

# New Media, Old Anxieties: Mainstream Narratives of Childhood and Sexting

## Abstract

In an attempt to cope with current public concern over childhood and child sexuality, this paper aims to trace the dominant discourse about these concepts. By investigating the social construction of childhood and child sexuality, I argue that the anxiety about childhood is not a totally new phenomenon. What is new, however, is the widespread use of media and technology by young people today. I draw on findings from qualitative research based on Greek newspaper publications of the last 10 years which relate to the main topics and implications of both the relation between childhood and sexuality and the connection between childhood and sexting.

## Zusammenfassung

Ausgehend von der Prämisse, dass Kindheit und kindliche Sexualität sozial konstruiert sind, untersucht der Beitrag die dominierenden, überwiegend problemorientiert ausgerichteten Diskurse zu Kindern und ihrer Sexualität. Die damit einhergehenden Sorgen sind keinesfalls neu. Neu ist jedoch, dass die weit verbreitete Nutzung von digitalen Medien durch Aufwachsende heute den Diskurs beeinflusst. Der Beitrag stellt die Ergebnisse einer qualitativen Studie vor, in welcher Berichte griechischer Zeitungen der vergangenen zehn Jahre im Hinblick auf die Thematisierung von kindlicher Sexualität sowie des Phänomens Sexting untersucht wurden.

*Keywords:* Childhood, child sexuality, sexting, qualitative research, new media.

## 1 Introduction

This paper aims to investigate the relation between children and sexting through mainstream narratives in the media. The topic is placed within the broader context of the public debate about the construction of childhood and the sexuality of children, mainly girls (Hasinoff, 2014, pp. 108–110; Tsaliki, 2015, p. 6). It is also connected with media panics (Buckingham & Jensen, 2012; Drotner, 1999), as well as moral panics caused by the public concern about child sexuality and the use of the internet (Jackson & Scott, 1999, pp. 99–101). Last but not least, it is connected with the broader discussion about the politics of fear within contemporary and changing societies (Bang, 2011; Beck, 1992; Douglas, 1992; Foucault, 1991; Giddens, 1998; Lupton, 1999).

There are two central concepts here that need to be defined. The first is 'child', which means, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, every human being below the age of eighteen. The second concept is 'sexting', which is defined as the 'creation and sharing of personal sexual images or text messages via mobile phones or internet applications, including Facebook, Snapchat and email' (Hasinoff, 2015, p. 1).

In the public debate the relation between the two concepts is discussed mostly as a problem and in terms of fear, threat, peril and harmful effects upon children, who are represented mainly as innocent and fragile creatures, lacking sexual knowledge and desire ('asexual'). It also seems that public anxieties are intensified by media representations, which focus disproportionately on the negative aspects of the internet (Haddon & Stald, 2009, p. 2; Jackson & Scott, 1999, pp. 90–99).

However, there are researches which challenge this pessimistic perspective on the subject and suggest the ability of children to think in a critical way about the mainstream narratives of the media (Rovolis & Tsaliki, 2012). Consequently, the relevant literature is premised upon the notion that children are competent social actors (Buckingham, 2000; Tsaliki, 2011). In this work I draw on British Cultural Studies and try to shape the general outline of the corresponding public debate in Greece. I start with a literature review, then proceed with methodology and finally discuss my findings before presenting my conclusions.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Childhood as a social construction: children at risk

The widespread definition of childhood as a distinctive age group with special characteristics and needs has not remained static over the years. On the contrary, it is the result of a combination of social, cultural and historical factors, which all shaped the notion of childhood in the twentieth century in a complicated, long-term process (Tsaliki, 2011, p. 293). We can trace significant changes over the years in the public debate about what it means to be a child. These changes fuel – and are also fuelled by – everyday ideas, scientific discourse, art and representations in the media (Karafotia, 2010, pp. 18–25). In any case, this is an intricate and contentious issue which raises a multitude of interesting questions. However, I shall focus both on the discourse of the different scientific approaches, no matter whence they derive, and on the media as well, which fuel the public concern about childhood in general and the relative dimensions like sexuality, and vice versa.

The dominant narratives about childhood consist of two controversial ideas (Jackson & Scott, 1999, pp. 90–91; Rovolis & Tsaliki, 2012). Children, on the one hand, are considered as innocent, vulnerable and asexual creatures. On the other hand, they are potentially 'evil', able to do harm to themselves and society at large ('toxic childhood', Palmer, 2006). In both cases, they urgently need to be protected and under constant vigilance by adults (parents, teachers, police, legislators), who are the only social agents

who know everything about children's needs and interests (Tsaliki & Chronaki, 2020). The above characterisation of 'children in danger' does not seem to be a new one. Tsaliki (2011, p. 293) goes back four centuries in order to identify numerous cultural products which fuelled public concern about childhood and enabled the notion of 'childhood at risk' to be formed (Tsaliki, 2011, p. 293). With particular relevance to the sexual dimension of childhood and the public concern it generated, Egan and Hawkes (2007) refer both to the social movements of 'child purity' at the end of the nineteenth century and to 'social hygiene' at the beginning of the twentieth. Textbooks on the education of children which were published during the 1930s and 1940s, and the extensive literature on the need to control practices such as masturbation and sexual desire, especially among working class girls, should be mentioned in this regard (Egan & Hawkes, 2007, pp. 446–451). Public concern was reinforced by medical and psychological discourse which further led to suggestions for the closer monitoring and regulation of children's sexual instincts (Egan & Hawkes, 2007, p. 455). The process outlined above contributed largely to the emergence of a key antinomy in the perceptions of child sexuality: that children have no sexual desire or sexual knowledge (they are 'asexual') and at the same time their sexuality has threatening possibilities if it is liberated by external negative factors (Egan and Hawkes, 2012, pp. 271–274).

As well as these ideas, public concern about children at risk and childhood sexuality has also been fuelled by notions of media culture and the culture of consumption (Buckingham, 2003; Rovolis & Tsaliki, 2012). It has also been intensified by the debate about media panics (Buckingham & Jensen, 2012; Drotner, 1999) and the emotionally charged reactions which the media generate (Drotner, 1999), as well as the whole idea of a changing, unstable and unpredictable world which is, moreover, fraught with risk (Jackson & Scott, 1999, p. 88). In all cases the list of perils that threaten children is dominated by an adult perspective, leaving almost no space for children to express their own thoughts and perceptions.

Whether we draw on the cultural/symbolic approach to risk (e.g., Douglas, 1992), on contemporary sociological theory (the 'risk society theorists', e.g., Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1998), or on the 'governmentality' perspective (Foucault, 1991), and despite the differences between them, they all emphasise its social, cultural and political dimensions. It is argued that this characterisation of risk is used as a pretext in current political debates and practices for the transition to a new way of social, economic and political organisation: neo-liberalism (Bang, 2011). It is also argued that risk is used to divert public attention from those people and institutions which the above theorists deem as the social agents mainly responsible for the current social disorders (e.g., Douglas, 1992; Foucault, 1991).

The perception of risk is central not only to the academic debate about current social and cultural theory but also to the public debate about the relation between childhood and sexuality. It is to this I now turn.

## 2.2 The sexualisation of childhood: a new threat against children

The notion of risk, which I referred to above (see 2.1), is of the utmost importance in the social construction of the relation between childhood on the one hand and new technologies and the sexualisation of childhood on the other ('the sexualisation of risk', Jackson & Scott, 1999, p. 87; pp. 99–101). The notion of the sexualisation of childhood is used within the public debate to indicate the framing of childhood in sexual terms. The discussion is connected with a wide range of topics (Jackson & Scott, 1999, pp. 99–101), e.g. the access of young people to sexual knowledge as a significant boundary marker between children and adults; the use of mass media and new technologies, especially the internet, as a means of access to sexual content; the early interest in sex and early sexual maturity; the danger of sexual abuse; the notion of the child as a potential abuser of others and of girls being at risk (Hasinoff, 2015; Tsaliki, 2015). In the same context, a key antinomy arises: on the one hand, the perception of young people as passive creatures, with no sexual knowledge or sexual instincts and on the other, the conceptualisation of them as active, knowing, potentially 'evil' individuals (Jackson & Scott, 1999; Tsaliki, 2015). The public debate about the risks to children arising from internet searches on sexual issues is a new factor that reinforces the already existing public concern about childhood (see also 2.1).

As stated above, children are currently perceived as asexual beings. Likewise, sexuality has been socially constructed as a particular dimension which is exclusive to adult social life. Therefore, childhood and sexuality are understood as mutually exclusive and furthermore as inimical to each other (Jackson & Scott, 1999, pp. 99–101). Consequently, any discussion combining childhood and sexuality generally or concerning a special issue (e.g. sex education) is bound to be explosive, since it is about an emotive, 'taboo' subject (Buckingham & Chronaki, 2014, p. 303; Tsaliki, 2015, p. 2). The 'risk-based approach' (Tsaliki, 2011, p. 295) thus seems to be the dominant way of thinking about childhood and sexuality.

Furthermore, the same approach characterises the academic debate about the access of children to sexual information on the internet (Palmer, 2006; Papadopoulou, 2010). While this perspective reinforces the public demand for closer monitoring and the protection of children by adults, there are topics of great importance that are neglected. First, there is the widespread use of media and technology by young people today (Tsaliki, 2015). Second, the internet is a potential source of knowledge about the sexual self and the social world, and may thus be a means of pleasure and experimentation (Tsaliki, 2015). Third, children have always been seeking access to sexual information (Tsaliki, 2016). What is new today, though, is the medium, since in the past children searched in magazines, books and other printed material whereas nowadays they mainly use the internet (Rovolis & Tsaliki, 2012). Fourth, searching on the internet could provide an opportunity for non-heterosexuals to express themselves (Rovolis & Tsaliki, 2012) and provide a means of support for them when they decide to come out (Tsaliki, 2011).

### 2.3 Children and sexting

Sexting was firstly discussed publicly in the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2008), in which it was claimed that 20 per cent of American teens practise sexting. Since then, the practice under investigation has been treated as a technological, legal, sexual and moral problem (Hasinoff, 2015, p. 1). It is also presented as the result of a personal, biological or psychological weakness (Hasinoff, 2015, pp. 49–69) and although it is pursued by both teens and adults (Albury, 2017; Hasinoff, 2015, p. 1) public concern is focused entirely on teens, especially girls (Hasinoff, 2015, pp. 101–126). Furthermore, the current understanding of sexting as a form of child pornography or cyber-bullying is prevalent (Albury & Crawford, 2017; Hasinoff, 2015, pp. 25–47).

In spite of the benefits ascribed to sexting and mentioned in numerous researches (e.g., Hasinoff, 2015; Tsaliki & Chronaki, 2020), the focus of public debate on the notion of risk has led to unfair and ineffective approaches to it, for example criminalisation and suggestions that young people should abstain from it (Hasinoff, 2012, p. 159). However, dealing with it in these ways places the relatively harmless practice of consensual sexting on a par with the abusive forms of this practice, such as the malicious distribution of private images (Hasinoff, 2012, p. 159; 2015, pp. 101–150). Blanchard mentions (as cited in Greenbergand & Elliott, 2012, p. 159) an instance in which two cheerleaders were sentenced for sexting, while the boys who spread the photos without the girls' agreement incurred no penalty. Sexting is therefore connected with a broader discussion about privacy, consent and ethical principles of communication in the current digital environment (Albury, 2017; Albury & Crawford, 2013; Hasinoff, 2015, pp. 101–150), as well as the cultural attitudes towards women and those who do not conform to the dominant perception of gender and sexuality (Albury & Byron, 2014; McGovern, Crofts, Murray & Milivojevic, 2016). Moreover, the mainstream narratives about sexting obscure the capacity of young people, whether girls or boys, to think, to make their own choices and decisions, and to undertake responsibility (Hasinoff, 2015, pp. 101–150; Tsaliki & Chronaki, 2020).

### 3 Methodological note

Based on the definition of the subject under investigation and the theoretical context I have examined so far, the main question of my research is 'How is the child-sexting relationship represented in the Greek newspapers?' It is divided into two sub-questions. The first one is 'What are the characteristics that construct childhood and the child-sexuality relationship in my sample?' and the second is 'What are the mainstream narratives about the children-sexting connection in the publications under investigation?' With respect to the sampling strategy I visited the websites of the national newspapers which are printed in Greece. Then I used the search engine and entered

the key word 'sexting'. The results of the search, along with some useful comments, are organised in Table 1. My sample thus consists of the online version of 69 articles from six Greek newspapers. Since my sample derives from the Greek press and the selected articles are therefore written in Greek, I have translated the quotations in the following section (see Section 4) into English.

Table 1: Sample

Name of newspaper (in alphabetical order)	Date of publication of the articles	Number of articles about children/ adults (total)	Additional notes
1. Efsyn	2015 May– 2019 Feb	6/1 (7)	<a href="https://www.efsyn.gr">https://www.efsyn.gr</a> , daily political , newspaper large print circulation
2. Eleftheros Typos	2016 Aug– 2018 Nov	2/5 (7)	<a href="https://www.eleftherostypos.gr">https://www.eleftherostypos.gr</a> , daily, mainly political newspaper
3. Kathimerini	2009 Feb– 2018 Mar	9/3 (12)	<a href="http://www.kathimerini.gr">http://www.kathimerini.gr</a> , Sunday mainly political newspaper, large print circulation
4. Naftemporiki	2012 Dec– 2016 Nov	2/5 (7)	<a href="https://www.naftemporiki.gr">https://www.naftemporiki.gr</a> , daily financial newspaper
5. Ta Nea	2009 June– 2018 Apr	12/7 (19)	<a href="https://www.tanea.gr">https://www.tanea.gr</a> , daily, mainly political newspaper, large print circulation
6. To Vima	2012 Jan– 2016 Aug	11/6 (17)	<a href="https://www.tovima.gr">https://www.tovima.gr</a> , Sunday, mainly political newspaper, large print circulation
<b>total 6 newspapers</b>	<b>2009 Apr– 2019 Feb</b>	<b>42/27 (69)</b>	<b>1 financial, 5 political newspapers 2 Sunday and 4 daily newspapers</b>

It was important to select the research method which best suited the aims of my work. The first step was to identify the main topics with which the articles<sup>1)</sup> dealt; the second was to understand which meanings and perceptions they embodied on the subjects of childhood, sexuality and sexting; and the third was to make connections with theory (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). Furthermore, appreciating that social reality derives from social and cultural experiences and is the result of a discursive, historical and social construction (Burr, 2006, pp. 31–41; Demertzis, 2002, pp. 119–181), I chose qualitative research methods. More specifically, I applied thematic analysis to the collection and scrutiny of my data and I discuss them in the context of Cultural Studies. I also use critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995) as a means of more detailed investigation.

## 4 The research findings

### 4.1 The construction of childhood and the childhood-sexuality relationship

In this subsection my aim is to trace by means of the articles in the sample which I have presented above (Table 1) the prevailing accounts of childhood and childhood-sexuality relations in the Greek press. I then try to investigate whether these specific accounts fit with those traced in the academic debate presented in the relevant sub-

1) The initial research sample consisted of both text and photos. Due to practical considerations, however, the present analysis is based only on the text.

sections of my work (see 2.1 and 2.2). I choose the following quotations because in my view they are representative of the trends traced in the original sample.

The following quotation is taken from an article about sexting, which is presented as ‘the trend that traps the teens.’ The article under investigation covers a case of sexting that caused troubles in a Greek family. The fourteen-year-old daughter shared intimate images of herself with her boyfriend, who circulated them to many of his friends. As a result, the girl was subjected to the insulting comments of others, and not only was she forced to change school but her entire family was obliged to leave the city. The first lines of the quotation introduce the readers to the subject. In the second part the mother shows a sense of guilt about what happened to her daughter and embarrassment and fear concerning new technologies. She also suggests close parental monitoring as the best way to protect children from difficult situations.

*It's true that children make mistakes. At the same time it's also true that they can be very tough. This is absolutely the case in the story which 'Kathimerini' sheds light on. My daughter is a good, intelligent and responsible child, with high scores at school. She made a mistake, though. It means we did, too. She belongs to the first generation that has been brought up with so many gadgets. You don't know how to cope with all this kind of freedom. Since we, I mean her parents, were deprived as youngsters, I didn't want the same thing to happen to my child. However, this was a false way of thinking. What is necessary in such cases is caution and control. You can see them all dressed the same way, one girl exactly like another, and you think they behave in a more mature way than we did, but finally they are just kids. This time it was my own child but tomorrow it could be somebody else's.' (Kathimerini<sup>2</sup>), 2014, February 2)*

What the quotation reveals is two controversial ideas about childhood. Although children are innocent and prone to ‘false’ choices, at the same time they are able to do harm to themselves and their family. This controversy reinforces the already existing academic discussion about the following three topics, among many others: first, the basic antinomy within childhood, which Jackson and Scott (1999, pp. 90–91) as well as Rovolis and Tsaliki (2012) talk about; second, the ‘toxic’ dimension of childhood (‘toxic childhood’) according to Palmer (2006); and third, the notion of ‘children in danger’ (Tsaliki, 2011, p. 293). The same quotation deals with ‘media panics’ in the way Drotner (1999), Buckingham and Jensen (2012) put it. In my view, when it comes to child sexuality, the quotation above uncovers a second key antinomy within childhood. It enriches the already existing debate among scholars about the ‘asexual’ nature of children and at the same time the strong potential of their sexuality when it is released by external negative factors (Egan & Hawkes, 2012, pp. 271–274). I can also attribute to the mother’s words what Jackson and Scott (1999, pp. 99–101) define as a ‘moral panic’. What I also infer from this quotation is that the mother’s approach to the subject is rather fearful, which makes her support the need for constant parental vigilance over children. This is another theme of academic discourse, connected with the question of whether young people should participate in the discussion about their own needs and interests as competent social agents (Tsaliki & Chronaki, 2020).

2) More about each newspaper of my sample in Table 1.

The next quotation is taken from a book about sex and girls written by an American journalist. The book deals mainly with the most popular practices which girls adopt to attract boys and the widespread stereotypes of beauty, femininity and sexuality that are promoted by pop stars, along with access to sexual content on the internet. The article begins with the sense of embarrassment and trepidation which parents, especially mothers, feel if they try to think about the sexuality of a teenage girl: 'Have you ever tried to deal soberly with the sexuality of a young girl? A real minefield!' (To Vima, 2016, May 22)

The rapid changes in the way that today's young people think and act concerning sex are the main subject of the following article. The journalist is discussing the encounters of children with sexual content on the internet, the dominant sexual stereotypes which are imposed on men and women, the need for sex education in the Greek school curriculum, early sexuality, and what doctors and journalists think about the subject. The article focuses on a fourteen-year-old girl. The following account is given by the journalist, who has arranged the meeting with the girl and her mother in a café. At the beginning of the story the mother has not yet joined the company.

*Her eyes didn't stay at the same point for a long time. She was constantly observing people in the café. 'Come on, don't be shy! All you want to know about me is if I have ever had sex.' Honesty? Impudence? She was only fourteen... When her mother came in, the girl was transformed into a child. Before we left the café, she whispered in my ear: 'It isn't difficult to understand what men long for.' I was embarrassed. Was she a kind of Lolita, an ill-mannered child or a prematurely grown up woman?*

(‘Teens are faster getting up older’, To Vima, 2012, July 11)

The quotations above shed light on the sexual characterisation of childhood within the public debate. This is exactly what Jackson and Scott (1999, pp. 99–101) call the ‘sexualisation of childhood’ (see 2.2). In the second quotation, one can discern the confusion of the journalist, who has a difficulty in drawing the line and deciding whether she is dealing with a child or a woman. The difficulty causes not only concern but a great deal of fear and threat, feelings which are apparent in both quotations. The quotations appear to confirm Jackson and Scott (1999), who talk about ‘the sexualisation of risk’ (1999). It is also notable that these quotations relate to the sexuality of girls, a fact that is relevant to what Hasinoff (2015) and Tsaliki (2015) say about the peril deriving from or surrounding children, especially girls. Thus the ‘risk-based approach’ to childhood and sexuality discerned in both of the above quotations matches the dominant way of thinking about the same subject in academic discourse (Tsaliki, 2011).

In the previous quotations, the adults disapprove of the expression of sexuality by a fourteen-year-old girl. However, this is not equally true of boys. The following quotation is taken from an article about the sexual behaviour of teenagers in Greece and is indicative of how differently boys are treated in the public debate.

*I bought a gift for my twelve-year-old son, a 'Playboy'. We came upon an issue at the hair-dressers', we had a look together and I promised to buy one for him. All I wanted to do was save time before his inevitable plunge into the internet... Maybe the real gift for him was*



*that mum is cool, that he could always talk to me about such things.*

(“Generation porn research”, To Vima, 2016, August 7)

The more that issues of great importance – such as acquiring knowledge about children’s physicality and sexuality, their right to a personal life and privacy and matters of respect and consent (Hasinoff, 2015; Tsaliki, 2015) – are neglected in the public debate about children and sexuality, the more dominant a sense of embarrassment, and more significantly of danger and panic, becomes. Having identified the prevailing narratives about childhood and sexuality within my sample, I unravel the implications first, about what is morally and socially acceptable concerning childhood (ethical discourse); then, about what adults have to teach children (pedagogical/didactic discourse); last, and just as important, concerning the ability, or inability, of children to behave as competent social actors (political discourse) (Tsaliki & Chronaki, 2020). The mainstream accounts and implications of childhood and sexuality seem to intensify the already existing public concern about ‘children in danger’ (Jackson & Scott, 1999, pp. 90–91; Tsaliki, 2015, pp. 1–3) and the notion of risk in contemporary societies (Beck, 1992; Douglas, 1992; Foucault, 1991; Giddens, 1998). Since my findings match the theory outlined above (see Section 2), it seems that the media are a factor which contributes to the construction of the mainstream narratives about childhood and child sexuality.

#### 4.2 The construction of children-sexting relationship

The following quotations are the titles of different newspaper articles:

*“Sexting among teens: a new epidemic”* (Kathimerini, 2018, March 1)

*“Sexting, the trend that traps the teens”* (Kathimerini, 2014, February 2)

*“Sexting invades our lives”* (Ta Nea, 2011, June 24)

According to my analysis, the children-sexting relationship is covered merely in terms of danger and intrusion. Such an approach fuels the already existing academic debate about the ‘risk-based approach’ to the childhood-sexuality relation (Tsaliki, 2011, p. 295).

What follows is a quotation from the newspaper review of a book about child abuse:

*In this book various forms of abuse are analysed, such as physical and sexual abuse and child labour. The role of the internet, cyberstalking, sexting, seduction, child pornography and suicide as a harmful effect of internet use and bullying are thoroughly discussed. Suggestions about dealing with victimisation are also offered. Both scientists and parents, who are justifiably anxious, will find a guide of high quality, one which has the ambition to revitalise the discussion about child abuse in a contemporary context and contribute to a more effective treatment of such a serious and problematic phenomenon.*

(Ta Nea, 2015, April 10)

In this quotation sexting is framed mostly in terms of sexual abuse, child pornography and cyberbullying. It is also treated as a sexual and moral problem, which are all topics discussed by Hasinoff (2015, p. 1; pp. 25–47), Albury and Crawford (2017), who have contributed to the relevant theoretical debate (see also 2.3).

Another quotation, which is part of an article published in all the newspapers of my sample, refers to an incident in a Colorado school, where many students were involved in sexting. The local sheriff and the school administration were asked to cope with the situation.

*Police investigators took a mobile phone with hundreds of shameful photos. Sexting is very common due to the new technologies. Should parents be upset? Of course they should! Offenders are now facing legal consequences while the incident is under investigation.*  
(Kathimerini, 2015, November 11)

According to my analysis, this is the construction of sexting as a legal problem which has to be resolved through prosecutions and punishments. This is exactly what Hasinoff (2012; 2015) disapproves of as an unfair and inappropriate way of addressing the subject. Furthermore, it obscures issues of great importance, such as the ethical principles of communication in the current digital environment (Albury, 2017; Albury & Crawford, 2013; Hasinoff, 2015, pp. 101–150).

As I proceed towards the completion of the present study, my sample uncovers a repeated set of ideas and perceptions about both childhood sexuality and children-sexting relations which seem to contribute to the construction of the broader dominant discourse about the subject. According to the mainstream narratives, children are innocent and fragile. They can also be evil, especially girls. In any event, they are at risk, which derives mainly from the use of digital media ('media panics', Buckingham & Jensen, 2012; Drotner, 1999). Moreover, instead of being perceived as a potential source of knowledge about the sexual self and social relations (Hasinoff, 2014; Hasinoff, 2015, pp. 101–150; Tsaliki, 2011, p. 295), children's encounters with sexual content on the internet are represented as a threat against the purity of childhood (Jackson & Scott, 1999, pp. 90–91). Likewise, sexting is treated in terms of a technological, moral and legal problem which needs to be resolved exclusively by adults (parents, teachers, the law and police) in terms of constant surveillance and regulation (Jackson & Scott, 1999, pp. 86–88), criminalisation and punishment (Hasinoff, 2015).

Moreover, instead of creating an opportunity for discussion about privacy, consent and moral principles in the contemporary digital environment (Hasinoff, 2015, pp. 101–150; Tsaliki, 2015, pp. 1–4), the way that sexting is covered by the press intensifies the already existing public concern about childhood (Hasinoff, 2014, pp. 451–452). No surprise, then, that human rights are neglected in the name of safety:

*There is a great deal of objection by human rights' organisations. However, the majority of parents consider it to be without doubt a lawful measure since in addition to providing a sense of safety it enables them to get to know their children better.*  
(‘Teenagers’ mobile phones under surveillance in the USA’, Kathimerini, 2009, April 21)

## 5 Conclusion

What I have so far tried to investigate is the coverage of the childhood-sexting connection in the Greek press through the mainstream narratives about children and se-

xuality. With respect to sexting, a particular aspect of this connection, scholars like Hasinoff suggest that teens should have the right to sext and at the same time the right to demand that the content they create and share within this practice is kept private (Hasinoff, 2012, p. 163). At this point, an interesting question has to do with the ways in which General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) may affect sexting and more generally with the access of young people to the internet (Milkaitė & Lievens, 2019). Although sexting is more than a merely legal problem, further legal reforms for the protection of online privacy may be welcome. However, I suggest that the complicated and contentious issue of privacy in the new digital media environment should be discussed, taking into account both the need to protect children's rights and enable their participation in affairs that matter to them.

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2. <https://www.eleftherostypos.gr>
3. <http://www.kathimerini.gr>
4. <https://www.naftemporiki.gr>
5. <https://www.tanea.gr>
6. <https://www.tovima.gr>

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