Feminism and LGBTQI+ Rights in Catholic Scout Youth Movement: Navigating among Identities

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Abstract. In this paper we examine the advancement of feminist and pro-LGBTQI+ ideals within the Italian Scout movement. This context provides a unique lens to test the interplay between traditional religious frameworks and progressive gender and sexuality discourses, particularly among youth, so contributing to the ongoing exploration of how spaces of youth participation are shaped by gender cultures, and how feminist and LGBTQI+ perspectives can coexist or challenge religious activism. We present data from an original study conducted on four hundreds of scout leaders during a national gathering. Our questionnaire investigates how feminist values and attitudes toward LGBTQI+ rights are embraced by the movement and how these views translate into a distancing from the highly binary rules of scouting and the willingness to change them. We then present a four categories typology of catholic young activists based on their attitudes toward feminism and LGBTQI+ and their religious participation. While girls are more open to addressing these topics, boys feel less comfortable challenging longstanding norms around gender segregation and sexuality. In other words, girls are more likely to show a *Secularized* or *Devoted resistant* profile than their male counterparts, who are more likely to be *Traditionalist* or *Detached*. Our multivariate models on the likelihood to embrace feminist and LGBTQI+ values emphasize the intersectional nature of factors influencing openness to feminism and LGBTQI+ rights, especially gender and age.

Keywords: Scout movement, Feminism, LGBTQI+, Religiosity, Youth.

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite a lively presence of anti-gender propaganda in the European public debate in recent years (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017), feminist and pro-LGBTQI+ values have been increasingly embraced by younger generations: international surveys show a growing acceptance of gender equality and LGBTQI+ rights among younger cohorts, especially women (Halman and van Ingen 2015; Kuntz *et al.* 2015; Eurobarometer 2023), as well as the challenge of traditional gender and sexual norms and more progressive attitudes among young adults and adolescents (Inglehart and Norris 2003; 2009; Halman and van Ingen 2015; Lyons, Bauman and Kivisto 2017 for Italy as a paradigmatic case study, see Prearo 2024). Such trends have long been discussed by sociologists and other social scientists, especially in relation to long-durée social

processes. Notably, religion, family, and social collectives – often seen as constraints on individual emancipation – are at the base of the *individualization* thesis (Lash 1993; Beck 1992), which stresses the importance of reflexivity as new expression of behaviour driven by deliberate human actions and choices. This holds true especially for women who, more than in the past, are permitted and expected to shape their biographies according to their personal values and desires (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). According to individualization theorists, traditions and groups continue to play a role in individual experience, but the meaning of tradition and group membership has shifted from an external imposition to something done consciously by individuals to inform self-identity and personal biography (Howard 2007).

Indeed, this process is also connected to *secularization* and the decline of the influence of religious institutions on societal values and laws, as well as to the popularization of feminist and LGBTQI+ claims. A vast body of literature has documented the generational shift towards secularization, with studies highlighting the decline of religious affiliation and practice among younger cohorts (Kasselstrand, Zuckerman and Cragun 2023; Voas and Chaves 2016; Norris and Inglehart 2011), and the growing trend toward personalizing the relationship with religiosity, thus resulting in a diversification of religious experience, particularly among younger generations. At the same time, a large body of research has shown the young people's increasing openness to sexual liberation, the transformation of intimacies and their deconstruction and elaboration of gender binaries (Giddens 1992; Scott 2018). Younger generations tend to be more open and supportive of feminist and LGBTQI+ issues compared to older cohorts (Halman and Ingen 2015a; 2015b), reflecting a broader societal shift towards progressive values on gender and sexual equality, partly due to the influence of social media (Banet-Weiser 2018) to the extent that, according to some scholars, feminist and LGBTQI+ claims have been co-opted within neoliberal logics, leading to their commodification and depoliticization (Rottenberg 2018; Fraser 2020). How do the processes of individualization, secularization, and particularly the spread of feminist and pro-LGBTQI+ values – which are so influential among young people – interact with religion-oriented identities, such as those of young Catholic activists? How do young Catholics reconcile a generational sensitivity that is generally open to elements of social justice, yet are contested by the very religious institutions to which they actively adhere?

In this paper we aim to examine secular, feminist and pro-LGBTQI+ ideals within a specific context, the Catholic brunch of the Italian Scout movement (AGESCI)[1]. Such context provides a unique lens to test the interplay between the official position of the Catholic Church on gender issues and more innovative and inclusive gender and sexuality discourses, particularly among young adults, so contributing to understand how gender cultures shape spaces of youth participation and how feminist and LGBTQI+ perspectives can either coexist with or challenge religious activism.

More in detail, we will present data from an original study conducted on a sample of 413 AGESCI Scout leaders during a national gathering of scout leaders held in August 2024 in the city of Verona (Italy). AGESCI is the main component in the Scout movement, and it is situated within the broader and diverse spectrum of Catholic activism. Our questionnaire investigates, on one hand, how feminist values and attitudes toward LGBTQI+ rights are embraced by leaders within the movement. On the other hand, it explores how these views translate into a distancing from not only the official teachings of the Catholic Church but also from the highly binary rules of scouting, and, more broadly, into a desire to reform scouting practices. We then present a typology of adherents and a multivariate analysis of the impact of individual and contextual variables influencing adherence to feminist and LGBTQI+ values.

2. GENERATIONAL SHIFTS IN RELIGIOSITY, FEMINIST AND LGBTQI+ VALUES

A growing body of research shows that the attitudes towards feminism, gender equality, and LGBTQI+ rights tend to align, meaning that individuals who endorse one of these causes are often supportive of the others as well. These issues can therefore be examined collectively, as they are increasingly addressed together in public debate and commonly positioned within the same progressive or conservative ideological framework.

Beyond reasons of internal coherence regarding the theme of social justice, two factors explain such alignment. On the one hand, in the last fifteen years, this kind of alignment has been reinforced by anti-gender movements, which have grouped issues such as women's rights, gender identity, LGBTQI+ rights, and abortion under the broad umbrella of "gender ideology". The concept of "symbolic glue", discussed by scholars such as Pető, Kováts and Grzebalska (2017; Kováts *et al.* 2015), highlights how anti-gender actors (including the Catholic Church) strategically link feminism, LGBTQI+ rights,

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[1] The Scout Movement is also composed by the non-religious section (CNGEI); however, for simplicity in the paper, we use the term "scout" to refer only to the AGESCI.

and gender equality into a single ideological enemy (see also: Butler 2024). On the other hand, in a social justice perspective, feminism, gender equality, and LGBTQI+ rights cannot be neatly separated because they are all concerned with structural inequalities related to gender and sexuality (Butler 2004): addressing LGBT issues and feminism together can play a crucial role in achieving full sexual citizenship (Richardson 2017).

Some authors today suggest a more nuanced view of the fault lines between the two fronts (anti-gender movements, and those who are for women's and LGBTQI+ rights), suggesting that in current populist and authoritarian contexts the boundaries between the discourses and politics of those who campaign *against* and those who campaign *for* gender and sexual equality are blurring (Beck, Habed and Henninger 2024). But it is still noteworthy that the Vatican and many Catholic institutions have played a crucial role in supporting anti-gender movements and their construction of "gender ideology" as a dangerous drift toward individualism, relativism, totalitarianism, and neoliberalism.

As a matter of fact, religiosity, civic values, and attitudes can be interconnected in a complex and not always linear manner, especially among young generations. Dugan (2017), for instance, shows how millennial Catholics internalize traditional gender roles through religious practices and, despite this, they often experience tension between these prescribed roles and modern societal expectations. This echoes Lavizzari (2016), where Catholic people, especially women, navigate the balance between feminist ideals and traditional religious teachings, often leading to internal conflicts as they seek to harmonize their beliefs with modern values of gender equality. Worthen, Lingiardi and Caristo (2017) highlight how younger generations, particularly in religious settings, are more open to non-traditional family structures and more supportive of LGBTQI+ rights compared to older, more conservative family members and religious leaders. This is also observed in Giorgi and Palmisano (2020), where they discuss how younger Catholics are increasingly distancing themselves from the strict traditional views upheld by their Church, particularly in relation to gender and sexuality. These generational differences are also explained by Price (2023), who discusses how GenZ (people born between 1997 and 2012), especially girls, are heavily influenced by social media and global pop culture, platforms that often promote individualism, gender equality, and support for LGBTQI+ rights. From Kosar *et al.* (2023) and Savage (2021), we see a pattern where young people, particularly women of the Generation Z, are engaging with feminism through various platforms like social media and celeb-

rity endorsements (Banet-Weiser 2018), despite of course, the emergence of many forms of critical engagement with social media as well. The existing literature also highlights a difference in attitudes between boys and girls, with boys generally holding more traditional views in feminist and LGBTQ values: Banaszak *et al.* (2023)'s work shows that women's protests are shown to influence youth attitudes, but boys tend to adopt progressive views at a slower pace. Indeed, feminist issues may resonate more strongly with young women, as they recognize in feminism a movement that represents their interests and affirms their aspirations. In contexts where gender equality is not yet fully normalized, such as religious or more traditional environments, boys may hold onto conventional ideas longer, reflecting the patterns we observe among the male scouts. Frisinger (2022)'s study on the commodification of feminism also helps explain why some young people, particularly boys, may be resistant to or sceptical of feminist ideals. As feminism becomes more commodified, with its messages diluted in consumer culture, boys may see feminism as a trend rather than a political movement aimed at systemic change. This commodified version of feminism might also be perceived as less relevant to their lived experiences, leading to a gender gap. However, girls, exposed to both popular and radical forms of feminism through social media, as well as forms of feminist protest and activism, might resonate more with its empowerment messages, as seen in Frisinger (2022) and Savage (2021). In general, women often exhibit stronger affinity for feminist values and acceptance of LGBTQI+ rights compared to men (Lyons, Bauman and Kivisto 2017).

In Mather (2018) and de Vries *et al.* (2021), we see how religious environments, particularly Christian and Catholic institutions, tend to reinforce traditional gender roles. Religious teachings often uphold conservative gender norms, and parents, particularly fathers, may continue to impart these values to their children. Nevertheless, Romagnoli *et al.* (2011) and Riley (2019) show that young people are becoming more aware of gender-based violence and inequality, despite traditional views around family and intimate relationships.

Such results align with a long-durée sociological explanation. Studies by Inglehart and Norris (2003) and Halman and van Ingen (2015a; 2015b) indicate that younger individuals, influenced by evolving social and cultural contexts, are generally more supportive of gender equality and minority rights. This literature shows, on the one hand, that individuals who are more religious tend to prioritize stability and social order over individualistic and self-enhancing values. On the other hand, it highlights that older individuals generally adhere more strong-

ly to conservation values (e.g., tradition and conformity), whereas younger generations are more inclined towards values promoting openness to change and self-direction.

Some works tried to explore such conflicting religious identities and attitudes toward feminism and gender issues. Our analysis will draw particularly on the categories introduced by Elaine Howard Ecklund and Tanya Zion-Waldocks. Ecklund's (2003) study explores how Catholic women reconcile their dual identities as committed Catholics and feminists. Focusing on the diverse strategies that women use to remain committed to their religious institutions while advocating for gender equality, the Author identifies three primary approaches: reinterpreting feminism through the lens of Catholicism; reinterpreting Catholicism through the lens of feminism; individualizing identities[2]. Zion-Waldocks (2018)'s research on Agunah activists, who struggle against restrictive practices within their religious community while still seeing themselves as part of that community, suggests the notion of "devoted resistance" to understand an activism aimed at reforming unjust aspects from within, while still committed to tradition.

As for Italy, which serves as the context of this study, many authors have suggested that the adherence to institutional religious doctrines is uncertain among young cohorts, where religious sentiments are still present but responses to existential questions are personal and sometimes contradictory (Garelli 2020). Here, studies have registered an increasing trend towards individualized and plural forms of religious involvement, in the context of a growing personalization of practices and a far-from-linear intergenerational transmission of religious beliefs (Crespi and Ricucci 2021) sometimes intersecting new forms of spirituality (Palmisano and Pannofino 2021). But Catholic activists should be, within the same age group, among those least affected by these changes and more resistant to the personalization of religious messages and the secularization of values – particularly regarding feminist and LGBTQI+ issues, such as abortion, same-sex marriage or rights of trans people on which Catholic institutions have expressed criticism in their official documents. So, it is particularly interesting to see to what extent these values are spread among young religious activists and how they reconcile their values with

the Catholic Church doctrines. The challenge lies in how these young individuals can maintain their commitment to the values of their faith community while also embracing the progressive ideals prevalent among their peers.

For all these reasons, the Scout movement, as a young population that identifies as practicing Catholics and actively engages in religious associations, represents a particularly intriguing case study.

3. GENDER AND LGBTQI+ ISSUES IN THE SCOUT MOVEMENT

The Scout movement is the largest youth organization in the world, with over 38 million participants. The movement primarily engages individuals aged 6 to 21, although older youth also actively participate as guides for younger cohorts. Founded in 1907 by Robert Baden-Powell, the Scout movement is now structured into two principal organizations: the World Organization of the Scout Movement and the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts.

Originally, the Scout movement was not intended for women in the UK. Baden-Powell envisioned a community where men and boys could connect with others from diverse backgrounds, united by shared values such as patriotism, patriarchy, and empire (Mills 2016). In its early days, the term "others" referred not only to foreigners (those outside the UK) but also to young women who were excluded from the movement and its activities. Despite the program being designed for boys, it quickly began to attract young women, whose desire to become "scouts" grew significantly. By 1912, Girl Scout groups, known as Guides, were already active in ten countries, including Italy. These Girl Scouts organized themselves into small groups; in some cases, boys and girls gathered together, while in others, they were separated. For a considerable time, however, females were not allowed to participate in official spaces, and when they did, the division between boys and girls was pronounced (*ibidem*). For more than a century, participants have strongly endorsed the necessity of maintaining two separate and independent sections, emphasizing feminine personality, such as domestic ones, and refusing the tendency to masculinize girls. From the 1990s onward, the organization undertook a profound reflection on sexual identity and the differences between women and men, a dialogue that continues to this day (Vescovi 2012) and women's increasing involvement in the Scout movement was an integral part of the broader struggle for women's emancipation, self-fulfilment, and political equality. In 2023 the Italian Scout Movement, for the first time, established a

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[2] In particular, Ecklund's categories included: (1) Reinterpreting Feminism in Light of Catholicism, where women align their feminist values with their religious beliefs, making feminism part of their spiritual identity; (2) Reinterpreting Catholicism in Light of Feminism, where women apply feminist ideals, such as gender equality, to their understanding of Catholicism, even if this challenges Church doctrines; and (3) Individualized Identities, where women selectively choose aspects of both Catholicism and feminism, maintaining both identities but without necessarily seeking consistency between them.

special commission on gender and sexual identity. This commission aims to gather testimonies and stories from LGBTQI+ scouts of all ages to open a broader debate and implement specific actions. We could say that for the first time, the official debate overcame binarism by opening up for something that, in two binaries, did not fit.

In Italy, by the 1990s, the movement demonstrated a strong awareness of evolving models of femininity and masculinity (Fasoli 1994): the pedagogy of difference has been central to the educational method of both Girl and Boy Scouts, as children and adolescents are taught to recognize and appreciate gender differences (Di Nicola 1994). Co-education, in this context, is not understood as complementarity, as traditionally posited by the Church, but rather as reciprocity: each individual, with their limitations, contributes to the collective whole (Lucchelli and Patriarca 1994). According to Halls *et al.* (2018), guiding attracts young girls due to its ability to flexibly and meaningfully adapt to social change, particularly regarding gender norms across different times and places. But, especially at the top level of organizations, there is scepticism towards the third feminist wave's concepts of fluidity and no-binarism, emphasizing, on the contrary, the women's identity within a hetero and binary normative frame (*ibidem*). Indeed, using the words of Tilstra *et al.* (2022: 183), it is still a matter of interest to understand how Scouts' «presence in the space is conceptualized or affected by gender».

4. DATA AND METHODS

This research is drawn from data gathered through a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was composed mainly of closed questions, with only two open questions. It was created using Qualtrics, a web-based software that makes surveys and generates reports. The questionnaire was structured into nine main sections: demographic information about the respondent and their family; the size and composition of their scout group; attitudes towards various gender-related issues; the opinions of the participants' mothers, fathers, scout group members, and priests on these topics; perceptions of the inclusiveness within their groups; their perceived readiness to handle specific sensitive situations; opinions regarding the Commission on Gender Identity; agreement with the binary division of activities and spaces; views on sexuality; and, finally, opinions on Catholic norms and the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Scout movement. We included two open questions about the gender division in the scout rules and episodes regarding gender, sexuality, or LGBTQI+ rights in the Scout movement.

The questionnaire was disseminated in two waves: first, it was sent to some personal contacts within the movement of those writing, who sent it to other scout leaders[3]. Through WhatsApp, we sent a message with the link and QR code. Secondly, one of the authors went to the "National Route" organized in Verona from the 22nd to the 24th of August 2024, which gathered around 17.000 scout leaders from all Italian regions. In Villa Bruni's location, she distributed the questionnaire among the participants. Furthermore, each person who proposed the questionnaire was asked to send it to his or her CoCa[4]. An initial observation was that the proposed topic was considered attractive by almost all the people who were proposed to. They tell us that over the last five years, the gender issue started to be questioned and discussed within their scout groups. The sensation was that they were pleased that someone was treating such a theme in such an environment.

Participation in the National meeting was not individual; most people went with their CoCa. This means that loco recruitment has been a group rather than an individual one. We stopped groups of people from the same CoCa and the same city and region. Moreover, we should consider that all questionnaires sent by WhatsApp might be biased because only people interested in such issues are willing to fill out a 15/20-minute survey. This problem has been partially overcome by distributing surveys in person, even though we did not have complete control of the filling process in that case. However, the fact that the questionnaires were distributed at an event that was not specifically centred around this topic (the National Leaders' Gathering) and in contexts where gender issues were not particularly relevant (for example, on trains while people were traveling to the gathering) helped to limit the self-selection bias.

Indeed, one of the limitations of our survey is that it focuses on the experiences and opinions of scout leaders, without considering the voices of younger movement members. This lack of inclusivity could result in a partial perspective on the situation. Moreover, self-selection bias and the numerosity of the sample are limitations to the generalizability of our results.

The survey was completed by 421 scout leaders currently active in the movement. The average age was 26, the range went from 20 to 69 and most of our respondents are part of the GenZ (12-27 years old). 51% identified themselves as female; 8 people (1.9%) responded

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[3] We chose to focus on Scout leaders because they have a central role in the educational method and are the younger generations' guides.

[4] CoCa (which stands for Comunità dei Capi, leaders' community) is a group of adult scout leaders responsible for the management, organization, and educational direction of the various scouting units.

Table 1. Sociodemographic profiles of males and females.

	Male	Female	Tot
Age			
<25	30.6	43.7	37.5
25-28	27.0	30.2	28.7
>28	42.3	26.0	33.8
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0
Education			
High school or less (excluding university students)	23.3	8.8	15.7
University students	14.2	30.9	22.9
University degree or more	62.4	60.4	61.4
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0
Parents' education			
No graduate parent	51.4	46.6	48.8
At least one parent with university degree	48.6	53.4	51.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Area of residence			
North	60.9	61.9	61.4
Centre-South	39.1	38.1	38.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	197	216	413

Source: Authors' elaboration.

"other". The sample was mainly composed of Italian people. We have responses from all the regions (except for Molise and Aosta Valley). Despite the expected over-representation of some geographical contexts, our sample is not limited to a single area. Northern scouts account for 61.9% of the total (260 cases), of whom 27.1% in the North-West and 34.8% in the Nord-East. Scouts from the Centre-Italy regions are 18.1% (76 cases; Tuscany: 7.1%) and those from the South 20.0% (85 cases; Sicily: 9.3%). In terms of education, 6 out of 10 respondents have a university degree, and more than 20% are university students, mainly women (30.9% compared to 14.2%). Only 16% have completed their education at the high school level or below, without pursuing further studies (men: 23.3%). Parental education is equally divided between families with at least one parent with tertiary education and families with no parent with such a higher education level.

5. ATTITUDES TOWARD AGESCI'S BINARISM, FEMINIST AND LGBTQI+ ISSUES

The history of the Scout movement reveals that it initially operated as a binary organization in both structure and operation (Mills 2016; Vescovi 2012). This binary nature was evident in various aspects – from the segregation of spaces and clothing distinctions – to gender-specific workshops and an educational model based on gender roles (Smith 2006; Lundberg 2022). While much of that legacy has been overcome, its influence is still present in the activities offered in scout groups of all ages, from the gender division of tents to the organization of groups and activities.

Examining the frequency distribution of questionnaire responses related to the binary gender distinction, we observe, on the one hand, how much of the rigidity from earlier times has been overcome. On the other hand, gender distinctions still serve as a starting point for developing effective educational methods. Concerning the attitude toward the "division of workshop activities for females *vs.* scoutball for males" the position is clear: nearly the entire sample disagrees, with no significant differences between male and female scout leaders. However, opinions are less clear when it comes to gender-based divisions within the reparto and squadriglia[5]. About 38% of male respondents strongly agree with this distinction, compared to 29% of females who think such a division benefits children and adolescents' development. Regarding space separation – specifically toilets and sleeping arrangements at night – responses are more varied. Here, male scout leaders (29.1%) are more likely to support the separation of bathrooms than female leaders (20.3%). However, some respondents' answers may be influenced by hygiene concerns rather than gender issues. The strongest agreement on binary divisions in both genders appears in the question about separating males and females during sleep, with 47% of males and 35.2% of females in favor. In the quote below, taken from the answers to the open questions, the perceptions of living in a still cisnormative and binary environment is clear:

> It happens quite often, especially regarding gender roles. In my scout leader group, there is still the belief that it's essential to have male figures, particularly in the scout troop, otherwise, it seems like it's not done properly. Here's an example: in the clan, there is only one male scout, and for an activity, we had to find biographies of significant people. I had only found stories of women. My fellow leader insisted on introducing a man's biography because she was concerned the only boy would feel excluded.

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[5] A *Reparto* is the larger unit within the Scouts, typically made up of several smaller groups called *Squadriglie*. A reparto is usually composed of scouts in the age range of 11 to 16 years old and includes both boys and girls in coeducational groups. The *Reparto* functions as a community where scouts participate in larger-scale activities, such as group games, ceremonies, and camps. It is led by adult leaders and sometimes older scouts. Any *Squadriglia* consists of 6 to 8 scouts of the same gender or mixed, depending on the organization. This group is more intimate and self-organized, often led by one of the older scouts.

Table 2. Attitudes toward binary division of spaces and activities (% agree and very agree)

	Man	Women	All respondents	Measure of ass. (Cramer's V)	Sign.
Tents divided by gender at night	47.0	35.2	45.8	.252	.000
Division of lab activities for females *vs.* scoutball for males	1.4	1.3	1.4	.098	.655
Gender-segregated patrols and troops during adolescence	38.9	29.2	33.2	.216	.000
Separate bathrooms for males and females	29.1	20.3	23.1	.168	.027

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Table 3. Attitudes toward AGESCI and some gender issues

	Men	Women	All respondents
I wish AGESCI were more open about contraception	72.9	88.4	80.0
I wish AGESCI were more open about cohabitation outside marriage	79.1	89.6	84.6
I wish AGESCI were more open about LGBT rights	78.5	89.5	83.5
AGESCI, as a Catholic organization, should adhere to Church dogmas	38.2	21.8	28.9
I wish AGESCI included sexual education	66.9	67.4	67.1

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Although the Scout Movement continues to attract young people due to its ability to flexibly and meaningfully adapt to social change, particularly regarding gender norms, at the top level of organizations, there is scepticism towards the third feminist wave's concepts of fluidity and no-binarism, emphasizing, on the contrary, the women's identity within a hetero and binary normative frame (Halls *et al.* 2018). This ambivalent position does not attract the favour of many young scouts, who would desire a more progressive and clear position on gender-related issues. This is evident in the responses to the questionnaire, which included the respondents' opinions on the position of AGESCI. Both women and men wish for more openness of the AGESCI on the issues of sexuality, contraception, cohabitation outside marriage, and LGBTQI+ rights. However, girls appear more progressive in each of the items we have considered. The percentage of girls who answered, "very agree" and "very much agree" is at least 10% higher in three items. Moreover, girls are also more in disagreement with the fact that AGESCI, as a Catholic association, should adhere to the Church's dogmas compared to the males. Only in the topic of sexual education, males and females have almost the same average percentage of people who responded "agree" or "very much agree" to the introduction of sexual education for Scouts.

Our data on attitudes toward sexuality, feminist, and LGBTQI+ issues reveal a clear gender difference in the degree of progressive views expressed. Women consistently score higher than men across all categories, indicating more progressive attitudes. For example, women's scores are notably higher on issues such as rights for trans people (0.85 vs. 0.75 for men), sex outside of marriage (0.90 vs. 0.83), and feminism (0.89 vs. 0.78), same-sex couples, (0.89 vs. 0.76 for men). The largest gap is seen in the category of traditional gender roles in the family, where women score 0.93, the highest of any item, while men score 0.83. In contrast, men, while generally progressive, show more conservative attitudes relative to women, especially on issues such as abortion and the education of gender and sexuality from primary school, where the differences are 0.74 vs. 0.85 and 0.77 vs. 0.87, respectively. On average, all respondents exhibit progressive attitudes, with scores ranging from 0.80 to 0.89, reflecting a relatively high level of openness across the sample. These findings suggest that women are leading the way in embracing more progressive views on sexuality, feminism, and LGBTQI+ rights, but men are also moving in that direction, though at a slightly slower pace. As one respondent wrote:

Several years ago, I collaborated with a regional scout magazine. We produced an issue about love, in which I wrote an article dedicated to Catholic homosexual couples. Although the article was initially accepted, authorized, and therefore written, when it came time for printing, it was almost censored. We resolved the issue by including a disclaimer stating that the article did not represent the views of the associ-

Table 4. Attitudes toward sexuality, feminist and LGBTQI+ issues, average score (scale 0-1, 0 max conservative, 1 max progressive). Respondents and (respondents' perceptions) of their parents' placement on the scale.

	All respondents	Men	Women	Fathers	Mothers
Rights for trans people (3)	.80	.75	.85	.43	.49
Sex outside of marriage (1)	.87	.83	.90	.67	.64
Abortion (1)	.80	.74	.85	.56	.56
Feminism (2)	.84	.78	.89	.58	.69
Adoption for same-sax couples (3)	.83	.76	.89	.44	.51
Traditional division of gender roles in the family (2)	.89	.83	.93	.59	.69
Education, gender and sexuality from primary school (2)	.82	.77	.87	.54	.59
N	413	197	216	413	413

Note: (1)=sexuality; (2)=feminism; (3)=LGBTQI+ issues.
Source: Authors' elaboration.

ation. I had to personally inform the two boys I interviewed about this stance, which was quite unfair and humiliating, especially since the article had been reviewed at various levels. All of this happened because, when asked, 'What advice would you give to scout leaders?' their answer was, 'Never assume they are heterosexual.

6. ADHERENCE TO FEMINISM AND RELIGION: A TYPOLOGY

Building on the insights from Ecklund (2003) and Zion-Waldocks (2018) previously discussed, we constructed a typology that includes four distinct profiles, representing different ways individuals navigate the pressures of religious expectations and progressive values[6]:

The Detached: Those in this category feel only weakly connected to both religious and feminist/LGBTQI+ pressures. They are neither strongly influenced by traditional religious expectations nor actively engaged in feminist or LGBTQI+ advocacy, leading to a more disengaged stance.

The Secularized: Individuals in this category distance themselves from traditional religious norms and are open to themes of feminism and LGBTQI+ rights. They embrace strongly progressive values and challenge the traditional roles imposed by religious institutions.

The Doctrinal: This profile represents individuals who adhere closely to religious impositions and resist feminist and LGBTQI+ ideas. They uphold traditional beliefs and are less inclined to support social changes that diverge from established religious doctrines.

The Devoted Resistant: Similar to the concept outlined by Zion-Waldocks, these individuals feel the tension of both religious expectations and strong progressive feminist and LGBTQI+ ideals. They are committed to their faith while also engaging in resistance, attempting to reconcile and balance both influences.

By integrating the theoretical patterns of both Ecklund (2003) and Zion-Waldocks (2018), we suggest a comprehensive framework for analysing our data and capturing the complex ways in which individuals negotiate multiple, and often conflicting, influences on their social identities. In doing so, we can see that the Secularized profile is the most prevalent in our sample, representing 33.2% of respondents, while the Detached group is the least common at 14.4%. This suggests that many participants have either adopted progressive views or are

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[6] Our typology combines the dimension of gender and religiosity. As regards the former, we use a single battery of items on attitudes (conservative vs progressive: 1-7 scale) towards gender equality, feminism, sexuality, rights for homosexual and trans people. The index is dichotomized into 0 (below median) and 1 (above median). The dimension of religiosity includes four variables: a) importance of religion in respondent's life (0=low, little; 1=enough, rather much, very much); b) parents' religious belief/belonging (0= both parents non-religious/other religion than Catholic/Catholic but not attending Church or attending less than one a week; 1=at least one parent Catholic and attending church once a week or more); c) religious activism (0=no participation in religious groups; 1=participation in religious groups); d) position on issue: "The Church should be faithful to its dogmatism without being influenced by modernity" (0=strongly disagree, disagree; 1= enough agree, agree, strongly agree). The religiosity index ranges from 0 to 4 and is dichotomized into 0-1 (0=score 0 and 1; 1=score 2 to 4).

Table 5. Typology of Respondents according to attitudes toward Feminist and LGBTQ issues and attitudes toward religious norms.

		Feminism and LGBTQ Issues	
		-	+
Religious norms	-	Detached	Secularized
	+	Doctrinal	Devoted Resistant

Source: Authors' elaboration.

actively balancing both traditional and progressive influences, while a smaller portion remains disengaged from both. When examining gender differences, it becomes clear that Doctrinals are more likely to be male, while Secularized individuals are predominantly female. This indicates that men are more inclined to adhere to traditional values, whereas women show greater openness to feminist and LGBTQI+ themes. The Devoted Resistant group is more evenly distributed between genders, highlighting the tension of navigating both influences among both men and women. The Detached category, however, shows a higher representation among males, suggesting that men may be more prone to adopt a disengaged stance from both sets of pressures.

Age plays an important role in determining the distribution of profiles. The Secularized profile is more common among younger participants, particularly those under 25, suggesting a generational shift towards more progressive values. Conversely, Doctrinals are more prevalent in the over-30 age group, reflecting a stronger adherence to traditional values among older respondents. The Devoted Resistant group spans all age categories, with no significant age-related trend, while the Detached group is distributed relatively evenly, indicating weak correlations with age.

The analysis shows clear educational differences among the profiles. Doctrinals span all education levels, while the Secularized and Devoted Resistant groups are more common among university-educated individuals. The Detached group, however, is more prevalent among those with only middle or high school diplomas.

Parental education also appears to influence the distribution of profiles. Secularized individuals are more common among those with at least one parent holding a university degree, suggesting the influence of parental education on the adoption of progressive values. Doctrinals and Detached profiles, by contrast, are more prevalent among those with less educated parents. The Devoted Resistant profile is distributed across both groups, reflecting the complex interplay between parental education and the negotiation of competing identities.

The analysis of regional distribution reveals that Doctrinals are more common in the northern regions, while Secularized individuals are particularly prevalent in the central and southern regions. Interestingly, the Devoted Resistant group is more prevalent in the central and southern areas, while Detached individuals are more represented in the north, further indicating a nuanced regional distinction.

Lastly, attitudes toward gendered scout rules provide further insight into these profiles. Doctrinals tend to support scout rules, with a majority favouring their

retention, while Secularized individuals are more likely to be anti-rule and support changing the existing regulations. The Devoted Resistant profile is almost evenly split between pro- and anti-rule attitudes, reflecting the internal conflict between upholding tradition and advocating for change. The Detached group also shows a more supportive stance toward scout rules but exhibits a weaker alignment with either position.

7. THE LIKELIHOOD TO BE FEMINIST AND PRO-LGBTQ: A REGRESSION ANALYSIS

We ran a logistic regression to test the impact of sociodemographic determinants on respondents likelihood of being open to feminism and LGBTQI+ rights versus not being open to these values. As a dependent variable we used the abovementioned dichotomized scale of progressivism on gender issues (0=low pro-feminist view; 1=high pro-feminist view). Other variables in the regression are: gender (male, ref. cat., female); age (under 25; 25-28; >28, ref. cat.); education (less than degree, ref. cat.; degree); region (Centre and South, ref. cat.; North); parents' religiosity (low, ref. cat.; high). Model 1 reports the effect of sociodemographic background without any other specification. In Model 2 we added two different dimensions concerning the social context in which our respondents are embedded: parish priest's and scout group's views on feminism (the same battery used for the dependent variable). For both variables we created a dichotomy (below vs. above median value of progressive).

The regression analysis shows that gender plays a significant role in determining openness to feminism and LGBTQI+ rights, as indicated by a consistently high positive coefficient across both models. Gender is a significant predictor in both models, with women being much more likely than men to hold pro-feminist views. In Model 1, the coefficient for gender (Exp(B) = 4.196) indicates that women are over four times more likely to have a high pro-feminist view compared to men, and this effect strengthens slightly in Model 2 (Exp(B) = 4.789). This finding remains statistically significant throughout. Age also plays a role in shaping attitudes. The age group under 25 shows a significantly higher likelihood of holding pro-feminist views compared to the reference group (>28 years), with an Exp(B) of approximately 4.1 in both models. Education does not emerge as a statistically significant predictor in either model, with Exp(B) values of 1.892 in Model 1 and 1.535 in Model 2. This suggests that holding a university degree, compared to having less education, does not significantly affect the likelihood of supporting feminist

Table 6. Regression analysis on the likelihood to have pro-feminist and pro-LGBTQI+ attitudes.

	Model 1				Model 2			
	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp(B)	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp(B)
Gender: female (ref. male)	1.434	.467	.002	4.196	1.566	.490	.001	4.789
Age (ref.>28)			.021				.030	
Age (<25)	1.425	.622	.022	4.158	1.402	.635	.027	4.064
Age (25-28)	-.305	.521	.559	.737	-.276	.540	.610	.759
Education: degree (ref. less than degree)	.638	.544	.241	1.892	.429	.562	.446	1.535
Region: north (ref. centre-south)	.159	.458	.728	1.173	-.015	.484	.976	.985
Parents religiosity: high	.144	.462	.755	1.155	.099	.473	.834	1.104
Parish					.577	.452	.202	1.781
Scout group					.737	.472	.119	2.089
Constant	-1.078	.656	.100	.340	-2.966	1.116	.008	.052

Source: Authors' elaboration.

and LGBTQI+ values in this sample. The region variable (North vs. Centre and South) also does not show a significant effect in either model, with Exp(B) values close to 1 in the second model. Parental religiosity similarly lacks a significant impact on respondents' attitudes, with Exp(B) values of 1.155 in Model 1 and 1.104 in Model 2.

In Model 2, two new variables are introduced to capture the influence of the social context—the parish priest's and scout group's views on feminism. The parish priest's view shows a positive but not statistically significant effect (Exp(B) = 1.781), while the scout group's view (Exp(B) = 2.089), suggests that being embedded in a more progressive scout group might foster more supportive attitudes towards feminist and LGBTQI+ issues, but again, this effect does not reach statistical significance.

Overall, the regression analysis underscores that gender and age are the most significant predictors of openness to feminist and LGBTQI+ rights, with younger individuals and women more likely to hold progressive views. The expected influence of education, region, and parental religiosity appears less pronounced, suggesting that individual sociodemographic characteristics alone may not fully capture the complexity of attitudes towards gender issues.

8. DISCUSSION

One of the most important results in our findings is the openness to feminist and LGBTQI+ values among Scout young activists in the sample as compared to the official positions of the Church and the persistence of a strong gender difference in such change. Banaszak *et al.* (2023) demonstrate that exposure to feminist and egalitarian movements can cause a shift in gender attitudes among young adults. However, boys may experience this shift more slowly, particularly when their community or upbringing reinforces traditional views. In the Scout context, the tension between maintaining traditions, such as separate living spaces, and embracing progressive values creates a conflict for boys, who may feel pressure to conform to traditional masculinity. This could also explain why they are less open to the idea of cohabitation without community approval, as these structures reinforce traditional notions of family and marriage. The findings that boys feel less prepared than girls to discuss with children's topics like sex changes and sexuality, and that they are less likely to agree with the community on issues such as separate tents, gender-based activities, and the need for leadership approval for cohabitation, highlight again significant gender-based differences in attitudes toward sexuality and traditional roles, which confirm the literature. This echoes Romagnoli *et al.* (2011) when they discuss how boys tend to uphold conservative views in intimate and social relationships. De Vries *et al.* (2021), Mather (2018) and Riley (2019) as well, discuss how boys, particularly in religious environments, are more influenced by traditional gender norms perpetuated by their parents, especially their fathers, than girls, who may be more encouraged by progressive educational environments to question gender roles.

By applying the lenses of our typology to analyse our sample, we found many of the patterns described in the literature on feminism and religion discussed earlier. The Secularized profile, the most prevalent in our sample, aligns with the findings from Mori *et al.* (2023) and Savage (2021), which show that younger generations, particularly Generation Z, are more engaged with feminist values, often influenced by social media and celebrity endorsements of feminism. This openness is

reflected in our data, where a significant proportion of women, especially those younger and more educated, fall into this category. In contrast, the Doctrinal profile remains more common among men and older individuals, which is consistent with findings from de Vries *et al.* (2021) and Riley (2019). These studies show that traditional religious teachings often reinforce conservative views on gender roles, particularly among men and older generations. The Doctrinals in our sample tend to resist feminist ideals and maintain adherence to religious doctrines that emphasize traditional gender roles. This also echoes Mather (2018), which found that some religious settings still tend to promote more conservative attitudes, especially among students from more traditional backgrounds. The Detached profile, which is less common in our sample, represents individuals who feel only weakly connected to both religious and feminist influences. This aligns with Frisinger (2022), who discusses the commodification of feminism and the resulting disengagement that some individuals feel towards the movement. The Detached individuals in our study, more often men with lower levels of education, appear to be disengaged from both progressive and traditional pressures, reflecting a lack of identification with either side of the debate. This detachment may be a response to the perceived complexity or irrelevance of both feminist and religious narratives in their lives. The most interesting profile, the Devoted Resistant, feels torn between religious adherence and progressive values, aligns with the characteristics of the religious reformers and visionaries in the devoted resistant group described by Zion-Waldocks (2018). These individuals embody a dual commitment: they challenge unjust aspects of their religious community while remaining deeply connected to it. Our findings indicate that such a profile is distributed across different age groups and educational backgrounds, suggesting that this internal conflict is experienced by a wide range of individuals, who strive to reconcile their faith with their desire for social change, highlighting the tension between tradition and progress that many religious feminists face.

Gender differences across these profiles, with girls more likely to be Secularized or Devoted Resistant, are consistent with Worthen, Lingiardi and Caristo (2017), who found that younger women are more open to progressive social changes and to engage with feminist values compared to their male counterparts. On the other hand, men are more likely to fall into the Doctrinal or Detached categories, suggesting a stronger adherence to conventional norms or a general disengagement from the debates surrounding gender and religion. Higher education is strongly associated with the Secularized and Devoted Resistant profiles, and it confirms findings by Kosar *et al.* (2023) and Banaszak *et al.* (2023), highlighting the influence of education in fostering more egalitarian views and encouraging critical engagement with both religious and social issues. Lastly, the influence of community context, such as the progressiveness of the scout group or the parish priest, also affects the likelihood of adopting a particular profile. As suggested by Giorgi and Palmisano (2020), community influences play a crucial role in shaping individual attitudes towards gender and religion. Our data show that individuals with a progressive parish priest or a progressive scout group are more likely to be Secularized or Devoted Resistant, reflecting the importance of community leadership in fostering openness to change.

Our regression models confirm that women of our Catholic young adults' sample are four times more likely to have a progressive attitude towards feminism and LGBTQI+ than their male peers, who could embrace general progressive views due to their age, but at the same time feel feminism and LGBTQI+ issues as alienating or overly critical of men. This aligns with other studies about a persistent diversification of experiences and beliefs between men and women in young Millennials (Crespi 2019). Also, age plays a significant role, with younger respondents more open to progressive gender values, which resonates with findings from Generation Z and younger millennials, particularly in countries where progressive values are increasingly normalized through social media (Price 2023). Indeed, this point needs further investigation through data about social media consumption. In any case, a generational shift is evident in the regression results, where younger respondents are significantly more likely to be open to feminism compared to older individuals. Education has no significant effect in our models, and this is somewhat surprising, as previous literature such as Mather (2018) and Frisinger (2022) often indicates a positive correlation between higher education and progressive views. However, our result may be due to the fact that many respondents do not hold a degree but are currently university students, making it difficult to draw conclusions about the impact of educational attainment. Similarly, the region has no significant role in our models and this result contrasts with findings from Romagnoli *et al.* (2011), which indicated regional differences in gender attitudes in Italy, with the North generally being more progressive. It is possible that in the context of this specific sample, regional influences are less pronounced, or that the attitudes have converged across regions due to broader societal changes in the past decade or so. Having highly religious parents does not necessarily reduce the likelihood of holding progressive views in this con-

text, which contrasts with Caltabiano and Dalla Zuanna (2021) and de Vries *et al.* (2021), who found that strong parental religiosity tends to reinforce traditional gender norms. This finding might reflect a broader generational gap where younger individuals increasingly diverge from their parents' beliefs, even in religious contexts. The parish priest's view shows a positive effect, and this aligns with Giorgi and Palmisano (2020), which discusses the role of religious leaders in either reinforcing or challenging traditional views, while being in a progressive scout group seems to foster a more supportive attitudes towards feminist and LGBTQI+ issues, but again, both effects do not reach statistical significance.

In general, the lack of statistical significance may be due to the small sample size, which limits the power of the analysis to detect meaningful effects. Nevertheless, the concept of «devoted resistance» from Zion-Waldocks (2018) seems useful to explain these findings, as individuals in these contexts may still navigate the tension between progressive group influences and traditional community values, leading to mixed outcomes.

9. CONCLUSIONS

In an increasingly secularized society, younger generations navigate their identities, ever more prioritizing progressive values and striving to create environments that foster equality and acceptance. This leads them to often reject conservative norms and advocate for equality, reflecting their commitment to social justice and inclusivity. Our research demonstrates the Scout movement is no exception to this regard. Our respondents express more progressive views on feminist and LGBTQI+ issues compared to their parents and the broader societal context. This generational shift highlights a growing intolerance toward rigid gender norms and traditional expectations. Indeed, such finding is even more interesting as it refers to a Catholic activist group, whose adherence to the Catholic doctrine (officially against adoption, same-sex marriage and other LGBTQI+ movements' claims; Garbagnoli and Prearo 2018) would be expected to be stronger than that of the broader "cultural catholic" young population (Garelli and Ricucci 2023) and whose education tends to reinforce traditional gender roles (Caltabiano and Dalla Zuanna 2021). Some interesting trends emerge. While girls, influenced by online feminism and more inclusive discourses, are more open to addressing these topics, boys feel less comfortable challenging longstanding norms around gender segregation and sexuality. In a four categories typology of catholic young activists

based on their attitudes toward feminism and LGBTQI+ rights, girls are more likely to be classified as Secularized or Devoted resistant than their male counterparts, who are more likely to be Doctrinal or Detached. Our analysis, on the likelihood to embrace feminist and LGBTQI+ values, emphasizes some important factors influencing openness to these positions. Gender remains a significant predictor, with women more likely to support these values, reflecting broader trends of engagement with feminist ideals seen in the literature. The role of contextual influences, such as the views of the parish priest and scout group shows a positive trend, and this result serves as an example of how community-based organizations can foster or hinder progressive attitudes, depending on the cultural schema they promote; nonetheless, their full impact requires further exploration to be determined.

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