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(working title)

The world is an oyster: research findings from the project *Greek Kids Go Online*

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Abstract

This paper draws from the research findings of the Greek Children Go Online project, as well as the collaborative EU Kids Online I network in which I participated, in order to explore the relationship young children have with pornographic and sexually-related texts and cultures through online media and their coping strategies, as well as on *parental* perceptions of this relationship. What do children actually do when they come in contact with pornographic and sexual online content? Do they instigate and pursue such contact or are they the recipients of it? How do they actually feel and how do they react anyway? These are some of the questions this article tries to answer.

Harm, childhood and appropriate media content: an ongoing debate

According to the EU Kids Online ranking of online risk incidence, based on existing research on teenagers across 21 EU countries, seeing online pornography is the second most common risk encountered by every 4 in 10 teenagers across Europe¹, coming immediately after giving out personal information (for almost half of online teens) (EU Kids Online, Final Report 2009). Talking about sex in relation to children and teenagers is a taboo issue by and large, given the preconception of children as

¹ It is followed by seeing violent or hateful content, experienced by almost one third of teenagers; being bullied (for 5 in 6 teenagers online); meeting an online contact offline, which is the least common risk experienced with almost 9% of online teens attending such meetings- usually these meetings involve teenagers of a similar age; finally, approximately 15%-20% of online teenagers report feeling distressed or uncomfortable when online, thus indicating the proportion of teenagers for whom risk taking represents a degree of harm (EU Kids Online, Final Report 2009).

'innocent' and asexual. Adult anxiety regarding young people's relationship with sex - sex among teenagers being perceived as a potential indicator of risk by the wider control culture- is evidenced, for example, in the way UNICEF assesses child well being (UNICEF Report on Child Well-Being, 2007). In order to sketch a wider context of risk culture, I looked at the rates of cigarette smoking, drinking, cannabis use, and sexual intercourse among Greek teenagers²: 6% of them smoke cigarettes once per week – compared, for example, to 13% of youth in the UK, 16% in Germany, almost 13% in Spain and 7% in Sweden. Moving on to having been drunk once or twice, this applies to 10% of Greek teenagers as opposed to 31% of British youth, around 18% of youngsters in Germany, 10% in Spain and 16% in Sweden. Cannabis use is still unpopular among Greek 15 year-olds (4%), compared to 35% of teenagers in the UK, 19% in Germany, 31% in Spain, and less than 5% in Sweden. Finally, sexual intercourse among Greek 15 year-olds is significantly higher compared to the other indicators examined (for almost 22% of them), as opposed to 38% of youngsters in the UK, 28% in Germany, 16% in Spain, and 28% in Sweden. It would appear that although young teenagers in Greece do not participate intensely in a culture of risk, they engage in one specific aspect of what is widely perceived as 'risky behaviour' – i.e. sex.

Without conflating sex with pornography, any discussion with children pertaining to pornography is equally taboo. This is due to the characterization of porn as a corrupting flood, something that comes in abundance and from which we need to fend ourselves, and mainly children, against (Maddison 2010). The assumed harmful influence of porn on children goes back to a long and still ongoing tradition of media effects, and has been exacerbated with the advent and unprecedented proliferation of online pornography. Children need to be protected from harmful content –and sexual and pornographic content more often than not falls within this category.

In fact, research shows that there were no media specifically aimed at or intended for children until the late 18th century. Books such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*, were originally written for adults but also read and enjoyed by children too; at the time, though, there were no books written with children in mind. During this time children were nothing but shunned from reality - instead, they were confronted with all kinds of social problems (though not educated about them) (Ariès 1962; Cunningham, 1995). Attitudes towards children and the media they consumed started to shift towards the late 18th century, after 1770. Fairy tales such as *Little Red Riding Hood* and the *Frog Prince* were perceived harmful for child moral development, as they involved scenes of nudity and sexuality, and were reedited. For the first time in history, childhood is regarded as a period in its own right, although until the late 19th century, it remained a privilege of the upper middle classes and the aristocracy. It was not until the introduction of compulsory education and the ban on child labour, in the early 20th century, that the phenomenon of childhood with its ingredients of innocence, fun and play, penetrated all layers of the population; the same applied to the media developed for children. The notion of carefree childhood flourished in the first half of the 20th century, and children were entirely protected

² UNICEF Report on Child Well-Being, 2007: percentage of young people smoking cigarettes at least once per week, ages 11, 13,15; percentage of young people who have been drunk twice or more, ages 11, 13, 15; percentage of young people who have used cannabis in the last 12 months, aged 15; and ; percentage of young people who have had sexual intercourse, aged 15.

from the reality of daily life. Subjects such as birth, death, sex and money were not raised in the family, and the printed media designed for children revolved around moralizing stories, devoid of taboo issues (Valkenburg 2004). The segregating function of printed media and radio for specific target groups was broken down with the advent of television, the consumption of which by young viewers consisted of both children's and adult programmes. Some theorists go as far as suggesting that television was in fact responsible for the 'disappearance of childhood' (Postman 1982/1994): whereas print technology has been argued to be responsible for the emergence of a distinct 'youth culture' (i.e. childhood) in industrialized societies (Eisenstein 1979), television was conducive to the destruction of childhood in two ways; by 'banishing shame' as it made adult sexual knowledge directly available to children, and by superseding literacy as the primary means of communication. Once television became the primary deliverer of information and entertainment to the young, the age-related and gradual acquisition of knowledge required by learning to read complex written texts was brought to an end (Messenger Davies 2004).

However, although television informed children of issues they would not have come across in the past in printed media or radio, it is hardly the only cause for the changes that occurred in the concept of childhood. The democratization of family relations that took place during the 1960s means that parents and children negotiate about what can and has to be done within the family, while parents are becoming more tolerant regarding the media content their children are being exposed to. This doesn't take place in a vacuum though, since the dominant social paradigm of the vulnerable child is being attacked. In fact, in western societies there is no longer one dominant view on childhood, and alongside the paradigm of the vulnerable child, there is that of the empowered child. Instead of seeing children as passive and innocent creatures who need to be protected -especially from the effects of harmful media content- children are being considered as clever, autonomous, streetwise and able to stand up for themselves (Buckingham 2000).

The idea that children may be affected by exposure to graphic depictions of violence and pain or feel discomfort by portrayals of adult sex, alongside the desire of adults to understand and prevent such harm has been discussed from the point of view of an illiberal desire to censor public life. This is further complicated by the fact that the protection of children and of free speech are treated by different academic disciplines – the former predominantly by medicine, education and the law, while the latter mainly by philosophy, politics and the humanities. Quite often these ways of care and concern, though potentially adopting politically liberal approaches, are opposed, something that impairs the position of children and academic scholarship (Messenger Davies 2004: 9).

The debate concerning the exposure of minors to potentially harmful or offensive media content³ still abounds. Across the various media, many studies are based on the study of television where the primary subjects of research on exposure to content have been children and young teenagers as they are considered more vulnerable to negative media influence. Many studies in this field use methods which are methodologically flawed, while it is also the case that too little of the research evidence examines age-appropriate content exposure. Much of the existing research has been less equivocal in demonstrating evidence for offence caused (e.g. offensive language, depiction of violence or of sexual activity) rather than harm, while clear audience differences are based on gender (i.e. boys tend to be more affected by violent content) and age (Millwood Hargrave and Livingstone 2006: 9).

When it comes to film, the empirical research evidence for harm and offence is predominantly concerned with pornography where children users feature as one of the key foci of attention. The evidence, however, that viewing pornography harms children is scarce and inconclusive given that major ethical considerations have restricted conducted research. Arguments on harmful media effects where pornographic content is concerned range from religious and moral objections on the grounds that it corrupts societal values; feminist criticism that pornography is a form of sexual violence as it objectifies women and encourages male violence; and child welfare concerns that it harms children's sexual and emotional development (Attwood 2004; 2010, Waskul 2004, Boyle 2000, Malamuth et al. 2000, Malamuth and Impett 2000; Mitchell et al. 2003, among many others). In general, age and gender do matter as evidenced in an Australian survey which reported that ¾ of 16-17 year old boys (as opposed to 11% of girls) have seen at least one adult content film (with real depictions of sexual intercourse), while a small minority watch porn regularly (Flood and Hamilton 2003a, 2003b).

Despite considerable academic interest in the possibility that accidental exposure to sexually explicit material may harm children, there is very little direct research on such claims for harm, for ethical reasons (Heins 2001; Helsper 2005). In fact, Helsper argues that there is no conclusive empirical evidence for a causal relationship between exposure to R18 material and impairment of mental, physical and moral development of minors (op.cit.); at the same time, others report that although most experts working with children (child psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, family therapists, social workers, teachers) consider viewing pornography as harmful for children, opinions vary as to the degree of harm, with some of them claiming that little if any harm is likely, and that harm is greatest to already vulnerable children (Cragg 2000; see also Buckingham and Bragg, 2004).

³ It is useful to define 'harm' and 'offence' at this point, since both terms are increasingly used in the same phrase in discussions of media content regulation, gradually replacing the former 'taste and decency': harm is predominantly perceived to be observable by others (regardless of whether harm is acknowledged by the individual concerned) and is measurable in a reliable manner. Offence, on the other hand, is predominantly perceived in subjective terms as it is taken to be experienced and reported by the individual (hence it is difficult to assess reliably) (Millwood Hargrave and Livingstone 2006: 15).

Online sexually explicit material and minors

The proliferation of internet access, with its affordability, anonymity and ease of use is considered to be conducive to media harm and offence, as familiar contents and anxieties have simply moved online. The ubiquity and availability of online sexually explicit material has also grown exponentially in recent years, the range of which spans from the equivalent of top self magazine imagery to otherwise highly restricted or illegal content, and from images of consensual sexual activity to violent or non-consensual –even sometimes criminal- activity. In addition, the lack of clear definitions of levels and types of pornography and violence online, limits research as do the ethical restrictions on researching the potentially harmful effects of online content on children in particular (Millwood Hargrave and Livingstone op.cit.).

The lack of evidence and the paucity of research on harm, as demonstrated by the EU Kids Online network (Livingstone and Haddon 2009), is gradually being compensated by a growing national and international interest on the potentially harmful consequences of pornographic and other welcome content and user-generated contact and conduct. In the UK Children Go Online project, upon which the Greek survey was based, focus groups of children and young people were used to overcome methodological and ethical limitations of ascertaining harm⁴; in these groups, annoyance and disgust seemed to be more frequent reactions towards pornographic content compared to feelings of disgust, with girls showing especially negative responses in cases of being sent or shown such content by boys they knew. 57% had seen internet pornography, unintentionally (38% via pop ups, 25% via junk mail, 9% through someone they knew), and 10% on purpose. Age plays a significant role as expected, with 58% of 12-15 year olds, 76% of 16-17 year olds and 80% of 18-19 year olds having been exposed to online pornography compared to 21% of 9-11 year olds. Half of the youngsters who have been in contact with sexually explicit material report not to be bothered by it, and a small minority admits liking it. A significant minority, 1/5, report to having felt disgusted, with girls and younger children more likely to say this. Overall, although a sizable minority has seen an upsetting or disgusting image, the majority of youth have either not seen or not been concerned about pornographic content online, (Livingstone and Bober 2005), which has implications about the population we might be worried about and about the policy initiatives implemented.

One of the key findings of EU Kids Online I⁵ was that children's use of the internet continues to grow, with the most striking rise taking place among younger children; to set the record straight, 60% of 6-10 year olds were online by 2008; 34% of them are going online on their own computer; 65% of them are more likely to use the

⁴ This was followed in the Greek survey only within the interviews held at home, as the survey itself was conducted at school; the questionnaires were filled in by the children themselves in a convivial atmosphere, in the absence of their teacher. Children were encouraged by the student volunteers to respond truthfully.

⁵ Funded by the European's Commission Safer Internet Programme, *EU Kids Online I* is a thematic network that run between 2006-2009, and aimed to identify, compare and draw conclusions from existing and ongoing research on children and online technologies in Europe. For more detailed information, see www.eukidsonline.net.

internet at home compared to 57% who are more likely to use it at school (Livingstone and Haddon, 2009). As a result, the proliferation and streamlining of internet technologies in everyday life raises a number of questions concerning access and inequalities, the nature and quality of use, the impact on children's social and educational development, as well as the balance between online risks and opportunities for children and their parents (Livingstone and Bober 2006). Based on a classification of countries by the EU Kids Online review of studies with regard to the likelihood of children's experiencing online risk to 'high risk' (i.e. above the European average), 'medium risk', (i.e. around the European average), and 'low risk' (i.e. below the European average) (Hasebrink et al 2009), and given the positive correlation between use and risk (in the sense that fewer opportunities for internet use provide less chances for encountering online risk, while high internet use by children is associated with high encounter of risk), Greece is a country with low children's internet use and a medium likelihood of risk to be encountered by them.

Further evidence from the EU Kids Online (content analysis in 14 of the 21 countries participating in the project, Haddon and Stald, 2009), consolidates that media coverage distracts attention from potential benefits of the internet to focus public attention disproportionately on the risks. In all countries examined, the majority of press coverage on children and the internet is concerned with risks rather than opportunities (64% of the news stories were risk-related compared to 18% related to opportunities). More particularly, in Greece, content risks, mainly pornography, account for over half of the risks covered in the press (ibid.; see also Tsaliki and Chronaki 2008), which indicates that the media invariably prefer to draw social and parental attention to the emerging risks and concerns regarding internet technology rather than to its creative and educational potential- thus promoting a notion of the internet as a scary and sinister place, the access to and use of which need to be regulated and controlled (Livingstone and Bober, 2006).

GR Children Go Online: Research methods and design

The GR Children Go Online (GRCGO) project (Παιδιά και Διαδίκτυο στην Ελλάδα: Ευκαιρίες και Κίνδυνοι) was designed along the lines of the UK Children Go Online original study (Livingstone and Bober 2005, <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/399/>), adopted to the Greek reality.

The GRCGO project conducted a survey of 9 to 18-year-olds in Attica, the largest prefecture in Greece, which was then followed by a number of interviews, examining young people's Internet use in detail. The Greek project, similarly to the British original, balances online risks and opportunities encountered by youth in order to contribute to academic and policy frameworks on children and young people's Internet use.

The survey was questionnaire-based, using the original UKCGO questionnaire, translated and adopted for the Greek audience⁶; it was conducted at 24 schools across Attica with the help of M.A and undergraduate students from the Faculty of Communications and Mass Media at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens⁷. The schools, spanning across the last three grades of primary education (dimotiko), the three grades of lower secondary (gymnasio), and the three grades of upper secondary education in Greece (lykio), were selected following the administrative classification of school units of the Greek Ministry of Education, and mirror the socio-demographics of the prefecture of Attica⁸.

The fieldwork was carried out at school by the teams of researchers (undergraduates supervised by the team of post-graduate students) at agreed times and dates. Pupils were given instructions how to fill in the questionnaires and were supported by the team of researchers in the classroom. Formal consent to take part in the survey had been asked from a parent for younger children, as is the usual procedure in Greece, and only those pupils with permission took part in the project; for older teenagers, informed consent was obtained. 627 pupil questionnaires⁹ were collected between February and April 2009 from schools in Attica, to which another 148 were added upon¹⁰, bringing the total number up to 775. A parent questionnaire was also handed out in the classroom, and pupils were asked to return them within a fortnight; on arrival, they were collected by the GRCGO researchers.

In order to see through the nuances and the different contexts that usually go amiss when using quantitative methods, in-depth, open-ended interviews were scheduled. In the end of the parent questionnaire, parents were asked to state their availability

⁶ The questionnaire had been previously revised and approved by the Greek Institute of Education, and formal permission to access schools was granted by the Ministry of Education as is the formal procedure in Greece in similar cases. Following the adjudication of the Institute of Education, two sets of questionnaires were compiled, one targeting ages 10-14, that is, including the 1st and 2nd grade of gymnasio, and one targeting ages 15-18, that is, including the 3rd grade of gymnasio, and the three grades of lykio. Both questionnaires carried a detailed section on mobile phone practices among children.

⁷ See Acknowledgements.

⁸ For the list of participating schools, see Acknowledgements. The distribution between public and private schools in the sample (7 public to 1 private) reflects the total student population in primary and secondary education in the prefecture of Attica in 2008. The initial aim was to target 600 students altogether, on the basis of an average cohort of students of 25 people per class. As a result, GRCGO would survey 525 pupils in *public* primary and secondary schools (175 pupils X 3 levels of education) and 75 pupils in private one (25 pupils per level of education, i.e. dimotiko, gymnasio, lykio). Along the way, we discovered that either some schools were not working out (for example, in one case, the Principal was hesitant about granting us permission to conduct the survey on the grounds that the school had been over-exposed to surveys and everyday practice and schooling was disrupted too often to allow it to happen again), or that we did not collect the number of questionnaires we expected. Therefore, we made up for the 'loss' by accessing additional cohorts of pupils in the school units that were more open towards our research.

⁹ The age breakdown of the questionnaire is as follows: 348 children questionnaires for ages between 9-14 (4th, 5th, 6th grade of primary school, 1st and 2nd grade of lower secondary school, i.e. gymnasio); 279 teen questionnaires for ages 15-18 (final grade of gymnasio, 4th, 5th and 6th grade of lykio).

¹⁰ In addition to the schools in Attica, a school in Crete and another one in Kos offered to join us; we decided to include them in the survey, hence the total number of questionnaires comes up to 775 (26 from Crete and 122 from Kos).

for an inhome, face-to-face interview with them, and then, separately, with the child. Out of 775 parent questionnaires, only 266¹¹ were returned (243 from Attica and 23 from Kos), and of them, only 30 parents (from Attica) agreed to make themselves available for an interview; in the end, 20 inhome interviews were conducted with parents and children (not together but each one in their turn, alone with the interviewers, unless otherwise required by the interviewees). Interviews were taped and transcribed.

Discussion of research findings

The Greek context at large

Official statistics show that, in Greece, 67% of 10-11 year-olds (4th, 5th and 6th grade in primary education) and 78% of 12-15 year olds (1st, 2nd, 3rd grade of gymnasio) were using the internet in 2008. On a weekly basis, almost half of the youngsters get online, with younger children being slightly heavier internet users (47%) in comparison to older ones (43%); this trend is reversed if we look at daily internet use, whereby only 16% of 10-11 year olds are online compared to 41% of 12-15 year olds. Gender differences are disappearing, with girls slightly overcoming boys (76%: 70%) in overall use. When it comes to the amount of use, on a daily basis boys are slightly heavier users than girls (39%: 33%), only to be overtaken by them on a weekly basis (43% of boys vs 46% of girls) (Greek Observatory for the Information Society, 2008). This corroborates the trend found elsewhere whereby internet use increases with age, and differences in internet access and amount of use between girls and boys are decreasing (Livingstone 2009; Livingstone and Haddon 2009).

Research shows that the range of benefits and risks experienced by children are positively correlated, which means that the increase in opportunities goes hand in hand with an increase in risks and vice versa (Livingstone and Helsper, 2008). The same goes for skills, in the sense that the more experienced and skilled users are more likely to encounter more opportunities and risks compared to the less competent users. In other words, children with good internet skills, take up more opportunities online and are thus exposed to more online risks.

Following available evidence across Europe, the EU Kids Online network found that, when age is also taken into account, older children and teenagers are more prone to experiencing more online risks than younger ones, though it can be argued that as youth gain experience and skills with age, they are more capable of coping with them successfully; younger aged children, nevertheless, may come across fewer risks, because they use the internet less as a result of their modest online skills, but, once they encounter them, they may lack the appropriate coping skills. When it comes to gender, it seems that gender differences in internet use are waning, as there are now few differences in internet access and amount of use between girls and boys; nevertheless, girls and boys have different preferences for online activities, which exposes them to different types of online risk (Hasebrink et al. 2009). Furthermore, there is a chance that seemingly negative or 'inappropriate' content may create

¹¹ There were 162 children's parent questionnaires, and 81 teenagers'.

positive opportunities for youth. Children may develop strategies for coping with 'inappropriate' material and it can be a source of information and contribute to the process of actively developing their own values and beliefs (Byron 2008: 26).

One of my first research questions was to examine whether there was any difference in exposure to pornographic content between families with one child and those with more offspring- in the sense that children with older siblings would be more likely to have seen pornography. Looking at older teens (15-18 years old), about one third had encountered pornography by accident (36% of those with siblings, and 33% for only children), and another third was deliberately looking for pornography (32% of those with siblings and 35% for only children), thus indicating that there is no major difference between the experiences and conduct of only children and children with siblings. The Pearson chi-square test consolidated this finding as it showed that being an old child or having siblings does not determine whether young users will accidentally run into porn content or whether they will go looking for it.

Younger children (ages 10-14) are more likely to encounter pornographic material by accident regardless of whether they have siblings or not (one third of them in each case) rather than by looking for it on purpose (less than one tenth).

My next assumption was that minors who have their home computer in their bedroom are more likely to have come across sexually explicit material. Again examining older teens, it seems that the location of the PC in the bedroom makes barely any difference when it comes to accidental exposure to pornography (about one third in each case). However, things change as far as *deliberate* search of pornographic content is concerned- here having you own bedroom, away from parental control, makes a difference: 43% of teens with a PC in their bedroom are looking for such content on purpose as opposed to only 22% of youth who look for such content and who do not have a computer in their room. The chi-square test verifies that deliberate exposure to pornographic material is strongly dependent on teens having their computer in their own bedroom (p-value at 0,001). This finding consolidates the notion that in contemporary media-rich homes with a predominant 'bedroom culture', youth are very often left without appropriate parental monitoring and control, and while this is to be expected from older children, it begs the question for younger ones. As many Greek parents are not internet savvy¹² and therefore not in any position to regulate their offspring's online behaviour, this is hardly surprising. When it comes to younger children (10-14 years old), the chi square test shows that having their computer in their bedroom makes no difference regarding exposure to online pornography, whether that might be by accident or on purpose. However, with more than one third of younger minors experiencing sexually explicit material by accident on their bedroom computer (compared to only one tenth seeking for it deliberately), it seems that more active parental mediation (that is, talking to

¹² According to the Eurobarometer 2008 (EC 2009), Greek parents are among the laggards in internet use across the EU: 45. 8% of them are not internet users (EU27: 16.4%), and just 20.9% use it on a daily basis (EU27: 31,9%); only half of the parents in Greece are aware that their children are internet users, when equivalent parental awareness in Estonia is 93% and in Romania 69,5%; finally, the fact that one third of parents in Greece have not posed any restrictions on their children's online conduct is further proof of parental ignorance of online risk.

children about online risk and content) or restrictive mediation (i.e. setting rules) (Lobe et al, 2009) and filtering is needed.

Gender variables also play a significant part in experiencing online porn, as boys and girls prefer different online activities; as evidenced by the EU Kids Online research findings, their choices have different consequences, with boys appearing more likely to seek out offensive or violent content, access pornographic content or be sent links to such content, and girls appearing more likely to be upset by offensive, violent and pornographic material (among other things as well) (Livingstone and Haddon 2009). 44% of older boys have accidentally come across online porn and another 56,5% went deliberately looking for it, as opposed to 28% and 11% of girls respectively. The Pearson Chi-Square test showed very high statistical significance and dependence between gender and accidental exposure to pornographic content (p-value 0,011 at five percent level of significance), as well as purposeful exposure to such content (p-value less than 0,001).

Deliberate exposure to online pornography is also gender dependent insofar younger minors are concerned, though to a much less degree (p-value at 0,002): 13% of young boys go online looking for porn (: 4% of girls); more than one third of younger boys (40%) are encountering pornographic content online by accident (: 27% of girls). This confirms that the kind of online practices taken up by younger and older boys makes them much more likely to encounter sexually explicit material in relation to girls.

When asked whether they use their mobile in order to exchange sexually explicit material, both genders were not exactly thrilled by the prospect: only 16% of older boys reported that they used their mobe in such a manner (compared to only 2% of girls), with almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of them (71%) rejecting this use altogether (compared to more than 90% of girls). This indicates that despite any level of experimentation with porn, older teens in Greece do not favour user-generated pornographic content through the mobile¹³.

Conforming to the EU Kids Online findings that risk taking is positively correlated with age, older teens are overall more open to risky behaviour- in fact, there is a strong positive correlation between gender and risky conduct (p-value 0,108): a sizeable minority of them admit finding risky behaviour a fun thing to do, with more older boys than girls reporting that they 'often do risky things because it's fun' (36%: 25%), as opposed to those who say they do not (49% of boys: 62% of girls). Having siblings or being an only child also heavily impacts on the adoption of risky conduct (p-value 0,035), with 44% of older only children admitting to like 'doing risky things for fun' as opposed to 27% of teens with siblings.

Coping strategies

Among those teens who have encountered pornographic content, older boys, not surprisingly, are more open to such content in relation to girls: a quarter of boys went on to check a similar link so as to explore what is available (as opposed to only

¹³ Due to ethical considerations, and following the recommendation of the Greek Institute of Education, some issues were not raised with the younger children; this was one of the. The same applies in all cases where there is no mentioning of younger minors.

5% of girls); 47% of them opened up and looked at the pornographic files they were sent (as opposed to only 11% of girls). In both these cases, there is great dependency between gender and the particular coping strategies (p-value at 0,001 and 0,000 respectively). Older teens did not feel any need to share their encounter with adults - parent or teacher- (only 3% of older boys and none of the girls), while just above one tenth of them confided in their peers (11% of boys: 13% of girls). Interestingly, 58% of older girls erased the explicit files without further exploration compared to less than a quarter of older boys (20%). The chi square test in this case shows very strong dependence between gender and deletion of pornographic material (p-value at 0,000).

Younger children are not that much into sexually explicit material compared to older teens anyway, which problematizes the generalized public concern about the harmful effects of pornography on younger users. Significantly, for the most part, younger minors delete inappropriate content without bothering to look at it further (40% of boys: 57% of girls), whereas very few boys pursue it any further: just above one tenth went on to check another link to find what is available, and less than a quarter of them actually opened up and looked at the pornographic files they have been sent. It is therefore evident that there is strong dependence in favour of boys between gender and visiting a relevant link (p-value at 0,006), and opening up the file to look at it (p-value at 0,002). Also interesting is the fact that when it comes to informing an adult (parent or teacher) about such an encounter, it is predominantly girls who resort to this coping strategy (p-value at 0,005) whereas younger boys tend to share this information with their peers (p-value at 0,012).

Reactions to pornographic content follow expected gender lines, with a little less than half of the older boys reporting they do not think anything of it (44%) as opposed to one third of the girls (35%). A quarter of the boys found it interesting (: 6% of the girls), while only 4% felt disgusted by it (: less than a quarter of girls, 20%); in both cases, the Pearson Chi Square test showed very strong dependence between gender and feelings of interest and disgust towards pornography (p-value 0,004 and 0,005 respectively). Despite feelings of discomfort and disgust, however, only a small minority of older teens wished they had never actually seen such content (2% of boys: 8% of girls), indicating that inappropriate content is not necessarily deemed harmful by the young people themselves¹⁴. This is further compounded by the next piece of findings, regarding porn practices.

In the case of younger minors the chi square test showed strong dependence between gender and feelings of utter disgust ('I wish I never saw it'), and admittance of liking such content (p-value at 0,001 in both cases), and light dependence between gender and feelings of nonchalance from the point of view of boys ('I didn't think anything of it') (p-value at 0,078). Hence, a little more than half of younger girls (57%) wished they had never seen online pornography (: 40% of boys), while a little less than a quarter of younger boys (20%) reported actually liking what they saw (: 3% of girls); another 16% of boys thought such content was interesting (: 3% of girls). Non surpassingly, sexually explicit content provokes stronger negative reactions as far

¹⁴ The Chi-Square test showed that there is no dependence between gender and wishing never having encountered such content.

as younger children are concerned, more from younger girls than from boys, and it is in this particular case that parental mediation should be more proactive.

Practising porn

The frequency of exposure to pornographic content is also gender-dependant with older boys showing a strong preference for explorations with such material across different media, especially on a more regular basis: almost 2/3 of them have encountered many times porn on the internet (only 14% of girls), just above one third of them on television (16% of girls), and more surprisingly, 40% of them on DVDs (only 6% of girls), 29% on magazines (only 9% of girls), which shows that boys are still making some kind of an effort to find sexually explicit material offline that is purchased or rented. The chi-square showed heavy dependence between gender and each one of these media, which suggests that the frequency of exposure to porn on the internet, television, DVDs and magazines is directly related to one's gender¹⁵ Another interesting finding was that 40% of older boys have seen many times pornography on their mobile (only 1,5% of girls).

These findings should not be interpreted as if older girls have no experience of pornography. In fact, although very few of them have encountered porn very often, quite a few of them have been in contact with such material from 1-4 times: 44% of them: 33% of boys online; 43% of them: 38% of boys on television; about one third of both gender on DVDs; one third of girls: 40% of boys on magazines; 11% of girls: 27% of boys on their mobile. This consolidates, in my view, the previous finding that although young teenage girls are not as much interested in pornography as teenage boys, they are not actually bothered and see themselves being hurt by it, and hence, any overall claims about harmful effects of pornographic content on young teenagers should be made within this context in mind. Also significant is the fact that there is strong dependence between gender and seeing porn for the first time on the mobile (p-value at 0,006) for older boys.

In the case of younger children, boys overtake girls in frequency of exposure, though, truth be told, such exposure (many times) is not widespread within this group across the different media (internet, television, DVDs, magazines and mobiles): the internet, television and magazines is where a quarter of younger boys have seen pornography on a regular basis. Looking into exposure on pornography from 1-4 times, the internet comes on top (around 40% for both boys and girls), followed by magazines (about a third of boys and a quarter of girls), television, DVDs and mobiles in smaller percentages. The chi-square suggests very strong dependence between gender and exposure on pornographic material on the internet (0,002), magazines (0,003) and the mobile (0,017) in favour of the boys.

Parental attitudes, worries and strategies of mediation

Parental mediation of children's internet use has only recently started to attract considerable academic and research interest and attention. When it comes to how children and parents cope with online risks, there is considerable variation across

¹⁵ P-value 0,000; 0,028; 0,000; and 0,008 for each medium.

countries: in some countries, including Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark, Iceland and Norway, almost all children who go online have parents well acquainted with the internet. In others, including Greece, Cyprus and Portugal, where barely half of children go online, parents generally do not use the internet and hence are hard-pressed to monitor their children online (Hasebrink et al., 2009). Empirical research has shown that there is no easy one-fits-all solution to parental mediation regarding children's online risks. Instead, active mediation may be the most effective strategy in some countries, whereas in different cultural contexts, filtering software may be more effective (Lobe et al 2009). Given that parents in Greece are considered 'digital immigrants', and the predominant 'risk averse' culture promoted by the Greek press, it would be useful to examine parental views regarding the internet and their offspring's experience of pornography, as well parental regulation and control.

Taking into account the level of education, the higher this is, the better the attitude towards the internet: when asked whether the internet helps improve teen's performance at school, only 16% of high school graduate parents of older teens agreed as opposed to 34% of parents with post-graduate studies; predictably, about one third of parents with high school education believe that the internet reinforces inappropriate conduct among their children, compared to 15% of parents with vocational education, 4% of university graduates while all parents of older teens with post-graduate education rejected this notion. The majority of Greek parents believe that their child is not missing out without using the internet (88% of high school graduates, 100% of parents with vocational education, 96% of university graduates which falls to, a still high, 75% for those with post-graduate education), something that, overall, confirms the notion of the Greek parent as a 'digital immigrant'. The case with the parents of younger children is rather different, however, and shows that adult attitudes regarding the value of internet use by young children in Greece are gradually changing. Quite a few of them believe the internet may help their children at school, regardless the educational background (percentages range from almost 50% for high school graduates and those with postgraduate education to around 40% for those with vocational and university education), whereas overall more parents think the internet reinforces inappropriate conduct (in relation to parents of older teens): percentages range between 30% for parents with lower education to 17 and 16% for those with graduate and postgraduate education).

Given the choice between the internet, DVDs, television and magazines and asked where do they think their child encountered pornographic content most probably, more than half of the parents of older teens point the finger to the internet, regardless of their educational background, thus verifying the 'myth of online porn' in epidemic proportions (Maddison op.cit.). The same applies for parents of younger children (approximately 2/3 for parents with lower education and university graduates, and half of the parents with postgraduate background). In fact, when asked if they are worried their children may encounter sexually explicit images online, most parents of older teens report they do (over 2/3 of them), with the exception of those with post-graduate education (a quarter of them). Looking at parents of younger children, the level of worry is still high, ranging from more than three quarters for high school graduates to two thirds for parents with postgraduate education.

Even so, and despite their worries, parents of older children are not particularly employing filtering software to block their offspring from accessing pornographic sites: only 15% of parents with high school education; 23% of parents with vocational background, one third of university graduates, whereas parents with post-graduate education are not using any filtering at all. This may be either because parents believe their teenage children are able and mature enough to cope with such kind of material, because they think that it is no longer their place to put filters, or because parents themselves do not have the necessary literacy to employ filtering mediation. This is not so in the case of parents of younger children, where the percentage of them using such software has increased significantly - one possible reason being increased parental awareness of internet-related risks for young children, including pornographic content: twice as many high school graduates employ such filters, 2/3 of those with a vocational background and more than half of parents with postgraduate background.

When it comes to actually facing the possibility of their youngsters having encountered pornographic content, almost all parents of older teens reject this notion regardless of educational background (all parents with vocational, university and post graduate education, and 88% of parents with high school education); the same applies for parents of younger children, where all of them deny any such encounter from the point of view of their offspring. This in effect reifies the commonly held belief of the innocent and asexual child and teenager for whom sex and porn are issues 'off limits'.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have explored the porn practices of young children and teenagers in Greece in order to make more sense of their broader sexual cultures and the ways in which Greek parents respond to them, and in order to contribute to the ongoing discussion regarding the notion of harm in relation to contemporary media culture and its consumption. Talking about sex in relation to children and teenagers is a taboo issue, given the preconception of children as 'innocent' and asexual; any discussion with children pertaining to pornography is equally taboo. A view predominates that children need to be protected from harmful content - and sexual and pornographic content is more often than not seen as falling within this category. The ubiquity and availability of online sexually explicit material has been seen as exacerbating media harm and offence.

Yet as I have shown, there is no particular reason for concern regarding young people's exposure to sexually explicit content. Although teenage girls are not as interested in pornography as boys, they do not see themselves being hurt by it, and any claims about the harmful effects of pornographic content on young teenagers should be made within this in mind. Reactions to pornographic content also follow expected gender lines, with more interest from boys and disgust from girls. Despite feelings of disgust, however, only a tiny minority of older teens wished they had never seen such content, indicating that 'inappropriate' content is not necessarily deemed harmful by young people themselves. Younger children are not as interested in sexually explicit material compared to older teens, a fact that problematizes the public concern about the supposed harmful effects of pornography on younger

users: for the most part, very few younger children pursue their encounters with porn any further. Younger girls tend to inform adults about a pornographic encounter whereas boys tend to share this information with their peers.

It is possible, then, to conclude that while a small number of young people are clearly offended by porn that they encounter, there is no evidence to suggest that they are harmed by it. However, the fact that sexually explicit content provokes stronger negative reactions as far as younger children are concerned, suggests an area of concern. Greek parents are not internet savvy and media rich bedrooms allow unmonitored encounters with pornographic material, and here it seems that more active parental mediation (talking to younger children about online risks and content) or restrictive mediation (setting rules) (Lobe et al, 2009), and filtering is needed.

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