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Italian Bisexual Women's Perspectives on Sexuality Education: A Mixed-Methods Study

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ABSTRACT

The present work aims to understand Italian bisexual women's perspectives regarding sexuality education through a mixed-methods study. Self-identified bisexual women ($n=439$; $M_{age} = 27.25$; $SD=5.34$) participated in the first stage and completed a questionnaire. In the second stage, 23 of the 439 women responded to semi-structured interviews. Quantitative results show that informal sources of information, such as newspapers and magazines, TV, social media, the Internet, and pornography, are the primary references for sexuality education. Using bottom-up thematic analysis, three themes emerged: (a) *Sources of Sexuality Education*; (b) *Positive Aims of Sexuality Education*; and (c) *Barriers to Sexuality Education*. The study has relevant policy and educational implications for the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education, highlighting the importance of including LGBTQ+ issues in school curricula.

KEYWORDS

Sexuality education;
bisexual women;
mixed-method study;
school; stigma

Introduction

The United Nations (UN) initiative “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” highlights the intrinsic connection between quality education, good health and well-being, gender equality, and human rights, positioning sexuality education as a human right that should be universal for all children and young people (International Planned Parenthood Federation [IPPF], 2016b; UN, 2015; UNESCO, 2023a). A comprehensive approach toward sexuality education plays a central role in the prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unintended pregnancies, gender-based violence, and gender inequalities while helping young people prepare to express their sexuality safely and authentically (Makleff et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2018). However, there is still a scarcity regarding the

perception of individuals from socially marginalized groups, such as bisexual women, concerning the importance of comprehensive sexuality education, sources of information, barriers, and expectations, especially in the Italian context. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer + (LGBTQ+) rights have undergone significant changes over the past few years in Italy. The main aim of the present work is to understand the experiences and perspectives of Italian bisexual women on comprehensive sexuality education, considering their specific needs, concerns, and perceived barriers.

Comprehensive sexuality education is defined as a lifelong learning process since childhood, and it is recognized as a sexual human right (World Association for Sexual Health [WAS], 2014). It should be addressed in schools by trained teachers in a multidisciplinary manner (IPPF, 2016a, 2017). However, comprehensive sexuality education remains a worldwide controversial topic, facing several challenges and barriers in the school environment, with teachers lacking the knowledge, skills, tools, and materials to implement it in their lessons (Bruno et al., 2025; Kockelkoren et al., 2023). Comprehensive sexuality education should encompass several topics, with age-appropriate, culture-based curricula that take an open perspective, promoting respect and visibility for differences. Its nature includes LGBTQ+ issues and foresees a gender-based framework to education, promoting a positive approach to gender and sexual diversity. It is essential to emphasize that with gender and sexual diversity, the authors include positively all the possible sexual identities with which an individual may identify.

Comprehensive sexuality education in educational settings should discuss gender and sexual diversity inclusively and scientifically (UNESCO, 2023b). When the school environment is open to gender and sexual diversity, it can contribute to healthy development, safety, and protection, especially for LGBTQ+ young people (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017; Kesler et al., 2023). However, bisexual women and other LGBTQ+ people seem at greater risk of experiencing violence and stigma when compared to their cis and heterosexual peers due to an unequal comprehensive sexuality education or a cis-heteronormative school environment (Toomey et al., 2012; Woolweaver et al., 2023).

Educational disparities in knowledge and skills on sexuality persist across several countries, regardless of gender or sexual orientation (Charest & Kleinplatz, 2022; Hunt, 2023). Despite clear and compelling international evidence regarding the benefits of comprehensive sexuality education, few children and young people receive the preparation needed to make informed decisions about their sexuality and relationships in a free and responsible way (Dickson et al., 2024; Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States [SIECUS], 2024a). Furthermore, several international studies show the lack of inclusive comprehensive sexuality

education, its impact, and the differences in information received between the LGBTQ+ community in general and cis and heterosexual individuals (Aubrey et al., 2020; Burton & Avilla, 2021; Flanders et al., 2021).

The predominant focus on heterosexuality and cisgenderism contributes to feelings of exclusion among LGBTQ+ individuals, who often resort to self-directed learning and seek information primarily online. This process increases the likelihood of negative consequences, such as engagement in sexual risk behaviors, the acquisition of knowledge based on scientifically inaccurate information (Leung et al., 2019; Ovejas et al., 2024), and problems related to mental health (Estes, 2017; Hobaica & Kwon, 2017; Naser et al., 2023). In the literature on comprehensive sexuality education, bisexual identities are often invisibilized, as they are broadly categorized under LGBTQ+, resulting in limited discussion of their specific experiences and subjectivities. The systematic erasure of bisexuality in schools' comprehensive sexuality education can negatively affect the health of young bisexual women (Charley et al., 2023; Rabbitte, 2020).

Moreover, bisexual women find themselves in a context of double or even triple stigma, considering that the intersection of gender and sexual orientation places them in a position of social and structural vulnerability compared to their peers because they belong to at least two oppressed social groups—being a woman and bisexual (Eisner, 2013). Bisexual women are also subject to distinct forms of discrimination depending on the gender of their intimate partners: when involved with someone perceived as being of the same gender, they may experience heterosexism; when involved with someone perceived as being of a different gender, their LGBTQ+ identity is often rendered invisible. So, on the one hand, their sexual and reproductive rights are threatened, and they face the consequences of a patriarchal society as women; on the other hand, they are invisibilized, stigmatized, and/or perceived through biphobic stereotypes as bisexuals.

Finally, while being in an intimate relationship is considered a protective factor for gay men, lesbian women, and heterosexual people, the same has not been found in studies regarding bisexual+ (bi+) populations. Evidence indicates that bi+ women may experience even more stress and other mental health issues when they are in an intimate/romantic relationship (Baiocco et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2019) and that bisexual women are particularly vulnerable to experiencing intimate partner violence and sexual violence throughout their lifespan (Bermea et al., 2018; Corey et al., 2023). Moreover, due to double stigma, research also suggests that bi+ women have more significant symptoms of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, internalized stigma, identity uncertainty, substance abuse, at-risk sexual behavior, and health, and higher rates of suicide attempts in comparison to lesbian women, gay men, and heterosexual people (Lúcio et al., 2019; Pistella et al., 2023; Shokoohi et al., 2022).

The Italian context

Italy is one of the few European countries that does not provide comprehensive sexuality education in school curricula (IPPF, 2018; UNESCO, 2023a), and the current legislative proposal is far from a pluralistic approach and from the criteria mentioned above (Bruno, 2024, 2025). Nevertheless, projects and interventions designed by experts often introduce sexual topics into the school context, relying on Italian school autonomy (Chinelli et al., 2023; Grossi et al., 2025; Lo Moro et al., 2023), and making efforts to include LGBTQ+ issues. However, they may encounter different barriers and restrictions depending on sociopolitical resistances (Lavizzari & Prearo, 2019). The International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) Rainbow Map, which ranks the legal and policy situation for LGBTQ+ people across all 49 European countries, ranked Italy 35th (ILGA-Europe, 2024). The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights report (2024) states that 40% of bisexual respondents hide or disguise being LGBTQ+ at school and that, in 2023, 68% of LGBTQ+ people in Italy experienced mockery, teasing, or threats regarding their identity in the school context. Although a significant body of Italian research addresses LGBTQ+ youth and their schooling (Bacchini et al., 2021; Eleuteri et al., 2024; Garro et al., 2024; Ioverno et al., 2022), there has been limited scholarship specifically examining bisexuality and the school experience: bisexuality remains overshadowed by issues related to lesbian, gay, or heterosexual experiences (Elia, 2014).

Additionally, Italian bisexuals have been removed from LGBTQ+ discourses, spaces, movements, laws, and policies, and although the history of the movement in Italy has well-established literature, bisexuality and non-monosexual activism are frequently excluded and/or rendered invisible (Lucietto, 2023). Scandurra and colleagues (2023) also highlight that most studies on bisexuality in the Italian population have predominantly cisgender samples; thereby, trans and nonbinary experiences are even more marginalized. Even with a large number of people identifying as bisexual, there is a significant gap in research, policy proposals, and available services for this population in Italy.

Existing Italian studies indicate that bisexual people in Italy experience greater difficulties disclosing their sexual orientation to their families, are at higher risk for alcohol abuse, and report lower levels of community connectedness, intimacy, and self-awareness (Petrocchi et al., 2020; Pistella et al., 2016; Verrastro et al., 2016). Conversely, evidence indicates that cisgender bisexual women exhibit higher levels of positive affect, resilience, and identity self-awareness compared to lesbian women (ref), highlighting the heterogeneity of experiences within bisexual populations. (Pistella et al., 2023).

Notwithstanding that the data indicate specific relevant issues for the bisexual community, it is not uncommon for this population to have their demands ignored or understudied in the context of health and education. Bisexual people's social invisibility creates a context in which their requests, needs, and claims remain ignored or merged with lesbian, gay, or heterosexual demands (Monaco, 2021). The lack of cultural recognition of bisexuality is often and generally attributed to the persistence of binary understandings of sexuality that cause bisexuality to be overlooked or rapidly dismissed (Monro, 2015). For these reasons, disseminating knowledge about bisexuality is crucial so that bisexual people who are dealing with discrimination, invisibility, and binegativity can be supported.

When it comes to bisexual women and girls who are brought up in a patriarchal society, such as in Italy, it becomes even more critical that they can understand and experience their sexuality and that their bodies are not rendered silent due to an oppressive context (Saffiotti, 2015; Tolman et al., 2003). These vulnerabilities, the cultural stigma that bisexual women have to face, and the negative or at-risk situations could be challenged and addressed through comprehensive sexuality education, which can be an effective way to prevent sexual and gender inequities, violence in intimate relationships, and internalized negative perceptions of stigma and prejudice (Bonvini & Demozzi, 2024; Demozzi & Ghigi, 2024; Galizzi et al., 2024).

Considering this scenario, it becomes crucial to understand how bisexual women perceive the importance of comprehensive sexuality education, sources of information, barriers, and expectations to work on developing a comprehensive sexuality education that is truly bi+ inclusive within the Italian context. To our knowledge, this is the first empirical paper in the Italian context to discuss comprehensive sexuality education, drawing on the experiences and perspectives of bisexual women and considering their specific needs, concerns, and perceived barriers.

Method

Research design

The present study is part of a larger project that aims to investigate the experiences of bisexual women in their intimate relationships, indicators of mental health, biphobia, and identity in Brazil and Italy. The research project used a mixed-methods and sequential approach (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017) to triangulate quantitative and qualitative evidence, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of complex phenomena. In this work, we focus on the Italian participants' results; specifically, we analyzed the sexuality education sections of the questionnaire and the interview, designed without referencing any specific sexuality education

approach. The quantitative study enabled us to map the sources of information regarding sexuality education. Meanwhile, the interviews allowed a deeper exploration of the topic and the experiences of bisexual women in Italy. The two different phases of the mixed-methods research are presented separately as two studies—study 1 used quantitative data, and study 2 used qualitative data—to make the phases and results of the research more comprehensible. The inclusion criteria for participation were being 18 years or older, identifying as bisexual, and speaking Italian.

The quantitative step of this study included 526 self-identified bisexual participants; 439 self-identified bisexual Italian women, of whom 98,4% ($n=432$) were cisgender. 87 nonbinary participants have been excluded from this study because the research group will analyze their data in a subsequent phase of future research. The qualitative step included 23 of the previous 439, and the inclusion criteria for participation were being 18 years or older, identifying as a bisexual woman, and speaking Italian. Details regarding data collection procedures and participants are presented separately for studies 1 and 2.

Study 1: Quantitative data

The first study involved a quantitative cross-sectional design. Specifically, we analyzed the sections on sexuality education, how bisexual women informed themselves in Italy, and whether they perceive receiving sexuality education as important.

Instruments

The *sociodemographic questionnaire* investigated sociodemographic characteristics, including age, sex assigned at birth, gender, relationship status, wage, education, employment status, and field, and LGBTQ+ group membership (yes/no). Sex assigned at birth and gender were assessed based on the two-step measure of gender proposed by Costa and colleagues (2022). Furthermore, we designed some measures based on the literature (Gradellini et al., 2022; Lunde et al., 2022) for the three sexuality education sections of the questionnaire to investigate the experiences and perceptions of bisexual Italian women:

The *Sources of Information Scale* aimed to identify the sources from which participants received sexuality education, offering 22 sources, each rated from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). Sources of information included: *mother, father, partner, colleagues, friends, school projects, books, social media, the Internet, religious spaces, and associations*. Notably, we grouped different sources of information into six factors, respectively composed by different levels, which have been included in the model: (1) *Family*, which

comprises *mother, father, brother, sister, and other relatives*; (2) *Close people*, which refers to *partner, colleagues, friends, and peer group*; (3) *Informal sources of information*, which refers to *newspapers and magazines, TV, social media, Internet, and pornography*; (4) *School*, which comprise *school projects, and school teachers*; (5) *Formal sources of information*, as *books, scientific papers, and sexuality education specialists*; and lastly (6) *Associations*, which refers to *LGBTQ+ people, religious spaces, and associations*. The reliability analysis of the 22 items yielded a Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.71 (*Family*) to 0.78 (*Formal sources*).

The *Importance of Sexuality Education* was evaluated using a direct question (Do you think it is important to receive sexuality education?) on a Likert scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much).

The *Perception of Training Needs* was investigated through one question (Do you think you need to be trained to address sexuality education activities?) using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much), which was asked only to women who reported working in the educational field (yes-no question). The decision to focus on the educational field stems from guidelines that advocate for providing sexuality education in schools by well-trained teachers (Plan International 2020a, 2020b).

Data collection procedures

Data collection, which consisted of questionnaires, was conducted online between November 2023 and February 2024 using the Qualtrics platform. The research was promoted through social media and emails to Sapienza University of Rome students. The research was submitted and approved by the Ethics Committee of Sapienza University of Rome (protocol number 237/2024). All participants signed the informed consent form and were informed about potential risks and the possibility of withdrawing at any given time. All procedures performed with human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and the 1964 Helsinki Declaration. Data are available upon request in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR; Regulation EU2016/679) on the protection of natural persons regarding the processing of personal data and the free movement of such data.

Participants

The mean age of our sample – 439 participants—was 27.25 years old ($SD=5.34$), and the majority self-identified as cisgender bisexual women ($n=432$). The majority were single ($n=246$; 56%), had a median family wage ($n=263$; 59,9%), had a bachelor's degree ($n=143$; $n=32,6\%$), were

currently working ($n=285$; 64,9%), and had an LGBTQ+ group membership ($n=283$; 64,5%).

Data analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software. The relevance of informant sources was investigated through repeated-measures ANOVAs, in which we compared participants' preferences for different informants regarding sexuality education. First, we compared the six sources of information to obtain a general overview of the primary informants participants recognized as relevant to sexuality education. Secondly, given the multi-level composition of each source of information, we analyzed differences within each source and between levels. Considering the multi-level structure of the variables, we calculated the missing-data rate for each level within each source of information.

Results

Participants perceive receiving sexuality education as “very much important” ($n=375$; 85,4%) and “very important” ($n=53$; 12,1%). The perceived importance of sexuality education is not significantly different depending on the women's age ($\chi^2(1, N=436) = 0,010, p = .92$). Similarly, no significant difference is observed in the perceived importance of sexuality education based on women's working field, specifically between those employed in the educational field and those in other professional domains ($\chi^2(1, N=285) = 0,001, p = .98$). Among women working in the educational field ($n=141$; 32,1%), the majority affirmed the need for specific training on sexuality education ($n=109$; 77,3%). Detailed information can be found in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Description of participants.

		N (%)
Cisgender women		432 (98,4%)
Transgender women		7 (1,6%)
		Mean (SD)
Age (N=437)		27.25 (5.34)
		N (%)
Importance of Sexuality Education	Not at all	1 (0,2)
	Little	2 (0,5)
	Moderately	8 (1,8)
	Very	53 (12,1)
	Very much	375 (85,4)
	Total	439
Working in the educational field	Yes	141 (32,1)
	No	144 (32,8)
	Missing	154 (35,1)
	Total	439
Perception of training needs	Yes	109 (77,3)
	No	32 (22,7)
	Total	141

Associations between variables

Bivariate correlation examined relationships between sources of information, age, and the importance of sexuality education (Table 2). Findings revealed that the importance of sexuality education was moderately associated with all the sources of information examined except the *Family* dimension. The higher correlations between the importance of sexuality education and the sources of information were with *Associations* ($r = .20$), *Formal sources* ($r = .19$), and *Close people* ($r = .18$). Furthermore, between sources of information, significant correlations were found. *Close people* correlated highly with *Associations* ($r = .41$) and *Family* ($r = .31$), indicating that women who regarded *Close people* as credible sources of sexuality education also extended this perception to *Associations* and the *Family* context. Additionally, a higher correlation between *Informal* and *Formal sources* was found ($r = .37$), suggesting that women who perceived *Informal* sources as truthful also perceived *Formal sources* similarly. Furthermore, *Formal sources* positively correlated with *Associations* ($r = .34$) and *School* with *Family* ($r = .27$), suggesting that women who viewed *Formal sources* as reliable sources also considered *Associations* similarly and perceived the *School* environment as reliable as the *Family* context.

Differences in the sources of information

First, we explored which sources of information were most frequently chosen by participants: 71,1% Internet, 58,8% social media, and 50,8% books. Conversely, only 8,1% refer to *school projects*, 4,3% to *school teachers*, and 2,8% to the *father*. Thus, after grouping sources of information into six factors (see the instruments section for more details), we conducted a series of repeated-measures ANOVAs to explore differences within each level of the sources of information. Accordingly, *Family* sources reported a significant effect on participants' preferences, $F(4,424) = 33.27$; $p < .0001$,

Table 2. Correlation matrix.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	1							
2. Importance of sexuality education	-0.03	1						
3. Close People	-0.02	.18**	1					
4. Informal	-0.04	.17*	.29**	1				
5. Formal	.06	.19**	.26**	.37**	1			
6. School	.02	.12*	.13**	.10*	.25**	1		
7. Associations	.09	.20**	.41**	.20**	.34**	.00	1	
8. Family	.09	.05	.31**	.11*	.26**	.27**	.26**	1

**The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

*The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

Note. Close People=Close People source of information; Informal=Informal source of information; Formal=Formal source of information; School=School source of information; Associations=Associations source of information; Family=Family source of information.

$\eta^2 = .24$. Notably, the *Mother* seems to be the primary reference ($M=2.01$; $SD=1.04$), followed by *Sister* ($M=1.46$; $SD = .88$), *Father* ($M = 1.27$; $SD=0.63$), *Brother* ($M=1.15$; $SD = .50$), and lastly *Other relatives* ($M=1.12$; $SD = .44$).

Regarding the source of *Close people*, we found a significant effect of this informant's typology on participants' liking, $F(3,1029) = 217.26$; $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .38$. *Friends* represent the principal reference for discussion about sexuality education ($M=3.30$; $SD=1.15$), followed by the *Peer group* ($M=2.87$; $SD=1.22$), the *Partner* ($M=2.80$; $SD=1.22$), and *Colleagues* ($M=1.63$; $SD = .97$). Regarding the *Informal sources* of information, we also found a significant effect, $F(4,415) = 282.69$; $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .71$. *Internet* ($M=4.02$; $SD=1.06$) and *Social media* ($M=3.62$; $SD=1.23$) represent the primary informants, followed by *Newspapers and magazines* ($M=2.50$; $SD=1.23$), *Pornography* ($M=2.29$; $SD=1.20$), and lastly, *TV* ($M=2.28$; $SD=1.12$).

We found the same result even within the *School* source ($F(1,430) = 84.70$; $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .16$): *School projects* have been recognized as more informative ($M=1.95$; $SD = .47$) compared to *School teachers* ($M=1.58$; $SD = .41$). Again, we also explored the effect of different levels of *formal sources* of information, finding a significant effect on participants' liking ($F(2,788) = 214.04$; $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .35$): *Books* ($M=3.50$; $SD=1.11$) are the primary reference, followed by *Scientific papers* ($M=2.91$; $SD=1.25$), and *sexuality education specialists* ($M=2.03$; $SD=1.21$). Finally, we found the same results regarding *Associations* source of information, $F(2,324) = 430.70$; $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .71$. Notably, *LGBTQ+ people* represent the primary reference ($M=3.30$; $SD=1.27$), followed by *Associations* ($M=1.85$; $SD=1.16$), and *Religious spaces* ($M=1.20$; $SD = .59$).

Moreover, to analyze differences in the sources of sexuality education information and their related levels across participants, we performed a series of repeated-measures ANOVAs. Results showed a significant effect of different typologies of sources of information about sexuality education on participants' scores, $F(5,2160) = 264.73$; $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .38$. Notably, *Informal sources* of information seem to represent the primary reference ($M=2.93$), followed by *Formal sources* of information ($M=2.82$), *Close people* ($M=2.83$), and *Associations* ($M=2.27$). Conversely, *School* ($M=1.76$) and *Family* ($M=1.65$) seem to be the least relevant sources of sexuality education information.

LGBTQ+ group membership and educational level

Thus, we performed a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) 2 (LGBTQ+ group membership: yes vs. no) X 3 (educational level: mandatory school vs. bachelor vs. higher education) to investigate possible

differences across sources of information. Participants' age was considered as a covariate. MANOVA results showed significant differences regarding educational level, $Wilks' \Lambda = .92$; $F(12,844) = 2.77$; $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$, and LGBTQ+ group membership, $Wilks' \Lambda = .88$; $F(6,421) = 9.68$; $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$.

Notably, findings showed that there was a significant main effect of educational level on *Close people* source, $F(2,426) = 13.67$; $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$, and *Associations* as informants, $F(2,426) = 2.45$; $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .02$, indicating that women with higher education tended to refer higher both to *Close people* and *Associations* as sources of sexuality education. Furthermore, a significant effect was also found in LGBTQ+ group membership on *Associations* source, $F(1,426) = 47.98$; $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .10$, and on the *Formal sources* of information, $F(1,426) = 8.73$; $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .02$, highlighting that members of LGBTQ+ groups referred more to the *Associations* and *Formal sources* of information. We did not find an interactional effect of LGBTQ+ group membership and educational level on different sources of information, $Wilks' \Lambda = .98$; $F(12,844) = .62$; $p = .82$, $\eta^2 = .01$.

Study 2: Qualitative data

The exploratory qualitative method was employed through semi-structured interviews with a subset of participants from the first stage.

Instruments

The research team designed a semi-structured interview based on the literature (Bible et al., 2022; Bruno et al., 2025; Mata et al., 2022; Sperling, 2023). The instrument was articulated in different sections to understand better the process of identifying as bisexual in the Italian context, experiences of violence and discrimination, belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, and sexuality education. For this article, specific questions regarding sexuality education were analyzed: 1) *Have you ever received sexuality education? If so, how did you receive it?*; 2) *Do you believe that receiving sexuality education could be helpful for a bisexual person? If so, in what way?*

Data collection procedures

At the end of Study 1, participants who were interested in participating in the next phase of the study provided their email addresses for contact. The research team subsequently contacted the participants, while nonbinary bisexual participants who expressed their interest were informed of a forthcoming research phase dedicated to their experiences and perspectives.

Participants in Study 2 were allowed to choose their preferred method of participation, whether online or in-person, to ensure their comfort. Thus, some interviews were held on the university premises, while others were conducted online *via* Google Meet. The interviews were conducted between February and April 2024. Study 2's ethical standards are the same as those in Study 1.

Data analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis, following the steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): 1) familiarizing with data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; and 6) producing the report. The analysis also followed the recommendations for reporting standards in mixed-methods research in psychology (Levitt et al., 2018; Veldhuis et al., 2024). To summarize the main findings in themes and subthemes, the authors used Reflexive Thematic Analysis to engage deeply and systematically with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021) and Data Triangulation to ensure the credibility and validity of the process. Specifically, the third triangulation approach, "Investigator Triangulation," was utilized in the analysis (Patton, 1999) involving multiple coders to mitigate the effects of authors' bias (Renz et al., 2018).

Following the steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019, 2021), the first and second authors read the interviews' transcriptions multiple times, made initial notes, and identified potential themes. Coding was conducted inclusively, involving the identification, naming, and description of central themes and subthemes across the data. In the process, we precisely followed three steps: (a) the first and second authors independently open-coded the articles into research areas (i.e., experiences of sexuality education); (b) the same authors compared the identified research areas and created a set of shared categories; (c) all authors discussed over several meetings the research areas emerged, and in some case redefined the categories as presented in the final version, which we present with details in Tables 3, 4, and 5. Finally, in reporting the participants' quotations, the research team used pseudonyms (Veldhuis et al., 2024).

Positionality and reflexivity statement

The research team includes two experienced researchers and university professors, one post-doctoral researcher, and two PhD students who conducted the interviews. The authors comprise white Italians and one Latin American Brazilian person. The team includes bisexual, lesbian, heterosexual, and pansexual cisgender psychologists and one bisexual cisgender

Table 3. First theme and relative sub-themes.

Theme	Sub-themes	Quotations
Sources of Sexuality Education (120)	Other contexts (50)	“So, unfortunately, I had to build my sexual education on my own, with the internet, the library, reading books, asking teachers who were great teachers in middle school and high school, with whom I could talk and then discuss, and then, yes, definitely more in university with people my age or even older people I became friends with, older women to whom I could ask certain things.” (Ada, cisgender bisexual woman, 30 years old)
	School (43)	“No [laughs]. I mean, there was this embarrassing moment in high school. [...] We were in the fifth year of high school, and we went to this sexual education lesson at a clinic, and basically, there was this doctor who said that gay people become gay because they have traumas when they are little.” (Francesca, cisgender bisexual woman, 27 years old)
	Family (27)	“No, I only remember when I had my menarche, my first period; my mother told me that it meant I could have children from that moment on. But there was never any education about how children are made, about sexual orientation, none of that.” (Michela, cisgender bisexual woman, 31 years old)

Note. The quotations in the table are different from the others in the text, and all the names are pseudonymous.

Table 4. Second theme and relative sub-themes.

Theme	Sub-themes	Quotations
Positive Aims of Sexuality Education (69)	Sexuality and relationships (28)	“I would love courses that explain that sexuality can be experienced in a calm and relaxed way and [...] you can do whatever you want because it’s a game. I mean, sex is a game. You should approach it with ease and serenity.” (Irene, cisgender bisexual woman, 35 years old)
	LGBTQ+ (21)	“In my opinion, being able to find this kind of support, for example, within the school context, I’m thinking back to when I was a teenager and had just come out to myself, how much it would have helped me to know that these things exist, that they are talked about, that it’s a normalized topic. It was a taboo, which would have helped me navigate it with fewer doubts and less uncertainty.” (Camilla, cisgender bisexual woman, 26 years old)
	Consent (12)	“I think it can be helpful for everyone, especially to understand consent and respect for others. What violence is. This is something that can impact everyone.” (Laura, cisgender bisexual woman, 31 years old)
	Medical prevention (8)	“Someone who could also talk about what it means to have sex [...] covering topics like sexually transmitted diseases, and maybe the differences in risk between men and women. Because when sexuality education is taught in schools, for example, I think it’s very heteronormative in its approach. [...] They [straight friends] have this idea shaped by porn, unrealistic and highly imaginative.” (Ada, cisgender bisexual woman, 30 years old)

Note. The quotations in the table are different from the others in the text, and all the names are pseudonymous.

pedagogue. All authors actively engage in activism within LGBTQ+ health and rights, and advocate for comprehensive sexuality education in Italy and Brazil.

Table 5. Third theme and relative sub-themes.

Theme	Sub-themes	Quotations
Barriers to Sexuality Education (30)	Culture (22)	“Since the idea of young people having sex or homosexuality being taught and explained in classrooms can be very polarizing, in Italy right now, I don’t think it’s imaginable.” (Elisa, cisgender bisexual woman, 30 years old)
	Current political situation (5)	“In Italy, we are really, really years behind when it comes to these things that aren’t even directly related to sexuality, not even vaguely. It’s really about health.” (Veronica, cisgender bisexual woman, 40 years old)
	Religion (3)	“Because Italy is a Catholic country. If you say no, in the end, it still is. And so, it’s hard to push certain things forward. [...] These are all topics that just can’t be addressed because we’re still carrying too many years of history shaped in a certain way. So, I think that’s the real problem.” (Daria, cisgender bisexual woman, 42 years old)

Note. The quotations in the table are different from the others in the text, and all the names are pseudonymous.

We acknowledge that our analytic process was embedded within an engaged scholarship standpoint. Recognizing the importance of incorporating diverse standpoints in qualitative research, we intentionally sought to include researchers with different positionalities regarding gender identity, sexual orientation, nationality, and ethnicity. However, the absence of trans researchers on the team represents a potential limitation of our analyses (Hartsock, 2019; Veldhuis et al., 2024). The research team’s awareness of potential biases related to positionality informed the decision to include multiple coders in the analytic process. Coders within the authorship team engaged in ongoing dialogue, debate, and reflexive confrontation while following the thematic analysis procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019, 2021).

Participants

Twenty-three participants among the previous 439 engaged in Study 2. At the time of the interview, one participant disclosed identifying as assigned female at birth nonbinary and expressed a preference to participate in the study, given that they had lived and been socialized for most of their life as a bisexual woman. Thus, twenty-two cisgender bisexual women and one nonbinary person participated in the qualitative stage. The average age of the participants in the second stage was 30.1 years ($SD=4.23$), and the majority identified as single and had a median monthly household income.

Thematic analysis results

Based on qualitative analyses, three main themes were identified: 1) *Sources of Sexuality Education* ($n=120$); 2) *Positive Aims of Sexuality Education* ($n=69$); and 3) *Barriers to Sexuality Education* ($n=30$).

Sources of sexuality education

The first theme, *Sources of Sexuality Education*, explores participants' experiences and perspectives on sexuality education throughout their lives. From the thematic analysis, three subthemes emerged (Table 3): *Other Contexts* ($n=50$), *School* ($n=43$), and *Family* ($n=27$).

Other contexts

The first subtheme, *Other Contexts*, refers to participants' experiences of self-education ($n=50$). Participants specified that their self-education often stemmed from interactions with peers, little involvement in university lessons or other feminist and LGBTQ+ organizations, reading books or magazines, and searching for information online through the Internet and social media, as Beatrice recalled:

Everything I know, I had to look up on my own, and it was more of a peer-to-peer thing, like with my friends, we would share certain things, maybe ask each other questions, and then we would go look for answers in books [...], or I would see people on social media [...]. Maybe social media helped me a lot, following pages that focus on spreading information about sexuality. (Beatrice, cisgender bisexual woman, 26 years old)

School context

The second subtheme concerns the *School context* ($n=43$), including personal experiences and perceptions of sexuality education in schools as being closer to a medical paradigm and being influenced by teachers' and professionals' religious or personal beliefs, as Olivia experienced:

A couple of sessions at school, but... they were poorly done; we had, I do not know, one or two encounters in high school, which were very... About sexually transmitted diseases and using condoms. They were poorly done, in the sense that they told us things like "condoms do not break." (Olivia, cisgender bisexual woman, 28 years old)

Family

The last subtheme regards sources of sexuality education in the *Family* ($n=27$), which includes experiences of sexuality as a family taboo, along with sporadic other experiences with family members, such as sisters or grandfathers, regarding sexual topics. Often, the first answer was "No," followed by a laughing reaction as Sofia depicted:

No [laughs]. No, no. I discovered condoms in the bathroom because my older sister used them, and... once I stole one from her to see what it was and how to use it, and she caught me and said, now I will show you how to use it [laughs] and then... I... I was not told anything else. (Sofia, cisgender bisexual woman, 25 years old)

However, Noemi—a cisgender bisexual woman interviewed—recounted a positive experience stemming from a different educational system while

living with her family in another country; she received what she described as proper sexuality education:

When I was nine years old, we were taught basic things, like ‘your body is yours, and no one can touch it if you do not want them to’, how babies are made, a bit about bodies in general, and so on. Then, I found another one great when I was 12 or 13 years old. That one was specifically focused on abuse prevention and similar topics [...] like sexual violence, what it is, your rights, how to handle situations when something is wrong, who to talk to, and so on. [...], we also had a standard sexual education that covered things like what sex is, sexually transmitted diseases, and so on. (Noemi, cisgender bisexual woman, 30 years old)

Noemi’s experience was different than most of the other participants in the family context too, considering she reported receiving support from her family regarding information and education on sexual topics:

I have always had a very open-minded mom. If I had questions, she would come to me and say, “You can ask me anything”. I always felt like I could talk to her about these things. So, we had that education at school, but I could also ask her questions at home. With my mom, more than with my dad. (Noemi, cisgender bisexual woman, 30 years old)

Even though the bisexual participants interviewed reported a lack of both school and family education regarding sexuality education and had to self-educate themselves, almost all participants firmly agreed on the importance of sexuality education for everyone—regardless of sexual identity—and showed a preference for the school context, ideally from 11 to 13 years old or even earlier. Only one out of the 23 women affirmed that sexuality education should be addressed at home with parents, highlighting the need for parents’ training. Moreover, they all refer to being—or the drive to become—a source of sexuality education for others, stemming from awareness of the importance of sexuality education and from a desire to generate positive change through sharing knowledge to address potential exclusion.

Positive aims of sexuality education

The second theme, *Positive Aims of Sexuality Education*, explores how participants who did not receive formal sexuality education understand its role for others. It is divided into four subthemes that address the potential effects of the ideal topics included in the comprehensive sexuality education framework (Table 4): *Sexuality and Relationships* ($n=28$), *LGBTQ+* ($n=21$), *Consent* ($n=12$), and *Medical Prevention* ($n=8$).

Sexuality and relationships

The first subtheme, *Sexuality and Relationships* ($n=28$), encompasses the key aspects participants highlighted as necessary for sexuality education in school. For example, pleasure, sexual practices like autoerotism or BDSM, and body

self-determination to increase awareness in young people facing their sexual experiences, aiming at a safe and healthy sexual development. Furthermore, the participants included the emotional and relational aspects, discussing the sexuality education effects on intimacy, emotional management, and friendships other than romantic and sexual relationships, as Giada explained:

In this way, relationships with others are also improved. Sex is no longer seen as taboo, which helps facilitate the exchange of information among young people. They will not just hear things like ‘use a condom, or you will catch some infectious disease’, but instead gain more intimate and useful knowledge. Moreover, it changes how we perceive other people. If we first become aware of the complexity behind each individual, we will stop viewing people based on societal stereotypes, right? This, in turn, allows for more fulfilling relationships. (Giada, cisgender bisexual woman, 22 years old)

LGBTQ+

The subtheme *LGBTQ+* ($n=21$) concerns the thoughts of interviewed women about the community, with reflections on their own experiences, including challenges in coming out and in self-acceptance. For them, including LGBTQ+ topics in school sexuality education would primarily benefit LGBTQ+ students by supporting their process of self-recognition while also helping cisgender heterosexual students develop greater respect and awareness for all sexualities and providing terminology and definitions to normalize gender and sexual diversity, as Elisa affirmed:

It becomes normality when we make it so, but to do it, we must give the young the space to express themselves, [...] if you do not have the words, you cannot describe it. If you cannot describe it, it does not exist. And if it does not exist, you do not exist. So, how can you represent yourself or see yourself if you do not even know that this thing exists? (Elisa, cisgender bisexual woman, 37 years old)

Consent

The third subtheme, *Consent* ($n=12$), highlights the importance of consent and respect in promoting healthier intimate relationships and preventing experiences of interpersonal violence. Coherently with the two previous subthemes, to increase awareness of sexual and romantic relationships aspects and in the respect and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community, the women interviewed stated that discussing consent in sexuality education would help both individuals and societies prevent violence in several contexts, foster respect for others, and, when necessary, encourage reporting and seeking justice for acts of violence. On this, Irene thought that:

The part related to gender-based violence [...] is essential because it falls under sexuality education [...], learning to be mindful in certain situations, understanding when to react and report to others, and recognizing toxic relationships. I believe this aspect is incredibly important for every sexual orientation. (Irene, cisgender bisexual woman, 26 years old)

Medical prevention

Finally, the participants emphasized the importance of addressing *Medical Prevention* ($n=8$), highlighting their view of sexuality education as a tool for preventing the medical risks associated with unprotected sexual intercourse, as Giada told:

Sex is no longer seen as a taboo, and so it improves the exchange of information between young people, who otherwise might not have information about things like condoms, not just the basic warnings like “use a condom or you will catch some terrible disease,” but also something more intimate, more useful. (Giada, cisgender bisexual woman, 22 years old)

Furthermore, participants included the prevention of STIs in the aims of sexuality education, as well as other negative consequences like unintended pregnancies; as Irene said, it would mean “Learning about sexually transmitted diseases, because it’s not just about contraceptives. Many young people think that coitus interruptus is a form of contraception, but it’s not.” (Irene, cisgender bisexual woman, 35 years old).

Barriers to sexuality education

The last theme, regarding perceived *Barriers to Sexuality Education*, examines participants’ distinct views on sexuality education in Italy. It is divided into three subthemes (Table 5): *Culture* ($n=22$), *Current Political Situation* ($n=5$), and *Religion* ($n=3$).

Culture

The first subtheme includes the barriers they perceived from the *Culture* ($n=22$), such as false myths about explaining sexuality in school or inter-generational sexuality perceptions, as Teresa stated:

Even though I see that the new generations have managed to fight even harder for recognition, on the other hand, we still suffer from the cultural legacy of our parents. This is why many are still prone to bullying, including within schools. (Teresa, cisgender bisexual woman, 30 years old)

Current political situation

The second subtheme, *Current Political Situation* ($n=5$), regards the primary Italian barriers to developing and promoting an inclusive and effective sexuality education curriculum in the present context. The women interviewed conveyed a negative perception regarding the potential implementation of sexuality education in schools, citing Italy’s position behind other countries regarding sexuality and gender policies. They also expressed pessimistic outlooks for the future, reflecting skepticism about the

prospects for change within the Italian context; for example, Noemi explained that Italy has “a very closed, conservative government. [She does not think] anyone who wants to introduce this kind of open, tolerant sexual education would be able to get it approved in schools.” (Noemi, cisgender bisexual woman, 30 years old).

Religion

Finally, some of the women interviewed identified *Religion* ($n=3$) as a barrier to the implementation of sexuality education in schools, highlighting it as a significant factor contributing to the negative stereotyping of diverse sexuality and gender expressions. However, they did not refer to personal religious beliefs; instead, they discussed the impact of religion as an intergenerational cultural value, transmitted at the national level, shaping the establishment of norms, practices, legislations, and other societal frameworks, as for Irene Italy “is a secular country with a strong Catholic imprint, a country where most people are very conservative and elderly. And sexuality is more or less equated with filth that is told to children.” (Irene, cisgender bisexual woman, 35 years old).

Discussion

Comprehensive sexuality education is an essential tool through which the school curricula produce positive effects for all students, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to navigate relationships and sexuality confidently (Antoniucci et al., 2023; Bodnar & Tornello, 2019; Bruno et al., 2025; Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). Furthermore, comprehensive sexuality education results are particularly beneficial in helping combat social stigma and improve overall well-being (Kesler et al., 2023; Pampati et al., 2021). Bisexual people still face prejudice, double social stigma, and negative attitudes, not only from heterosexual people but also from members of the LGBTQ+ community (Dodge et al., 2016; McGorray & Petsko, 2024; Oswald et al., 2024). Invisibility, social stigma, and prejudice combined create a social context that invalidates bisexual experiences and identities (Chieregato et al., 2023; Gutekunst & Liang, 2023).

In Italy, bi-cancellation is widespread, and the adverse effects highlighted by international literature are confirmed, with bisexual women facing increased vulnerability, higher risk of problematic relationships and behaviors, and elevated symptoms of depression and anxiety (Malaika & Liang, 2023; Pistella et al., 2023). However, growing up in a sociocultural context free from invisibility and rejection should not be a privilege reserved for a few but a fundamental prerequisite and a right for promoting healthy development. It is essential to achieve healthier development to foster a respectful approach toward all sexualities and gender expressions across

various contexts, and school environments play a critical role. Schools have the potential—or the risk—to shape values, attitudes, and knowledge (Silva et al., 2021). Opening the school environment to diverse expressions and experiences can create a context in which acceptance, visibility, respect, and inclusivity foster a safe space for students to affirm their identities (Andrzejewski et al., 2020; Eleuteri et al., 2024; Ferfolja & Ullman, 2020).

Comprehensive sexuality education is often restricted to a singular focus on sexual intercourse and/or cisheteronormative sexuality, even if it fails to encompass the diverse range of sexual experiences and identities. In Italy, comprehensive sexuality education is not mandatory (Bruno, 2024, 2025). However, it is typically provided through projects and interventions (Chinelli et al., 2023; Grossi et al., 2025; Lo Moro et al., 2023) or following two approaches commonly discussed in the literature: Abstinence-only and Abstinence-”plus” (Hawkins, 2024), focusing either on promoting abstinence from sexual intercourse or on emphasizing medical prevention and contraception. Despite their intended goals, both approaches risk perpetuating stereotypes and prejudices, ultimately fostering taboos on critical issues, misinformation, and myths (Heels, 2019; Miedema et al., 2020).

It is crucial to integrate the experiences and perspectives of bisexual people into educational frameworks. The present research focuses on bisexual women’s opinions regarding general sexuality education to investigate their primary sources of information, experiences, and perceptions of sexuality education’s importance, using a mixed-methods approach. This approach allows for an understanding of the challenges and opportunities in designing comprehensive sexuality education curricula.

Sources of information regarding sexuality

The quantitative study shows a positive sexuality education perception with no significant differences between sexuality education’s importance and age or working field. Our findings highlight the need for sexuality education training among women in education. Additionally, six sources of information were grouped through repeated-measure ANOVAs and categorized into *Family*, *Close people*, *Informal sources*, *School*, *Formal sources*, and *Associations*. Perceptions of the importance of sexuality education are associated with *Close people*, *Formal sources*, and *Associations*.

We found positive associations among the following sources: *Close people* with *Associations* and *Family*; *Informal sources* with *Formal sources*; *Formal sources* with *Associations*; and *School* with *Family*. These results align with the comprehensive sexuality education framework, which holds that a shared educational responsibility should include parents, siblings, schools, friends, partners, groups and associations, and experts in medical or societal fields (UNESCO, 2018; WHO, 2010). In the *Family* context, the mother

is the predominant informant, while friends emerge as the primary informants within *Close people*. Based on the participants' experiences, the school environment primarily informs through external school projects, while books are the most common among *Formal sources*. Lastly, LGBTQ+ people provide more information than the other *Associations* sources.

Again, the results show the effect of educational level: when it is high (bisexual women with a bachelor's or master's degree, or a PhD title), participants refer most often to *close people* and *Associations* to receive information on sexuality. According to the literature, higher educational levels are associated with greater perceived importance and need for sexuality education, as well as a greater autonomous search for sexuality education information (Jackson & Haile, 2023; Zhang & Yuan, 2023). Furthermore, participants with an LGBTQ+ membership refer to *Associations* or *Formal sources* of information. The literature corroborates this result, as stigmatized or marginalized people tend to rely on equal or similar identities within associations to search for sexuality education information (Delmonaco & Haimson, 2023; Veinot, 2010). Among the six sources of information, *Informal sources* appear to be the most influential, with the Internet being the primary one.

Findings are further explored and corroborated by the qualitative ones. Interviews were conducted with 22 bisexual women and 1 bisexual non-binary person who participated in the quantitative phase. By conducting the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021), we identified three themes: 1) *Sources of Sexuality Education* ($n = 120$); 2) *Positive Aims of Sexuality Education* ($n = 69$); and 3) *Barriers to Sexuality Education* ($n = 30$).

School, family, and informal contexts for information

The different sources of information on sexuality education identified in study 1, and the use of the Abstinence-”plus” and Abstinence-only approaches found in the literature, are corroborated by the participants' statements. They indicated that the sexuality education they received in the school context was either ineffective, based on heterosexual intercourse and medical prevention, or absent and based on conservative abstinence models, with a strong influence of catholic values and no bi+ specific topics. These experiences align with those of other LGBTQ+ people. Several studies highlight a predominant focus on heteronormative sexuality and medical prevention, often reinforcing taboos and perpetuating invisibility (Antoniucci et al., 2023; Bishop et al., 2021; de Heer et al., 2021; Francis, 2025).

Shifting from the school to the family context, experiences are slightly more positive. Nevertheless, the accounts still fall short of reflecting

perceptions of openness and support regarding topics related to sexuality and female bisexual identity. The family plays a key role in reproducing patriarchal and heteronormative norms, fostering a sense of taboo around sexuality, as perceived by the participants, and suggesting that the family may not be an appropriate source of sexuality education for bisexual people in Italy. These findings are consistent with the literature, which indicates that the family context has difficulties in providing information due to embarrassment, religious beliefs, lack of knowledge, comfort, and competencies in discussing sexual topics (Antoniucci et al., 2023; McKay & Fontenot, 2020; Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2021; Sánchez et al., 2023).

Although these contexts are recognized as crucial for the individuals' psychosocial development, our findings suggest that both the family and the school are less relevant sources of information on sexuality-related topics for bisexual people in Italy. For the study participants, other contexts, such as books, the Internet, partners, and friends, are the primary sources for sexuality-related topics. Among these sources of self-education, our results indicate a predominant use of the Internet, friends, and peer-group discussions. This finding aligns with several studies that identify these as the primary sources used by the bisexual and broader LGBTQ+ community (Baker et al., 2021; Delmonaco et al., 2020; Lee-Foon et al., 2020).

Another informal source seems to be the participation in discussions within LGBTQ+ groups, consistent with the literature on the support provided by LGBTQ+ organizations (Hawkins & Giesecking, 2017; Jia et al., 2022). Given the insufficiency of formal contexts in providing adequate sexuality education, participants interviewed seek to address this gap through alternative means. Participants also created inclusive spaces for reflection and discussion. Participants' agency may exemplify queer generativity, in which LGBTQ+ people endeavor to create, strengthen, and sustain spaces within society for their community despite the oppressions they encounter (Rosati et al., 2021).

Positive aims and future implementation of sexuality education

By exploring what and why the bisexual participants interviewed would like to see implemented in school sexuality education, they reveal a strong preference for a genuinely comprehensive sexuality education approach to sexual topics and its positive aims. The comprehensive sexuality education approach would address sexuality holistically, considering individuals' development and encompassing all aspects of sexuality, from ethical, moral, and personal to sociocultural and relational. Participants' preference is driven by the perception of comprehensive sexuality education's role in promoting well-being, consent, and respect for all individuals, regardless

of sexual identity. These results align with the literature that highlights the positive effects of comprehensive sexuality education on both individual and societal well-being.

Furthermore, the results underscore the importance of dismantling the stereotype that sexuality is equal to sexual intercourse by addressing all thematic areas of comprehensive sexuality education categorized in the literature, encompassing behavioral, anatomical, identity-related, emotional, sociocultural, and personal aspects of sexuality (Bloom et al., 2022; SIECUS, 2024b). The participants also stated that, if implementing comprehensive sexuality education becomes possible, it could be useful in promoting acceptance of bisexual identity, its visibility, and the normalization of diverse sexual experiences and identities (Harris et al., 2025; Moore et al., 2024).

Sociocultural and political challenges to sexuality education

Participants' perceptions of Italian comprehensive sexuality education reveal a pessimistic outlook on its future implementation in Italian schools. They recognize the sociocultural barriers to comprehensive sexuality education adoption, such as the ongoing presence of false myths and lack of knowledge regarding sexual topics, discrimination toward the LGBTQ+ community, and far-right or right and/or conservative personal and political beliefs (Callahan & Loscocco, 2023; Catarinella & Kram, 2024; Nimbi, 2024; Rosati et al., 2025). These barriers, which can also be present in other sociocultural contexts but are more pronounced in conservative Catholic contexts, such as Italy, which remains one of the last European countries to implement comprehensive sexuality education in schools (IPPE, 2018; Nimbi, 2024; UNESCO, 2021, 2023a).

Finally, participants highlight at different levels—political, cultural, and individual—the impact of religious beliefs, intergenerational misinformation, conservative, misogynistic, and heteronormative ideologies, and opinions surrounding sexuality. Participants, faced with a misogynistic context that prevented the dissemination of information about sexual and reproductive rights, pleasure, and bisexual sexuality expression, became agents of transformation for themselves and others within the community. The same participants who were denied a comprehensive sexuality education became sources of information for others, drawing on their own experiences and the knowledge they acquired through self-education, thereby creating a virtuous educational cycle. LGBTQ+ people seem forced to look for self-education when institutional comprehensive sexuality education is lacking, leading to the eventual negative consequences on sexual and mental health (Epps et al., 2023; O'Farrell et al., 2021). Still, they have found alternative ways to make their identities possible.

Limitations and future perspectives

The present work highlights the importance of a social change in how comprehensive sexuality education is conceptualized and implemented in schools, to ensure that bisexual women and those who socialize as bisexual women can have access to quality sexuality education and a context of visibility and acceptance of their experiences. By amplifying the voices of marginalized groups such as bisexual women, this work aims to contribute to the development of a truly representative framework for comprehensive sexuality education, for bisexual individuals, the LGBTQ+ community, and, more broadly, for all sexualities and society.

Despite the present work providing evidence for the scientific, educational, and research interest in comprehensive sexuality education in school contexts, it has some limitations. Although the study was disseminated to both cisgender and transgender bisexual women, most respondents identified as cisgender, and nonbinary bisexual participants were excluded to be further analyzed in a specific study. Therefore, the dissemination strategy may have contributed to a degree of sampling bias, and the findings should be interpreted with caution. Given the diversity within the bisexual population, further research focusing on bisexual trans women is essential to better understand their trajectories of vulnerability and their contributions to discussions on comprehensive sexual education in Italy.

Investigating other perspectives to explore differences and similarities within the bisexual community is essential to designing a genuinely bi+inclusive comprehensive sexuality education program for bisexual people in Italy. Additionally, future research could explore how teachers and professionals within the school context understand the needs of bisexual women and the role of comprehensive sexuality education, gaining a deeper understanding from various perspectives for developing a more inclusive curriculum. Finally, additional studies should also seek to expand the use of validated measures.

However, the research demonstrates significant strengths, including adherence to a rigorous scientific approach through the authors' research strategy. The research explored bisexual participants' perspectives regarding comprehensive sexuality education, suggesting the importance of designing more comprehensive and inclusive educational and training programs that will meet people's needs and help them overcome challenges and negative consequences. Studies in this field and research direction highlight increased knowledge and awareness regarding comprehensive sexuality education topics and positive, respectful, and open attitudes toward all sexualities (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017; Kesler et al., 2023; Proulx et al., 2019). Developing comprehensive sexuality education curricula in schools that are shareable, replicable, and culture-based, and equally shareable, replicable, and culture-based training programs, is necessary.

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Ethical considerations

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Approval was granted by the Developmental and Social Psychology Ethics Committee, Faculty of Medicine and Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome (protocol number 237/2024).

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study’s conception and design, material preparation, and data collection. Methodology: Thaís de Castro Jury Arnoud and Valeria Bruno; Formal analyses and investigation: Valeria Bruno, Thaís de Castro Jury Arnoud, and Chiara Antoniucci; Writing - original draft: Valeria Bruno and Thaís de Castro Jury Arnoud; Writing - review and editing: All authors reviewed the manuscript. Supervision: Roberto Baiocco and Jessica Pistella. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Consent to participate

Participants of this research provided their written consent before completing the questionnaire for the first study. By giving us their emails, they granted permission to be contacted for the second study, including written and oral consent to participate in the interviews.

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