Special Section: Approaching intersectionality in gender psychology research
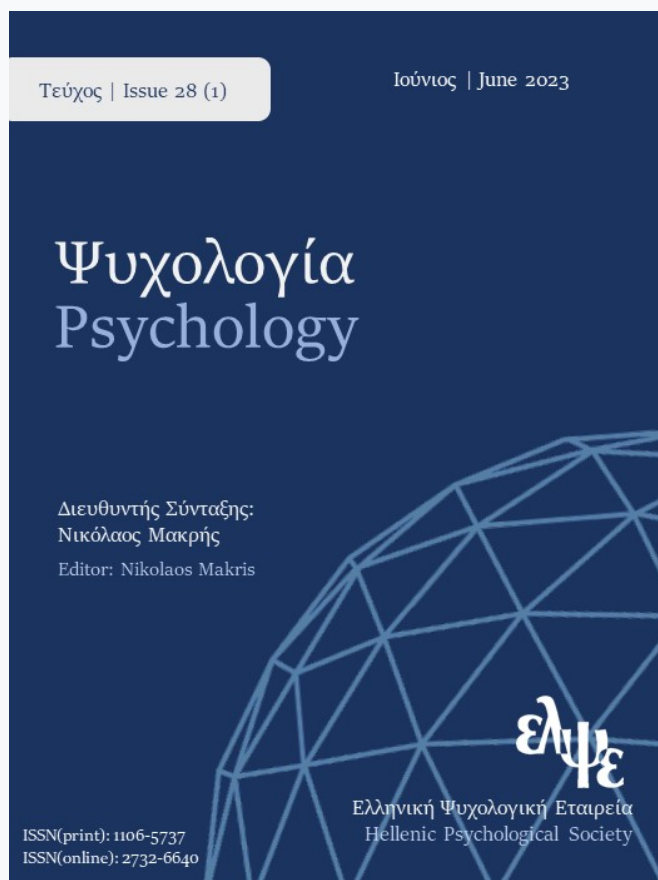
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Ελληνική Ψυχολογική Εταιρεία
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Approaching intersectionality in gender psychology research

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Intersectionality, Gender identity, Gender research	The present special section constitutes the first systematic attempt to present the concept of intersectionality in Greek psychological research and specifically in gender research. Consequently, it aims to highlight the ways in which gender intersects with other identificatory categories, shaping the experiences of individuals, especially those belonging to disadvantaged groups. The papers presented in the issue demonstrate that intersectionality reflects the reality of life while being at the same time, an important 'tool' for understanding the complexity of the human experience. It is expected that the special section will contribute, both at a research and clinical level, to a critical review of traditional theories and methods in Psychology, providing an impetus for further research which will take into consideration both cultural (e.g., social norms, stereotypes, etc.) and social (e.g., power structures) contexts in the study of individual behavior and experience.
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A basic principle of the feminist critical approach in the field of Psychology is that gender is not a natural and unchanging category, which differentiates men and women, but a complex social construction; the individual shapes the ways in which he/she positions or perceives him/her-self, as a gender subject, in different social and cultural contexts. Having this principle as a starting point, gender research in psychology and other disciplines focused on understanding both the specific challenges faced by women as well as the differences and inequalities between men and women enriching our understanding of the female experience but also of the human experience *per se*, both theoretically and methodologically

Useful as it is, the feminist critical approach gave rise to the criticism leveled in the last 30 years that gender research has mainly focused on gender-specific issues ignoring intra-group differences due to the other groups in which women belong to. According to this line of thought, human lives cannot be explained by considering exclusively single categories. Gender is only one aspect of a person's identity and experiences, and thus, the observed inequality between men and women is intensified not only because of gender but by the different groups to which the person belongs, in relation to race, ethno-cultural origin, socio-economic level, religion, sexual orientation, health, age, etc., in other words, by the combination of intersecting categories with which he/she identifies (Carastathis, 2014; Crenshaw, 1991).

Consequently, the ways in which gender intersects with other identities can differentiate women's experiences of oppression and privilege. As the scholar who first coined the term intersectionality pointed out, in her article titled "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" (Crenshaw, 1991), "intersectional subordination ... is frequently the consequence of the imposition of one burden that interacts with preexisting vulnerabilities to create yet another dimension of disempowerment" (p. 1249). Moreover, as Hankivsky (2014) and Carastathis (2014) suggest, intersectionality refers to the interaction and mutual influence of social categories as well as to the multiple and intersecting forms of gender positions,

which are constructed by structures such as social class, sexuality, and race. Within this context, the study of intersectionality requires a multi-level analysis taking into consideration the intersecting processes by which power and inequality are produced, reproduced, and actively resisted (Hankivsky, 2014).

The last few decades, the concept of intersectionality has expanded feminist theory and academic research, by including the overlapping and contradictory systems of power that act simultaneously and affect the lives of individuals and their perspectives (Shields, 2008). Psychology has increasingly used this concept as well, although to a lesser degree than those academic fields which are concerned with questions of power relations (Shields, 2008). Various explanations have been offered for this delayed use of the concept of intersectionality in Psychology. These cover a broad range, from the dominant methodology employed and the emphasis being placed on the experimental approach (Shields, 2008) to the tendency to focus on the "personal" rather than the "political" and, consequently, to ignore power relationships either between groups or within the group or other societal factors (Burman, 2012).

Psychological studies using the concept of intersectionality, however, have shed light for the last two decades on a series of issues, such as social identity, stereotypes, mental health issues and clinical practices as well as social inequalities and social justice. Within this context, gender identity is not regarded as a fixed and transcendental entity, but it is rather understood as fluid and in conjunction with other categories such as race, socio-economic status, power, sexuality, etc. These intersected categories seem to be sources of oppression and biases, motivating researchers to advocate social action aiming at equality and social justice (e.g., Fine, 2012; Rosenthal, 2016; Shields, 2008).

Moreover, in the clinical field, intersected categories seem to affect clinical diagnosis and practice in various complex ways, urging mental health professionals to "embrace" this diversity, that is, to accept and understand each person's complex gender identity seeking solutions not only within the individual but within societal factors that enhance inequality and oppression (e.g., Goodman et al., 2004). Consequently, one might say that by incorporating the concept of intersectionality, psychology has expanded our understanding of the complex dimensions of identity and their interplay with one another as well as the individuals' experiences. Moreover, it has enriched research, clinical practice, and social intervention strategies.

In Greece, similarly to what has happened abroad, the concept of intersectionality has been explored mainly by feminist scholars from fields other than Psychology (for example in Political Theory; Carastathis, 2014; in Sociology; Zavos, 2021). One of the first attempts in Greek psychological research to investigate the joint effect of return migration and gender on family roles through quantitative methodology was made by Sakka (1996). Despite the interesting results, the author suggested that existing psychological theories on gender and the quantitative approach were insufficient to explain how return migration and gender shape the participants' experiences (Sakka, 1996; Sakka, & Dikaiou, 2001; Sakka et al., 1999).

In consecutive years, attempts were made to study, through a feminist perspective, how categories such as social class, level and type of education as well as rural or urban place of living, together with gender, shape women's and men's identity during adolescence and adulthood, especially in relation to career and family life (Athanasiades, 2002; Athanasiadou, 1997; Deliyanni-Kouimtzi, & Sakka, 2005; Sakka, 2007). It was not until 2012, however, that the issue of intersectionality became the focal point of the discussion (Athanasiades, 2012; Figgou, 2012), within the context of a Special Issue of the Greek Journal *Psychology* titled "Gender as an object of negotiation in psychological research" and edited by Deliyanni-Kouimtzi & Sakka (2012). The authors of this issue, using mostly the feminist approach, investigated the interplay of gender identity with other identities or categories, such as unemployment (Tazoglou & Deliyanni-Kouimtzi, 2012), minority status (Sakka, 2012) and multiculturalism (Malikiosi-Loizos, 2012). As Figgou (2012) pointed out, in the rest of the papers, the analytical categories that the authors use presuppose the intersection of gender identity with that of the substance addict (Papathanasiou et al., 2012) and the woman who underwent a mastectomy (Avdi et al., 2012).

Despite the limited interest of academic Psychology in the concept of intersectionality in Greece for about two decades, it seems that this is slowly changing, since more and more researchers, even though sporadically, are beginning to incorporate the concept of intersectionality investigating issues of feminine identity or sexuality through the discursive/rhetorical paradigm (i.e., Kotroni & Athanasiades, 2011; Michos et al., 2021; Figgou et al., 2023; and others).

Within this context, the present special section of the Journal *Psychologia* comes to fill this gap and aspires to call attention to some of the ways in which intersectionality has been integrated into psychological research on gender. Consequently, it aims at highlighting: (a) the ways in which gender intersects with other categories

of identity, shaping the experience of individuals, especially those belonging to disadvantaged groups, and (b) how the concept of intersectionality has influenced the ways and the methods through which we investigate gender identity in relation to other categories.

More specifically, the papers presented in this special section will attempt to provide answers for some of the issues which have been discussed above, through different perspectives, methodologies, and research examples of the Greek and Australian social context. Authors of the first two papers discuss the interplay of gender and culture/race and investigate, on the one hand, women's leadership speeches and, on the other hand, the views of adolescents of different cultural and social background regarding adult life The next three papers investigate diverse experiences of women, such as everyday spoken sexism, "good motherhood" during the pandemic, and the experience of breast cancer and mastectomy, discussing respectively the intersection of various categories (gender and sexuality) or various roles (mother and employee) or various identities (the identity of the woman who has experienced breast cancer and/or mastectomy). Finally, the authors of the last paper focus on assessing the multiple dimensions of heterosexual male identity through the construction and the assessment of an instrument which is not limited by the comparison of the heterosexual male identity with the LGBTQI+ identities.

More particularly, the first article by E. Corpez, M. Augoustinos and C. Due investigates how intertwined identities are implicated in minority women's experiences of leadership in a range of professions. By using a discursive analytical approach, the authors applied the concept of intersectionality as a theoretical framework to analyze nine speeches delivered by culturally, and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in leadership, in the context of Australian "Women in Leadership" forums, from 2010 to 2017. The objective of these forums was to discuss critical issues faced by women in public and corporate life, by inviting prominent and influential people to offer firsthand accounts of their own personal experiences of leadership. According to the analysis, it was found that women speakers drew upon multiple identities to position themselves as leaders in their respective fields, as well as detailing the many struggles they had to overcome to achieve this. These identities are associated with gender, race and culture, migrant status, illness, and disability, as well as parenthood. Finally, all speakers recognized and emphasized the structural and institutional barriers that continue to exist, demonstrating thus, how equality remains elusive even as the numbers of women in leadership roles are rising.

The article by D. Sakka and I. Papazoglou attempts to highlight the ways in which culturally diverse adolescents, in terms of gender, ethnic background, religion, and social status, plan their future family and professional life. The results of the study reveal the multiple gender identities that are constructed, whereas it is suggested that the participants' views are shaped by the marginalized or privileged categories in which they belong to. Minority boys, on the one hand, limit their future choices when compared to majority boys, while on the other hand, minority girls are often the target of double (gender and ethnicity) or, even, multiple types of discrimination. While discussing the results, the authors argue that the observed differences between the two groups of adolescents seem to be determined by the different starting points of each group; starting points are related to their social position (minority-majority, marginalized or privileged) as well as to the gender of the participants, their socio-economic level, and their cultural background. They further suggest that the participants' understanding of the different access they have to privileges and power, seems to further affect the images they construct of their future selves as men and women and contribute to the differentiation of the two groups from one another.

The third paper, by A. Flouli and C. Athanasiades, focuses on spoken sexism and, more particularly, on how women discursively construct sexist comments as a cause for reaction and resistance to sex-based oppression and misogyny. Using the theoretical and methodological framework of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, the authors explored the conceptual discursive constructions of spoken sexism delivered by thirty women, aged 18-45 years old, who participated voluntarily in the study through semi-structured individual interviews. During the interviews, women were asked to share their experiences, their views as well as their understanding of sexist comments in everyday spoken language. Great attention was paid to how participants cope with sexist comments in their everyday life, as well as to the impact that such comments have on them. According to the analysis of the transcribed material, it was found that women discursively contracted spoken sexism as a cause for reaction, drawing upon a discourse of resistance and adopting a combative subject position. Overall, the study revealed that sexist comments are still an integrated part of women's everyday interactions, deepening the structural

disadvantage that women face in terms of status and hierarchy. However, it was also found that at least the women in the study adopted a combative position and demonstrated, through their discourse, a sense of empowerment, awareness, and a willingness to react in accordance with a feminist stance.

The fourth paper, by A. Psalti and C. Antoniou, negotiates the notion of "good motherhood" in conditions of lock-down and teleworking during the COVIC-19 pandemic. The authors interviewed eight working mothers with children, between the ages of 3 and 18, during which the women participants were invited to talk about their experience of the lock-down in relation to their role as working mothers. The study followed the theoretical and methodological guidelines of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Results indicated that working mothers in Greece felt that they had been 'penalized' by the pandemic, as they continued to be the primary caregivers while trying to meet the demands of their job. The major challenges that they faced during the lockdowns were teleworking from home, multitasking, "intense" motherhood, and a loss of control over their lives. According to the authors, understanding the experiences of working mothers of minors in the midst of a pandemic will contribute to the design and implementation of targeted and evidence-based interventions during future health and other crises.

The fifth article by D. Ziliaskopoulou & E. Avdi studies the experience of mastectomy as it emerges through women's narratives, emphasizing the subjective meanings that it holds for women, in relation to their identity and relationships. The female breast is directly linked to important aspects of female identity such as femininity, sexuality, and motherhood, and the article, using the phenomenological analysis, specifically attempts to examine the experience of mastectomy in relation to the socio-cultural context and gender-social relations. The analysis highlighted the need to expand the concept of liminality in psycho-oncology, to include the ambiguity associated with women's self-identification as 'normal women', in relation to embodied experience and the sociocultural constructions of the female breast. According to the authors, liminality in relation to gender identity seems to characterize many women's experiences, despite the use of silicone pads and/or plastic reconstructive surgery to manage the altered body. Findings are further discussed in relation to individual support practices for women who have undergone mastectomy.

The last article by Ch. Daoultzis & P. Kordoutis focuses on the psychometric properties of a newly designed self-report measure assessing heterosexual male identity dimensions which is called "Male Identity Scale" (MIS). The authors argue that the need to understand and measure male identity and its dimensions derives from the fact that rarely has the sexual identity of heterosexuals been the focus of research because of the biased perception that heterosexuality has been the "standard" sexual orientation which is "natural" and stable. These biases are even reflected in the tools used to measure male identity development since they focus on comparisons of straight to non-straight people ignoring the assessment of intra-individual identity development processes *per se*. Taking as a starting point the most modern understandings of the development of male identity as a fluid self-perception shaped by societal, historical, intra-, and interpersonal factors (e.g., Stein, 1997) (i.e., socially fabricated, and imposed gender roles and cultural norms), the authors point to the need for developing an instrument that assesses the multidimensional nature of male identity and tests its psychometric properties.

In conclusion, we might say that the present special section constitutes the first systematic attempt to present the concept of intersectionality in the field of academic Psychology in Greece and it shows that intersectionality reflects the reality of life, and it is an important tool for understanding and addressing the complexity of human experience. We hope that this brief presentation will contribute at both the academic and clinical level to the critical consideration of the traditional theories and methods of Psychology and will trigger further research on intersectionality taking both the cultural (i.e., norms, stereotypes, etc.) and the social context (i.e., structural power) into account when studying individual behavior and experience.

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Προσεγγίζοντας τη διαθεματικότητα στην ψυχολογική έρευνα για το φύλο

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ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ	ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ
Διαθεματικότητα, Ταυτότητα φύλου, Έρευνα για το φύλο	Το παρόν ειδικό αφιέρωμα αποτελεί την πρώτη συστηματική προσπάθεια παρουσίασης της έννοιας της διαθεματικότητας στην ψυχολογική έρευνα στην Ελλάδα και συγκεκριμένα στην έρευνα για το φύλο. Κατά συνέπεια, στοχεύει στην ανάδειξη των τρόπων με τους οποίους το φύλο διασταυρώνεται με άλλες ταυτοτικές κατηγορίες, διαμορφώνοντας τις εμπειρίες των ατόμων και κυρίως εκείνων που ανήκουν σε μειονοτικές ομάδες. Οι εργασίες που παρουσιάζονται στο αφιέρωμα αποδεικνύουν ότι η διαθεματικότητα αντανακλά την πραγματικότητα της ζωής, αποτελώντας ταυτόχρονα σημαντικό 'εργαλείο' για την κατανόηση της πολυπλοκότητας της ανθρώπινης εμπειρίας. Αναμένεται να συμβάλει, τόσο σε ερευνητικό όσο και σε κλινικό επίπεδο, στην κριτική θεώρηση των παραδοσιακών θεωριών και μεθόδων της Ψυχολογίας, δίνοντας το έναυσμα για περαιτέρω έρευνα η οποία θα λαμβάνει υπόψη τόσο το πολιτισμικό (π.χ. κοινωνικοί κανόνες, στερεότυπα, κ.α.) όσο και το κοινωνικό (π.χ. δομές εξουσίας) πλαίσιο στην μελέτη της συμπεριφοράς και των εμπειριών του ατόμου.
ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΑ ΕΠΙΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑΣ	
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