusal to implement his alias career through a video statement. The video quickly gained widespread media attention and was reported in numerous local and national newspapers (Berterame, 2021; Lupia, 2021; Marchese, 2021). Following significant media attention and pressure from Andrea

and the student organisation, Cavour High School began implementing the alias career in the 2022/2023 school year (Liceo Cavour, 2022). In November 2022, the school faced media scrutiny again after another trans* student, Marco, experienced transphobic discrimination at the hands of a teacher. Marco, like Andrea, publicly denounced the incident, and the student organisation organised a flash mob in front of the school in solidarity (Lupia, 2022; Tominic, 2022).

Although the media debate was not treated as a primary data source, we cannot deny its relevance to the case study, particularly as part of the broader discursive context. Consequently, we provide a concise reconstruction of the media coverage, which can be grouped into three main discursive spheres: Firstly, an emotive sphere, centred on Andrea and Marco's personal stories, used to evoke sympathy and solidarity (Berterame, 2021; Lupia, 2021, 2022; Marchese, 2021); Secondly, a conflict-centred sphere, highlighting trans*-antagonistic episodes within the school, such as a teacher's refusal to recognise Marco's chosen name or the tearing of a trans*-inclusive poster (Figure 1) (Lupia, 2023; Tominic, 2022); Lastly, an institutional sphere involving political actors, advocacy groups, and school principals, which frames the debate in terms of trans* rights, school policies, and the need for structural change (e.g., the implementation of the alias career) (Lupia, 2022; La Repubblica, 2022; Raimo, 2021).

These discursive spheres highlight how institutions function as spaces where gender recognition may intersect with institutional and ideological resistance. They also reflect themes that emerged in the interviews, such as the difficulty of asserting one's identity in trans*-antagonistic environments and the strategies implemented by students to face such hostility, the perceived (il)legitimacy of student demands, and the ambivalent role of educators and school principals.

However, the media were not included in the analytical corpus, as the research aims to explore the lived experiences of the students directly involved. For this reason, we look at Cavour's case as an opportunity to make visible trans* students' perspectives and voices in the fight for recognition of their rights and needs within the school context and to reflect on trans* youth «subjectivity, agency, and power in schools and in the public sphere» (Iskander and Shabtay, 2018: 340).

4. METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study aims to describe and analyse youth resistance concerning the alias career, focusing on their ability to advocate for

change within their institution. Cavour High School in Rome was identified as a case study to explore these themes through the lived experiences of two trans* students who were able to challenge school authorities through peer and media support in the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 school years. Additionally, Cavour High School is a cautionary tale concerning the implications of implementing school policies without adequate teacher training.

As a result, in January 2023, we interviewed the two trans* students, Andrea and Marco, along with two students, Giada and Emma, who were student representatives of Cavour High School in the 2021/2022 school year (Table 1). After the interviews, Marco and Giada were contacted again in December 2024 for supplementary information regarding possible legal developments.

Table 1. Students interviewed

Name ⁴	Gender	Interview age	School grade
Andrea	Boy	20	Graduated
Marco	Boy	18	Fifth
Giada	Girl	18	Fifth
Emma	Girl	19	Fifth

The interviews were conducted using the semi-structured interview method (Bichi, 2002), starting with the prompt: “Could you tell me about your experience with the alias career?”

The interviews further explored the following themes:

- Requesting the alias career
- Resistance to school administration and educators
- Support from peers, school organisations and Lgbtqia+ organisations
- Media coverage (news articles, interviews) and its impact

All interviews were translated from Italian with careful attention to preserving the integrity of the students’ words and faithfully representing their meanings. Then, they were analysed through narrative analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013), focusing on Andrea and Marco’s experiences.

As trans* researchers, we recognise the importance of our positionality in the research process. Indeed, participants were aware of

⁴ Andrea consented to use his real name, while we adopted the pseudonym used by the media for Marco. Pseudonyms were also assigned to the student representatives.

the interviewer's background, which may have influenced their responses.

5. ANALYSIS

5.1 *Andrea's Case: fighting for the alias career*

During the second half of the 2020/2021 school year, Andrea contacted his school principal to request the adoption of the alias career. After being consistently not recognised as a boy by most peers and educators, he thought that acquiring institutional support would improve his school life.

However, he was told they would sign the documentation to implement the alias career in September, the beginning of the 2021/2022 school year, his fifth and final year of secondary school. Despite this promise, his principal delayed contacting him until November and subsequently decided not to adopt the alias career. The main reasons she provided were that some parents complained and did not want the school to adopt the policy, and she was shielding him from bullying. The principal also repeated the latter during a meeting with Andrea's father.

In the meantime, my father met with the principal, and he came back home telling me, «Look, the principal is a great woman. She told me she's doing this for you». For me?! She's doing it actively for me?! So, it's not even like I had problems or things like that, right?! I mean, you're imposing yourself on my need to be called by my name for my own good?! So I won't get mocked by who, exactly?! By those same jerks who perform Roman salutes in class and call me by a name that isn't mine, and then laugh when the teacher makes me cry in class and things like that?! I mean, I already feel bullied, and I don't need a name that isn't mine on the register and my class assignments, too (Andrea, 20 years old).

In December, the school body decided to occupy the institute. Moments before the occupation, Andrea asked for support from one of the organisers, a former Cavour student and member of the students' organisation *Rete degli studenti medi del Lazio*. As a result, the alias career was put on the protest agenda, and Andrea was given a journalist's contact information. During the school's occupation, he filmed a video reposted by many newspapers (Lupia, 2021) and was interviewed by Fanpage (Berterame, 2021), among others. These two videos went viral and were the stepping stones for the school body to fight and support Andrea. During the interviews for the media and with us, he was adamant that he would not continue to be disrespected at school.

I can't allow myself to be trampled on in this way, especially when it comes to who I am [...] you can't tell me how I should live my gender identity, how I should experience the social acceptance of my gender identity. That just doesn't make sense in heaven or on earth (Andrea, 20 years old).

The school's student union also organised many events, such as Institute assemblies concerning the alias career and trans* students. Andrea was not actively involved during these events due to the passing of his best friend, but recounted that the school's student union was the main force against the school principal.

After gaining attention from the media and pressure from students, parents, teachers and Lgbtqia+ organisations, the principal rectified her decision concerning the alias career, announcing that it would be adopted indeed. However, it would be officially adopted and regulated only after Andrea's graduation.

I didn't obtain the alias career. My name on the register stayed the same, but in return, with the whole newspaper issue, those teachers who used to be hostile towards me no longer dared to use a pronoun or a name that wasn't mine. Sure, for instance, the physics teacher would just call me "you". At the final exam, their eyes showed pure hatred instead of resentment. I mean, they looked at me with utter disgust when I went in for the oral exam. But I didn't care. I just had to leave that school (Andrea, 20 years old).

Despite the continuing issues within his classroom and not obtaining the alias career, he supported the school representatives who had started working on the alias career regulations with some teachers, parents, and lawyers, as the principal had left the task up to them.

In the Lazio Region, most schools adopted the alias career regulations of Via di Ripetta High School (Liceo Via di Ripetta, 2020), one of the first schools in the capital with this policy. However, the regulations have many issues. They require trans* students to provide a diagnosis of gender dysphoria and do not mention bathrooms, locker rooms, or teacher training. The individuals who worked on the regulations at Cavour High School did not include the diagnosis as a requirement and added other forms of support missing from Via di Ripetta High School's regulations, such as helping trans* students whose parents are against signing the confidentiality agreement.

The great thing about our alias regulation is that many schools with an alias career policy have a bit less than we do. For example, we don't require a diagnosis of gender dysphoria, which often excludes non-binary people. Additionally, you don't need to go through a diagnosis, which can also feel

pathologising. [...] Plus, there are other elements, like the fact that the school can provide support, and teachers can help communicate with parents because... if you're a minor, parents have to know anyway; it's unavoidable that parents are informed about this. [...] So, there are these additional elements (Giada, 18 years old).

However, when we asked both Giada and Emma if the teacher who helps students without parental support is trained on trans* issues, they were unable to respond.

Despite Andrea's challenges and the delays in adopting the alias career, he and the students' union advocated for change, allowing future trans* students to be recognised and respected. The efforts of students, parents and teachers resulted in regulations based on self-determination, eliminating the need for a gender dysphoria diagnosis and adding further supportive measures for minor students (Liceo Cavour, 2022). Nevertheless, like in most schools, significant issues remain, particularly concerning teacher training and awareness (Bourelly, 2023; 2024), as we will explore in the next section.

5.2 Marco's Case: Denouncing transphobia despite the alias career

Starting from the 2022/2023 school year, trans* students attending Cavour High School could request the alias career after Andrea and the school representatives' efforts. As a result, Marco, a fifth-year trans* student, was able to apply for the alias career.

In November, he signed a school test with his chosen name as allowed by the school's regulations (Liceo Cavour, 2022). However, his teacher deleted "Marco" from the test and wrote his birth name.

So... there was a class test, an exam. I signed it as Marco because I have the alias career and can do so. I mean, it's in the regulations. I didn't make it up. And... when the teacher returned it, I saw that he had changed the name like he literally corrected it [laughs]. So, I asked for an explanation, and he told me that since the test was an official document, I couldn't use a made-up or fake name. I had to use the name on my ID card, which isn't true at all because the alias career was created precisely for this reason. So, I pulled out the alias career regulations, Article 4, and kindly invited him to read it, but he refused [laughs]. At that point, I wondered, «What am I supposed to do? » Anyway, he refused to read it and started yelling at me. I turned around and went to the vice principal's office because having a conversation was impossible. Every time I tried to speak, he yelled at me again. I was also on the verge of a panic attack, so I just gave up (Marco, 18 years old).

The possibility of signing school tests with one's chosen name has been debated for many years, as some schools state that they are official documentation. However, according to Gianluca Dradi (2024), a high school principal and lawyer, there are no legal concerns. In fact, tests can be easily attributed to the correct student since they must sign a confidentiality agreement and have all their personal information stored by the school.

Nevertheless, as the alias career regulations were written and voted on by the School Council, the teacher should have discussed the validity, or lack thereof, of article 4 with the principal and not used it as an excuse to bully a student. Indeed, the teachers' behaviour was indicative of a lack of training and transphobia and not solely related to the possible illegality of the regulations; «He said, 'I can't call you anything else because you're a woman, and that's the name written on your documents'» (Marco, 18 years old).

As with Andrea, Marco and the student union went to the media (Lupia, 2022). In support of Marco, the student union also organised a flash mob and a school assembly. During his interview in January 2023, Marco also stated that he and his family were considering suing his teacher. When we followed up with him in December 2024, he confirmed that he had filed the complaint but had received no further updates and feared that the investigation had not been pursued. However, given the slow pace of Italian bureaucracy, the investigation may still be ongoing.

Additionally, after the school gained attention from the media, three measures were taken due to the events. Firstly, Cavour High School's principal decided to take disciplinary action against the teacher, as recounted by the students. However, the interviewees could not tell us which specific actions were taken, and when following up in 2024, Marco and Giada reported that the teacher was still working at the school. Secondly, the Lgbtqi+ association Gaycenter reported the event to the Ministry of Education, which resulted in Minister Giuseppe Valditara making a statement on the matter.

Then, after we caused such an uproar over this matter, the minister also made a statement saying, «no more discrimination» and other similar statements. But what does «no more discrimination» even mean? If he really believed in something like that, Minister Valditara should approve the alias career in all schools. Because saying «no more discrimination» means nothing if the alias career isn't actually implemented in schools (Giada, 18 years old).

Lastly, the event was reported by *Partito Democratico* (Senato della Repubblica, 2022) in an oral question to the Senate on November 16, 2022.

In their statement, they questioned which initiatives the Minister of Education would adopt to ensure trans* students' inclusion. They also asked if the Ministry would provide guidelines to ensure schools would adopt the alias career. However, this oral question is reported as still in progress; therefore, the authorities have yet to respond as of January 2025.

While disciplinary measures were taken against Marco's teacher, it is unclear whether these actions addressed the teacher's transphobia. On an institutional level, the statement by the Minister of Education against discrimination was not followed by prophylactic measures to protect the well-being of trans* students or to address systemic issues within the school environment. As mentioned by Giada, awareness regarding the alias career is necessary to address systemic issues and create awareness within schools.

We have tried to raise as much awareness as possible on this issue. We can adopt the alias career, but if the teachers are unaware and don't understand what it means or how it works... they will continue to do things like what happened to Marco (Giada, 18 years old).

As Giada predicted, the issues at Cavour High School did not end with Andrea and Marco. After the interview, for the 2023 Transgender Day of Visibility, *Rete degli studenti medi del Lazio* (2023) organised numerous events to give visibility to the alias career. During Cavour High School's event on March 31, 2023, a teacher tore a student's banner, saying, "alias careers in every school" (Figure 1). Instead of admonishing the religious studies teacher, Cavour High School's principal decided to reprimand the students because the school did not authorise the event.

Figure 1. Torn banner “alias careers in every school”



Source: Rete degli studenti medi del Lazio (2023)

6. DISCUSSION

The interviews with Cavour High School's students revealed numerous issues with the lack of ministerial regulations and guidance for adopting the alias career and the consequences of implementing the policy without staff training and awareness on trans* subjects. While the events at Cavour High School indicate systemic issues within this particular institution, it is essential to highlight that not all students have the support systems needed to denounce the school administration's wrongdoings. Consequently, students from other schools may have faced similar issues, but they are not visible due to a lack of support. Indeed, Andrea and Marco brought about change and awareness within their institution thanks to the support of the school body, student unions, Lgbtqia+ associations and media outlets (Iskander, Shabtay, 2018).

The most notable issue that emerged from the interviews was related to the difficulties faced during interactions between students and adults. In particular, the school principal took action in both events only after facing backlash from the media. Her changed behaviour highlights how her priorities do not lie with supporting students but initially with acquiescing with the demands of transphobic parents (Iskander and Shabtay, 2019: 343-344) and afterwards with maintaining a positive public image. In recent decades, schools have been managed as businesses rather than educational environments for young people (Benadusi et al., 2020). Additionally, students requesting the alias career

without their parents' direct involvement face additional issues due to adultism and the invisibilisation of trans* identities, further highlighting the inherent power imbalance in the relationship between students and school authorities. The restriction of students' agency during these interactions can act as the catalyst for student resistance, as demonstrated by Andrea (Hall, 2021; Iskander and Shabtay, 2018).

While the principal's decisions were ultimately influenced by public pressure, Cavour High School's reactive approach underlines the challenges faced by students without external support or visibility. Most schools adopt the alias career only when requested, leaving many students needing to advocate for themselves and come out when seeking support.

The media's involvement not only changed the principal's actions. In Andrea's case, it also shaped the behaviour of the teachers and classmates who did not respect his gender identity and bullied him. However, this shift was not indicative of understanding and changed values, but most likely of the fear of being shamed for their actions, knowing that Andrea was no longer alone in his battle. Indeed, receiving support from activists and adults within and outside school can be essential to fighting the power imbalance between students and educators (Francis, 2023; 2024).

Additionally, Marco's experience shows how teachers can easily undermine and challenge the alias career and how, without external support, administrators can ignore their actions. Indeed, implementing the alias career without mandatory training on trans* issues and addressing systemic transphobia within the institution leaves students vulnerable and possibly the victims of bullying by staff and peers (Bourelly, 2023).

Cavour High School is a perfect example of how trans students can resist school authorities through situated agency. Andrea and Marco's actions, in fact, reflect the interplay between their need for recognition and support and the constraints imposed by their principal and educators (Hillier et al., 2020).

The collaboration between trans* youths and student unions, Lgbtqi+ associations, and media outlets shows the strategic use of support networks to shape their school environment by showing a united front to resist school authorities after their inaction.

Andrea's advocacy for the alias career for himself and other trans* students, such as Marco (Gooding et al., 2023) and Marco's determination to confront his teacher's transphobia underline the active role trans* students can take in redefining power dynamics within their institutions (Hillier et al., 2020). Indeed, by actively asserting their rights as students and trans* individuals, Andrea and Marco directly challenge the dominant cisnormative gender system within the school environment.

Establishing solidarity networks among students has proven crucial in advocating for implementing the alias career and denouncing discrimination, leading to concrete and situated improvements within the school environment (Francis, 2023; 2024; Iskander and Shabtay, 2019). These collective actions not only address immediate concerns but also have the potential to create lasting change, opening up new possibilities for current and future trans* students within the educational context (Gooding et al., 2023).

However, policies supporting trans* students and teacher training must already be present in all schools, but they have not been implemented because of students' resistance and advocacy (Omercajic and Martino, 2020). Consequently, the Ministry of Education must provide regulation and guidance on the alias career and mandate training for principals, teaching and non-teaching staff, and pre-service educators.

7. CONCLUSION

By examining the resistance tactics adopted by Cavour High School's students, this research sheds light on the complex relationship between youth agency and vulnerability within cisnormative educational settings (McBride & Neary, 2021), providing crucial recommendations for school administrators and policymakers.

The Cavour High School case study urges us to rethink the power relations within school contexts. The analysis of the resistance strategies employed by trans* students at Cavour High School and the supportive networks they have built underlines the urgent need for systemic change within the educational institution. While these student-led initiatives are crucial for challenging discrimination and marginalisation, the responsibility for transforming the school environment cannot solely rest on the shoulders of trans* students. While resistance strategies are essential for challenging cisnormativity, they can also increase the visibility and vulnerability of trans* students within the school environment (Hillier et al., 2020; McBride and Neary, 2021). This issue highlights the complex and often ambivalent nature of resistance within unequal power structures, where increased visibility can also heighten vulnerability (Singh et al., 2014; Santambrogio, 2024). In that respect, we argue that teachers and school staff play a pivotal role in fostering a more welcoming and respectful school environment. This change necessitates a commitment to personal and institutional transformation, requiring critical self-reflection on cisnormative biases within the school

culture and the active promotion of gender equity (Paechter et al., 2021) that extends beyond the formal adoption of the alias career.

The analyses presented here also have implications for policymakers, highlighting the importance of prioritising trans* students' well-being and promoting structural change to make schools safer and supportive environments (Phipps and Blackall, 2023).

Indeed, Andrea and Marco's experiences highlight the need for schools to equip themselves with the means, such as the alias career, necessary to promote trans* students' rights and positive educational pathways. However, simply adopting these policies without engaging the entire school community in a participatory process of systemic change cannot guarantee their effectiveness.

We believe the alias career can only be effective if it is accompanied by the implementation of training courses for school and teaching staff, and structural changes based on the principle of gender self-determination (Bourelly et al., 2022; Evans and Rawlings, 2021; McBride and Schubotz, 2017). These transformative actions include: the creation of gender-neutral bathrooms and changing rooms accessible to everyone, updating dress codes to allow students to wear uniforms consistent with their gender identity and/or expression, commitment to ensure respect for the alias career also in relation to external realities (such as Pathways for transversal skills and orientation⁵, or sports competitions), the inclusion of trans* themes in educational and curricular materials, and the creation of structured and continuous training courses for the student population, implemented by competent local organisations (such as Lgbtqia+ associations) (Ingrey, 2023; Francis and Monakali, 2021; McBride and Schubotz, 2017; Phipps and Blackall, 2023).

It is, therefore, crucial for policymakers to be able to listen to, welcome, and support the voice and needs of trans* students, to build bottom-up and situated policies that are genuinely committed to making schools places founded on a gender culture that values every gender identity and expression (Francis, 2024; Vicars and Wolfe, 2023).

As Kumashiro states:

The situated nature of oppression (whereby oppression plays out differently for different people in different contexts) and the multiple and intersecting identities of students make difficult any antioppressive effort that revolves

⁵ *Percorsi per le competenze trasversali e per l'orientamento* (Pcto) is a mandatory program required for graduation, designed to help high school students acquire practical skills through work-based learning experiences and career orientation activities.

around only one identity and only one form of oppression. [...] what is produced or practised as a safe space, a supportive program, a feminist pedagogy, or a culturally relevant pedagogy cannot be a strategy that claims to be the solution for all people at all times, but is rather a product or practice that is constantly being contested and redefined. Rather than search for a strategy that works, I urge educators to address the articulated and known needs and individuality of the students, while constantly looking to the margins to find students who are being missed and needs that have yet to be articulated (2002: 38).

If structured in this way, the alias career can act as a picklock, able to unhinge the codes of cisnormative school organisation, supporting programmatic and multilevel actions effectively committed to promoting the rights, well-being and positive schooling of trans* students.

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