# GIRLS LIKE COMPUTERS, MAYBE THEY JUST DON'T LOVE THEM: EXPLORING GENDER AND COMPUTER ATTITUDES AMONG GREEK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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## Abstract:

Information and communication technologies constitute a major driver of economic and social change, also providing opportunities for rewarding, innovative jobs, cutting across diverse fields. However a gender "digital divide" has been noted, indicating that girls and women may not be equally participating in the knowledge-based economy, taking full advantage of its diverse options and opportunities. Lack of basic ICT skills is perhaps no longer a problem, but the underrepresentation of women in the growing and evolving ICT sector persists, a trend also evident in Greece. A stronger female involvement would diversify the ICT and related industries, contributing women's talents, values and ideas, and would, at the same time, address the shortage in high-skilled workers facing Europe. Young and returning female workers could expand their options for potentially fulfilling and prosperous careers, co-creating the "digital future" and advancing issues meaningful to them.

The literature on gender and ICT suggests that the gender gap becomes prominent in secondary education: female students are less likely to select computer science courses and to aspire to ICT studies and careers. This paper presents research conducted among high school students (n = 180) in Athens, Greece, investigating gender differences in a number of variables identified in the literature, using scales developed in a pilot study. Male and female students alike adopted positive attitudes toward computers and did not hold negative beliefs about them. Girls rejected sex stereotypes regarding computers more strongly than boys. However girls scored lower on almost all of various computer experience and use indicators and reported higher levels of insecurity about learning and using the computer (a derived factor conceptually similar to computer anxiety). Girls were also found to have taken significantly fewer ICT courses and to be less likely to pursue ICT studies or careers. Future research should verify the absence of gender differences in computer attitudes among Greek students and address other possible causes of female underrepresentation in ICT-related fields, such as lack of interest, role models and a clear picture of options. Education can play a vital role both in alleviating students' computer anxiety and in promoting their interest in the diverse ways in which they can shape and apply technology.

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