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“We were” versus “they are”: Greek teachers talk about contemporary adolescent femininity

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In feminist research **gender identities** are being studied mainly as factors that decisively influence both distribution of roles between men and women and gender relations within the framework of social structures.



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Education has a central role in shaping femininity (Deliyianni-Kouimtzi & Athanasiadou, 2017 ; Frosi, 2005, 2010).

Secondary school through its social role is of vital importance in shaping social relations, including gender.

- subjects taught in school and the type of knowledge transmitted
- the school books
- the teaching and assessment methods
- the school rules and the discipline control
- the models of authority
- some aspects of the hidden curriculum
- the teachers themselves as carriers of beliefs and school practices



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The **formal rhetoric of school** denies its responsibility for the perpetuation of gender differences (Frosi, 2005; Frosi & Deliyanni-Kouimtzi, 2015).

A large number of **Greek teachers believe that in recent years gender issues have no place on the educational agenda**, as they do not exist as a problem in the school environment anymore.



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Teachers:

- continue to construct traditional images for both social gender relations and genders.
- underestimate the girls' high school achievements
- interact in different ways with boys and girls.
- support traditional gender behaviors
- have different beliefs about girls' and boys' abilities, as well as different expectations of them
- adopt a dichotomous discourse, as they emphasize the differences between boys and girls



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The research questions

- What has changed and what remains the same regarding to adolescent femininity in the Greek context, according to the teachers?
- What are the new aspects of femininity?
- Where do teachers attribute these changes?



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The research

Participants –Data collection and analysis

- Six high school teachers employed (3 men and 3 women, aged 40 to 53)
- personal semi-structured interviews
- thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013).



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Results and discussion

- The participants describe the adolescent femininity of today opposite to their own (late 1970s-early 80s to early 90s), comparing their female students to their own adolescent selves, as they recall them in their memory.
- They often compare the girls of today with the boys of today.



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Results and discussion

- **three main themes:**
 - ▶ (a) positive aspects of new hegemonic femininity
 - ▶ (b) negative aspects of new hegemonic femininity
 - ▶ (c) positive intergenerational aspects.



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New aspects of femininity and intergenerational aspects

| Themes | Sub-themes |
|---|--|
| Positive aspects of hegemonic new femininity | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wide range of information• Claim and determination• Freedoms (choice of studies, sexuality, reduced social control)• Academic and work orientation |
| Negative aspects of hegemonic new femininity | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Boyish (aggressive) behaviors• Excessive effusion in relationships with boys• Early and shallow love relationships• Undertaking initiatives to engage in love relationships• Emphasis on external appearance |
| Positive intergenerational aspects | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discipline/Obedience• Study• Targeting to the creation of a family• Communication skills |

Positive aspects of hegemonic new femininity

Participants say that all contemporary **adolescents**, including girls, in contrast to their own adolescent selves “**are well informed for everything. For studying, for sexual issues, for contraception, for everything**” (W-3), as opposed to the adolescents of their own generation.

They also describe girls as individuals who **claim** their rights, **decide** on issues that concern them in a context of realism, self-awareness and goal commitment.



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Positive aspects of hegemonic new femininity

"They claim their lives. [...] "I will study and I'll not get married early", they have a goal and they go for it. [...] Many of them are very grounded and realistic. She is 17.5 years old and puts a manifesto on you, that "I want to do this and that, this and that" and when you ask her "how can you do that?", she puts you next to a list of alternatives. It means that these girls really have a plan in their minds and they want to succeed it. " (W-1)



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Positive aspects of hegemonic new femininity

Teachers emphasize the **academic orientation** of girls and their plans for work, which will guarantee the financial independence they want.

" 'I'll do my Master, I'll do my PhD, I'll work". In my own time, getting a university degree was a great feat, especially in the province. Neither was it necessary (for women) to work" (W-1)



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Positive aspects of hegemonic new femininity

Nowadays girls enjoy more freedoms, especially when it comes to choose their friends, including boys, their entertainment and nights out and the expression of their sexuality.

"And my niece talks comfortably about her flirting, going out and having fun and coming back home late at night [...] I see a freedom I did not see before. I also see parents more comfortable ..." (W-3)

"In our times there was gossip, mainly in small places and especially for girls. They could not come back home or walk in the street late at night. Nowadays, even in the villages, I see society being more tolerant. The family, as well as society, accepts it." (M-2)

Participants, however, seem to be ambivalent towards this status of freedom.

"Since (girls) are in high school, they don't hesitate to be in a relationship for a week and after 10 days to do the same thing with another boy. [...]in my own time, in order to create a relationship, you had, if anything, to have marriage as a long-term goal. ..." (W-1)

"When I was a teenager, I did not dare to hang out with boys, not to have a love relationship. Now, in high school (age), many girls have sexual relationships. Short term relationships." (W-2)



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Some of the teachers seem to be very cautious about the effusion that characterizes relationships between boys and girls, even when they are just friendly ones.

"I see a joviality, verbal and physical, they touch, hug, and kiss each other, while we did not use to do the same. These things didn't happen in the society I was living in ... but now it is, I still think, it is too much. I wish they were not so effusive, so expressive to each other." (M-1)



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"... they make the first move" (W-3).

"Girls are more aggressive, meaning that they will make a first step closer to a boy, they do not wait for a long time, they have become the hunters." (W-1)

"I think boys are lost somewhere. I mean they are raised by their parents, by the existing narratives, etc. to become hunters, and then, they get surprised by the fact that the reality they face is different, like what is going on? They get confused." (W-2)



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Negative aspects of hegemonic new femininity

"Girls imitate the way boys talk, it's not a very feminine way, ..." (W-2)

"... the girl may tease the boys, she may use a vocabulary that suits a boy" (M-3)



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Negative aspects of hegemonic new femininity

Emphasis given by girls on their external appearance even in every day school life.

"I see little girls, even in Junior High School, but even more in high school, going to hair salon to dye their hair. Dyed nails and so on. Some of them go too far. I remember when I was a student, there was a girl in a higher class and we were saying 'look, she dyed her hair red! [...] we were wearing a uniform, make-up was forbidden in school, you could get scold, at least.'" (W-1)



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positive intergenerational aspects of femininity (1/3)

- high school achievements, which are related to obedience, diligence, cooperativity

"Girls are less loud, and more disciplined" (W-1)

"Girls are more diligent, more patient and more persistent. Boys are more easily disoriented even in the classroom." (W-2)



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positive intergenerational aspects of femininity

(2/3)

- **high communication skills versus boys'**

"Their sociability is better, girls communicate better. [...] Boys are together, but they talk less or they talk nonsense. They curse or say futile things. Girls are always more talkative, they analyze situations more, they approach a problem from several perspectives in order to solve it. This has always been happening and it is still happening."(M-2)



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positive intergenerational aspects of femininity

(3/3)

- girls believe in the institution of the family, which they want to create after completing their studies and finding a job. That leads them to postpone the family goal in their life plans.

"They say, 'someday I will get married, after 30 or 35. I'll study, I'll get a job and then I'll get married.'" (W-3)



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Conclusion (1/3)

- The hegemonic femininity described by the participant teachers differs significantly from that of their own generation
- The adolescent femininity of today has been expanded and includes aspects deriving from the traditional masculinity. Some of them are presented as positive changes, while others as a loss of part of femininity.
- Girls of today appear to have the same freedoms and opportunities as the boys in their age, regarding studies and relationships. They are also presented as socially mature, academically and work-oriented, they set goals and demand their achievement.



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Conclusion (2/3)

- All above new aspects of femininity are considered by the participants to be positive and beneficial for girls.
- The aspects of femininity derived from the dominant traditional masculinity are negatively evaluated by participants (adoption of boyish behaviors, especially cursing, excessive effusion in their relations with boys, early and shallow love relationships and the emphasis on their appearance)



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Conclusion (3/3)

- The teachers' ambivalence regarding adolescent girls' relationships with boys reflects a **willingness for greater social control over female sexuality.**
- Teachers attribute the new aspects of femininity to the claim of girls themselves, as well as to their parents and the wider society that has become more tolerant and less regulating. **They do not connect school or even teachers themselves in anyway with the changes in aspects of femininity or with the social change they refer to.**



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Thank you!



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