

Domesticity and the construction of intimacy: Producing the erotic body and self within 'the love nest'

Sexualities

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Abstract

Following recent academic attention on the neoliberal self, in this article, we situate the construction of the sexual self and body as part of an ongoing, neoliberal 'aesthetic entrepreneurship' and argue that people draw on various material and cultural resources in order to put these entrepreneurial selves together. Drawing on 40 open-ended interviews with young Greek adults aged between 20 and 33, conducted between 2018 and 2019, we explore the cultural and material resources people use in order to create the intimate self. We situate our work within an analytical framework about the 'aesthetic labour' people invest themselves into within neoliberalism and argue that such work contributes to the growing body of work on self-surveillance and the articulation of an ethical self.

Keywords

aesthetic labour, domesticity, ethical self, erotic body and space

Given the popular and scholarly attention to how neoliberal work on the self plays out through diet, fitness, wellness, plastic surgery, and reality TV (Banet Weiser 2018; Gill 2017; Gill and Kanai 2018; Weber 2014), here, we take the view that the construction of the sexual self and body is part of a self-inventing, self-monitoring, self-reflexive, ongoing, neoliberal 'aesthetic entrepreneurship' (Elias et al., 2017). Premised upon the

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sexual stories people tell (Plummer 1995) when accounting for the ways in which they produce, as sexual subjects, erotic bodies and spaces within the domesticity, we offer that people draw on various material and cultural resources in order to put these entrepreneurial selves together.

Hence, we use the personal erotic trajectories of young Greek adults aged between 20 and 33 to make sense of an under-researched area in the country: people's patterns of sexually related consumption, thus offering insights into their sensuous constructions. Drawing on 40 open-ended interviews conducted between 2018 and 2019, we explore the cultural and material resources people use in order to create the intimate self. We situate our work within an analytical framework about the 'aesthetic labour' people invest themselves into within neoliberalism (Elias et al., 2017). We argue that this article contributes to the growing body of work on self-surveillance through its theorisation of neoliberalism and its attentiveness to the ways in which aesthetic labour incites surveillance and monitoring of the sexual self, while also contributing to the articulation of an ethical self

Having drawn from our pool of students, and their entourage, this research followed the gender and sexual identities of our volunteer participants. There was no non-binary individual in our interview sample, thus limiting our understanding of the sexual self to binary individuals, yet of different sexual orientations. Our sample is skewed towards heteronormative constructions of the sexual self and body, as the majority of our interviewees self-identify as heterosexual. Still, drawing on longer discussions about the sexual body, body hair, and sex in the domesticity as compared to sex in public spaces, this article presents both heteronormative and queer accounts about how individuals produce, discuss and monitor their bodies and personal spaces, and how they position themselves towards 'romantic love' and 'casual sex'. We are also interested in the ways in which 'disgust' becomes a regulatory tool through which people discipline and control their bodies and their sexual self, following specific rules and scripts about body practices (Fahs 2017). In so doing, we argue that people draw upon a variety of material and cultural resources – such as consumption culture, media culture, celebrityhood, and post-feminism – which contribute to a discourse of aesthetic entrepreneurship, affecting both women and men.

Neoliberalism and young Greek adults as 'aesthetic entrepreneurs'

Taking a Foucauldian approach that views subjectivities being reconstituted through neoliberalism (Brown 2003), we see the enterprising self being ruled by ambition, calculation, and personal responsibility (Elias et al., 2017; Rose 1992). It is women in particular that are positioned as ideal neoliberal subjects (Gill and Scharff 2011; McRobbie 2009; Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008), not least because the neoliberal self is defined by its consumption skills, something that, in turn, privileges the feminine through a long-standing association of women with consumption (Bundy 2004; Davies 2005; Niblock 2004). However, we argue in this article, there is evidence to suggest that the notion of 'aesthetic entrepreneurship' (Elias et al., 2017), whereby the individual is

expected to transform themselves and manage their bodies and ambience to become desirable, is also extended to masculinity. In this respect, we offer, it is not just women who are required to fit the relentless requirement to work on and construct their body, style, image, and lifestyle – what [Wissinger \(2015\)](#) has coined as ‘glamour labour’ when talking about fashion models – but men as well. [Elias et al. \(2017\)](#) build upon the concept of ‘glamour labour’ to introduce the idea of ‘aesthetic labour’ – a kind of incessant, evergoing, labour, we are all expected to perform and take an active role in, regardless of whether we materialise it or not eventually. Thinking of how young Millennials have fully embraced the exigencies of the new ‘attention economy’ ([Marwick 2015](#); [Watkins 2009](#)), with its new forms of visibility, appearance and looking, and how they are expected to participate in the endless labour of ‘curating a visible self’, online and off it ([Dobson 2015](#)), it transpires from our research with young Greek adults that the work on the self that is ‘aesthetic labour’, is catered to and internalised by both women and men. Following [Elias et al. \(2017: 37-38\)](#), we take the view that ‘aesthetic labour’ not only refers to the ‘body work’ people are expected to put in order to make themselves desirable but also extends to their subjectivity, rendering it malleable through various aesthetic practices that involve people’s body, beauty, and spatial makeover, which, in turn, offers them self-confidence, as we shall discuss later on. [Elias et al. \(2017: 38-39\)](#) call this ‘aesthetic entrepreneurship’, drawing links with critiques of neoliberalism as a social, cultural and psychic project. They particularly insist on ‘entrepreneurship’, which they see refuting accounts of beauty work within a context of passivity; instead, in ‘aesthetic entrepreneurship’ they view the aesthetic labour people put into, together with the agency, creativity – and we would add ‘resistance’ – people deploy when styling and transforming themselves (*ibid*: 39). In addition, through the concept of ‘aesthetic entrepreneurship’, they make the link between contemporary beauty politics and neoliberalism so as to envisage the neoliberal subject as an aesthetic entrepreneur – self-inventing, self-monitoring, self-reflexive and calculating. This way, ‘... preoccupations with appearance, beauty, the body’ – and we would add here ‘desirability’ as well – ‘...are turned into yet another project to be planned, managed and regulated...’ (*ibid*: 39). The exigencies of beauty culture are managed by the aesthetic entrepreneur and are widely dispersed across cultures and national contexts, as other work ([Dosekun 2017](#)), and ours here, show, following the global reach of neoliberalism.

Methodological note

For the purpose of this study, 40 semi-structured interviews with 25 women and 15 men were conducted between 2018 and 2019. To explore the cultural and material resources people use in order to create the intimate self, we explored the kinds of sensuous constructions people employ upon their bodies and their space. Where do they draw from in order to produce the ‘erotic self’? How do they discipline their bodies by using narratives of the ‘sexy’, ‘erotic’ body, and what does this body entail for them? What kinds of patterns of sexually related consumption do people put together in the rendering of sexual personas in the domesticity? How do they negotiate the public/private axis of sex-making, either within the long-term relationship or within casual sex? Participants

were asked about long-term relationships and casual affairs, about romantic and ‘kinky’ sex, the production of intimacy, about the construction of the sexual/erotic self and the preparation of intimate space, as well as about the difference between having sex in private and in public space.

In terms of data analysis, we have followed a discursive – Foucaultian – approach to intimacy and desirability, seeing the body as an aestheticised construction, where various affects are mobilised, from disgust and shame to pride and content in one’s subjecthood and sexual citizenship (Isin 2014; Tate 2013; Tyler 2008). The interviews were conducted within the Porn Studies Seminar, which we teach at the Department of Communication and Media Studies at the NKUA, using a snowballing technique. In this, students were asked to facilitate interviews through their own circle of friends, and were instructed as to how to interview subjects about sensitive issues. All interviewees have been given pseudonyms and amongst them are university students/graduates, a few professionals (in education, in marketing and PR, in EU bodies, in the public sector) and self-employed. In this respect, and on the basis of their family and professional background, our sample reflects (white) middle class young Greek adults. None of our interviewees has children or is married. The majority of our sample identifies as cis-heteronormative, to the exception of 8 queer individuals, a limitation to our understanding of gender and sexual identities, to be addressed in future research (see [Appendix for a list of participants](#)).

We now move on to discuss the broader cultural and material resources young Greek adults draw upon in order to construct and talk about the sexual self and body.

Cultural and material resources of the sexual aesthetic entrepreneur in everyday domesticity

In our quest for the resources of sexual aesthetic entrepreneurship in the domesticity, we look into the ‘presentation of self’ (Goffman 1959) and the constructions of sexual subjectivities by exploring the ways people prepare and beautify themselves and their bodies, within a context of ‘aestheticization of everyday life’ (Featherstone 2007). We have identified the following narrative arcs in the discursive engagements of our participants:

Beauty, desirability, and cleanliness as part of an ongoing care of the self

There has been a significant resurgence of interest in beauty culture in the first two decades of the 21st century (Elias et al., 2017), leading some theorists to argue that this feminist ‘turn to beauty’ has brought new attention to agency, pleasure, embodiment, and intersectionality (Coleman and Figueroa 2010), as well as to self-surveillance and monitoring (Gill 2019; Lupton 2016), especially when it comes to sex making. Indeed, the ‘look good’ requirement impacts upon both women and men, whether heteronormative or queer, and points towards an ‘extensification of beauty pressures’ (Elias et al., 2017: 28), in itself part of the neoliberal and postfeminist beauty culture, into the domain of desirability and sexiness. As a result, this pointing towards the ubiquity of a certain – to paraphrase Ross Gill (2007; Gill and Kanai 2018) – ‘neoliberal sensitivity’ by which both

women and men practice a degree of forensic self-surveillance and carry through embodied expectations of beauty and desirability in order to attain 'sexiness'.

Some participants have shown acute awareness of their performative – and normative – presentation of self, as for example, Nicky (heterosexual female, 25) who explains that practices of sexiness mean *different things to different people, like, there are women who put on high heels and make-up, and others who prefer a casual style... personally, I spend a lot of time getting ready.. I make the effort – hair dyed, clothes, shoes... as well as put to work all my arms of seduction – what to say, how to say it, paying him compliments, being appreciative... so I perform a certain kind of femininity.. one of my ex's once told me I know how to 'sell' myself as a sexual subject (laughter)*. Nicky shows self-reflexivity and is in tune with the perennial sexy/slutty dichotomy, which she claims she has mastered following the lead of female celebrities, and their paedagogic role in consumption and femininity (Marshall 2010, 2016; author 1): *the way you dress, well, some may say it's sexy, some [may say] it's slutty... I think I dress sexy without being 'cheap', you know... like so many celebrities have shown us – thank God for Kim Kardashian who liberated us from the 'remorse police'*. With this, Nicky makes a covert class statement, separating herself from some 'other' women who cannot do 'sexy' right – and are therefore seen as 'cheap', while pointing at the way celebrity culture is part of the cultural resources put into use when producing the sexual self.

The care of the self revolves a lot about 'being clean', whether straight or not. For Christos (gay male, 23), taking a bath is a 'must' – *regardless if it leads to sex or not... for sure, I'll be clean, I'll shave.. won't shave my legs like women do, but I'll trim all over*. For Antonis (heterosexual male, 29), *taking a bath before sex and putting on nice clothes, makes me feel good about myself*, while for Filippas (heterosexual male, 21), the desirable self involves being clean and shaved, with an after-shave on – *this goes for any time I go out, regardless of sex; [being desirable] means putting on nice underwear, shaving, or at least trimming, your genitals... cause today it is frowned upon if you don't*, which suggests that the post-feminist sensibility of being hairless is not merely a self-regulatory practice but also a cultural norm that pertains to both men and women. The normative position the hairless/trimmed body seems to have reached amongst young adults in Greece is part and parcel of 'cleanliness' and a latent notion of 'disgust'. For example, Yiannis (gay male, 22) thinks that being clean and smelling nice is a basic rule, *the worst pet peeve is when the other person is not clean – basic human courtesy, you see... so, fresh clothes, cologne, trimming*.

Cleanliness – insofar as genitals are concerned – as part of a certain sex etiquette also resonates in Irini's account: *.... look, yeah, once I've been with a guy who made me think 'OMG, he hasn't washed his dick' – I didn't like that!-, but this is uncommon. I don't mind some sweat, and overall I like how my sexual partners smell!* (Irini, heterosexual female, 22). For Marios, our only bisexual participant, getting ready and cleaned up before sex is a matter of common curtesy: *...well, cologne and deodorant are 'musts', this goes for everyone!! In my view, this is the bare minimum, I mean you don't start going on a date if you haven't cleaned up yourself – it's a matter of self-respect, and a matter of respecting the other person'*. He then takes the discussion of cleanliness – in anticipation of sex – to a different level and allows for the particularities of anal sex: *... well, in gay sex... I mean if*

there's a chance a date may end up in sex.... I've gone out several times with people who have come fully prepared to our date, I mean they've douched alright.... I think this is something extra – it's one thing to shave and trim (before going on a date), but douching?? Douching means you've given it some thought some 2–3 hours before going out, it means you want to be prepared in case there's some kind of 'accident' while having sex... (Marios, male, bisexual, 22). His account shows how sexual desirability is tied to the notion of cleanliness – in itself seen as an integral part of the self-respecting individual, who applies constant self-surveillance by keeping themselves clean. Yet being clean has various layers – in gay sex – from the more simple practices of using cologne and antiperspirant to the more intricate one of douching.

Some men simplify the rules of cleanliness and do not fuss about 'a last minute shower' – as long as they have 'a clean dick': *... if I've showered the day before, then I'm not going to be very fussy about taking a last minute shower-because sex involves sweat and excretions, so you take a shower afterwards... BUT, I want my dick to be clean at all times, because, you know, it goes into mouths..... (Dimitris, male, heterosexual, 21).*

Elsewhere, practices of sexiness and beautification include the aesthetic labour of careful waxing, hydrating creams, make up – *not too much though, no man really appreciates heavy make up* – and nice clothes (Tatiana, heterosexual female, 28). Tatiana's narrative echoes middle-class standards of 'appropriate femininity', paying attention not to 'overdo' and thus become labelled as 'easy', while also retaining a 'postfeminist sensibility' of sexiness. Applying careful self-policing, Tatiana argues: *if you come across as 'too sexy', guys think you're just for sex and treat you accordingly*. She draws on a firmly embedded media and popular culture and quips: *it is always best to be prepared [for sex], than be caught unawares, this is common knowledge, you read about this everywhere, in all women magazines and YouTube beauty blogs and tutorials where you get advise*. The sexual story Tatiana tells, shows the level of sophistication people amass as 'sexual entrepreneurs' (Harvey and Gill 2011), borrowing from the wider media culture.

Fashionwise, there are those who do not pay any attention to what they wear for sex – *for me everything comes down to personality (Christos, gay male, 23)* – as well as those who take a 'realistic' approach: *I don't have many different looks... I have a casual/sporty and a smart kind of look and that's it, nothing unrealistic, nothing over the top (Antonis, heterosexual male, 29)*. Maria (heterosexual female, 29) offers a somewhat different view when she argues that: *yes, I'll go for lace lingerie, but, mind you, in my experience, men don't get turned off if you're in your penguin or duckling cotton panties (laughter)....* For Danai (heterosexual female, 29), the construction of the desirable self includes nice underwear – *not necessarily a string, but certainly not my period panties (laughter)*, hereby alluding to the perceived 'unsexiness' of the menstruating female body (Fahs 2017).

Disgust (for body hair) may reveal deeply engrained beliefs and perceptions about the (sexual) body and self, especially within a neoliberal context where individual 'choice' and 'agency' are put forward; the body politics of disgust, and its negotiation, demonstrate the ability of good neoliberal subjects to practice seemingly effortless and pleasurable self-care (Fahs 2017, 94), as reflected in the following quip – *women and men follow*

similar practices already, though, for women, expectations are stricter; the guy must be clean shaved all over; on his penis... well, he doesn't 'have' to, but it's a matter of common courtesy.. and women have to remove hair from genitals, legs, armpits, face – this is how it's done now... yet, a while ago, it wasn't so dominant for women to be clean shaved... (Nikos, heterosexual male, 22). And he goes on - *now, as for me, I wouldn't object to a fair level of unkempt in the sensitive area*, thus 'nodding' towards a postfeminist sensibility (Gill 2016), with the 'right amount of sexy'.

Hence, not everyone abides by the 'regulatory politics of disgust' when it comes to body hairlessness, as both young adult women and men in Greece often negotiate the vernacular power of hairlessness with small acts of defiance (Gill 2016): *I wax all over – legs, armpits, genitals – mainly for myself, to feel clean and comfortable*, says Evi (heterosexual female, 22), linking hair removal with cleanliness and comfort in oneself. She then adds, *once, I was with this guy and I hadn't waxed down under for some time – he didn't mind, but if he did dare to comment on this, I'd be sure to show him the way out [...] as long as I take a bath, brush my teeth, put on deodorant and some foundation, I'm alright really!* which suggests that being clean is way more important for the sexual self.

Antonis (heterosexual male, 29) offers his view about self-surveillance and policing within a long-term relationship, referring to his girlfriend's hair removal practice. He told us that although he appreciates the time she takes for self-care, he believes she should not feel obliged to be 'impeccable' all the time, thus offering a feminist critique to the mandates of neoliberal post-feminism: *... I mean, she must have the right to feel tired and to not HAVE to wax/shave ... I want her to feel at ease with me.. yet there are many women out there who find it unacceptable to have hair on their legs... which I find kind of oppressive, brought upon women by men... I think it's fascinating when she decides to defy this strict regime of hair removal – same goes for me too, I mean I expect to be judged as a person... for who I really am... not by the length of my hair.*

Aesthetic labour (Elias et al., 2017) is also dependent upon the level of intimacy between partners, with some suggesting that being in a relationship 'takes off the pressure' of having to 'look good' all the time: *in my current relationship, I don't put that much effort – this doesn't mean I go unkempt, naturally... but because he is not that fussy about such things, and we've been together for a while now – it's ok (to let yourself a bit loose)... of course, if I were with a partner with a sharp eye to detail, I'd make sure I'd be a good match for him.. so it all depends on who you are with....* (Christos, gay male, 23). In this case, we see that sexual subjects, both heteronormative and queer, have internalised the (neoliberal) exigency of the care of the self as a personal, self-monitoring, responsibility – 'naturally'. In this way, they comply with the notion of the 'good neoliberal subject' (Gill 2019) when 'presenting the self' (Goffman 1959).

It appears that a focus on the body as the route to empowerment and confidence (Banet-Weiser 2017: 270) is maintained for young Greek adults, yet with a heavier impact upon women compared to men, with various degrees of nuanced defiance and negotiation of existing/expected norms of appearance and decorum, allowing the formation of different sexual subjectivities. Sexual subjects, in this respect, perform a new kind of post-feminist and neoliberal form of aesthetic labour that Dosekun calls 'aesthetic vigilance' (2017: 174–176). Within it, neoliberal subjects perform beauty practices on an 'on-off' basis,

taking a rest from incessant beauty work, before they resume it once again. As we have suggested, our work with young Greek twentysomethings not only indicates that such vigilance is deployed, and negotiated, by women without excluding men, but also that empowerment and confidence is still strongly anchored on the body and self-image (Banet-Weiser 2017: 268).

Material resources: Props and interior design in the production of erotic space

Goods have been discussed for long as information systems about individual consumers (Douglas and Isherwood 1979). For many of them, the 'love nest' is the domesticity, where intimacy is more easily accommodated (Wilson Kovacs 2007). A common thread involves personal space being 'neat and tidy' for the partner coming over, with most participants mentioning that lack of cleanliness as a determinative drawback. This applies to both women and men, as for example, in Antonis' case (heterosexual male, 29), for who keeping personal space clean and tidy is paramount while preparing for sex: *no dirty briefs and laundry on the floor, nor any rubbish... [your] place looks nice; I don't mind if her place is untidy or dirty, but when we're at mine's, I believe everything must look 'in place'*. Filippas (heterosexual male, 21) argues that you must have prepared your space for sex – *it must be well-kept and clean, with nice sheets ... and condoms, sex toys – like blindfolds, handcuffs – nearby.. so that you don't go looking for them*.

Occasionally, for women lighting plays an important role: *I like dim lighting... overall I prefer sex at night-time rather than daytime cause the light gets softer... mind you, now that I'm a bit older, I'm more self-confident and not that concerned about how I look in strong (day) light (laughter)*, says Nicky, bringing up the issue of 'self-confidence' (heterosexual female, 25). Light, or the absence of it, is pitched differently by Irini: *... I totally despise sex in the dark, especially when I think 'man, I've got myself a good hunk-what a waste not to be able to see him!!'. I have my own insecurities about my body, which is why I may choose not to be on top at the first couple of times (we have sex), because I don't think that (being on top) flatters me* (heterosexual female, 22). Once again, we see the intricacies of 'confidence culture' (Gill and Orgad, 2015), making a young woman both confident (to want to have sex with the lights on) and self-conscious at the same time (by worrying about not fitting the 'ideal' body type). The sexual aesthetic entrepreneur is at work, negotiating deeply internalised insecurities about body appearance and monitoring the ('imperfect') body, at the start of the affair, by avoiding 'compromising' positions. When men take romantic action, sometimes it's for the benefit of their partners – *well, I'd prepared a romantic setting... with candles and sticks... – for my partner, not so much for myself* (Nikos, heterosexual male, 22).

People's tastes differ as to where is best to have sex at home, with some preferring *the bedroom – cause there's plenty of space and you can try stuff out* (Elena, heterosexual female, 21); or because it's where they keep their *sex props: chains, cuffs, rods, usually above the bed – for easy reach* (Anna, heterosexual female, 33). Others think of the bed as cliché and boring: *I prefer the couch for sex... in my mind, the bed is for sleeping* (Christos, gay male, 23), and suggest either – *the living room, for, you run quickly out of options in the bathroom* (Nicky, heterosexual female, 25) – *the kitchen island, especially if*

he's tall because you're on the perfect height (bursts into laughter) (Tatiana, heterosexual female, 28); or *the floor – I love having sex on the floor... yeah... because I'm into BDSM sex, I'm a submissive, so I like the floor... puts the other person in a dominant position...* (Yianna, heterosexual female, 21).

In briefly presenting how our participants prepare the domestic space upon welcoming a sexual partner, we see the production of erotic space in the domesticity as an extension of people's sexual aesthetic entrepreneurship.

Allusions to celebrity culture: The private/public sexual self

Celebrity iconicity has gained new heights of public visibility in the 21st century (Marwick 2013), for ever shifting the visible presentation of the different boundaries of public/private, inviting the individual to take part in a world of general exposure, while educating it to inhabit the (privacy) risks that such a world (of visibility) entails (Marshall 2016). Several respondents made recurrent references to the way celebrity culture has offered visible, performative, and pedagogic examples on how to construct forms of public expression (Marshall 2010) while having sex in public spaces, on occasion linking the presentation of this public self with casual/'kinky'/'naughty' sex (this, however, does not exclude the possibility for public sex within a steady relationship, that is, within romantic love). It is interesting that many respondents either had personal experience of public sex, or, in the few cases they had not, offered a positive opinion of it, linking public sex with passion, fun and 'naughtiness'.

[have had sex] in a park, in the toilet, by the car side (when away from traffic)... it's more exciting out in public because there's the risk of getting caught [...] many people my age do this, not just celebrities who you get to read about on gossip sites... not a big deal, really (Elena, heterosexual female, 21).

[it] makes you feel like a movie star avoiding the paparazzi (laughter) (Maria, heterosexual female, 29).

Of course [I've had sex]... in club toilets, in the sea.. so 'kinky' and risque – like Kim Kardashian when she had sex on a plane (Anastasia, heterosexual female, 21).

Yes, I've done public sex several times, in a car, in the toilet, even at a construction site! Sex in a public space is unbeatable for both people involved – unless one is blocked for fear of being found out!! (Aris, heterosexual male, 24)

In this way, the privileged position that hegemonic heterosexuality has traditionally enjoyed (in the West), cloaked within norms of property and propriety while usually leaving 'sex in public' as a queer practice dependant on urban planning and zoning practices, is upset. Long gone are the days when '... a core national [heterosexual] culture [was] imagined as a sanitized space of sentimental feeling and immaculate behaviour, a space of pure citizenship' (Berlant and Warner 1998: 549). For, it would appear that although heteronormativity continues to link intimacy to private personhood (ibid: 553),

sex in public has become a guilt-free, sought-after, and widely mainstreamed sexual practice for young Greek women and men.

For others, sex in public isn't a turn-on: *sure, I've had sex in public – at the beach... no big deal – but didn't enjoy it that much...* offers Christos (gay male, 23). To diffuse any notions of prudency, he explains he ... *wouldn't object to sex with multiple partners, but I'd rather it took place in a private space*. Instead, he posits that if the relationship is working, one way to beat the routine is to have sex in a new – private – space, *on a trip, in a hotel, a new apartment*. This is also echoed in Nicky's case (heterosexual female, 25) who utters – *yeah, I've done my fair share of sex in public... though I prefer sex in private, in bed... sex on the outside is restrictive*. Nicky offers a nuanced account of the cultural construction of sexual subjectivity (Weeks 2007) when she argues that *it all comes down to how you've been educated sexually... like, most of us grow up with a notion that sex takes place behind closed doors, and that the naked body is not to be seen by just about anyone...so, it's a matter of culture and education*.

A different solution to the dilemma between sex in private/sex in public opens up when participants throw in 'hotel sex': *you feel safe in a hotel... there's excitement because it's a new environment and you wanna explore it, yet you know there's no risk involved of someone walking in on you* (Tatiana, heterosexual female, 28). This is how she negotiates a much needed sense of privacy yet combines it with a new, 'exciting' space outside the domesticity, where the notion of risk involved in 'outside sex' is mitigated. Hotel sex is also discussed – *if there's no alternative*, as something better than sex in public – *see, for example, sex on the beach has limitations... you can't go at it if there's no towel, you get sand in all the wrong places* (laughter) (Evi, heterosexual female, 22). A female interviewee offers a different pitch to the public/private self, by introducing the trend of 'going commando'.

The public/private sexual self can be produced through yet another form of aesthetic entrepreneurialism: drawing resources from a wider celebrity and media culture, Dora quips, *'I try out different things – like, sometimes, when out on a date, I 'go commando' – to stir things up....'* (laughter) (heterosexual female, 21). Indeed, various celebrities, both local (e.g. actress Maria Solomou, Bovary, 2022) and artist Eleni Fureira, Iefimerida (2021), as well as from the international celebrity scene (from Kim Kardashian and Beyonce, to Rihanna and Emma Thompson, look for example in Life and Style, 2022; Vogue, 2022a, Vogue, 2022b), go about without underwear. Thus, 'going commando', for the lay person, has been already spotted and addressed in the local media culture (Ladylike, 2016; Care24, 2017), thus hinting at how gender norms of 'appropriate femininity' are momentarily curtailed within a postfeminist visual narrative of 'sexiness'.

Negotiations and manifestations of sexuality and the sexual self are an inherently private/public matter. And our respondents seem to show acute awareness of the cultural and social workings of sexual performance in the public/private space when positioning towards their preferences.

Conclusions

In this article, we unpacked young adult's performative traits and taste cultures while preparing for their erotic routines within the domesticity, locating the sexual self and body within a context of neoliberal 'aesthetic entrepreneurship' wherein even celebrity culture plays a role. Investigating the social and symbolic meaning (Douglas and Isherwood 1979) young Greek adults ascribe to the material and cultural resources of intimacy – the props, practices, and spaces of sexual closeness when at home, their accounts of private and public sex, as well as of their accounts of desirability and disgust – we discuss how heteronormative and queer Greek young adults put these entrepreneurial selves together, and how they monitor them. By this, we refer to the ways in which people invariably 'nudge' to consumer culture, celebrityhood, the media, and post-feminism when intimate – or don't 'nudge', as was the case of pornography culture which was not mentioned as a resource for the construction of the erotic body and selfhood.

The discourse of sexual aesthetic entrepreneurship affects both women and men in Greece, pointing towards an 'extensification of beauty pressures' (Elias et al., 2017: 28), as a result of a neoliberal and postfeminist culture that encroaches cultures and national contexts (Dosekun 2017). Beauty and sexual desirability are technologized – via makeup, hair management techniques, lingerie, bedlinen, hydration, perfume, bathing, and other cleaning practices – calling individuals to take personal responsibility and calculate the risks of not complying to such desirability norms, as true 'aesthetic entrepreneurs'. Through its theorisation of neoliberalism and its attentiveness to the ways in which aesthetic labour incites surveillance and monitoring of the sexual self, this article suggests that the 'good citizen' of late modernity perceives themselves as predominantly clean and well-kept, building upon the legacy of modernity (Rose, 1989/1999). Through practices abiding by the 'makeover paradigm', our participants' conduct of the female and male sexual self-embraces the 'psychic life of postfeminism' (Gill, 2017).

Domesticity is chosen because the home is a place people control as their own and as such, the home stages intimacy. The configuration of intimate space within the domesticity includes the bedroom, as well as other spaces where intimacy materialises, such as the bedroom, the kitchen, and the living room. Spatial rearrangement within the home signals the erotic production of space and marks participants' ideas of pleasurable locations – as well as the significance material culture has for them (Wilson Kovacs 2007). What does this creation of personal space indicate? Participants emerge as architects of intimacy through the various 'technologies of self-care' they employ when constructing the erotic body and space. In this sense, the ethical 'care of the self' – in Foucauldian terms – extends to the sexual self and body, both of which are tied to consumption and aesthetics, and, by association, to *neoliberal culture as well*. The ethical 'care of the self', as an obligation towards oneself, is manifested in the technologies, activities, and reflections through which we gain self-knowledge in the practice of improving oneself. Through our participants' sensuous constructions, the complex relationship between cultural resources, (i.e. celebrity culture), material culture, pleasure, and 'ethical' intimate conduct is further explored. This way we get to make sense of how cultural and material resources are being mobilised in order to sustain sexual intimacy while also projecting an

‘ethical self.’ In articulating a ‘politics of the self’, our respondents show how the literal ‘care of the self’ leads to the formation of Foucauldian ‘ethical selves’. While in the process of self-formation, individuals transgress normalised identities (seen, e.g. in the way some of our participants resist ‘normalizing’ forces shaping what is masculine, feminine or sexy). In this light, the ethical self breaks down to the way we, as subjects, think about our lives and how we should live them. This ‘ethical care of the self’, however, is not practised in isolation but is a social practice that materialises within a broader context – that of *neoliberal aesthetic entrepreneurship*.

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Appendix

Name	Gender	Sexual orientation	Education/Professional status	Age
Anastasia	Female	Heterosexual	Media studies student	21
Anna	Female	Heterosexual	Self-employed	33
Antonis	Male	Heterosexual	Civil servant	29
Artemis	Female	Heterosexual	Media studies student	21
Christos	Male	Gay	Media studies student	23
Danai	Female	Heterosexual	Civil servant	29
Elena	Female	Heterosexual	Media studies student	21
Evi	Female	Heterosexual	Media studies student	22
Filippos	Male	Heterosexual	Media studies student	21
Maria	Female	Heterosexual	PR executive	29
Nicky	Female	Heterosexual	Master's student	25
Nikos	Male	Heterosexual	Media studies student	22
Tatiana	Female	Heterosexual	Teacher	28
Vicky	Female	Lesbian	Actress	29
Yiannis	Male	Gay	Media studies student	22
Apostolos	Male	Gay	Marketing executive	23
Mimi	Female	Heterosexual	Media studies student	21
Panos	Male	Heterosexual	EU project officer	28
Kiriaki	Female	Heterosexual	EU project officer	29
Dora	Female	Heterosexual	Media studies student	21
Litsa	Female	Heterosexual	Preschool educator	28
Aggelos	Male	Heterosexual	Media studies student	21
Marios	Male	Bisexual	Media studies graduate	22
Lena	Female	Lesbian	Media studies student	22
Christina	Female	Heterosexual	Maths student	21
Mary	Female	Heterosexual	Greek lit student	21
Markos	Male	Gay	Self employed	22
Pavlos	Male	Gay	Political science student	20
Thodoris	Male	Heterosexual	Media studies student	20
Charis	Female	Heterosexual	Law school student	22
Dina	Female	Heterosexual	Media studies student	21
Ioanna	Female	Heterosexual	Philosophy student	21
Giorgos	Male	Heterosexual	Engineering student	21
Aris	Male	Heterosexual	Computer science student	24
Katia	Female	Heterosexual	Restaurant employee	21
Chrissa	Female	Heterosexual	Actress	29
Yianna	Female	Heterosexual	Psychology student	21
Dimitris	Male	Heterosexual	Media studies student	21
Irini	Female	Heterosexual	Media studies student	22
Vaggelia	Female	Heterosexual	Media studies student	22