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**“SEXISM BLINDNESS”  
A STUDY OF THE IMPOLITENESS STRATEGIES  
EMPLOYED IN A GREEK YOUTUBE POLYLOGUE ON  
SEXISM**

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## **Declaration page**

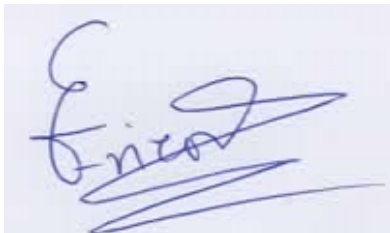
### **Declaration**

This submission is my own work. Any quotation from, or description of, work of others is acknowledged herein by reference to the sources, whether published or unpublished.

Name

Eleni Sitou

Signature

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Eleni Sitou', with a stylized flourish underneath.

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## Abstract

Following a Digital Discourse Analysis approach, this paper investigates a conflictive YouTube polylogue which was created under a Greek video-clip about Covid-19. The video-clip was released on May, 2020 but was immediately withdrawn by the General Secretariat for Civil Protection, following fierce reactions as to its sexist content. The video-clip that was posted on YouTube depicted the Greek actor, Christos Loulis, having a telephone conversation presumably with his girlfriend (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUVzB6Kn-0k>).

The aim of the study is to analyse and discuss the impoliteness strategies that are employed by YouTube users based on Culpeper's (2011) and Bousfield's (2008) approaches to impoliteness. The comments that are analysed in this paper involve impoliteness towards the individuals who attribute sexism to the video-clip. The thesis takes a qualitative perspective to the analysis of the digital data.

Impoliteness has been found to be rampant in digitally-mediated communication, which allows the expression of impolite as well as insulting views, since people can conceal their true identity, thus finding it easier to insult others. The examination of the present YouTube polylogue suggests that the topic of sexism creates polarization as well as antagonism among YouTube users which also leads to the creation of an ingroup, consisting of individuals who claim that they see no sexism in the video-clip, and the outgroup, which consists of people who attribute sexism to the video-clip and become recipients of the ingroup's insulting comments. Finally, the study shows that the majority of the commenters are unable to recognise the mansplaining and the indirect sexism that surround the actor's words.

**Keywords:** impoliteness, indirect sexism, YouTube, online polylogues, asynchronous DMC, online conflict

## Περίληψη

Ακολουθώντας τη μέθοδο Ψηφιακής Ανάλυσης Λόγου, η παρούσα εργασία μελετάει έναν συγκρουσιακό πολύλογο στο YouTube, ο οποίος δημιουργήθηκε με τα σχόλια που ακολουθούν ένα βίντεο που δημιουργήθηκε στο πλαίσιο εκστρατείας για την αντιμετώπιση του Covid-19. Το βίντεο κυκλοφόρησε τον Μάιο του 2020 και αποσύρθηκε άμεσα από τη Γενική Γραμματεία Πολιτικής Προστασίας, καθώς δέχτηκε έντονη κριτική για τον σεξιστικό του χαρακτήρα. Το βίντεο, το οποίο αναρτήθηκε στο YouTube, δείχνει τον Έλληνα ηθοποιό, Χρήστο Λούλη, να μιλάει στο τηλέφωνο με την φίλη του, εξηγώντας της γιατί δεν πρέπει να πάνε στην πλατεία (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUVzB6Kn-0k>).

Ο κύριος στόχος της παρούσας διπλωματικής είναι να αναλύσει και να συζητήσει τις στρατηγικές αγένειας οι οποίες υιοθετούνται από τους χρήστες του YouTube και η ανάλυσή τους βασίζεται στις θεωρίες της αγένειας του Culpeper (2011) και του Bousfield (2008). Σε δεύτερο επίπεδο, η παρούσα εργασία πραγματεύεται πώς εμφανίζεται ο σεξισμός στα σχόλια του YouTube, με βάση την θεωρία της Mills (2008) περί γλώσσας και σεξισμού. Τα σχόλια προς ανάλυση εκφράζουν αγένεια προς τα άτομα τα οποία αναγνωρίζουν το σεξιστικό περιεχόμενο στο βίντεο. Η μεθοδολογία της έρευνας είναι ποιοτική ως προς την συλλογή και ανάλυση των σχολίων.

Η ασύγχρονη ψηφιακή επικοινωνία φαίνεται να επιτρέπει την έκφραση αγενών και προσβλητικών απόψεων, καθώς οι χρήστες μπορούν να αποκρύπτουν την πραγματική τους ταυτότητα, και άρα είναι πιο εύκολο για αυτούς να προσβάλλουν κάποιον με διαφορετική άποψη από την δική τους (Pihlaja 2014: 4). Η εξέταση του παρόντος πολυλόγου στο YouTube υποδηλώνει ότι το θέμα του σεξισμού δημιουργεί πόλωση και ανταγωνισμό ανάμεσα στους σχολιαστές, που οδηγούν στην δημιουργία μιας ενδο-ομάδας, αποτελούμενη από άτομα τα οποία υποστηρίζουν ότι δεν βλέπουν σεξισμό στο βίντεο, και μιας εξω-ομάδας, η οποία αποτελείται από ανθρώπους που αναγνωρίζουν το σεξιστικό περιεχόμενο του βίντεο και γίνονται δέκτες των προσβλητικών σχολίων της ενδο-ομάδας. Η μελέτη, επίσης δείχνει ότι η πλειονότητα των σχολιαστών/τριών του υπό διερεύνηση βίντεο δεν

αναγνωρίζουν το mansplaining καθώς και τον έμμεσο σεξισμό που βρίσκονται στα λόγια του ηθοποιού.

**Λέξεις κλειδιά:** αγένεια, έμμεσος σεξισμός, YouTube, διαδικτυακός πολύλογος, ασύγχρονη ψηφιακή επικοινωνία, διαδικτυακή σύρραξη

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

Im/politeness and its various understandings have constituted a central part of pragmatic research. Being polite is an important social construct for societies and people seem to use language in order to maintain appropriate social interactions with their interlocutors. Being impolite is also another important feature of social interaction which has been extensively investigated in the last two decades (Bousfield 2008; Culpeper 1996, 2011; Culpeper et al. 2017). As impoliteness is termed the use of “communicative strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony” (Culpeper et al. 2003: 1546).

Impoliteness is quite common in various types of discourse (Culpeper 2011: 6). The online context seems to be one of those types of discourse that impoliteness has been found to be rampant, especially when the topic of discussion is contested and sexism is one such context.

Gender conflict based on sexist stereotypes is an all-important social issue that still holds true today. Sexism and gender discrimination against women is often reflected in language and that is why several linguists have examined it thoroughly. According to Mills (2008), sexism is a phenomenon which has been institutionalised in societies and has led to social injustice. Sexism is also the main cause of dispute among individuals over the issue of power relations. It encompasses stereotypical beliefs about women, which should not only be seen as inherent in language, but also as context-dependent (Mills 2008: 1, 4). In this thesis, sexism is examined in an online setting, since language aggression against women is also found on the Internet with the aid of various impoliteness strategies.

Online settings allow users to communicate their views “without limits, and typically (though not always) without control” (Assimakopoulos et al. 2017: 11). YouTube is one of those online settings in which individuals can post comments under a particular video anonymously. Anonymity in digitally mediated communication fosters the expression of impolite behaviours, since people can conceal their true identity (Assimakopoulos et al. 2017: 11). YouTube conflicts



tend to create polylogues, including comments and replies to other users' posts (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2016: 232).

The aim of the present study is to investigate online impoliteness against women in asynchronous digital communication based on sexist comments in a particular online polylogal setting – YouTube comments posted under a Greek video-clip. The video-clip was produced by the General Secretariat for Civil Protection, as part of the campaign to deal with Covid-19, was released on 9 May, 2020 but was immediately withdrawn, as it was considered to be sexist. The video-clip presents the Greek actor, Christos Loulis, presumably talking to his girlfriend on the telephone (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUVzB6Kn-0k>).

The present thesis is structured as follows. In section 2, the theoretical background is provided with a focus on the theory of impoliteness, impoliteness in online contexts and sexism. Section 3 presents the methodology employed to collect and categorise the data. Section 4 comprises the analysis of selected comments from each category, according to the impoliteness strategies identified by Culpeper (2011), while in section 5, I discuss how impoliteness develops in this YouTube setting. Finally, section 6 completes the present study by drawing certain conclusions regarding online impoliteness and sexism.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Theoretical background**

The current research draws on theoretical approaches which investigate im/politeness in digital interaction. Impoliteness in this paper is seen from a sociocultural perspective, as a product of social practice and of social interaction (Mills 2017: 45).

People seem to disagree as to what im/politeness means and how it is conceptualized; individuals evaluate differently certain behaviours, which means that something that is considered impolite for one may not be considered so for the other (Culpeper 2011: 22).

#### **2.1 What is Impoliteness?**

The notion of impoliteness is quite controversial. Culpeper has been one of the first linguists who have thoroughly examined impoliteness, which he defined as “the use of strategies that are designed to ...[cause] social disruption” (1996: 350).

Culpeper (2011) gathered some of the most important definitions of impoliteness in order to illustrate that “there is no solid agreement [...] as to what ‘impoliteness’ actually is” (Locher and Bousfield 2008: 3). Defining impoliteness may be a challenging task, as there are different views and not just one understanding of impoliteness, and that is why it has been stated that “impoliteness is very much in the eye of the beholder” (Culpeper 2011: 22).

Culpeper (2011: 254) offers an extensive definition of impoliteness which reflects how multifaceted the phenomenon of impoliteness is:

Impoliteness is a negative attitude towards specific behaviours occurring in specific contexts. It is sustained by expectations, desires and/or beliefs about social organisation, including, in particular, how one person's or a group's identities are mediated by others in interaction. Situated behaviours are viewed negatively – considered ‘impolite’ – when they conflict with how one expects them to be, how one wants them to be and/or how one thinks they ought to be. Such behaviours always have or are presumed to have emotional consequences for at least one participant, that is, they cause or are presumed to cause offence.

What is notable in this definition is the fact that there are various factors which determine what constitutes impoliteness, one of the most important being the contextual factors which determine how the communicators will express their impoliteness, since impoliteness is not inherent in language (Culpeper 2005: 41; Mills 2005: 276).

In order to study how impoliteness is expressed in various types of discourse, Culpeper (1996: 356) lists five impoliteness superstrategies that are used to attack somebody's face. These are: (1) Bald on record, (2) Positive impoliteness, (3) Negative impoliteness, (4) Sarcasm or mock politeness and (5) Withhold politeness. Culpeper (2005) elaborated on his aforementioned model, and more specifically he introduced "off record impoliteness" in the place of sarcasm, explaining that impoliteness can appear in the form of an implicature (Culpeper 2005: 44) relegating "sarcasm" as a distinct meta-strategy. Briefly outlined below, the impoliteness superstrategies are used as a way to attack somebody's face:

#### Impoliteness Superstrategies

*Bald on-record impoliteness*: the face-threatening act (FTA) is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimised.

*Positive impoliteness*: the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants, e.g. ignore the other, exclude the other from an activity, be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic, use inappropriate identity markers, use obscure or secretive language, seek disagreement, use taboo words, call the other names.

*Negative impoliteness*: the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants, e.g. frighten, condescend, scorn or ridicule, be contemptuous, do not treat the other seriously, belittle the other, invade the other's space (literally or metaphorically), explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect (personalize, use the pronouns 'I' and 'You'), put the other's indebtedness on record.

*Off-record impoliteness*: the FTA is performed by means of an implicature but in such a way that one attributable intention clearly outweighs any others.

*Withhold politeness*: the absence of politeness work where it would be expected. For example, failing to thank somebody for a present may be taken as deliberate impoliteness.

#### Impoliteness Meta-strategy

*Sarcasm or mock politeness*: the FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain surface realisations. (Culpeper 2011: 208-9).

Bousfield (2008) proposed a modification of Culpeper's model of impoliteness, abandoning the distinction between positive and negative impoliteness strategies and maintaining only that between "on record impoliteness" and "off record impoliteness", within which Culpeper's "sarcasm" and "withholding of impoliteness" strategies are included. Thus, Bousfield (2008: 95) provides the following list of impoliteness strategies:

1. On record impoliteness

The use of strategies designed to explicitly (a) attack the face of an interactant, (b) construct the face of an interactant in a non-harmonious or outright conflictive way, (c) deny the expected face wants, needs, or rights of the interactant, or some combination thereof. The attack is made in an unambiguous way given the context in which it occurs.

2. Off record impoliteness

The use of strategies where the threat or damage to an interactant's face is conveyed indirectly by way of an implicature (cf. Grice [1975] 1989) and can be cancelled (e.g., denied, or an account / post-modification / elaboration offered, etc.) but where "...one attributable intention clearly outweighs any others" (Culpeper 2005: 44), given the context in which it occurs. Sarcasm and the Withholding of Politeness where it is expected would also come under this heading, as follows:

(a) Sarcasm

Sarcasm constitutes the use of individual or combined strategies which, on the surface, appear to be appropriate but which are meant to be taken as meaning the opposite in terms of face-management. The utterance that appears, on the surface, to positively constitute, maintain, or enhance the face of the intended recipient(s) actually threatens, attacks and/or damages the face of the recipient(s) (see Culpeper 2005) given the context in which it occurs.

(b) Withhold politeness More specifically, withhold politeness where politeness would appear to be expected or mandatory. Withholding politeness is within the OffRecord category as "[...] politeness has to be communicated [...] the absence of communicated politeness may, *ceteris paribus*, be taken as the absence of a polite attitude. Brown and Levinson (1987: 5).

However, in agreement with Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2010), I find the distinction between positive and negative impoliteness useful and will retain it in my work.

The above superstrategies often appear in combination in interaction, as Culpeper has noted (2005: 42).

Apart from those superstrategies, other ways to examine impoliteness in language and in interactions are what Culpeper (2011, 2016) has named as “conventional impoliteness formulae”. These are some conventional ways to express impolite behaviour through language. A list of the proposed formulae follows:

#### Insults

1. Personalized negative vocatives
2. Personalized negative assertions
3. Personalized negative references
4. Personalized third-person negative references (in the hearing of the target)

Pointed criticisms/complaints

Unpalatable questions and/or presuppositions

Condescensions

Message enforcers

Dismissals

Silencers

Threats

Negative expressives (e.g. curses, ill-wishes)

(Culpeper 2011: 135-36)

## **2.2 Impoliteness and conflict in online contexts**

It has been argued that impoliteness is rampant in online contexts (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014, 2016; Divrami 2020; Hatzidaki 2020; Sagredos & Nikolova 2020; Santana 2014;). Digital discourse analysis has gathered momentum in linguistics, as it provides linguists with various types of data which can be easily accessed and analysed. The worldwide spread of the Internet together with the emergence of social media platforms has changed the way people interact and conflicts among its users are frequent. YouTube is one of those platforms in which users can comment and thus online debates/polylogues are created in the comment section.

This Asynchronous Digitally Mediated Communication (ADMC) provides linguists with text-based data that involve the phenomenon of deindividuation; the physical anonymity makes people less inhibited and enables them to post impolite, aggressive and offensive comments more easily (Pihlaja 2014: 4). It has been found that in digital discourse people tend to express impolite behaviours more easily, since they can hide their true identity (Assimakopoulos et al. 2017: 11). Various studies have attested that anonymity in online contexts does influence the civility and the incivility of the comments (Fredheim et al. 2015; Santana 2014; ).

Impoliteness is not only fostered by the anonymity which makes people post less civilised comments. People seem to lose their individuality when they comment anonymously about confrontational issues and start identifying themselves with a group in which they share common beliefs, disassociating with the individuals of the outgroup, whom their beliefs are rejected by the ingroup (Riketta 2005: 98; Lee 2007).

This phenomenon of social identification/deindividuation (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2014) has been observed in several online settings. YouTube is one of those online settings in which people, unknown to each other, can exchange opinions on various topics. If these topics of discussion are controversial, this type of interaction can provoke conflict as well as polarization (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2014: 20). Online conflict is closely intertwined with particular social norms established in society and, if those norms are infringed, people's opposing views may unfold in the comment section of a YouTube video, which will reveal the level of hostility that holds among them about a particular controversial topic (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2014: 20).

Although the aim of the paper is not to explain the reasons an online conflict emerges, it is interesting to note that some YouTube users have argued that they tend to post aggressive and offensive comments unsparingly because they will never learn if and to what extent they have hurt their recipients. Others have reported that they are being hostile when others have posted offensive comments towards them (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2014: 20).

Those confrontational exchanges on YouTube tend to create a polylogue, namely a discussion among several people or a “multi-participant interaction” in the comment section of a video (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2014: 21). Users can either participate actively in a polylogue, by posting comments or passively without contributing to the comment section and just by reading them (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2014: 21).

In the present study the comments posted in the comment section of the video under investigation create several polylogues, which trigger conflict. As will be shown in the fourth section, commenters disagree over the existence or the non-existence of sexism in the video-clip. Their opposing views result in the creation of two groups, the ingroup, consisting of people who consider the video non-sexist, and the outgroup, consisting of those who find the video-clip sexist.

As will be discussed in section 4.1, sexism is present in the video-clip but in an indirect way and that is, maybe, the reason the majority of people cannot easily grasp it. However, the fact that there are people who can actually detect sexism leads to polarization and people from the ingroup attack verbally to the ones who belong to the outgroup.

Users’ contributions in the comment section remain intact (if not deleted by the owners of the YouTube channel) for as long as the video is on YouTube and that is why discourse analysts can have easy access to them, especially diachronically.

### **2.3 Impoliteness, gender and sexism**

Women have been found to be the target of much of the impoliteness on social media/YouTube (Bou-Franch, Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2016; Divrami 2020; Hatzidaki 2020; Sagredos & Nikolova 2020). Sexist as well as stereotypical comments tend to be posted through the use of both impolite strategies and conventional formulae.

Before discussing impoliteness and sexism, it is important to define what gender is. In many people’s minds, gender is something that you inherently possess from the very early stages of your life as a foetus and which automatically categorises you as a ‘woman’ or a ‘man’ (Holmes 2013: 320). Hopefully, nowadays gender is not only associated with sex categorisation, i.e.

male, female; gender is seen “as something which is discursively negotiated and performatively constituted” (Chalupnik et al. 2017: 518). As Mills (2005: 271) states, feminist linguists see gender as something that one performs while interacting with others and not as something that one inherently possesses. However, the term ‘gender’ has been used to “distinguish people on the basis of their socio-cultural behaviour” (Holmes 2013: 159); hence, in sociolinguistics, this concept was used in order to identify various contrasting characteristics in women’s and men’s speech (Holmes 2013: 159).

Mills (2005: 274) has pointed out that the relationship between gender and impoliteness should be analysed in relation to “the way that participants view their gendered identity and the way that they think their usage is judged by others”. Mills (2005: 275) further argues that gender is not a factor which determines whether a woman’s or a man’s utterance is impolite or not; gender should be seen “as constructed within interaction itself” and as a concept which will assist linguists in assessing gendered behaviour norms in a particular context.

When discussing gender and sexism, the notion of stereotype is often evoked. According to Talbot (2003: 468), “stereotyping involves a reductive tendency: to stereotype someone is to interpret their behaviour, personality and so on in terms of a set of common-sense attributions which are applied to whole groups”. Gendered stereotypes are connected to and reproduce gender differences (Talbot 2003: 472). Examples of gender differences which have led to gendered stereotypes are that women are less competitive and imposing conversationalists than men (Talbot: 2003: 475; Mills 2008: 166) or that women are brought up to become nurturers and mothers whereas men tend to gain more powerful positions in society (Talbot 2003: 476; Mills 2008: 127).

Some of those stereotypes and attitudes about women and men can be reflected in language. Since language conveys attitudes, a sexist attitude can also be conveyed through language (Holmes 2013: 325). Sexism has been defined “as prejudice or discrimination based on sex or gender, especially against women and girls” (Masequesmay 2020). The term appeared during the rise of the “second-wave” feminism in the 60s-80s and suggests “that one sex is superior to or more valuable than another sex” (Masequesmay 2020). Sexist



language illustrates lack of equality between females and males. An example of sexist language is when one uses the word ‘policemen’ to refer to both male and female police officers, and, hence, making women invisible.

Sexism has been distinguished as overt and indirect. Overt sexism, as depicted in language, can be defined as the process in which an individual directly disparages a female through the use of derogatory linguistic forms (Mills 2008: 10-11, 73). Although it has been considered anachronistic, since it expresses conservative views about a woman’s position in society (Mills 2008:11), it is still common, especially in online contexts. Mills (2008: 135) further notes that because this type of sexism is considered too conservative, people may often resort to indirect sexism. Indirect sexism can be considered even more dangerous than overt sexism “since it both challenges overt sexism and keeps it in play” (Mills 2008: 134) and that is the main reason most individuals are unable to recognise it and deal with it. It should be noted that the use of humour and irony (both possible indirect means of sexism) do not alter “the nature of the sexism itself, but rather simply change the way it can be responded to” (Mills 2008: 134). Therefore, indirect sexism may be more dangerous since it disguises itself in the form of humour and irony; in this way, speakers avoid being charged with intentional sexism (Mills 2008: 136).

Gendered stereotypes can be expressed either overtly or covertly and, unfortunately, various stereotypes about women are still being reproduced by the media (Mills 2008: 127). However, when gendered stereotypes are expressed indirectly, it is much more difficult to deal with them, since people are unable to “pick it”, as in the case of the YouTube video under investigation. Interestingly, the majority of the YouTube users state that they cannot “see sexism” in the video, hence the title of the paper “sexism blindness”.

Online misogyny seems to occur “when assumptions about gender are not shared by participants, and this is not a conflict which is restricted to a struggle between women and men, but can be a conflict between women, where some hold a more traditional view of what women should do, whilst others aim to challenge those stereotypes” (Mills 2008: 129-30). Various recent studies have drawn upon (im)politeness theories in order to explore both sexism and verbal aggression in asynchronous DMC contexts. As regards Greek contexts, one

could mention a number of studies. For instance, Angouri and Tseliga's (2010) corpus consisted of data from two Greek online discussion fora whereas Georgalidou (2017) draws her data from video-recordings from the Greek parliament. Their findings suggest that several impoliteness strategies are employed in DMC as well as overt and covert language aggression against women. Hatzidaki (2020), Sagredos & Nikolova (2020) and Divrami (2020) draw their data from YouTube comments and find that commenters tend to attack verbally women, express stereotypical beliefs that contained patriarchal and misogynistic connotations and, in that way creating two groups, the ingroup, consisting of commenters who post insulting and offensive comments about people who belong to the outgroup, mainly female feminists or generally people who do not belong to the ingroup and have different views from them.

For their part, Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2014) have examined online language aggression against women in a set of YouTube comments on a video about domestic violence in Spain. Their findings suggest that male users of YouTube “not only constituted negative evaluations of the social identity of women”, but also defended their violence against them through the use of justifications (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2014: 244). Hatzidaki (2020: 25) examined online language aggression against the Greek actress, Klelia Renesi, in a confrontational Greek YouTube polylogue and her findings revealed similar patterns: male YouTube users expressed extensive verbal assault towards Renesi and they even justified their judgements by invoking her lack of ethical and moral principles. Sagredos and Nikolova (2020) conducted a similar research on a gendered conflict on YouTube, investigating the “comments posted in response to the misogynistic Greek pop song *Καριόλα σε μισώ* ‘Slut I hate you’” (Sagredos and Nikolova 2020: 1). Their findings suggest that “online VAW [Violence against Women] is pervasive and can thus be seen as a continuum to offline violence” (Sagredos and Nikolova 2020: 26).

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

The thesis will take a qualitative approach to the investigation and analysis of the digital data. The main research question that is posited in this dissertation is the following: *What impoliteness strategies are employed in the Greek YouTube polylogue on sexism?* Impoliteness was chosen as the focus of this research as it has been observed that anonymity in ADMC triggers posts that are insulting and discriminatory more easily (Assimakopoulos et al. 2017: 11) and, thus, a YouTube polylogue on sexism was considered suitable for investigating impoliteness.

A second research question is: *How is sexism manifested on the YouTube polylogue?* The analysis of the data focuses on the impoliteness strategies that are employed in the comments that deny the existence of sexism.

The impoliteness formulas are analyzed using Culpeper's theory of impoliteness (2011: 208-9) as well as his theory about "conventionalised impoliteness formulae" (2016: 436-7).

Three hundred and ninety-two (392) comments are of concern to the current research that were posted under the video clip *The withdrawn, due to its sexist content, corona virus advertisement (spot) with Christos Loulis, produced by the General Secretariat for Civil Protection* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUVzB6Kn-0k>), which was posted on YouTube on May 10, 2020. I downloaded the polylogue from the YOUTUBE COMMENTS DOWNLOADER site (<https://youtubecommentsdownloader.com/>), which is a tool that enables people to download all the comments that are posted on a particular day. At the time of its collection (from 24 to 30 October 2020), the corpus consisted of nine-hundred (900) comments. More specifically, all the comments (including replies) were copied from the YOUTUBE COMMENTS DOWNLOADER and were pasted on a word file. Access to the YouTube comment section is open to the public, even if one is not a subscribed member of YouTube. For ethical reasons, I have concealed the commenters' usernames as well as their profile photos.

The comments are divided into four main categories, and more specifically into those that deny the existence of sexism in the video, the ones that acknowledge it as well as those that discuss generally the topic of sexism. Finally, there are two hundred and fifty-two comments that are not of concern to the current research. The existence or the non-existence of sexism is the main subject of discussion in the comment section and, therefore this led to the current categorization of the comments. The following table illustrates how the comments were categorised:

Table 1. Categorization of comments

<b>TYPE OF COMMENT</b>	<b>Denying Sexism</b>	<b>Acknowledging sexism</b>	<b>General comments about sexism</b>	<b>Off topic</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Total comments</i>	<b>392</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>900</b>

The comments that acknowledge sexism or generally discuss the phenomenon of sexism were not analysed in this paper, since the majority of them did not exhibit impoliteness and did not cause polarization. Furthermore, there were comments that were totally irrelevant and not of concern to the present study, as a number of them discussed that both the actor's performance as well as the content of the video-clip was senseless, e.g.

(1) ██████████ 5 months ago  
Τι ηλίθια προσέγγιση! Τι ηλίθιο σποτ!  
“What an idiotic approach of the phenomenon! What a senseless spot!”

(2) ██████ 5 months ago  
κακογραμμενα και κακοπαιγμενα.  
“Ill-written as well as ill-performed”

Some other comments involved political content and that was the reason that they were excluded from the research. For example:

(3) ██████████ 5 months ago  
γελία πiónια της ακροδεξιας μικροπολιτικής.  
“Ridiculous puppets of the right-wing micropolitics.”

(4) ██████████ 5 months ago  
Ουτε σωστη προπαγανδα δε μπορουνε να κανουνε. Forshame!  
“They cannot even appropriately propagandise. Forshame!”

A vast number of comments, especially replies to a main comment, exhibited a type of conflict between the contributors over several issues, one of them being sexism, but on a personal level or on a more scientific one. These comments, which are neither impolite nor openly or covertly sexist, belong to the category of general comments. A representative example of this category is the following comment:

(5) [redacted] 5 months ago

@ [redacted] Κοίτα. Μεγάλωσα σε οικογένεια με μαμά, αδερφή και έναν μπαμπά που έλεγε: "Γιατί να πλύνω τα πιάτα, τρεις γυναίκες έχω...." και άλλα τέτοιου στυλ πράγματα, με αποτέλεσμα να θεωρεί πως πρέπει να είναι ο πασάς με το χαρέμι. Αλλά είχα και μια μάνα που έλεγε: "Τι νοικοκυρά θα γίνεις? Μάθε να μαγειρεύεις". Και γενικά μια οικογένεια που διαιωνίζε τα στερεότυπα, γιατί έτσι είχαν μάθει. Ακόμα λαμβάνω ερωτήσεις του πότε θα κάνω οικογένεια και παιδί, επειδή είμαι γυναίκα και μάλλον αυτός πρέπει να είναι ο σκοπός μου, για τα μυαλά τους. Άσχετο αν δεν θέλω παιδιά και έναν μέτριο γάμο. Για μένα λοιπόν, ο τρόπος που μεγαλώνουμε τα παιδιά μας έχει πολύ δρόμο ακόμα για να γίνει αυτό που πρέπει να είναι. Ναι, και οι άντρες μεγαλώνουν με στερεότυπα. Όλοι μεγαλώνουμε με τα στερεότυπα μιας πατριαρχικής κοινωνίας γιατί σε μια τέτοια ζούμε. Αν ζούσαμε σε μητριαρχική θα μεγαλώναμε με άλλα στερεότυπα, αυτά της μητριαρχίας. Αν θέλουμε λοιπόν ευτυχισμένους ανθρώπους πρέπει να σταματήσουμε να τους πατρωνάrouμε σε όλες τις κοινωνίες, σε ό,τι κατηγορία και να πέφτουν. Οπότε μάλλον συμφωνούμε στο τέλος τέλος. Άντε να ανοίξει και το Άγιο Όρος να δούμε και εμείς τις ομορφιές του τρίτου ποδιού. ;)

"Look. I grew up in a family with a mum, a sister and a dad who used to say 'Why should I do the washing-up, I have three women....' and other stuff like this, and as a result he thought that he could be a pasha in the harem. But, I also had a mum who used to say 'What type of housewife are you going to become? Learn how to cook'. And generally speaking, it was a family that perpetuated stereotypes, because that was what they had learned to do. They still ask me questions like, when I am going to make a family and have a child, because I am a woman and that is my purpose, for their minds. It is totally irrelevant [to them] if I do not want kids and an average marriage. In my view, we have to travel a lot of distance in order to raise our children properly. Yes, and men are raised with stereotypes. We all grow up with the stereotypes of a patriarchal society because we do live in such a society. If we lived in a matriarchal one, we would be raised with different stereotypes, the ones of the matriarchy. If we want people to be happy, we must stop patronising them in all the societies [around the world], in whatever category they fall into. So, we might agree at the very end. May the Mount Athos become accessible one day in order for us to admire the beauty of the third peninsula. ;)"

Some other comments were completely off topic. For instance:

(6) [redacted] 5 months ago

· @ [REDACTED] αφού παραχώρησε τις μετοχές ρε φίλε. Σταματήστε τα συννομολογικά, καποιοι απλα δεν μπορείτε να χωνέψετε οτι εχεις τοσα χρεη που κανεις δεν ενδιαφέρθηκε ποτε σοβαρα για την ομάδα σου...  
“He has given the stockholdings, my mate. Stop propagating conspiratory views, some of you just can’t accept that your team has so much debt that nobody has ever taken your team seriously...”

All the comments are characterised as asynchronous, since the commenters can edit their comments, reply whenever they want and most importantly communication can occur “from one-to-one, one to-many and many-to-many interaction” (Angouri and Tseliga 2010: 61). Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss stylistic issues, it is interesting to note that some of the comments that express both sexism and impoliteness have “non-standard typography and orthography” or have “missing or incorrect capitalization and punctuation, sentence fragments”, features that make them be seen more as “utterances” rather than as “sentences” (Herring & Androutsopoulos 2015: 131). It is a recurrent pattern in most of the impolite comments posted in the video-clip under investigation, as the majority of the non-sexist and not impolite comments do not depict inappropriateness.

In the following chapter an analysis of both the video clip as well as the impoliteness strategies employed in the four main categories of the comments will be provided.

## Chapter 4

### Analysis of the data

#### 4.1 Analysis of the video-clip

The television video-clip used here was produced by the General Secretariat for Civil Protection as part of the campaign “We stay safe” “We come out winners”. Its aim was to sensitise people against overcrowding squares given the corona virus threat. The advertisement was broadcast on TV on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May and was withdrawn the following day, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, due to the harsh judgements it received, as numerous people as well as the former General Secretary for Gender Equality objected to its sexist content and argued that it reproduces sexist stereotypes. Afterwards, the video was posted to YouTube and at the time of data collection it had received 900 comments, which constitute the polylogue under scrutiny. The video-clip depicts the Greek actor Christos Loulis rehearsing a telephone conversation he had presumably with his girlfriend.

Με παίρνει τηλέφωνο το πρωί, πρωί-πρωί...

-Θα βγούμε το βράδυ; Μου λέει...

-Και βέβαια! Της λέω...

-Πού θα πάμε;

-Καμιά βόλτα; Της λέω.

-Μόνοι μας; Με ρωτάει.

-Γιατί θέλουμε και παρέα; Της απαντάω

-Γιατί δεν πάμε στην πλατεία που θα έχει και κόσμο; Μου λέει...

-Μήπως επειδή πρέπει κάπως να προσέχουμε; Της λέω.

Και με αυτή την γλυκιά φωνή που συνήθως με κάνει ό,τι θέλει...

-Μα θα 'ναι όλοι εκεί...Μου λέει

-Ακριβώς αυτό είναι το θέμα, σου λέω! Της λέω... Θα είναι όλοι εκεί, άρα μπορεί να είναι και ο ιός εκεί, κι αν είναι ο ιός εκεί, τότε όλοι οι υπόλοιποι πρέπει μάλλον να είμαστε κάπου αλλού.

Γιατί τώρα που ξέρουμε με τι έχουμε να κάνουμε, ξέρουμε και τι πρέπει να κάνουμε. Ο συνωστισμός αυτή τη στιγμή είναι ο μεγαλύτερος κίνδυνος. Τον αποφεύγουμε, και αποφεύγουμε τα χειρότερα. Γιατί κανένας μας δεν θέλει να γυρίσουμε εκεί που ήμασταν χτες.

She calls me early in the morning

Her: *Shall we go out tonight?* She tells me...

Him: *Of course!* I tell her...

Her: *Where are we going to?*

Him: *Let's go for a walk.* I tell her  
 Her: *Just the two of us?* She asks me...  
 Him: *Why? Do we need the company of others?* I reply...  
 Her: *Why don't we go to the square which will be full of people?* She tells me...  
 Him: *Maybe because we have to be really cautious?* I tell her.  
 And with that sweet voice that compels me into doing as she pleases....  
 Her: *But everyone will be there...* She tells me  
 Him: *But that's exactly the point, I tell you!* I tell her... *Everyone will be there, so the virus may be there, too! And if the virus is there, the rest of us should be somewhere else*  
 Because now that we are fully aware of the dangers, we know exactly what we have to do! Social gatherings pose a risk. By avoiding them, the situation cannot get worse. Because nobody wishes to return to yesterday's situation.

Since both various organizations against gender inequality and a large part of the Greek population reacted to its content and its overall tone as being condescending towards his alleged girlfriend, both the video-clip and the actor attracted the journalists' and the general public's attention and became the bone of contention. For that reason, the General Secretariat for Civil Protection decided to withdraw the video-clip, with the following announcement: "Two new spots were broadcast as parts of the campaign to counteract the corona virus. One of them received criticism about its sexist content. Although this criticism is quite unfair, since our intention was not to reproduce sexism, we decided to withdraw it. The aim of this campaign was and it still is to sensitise people. The spot did not serve the purpose of uniting its people, since it split them. The campaign will continue with another spot" ([https://www.civilprotection.gr/sites/default/gscp\\_uploads/gscp\\_20200510.pdf](https://www.civilprotection.gr/sites/default/gscp_uploads/gscp_20200510.pdf)) (author's translation). Then, it was posted to YouTube and the comment section abounded with comments primarily from people who argued that they could not detect any sexism in the spot, accused women of overreacting and argued that if the reverse had occurred, i.e. if a woman was enacting a telephone conversation in the same way, nobody would have reacted.

This type of conflict seems to have occurred because people do not hold the same beliefs about gender. As has been stated in the previous section, the most interesting aspect of this dispute is that not only male contributors think that this video-clip was not sexist (at all), but also some women, who presumably have more old-fashioned and conservative views about women's position in society



(Mills 2008:129-30), although in this kind of data it cannot be stated with any certainty whether it is a male or a female who has posted a certain comment.

Nowadays it has been observed that overt sexism is frequently condemned, but it has not disappeared. It is present in the media, for example on television and radio programs, newspaper and magazine articles (Mills 2008: 133), but also on social media as in the case of the video-clip under scrutiny. What is noteworthy in my data is that the majority of the commenters cannot “see sexism”; however, sexism is present throughout the video, primarily in the form of “mansplaining”, namely the process in which a man “explain[s] something to a woman in a condescending way that assumes she has no knowledge about the topic” (Merriam-Webster 2020).

In the video, Christos Loulis is explaining to his girlfriend the reasons they should not go to the square as if she were totally unaware of the possible dangers this action would pose and as though she were dim-witted. In this way, the speaker cannot be accused of being intentionally sexist and that is the main reason why the majority of the posters are unable to detect sexism in the video-clip (Mills 2008: 135).

Mills (2008: 140-152) has argued that indirect sexism can appear in the form of humour, presupposition, conflicting messages, scripts and metaphors, collocation as well as an androcentric perspective ). The present video seems to contain sexism at the level of presupposition. A presupposition is mainly a speaker’s property and it is termed as a tacit assumption or as background belief whose truth is taken as granted within any type of interaction. In order for the communication to be successful, the interlocutors need to share mutual beliefs about the presupposed utterance (Stalnaker 2002). In the video, the actor expresses views, which, on the surface, seem unproblematic, but, in fact, they conceal stereotypical thinking about women’s intelligence, which can be easily inferred.

In order for somebody to identify the presuppositions involved in the video, it is necessary to make overt the main ideas upon which sexism is based. For instance, in the phrase “*Maybe because we have to be really cautious?*” the speaker’s tone is quite ironic and it seems that he presupposes that his alleged girlfriend is unaware of the fact that she must be really cautious of the new virus.

During their conversation, the male protagonist says that his female interlocutor “sweetens” her voice, presenting her as if she tried to avoid conflict and disagreement. On the other hand, the male appears to show off his wittiness through irony, another identified feature of male conduct (Holmes 2013: 315).

Another example of indirect sexism is the speaker’s comment “with that sweet voice that compels me into doing as she pleases”. The softening or sweetening of the voice is stereotypically considered to be a feminine characteristic, which, as it is assumed, women take advantage of, when somebody does not fulfil their wishes. Moreover, the adjective “sweet” has been considered a rather ‘feminine’ adjective, since it is often attributed to women (Holmes 2013: 321). Firstly, it is presupposed that males can be transformed into puppets after hearing their girlfriend’s “sweet voice” and, secondly, it is implied that women cannot satisfy their needs on their own and have to persuade a male to do so. Thus, the video clip perpetuates the widely spread stereotype that women are more sentimental, emotional and manipulative than men.

Another interesting aspect of the video-clip is the fact that the female is presented as asking questions - which is actually a feature associated with female speech- to the male protagonist, who seems to exhibit assertiveness and directness in his speech, both considered characteristics particularly of male speech (Holmes 2013: 320; Mills 2008: 130; ). For example, the woman asks the man questions that concern their plans for going out (e.g. “*Shall we go out tonight?*” or “*Where are we going to?*”), whereas the man, instead of clearly stating that they should not go out with other people, he ironically responds to her “*Why? Do we need the company of others?*”, which is a type of rhetorical question that needs no answer at all; its aim is to emphasize the speaker’s opinion, namely that they do not need the company of others.

## **4.2 Analysis of the impolite comments which deny sexism**

In this section I analyse some examples of comments that deny sexism and whose commenters employ several impoliteness strategies and conventional impoliteness formulae. Table 1, which illustrates how the nine-hundred comments were categorised, is repeated here for ease of reference. Table 2

shows the number of the impolite and non-impolite comments that deny the existence of sexism in the comment section of the video-clip under investigation.

Table 1. Categorization of comments

TYPE OF COMMENT	Denying Sexism	Acknowledging sexism	General comments about sexism	Off topic	Total
<i>Total comments</i>	<b>392</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>900</b>

Table 2. Categorization of comments denying sexism

DENYING SEXISM	Impolite	Non-impolite
<b>392</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>117</b>

Table 3 illustrates the main impoliteness strategies (based on Culpeper's (2011: 208-9) categorization of impoliteness strategies) commenters use in their comments on the video-clip under investigation. The following subsections provide an analysis of specific comments which have been chosen by the author as they illustrate clearly the impoliteness strategies that commenters tend to use in the comment section under research.

Table 3. Categorization of impoliteness strategies (Culpeper 2011: 208-9)

POSITIVE IMPOLITENESS	NEGATIVE IMPOLITENESS	OFF-RECORD IMPOLITENESS	IMPOLITENESS META-STRATEGY	MIXED
<b>73</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>82</b>

#### 4.2.1 Positive Impoliteness

The majority of the comments that adopt positive impoliteness strategies include call the other names, through the use of taboo or swear language as well as derogatory nominations (e.g. "shit feminist woman") and most of them, deny association or common ground with the other (e.g. "I am a woman and I do not like being supported by a disgusting creature like you").

(1) [REDACTED] 5 months ago  
 ελεος πια το παρακαναμε! μια χαρα διαφημιση ειναι! θα μπορουσε να ισχυε το αναποδο κ η γυναικα να ελεγε το σωστο! ξεκολλατε ταλιμπανοφεμινιστριες! που διαολο ειδατε τον σεξισμο???

“oh jeez, we overreact! It’s a very nice spot! It could have happened the reverse and the woman could have said what was the right thing! Get over it taliban-feminists! Where the hell you saw sexism???”

This comment employs positive impoliteness, since it constructs the face of women in an “outright conflictive way” by calling them “taliban-feminists”. The contributor expresses pointed criticism/complaint (oh jeez, we overreact!), a personalised negative assertion (Get over it taliban-feminists!) as well as an unpalatable question (Where the hell you saw sexism???), which does not expect an answer. Obviously, the commenter fails to recognise the sexism in the video-clip and through a question, which is actually a statement, denies its sexist content and attacks women by calling them “taliban-feminists”.

The reason that the commenter relates feminist women to “Taliban” is that this is an “ultraconservative political and religious faction that emerged in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s” (“Taliban” 2021), and s/he does so in order to underline their extreme reaction as to the sexist content of the video-clip as well as to emphasize their radical and extremist views.

(2) [REDACTED] 6 months ago

@ [REDACTED] ρε κουράδοφεμινιστρια πάνε να ξυρίσεις το μουστάκι σου.  
“hey, shit feminist woman go and shave your moustache.”

This is a comment reply, in which the person in (2) replies maybe to a woman by addressing her “hey, shit feminist woman”, which includes a personalised negative vocative, enforced by the message enforcer “hey” and, hence the contributor employs a positive impoliteness strategy as s/he expresses derogatory nomination and calls the other names (“shit”). Moreover, this comment contains an insinuation, i.e. that feminist women have moustache and they should shave it, as men do, which points to a popular stereotype about women who support feminism, namely that they have masculine external characteristics, as they do not care about their appearance and that is why the contributor expresses the dismissal “go and shave your moustache”, which suggests another type of unfounded bias against feminists.

Those references to feminist women’s appearance belong to the unattractive feminist stereotype, which suggests that “sex appeal and/or lesbianism could account for the negative link between attractiveness and feminism” (Rudman and Fairchild 2007: 128). One could, thus, understand that the less attractive a

woman may be considered, the higher the chances she is a feminist. Hence, the stereotype that less attractive women who may also have male stereotypes, e.g. moustache, are likely to be feminists and homosexual still holds true today and seems to be adopted by people.

(3) [REDACTED] 5 months ago

Αν οι ρόλοι ήταν αντιστροφοί, δεν θα γινόταν τίποτα αχχαχαχα... αριστεροί του καναπέ ολοι ειστε

“If the roles were reversed, nothing would have happened hahahaha... all of you are leftists from your couch”

Numerous comments like (3) have been posted in the comment section. The contributors of these comments refer to what is called reverse sexism, namely sexist discrimination towards men. As will be discussed in the following section, although men - and all human beings - can be victims of every type of discrimination, it cannot be argued that sexism towards men is sustainable (Singh 2018; Smith 2018). Women used to and still fight for basic rights all over the world, whereas men used to be and still are more privileged in many domains, e.g. education, work and politics and that is why they possess more instrumental positions in society. Therefore, in a system that generally benefits men one can advocate that men cannot suffer from what is called reverse sexism.

Concerning impoliteness, as can be observed, the comment contains a personalised negative assertion (“all of you are leftists from your couch”). The contributor seems to believe that whoever finds the video-clip sexist has left-wing political views, which are not realistically fulfilled (“from your couch”), namely by objecting to the content of a TV spot in the comment section. The comment attacks the positive face of the people s/he calls “leftists from your couch”, which is used in a derogatory way, since people who stand on the political left fight for their ideals, whereas the people in the comment section who find the video-clip sexist do not. Moreover, by using this derogatory nomination, the contributor denies common ground with the “leftists from the couch” and that is why he seeks disagreement with them over the sensitive topic of politics. All the above suggest that positive impoliteness strategies are used in comment (3).

(4) [REDACTED] 5 months ago

όποιος νομίζει το βίντεο είναι σεξιστικό έχει κάλο στον εγκέφαλο και πρέπει να τον κοιτάξει γιατρός.

“Whoever thinks that this video is sexist, is a bonehead and had better see a doctor.”

(5) [REDACTED] 6 months ago

@ [REDACTED] εδώ ασχολούμαστε με τους ηλίθιους που τον λένε σεξιστή  
“we are still concerned with the idiots that call him a sexist”

The contributor of comment (4) claims that people who find the video-clip sexist have a “mental callus” and, thus, s/he questions their mental stability as well as their wellness, urging them to be examined by a specialist. Comment (4) contains a personalised third-person negative reference “they have a callus on their brain and had better see a doctor” and so does comment (5) by calling the people who acknowledge the existence of sexism in the video-clip “the idiots that call him a sexist”. Both of them employ positive impoliteness strategies since they use abusive language which insults their addressees (“have a callus on their brain”, “the idiots”).

In addition, the commenters in both (4) and (5) not only disassociate themselves from the people who find the video-clip sexist in terms of understanding??? sexism, but also in terms of mental stability. Therefore, they construct the ingroup, including people who deny sexism in the video-clip and consider themselves mentally healthy, and the outgroup, including people who recognise sexism and/or are feminists but are mentally unstable.

(6) [REDACTED] 5 months ago

isa mori xamoyra pline kanena piato xaxaxax  
“Hey, ‘chamoura’, wash some dishes hahaha”

This comment is based on the famous stereotype that housework is done only by women and their position in society is set within the house (Mills 2008: 127). A positive impoliteness strategy is employed in this comment, since the commenter addresses women with the derogatory nomination ‘chamoura’. By addressing women the message enforcer “Hey, ‘chamoura’”, s/he also employs a personalised negative vocative towards women, since “chamoura” in Greek is a term that is used mainly for women to denote not only a worthless and inferior person but also a slut. The contributor attempts to ostensibly mitigate his assertion by adding to his/her comment “hahaha” and maybe he tries to sound sarcastic; sarcasm is another strategy that is employed by the contributor of this

comment, since it is highly likely that his/her intention is not to entertain his/her addressees, but to damage their positive face. It can be inferred that s/he does not comprehend the type of sexism that is entailed in the video-clip and tries to mock both the situation as well as the people who find it sexist.

(7) [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Είμαι γυναίκα και δε γουστάρω να με υποστηρίζει ένα σίγαμα σαν και εσένα και πίστεψε με ανήκω στη πλειοψηφία των γυναικών που θεωρούμε μαλακίες αυτά περί σεξισμού στη Δύση εν έτει 2020  
“I am a woman and I do not like being supported by a disgusting creature like you and, believe me, I do belong to the majority of women who think that in 2020 all this stuff about sexism in the West is bullshit.”

This is a quite interesting comment, as the commenter feels the need to state clearly that s/he is a female in order to stress the importance of his/her comment, namely that sexism is nonsense in Western societies as apparently, for him/her, it does not exist. The commenter attacks the positive face of the person s/he replies, by calling him/her a “disgusting creature”, a derogatory nomination, which is blatantly a case of a personalised negative assertion. In addition, a positive impoliteness strategy is employed in the second part of the comment since the contributor denies association and common ground with the feminists (“I do belong to the majority of women who think that in 2020 all this stuff about sexism in the West is bullshit”). Therefore, polarization is created, since an ingroup is constructed, which is represented by the commenter who attacks both the person s/he replies to and generally the supporters of feminism, and an outgroup, which consists of people who maintain that the video clip is sexist and that feminism is the solution to this serious issue.

#### 4.2.2 Negative Impoliteness

(8) [REDACTED] 5 months ago  
Τίποτα σεξιστικό δεν υπάρχει σε αυτό το βίντεο. Οποίο απαίτησαν να αποσυρθεί να πάνε να κοιταχτούν σε ψυχολόγο. Αηδία έχετε καταντήσει  
“There is nothing sexist in this video-clip. Whoever demanded that it should be withdrawn, go to a psychologist. You disgust (us)”

Negative impoliteness strategies are employed in this comment. The contributor sees no sexism in the video-clip and asserts that the people who recognise sexist content must have psychological problems and urges them to visit a specialist to

seek cure. Obviously, s/he does not take the people who find the video-clip sexist seriously and that is the reason the expression “go to a psychologist” is considered as negatively impolite, which constitutes a type of dismissal. Also, the personalised negative assertion “you disgust [us]” (‘us’ referring to the group of people who claim that there is no sexism in the video-clip) shows that the contributor’s aim is to belittle the people who believe that sexism does exist in the video-clip, another output strategy of negative impoliteness strategy.

As in the case of comments (4) and (5), the ingroup in this comment consists of people who see no sexism in the video-clip and have no psychological issues to solve, whereas the outgroup consists of people who acknowledge the existence of sexism in the video-clip and have psychological issues, which they should try to solve with the help of a psychologist.

(9) [REDACTED] 5 months ago

[REDACTED] Ισότητα ΓΙΑΤΙ;

Σε περίπτωση πολέμου, πολεμούν ή στην μηχανή του κιμά, πετάνε εμάς για να ζήσουν αυτές.

Γνωρίζεις κάποια γυναίκα που θα θυσιάζε ποτέ τη ζωή της για άνδρα;

Γνωρίζεις κάποια γυναίκα που αυτοκτόνησε για άνδρα;

Άκουσες ποτέ κάποια γυναίκα να πει ευχαριστώ για την ισότητα (στα δικαιώματα φυσικά, όχι στις υποχρεώσεις) που ΕΜΕΙΣ τους δώσαμε ή μήπως ζητούν όλο και περισσότερα;

Γνωρίζεις κάποια γυναίκα να διεκδικεί ισότητα στις υποχρεώσεις ή έχουν εφεύρει το "διαφορετικοί αλλά ίσοι"

Στα δικαιώματα ισότητα, στις υποχρεώσεις διαφορετικότητα.

Σε περίπτωση ναυαγίου ή άλλων επικίνδυνων καταστάσεων, σώζονται τόσο σε αυτές, όσο και σε εμείς ή μήπως ΠΡΩΤΑ ΑΥΤΕΣ και ΜΕΤΑ ΕΜΕΙΣ;

Αν κάποια πάει στην αστυνομία και σε κατηγορήσει για σεξουαλική παρενόχληση, θα πιστέψουν εσένα ή μήπως αυτή;

Ο πλανήτης αυτός χτίστηκε πάνω στην γυναικεία ή στην ανδρική νοημοσύνη;

Γνωρίζεις μέχρι και τις μέρες μας, κάποια ιδεολογία από γυναικεία νοημοσύνη;

Γνωρίζεις πως και ο φεμινισμός είναι ανδρικό δημιούργημα;

Γνωρίζεις κάτι που κάναν οι γυναίκες, χωρίς να το αντιγράψουν από εμάς;

Γνωρίζεις να υπάρχουν "καλές φεμινίστριες" που να αντιτάσσονται στις κακές που θέλουν την ισοπέδωση της πατριαρχίας και την επικράτηση της μητριαρχίας;

Ο φόνος αγέννητων παιδιών που πρεσβεύουν ξεδιάντροπα είναι κι αυτό στα πλαίσια του σεβασμού απέναντι στην ανθρώπινη ζωή;

Μάθε λίγο περί φεμινισμού και μετά μίλα.

“Equality WHY?

During wartime, do they fight or do they throw us in the meat grinder so that they survive?

Do you know any woman that would sacrifice her life for a man?



Do you know a woman that has committed suicide for a man?  
 Have you ever heard a woman say ‘thank you’ for the equality (in their rights, of course, not in their obligations) that WE have offered them or are they continually asking for more and more?  
 Do you know any woman that demands being equal with men in their obligations or have they invented the catchphrase ‘different but equal’?  
 In the case of a shipwreck or other emergency cases, are men treated as women, or ARE THEY FIRST SAVED and THEN WE?  
 If a woman goes to the police and accuses you of sexual harassment, will they believe you or her?  
 Has this planet been built based on a woman’s or on a man’s intelligence?  
 Do you know any existing ideology that was created by a woman’s intelligence?  
 Are you aware of the fact that even feminism is a male’s creation?  
 Do you know anything that women have done without having copied it from us?  
 Do you know if “good feminists”, who oppose to the bad ones and want to eliminate patriarchy and establish matriarchy, really exist?  
 Is the killing of unborn children that they shamelessly support in the context of respect towards the human life?  
 Learn a few things about feminism and then talk.”

This -rather long by YouTube standards- comment overflows with sexist stereotypes and bias against the female gender that are expressed in the form of fourteen unpalatable questions and in a quite condescending tone. Since the commenter is being contemptuous, s/he is employing mainly a negative impoliteness strategy (Culpeper, 2011: 208), as his/her questions doubts the other’s encyclopaedic knowledge of feminism.

The condescending tone towards women is ubiquitous throughout the comment; in the beginning, the commenter claims that women should not be considered equal to men, because they do not fight in a war and/or they are not willing to kill themselves for a man. Even more disdainful is the statement that men have “offered” women the right of equality, presenting it as a thing that one can give and withhold it, hence intentionally not mentioning how much have women fought - and still continue to fight- for their rights. The three rhetorical questions which question women’s intelligence are on the same wavelength with the previous statements-questions: the commenter expresses the view that only men have contributed to all scientific domains and even feminism is “a male creation” and goes on to state that women are unable to become innovators and that is why they “copy” men.

The rhetorical question “If a woman goes to the police and accuses you of sexual harassment, will they believe you or her?” contradicts reality completely : the majority of the female rapes in Greece go unreported and even unpunished (e-kathimerini.com 2017) and, when they are actually reported, police officers do not believe women and their cases are usually dismissed.

The commenter also differentiates feminists into “good” and “bad” ones and presents them as women who are opposed to patriarchy and wish to establish matriarchy, disregarding the fact that feminism is a movement that aims at establishing equality of the sexes in all domains of life. Finally, the comment makes reference to the popular among anti-feminists belief that abortion equals to a murder, a finding suggested also by Divramis’s (2020: 16) research on online impoliteness and gender stereotypes. The commenter explicitly associates women with negative aspects, as s/he presents them as man haters and as child murderers, both suggesting negative impoliteness strategies (Culpeper, 2011: 208).

#### *4.2.3 Off-record Impoliteness*

(10) [REDACTED] 5 months ago

Που ακριβώς είναι ο σεξισμός δηλαδή;;;  
“That is to say, where exactly is sexism????”

(11) [REDACTED] 5 months ago

Το σεξιστικό από που κ ως που; Μπορεί να μου εξηγήσει κάποιος;  
“How is that sexist? Can somebody explain it to me?”

Comments (10) and (11) could be considered ironic, since the contributors most probably do not sincerely wonder if the video-clip is sexist or not; they are certain that there is no sexism in it and they provoke -in a way- those who advocate that the video-clip is sexist to reply to them and explain the reasons they find it sexist. This could be considered off record impoliteness, as the people who posted the comments seek disagreement, but not in a salient way, with the group of people who claim that the video-clip is sexist; they do not actually wish to exchange views, a fact that is triggered by the profuse of question marks in comment (10) as well as the use of interjections (“That is to say”, “How is that”) and the use of intensifier (“exactly”). It could be inferred

that those questions are actually statements which are used rhetorically in order to emphasize the fact that there is no sexism in the video-clip.

(12) [REDACTED] 5 months ago

Αν είναι αυτό σεξιστικό, τότε όταν γελάω στην μάνα μου την φλερτάρω.  
“If this is sexist then, when I smile to my mum I flirt with her.”

The person who posted the comment (12) is apparently mocking the people who find the video-clip sexist; s/he thinks that not only the video does not entail sexism, but also that people are exaggerating and are trying to overdramatize the whole incident. His comment “when I smile to my mum I flirt with her” is used sarcastically, as a type of off record impoliteness, since the contributor implies that if the video-clip was sexist, then, every action showing affection towards women should be considered a type of flirt, even a smile to our mothers. Apparently, this statement suggests a hyperbole, since the commenter believes that people who find the video-clip sexist exaggerate, as well. The face threatening act (FTA) in this expression is, thus, performed through an implicature and that is s/he why is being indirectly impolite towards the group of people who find the video-clip sexist. More specifically, the statement “when I smile to my mum I flirt with her” is a particularized conversational implicature, since its understanding depends on particular characteristics of the context (Blome-Tillmann 2013: 179).

(13) [REDACTED] 6 months ago

@ [REDACTED] την τρίχα τριχιά την κάνετε..  
“You are making a mountain out of a molehill..”

This comment reply contains a famous Greek proverb which suggests that people who find the video clip sexist actually exaggerate a trivial issue. By using this proverb, the commenter implies that the video-clip should not be considered sexist, and people who claim that it contains sexist connotations overdramatize the whole situation. Therefore, the proverb “You are making a mountain out of a molehill” is a type of conventional implicature, since its meaning can be understood regardless of the context in which it appears (Blome-Tillmann 2013: 173).

This comment is being impolite in a covert way since it implicates that people who see sexism in the video-clip are overreacting, hence comprising the outgroup, whereas the ones that admit there is no sexism are more normal and face the whole issue more reasonably, comprising the ingroup.

#### 4.2.4 *Impoliteness Meta-Strategy*

(14) [REDACTED] 6 months ago

[REDACTED] εμενα μου αρεσουν οι δυνατες γυναικες, γιαυτο βαζω τη γκομενα μου να κανει ολες τις βαριες δουλειες...

“I like strong women, and for this reason I have my chick do all the heavy housework...”

This sarcastic comment is based on the popular stereotype that women have the major role in doing the household chores (Mills 2008: 127). The commenter says the s/he likes “strong women” - which is actually sexist, since s/he categorises women into strong and non-strong - which, then, comes in contrast to the derogatory nomination “chick” as well as the impolite utterance “I have my chick do all the heavy housework...”, which implies that s/he has the power to make women do things for him/her. Therefore, comment (14) perpetuates the stereotype that women, who are often being called “chicks”, are the ones who are responsible for the housework. It seems that the commenter tries to mitigate his/her sexist comment by making it look sarcastic or s/he tries to generally mock the issue of sexism, as it seems that he denies the existence of sexism in the video-clip under investigation.

(15) [REDACTED] 5 months ago

Όταν παραμονεύουν στη γωνία και ψάχνουν ευκαιρίες να ονομάσουν το οτιδήποτε "σεξιστικό".

-Τι θα κάνουμε σήμερα;

-Ας ψάξουμε να βρούμε μια μικρή αφορμή να αναφέρουμε κάτι ως σεξιστικό...

“When they lurk in the corner and look for opportunities to name everything as ‘sexist’.

-What are we doing tonight?

- Let’s look for a small reason to call something sexist...”

The above contribution, which is presented as a joke, implies that people who see sexism in the video-clip are actually the ones who are continually searching for reasons to blame others for their sexist behaviour. This seemingly sarcastic comment suggests that people who consider this video-clip sexist exaggerate and

magnify the severity of the issue. The verb “lurk”, which is metaphorically used, seems to intensify the commenter’s opinion that those people are always vigilant in such topics in order to express their opposition and they do it so often, as if it has become part of their every day routine.

(16) [REDACTED] 5 months ago

ΠΩΠΩ ΠΡΟΣΒΛΗΘΗΚΕ ΠΑΡΑ ΠΛΑΥ ΤΟ ΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΙΟ ΦΥΛΛΟ ΝΤΡΟΠΗ  
1!!2!3!4!56!6!!21!!1!!1!!1!!  
“GEE THE FEMALE GENDER WAS OFFENDED VERY MUCH SHAME  
1!!2!3!4!56!6!!21!!1!!1!!1!!1!!”

What is really interesting in this comment is the misspelling of the Greek word gender (φύλο), which is written with double ‘l’ instead of one, so in English it would be translated as ‘leaf’. Also, the word ‘ΠΛΑΥ’ has been misspelled, which should be written as ‘πολύ’, meaning ‘much’ in English; however, the person who posted this comment has confused the two vowels ‘I’ and ‘O’- probably because they are next to each other in the keyboard of a computer- maybe because of his/her hurry and excitement to post an ironic comment which aims to deride women. The contributor has capitalised the whole comment, a fact that triggers its impoliteness. The comment is expressed through the impolite formula of pointed criticism, since it indirectly criticizes women who feel insulted by the video-clip. The most interesting aspect of this comment is the punctuation. The contributor has used too many exclamation which intensifies his ironic tone; “unconventional spelling and punctuation is employed [...] primarily as a means of accentuating emotions”. In this comment “these strategies are used to express strong disagreement and to aggravate face-threatening acts” (Angouri & Tseliga 2010: 77); however, it is not under the scope of this paper to discuss impoliteness and punctuation.

(17) [REDACTED] 5 months ago

[REDACTED] ευχαριστούμε για τη διευκρίνιση γιατί ειχαμε μπερδευτεί. Εμείς τελικά είμαστε οι ηλίθιοι και εσείς αυτοί που ξερουν απλα το αυτονόητο, οτι η διαφήμιση είναι σεξιστική. Μας βοηθήσατε να καταλάβουμε, πως μας διέφυγε.  
“Thank you for the clarification because we were confused. Ultimately, we are the idiots and you are the ones who see the self-evident, namely that the advertisement is sexist. You helped us understand it, how did we miss that?”

In comment (17), the commenter ironically thanks the person s/he replies to (“Thank you for the clarification”) and ironically states that s/he helped both him/her and the rest of the people to acknowledge the sexist content of the video-clip (“You helped us understand it”), politeness strategies that are obviously used in an insincere way (Culpeper 2011: 209).

The ironic tone is intensely realised in the commenter’s forming the ingroup and the outgroup in a different way than normally; in this comment, “the idiots” are those who could not see sexism in the video clip, comprising the ingroup, whereas for the first time in the whole comment section the outgroup consists of smart people, who are able to recognise sexism in the video-clip and help people in the ingroup see sexism, too. However, the majority of the comments examined in this paper exhibit a totally different character, as the ingroup consists of people who deny the existence of sexism in the video clip and the outgroup consists of people who recognise sexism in it and are becoming recipients of impolite comments from the ingroup.

Finally, the unpalatable question “how did we miss that?” intensifies the commenter’s ironic attitude, since s/he is not truly wondering how sexism eluded his/her understanding and, thus, it’s a type of rhetorical question.

#### 4.2.5. *Mixed*

(18) [redacted] 5 months ago

Ηλίθιοι... που κοιτάνε μυρμήγκι και νομίζουν ότι είναι ελέφαντας. Που στο διάολο το είδαν το σεξιστικό; Ένα χαρούμενο σατιρικό μήνυμα και τίποτε άλλο. Αγάμητες χοντρό κόλες που από την αγαμία το παίζουν σε φεμινίστριες!!!  
“Idiots... that look at the ant and think it’s an elephant. Where the hell they saw the sexist content? It’s a happy and satirical message and nothing more. [you are] Unfuckable fat-ass [women] that because you haven’t had sex for a while you behave as if you were feminists!!!”

(19) [redacted] 5 months ago

κομπλεξικές χοντροφεμινίστριες εχετε γαμησει το συμπαν. αντε να σκασετε στο φαι και αφηστε το κοσμο ησυχο  
“oversensitive fat-feminists you have fucked the universe. go and gorge on food and leave the world in its peace”

(20) Le Pa 5 months ago

φεμινίστριες ΒΟΔΙΑ ΒΟΥΒΑΛΙΑ ΤΟΦΑΛΟΙ  
“feminists OXES BUFFALOES BUTTERBALLS”

The above comments illustrate both positive and negative impoliteness, since all the contributors are explicitly attacking the women's face; all comments make use of profane language (e.g. Unfuckable fat-ass, oversensitive fat-feminists, OXES BUFFALOES BUTTERBALLS); they also express contempt towards women (e.g. because they haven't had sex for a while they behave as if they were feminists!!!). All of them include insults, and more specifically, they employ the following formulas: personalised negative vocatives (e.g. Idiots, feminists OXES BUFFALOES BUTTERBALLS), personalised negative assertions (e.g. oversensitive fat-feminists you have fucked the universe) and negative expressives (go and gorge on food and leave the world in its peace).

The commenter in (19) addresses women with the use of animal imagery (OXES BUFFALOES BUTTERBALLS). What all three animals have in common is their weight, since all three are overweight and are stereotypically used to refer to overweight women and thus contain negative connotations (Holmes 2013: 325).

What all three comments - and most of the comments that express overt sexism- do is that they present feminist women as being overweight. This suggests a type of unfounded bias against feminists that might have started from the previous century, when feminism raised awareness about fat activism and liberation, which emerged during the 1960s in the US. For this reason, feminism consolidated fat feminism among its other ideologies in order to address the issue of fat oppression (Simic 2016: 17-18). Therefore, insults towards feminist women based on their being fat could be considered a wrong generalization for an ideology, i.e. fat activism, that feminism supports. However, these people forget that "not all fat activists are women and not all women within fat activism are feminists" (Simic 2016: 15).

(21) [REDACTED] 5 months ago

Είμαι γυναίκα....

ΤΟ ΣΕΞΙΣΤΙΚΟ ΓΑΜΩΤΙΣΦΕΜΙΝΑΖΙ ΠΟΥ ΕΙΝΑΙ;

Ήρεμα ρωτάω

"I am a woman....

WHERE IS THE SEXIST CONTENT FUCKTHEFEMINAZI?

I am asking calmly."

The contributor of this comment feels the urge to state that she is a woman. Mills (2008: 41) has noted that not only men but also women can be sexist and

express traditional views about a woman's position in society. The contributor is also being explicitly impolite against women, expressing positive impoliteness by attacking their positive face (FUCKTHEFEMINAZI), which also suggests a personalised negative assertion. This assertion is expressed in the form of an unpalatable question which is capitalised (WHERE IS THE SEXIST CONTENT FUCKTHEFEMINAZI?), which is enforced by the next assertion "I am calmly making this question", which constitutes off record impoliteness, since it is sarcastic; by capitalizing his/her comment, the commenter does not seem to make the question "calmly". On the surface, this assertion is considered appropriate; however, the unpalatable question was written in capital letters, it contained profane language and was quite ironic, since the contributor says that s/he cannot see any sexism in the video-clip. Thus, the phrase "I am calmly asking" is insincere and encompasses impoliteness as it is not meant to be taken seriously.

(22) [REDACTED] 6 months ago

@ [REDACTED] Στα χρόνια του παππού μου οι γυναίκες είχαν αποκλειστικά την ευθύνη του σπιτιού. Σήμερα αρκετοί άντρες ασχολούνται με αυτό και τα παιδιά. Γνωρίζω πολλούς. Αν όμως αυτοί οι άντρες δεν ασχολούνται στον ίδιο βαθμό με τις γυναίκες δεν είναι σοβαρό θέμα ούτε φυσικά είναι ισχυρό επιχείρημα. Όλες οι Ελληνίδες πολίτες της χώρας μας έχουν το δικαίωμα να διεκδικήσουν αξιώματα εξουσίας αρκεί να πληρούν κάποιες προϋποθέσεις. Αυτό είναι το σημαντικό σε σχέση με παλιότερα που οι γυναίκες όχι μόνο δεν διεκδικούσαν τίποτα αλλά ούτε καν ψήφιζαν. Το ότι δεν υπάρχουν γυναίκες πρωθυπουργοί στην Ελλάδα δεν σημαίνει απαραίτητα ότι δεν το επιτρέπουν οι άντρες ή η νοοτροπία ότι οι γυναίκες δεν κάνουν για ανάληψη τέτοιας ευθύνης. Γιατί εσύ και όλες οι φεμινίστριες σκέφτεστε αυτό και δεν σκέφτεστε ότι δεν απλά δεν το προτιμούν ή ότι δεν πληρούν τις προϋποθέσεις. Ωστόσο υπάρχουν πάρα πολλές γυναίκες που κατέχουν ανώτατες θέσεις εξουσίας. Το γεγονός ότι δεν έγιναν πρωθυπουργοί επίσης δεν είναι σοβαρό επιχείρημα. Το επιχείρημά σου σχετικά με τον βιασμό δεν πρόκειται να το σχολιάσω, γιατί θα υποτιμήσω την νοημοσύνη μου. Σε γενικές γραμμές ο φεμινισμός στη σημερινή εποχή στη Δύση είναι μια γελοιότητα. Ευτυχώς δεν ανήκω στην συνομοταξία των γελοίων. Μια τέτοια γελοία φεμινίστρια είναι και μια ονόματι Καλογεροπούλου Μαρία, η οποία δεν έχει την ικανότητα της διάκρισης και λέει ανοησίες στα βίντεο της στο youtube. Επηρεάζει αρνητικά τα νέα παιδιά.

"In my grandfather's day, women used to be responsible for the household. Today, many men, as well as children are also responsible for taking care of the household. I know a lot of them. But, it's not a serious problem or a solid argument (to say that sexism exists) if those men are not involved in the household to the same extent as women. All Greek female citizens can claim authority, as long as they are qualified for it. This is quite important since in the past, women not only could not claim on anything but they also could not vote.



The fact that there have not been female prime ministers in Greece doesn't necessarily mean that men do not let them become so or there exists a belief which claims that women are unable to take office. Why do you and other feminist women not consider this, namely that there are women who do not want to (take office) or that they are not qualified for this? The fact that women have not become prime ministers is not a solid argument, either. I will not comment on your argument concerning rape because I will insult my intelligence. Generally speaking, nowadays feminism in the West is an absurdity. Fortunately, I do not belong to the phylum of ridiculous people. Such a ridiculous feminist is a woman called Kalogeropoulou Maria, who is incapable of recognising what discrimination is and talks nonsense on her YouTube videos. She influences negatively the young."

Not only does the commenter deny the existence of sexism in the video clip, but also the existence of sexism in western societies. S/he makes reference to a prevalent stereotype, namely that mostly women used to have the major role in household management and that still today men may not be involved to the same extent as women in it (Mills 2008: 127). Another stereotype that is mentioned in comment (21) is that women may not be qualified enough for taking office or just they are not willing to undertake positions of power. However, s/he claims that all these should not be deemed as gender discrimination. The commenter seems to hold quite traditional views of what women should do and how they should behave.

Although at the beginning the commenter presents his/her arguments in a non-impolite way, at the end of his/her comment s/he exhibits a totally impolite attitude. S/he states that s/he will not respond and comment on the issue of rape, as this "will insult my intelligence", showing a derogatory stance towards the person s/he responds to. S/he employs a negative impoliteness strategy, as she is being contemptuous and s/he explicitly associates the person s/he replies to with a negative aspect, as s/he implies that this commenter's argument is unfounded. S/he supports this view by expressing a pointed criticism, calling the movement of Feminism "an absurdity" and the people who support it "ridiculous", hence denying common ground with them and employing a positive impoliteness strategy. Closing his/her comment, s/he attacks a famous Greek feminist called Maria Kalogeropoulou through a personalized third-person negative reference ("Such a ridiculous feminist is a woman called Kalogeropoulou Maria"), which suggests that s/he employs both positive impoliteness strategies, as she calls

Maria Kalogeropoulou “ridiculous”, which is quite derogatory as well as negative ones since s/he is being contemptuous towards her (“talks nonsense on her YouTube videos.” , “She influences negatively the young.”)

(23) [REDACTED] 6 months ago

@ [REDACTED] Το ίδιο είναι ρε ζων. Γιατι αν το δουμε απο την δικια σου την σκοπια, τοτε η γυναικα βλ. Λεχου είναι η εξυπνη της παρεας και οι υπολοιποι οι ελαφρομυαλοι. Αν ηταν σεξιστικο Παντελακη μου θα ελεγε γενικότερα για τις γυναικες, δεν θα εκανε ενα προσωπικο διαλογο με την κοπελα του. Αντε προβατα.

“It’s the same, you animal. From your perspective, a woman, like Lechou, would be the smartest in a company and the rest would be feather-brained. If it was sexist, my Pantelakis, he [the actor] would generally refer to women, he wouldn’t just speak with his girlfriend. You [are all] sheep.”

This comment reply abounds with insults both to a person who disagreed with the contributor of (15) (“you animal”) as well as to anyone who disagrees with him/her “you [are all] sheep”. Both expressions constitute personalised negative vocatives, which aim at damaging the addressee’s (and addressees’) positive face, since the contributor calls the other names; hence, a positive impoliteness strategy is employed in this comment. Also, addressing the person s/he replies to as “my Pantelakis”, suggests belittling the other, since the contributor uses the diminutive of his name (the suffix -akis produces male diminutives in the Greek language), and thus a negative impoliteness strategy is employed in this contribution, too.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

The video-clip under investigation provoked disagreement among people over the issue of sexism: many contributors claim that the video clip is not sexist and their comments are sexist (either overtly or indirectly). Each of those contributors attempts to convince the YouTube community in the comment section about the validity of their statements and at the same time they “deny association or common ground with the other” (Culpeper 2011: 208), thus forming an ingroup and an outgroup. The ingroup consists of people who identify themselves with a group in which they share common beliefs, disassociating with the individuals of the outgroup, whose beliefs are rejected by the ingroup (Lee 2007; Riketta 2005: 98). Thus, it can be inferred that the commenters of 1-23 construct an ingroup which consists of people who post insulting comments about the people who claim that the video-clip is sexist and is differentiated from the outgroup, which consists of the ones that find the video-clip sexist.

Kopytowska et al. (2017: 76) contend that gender is one of those contentious topics which trigger the use of insults in online contexts, a fact that can be attested by the present study, as well, since the YouTube interactions analysed in section 4 are characterised by polarization and antagonism. Anonymity seems to be one reason for people’s tendency to post impolite comments and be more aggressive towards the outgroup (Pihlaja 2014: 4), namely the individuals who recognised the sexist content in the video-clip, a finding supported by other similar studies, as well (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014; Divrami 2020; Sagredos & Nikolova 2020).

The majority of the comments examined in this paper adopt positive impoliteness strategies. The commenters who deny the existence of sexism in the video call the people in the outgroup names, by using swear and/or profane language (e.g “taliban-feminists”, “shit feminist woman”, “Unfuckable fat-ass [women]”, “FUCKTHEFEMINAZI”, etc.). Those derogatory nominations which, as can be understood, are mostly aimed at feminist -and not only- women

suggest language aggression against women. Almost all of them are based on stereotypical beliefs about [feminist] women's appearance as well as women's position in the society. Some of the comments illustrate that the "unattractive feminist stereotype" is still alive (Rudman & Fairchild 2007: 133). For example, the dismissal "go and shave your moustache" in comment (2), the personalised negative vocative "unfuckable [women]" as well as the negative expressive "because they haven't had sex for a while they behave as if they were feminists!!!" in comment (18) support and perpetuate the stereotypical belief that female feminists are less attractive than non-feminists and, because of that, men may not want to have sexual intercourse with them. Examples like these prove that overt sexism still holds true today and that is why it is important for women to never stop campaigning about their rights and their position within communities. What we also have to bear in mind is that most of the feminist women are not so concerned with their external appearance since they consider their personal achievement as a more important aspect for their lives and for this reason they may not socialize with people who judge their appearance, a fact also supported by Rudman & Fairchild (2007).

Another pattern observed in the comments that employ positive impoliteness strategies is that commenters tend to question the mental stability of people who recognise sexism in the video-clip. Apparently, these commenters disassociate themselves from the others that they portray as having a "mental callus" and are characterised as "idiots" (Culpeper 2011: 208), creating the ingroup, which consists of people who deny sexism and are mentally healthy, and the outgroup, consisting of those who see sexism, but are mentally unstable. Calling people "idiots" and crazy because they can actually acknowledge discrimination and sexist features in the video-clip does not make sense, since it cannot count as a solid counter-argument. People who actually find it sexist can present reasons and justifications for this. However, most of the people who deny sexism -the ingroup- verbally attack the ones who can see it- the outgroup.

Many of the comments posted in the comment section of the video-clip under investigation make reference to the stereotypical belief about women's position in society, namely that women are responsible for the housework (Mills 2008: 127). Comment (6) and (21) are two examples that contain this stereotype.

The commenter in (6) calls women “chamoura”, a personalised negative vocative (Culpeper 2016: 437), which is a quite derogatory term used by Greeks to denote that women are worthless and inferior, and orders them to “wash some dishes”, being directly sexist towards them, hence employing mainly a positive impoliteness strategy. The commenter in (22) expresses traditional and stereotypical beliefs about women’s position in society, too. S/he denies the existence of sexism in western societies, but, at the same time, claims that mostly women have the major role in the household management. In addition, although s/he acknowledges the fact that women are not significantly involved in politics, s/he argues that this may happen because they are not adequately qualified or willing enough to take office, an assertion which perpetuates the stereotype that women cannot excel in the political arena and, in some cases, even professionally. All these stereotypical characteristics attributed to women tend to marginalise them, underestimate their power and intelligence and, consequently, excluding them from the public sphere (Mills 2008: 40).

It is a common belief that mainly men express stereotypical views about women. However, as noted above, Mills (2008: 41) has claimed that females can also be sexist and express traditional views about a woman’s position in society. As has been stated, YouTube is an online setting in which people can conceal their true identity. Many of the commenters use a gender-neutral username on YouTube, whereas some others may use a male username, while being female or the reverse. That is why some commenters in the YouTube section of the video under investigation, before stating their opinion, they explicitly stated their sex. Examples of this phenomenon are comments (7) and (21), which both start with the phrase “I am a woman”, whereas the commenter in (7) states with certainty that the majority of women in 2020 believe that sexism in the West does not exist (“I do belong to the majority of women who think that in 2020 all this stuff about sexism in the West is bullshit.”). Both comments employ mainly positive impoliteness strategies. More specifically, the commenter in (7) calls the person s/he replies to - and who obviously belongs to the outgroup - “disgusting creature”, a rather derogatory personalised negative assertion. Comment (21) calls feminist women ‘feminazi’, a pejorative term which is a blend of two words, feminist and Nazi and is used to refer to female feminists whose views are considered radical. This derogatory nomination is enclosed in the capitalised

dismissal “FUCKTHEFEMINAZI”, which is written without spaces in order for the commenter to emphasize his/her point.

The comments that employ negative impoliteness strategies directly condescend both people who acknowledge sexism in the video-clip and, generally, (feminist) women. Comment (8) resembles comments (4) and (5), as the commenter states that whoever criticised the video-clip for sexism faces psychological problems and must visit a psychologist. As with comments (4) and (5), people who belong to the outgroup are presented as having psychological issues and their mental stability is questioned. Most of the negative impoliteness comments claim that people who can see sexism in the video-clip “disgust” them or they are “disgusting”, as can be seen in comment (7) “I do not like being supported by a disgusting creature like you”, a type of insult that suggests a personalised negative assertion (Culpeper 2016: 437). Contemptuous are also the impolite comments (16), (17) and (18) which insult overweight feminist women, and associate them with negative aspects (e.g. calling women oxes).

Another common pattern that is observed in the comment section is both calling the movement of feminism or the feminists ridiculous (e.g. in comment [22] is stated that “feminism in the West is an absurdity” and “Such a ridiculous feminist is a woman called Kalogeropoulou Maria”). In comment (7), which is mainly positively impolite since it calls the people who belong to the outgroup “disgusting creatures”, the commenter states that “in 2020 all this stuff about sexism in the West is bullshit”, which could be considered negatively impolite, since comments like (7) and (22) associate feminism with a negative aspect. Looking closely through these types of comments, one can understand how important the movement of feminism is, even in modern societies, as there are still people who hold traditional views about women and make them doubt not only their position in society, but also their sense of self. Therefore, it seems that feminism is needed more than ever.

Another recurrent pattern observed is the rhetorical questions that flood in the comment section. Their common feature is that none of these questions expect answer(s). The negatively impolite comment (9) contains fourteen unpalatable questions, which are really condescending. The commenter at the beginning of

his/her comment wonders “Equality WHY?”, implying that there is no reason for men to be equal to women and at the same time s/he states that equality has been “offered” to women by men, thus, minimizing the importance of women. S/he further defends his/her derogatory views by arguing that women do not fight in wars like men, which is untrue since there are a lot of states that recruit women (e.g. the US, Norway). Totally disdainful are the statements about women’s contribution to sciences, since s/he questions their intelligence (“Do you know any existing ideology that was created by a woman’s intelligence?”, “Do you know anything that women have done without having copied it from us?”). It is widely known that numerous females have contributed and changed the world (e.g. Marie Curie was the first woman to win the Nobel Prize in Physics). S/he also claims that even when a man may not have sexually harassed a woman, but she accuses him of having done so, the authorities will believe women and not men. However, it is a fact that the majority of the female rapes in Greece go unreported and even unpunished (e-kathimerini.com 2017) and, when reported, women are either disregarded by the police officers or their cases are rejected in court (Noguchi 2017). Finally the commenter presents women as man haters, by stating that they want to establish matriarchy and not equality, as well as child murderers, because they are in favour of abortion. Consequently, the commenter of (9) explicitly associates women with several negative aspects, emphasizes the relative power of men and, therefore, belittles women (Culpeper 2011: 208), hence employing mainly negative impoliteness strategies.

All these negative characteristics discussed in the previous paragraph are expressed in the form of questions. Grammatically speaking, a question is a sentence that needs an answer. However, the questions in comment (9), as well as most of the questions included in the comments section of the video under investigation, do not expect an answer, as they are rhetorical and their aim is to emphasize the commenter’s opinion(s) or to mock the people who belong to the outgroup, namely the ones that acknowledge the existence of sexism in the video-clip. In comment (10) “That is to say, where exactly is sexism????” and comment (11) “How is that sexist? Can somebody explain it to me?” both commenters do not expect an answer; those questions could be considered negative assertions as they actually intend to mean that there is no sexism in the

video clip and none can explain where sexism is. Both examples express off record impoliteness, since the commenters do not expect their questions to be answered. On the contrary, it seems that they want to dispute with the outgroup and create polarization over the issue of sexism.

The examples of rhetorical questions that are to be perceived as negative assertions are not the only examples of off-record impoliteness. Some commenters are being intentionally impolite in a covert way, in order to conceal their judgemental intention. For example, comment (12) “If this is sexist then, when I smile to my mum I flirt with her.” contains particularized conversational implicature: it implies that if this video is sexist, then even a smile to our mothers should be considered flirtatious, which is a blatant hyperbole. The commenter seems to exaggerate with his/her statement, as he thinks that people who find the video sexist exaggerate, too. Comment (13) is also another example of off-record impoliteness, since the commenter intended to prove that people who recognize the sexist content in the video-clip overreact and exaggerate by posting the famous proverb “You are making a mountain out of a molehill..”.

Apart from covertly impolite comments, sarcastic but impolite comments are all pervasive, too. Comment (14) is based again on the stereotype already discussed about women’s having the major role in doing the household chores (Mills 2008: 127). The statement “I like strong women, and for this reason I have my chick do all the heavy housework...” may be used sarcastically in order for the commenter to mitigate his/her view that women should take care of the household, but, in fact, it ends up mocking the issue of sexism and perpetuating the stereotype about women’s position in society. Comment (15) also carries negative connotations about people who find the video-clip sexist, since it is claimed that they are continually searching for reasons to blame others for their sexist behaviour, even in cases when sexism does not emerge, like in the video clip. However, those connotations are expressed as a joke in order to seem less offensive.

As explained earlier, comment (16) is quite interesting to examine, since its impoliteness is triggered by the misspelling, the capitalization as well as the excessive punctuation. The Greek commenter either intentionally or because of ignorance writes the Greek word *φύλο*(gender) with double ‘l’ (*φύλλο* which



means ‘leaf’) instead of one. Also, the word ‘ΠΙΛΥ’ has been misspelled, which should be written as ‘πολύ’, meaning ‘much’ in English. The whole comment is ironic, since it ironically states that women have been offended after watching the video-clip under investigation. The exclamation of surprise “GEE” as well as the word “SHAME” function as intensifiers of the ironic tone that surrounds the comment, which is expressed through the impolite formula of pointed criticism (Culpeper 2016: 436).

Some other comments ironically thanked people of the outgroup for “helping” them spot the sexist content in the video-clip, like in comment (17): “Thank you for the clarification because we were confused.” It is more than obvious that the commenter is being polite in an insincere manner (Culpeper 2011: 209), only to mock the people who compose the outgroup. What intensifies the irony that comment (17) entails is the different way the commenter constructs the ingroup and the outgroup: s/he presents as “idiots” the ones who insisted that there is no sexism in the video-clip, whereas the people of the ourgroup are presented as smart, since they enlightened the people of the ingroup - who here are called “idiots”. The irony is more than salient in this comment, since the majority of the comments investigated in this paper exhibit a totally different character, as the ingroup is made up of people who deny sexism and attack people from the outgroup who can acknowledge it.

Another recurrent catchphrase in the comment section that suggests sarcasm or mock politeness is the statement “I am calmly asking”. Comment (21) is a typical example of this observed pattern: “WHERE IS THE SEXIST CONTENT FUCKTHEFEMNAZI? I am calmly asking”. This catchphrase has been used extensively in various Greek online settings in a sarcastic manner. However, in comment (21) both the capitalization of the question as well as the dismissal which includes a personalised negative assertion show that the commenter is not actually calm when s/he asks the question. Therefore, the popular catchphrase “I am calmly asking” is used in an insincere way and encompasses impoliteness, as it is not meant to be taken seriously.

The analysis of the present data suggests that commenters who belong to the ingroup endeavour to establish their views about the video-clip by verbally attacking people who belong to the outgroup, and more specifically, female

feminists. The majority of the commenters employ positive impoliteness strategies, as they “deny association or common ground with the other... Use...swear, or...profane language... call the other names - use derogatory nominations” (Culpeper 2011: 208). Most of the insults are expressed through personalized negative vocatives and/or personalized negative assertions (Culpeper 2016: 437). Also, numerous comments involved contemptuous and disdainful characterizations about people who belong to the outgroup, especially women, hence employing mainly negative impoliteness strategies. Another important finding is that several commenters who denied the existence of sexism in the video-clip, expressed stereotypical beliefs about women’s position in the public sphere. Therefore, the interpretation of the data shows that the expression of stereotypical as well as sexist beliefs are intimately related to impoliteness. It was also shown that discussions of gender and sexism bring about conflict among the commenters in an online context (Kopytowska et al. 2017: 76). Since the commenters are anonymous, they start identifying themselves with a group in which they share common beliefs, disassociating from the individuals of the outgroup, whose beliefs are rejected by the ingroup (Riketta 2005: 98, Lee 2007).

The present study bears similarities with a recent study about how impoliteness is viewed in the comments of a Greek online newspaper conducted by Tzanne and Sifianou (2019: 1031), which showed that impoliteness is “intimately related to issues of identity construction” and their data suggested “a relation of polarity and opposition between in-group/Us and out-group/Them”. Another similar finding between the two studies is that both sets of data reveal the stereotypical thinking that prevails in Greek society (Tzanne & Sifianou 2019: 1033), which is reflected in the comments that are expressed by the use of impoliteness strategies.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

This study explored how a conflictive YouTube polylogue, which was created under a Greek video-clip about Covid-19, unfolds and the impoliteness strategies the commenters use in order to express their views. The video-clip was criticised by several people as sexist. It has been claimed that gender is a controversial topic that tends to bring about conflict among people (Kopytowska et al. 2017: 76) and that people tend to be more uncivilized in online settings, because they can conceal their true identity (Pihlaja 2014: 4). In the video-clip under examination, sexism lies in mansplaining, which means that it is presented as indirect and that is the main reason people find it difficult to pick it. However, instead of wondering why there are people who claim that the video-clip is sexist by presenting solid arguments, some commenters decide to post impolite comments and verbally attack and/or mock people who argue that the video-clip is sexist.

As illustrated in tables 1 and 2, three hundred and ninety-two (392) comments out of the nine-hundred (900) denied the existence of sexism in the video-clip under investigation. What this paper examined were the two hundred and seventy-five (275) comments in which their commenters used several impoliteness strategies in order to express their view, namely that the video clip is not sexist and/or that they cannot see sexism, hence the title “Sexism Blindness”.

The analysis and the interpretation of the impolite comments was based on Culpeper’s (2011) theory of impoliteness and suggested that the majority of the commenters who denied the existence of sexism in the video-clip employed positive and negative impoliteness strategies. The rest of the comments employed off-record impoliteness, sarcasm and mock politeness. Most commenters expressed their views by verbally attacking people who acknowledged the sexist content in the video-clip, by calling them names, by using swear or profane language and by being condescending and/or disdainful towards women and sometimes towards female feminists. Also, the main finding

that emerges from the analysis of the data is that some of the commenters of the video under investigation create polarization and conflict deny association with people who have different views from them - the outgroup - lose their individuality and start identifying themselves with a group in which they share common beliefs, namely the ingroup. Another significant observation of this thesis is that people expressed stereotypical beliefs about women's position in society and presented them as inferior and subordinate, which suggests discriminatory discourse.

The present data indicate that online settings, like YouTube, can cause polarization and disagreement among people, which perpetuates stereotypical as well as sexist thinking. It is also evident that the topic of sexism triggers impoliteness and discriminatory discourse. Therefore, there is an interrelation between impoliteness and stereotype forming.

What is more, the current study shed light on two closely related crucial issues, namely the mansplaining and the indirect sexism. It can be inferred that there is also a connection between impoliteness and sexism, with the latter being manifested mainly in an implicit way on the social media. This kind of sexism is considered more dangerous, since it is latent and, thus, making it difficult to detect and refute it.

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