GENDER ISSUES
IN THE ITALIAN POLITICAL DOMAIN.
ARE WOMAN/MAN MINISTERS EVALUATED
AS DIFFERENT IN TERMS OF EFFECTIVENESS
OF THEIR BEHAVIOR?

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Although women have a growing representation in the Italian political sphere they are still often faced with sexism, borne out of feminine stereotypes, that is naturally not shared by their men colleagues in office. We investigated these stereotypes in the context of recent research on stereotypes toward women leaders. Researchers in this field have made two contrasting claims: (1) that women leaders are forced, to their detriment, between acting like either stereotypical women or stereotypical leaders, and (2) that women leaders are subject to stereotypes that largely do not overlap with stereotypes of women and leaders. We analyzed numeric and textual data on the perceived effectiveness of, and sexism toward, Italian man and woman ministers who were presented as being either gender stereotypic or counter-stereotypic. Our results were partially consistent with both claims and suggest a future in which Italian politicians will not be rigidly bound to gender stereotypes.

Keywords: Sexism; Politics; Gender roles; Italy; Lay attitudes.

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The political domain is generally considered to be masculine, creating a gender gap that penalizes the presence of women. This kind of penalization is strongly supported by gender role congruity theory, which comments on the incongruity between characteristics of leaders and those of women (Eagly & Diekman, 2006; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly & Wood, 2012; Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie, & Reichard, 2008). This article focuses on the way in which Italians assesses the efficacy of a man or a woman in a hypothetical high political office in conditions that either conform to, or violate, gender role congruity. We also assessed the perceptions of high political office held either by a man or a woman and the sexism in attitudes and language toward persons that deviate from, or accept, gender prescriptions.

INTRODUCTION

In 2017 the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), an autonomous agency of the European Union, published the most recent gender equality index, covering the 28 European Union countries (EU-

28) from 2005 to 2015. It takes into account six different domains (labor, money, knowledge, time, power, and health), with a value between 1 (absolute gender disparity) and 100 (full gender equality). The report shows an average index that from 2005 to 2015 increased by just over 4 points, from 62.0 to 66.2 (EIGE, 2017). As noted in the report "in the last ten years, almost all of the Member States have moved into the direction of becoming more gender equal." In this process Italy had the most improvement, rising from the 26th position to 14th. However, despite this great improvement, the country still remains below the European average, reaching the score of 62.1 in 2015.

Italy has shown clear improvement in the subdomain dedicated to political power (i.e., comprising share of ministers, of members of parliament, and of regional assemblies). Thus in the political subdomain, Italy rose from 23.5 points in 2005 to 47.4 in 2015; the EU averages were 43.8 in 2005 and 52.7 in 2015. In 2015, women made up 27.2% of ministers and 30.2% of members of parliament; in both cases higher than the EU-28 average. However, only 17.3% of members of regional assemblies were women — more than ten points lower than EU-28 general percentage. The trend is also confirmed by the World Economic Forum: in the 2017 Global Gender Gap Report (WEF-GGGR, 2017) Italy is ranked 82nd of 144 countries in gender equality. In the political empowerment sub-index (formed by percentage of women in parliament and in the ministries) Italy is 46th. This is Italy's highest ranking among the four sub-indexes considered by the report.

These data refer to a reality in which Italian politics, despite being a predominantly masculine universe, shows an increase in the feminine presence in parliament. In 2015, Italy reached the "critical mass"[1] (30%) and consequentially women are less peripheral in this domain. This positive trend is also confirmed by the most recent election (4 March 2018) in which 36% of elected parliamentarians were women. Although no woman in Italy has ever held the positions of Head of State or Head of Government, three women have previously served as the head of the lower house of the Parliament and a woman was recently elected as the President of the Senate. Despite this significant progress, the Italian political arena remains dominated by men, and this gap can be at least partially explained by the continued prevalence of gender stereotypes that penalize women politicians (Francescato & Mebane, 2011). Consequently, studying how women are perceived when they follow — or break — gender stereotypes is a pressing issue in the Italian political scene.

An important goal of the social sciences is to understand what actions can overcome this situation that penalizes women. A first possible action concerns the change of representations of women politicians in the media. The Inter-Parliamentary Union[2] (IPU) stated that the media is one of the more efficient ways through which to fight the stereotypes and prejudices that has made the entry of women in politics more difficult (Sensales & Areni, 2017). In fact, research has shown how, for example, the Italian press spreads representations that obscure the feminine contribution in the political sphere (Sensales & Areni, 2017; Sensales, Areni, & Dal Secco, 2012; 2013; 2016a; 2016b). Through a strategic use of language, the Italian press contributes to a collective imagination that sees politics as androcentrically oriented. This is the case of the over-utilization of the generic masculine in indicating specific political positions held by women. As a Romance language, Italian uses feminine and masculine declensions of words. In many cases, the masculine form is also applied to women, as for prestigious offices generally covered by men. For these offices there is only the masculine declension (i.e., the generic masculine), while the feminine form often requires a neologism, a new word that at first appears unusual. In politics, for example, the office of "sindaco" (man mayor) and "ministro" (man minister) has only recently appeared with a certain frequency in its feminine declension: "sindaca" and "ministra." This declension is often used in a derisive sarcastic context. Alt-

hough it appears to be a linguistic sanitization (Ng, 2007), in reality it is a sexist formulation (Sensales, Areni, & Baldner, 2018).

Concerning stereotypical representations of women politicians in Italian newspapers, two different investigations were conducted by Sensales, Areni, and Dal Secco (2012, 2013). On one hand, the results showed recursive references to the private sphere and to the body, in line with gender stereotypes verified by international literature (Aday & Devitt, 2001; Braden, 1996; Carlin & Winfrey, 2009; Kittilson & Fridkin, 2008). On the other hand, it also showed unexpected and highly counter-stereotypical referrals to competence and decision making, both of which are linked to the agentic dimension. Other stereotypical traits, such as tendency to dialogue, display of emotion, and attention to social and care activities were less present. These results about the coexistence of stereotypical and counter-stereotypical media representations reflect the problematicity of gender identity for women politicians: they can be perceived through the lens of both stereotypes of women and through stereotypes of politicians.

Research over the past decades in the psychology, political science, and gender studies literatures have investigated how women are evaluated when they take on stereotypically masculine roles (e.g., politics, management). This moves into a second possible way to understand how women are effected by stereotypes: beyond the stereotypic portrayals that are disseminated by the media, these women could be placed into a double-bind, whereby they are open to attack for violating either stereotypes of women or stereotypes of leaders. However, this is not a universal view, and other researchers have argued that women who take on at least some stereotypically masculine roles are treated differently than women as a whole. In order to focus our attention on a reasonable amount of literature, we will focus on three theories. We will first consider gender role congruity theory (see Eagly & Wood, 2012), which argues that women face the double-bind of being forced to adopt, to their detriment, either feminine or masculine characteristics. As an alternate point of view, we will also consider the subtyping (Schneider & Bos, 2014, 2016) and ladies-not-leaders (Brooks, 2013) theories, both of which argue that women, in at least some stereotypically masculine roles, are not perceived through typical stereotypes of women.

Consistent with the role congruity theory of Eagly and Wood (2012), a wide variety of studies suggest a sort of collision between political and gender role prescriptions (for gender role congruity, see Eagly & Karau, 2002; Johnson et al., 2008; see also Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011; Power & Berardone, 1998; Wood & Eagly, 2010; 2012), even with recent slight improvements in the representation of women in leadership roles (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). Thus, beyond mass media representations, women politicians must decide whether to adopt either masculine characteristics (agentic), typical of leadership roles, or to maintain feminine ones (communal).

Women leaders — including politicians — can adhere to gender counter-stereotypical characteristics and behaviors (agentic), but for that they can pay a price. For instance, women leaders were evaluated less favorably than their men counterparts, especially when they acted in a directive manner — that is, with more agency (Eagly & Wood, 2012). In experimental research, Heilman, Block, and Martell (1995) found that women described as successful managers were rated as more hostile than men described as such; these women are susceptible to be labeled as an "ice queen" and other similar epithets (see Tannen, 1994). Similarly, Baldner and Pierro (2019) argued that women managers faced backlash, derived from the mismatch between stereotypes of women and stereotypes of leaders, among individuals who desire stable knowledge and who adhere to traditional cultural principles; this pattern was observed even among women and political leftists, even though these groups were generally supportive of women managers. Similar issues seem to exist in the political sphere: as Dolan (2014) pointed out, women political candidates have been chal-

lenged on their ability, as an elected official, to also be a good mother — but also on their ability, as a single mother, to be a caring politician.

As a result, women leaders, according to this theory, are put into a double bind dilemma: if they adopt masculine characteristics they can be punished for being insufficiently feminine; if they adopt feminine ones they can be punished for being insufficiently leader-like (Elsesser, 2016; Elsesser & Lever, 2011). This dilemma is not shared by men leaders; women leaders move as a minority group that conforms to the majority by violating the congruent gender role, thus facing social sanctions — even if they have become less strong over time (Eagly & Diekman, 2006).

Other scholars dissent from this point of view, arguing that women politicians are framed more as leaders than as women and for that they are not necessarily sanctioned when they act in a counter-stereotypical way. This is the case of the "leaders-not ladies" theory formulated by Brooks (2013) on the basis of several experimental studies. Brooks proposed that women's progresses have begun to minimize gender stereotypes in the political sphere, even if double-binds exist in other domains (e.g., management). For instance, she found experimental evidence that women politicians who displayed toughness, relative to men politicians perceived to be tough, were not perceived to be less appropriate for political office. She argued that women politicians are not penalized at the ballot box when they seek high political office; they can be sanctioned when they display inappropriate behavior, but that they are not disproportionately sanctioned relative to men. Consistent with this theory, Dolan (2014) found that, even if negative women stereotypes exist, there are cases in which women candidates who adopted stereotypical masculine traits could be supported by voters (see Dolan, 2014 and Table 3). However, the strongest predictor of willingness to vote for a woman candidate was party affiliation: individuals were willing to vote for women at least provided that they were their party's candidate. Similar, Devroe and Wauters (2018) observed only slight differences between men and women politicians in competence in a range of issues — including stereotypically masculine domains, such as defense — even if women were perceived to be further to the left.

Schneider and Bos (2014), using a similar perspective, formulated the subtyping theory. A *subtype* is a group, drawn from a superordinate group, which has stereotypes that overlap relatively little with those of the larger group; this is contrasted with a *subgroup*, or a group whose stereotypes largely overlap with those of the superordinate group. The two researchers demonstrated that women politicians are considered as part of a subtype drawn from women. There are many subtypes of women, among them women politicians, women professionals, and women managers. As members of a subtype, women politicians are not effected by the same stereotypes as are women as a whole. Unfortunately, Scheider and Bos found that women politicians, unlike other women subtypes, were judged to have fewer feminine traits (e.g., sensitivity, compassion) than women as a whole. Although women politicians assume some masculine agentic qualities and behaviors, they were judged to have fewer leader traits (e.g., competence) than men politicians. Conversely, men politicians are considered as part of the masculine subgroup, as they share many stereotypical traits as men as a whole.

We have some indications that there are similar cases in the Italian political arena. Sensales, Areni, and Giuliano (2017a, 2017b) have shown that political communication performed by Italian parliamentarians only partially reproduces gender stereotypes and asymmetries that are present in society. For example, recent parliamentary speeches illustrate a trend toward more nuanced gender linguistic differentiations that dispute the idea of basically different linguistic styles for women and men. If this type of process is confined to the political elite, or its impact on perceptions of women politicians among potential voters, are open questions that we will try to answer with the present study.

Moving beyond the modes in which the media can disseminate stereotypes, and in which individuals could perceive women who act counter-stereotypically, there is a third possible way in which women politicians could be effected by stereotypes. Individuals who hold different forms of sexist attitudes could be more sensitive to violations of gender norms. According to the theory of ambivalent sexism (Glick & Fisk, 1996, 1999), sexism can be thought of as either hostile or benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism represents the traditional form of sexism in which women and men can be disliked when they violate gender stereotypes. Benevolent sexism instead represents a superficially positive form of sexism in which men and women are approved of — as long as they maintain their gender stereotype. Hostile and benevolent sexism tend to be correlated, in that individuals who disapprove of nontraditional men and women tend also to approve of traditional men and women; both help maintain traditional gender roles (Glick et al., 2004) Based on this theory, it is possible that participants' benevolent sexism could positively correlate with perceived effectiveness of politicians who conform to gender stereotypes, but negatively correlate with perceived effectiveness of politicians who violate these stereotypes.

Although men politicians do not face approbation from taking on leadership roles, there is some evidence that they are associated with increased levels of empathy and decreased levels of toughness — both of which are stereotypically characteristic of women (Schneider & Bos, 2014). Men, like women, can be judged as less effective when they violate gender norms — for instance, they can be perceived to be less deserving of respect (Eagly & Wood, 2012). However, men politicians who embrace some stereotypical feminine attributes and conduct (e.g., empathy) can create a sort of feminization of politics. At the other hand, women who adopt stereotypical masculine attributes and conduct (e.g., toughness) could help acclimate individuals to different subtypes of women — if this has not already largely occurred (e.g., Brooks, 2013). Based on this double process, we can think of the political domain as an ideal field for hybridization dynamics that go beyond gender stereotypes, generating new androgynous identities (Koenig et al., 2011). In order to investigate this possibility, it is important to assess perceptions of both men and women politicians who act either stereotypically or counter-stereotypically.

Our survey data is framed in the tradition of social representations (SR) that, through a model of theoretical triangulation (see Figure 1), can preserve the complexity of the object under observation (Flick, Foster, & Caillaud, 2015). The SR theory has developed a strong interest in language, communication, and gender, starting from the pioneering work of Kruse, Weimer, and Wagner (1988) to arrive to the more recent contributions overviewed by Sensales et al. (2018). Within the SR tradition, we studied the impact of specific linguistic categories on the evaluation of political effectiveness on free associations to the stimulus-words "man minister" and "woman minister." We also assessed the association between perceived political effectiveness on ambivalent sexism toward men and women in gender stereotypical and counter-stereotypical conditions.

Particularly, we will explore the assessment of efficacy in stereotypical versus counter-stereotypical behavior for both a man and a woman politician. For the woman leader, stereotypical behavior consists of working collaboratively with subordinates whereas counter-stereotypical behavior consists of decisively and directly guiding subordinates; for the man leader, this pattern is reversed. We will also probe if counter-stereotypical behaviors stimulate hostile sexist attitudes when they are enacted by a woman politician due to the persistence of aggressive attitudes toward women who violate gender norms by challenging male power (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001). On the other hand, it could be possible that there will be more benevolent sexist attitudes when the woman politician with her behavior accept traditional gender norms. With this purpose, we will investigate the representations of an abstract man/woman minister acting

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in a stereotypical or counter-stereotypical way, and the eventual interrelation of sexism in language and attitudes with these representations.
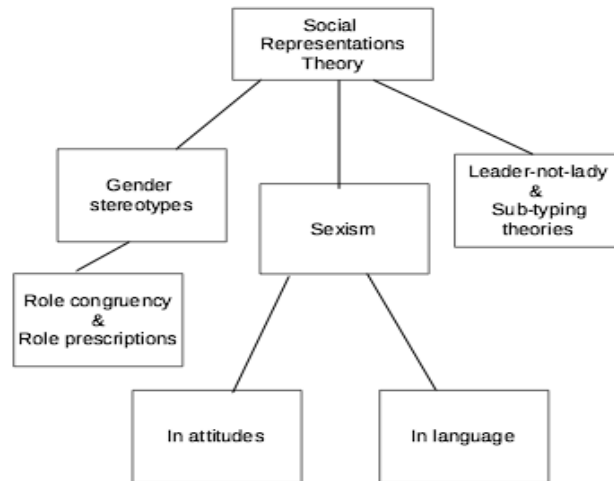

FIGURE 1
Theoretical triangulation model.

Objectives

We assessed our results relative to what would be expected from the gender role congruity theory and the leaders-not-ladies and subtyping theories. According to the former theory, we would expect a higher evaluation of political effectiveness for stereotypical behaviors compared to counter-stereotypical behavior (i.e., collaborative behavior [communal] for the woman minister, and a directive [agentic] behavior for the man minister), and a positive correlation between benevolent sexism toward men and women and evaluation of effectiveness in the stereotypical condition. In the case of counter-stereotypical behavior, we would expect a positive correlation between hostile sexism against men and women and evaluation of effectiveness in counter-stereotypical conditions, as a sign of aggression toward those who challenge gender norms and social roles.

Conversely, according to leader-not-ladies and subtyping theories we would expect a more positive evaluation of the political effectiveness for directive behavior (agentic) for both women and men. In this case, the counter-stereotypical behavior of the woman, and the stereotypical behavior of the man, would be assessed as more effective (Schneider & Bos, 2014, 2016). Consequentially, we hypothesized that there would not be a correlation with hostile and benevolent sexism due to the greater salience of the political identity in respect to the gender identity. Finally, we would expect differences across gender. In fact, according to the literature, the processes under analysis should be more salient for the men participants in the survey (Eagly et al., 2004; Hort, Fagot, & Leinback, 1990), relative to women participants.

Via a free-associations task to two stimuli, "man minister" and "woman minister," we will also explore 1) participants' word choices in order to verify the possible 1a) presence of stereotypical vs. counter-stereotypical associations for the man/woman minister; 1b) salience of a gender identity attributed to the man/woman minister; and 1c) production of sexist associations for the woman minister. We will also individuate 2) typical lexical clusters related to 2a) the assessment of effectiveness (three levels: low-

medium-high), the gender of minister (woman/man), and within the stereotypical/counter-stereotypical condition. The model of data triangulation, related to statistical elaborations with SPAD-T (Lébart, Morineau, & Bécue, 1989) is presented in Figure 2.
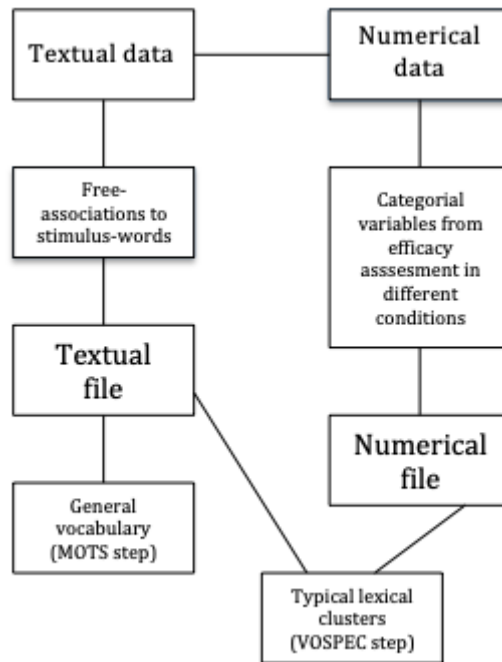

FIGURE 2
Model of data triangulation.

Note. In the model, textual and extra-textual work together. Textual data refer to the association task and are transferred into a textual file for elaboration with the MOTS ("Words") step. The MOTS step shows the general associative vocabulary. The extra-textual data refer to categorical variables related to the efficacy assessment attributed to woman/man minster in stereotypical/counter-stereotypical conditions. These categorical variables compose the numerical file that interacts with the textual file for the formation of typical lexical clusters.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

In 2016 a group of 830 Italian citizens (55.3% women; M_{age} = 29.8, SD_{age} = 12.25) voluntary participated in the survey. In 66.9% of cases they were students of different majors of Sapienza University of Rome. The remaining 33.1% were Roman residents between the ages of 18 and 63. The sample was approximately balanced by gender (55.3% women). A plurality of our participants (48.7%) indicated a left or center-left political orientation; 28.6% of our participants indicated a center political orientation; 22.7% of our participants indicated a right or center-right political orientation.

Materials

Effectiveness. We developed a questionnaire specifically for the survey. The questionnaire was opened with a statement affirming that the survey concerned how individuals represented the activity of political figures, as well as attitudes toward some significant social issues. We initially asked participants

to evaluate the high/low effectiveness of a hypothetical man/woman minister, in two different conditions characterized by stereotypical (man: agentic; woman: cooperative) or counter-stereotypical (man: cooperative; woman: agentic) behaviors. Each participant expressed his/her evaluation for only one of the conditions. Below is the template that allowed us to study the evaluation of effectiveness: "The woman (man) minister is very direct and decisive (very collaborative and cooperative) with people of her (his) staff to find a solution for the important problems of her (his) ministry." The request for assessment of effectiveness (on a scale from 0 to 5) for the man/woman minister in the stereotypical and counter-stereotypical condition was worded as follows: "How effective do you feel is the behavior of the man/woman minister in finding a solution to the important problems of his/her ministry?"

Ambivalent sexism. Hostile and benevolent sexism toward women were assessed with the 22-item Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fisk, 1996). The ASI consists of two 11-item scales for hostile (e.g., "Many women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking for 'equality'") and benevolent sexism (e.g., "Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility"). Each item was responded to on a likert-scale from 0 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). A factor analysis of the ASI confirmed the two-factor structure. We observed factors for hostile sexism (31.8% of variance; α = .89) and benevolent sexism (14.9% of variance; α = .86).

Hostile and benevolent sexism toward men were assessed with the 20-item Ambivalence toward Men Inventory (AMI; Glick & Fisk, 1999). The AMI consists of two 10-item scales for hostility toward men (e.g., "When men act to 'help' women, they are often trying to prove that they are better than women") and benevolence toward men (e.g., "Men are less likely to fall apart in emergencies than women are"). Each item was responded to on a likert-scale from 0 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). A factor analysis of the AMI confirmed the two-factor structure. We observed factors for hostility toward men (34.6% of variance; α = .89) and benevolence toward men (13.8% of variance; α = .85).

Free associations. With the help of an associative task, we also studied the deeper aspects of the representations by asking participants to freely associate the first three words that came to his/her mind for the two stimuli: man minister and woman minister.

Data Analysis

We tested our hypotheses through analyses of both numerical and textual data; in the following subsections we will summarize our analytic techniques in both areas.

Numerical Data

We first analyzed a 2 (gender of minister) × 2 (stereotypical/counter-stereotypical behavior) × 2 (gender of participant) ANOVA in order to assess evaluations of effectiveness across condition and gender. Post-hoc comparisons were conducted with the Student's *t*-test with the least significant difference. We also assessed bivariate correlations between each index of sexism (i.e., hostile and benevolent) and the perceived effectiveness of the woman minister.

Textual Data

We used various methods to analyze participants' free associations to the stimulus words "man minister" and "woman minister." We first used the MOTS step in the SPAD-T statistical package (Lébart et al., 1989). This method analyzes the frequency distribution of words in large text documents; we used this program in order to assess the frequency of free associations to the stimuli words, including free associations that were elicited by both stimuli. In order to visually demonstrate these results, we created a words cloud for each stimulus: this method displays more frequently occurring words in larger text. We then used the SPAD-T VOSPEC (Specific Vocabulary) step in order to highlight differences in the free associations to the stimuli across both the stereotypical and counter-stereotypical conditions and across perceived effectiveness.

RESULTS

Numerical Data

With respect to the assessment of effectiveness, we used a between-subjects design with four conditions that varied by stereotypical/counter-stereotypical behavior and by gender of the minister. Each of the participants evaluated the behavioral effectiveness only for one of the four conditions. To verify the hypothesis that political effectiveness is evaluated differently for each condition and/or for the gender of the respondents, we have applied a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ ANOVA model: man/woman minister $\times$ stereotypical/counter-stereotypical behavior $\times$ masculine/feminine gender of interviewees.

The ANOVA model showed a significant first-order interaction in the assessment of effectiveness between gender of minister condition and stereotypical counter-stereotypical condition, $F(1, 829) = 5.36$, $p < .05$), while the gender of the participants in the survey played no role. The results are illustrated in Figure 3.
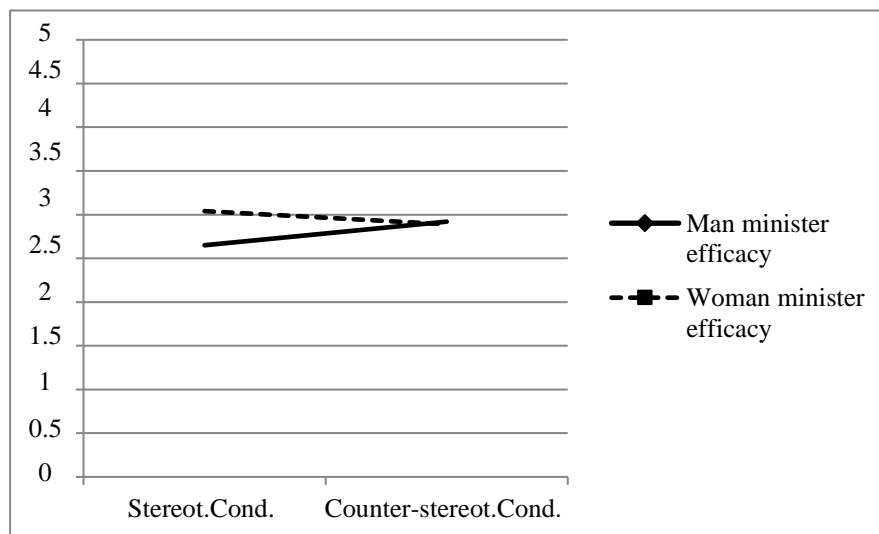

FIGURE 3
Interaction between the minister's gender and evaluation of the eeffectivenesss of his/her stereotypical/counter-stereotypical behavior.

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The post-hoc comparison, with the Student's *t*-test (least significant mean difference method), showed that the man minister was assessed as more effective in the counter-stereotypic behavior condition ($M = 2.92$) than in the stereotypical condition ($M = 2.65$), $p < .05$, whereas the woman minister was evaluated as more effective with stereotypical behavior ($M = 3.04$), compared to the man minister in the same condition ($M = 2.65$), $p < .01$. The results show that both the man and woman ministers were more positively evaluated when they collaborated with their subordinates instead of directly guiding them. In this way, the congruence of the gender role intervenes only in the high evaluations of the effectiveness of the woman minister with stereotypical behaviors, with respect to the man minister with stereotypical behaviors. On the contrary, the man minister is considered more effective in the counter-stereotypical condition, that is, in the violation of gender stereotypes also if this evaluation is lower in respect of the woman in the stereotypical condition. Finally, the correlations between effectiveness and hostile sexism ($r = -.036$, $p = .29$) and benevolent sexism ($r = .06$, $p = .08$) toward women were not significant.

Textual data

MOTS Step

With the MOTS step of SPAD-T statistical package (Lébart et al., 1989) we have obtained the general vocabulary of the free associations to the two stimulus-words[3]: man minister and woman minister. Textual data show a total of 4,748 free associations of which 1,709 were different (36%). The associations to the man and woman minister were approximately balanced.

Table 1 shows the most frequent associations (frequency ≥ 20) for each of the two stimulus words, as well as the identical associations that individual participants gave for both the man and woman minister. The high salience of gender identity is pointed out with the association of "man" and "woman" for the man and woman minister, respectively.[1] In this case, the association of "woman" for the woman minister was almost twice as frequent as the association of "man" for the man minister. The greater presence of figurative processes, an index of cognitive simplification, for feminine stimuli is present — with referrals to Boschi (woman minister of the 2014 centre-left Renzi Government) and Gelmini (woman minister of the 2008 centre-right Berlusconi government) — compared to the homologous masculine stimulus — which only sees the association to Alfano (man minister of the past 2008 centre-right Berlusconi Government and of more recent 2013 centre-left Letta Government). The references to gender stereotypes and the institutional domain are more evident for the associations toward the man versus the woman minister with the associations "politics/power/government/ministry/responsibility/politician/state." For the woman minister, the only association to the institutional domain is to "education," referring to a stereotypical field. For the man minister, the counter-stereotypical associations are very few and with very low frequencies (< 20), while for the woman minister there is the counter-stereotypical association "power," linked to the agentic dimension. With regards to linguistic sexism, there is the association "soup"[4] for the woman minister, which denounces, at the unconscious level, a sexist bias in response to a still partly unusual grammatical form. Finally, only the masculine declension of the office induces openly negative associations — "corruption/money/thief" — while, for both man and woman ministers, these associations show very low frequencies, with the exception of the association "money."

TABLE 1
Most frequent associations to the two stimulus-words (frequency ≥ 20)

Man minister	Freq.	Woman minister	Freq.	Both*	Freq.
Man [*uomo*]	113	Woman [*donna*]	204	Politics [*politica*]	106
Power [*potere*]	73	Boschi ***	47	Power [*potere*]	69
Government [*governo*]	54	Education [*istruzione*]	44	Government [*Governo*]	35
Politics [*politica*]	46	Soup [*minestra*]	43	Ministry [*Ministero*]	31
Corruption [*corruzione*]	34	Politics [*politica*]	40	Responsibility [*responsabilità*]	27
Money [*soldi*]	31	No associations [*nessuna associazione*]	32	Money [*soldi*]	26
Thief [*ladro*]	27	Gelmini****	28	Politician [*politico*]	21
Ministry [*Ministero*]	27	Power [*potere*]	25	State [*Stato*]	20
No associations [*nessuna associazione*]	27				
Alfano**	20				

* Identical associations that respondents produced for both men and women stimuli.
** Angelino Alfano, Interior Man Minister with the Renzi government (2014-2016); political party: NCD (New center-right).
*** Maria Elena Boschi, woman Minister for Constitutional Reforms and Relations with the Parliament with the Renzi government (2014-2016); political party: PD (Democratic party).
**** Mariastella Gelmini, woman Deputy (2014-2016) and Minister of Education in Berlusconi government, 2008; Political party: Forza Italia (Let's go, Italy).

Starting from these results, we continue to comment on the identical associations that respondents produced for both men and women. We can see the reproduction of many of the associations elicited separately for the man minister, which therefore seems to drive associations to the feminine stimulus. In this way, the stimulus woman minister shows the counter-stereotypical orientation "power/responsibility," and institutional references to "politics/government/ministry/state."

With the WordClouds statistical program we have delineated word clouds for each of the three associative conditions that allow us to visualize the different weight of associations based on their frequency. The results, which clearly illustrate the processes presented above, are shown in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4
Word clouds for associations to stimuli words "Man," "Woman,"
and identical associations that respondents produced for both men and women.

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VOSPEC Step

We used the VOSPEC (Specific Vocabulary) step[5] of the SPAD-T statistical package to construct 12 clusters related to the significant results that emerged from the ANOVA model (see Subsection "Numerical Data"). In this way, we explored the associative responses toward the woman and man minister in the stereotypical and counter-stereotypical conditions with a low, medium, or high efficacy assessment. VOSPEC is based on chi-square logic that constructs a large comparison matrix of textual data by individuating those that characterize each group at a level of significance < .05. The association is evaluated as statistically characteristic by comparing the frequency of the association in the group with the global frequency. The significance of the differences is evaluated by comparing the frequency of the association in the group and the theoretical frequency based on the hypothesis of casual distribution in the groups. The output table presents both the frequency of associations in the group, and the frequency of the associations in the entire population, as well as the level of statistical significance of these differences. Here we report the simplified tables where we omitted the information on the global frequency and the level of significance with which the association characterizes the group.

In all cases present in Tables 2 and 3, the significance of the typical associations is < .05. Table 2 shows the results for the efficacy assessment of the woman minister, while Table 3 presents the results for the efficacy assessment of the man minister. Comparing the low efficacy assessment in the stereotypical condition for both the woman (Table 2) and man minister (Table 3), we can see negative associations to the analogous stimulus and ambivalent associations — both negative and positive — for the inverted stimulus. For the associations that respondents produced for both men and women, we observe ambivalent attitudes with a negative word ("corruption") and two descriptive ("to administer" and "rules") for the feminine stimulus, while for the masculine associations there are only negative adjectives. In high efficacy assessment for the stereotypical condition, Table 2 shows positive associations for the stimuli declinated in both the feminine and masculine forms. Table 3 shows that, for the feminine stimulus, associations referred to policies of gender equality and toward the communal domain, while for the masculine stimulus the majority of associations are agentic, as in the case of the identical associations that respondents produced for both men and women.

With respect to the low efficacy assessment in the counter-stereotypical condition, we can see the absence of the similar stimulus both for woman and man minister. In this assessment, the associations to the opposite gender stimulus are ambivalent with positive, negative, and descriptive valences, as in the case of the identical associations that respondents produced for both men and women. Table 2 shows positive associations for all stimulus words in the high efficacy assessment referring to the woman minister. Some of these associations are agentic toward the feminine stimulus, as in the case of the identical associations to both men and women. Table 3, referring to the high efficacy assessment to the man minister in counter-stereotypical condition, shows associations to the woman minister centered on the communal dimension and opposition to the feminine declension of the office. For the man minister stimulus, the associations are ambivalent with references to the stereotypical domain ("power"), to negative aspects ("corruption" and "problems"), and to the aesthetic dimension ("tie"), while for the associations that respondents produced for both men and women there is only one negative word ("problems").

TABLE 2
Typical associations ($p < .05$) to woman minister efficacy assessment in stereotypical versus counter-stereotypical condition
with low-medium-high efficacy assessment

	Stereotypical (collaborative) condition		
	Low efficacy ($n = 64$)	Medium efficacy ($n = 60$)	High efficacy ($n = 83$)
Woman minister stimulus	incompetence-beautiful-chat-careerist [*incompetenza-bella-chiacchere-arrivista*]	Boldrini*-collaboration [*Boldrini-collaborazione*]	efficiency [*efficienza*]
Man minister stimulus	respect-craftiness-interests [*rispetto-furbizia-interessi*]	graduate-Republic [*laureato-Repubblica*]	important-council [*importante-consiglio*]
Woman/man minister stimuli	to administer-corruption-rules [*amministrare-corruzione-regole*]	-	-
	Counter-stereotypical condition		
	Low efficacy ($n = 81$)	Medium efficacy ($n = 55$)	High efficacy ($n = 81$)
Woman minister stimulus	-	unable-charge [*incapace-carica*]	equality-decision [*parità-decisione*]
Man minister stimulus	selfish-man-overbearing-determination-professionalism [*egoista-uomo-prepotente-determinazione-professionalità*]	House-Senate [*Camera-Senato*]	responsibility-effective [*responsabilità-efficace*]
Woman/man minister stimuli	unable-inefficiency-leadership-education [*incapace-inefficienza-leadership-istruzione*]	-	positive adjectives-Parliament-intelligent-office-power-seriousness [*aggettivi positivi-Parlamento-intelligente-carica-potere-serietà*]

* Laura Boldrini, woman President of the Chamber of Deputies, 2013-2017.

TABLE 3

Typical associations ($p < .05$) to man minister efficacy assessment in stereotypical versus counter-stereotypical condition
with low-medium-high efficacy assessment

	Stereotypical condition		
	Low efficacy ($n = 92$)	Medium efficacy ($n = 62$)	High efficacy ($n = 58$)
Woman minister stimulus	Negative adjectives-Gelmini*-determination-Lorenzin**-respect [*aggettivi negativi-Gelmini-determinazione-Lorenzin-rispetto*]	power-prepared [*potere-preparata*]	equal opportunity-sensitivity [*pari opportunità-sensibilità*]
Man minister stimulus	liar [*bugiardo*]	competence-disinterest-health-work-decisions [*competenza-disinteresse-salute-lavoro-decisioni*]	power-leadership-secretary-determination-coherence-money-man minister [*potere-leadership-segretario-determinazione-coerenza-denaro-ministro*]
Woman/man minister stimuli	negative adjectives [*aggettivi negativi*]	capacity-decision [*capacità-decisione*]	-
	Counter-Stereotypical condition		
	Low efficacy ($n = 69$)	Medium efficacy ($n = 52$)	High efficacy ($n = 73$)
Woman minister stimulus	cultural heritage-negative adjectives [*beni culturali-aggettivi negativi*]	woman-Decree-important [*donna-decreto-importante*]	seriousness-rights-do not like in feminine declension-family [*serietà-diritti-non piace nella declinazione femminile-famiglia*]
Man minister stimulus	-	old-male [*vecchio-maschio*]	culture-corruption-tie-power-problems-Brunetta*** [*cultura-corruzione-cravatta-potere-problemi-Brunetta*]
Woman/man minister stimuli	-	-	problems [*problemi*]

* Maria Stella Gelmini, woman deputy (2014-2016) and Minister of Education in Berlusconi government, 2008; political party: Forza Italia (Let's go, Italy).
** Beatrice Lorenzin, woman Minister of Health in Renzi and Gentiloni governments, 2014-2017.
*** Renato Brunetta, man deputy (2014-2016) and Minister for Public Administration and Innovation in Berlusconi government, 2008.

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DISCUSSION

The results of our survey show a complex framework in which new attitudes and representations, free from gender role prescriptions, coexist with more traditional attitudes and representations. These findings only apparently confirm gendered biased processes that seem to penalize women politicians that adopt masculine behaviors. Instead, we propose an interpretation that embraces some aspects of gender role congruency theory and some aspects of leader-not-ladies and subtyping theories. In fact, our results demonstrate a representational reality in which free associations, extremely negative toward the man minister, offer a possible reading for the discrepant results between explicit measures (effectiveness evaluation on Likert-type scales) and implicit measures (free associations).

In the case of explicit measures, our participants reward collaborative behavior for both the man (counter-stereotypical condition) and the woman minister (stereotypical condition). In the free associations for the man minister there are words that are predominantly agentic and linked to political institutions. These words are accompanied by very negative evaluations about the role of politics and the way that men cover the political office. This negative attitude, which emerges from the associative universe, can push our respondents to positively consider a different way of doing politics that censures the agentic dynamics of power, directing attention to those communal aspects that are able to promote politics closer to citizens. In this way, man, the protagonist of political life, becomes the object of a critical reaction from the political crisis that in Italy, as in many other Western countries, is accused of being more and more self-referential, corrupt, and far from the needs of citizens, resulting in the populist wave. In contrast, the characteristics of women, more focused on dialogue and the promotion of the common good, are perceived as the possible antidote to remove politics from this impasse. If this interpretation is correct, then the high evaluation of the effectiveness of the communal behavior of the ministers, both man and woman, can emancipate politics, bypassing, if necessary, gender roles.

Our data tell us about the contradiction inherent in this process. For example, the counter-stereotypical associations to the man minister are almost completely absent showing how, at a subliminal level, it is more problematic to embrace these associations because of the power relationships that make stereotypes based on masculine identity particularly robust and stable, as already stated by Diekman and Eagly (2000). On the contrary for the woman minister, there are both stereotypical and counter-stereotypical associations, prevalently linked to the institutional dimension, that almost entirely lack negative terms. In this case, the associations show hybridization processes intersecting gender identity and political identity, in which the traditional gender boundaries — unfavorable to women — are overcome according to a trend already discussed in the scientific literature in reference to the androgynous concept (Koenig et al., 2011). Another observation about the free associations concerns the centrality of gender identity, stronger for the woman minister than for the man minister. This result shows not only that for our participants, at a subliminal level, the gender discourse is more salient than political discourse, but also that this salience is attributed more to women than to men (with almost double of frequencies for the association "woman" compared to "man"), contrary to what was found by Schneider and Bos (2014).

The identical associations that respondents produced for both men and women show a different process that highlights the attractive force of an androcentric interpretation of politics. These associations are clearly anchored to masculine stereotypical dimensions that at a subliminal level appear to be pervasive. Concerning the feminine declension of political offices, its novelty and relative rarity can be the basis of the only sexist association with a high frequency. The word "soup" [minestra] as a response to the woman minister stimulus can in fact be interpreted as a symptom of a sexist attitude that leads to mocking a still

unusual feminine declension of a political office. The same novelty can explain the greater figurative processes for the woman (vs. the man) minister, implicated in the broad evocation of actual women political leaders. In this way, the novelty of the declension can stimulate a counter-balancing toward a most possible concrete associative response.

Regarding then the 12 typical associative clusters, related to the woman and man minister in the stereotypical and counter-stereotypical conditions with low, medium, high efficacy assessment, here we have only discussed those that emerged as significantly different in the ANOVA model. We will first focus on the comparison between the two clusters related to the man minister with high efficacy assessment in the stereotypical versus counter-stereotypical behavior conditions, and then on the comparison between the two clusters related to the woman and man minister with a high efficacy assessment in the stereotypical condition. The associative patterns of the first two subgroups show very distinctive trends. In the case of participants with a high efficacy assessment toward the man minister with stereotypical behavior, there are two types of associative responses to the woman minister stimulus: one covering a stereotypical field (sensitivity), the other covering egalitarian policies (equal opportunity). To the man minister stimulus, the associative answers adhere to the masculine agentic stereotypes, as in the case of the identical associations that respondents produced for both men and women. Concerning the negative valence of the associations there is only the reference to money for the man minister stimulus. In the case of participants with high efficacy assessment for the man minister in counter-stereotypical behavior the picture is more complex, showing ambivalent references as a possible signal of an associative imbalance with aggressive verbal behaviors, caused by derogation from role prescription. Thus, for the woman minister stimulus, there is a call to a stereotypical communal field ("family"), but also to linguistic sexism (with the opposition to feminine declension of the office), and only one recall to abstract rights. This ambivalence is more evident for the man minister stimulus, for which there is one stereotypical associative answer ("power"), two counter-stereotypical ("culture" and "tie"), and two associations with negative valence ("corruption" and "problems"). In this subgroup, the figurative association to a center-right leader (Brunetta) can be interpreted as a simplified defensive response to the counter-stereotypical condition, not very widespread and thus counter-balanced with the reference to a concrete man politician of an ideological conservative area, more adherent to gender stereotypes (Hershey & Sullivan, 1977). The negativity present for the man minister stimulus is extended also for the identical associations that respondents produced for both men and women with the word "problems."

Comparing the second pairs of subgroups in which the woman and man are assessed to be more effective in stereotypic behavior, we can see very few associations in the high efficacy assessment of the woman minister in the stereotypical condition. For the woman minister stimulus there is only one association that valorizes the woman in a counter-stereotypical positive dimension ("efficiency"), while for the man minister there is one positive adjective ("important") and another ambiguous ("council," which in Italian can also refer to an advice to prefer masculine declension). For the man minister subgroup with high efficacy assessment in the stereotypical condition we have already seen that the associative production is more articulated. As for the identical associations that respondents produced for both men and women ministers, our participants present only stereotypical association evoking for the woman the importance to incentivize the feminine presence in the political domain. In this last case the recall to the stereotypical feminine educational field can stimulate a sort of benevolent attitude underlined by the evocation of "equal opportunity" to protect the feminine presence in politics for those women accepting traditional power relationships (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Sibley & Wilson, 2004). Finally, as regards the ASI and AMI scales, no correlations were found between the subscales and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the man/woman

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minister's behavior. In this case we can refer to the salience of the politics for which there has not been the activation of sexist attitudes, through the request for assessment of the effectiveness for a stereotypical/counter-stereotypical behavior of a man/woman minister. The prevalence of a political identity capable of responding to requests to renovate politics has forced gender identity to a less important position, going beyond it. In this way, the congruence of the role is assessed in relation to politics, making sexist attitudes irrelevant, disconnected from the attitudes toward both the minister office and from gender roles prescriptions.

CONCLUSIONS

There are three results which are particularly interesting and which could form the basis for Italian politics in the future. First, gender identity was most salient for women politicians; second, highly effective women were perceived as both communal (stereotypic) and agentic (counter-stereotypic), whereas highly effective men were most commonly perceived as communal (counter-stereotypic); third, collaborative behavior — stereotypical for the woman minister and counter-stereotypical for the man minister — was rated as most effective by our participants — that is, by potential voters. This could speak to a "hybridization" of the Italian political sphere. Women politicians could be perceived to have a range of characteristics without penalty, even if their gender is perceived to be salient, while men politicians could have an incentive to work in a more collaborative, counter-stereotypic, fashion. If this is the case, in the near future gender identity for women politicians could become less salient while men politicians could be more likely to act — and to be perceived — as more collaborative.

The study, by our model of theoretical triangulation that privileged an anti-reductionist approach to gender and political identities, permitted us to individuate complex processes intersecting both types of identities. The data triangulation model, using explicit and implicit measures that focus on associative language as the vehicle of more profound aspects of representations, allowed us to point out on the contradictory nature of gender and political identities. In fact, our findings show a reality in which elements of novelty coexist with more traditional aspects, highlighting the importance of the role of feminine characteristics to emancipate the whole political domain. Our participants' representations demonstrate the need for a different consideration of the role of women in politics that defeats resistances in the social and collective imagination. From this point of view social institutions are called to overcome the sexist and stereotypical way in which so far women politicians have been described in order to spread representations capable of stimulating social change. These institutions can utilize the contradictions that our study has highlighted in order to build a common sense emancipated from sexist and androcentric views of politics that ultimately penalize the entire society. The first signals of this process are already present in the Italian press news in which there are representations of women ministers referred both to stereotypical and counter-stereotypical dimensions (Sensales, Areni, & Dal Secco, 2012, 2013). The future will tell us if this news will spread by implementing good practices for the real promotion of non-sexist representations of the women politicians.

These conclusions were possible only through our model of data triangulation; whereas our numerical data, referred to explicit measures (classical Likert scales), can tell us that both men and women ministers are appreciated when they act in a collaborative fashion, our textual data, referred to implicit measures (associative tasks to stimulus-words), can tell us that men are typically perceived not to act in this fashion and, accordingly, that the "masculine" style of politics is less appreciated. It is through combining the numerical and textual data that we can see a more complete picture of gender in Italian politics.

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Limitations and Future Directions

In the face of the wealth of data offered by our study, some limits must also be underlined. A first limit concerns our choice to refer to an abstract political figure, rendering more difficult the efficacy assessment processes. A second limit refers to not having foreseen a model that also studied the possible priming effect of the sexism scales by placing these before the other parts of the questionnaire. Responding to these two limitations has been the goal of two other empirical investigations already implemented and now in the phase of elaboration of the data. The first investigation was realized in 2017 ($n = 660$) with a similar questionnaire that had the ASI and the AMI scale before, rather than after, the efficacy assessment and the two free associations task. The second investigation, realized in 2018 ($n = 1,074$), in the course of the Italian political electoral campaign, explored the representations of Maria Elena Boschi, a woman leader of the center-left, a controversial politician due to her involvement in a political scandal. We explored the role of sexist attitudes and the more general representations of this leader, studied through four questions/stimuli: one on the evaluation of effectiveness of her work when she was minister in the Renzi government (2014), another on the assessment of opportunities for resignation from the position held in the Gentiloni government (2016) following a scandal, and two associative tasks to the stimuli "politics" and her last political role "under-secretary" (changed according to nine configurations/declensions of sexism/non-sexism/neutrality of the stimulus "under-secretary"). In this way we will further the literature on the role of sexism in language and attitudes and how they can differentially modulate the representations of a concrete political personality accused of violating the role prescriptions of both gender and politics.

Finally, in two future surveys we will use the same questionnaire presented here. The first survey will be changed only with respect to the evaluation of the minister's work expressed in terms of "goodness" (a term more related to the communal dimension) rather than efficacy (more related to the agency dimension). In this way we will be able to study the relationship between evaluation change and the two stereotypical/counter-stereotypical situations. In a second investigation, we will instead refer to the political figure of a hypothetical man secretary/woman secretary of a generic trade union to see the possible variations that occur in the two declensions of a widely-used term.

NOTES

1. "Critical mass" in political institutions conventionally is defined as 30% involvement of women (see International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Inter-Parliamentary Union, & Stockholm University, 2013).
2. Founded in 1889 IPU is a permanent forum for political multilateral negotiations throughout the world. This international organization monitors also the gender composition of Parliaments around the world.
3. To keep the association reference to the specific stimulus in the construction of the lexical file we have inserted an acronym immediately before the relative association (for example, for the stimulus "Man minister" and the association "power" we have transcribed MMpower).
4. In Italian the words *minestra* (soup) and *ministra* (woman minister) are formally similar because of a small difference in the modification of a single vowel.
5. It is a step based on chi-square logic that constructs a large comparison matrix of textual data by individuating those that characterize each group at a level of significance $\leq .05$. The association is evaluated as statistically characteristic by comparing the frequency of the association in the group with the general frequency. The significance of the differences is evaluated by comparing the frequency of the association in the group and the theoretical frequency based on the hypothesis of casual distribution in the groups.

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