



# The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

## Gender Equality, Mental Health and Gender Mainstreaming Health Policies

Online, 18-19 November 2021

Comments paper – Greece



*The information and views set out in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Commission. Neither the Commission nor any person acting on the Commission's behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.*



*This publication is supported by the European Union Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (2021-2027).*

*This programme is implemented by the European Commission and shall contribute to the further development of an area where equality and the rights of persons, as enshrined in the Treaty, the Charter and international human rights conventions, are promoted and protected.*

*For more information see: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/programmes/cerv>*

# Gender Equality and Mental Health in Greece

Liza Tsaliki

University of Athens

## Abstract:

Policy-making needs to think of ways to uproot the systemic culture of gender asymmetries in which young teenagers are being brought up. In addition, it needs to move beyond pedagogy framed by risk and instead engage with the affordances of social media as identified by young people themselves. However, education that is not informed by a nuanced and interconnected understanding of young people's everyday experiences of sexual well-being, mental health, and social media, is likely to be ineffective and inadequate as it does not resonate with young people's own lives. Instead, education and policy-making could well benefit from academic literature in fandom, cultural, gaming and childhood studies where the notion of participatory culture is prevalent, and where young people are not constructed as innately passive, impressionable, unable to distinguish fiction/representation from reality, or right from wrong, and unquestionably mimicking what they see across various media. If we are to do away with the 'discourses of anxiety' and all kinds of moral panics surrounding children and teenagers and their online cultures and practices, now is the time to start challenging dominant Western constructions of childhood and childhood innocence.

## 1. Country context: Greece

### 1.1 Gender-related effects of extensive consumption of digital- and social media on girls' and boys' mental well-being

#### 1.1.1 Monitoring of digital media usage

The Greek state does not keep a gender-disaggregated record of digital media usage (personal communication with the National Centre of Audiovisual Media and Communication-EKOME, <https://www.ekome.media/who-we-are/>). According to the latest Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) country report, Greece is ranked 27th amidst the 28 EU Member States, as Greeks are considered to lag behind in advanced digital technologies and skills compared to EU average (DESI 2018).

#### 1.1.2 Digital- and social media consumption: it's consequences and patterns

Once again, there are no specific quantitative data on the matter at the level of the Greek polity. However, one of the latest monitoring tools of media literacy amongst teenage schoolchildren in 7 European countries, including Greece, which offers an

evaluation of how young teenagers interact with broadcast and social media, their critical and aesthetic approaches when they receive media messages, the ability for self-expression via technology, and the development of personal independence while using the media (EduMediaTest 2020/2021), shows that teenage girls demonstrate considerably higher media literacy skills compared to boys, consistently across all countries (Executive report for EduMediaTest).

## **1.2 Incorporating a gender perspective in (mental) health policies and gender mainstreaming of health policies in Greece**

Although gender equality, including positive measures in favour of women, is written into the Greek Constitution, (Articles 4, 22, and 116), the first efforts to implement gender mainstreaming in Greece took place in the 2000s, through the General Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE). The Greek approach is characterised by an emphasis on legal matters, with little attention paid to quantitative indicators, and the production of sex-disaggregated data, up until recently, has been quite limited, as was the notion of gender budgeting (EIGE, 2019, country-specific information: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/countries/greece>).

Gender mainstreaming in health-related issues has only recently become directly addressed in Greek legislature, with the introduction of Law No 4604/2019 about 'Promoting Substantive Gender Equality, Preventing and Combating Gender Based Violence'. With Article 3 (par.1) introducing gender 'in all sectors of private and public life and in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural realities of the country', Law No 4604/2019 puts firmly in place gender equality mechanisms at central, regional and local level. Article 10/Law No 4604/2019 is ground-breaking for the Greek context, for it puts in place activities at ministerial level that will integrate gender mainstreaming into public policy-making. In addition, Article 18/ Law No 4604/2019 sets up the legal framework for the introduction and integration of gender mainstreaming in public policy-making on physical and mental health, and promotes a much needed gender-based health research. Of particular importance is paragraph 4/Article18, wherein provisions are made in order for a number of vulnerable groups, (including single-parent households headed by a single mother, abused women, women victims of human trafficking, women refugees and migrants, women from a minority background, teenage mothers, elderly women, women living below the poverty barrier, women released from prison, and women with severe health problems), to have access to services of physical and mental health.

Law No 4808/2021 is also of great national significance for it ratifies Conventions 187 and 190 of the International Labour Organisation for the Promotion of Safety and Health at Work and for the Elimination of Violence and Harassment in the World of Labour, respectively; it also incorporates Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and the Council, on the balance between work and private life, thus helping to alleviate a major source of stress for working women and men (for a detailed account of the work-life dilemma for women, known as 'downshifting', see Parkins 2009; Ross, 2016; Tsaliki 2019; Wilson and Chivers Yochim, 2017).

### 1.3 Examples of good practices

Recent policy measures include the new National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2021-2025), which 'promotes a coherent policy nexus with a horizontal integration of the gender perspective in all sectoral policies and takes into account both the social and economic environment of women, as well as all the particular conditions that came with the pandemic in Greece' (General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality, 2021). The underlying rationale is for an integrated policy approach towards gender equality and a continuous monitoring of actions taken at central, regional and local level. Four thematic Priority Axes have been drawn, each one of which aims at facilitating gender mainstreaming, and all of which are - eventually – related to women's (mental)/health: 1. Preventing and Combating Gender-Based and Domestic Violence and Protecting Women from all Forms of Violence and the Importance of Awareness Raising among Stakeholders and the Greek society. 2. Equal Participation of Women in Decision-Making/Leadership Roles, Aiming to Enable Women and Girls to Participate in Public Affairs and Prepare them for Positions of Responsibility. 3. Equal Participation of Women in the Labour Market to Strengthen Women's Employment and Entrepreneurship and Harmonisation Between Work and Personal Life. 4. Gender Mainstreaming in Sectoral Policies (General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality, 2021).

Health-related gender-mainstreaming within the Greek polity seems to have a strong societal component, as, for example, transpires in the case of women taking refuge in the national network of Women's Safe Centres, many of who involve immigrant and refugee mothers. These Shelters cater to women survivors of any form of Gender Based Violence (such as physical, psychological, sexual and financial violence), regardless of age, nationality and religion. As they also give legal counselling and aid, and facilitate women's access to employment, education, health and welfare agencies, in the process, the Shelters offer invaluable psychological support to women in need (General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality, 2021). In fact, despite the fact that Greece was considered a laggard in gender equality issues (EIGE, 2019), such policy-making has gained the country a 'thumbs 'up' in EIGE's 2021 Annual Report on Gender Equality in the EU, whereby Greece was celebrated for the way it catered for the needs and rights of vulnerable refugee and migrant women (EIGE 2021, p. 15). Similar initiatives that work towards health-related gender mainstreaming include the "Neighbourhood Nannies" project (as part of policy efforts to achieve greater balance between work and family life) (EIGE 2021, p. 34), as well as the national quotas to address gender imbalances in economic decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic (EIGE 2021, p. 37).

Within a similar frame of mind, and following a wave of revelations about sexual harassment in sports and performative arts, and an intense public debate regarding Gender Based Violence in late 2020-early 2021, the Greek authorities launched the <https://metoogreece.gr/> platform in March 2021, with the aim to protect all women/girls and men/boys from domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape, further

cementing the Greek polity's firm take on health-related gender mainstreaming (Eurogender/EIGE 2021).

Within a context of good practice, the General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health, has put in place monitoring mechanisms to evaluate gender-mainstreaming in health-related fields, agencies and services since 2017. Such policy initiatives include: participation of the Secretariat (at the time, 'General Secretariat for Gender Equality') in research led by the University of Maastricht regarding gender-equality in health; a co-ordinated attempt at battling gender stereotyping in health-related public administration and services (linked to physical, reproductive, sexual health and childcare); as well as actions to ensure gender equality in health services (including mental health) for migrant women and women refugees (Annual Progress Report on Gender Equality Policy making in Greece 2017, pp 52-53).

The interest the Greek polity has taken in the way in which biological and sociological factors converge, interact and impact upon the health of the citizenry is evident in the 2013 report of the General Secretariat for Gender Equality (now General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality) on 'Women's and Men's Health in Greece: defining factors of health and of health services use' (General Secretariat for Gender Equality, 2013). The report reflects upon the gender imbalance in the state of health in Greece, which remains an issue despite major improvements in the public health sector overall. Specific mentioning is given to the ongoing and heavy psychological load – linked with depression, stress, anxiety, nervousness, worry, domestic violence, loss of desire for sex, among others – brought about by the austerity crisis, affecting women and disenfranchised groups disproportionately than others. Gender inequalities in the Greek labour market mean that women in Greece face a greater risk of impoverishment compared to men, which, in turn, impacts their mental health further (General Secretariat for Gender Equality, 2013 p. xi).

A WHO report looking at young people's mental health in 12 European countries (World Health Organisation/WHO 2011), including Greece, Sweden and the Czech Republic, states that girls report more mental health issues than boys, and thus argues that adolescent boys are more stable and score higher on self-esteem in relation to girls, who show symptoms of depression and anxiety twice as much as boys (p. 5). What similar accounts lack is a broader, socio-cultural understanding of gender norms and expectations, which, once taken into account, can explain the higher ratio of mental health reporting we see from girls.

To put it differently, we need to realise that girls tend to report more often than boys mental health-related problems as a result of an over-arching culture that 'urges' young girls (more so than boys) to face adversity, take control, report problems and become more 'resilient'. What should not go amiss here is how boys are brought up and socialised within a context of 'manliness', where strength defines a man (thus the boy), and 'weakness' is ridiculed and frowned upon, hence boys tend to under report mental-health issues for Fear of Missing Out on 'manliness' – and the notion that it's now considered 'ok' for men, and boys to cry, is a misconception. Although campaigns for healthier masculinity and greater emotional literacy among men such as White

Ribbon's '[Boys Don't Cry](#)' video in Canada are a step in the right direction, we are still a long way away before eradicating unequal gender stereotyping. Men are silenced by a collective culture that expects them to be 'manly', Alpha, males – hence there's not enough room for self-doubt, helplessness and vulnerability. In Greece, hegemonic masculinity prescribes an equally rigid 'gender framing' for young boys, so no wonder 'male adolescents reported statistically significantly better mental health than adolescent girls' (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2008, in WHO 2011, p. 5).

Still, it's not just teenage boys who tend to under-report incidents of mental health (and come across with 'better mental health' than girls); if we take a historical look at the construction of femininity in modernity, we can account for the way in which teenage girls are almost 'expected' to report mental health problems. Indeed, elsewhere, as I unravel Cynthia Eagle Russett's (1989) rich account of the development of sexual science in the nineteenth century, I provide a mental bridge between present-day perceptions of the impact of sexual content on children and adolescents and the attendant dominance of psychological discourses of media effects, and the Anglo-American male scientific establishment of the later nineteenth century which pathologised female sexuality and constructed women and girls as emotionally vulnerable and in need of protection (Tsaliki 2016, ch.4). In equal measure, present day concerns about the impact of pornography consumption upon young girls resonate 18th century worries about female consumption of the romantic novel (Tsaliki 2016, *ibid*).

## 2. Comparison of the situation in Greece with Sweden and the Czech Republic

As mentioned above, Greece has been working fast and hard to rectify the 'missing' gender dimension in its (mental)health system and services. So, although research on mental health in relation to gender issues within the state administration is limited, as in the case of the Czech Republic, the National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2021-2025) the Greek state has put in place will work towards an integrated policy approach towards gender equality and its continuous monitoring at central, regional and local levels.

The Greek Ministry of Education and Religion introduced a pilot class on sex education in spring 2021 (within a wider framework – a Skills Workshop, where primary and secondary education students will learn Life Skills, including sexual education). At the moment, interested primary and secondary school educators are acquiring certified training on Sex-Ed, run by the Dept of Primary Education at the University of the Aegean. Training axes include: Sex-Ed across Europe (best practice from different European countries); Gender-Sexuality-Society; Corporeality and sexuality in folk fairy tales; Gender identities-Sexuality-Religion; Teenage sexuality; Children's rights and the role of educators in cases of sexual abuse. This is the first time that the Greek state has explicitly addressed sex-ed as part of the curriculum, and although this is a long-awaited development, little is known about what the course will actually entail. In this sense, there is no way, as yet, to determine and evaluate



the way in which gender parity and the variety of sexual and gender identities will be addressed within the Greek school.

One of the good practices mentioned in the Swedish report needs to be singled out. Here, I'm referring to the revised sex-ed Swedish curriculum, which will focus on a more consent- and value-based version of sexual education with an emphasis on discussing norms, values and consensual sex (The Ombudsman for Children in Sweden, 2020). The way in which the curriculum contextualises pornography consumption is interesting, because it seems that it makes room for young people's voices regarding pornographic content and the norms represented in it. What is also of great significance is how previous sex-ed was perceived to be skewed towards heteronormativity and gender dualism, to the exclusion of non-mainstream sexualities, sexual practices and gender identities. This is something really worth pursuing within the Greek context.

Insofar the (mental)health-related public policy-making about online technologies and uses is concerned, the over-arching narrative of child/teenage protection in Greece revolves around **internet and gaming addiction** and is usually treated alongside other kinds of (substance, gambling, etc.) addiction. In this sense, the Greek case differs a lot from the Swedish one.

The main public bodies that offer advice, parental mediation tips, toolkits and psychological and clinical support for teenagers (and sometimes their parents) are listed in annex 1 of this paper.

As I will argue in the next section, the contextualisation of young people's online practices and social media use as something leading to 'impaired mental well-being' (and more so for girls compared to boys), is problematic. Having said that, there is something to be said not only about the state of the public debate around mental health in Greece, but also about how mental health services in the country remain under-developed. The discussion of Tsaliki and Chronaki (in press) regarding the political upheaval that erupted when the film *Joker* was screened in Greece is a case in point, because it places young teenage boy's media practices at the centre of public discussion. The authors use the political and popular turmoil surrounding the screening of *Joker* in Greece to unpack the dominant discourse of the 'child-at-risk' but also to point at the missed opportunity to engage with 'toxic masculinity'. The hegemony of the pro-effects conceptual paradigm means that, with regard to male youth, in Greece, we find ourselves in the middle of a discussion about whether we should restrict or control young people's access to media for fear of what they will transpire as an outcome of their media practices. Framing the debate in these terms focuses attention on a narrow range of phenomena and 'infantilises' young teenage boys in Greece – for it perceives them being as impressionable as were the young readers of 19th century dime novels in Victorian times. It also largely misses the chance to widen the public dialogue in the country regarding 'toxic masculinity' and mental health (as well as the stigma attached to it), especially in what concerns adolescent young men living in austerity times (Tsaliki and Chronaki, in press).



In this sense, contrary to international social commentary about Joker's mental health and/or toxic masculinity, the contemporary 'discourse of anxiety' in Greece that surrounded the film was exhausted in a moral panic about boyhood masculinity, seen to become 'toxic' (though only implicitly) in the form of a politically instigated (aka left-leaning) urban guerrilla warfare, as a result of having watched the film. In equal measure, mental health problems and policy are only superficially addressed in the public debate surrounding Joker, something that chimes with the way mental health services at community level remain under-developed in Greece. The authors suggest that the Greek media coverage of mental health issues that came as a result of the screening of Joker, was marked by the missed opportunity to publicly address both teenage mental health and the stigma associated with mental health in Greece, as well as the weaknesses and shortcomings within the National Mental Health Plan (Karagianni 2016, Madianos 2019). Indeed, despite the deinstitutionalisation reform of the Greek mental health system that took place in the early nineties, the reform remains incomplete, also as a corollary of the post-2009 austerity crisis (Madianos 2019). The financial crisis has had a negative impact on the provision of public mental services for children and adolescents, with family finances becoming increasingly unable to provide treatment in the private sector (Giannakopoulos and Anagnostopoulos 2016). With little to have to offer towards the public debate regarding toxic masculinity – a theme that breaks up in Greece only in late 2020 and leading to the Greek #metoo – and the mental health system, discussion and commentary about Joker revolved almost exclusively around the impact of screen violence upon 'impressionable' (male) youth (Tsaliki and Chronaki in press).

Turning to how children's/teenagers' consumption of pornographic content is usually framed, Tsaliki and Chronaki (2015a) take into account the pro-effects reading of the culture of pornography that permeates the Greek context and a media agenda that focuses on children who are 'at risk' from the consumption of porn. The authors point at the overabundance of research that accounts for either the (usually negative) impact of pornographic content on children and teenagers (Greenfield 2004), or for its cultivation of sexist and misogynistic stereotypes (Tyden and Rogala 2004; Manning 2006). They discuss how contemporary public debate about pornography is largely framed by a notion of the psychological effects that follow the consumption of pornography, using an 'addiction' discourse and hypothesising about the adoption of violent behaviour (Flood 2009; Peter and Valkenburg 2008; Young 2008). Such a social construction of pornography as addictive, viral and pervasive is certainly not new, for it goes back to nineteenth-century conceptualisations of 'appropriate' content and sexuality with heavy class undercurrents and is devoid of any political readings of pornography. Yet this kind of conceptualisations become intensified with the 'onslaught' of online technologies which (are seen to) provide 'unfettered' access to pornographic content to just about anyone with an internet connection. In so doing, however, they constitute scaled up anxieties of the kind encountered in the nineteenth century, when mass literacy and technological developments facilitated the access and consumption of an array of texts, artifacts and representations – which up until then were predominantly available to the upper classes – to a mass audience, including 'vulnerable' groups such as women, children and the working class (Hunt

1996; Kendrick 1996; Tsaliki 2015b). The preoccupation with violent behaviour is fairly common within the radical feminist agenda, where pornography is equated with objectification (MacKinnon 1993; Nussbaum 1999) and with communicating unrealistic body images and standards of sexual performance (Albright 2008). In Greece, the study of pornography in the country remains underdeveloped and is dominated by a hegemonic pro-effects approach regarding the impact of sexually explicit content on children's and adolescents' wellbeing (Frangos, Frangos, and Sotiropoulos 2011; Tsitsika et al. 2009).

Meanwhile, contrary research has shown that social, policy and academic concerns regarding the 'devastating' impact of pornographic content on youngsters are seriously overstated and serve to reify a media alarmist and sensationalist culture (Buckingham and Bragg 2004; Buckingham and Chronaki 2014; Buckingham and Jensen 2012; Rovolis and Tsaliki 2012) and are largely fed by North American conceptions and political divisions.

Indeed, working within the EU Kids Online research network, which reflects a more mainstream agenda where children's online practices are discussed in terms of risks and opportunities, empirical research from 25,000 children from 25 participating countries shows that alarming voices regarding children's experiences with sexual content are largely overstated. Drawing on data related to sexual risks online, Rovolis and Tsaliki (2012), and Tsaliki et al (2014) have found:

- It is mostly boys rather than girls who have such experiences, and older children rather than younger ones;
- It is primarily girls and younger children who are likely to report being bothered by such experiences;
- Girls' and younger children's experiences are mostly accidental in comparison to older children and boys;
- Experiences with sexual content online are not significantly more than experiences with sexual content in mainstream media like TV;
- The number of children who report having been bothered by such experiences overall is rather small (4% of the 23% who reported experiencing sexual content). Of the 25,000 children interviewed, only 5,750 reported experiences with sexual content; of those, only 230 reported having been bothered by the experience;
- Experiences with sexting range from 4% to 22% in different countries, with a tendency to decrease over time.

It is notable that illegal or abusive activities like sexual harassment, sexual abuse ('grooming'), also fall within the range of sexual risks online and are invariably blended with experiences like sexual content and sexting and attributed to the 'child as perpetrator' (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.135). In effect, children's active engagement with sexual communication is by default considered not just problematic, but almost having legal implications. This understanding of children's sexual agency and the construction of their experiences as in need of censoring, regulation and guidance

reflect – as argued later – the anxieties that frame childhood as a status of innocence and as an uncontrolled, monstrous period in one's life (Egan & Hawkes, 2009), and scholars have argued that such constructions reflect further anxieties about societies' current state and future (Egan & Hawkes, 2012; Tsaliki, 2016).

### 3. Conclusions and recommendations

The Swedish contribution (insofar the Swedish Media Council is concerned) needs to take into account more the body of academic work on porn research and porn literacies, in order to avoid replicating stereotypical depictions of porn and social media in terms of (harmful) media effects. This way it could allow for a richer variety of cultures of consumption, inhabited by different communities of users, with a variety of sexual tastes and pleasures. Young teenagers should not be constructed as lacking in critical skills, and as 'at risk'. Such deployment of 'problem porn' as a blanket understanding of all kinds of sexual expression is indicative of the cultural conservatism and intense moralising that drives policy making related to children and teenagers for years by now, and shapes present-day parenting, to the extent that this moralising discourse has become hegemonic and 'commonsensical'.

As to social media uses and practices, as in many other cases of institutional policy making, here, too, young people's agency and critical awareness should not be undermined and their sexual and intimate citizenship not be problematised – especially that of young girls.

Research within cultural studies has already deconstructed the conventional wisdom cemented by psychologists and other clinical experts about young people 'at risk' from porn and social media alike. The way such voices are rarely heard and are ignored in policy-making circles has been discussed for some time now (among others, see Buckingham 2011; 2013; Buckingham and Bragg 2004; Chronaki 2013; Tsaliki 2016).

Rather than 'wishing innocence' on children and teenagers, constructing them as pre-sexual (the younger ones) or 'over-sexual' (teenagers), we need to see them as sexual beings, with sexual citizenship, who construct their sexuality as they negotiate their gendered identities in everyday social interactions and online practices. In the process, we also need to acknowledge that accessibility to sexual knowledge does not automatically translate into sexual enactment and behaviour.

Drawing from the 2014 EU Kids Online report on 'Experiences with sexual content: What we know from research so far' which reviews research about children's experiences with sexual content online from the EU Kids Online and Net Children Go Mobile projects (Tsaliki, Chronaki & Ólafsson 2014), what should be taken into account when considering children's experiences with sexual content, is that such experiences reflect the ways in which children define what they have seen as sexual. Such experiences, however, depend a lot on what adults frame as sexual, as well as on the parallel political and social context in which children are immersed. Thus, children employ these ready-made frameworks in order to interpret and classify something as 'sexual'. What children define as sexual content usually comes more

from 'traditional' media, such as television. However, sexually explicit content (i.e., pornography) is banned from television screens (and Facebook) by legislation in most countries. Hence, alarmist arguments about the internet posing a major threat to childhood should be contextualised and downplayed. This indicates that researchers, policymakers, educators and parents alike need to take into account children's definitions of what is 'sexual'. Children's experiences with sexual content are, after all, limited, as research has indicated. In addition, as already noted in other EU Kids Online reports, many children are well aware of effective coping strategies which they apply if annoyed or bothered by such encounters (see for example, de Haenens and Tsaliki, 2013).

Empirical evidence indicates that there is a need for policy, political and educational actors to consider the diverse ways in which children talk about sexual content and sexuality, more broadly. Children's voices need to be taken into account as well as claims about how they wish to participate in the discussions about young people's sexuality – which is why the revised Swedish sex-ed curriculum is exemplary. Such evidence could also possibly inform current and emerging sex education curricula, especially when it comes to countries that have no organised sex education. Additionally, we need to consider how public accounts of children's sexuality influence children and parents' approach to sexuality itself.

Next, and now drawing from the most recent EU Kids Online report on 'Young people's experiences with sexual messages online. Prevalence, types of sexting and emotional responses across European countries' (Barbovschi et al 2021), when discussing young teenager's social media practices such as sexting, it is worth framing it in terms of 'online reputation management'. This will pave the way towards different notions of self-presentation and curation of the self, instead of framing sexting as 'risk behaviour' that needs to be regulated. For sure, various 'sexting awareness' campaigns focus on the 'risks and consequences' associated with producing and sharing naked or semi-naked images, while abstinence-related notions about sexting put forward the message that sexting is almost always wrong and shameful (mainly for girls), without distinguishing between consensual sexting and deliberate acts of shame and humiliation. In this way, however, a sexual double standard is applied, whereby sexuality is tolerated for boys yet pathologised for girls. By stressing worse case scenarios, fear and shame for young girls is created, as attention is diverted from the perpetrator of the privacy breach and put onto the victim (thus authorising victim-blaming).

This way, urgently needed is relevant sexuality education that will allow young people to develop skills and promote critical and informed responses to sexualised digital communication. This also shows that we need to steer away from fear-based sexting education, and adopt a positive vision and rhetoric about appropriate sexual practice while taking into account young people's cultural practices and online and mobile media cultures (where sexting is a mundane practice) (Albury, Hasinoff and Senft 2017). In this respect, it is advisable that we open up school-based (as well as in tertiary education) sexual education to include issues of sexuality, privacy and consent related to existing practices of sexting. By viewing young people as media

producers (when sexting), and by building up their understanding of affirmative consent, the production and sharing of images will become integrated into conversations about negotiating consent and about broader participation in online and mobile cultures (: 530). Hence, taking advantage of young people's media production practices, it is time to start 'teaching with' instead of 'teaching about' social and mobile media in teaching and learning about respectful sexual relationships and about practices of self-representation. To this goal, the Teaching with Selfies syllabus (Senft et al 2014) can provide a footprint of how to engage with young people on issues related to sexuality, gender, and the presentation of the private/public self in a manner that is culturally and contextually relevant and applicable to them and their needs (for more detail, see Barbovschi et al 2021, pp.21-23).

On a similar level, we need to pitch policy-making differently, so that we stop thinking microscopically and start planning macroscopically: rather than targeting the individual (girl, more often, than boy) in order to alleviate the kind of emotional problems and harm that may follow certain social media uses, as for example experiences with sexting (see Barbovschi et al 2021, p. 22 on this), or revenge porn, and in the process render individuals responsible for their own resilience and privacy (see Banet-Weiser 2018; Gill, R. and Orgard, 2018; McRobbie 2020), we need to think of how to eradicate a systemic culture of gender asymmetries wherein sexism, misogyny (or misandry), misogynoir, homophobia, racism, hate speech and an all-around 'bitch culture' find breeding ground. Here, too, we need to steer with the media in order to enhance and solidify young people's cultural and sexual citizenship – consider for example how corporate videos with a feminist take like Procter and Gamble's 2014 Always campaign [#LikeAGirl](#), can be used in the school context to unpack established gender stereotyping and framing.

Insofar sexual communication is concerned, and taking into account the online disinhibition effect (Suler 2005) which may encourage some people to send unwanted sexts or pressure others for nude pictures, it is advisable that educators discuss with young people how online/mobile media can amplify forms of already existing gender- and sexuality-based harassment. In this context, in order to promote respectful relationships amongst the youth, school cultures need also to be taken into account, where physical bullying may co-exist with online forms of bullying and harassment. Otherwise put, I return to the point where policy-making needs to think of ways to uproot the systemic culture of gender asymmetries in which young teenagers are being brought up.

Policy-making needs to move beyond pedagogy framed by risk and instead engage with the affordances of social media as identified by young people themselves. However, education that is not informed by a nuanced and interconnected understanding of young people's everyday experiences of sexual well-being, mental health, and social media, is likely to be ineffective and inadequate as it does not resonate with young people's own lives (McKee et al. 2014; Hendry 2017, p. 510). It also needs to realise the links between young people's online media cultures and practices and the emergence of digital publics enacting new forms of participatory cultural citizenship (Hermes 2006) and benefit from academic literature in fandom,

cultural, gaming and childhood studies where the notion of participatory culture is prevalent, and where young people are not constructed as innately passive, impressionable, unable to distinguish fiction/representation from reality, or right from wrong, and unquestionably mimicking what they see across various media. If we are to do away with the ‘discourses of anxiety’ (Tsaliki and Chronaki 2020) and all kinds of moral panics surrounding children and teenagers and their online cultures and practices, now is the time to start challenging dominant Western constructions of childhood and childhood innocence.

## References

- Albright, J. M. (2008) “Sex in America Online: An Exploration of Sex, Marital Status, and Sexual Identity in Internet Sex Seeking and its Impacts.” *Journal of Sex Research* 45 (2): 175–186.
- Albury, K., Hasinoff, A. A. and Senft, T. (2017) ‘From Media Abstinence to Media Production: Sexting, Young People and Education’. In L. Allen and M. L. Rasmussen (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Sexuality Education*, (pp. 527-542)
- Albury, K. (2017). Just because it’s public doesn’t mean it’s any of your business: Adults’ and children’s sexual rights in digitally mediated spaces. *New Media & Society*, 19(5), 713–725.
- Albury, K., & Byron, P. (2014). Queering sexting and sexualisation. *Media International Australia*, 153, 138–147
- Angelides, S. (2013). Technology, hormones, and stupidity: The affective politics of teenage sexting. *Sexualities*, 16(5/6), 665–689.
- Annual Progress Report on Gender Equality Policy making in Greece (2017), General Secretariat for Gender Equality, Ministry of Internal Affairs, pp 52-53 (in Greek: Ετήσια Έκθεση των Πολιτικών Ισότητας των Φύλων στη Χώρα – Η Εφαρμογή των Πολιτικών Ισότητας στους Δήμους, Γ.Γ.Ι.Φ., Υπουργείο Εσωτερικών)
- Bailey, R. (2011). Letting children be children: Report of an independent review of the commercialization and sexualisation of childhood (Vol. 8078)
- Banet-Weiser, S. (2018) *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*, Duke University Press, Durham NC
- Barbovschi, M., Ní Bhroin, N., Chronaki, D., Ciboci, L., Farrugia, L., Lauri, M.A., Ševčíková, A., Staksrud, E., Tsaliki, L., & Velicu, A. (2021). Young people’s experiences with sexual messages online. Prevalence, types of sexting and emotional responses across European countries. *EU Kids Online and the Department of Media and Communication, University of Oslo*. <http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no91296>
- Boyle, K., 2005. *Media Violence: Gendering the Debate*. London: Sage.
- Bragg, S., & Buckingham, D. (2013). Global concerns, local negotiations and moral selves: Contemporary parenting and the ‘sexualisation of childhood’ debate. *Feminist Media Studies*, 13(4), 643–659.



- Buckingham, D. (2013) Representing Audiences: Audience Research, Public Knowledge, and Policy. *The Communication Review* 16(1–2): 51–60.
- Buckingham, D. (2011) *The Material Child: Growing Up in Consumer Culture*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Buckingham, D., S. Bragg, and S. (2004) *Young People, Sex and the Media: The Facts of Life?* London: Palgrave-Macmillan.
- Buckingham, David, and Despina Chronaki (2014) “Saving the Children? Pornography, Childhood and the Internet.” In *Thatcher’s Grandchildren? Politics and Childhood in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Stephen Wagg and Jane Pilcher, 301–317. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Buckingham, David, and H. S. Jensen (2012) “Beyond ‘Media Panics’.” *Journal of Children and Media* 6 (4): 413–429.
- Chronaki, D. (2013) Young People’s Accounts of Experiences With Sexual Content During Childhood and Teenage Life. *The Communication Review* 16(1–2): 61–9
- Cradock, G. 2004. Risk Morality and Child Protection: Risk Calculation as Guides to Practice. *Science, Technology & Human Values* 29(3): 314–31
- De Haenens, L. and L. Tsaliki (2013) ‘Risk vs. harm: Children’s Coping Profiles’ in B. O’Neill, E. Staksrud and S. McLaughlin (eds), *Promoting a Safer Internet for Children: European policy debates and challenges*, Nordicom.
- De Ridder, S., & Van Bauwel, S. (2013). Commenting on pictures: Teens negotiating gender and sexualities on social networking sites. *Sexualities*, 16(5/6), 565–586
- DESI (2018) Country Report for Greece. Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/newsroom/image/document/2018-20/el-desi\\_2018-country-profile-lang\\_4AA59C97-CC3B-7C25-9CE4F07248577AD8\\_52343.pdf?fbclid=IwAR28DvPfcC2IL\\_me8O28JEDEQqZzJgiah4UjbQ8lejthOPG8KjcrpNJrQ](https://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/image/document/2018-20/el-desi_2018-country-profile-lang_4AA59C97-CC3B-7C25-9CE4F07248577AD8_52343.pdf?fbclid=IwAR28DvPfcC2IL_me8O28JEDEQqZzJgiah4UjbQ8lejthOPG8KjcrpNJrQ)
- Du Plooy, C., Coetzee, H., & Van Rensburg, E. (2018). Psychological effects of multimedia-induced sexualisation of girls in middle childhood: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Mental Health*, 30(2), 67–85
- EduMediaTest 2020/2021. <https://edumediatest.eu/en>
- EIGE (2021) Annual Report on Gender Equality in the EU. Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/aid\\_development\\_cooperation\\_fundamental\\_rights/annual\\_report\\_ge\\_2021\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/aid_development_cooperation_fundamental_rights/annual_report_ge_2021_en.pdf)
- EIGE (2019), country-specific information: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/countries/greece>
- Egan, D., and Hawkes, G. L. (2012). Sexuality, youth and the perils of endangered innocence: How history can help us get past the panic. *Gender and Education*, 24(3), 269–284



Egan, R. E., and G. Hawkes (2010) *Theorizing the Sexual Child in Modernity*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Eurogender/EIGE (2021), The online platform #metoogreece under the initiative of the Greek Authorities. Available at <https://eurogender.eige.europa.eu/posts/online-platform-metoogreece-under-initiative-greek-authorities>

Executive report for EduMediaTest, by Roger Soler-i-Martí | Frederic Guerrero-Solé. Made personally available through the National Centre of Audiovisual Media and Communication- EKOME

Flood, M. 2009. "The Harms of Pornography Exposure among Children and Young People." *Child Abuse Review* 18 (6): 384–400.

Frangos, Christos C., Constantinos C. Frangos, and Ioannis Sotiropoulos. 2011. "Problematic Internet Use among Greek University Students: An Ordinal Logistic Regression with Risk Factors of Negative Psychological Beliefs, Pornographic Sites and Online Games." *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour and Social Networking* 14 (1–2): 51–58.

Flood, M. (2009). The harms of pornography exposure among children and young people. *Child Abuse Review*, 18(6), 384–400.

Faulkner, J. (2010). The innocence fetish: The commodification and sexualisation of children in the media and popular culture. *Media International Australia*, 135(1), 106–117.

General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality (GSDFGE) (2021), Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, 5th-Quarterly-Newsletter-Report-GSDFGE-May-Jul-2021. Available at <https://isotita.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/5th-Quarterly-Newsletter-Report-GSDFGE-May-Jul-2021-1.pdf>

General Secretariat for Gender Quality (GSQE) (2013) Deliverable 6/ Executive Summary: 'Women's and Men's Health in Greece: defining factors of health and of health services use'. Ministry of Internal Affairs (in Greek: Παραδοτέο 6/ Επιτελική Έκθεση «Η υγεία των ανδρών και γυναικών στην Ελλάδα: κατάσταση υγείας, χρήση υπηρεσιών υγείας και προσδιοριστικοί παράγοντες». Υπουργείο Εσωτερικών)

Giannakopoulos, G. and Anagnostopoulos, D. C., 2016. Psychiatric reform in Greece: an overview. *BJ-Psych Bulletin*, doi: 10.1192/pb.bp.116.053652, 1-3.

Gill, R. and Orgard, S. (2018) 'The Confidence Cult(ure)' in *Australian Feminist Studies*, 30 (86): 324–44

Greenfield, P. M. 2004. "Inadvertent Exposure to Pornography on the Internet: Implications of Peer-to-peer File-sharing Networks for Child Development and Families." *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 25 (6): 741–750

Hasinoff, A. A. (2015). *Sexting panic: Rethinking criminalisation, privacy and consent*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press

- Hendry, N. A. (2017) 'Social Media Bodies: Revealing the Entanglement of Sexual Well-being, Mental Health, and Social Media in Education'. In L. Allen and M. L. Rasmussen (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Sexuality Education*, pp. 509-526.
- Hermes, J. (2006) "Citizenship in the Age of the Internet." *European Journal of Communication* 21.3: 295–309
- Horvath, M. A. H., Alys, L., Massey, K., Pina, A., Scally, M., & Adler, J. R. (2013). *Basically, porn is everywhere: A rapid evidence assessment on the effects that access and exposure to pornography has on children and young people*. London: Office of the Children's Commissioner
- Hunt, L. 1996. "Introduction: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500–1800." In *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500–1800*, edited by Lynn Hunt, 9–48. Cambridge, MA: MIT Zone Books.
- Jackson, S., & Vares, T. (2015). Too many bad role models for us girls': Girls, female pop celebrities and 'sexualization'. *Sexualities*, 18(4), 480–498.
- Karagianni, P., 2016. Youth mental health context in Greece. *The European Health Psychologist*, 18 (3), 119-22.
- Kendrick, W. 1996. *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., & Ólafsson, K. (2011). Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children: Full findings and policy implications from the EU Kids Online survey of 9-16 year olds and their parents in 25 countries. *EU Kids Online*. London. Retrieved from: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/33731>.
- Lumby, C., & Albury, K. (2010). Too much? Too young? The sexualisation of children debate in Australia. *Media International Australia*, 135(1), 140–152
- MacKinnon, C. 1993. *Only Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Madianos, M., 2019. The adventures of psychiatric reform in Greece: 1999-2019. *BJ-Psych International*, 17 (2), 26-28.
- Manning, J. C. 2006. "The Impact of Internet Pornography on Marriage and the Family: A Review of the Research." *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity* 13 (2–3): 131–165
- McGovern, A., Crofts, T., Murray, L., & Milivojevic, S. (2016). Media, legal and young people's discourses around sexting. *Global Studies of Childhood*, 6(4), 428–441.
- McKee, A., Walsh, A., & Watson, A.-F. (2014). Using digitally distributed vulgar comedy to reach young men with information about healthy sexual development. *Media International Australia*, 153, 128–136
- McKee, A. (2013). Why are children the most important audience for pornography in Australia? In A. Moran & K. Aveyard (Eds.), *Watching films: Perspectives on movie-going, exhibition and reception* (pp. 87–100). Bristol: Intellect.

- McRobbie, A. (2020) *Feminism and the Politics of Resilience: Essays on Gender, Media and the End of Welfare*. Polity Press, London.
- Mitchell, K., Finkelhor, D., & Wolak, J. (2003). Exposure of youth to unwanted sexual material on the Internet: A national survey of risk, impact, and prevention. *Youth Society*, 34(3), 330–358.
- Nussbaum, M. C. 1999. *Sex and Social Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Parker, W. (2009). Shall I be a Mother? Motherhood and Domesticity in Popular Culture, in S. Gillis and J. Hollows (eds), *Feminism, Domesticity and Popular Culture* (pp. 65-78). New York: Routledge.
- Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2008). Adolescents' exposure to sexually explicit Internet material, sexual uncertainty, and attitudes toward uncommitted sexual exploration: Is there a link? *Communication Research*, 35(5), 579–601. Plummer, K. (1995)
- Ringrose, J., Harvey, L., Gill, R., & Livingstone, S. (2013). Teen girls, sexual double standards and 'sexting': Gendered value in digital image exchange. *Feminist Theory*, 14(3), 305–323
- Ringrose, J., & Renold, E. (2012). Teen girls, working-class femininity and resistance: Rethorising fantasy and desire in educational contexts of heterosexualised violence. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 16(4), 461–477
- Rogala. 2004. "Sexual Behavior among Young Men in Sweden and the Impact of Pornography." *International Journal of STD & AIDS* 15: 590–593.
- Ross, L. R. (2016). *Interrogating Motherhood*. Edmonton, AB: AU Press.
- Rovolis, A., & Tsaliki, L. (2012). Pornography. In S. Livingstone, L. Haddon, & A. Görzig (Eds.), *Children, risk and safety on the Internet: Research and policy challenges in comparative perspective* (pp. 165–176). Bristol: Policy Press
- Rush, E., & La Nauze, A. (2006). *Letting children be children: Stopping the sexualisation of children in Australia*. Canberra: The Australia Institute
- Russett, C. Eagle. 1989. *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Senft, T., Walker Rettberg, J., Losh, E., Albury, K., Gajjala, R., David, G., Marwick, A., Abidin, C., Olszanowski, M., Aziz, F., Warfield, K., & Mottahedeh, N. (2014). Studying selfies: A critical approach. Retrieved from <http://www.selfieresearchers.com/>
- Simpson, B. (2013). Challenging childhood, challenging children: Children's rights and sexting. *Sexualities*, 16(5/6), 690–709.
- Suler, J. (2005). The online disinhibition effect. *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, 2(2), 184–188.

Tsaliki, L. and D. Chronaki (in press) 'Joker: Toxic masculinity, the instigation of (political) violence and the protection of minors in Greece'. In *Breaking Down Joker: Violence, Loneliness, Tragedy*, (ed) Sean Redmond. Routledge: London.

Tsaliki L. and D. Chronaki (2021) 'Children's sexuality in the context of digital media: Sexualisation, sexting and experiences with sexual content in research perspective'. In Lelia Green, Donell Holloway, Kylie Stevenson, Tama Leaver, Leslie Haddon (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Digital Media and Children*

Tsaliki, L. and Chronaki, D., (eds.) (2020) *Discourses of Anxiety over Childhood and Youth across Cultures*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tsaliki, L. (2019). The Exoticisation of Motherhood: The Body Politics of Pregnant Femininity through the Lens of Celebrity Motherhood. *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics*, 3(1-2), 07. <https://doi.org/10.20897/femenc/5913>

Tsaliki, L. (2016) *Children and the Politics of Sexuality: The sexualization of children debate, Revisited*. Palgrave Macmillan: London.

Tsaliki, L. (2015a). Popular culture and moral panics about 'children at risk': Revisiting the sexualisation-of-young-girls debate. *Sex Education*, 15(5), 500–514.

Tsaliki L. and Chronaki, D. (2015b) Rethinking the pornography debate in Greece: a country specific reading of an 'old' argument, *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 29 (6), 811-820.

Tsaliki, L., Chronaki, D., & Ólafsson, K. (2014). *Experiences with sexual content: What we know from research so far*. London: EU Kids Online

Tsitsika, A., E. Critselis, G. Kormas, E. Konstantoulaki, A. Constantopoulos, and D. Kafetzis. 2009. "Adolescent Pornographic Internet Site Use: A Multivariate Regression Analysis of the Predictive Factors of Use and Psychosocial Implications." *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 12 (5): 545–550. Tyden, T., and C.

Tyden, T., and C. Rogala. 2004. "Sexual Behavior among Young Men in Sweden and the Impact of Pornography." *International Journal of STD & AIDS* 15: 590–593

Vänskä, A. (2017). "I am Lenni": Boys, sexualisation, and the dangerous colour pink. *Sexualities*, 22(3), 296–309.

World Health Organization/WHO (2011) 'Evidence for gender responsive actions to promote mental health: Young people's health as a whole-of-society response'. Available at [https://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/158102/316637\\_WHO\\_brochure\\_226x226\\_1-mental-health.pdf](https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/158102/316637_WHO_brochure_226x226_1-mental-health.pdf)

Wilson, J. and E. Chivers Yochim (2017). *Mothering Through Precarity: Women's Work and Digital Media*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Wolak, J., Mitchell, K., & Finkelhor, D. (2007). Unwanted and wanted exposure to online pornography in a national sample of youth Internet users. *Pediatrics*, 119(2), 247–258.

## Annex 1: Main public bodies offering advice and support for teenagers in the field of online technologies and uses

The [Adolescent Health Unit](#) of the 2nd Department of Paediatrics at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens: AHU has been addressing the needs of young people aged 11-18 since 2006, with a wide variety of health professionals, over dietary, sexuality, drug abuse and excessive internet use issues. They have their own Helpline.

[KET HEA](#) (Therapy Centre for Dependent Individuals) offers support to adolescents and young adults 'who are addicted to Internet and video games. The programmes seek to restrict the time spent in front of the computer screen and playing video games and to enable young people to deal effectively with the challenges and problems of adolescence'. Other addiction categories treated are drugs, alcohol and gambling.

[Over-18 Unit](#) (for young adults), Attika Psychiatric Hospital, Dept of Problematic Internet Use (): a psychiatric unit, aiming at supporting and treating individuals with problematic internet use and internet addiction.

The [Greek Centre for Safer Internet](#) is the legal representative of INSAFE and INHOPE pan-European networks within the framework of the Safer Internet Programme. It offers a series of multimedia resources on internet safety and internet addiction on its [website](#), catering for youth, parents and educators, under the auspices of the Greek Ministry of Education and Religion. With it can be found: [SafeLine](#), the Greek Hotline for illegal Internet content, and The [Greek Helpline](#), with advice on internet-related issues, including internet addiction.

Finally, the Greek Police's [Unit of Minors – Internet Protection and Digital Investigation](#). This Cyber Crime Division is an independent central service, aiming among others at the detection and prosecution of crimes committed against children using the Internet and other means of digital communication and storage, as well as at battling online harassment and bullying, racist and xenophobic instances online and online participation in suicide cases and suicide intent or cases of disappearance.