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The sexting experiences of a female adolescent

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

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(Educational Psychology)

Department of Educational Psychology
Faculty of Education
University of Pretoria

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DECLARATION

I, MICHELLE IRELAND (student number: 11064651), declare that the mini-dissertation, "*The sexting experiences of a female adolescent",* which I hereby submit for the degree Magister Educationis (Educational Psychology) at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research to my late grandmother, Betty Ireland, who taught me the importance of kindness towards others and appreciation for the diversity of human experience, which is engrained in me today. I am deeply appreciative of the opportunity to know you and for the loving contributions you made to developing me as a person

I would like you to know that I am sharing experiencing the success of completing my research with you.

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the sexting behaviour of a female adolescent in Cape Town, South Africa. Sexting has rapidly increased in recent years and concerns regarding the risks associated with the behaviour have prompted an increase in research on the topic.

The rationale for the study included an acknowledgement of risks and the prevalence of the behaviour, and thus a need to fully understand sexting to prevent negative outcomes for adolescents. Few qualitative studies exist, meaning that the depth of an individual's experiences has not been fully explored and nuances of the behaviour may have been missed. Furthermore, few studies have been grounded in specific theories. The purpose of the study was thus to explore a female adolescent's subjective sexting experiences and perspectives through qualitative means grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Research questions aimed to explore the existing empirical and theoretical perspectives of sexting, motivations for sexting and consequences of sexting.

An interpretivist research paradigm was employed with a qualitative approach. The research design was a single, descriptive case study and data was gathered through a semi-structured interview, observations and a reflective researcher journal. Selection criteria for sampling the participant included being between the ages of 18 and 19, female and having exposure to the topic. Inductive thematic analysis was conducted on the transcribed interview data to establish themes and subthemes.

The resulting four themes are, firstly, the participant's definition, conceptualisation and categorisation of sexting; secondly, the participant's perceptions of motivations for engaging in sexting; thirdly, the participant's beliefs concerning the consequences of sexting; and lastly, the participant's ideas on the protection of adolescents from negative consequences of sexting.

To summarise each theme: theme 1 established that the participant defined sexting as being both text-based and image-based and that each has differing

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purposes with a variety of technological influences. Theme 2 showed that the participant perceived the motivations for sexting to be associated with physical pleasure, emotional pleasure, intimacy, getting attention, seeking a relationship, coercion, a long-distance relationship, and for sexual communication. In theme 3 the participant described the consequences of sexting as being emotional and social and as punishment from adults. Theme 4 presented the participant's ideas on how adolescents might be protected from the consequences of sexting on an individual level and through interventions by adults.

When compared to the literature, the study confirmed many existing themes, while new data was identified along with gaps in the literature. This prompted recommendations for further research and assisted in informing recommendations for future intervention. The study's findings added to the qualitative literature on the sexting experiences of a female adolescent. Using the Theory of Planned Behaviour means that the study added to understanding of how the theory may be utilised when qualitatively exploring sexting. Further, a South African case study was added to the body of knowledge on sexting.

Keywords:
sexting behaviour, sexuality, adolescents, theory of planned behaviour, qualitative research, educational psychology

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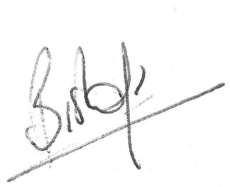

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CHAPTER 1
ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Awareness of sexting has rapidly increased following a few tragic incidents where female adolescents in the United States and United Kingdom took their own lives as a result of their nude images being circulated and experiencing, as a result, intense and incessant harassment by their peers (Lee & Crofts, 2015). There has been an increase in access to mobile phone technology with photographic and connectivity capabilities with this technological medium seeming to serve as a platform to explore sexuality. Sexting is therefore the end result (Chalfen, 2009). While sexting has been noted in numerous age groups in the USA (Lenhart, 2009), the combination of biological, cognitive and social-developmental processes in adolescence, in particular, seems to position the latter as more vulnerable to negative consequences of the behaviour. Such consequences, which have also widely raised concerns in parents, teachers and researchers, thus mark a clear need for a systematic exploration of the topic. Existing sexting research attempts to understand the behavioural mechanisms underlying the practice at the same time as finding practical means of protecting adolescents from the potentially harmful consequences thereof (Albury, Crawford, Byron, & Matthews, 2013). Aiming to contribute to an existing body of knowledge on the topic and offer useful insights into sexting behaviour, my study offers a detailed description of the sexting experiences of a female adolescent within a South African context embedded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

The following section is a brief orientation to the relevant available literature, which is explored in greater depth in Chapter 2. As a means to develop the rationale for the study, literature is discussed in order to give reference to a) the content of sexts, social factors and and motivations for sexting, b) risks and prevalence of sexting, c) developmental processes associated with adolescents and the implications on experiencing negative consequences from sexting, d) sexting experiences of female adolescents, e) the role of adults in sexting and f) the types of existing nature of existing literature. Lastly, my personal motivations for conducting the research are presented.

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Sexting, for the purpose of this study, is defined as “the sending or receiving of sexually explicit material (including written messages and images) via cell phone” (Rice et al., 2012, p. 668). It has been noted that the content of sexts varies widely and may contain fully nude images of genitals, pictures of individuals in underwear or sexually explicit text messages. Sexting, as a behaviour, cannot be separated from the complex social processes involved by which motivations for sexting are strongly influenced. Some of the reasons cited for engaging in sexting are feeling pressured, engaging in the practice to pursue developing romantic interests (Englander, 2012; Henderson & Morgan, 2011; Walker, Sanci, & Temple-Smith, 2013) or to denote commitment to an existing relationship (Drouin & Landgraff, 2012; Henderson & Morgan, 2011; Walker et al., 2013). Furthermore, an individual may use sexting to explore their sexuality (Hasinoff, 2012; Rice et al., 2012; Walker et al., 2013) or to seek pleasure and excitement (Drouin & Landgraff, 2012; Walker et al., 2013). A qualitative exploration of sexting may therefore reveal the nuances and variation in the behaviour as well as explore the social and motivational factors of an individual engaging in sexting.

Sexting, in studies conducted in the USA, has been associated with numerous risks including mental health risks such as suicidal ideation, suicide attempts and depression (Dake, Price, Maziarz, & Ward, 2012) as well as social risks including social exclusion and harassment (Englander, 2012). Sexual risk factors such as unprotected sex or multiple sexual partners have been linked to adolescent sexting (Temple & Choi, 2014; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2014). Additionally, sexting has been correlated with health risks such as substance and alcohol abuse (Benotsch, Martin, Snipes, & Bull, 2013). Legal risks are especially prevalent in the literature on sexting, where being charged with the creation, distribution and possession of child pornography, the associated criminal record and being entered in a child sex offender’s register are all serious consequences of adolescent sexting behaviour (Ostrager, 2010).

Risks are by no means negligible given the prevalence of adolescent sexting. Despite varying considerably, prevalence rates of adolescent sexting were found to be from 12.9% (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010a) in the USA up to 46% in a South African study

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(Schloms-Madlener, 2013). Additionally, many South African adolescents cite that the behaviour happens frequently and that most peers engage in it (Muller, 2014, p. 137). These rates of exposure to the practice and the prevalence of sexting amongst adolescent populations, even in the lowest estimates, evidently pose significant risks in urgent need of research, by which my topic was motivated.

In more general terms, I have chosen to focus my research specifically on an adolescent because the developmental processes in the various realms of adolescence not only contribute to sexting behaviour within this age group, but also make this age group particularly vulnerable to the harmful impact of sexting. The areas of development to be discussed are physical, social and emotional.

Physical development of sex characteristics and the associated rise in hormone production result in an increased desire for sexual contact (Christie & Viner, 2005) which may then be enacted through a widely available modern technological platform – the cell phone. Furthermore, developments in brain imaging have established that sensation-seeking during adolescence is increased while impulse control is simultaneously under-developed. Adolescent cognitive decision-making processes rely heavily on peer influences, and decisions are made by focusing more on rewards than on the negative consequences of a behaviour (Steinberg, 2010). Decision-making is thus hindered during adolescence where the drive to participate in the pleasure associated with sexting may be stronger than impulse control, thereby providing little discouragement from engaging in sexting.

Social development in adolescence includes an increase in romantic attachments, identification with peers and social groupings. Adolescents may therefore be susceptible to peer pressure and social norms when engaging in sexting (Smetana, Campione-Barr & Metzgner, 2006). Emotional development in adolescence involves developing a sense of self. Self-esteem has also been observed as decreasing during this time. Adolescents may therefore engage in sexting to gain recognition and thus boost their self-confidence (Robins & Trzesniewski, 2005).

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The experiences of female adolescents indicate that compared to males, females experience more severe consequences of engaging in the behaviour, especially in terms of their reputation and social standing (Dir, Cyders, & Coskunpinar, 2013; Lenhart, 2009; Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, & Livingstone, 2013). For example, it is female participants who frequently describe feeling coerced, pressured or threatened into engaging in sexting by male partners and being consequently blamed for the behaviour (Albury, Funnell, & Noonan, 2010; Lee & Crofts, 2015; Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Ringrose et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2013). The seemingly more severe consequences and negative experiences for female adolescents motivated me to focus my research specifically on the experiences of a female.

Within adolescence, supportive adults show great potential to serve as protective resources which could be useful when considering the risks posed by sexting (Ungar, 2008). However, adolescents seem not to be able to use adults as protective resources where they are described by adolescents as being unsupportive and untrustworthy in matters concerning sexting (Chalfen, 2009; Lipmann & Campbell, 2014; Strohmaier, Murphy, & DeMatteo, 2014; Walker et al., 2013). As such, adolescents cited punitive measures by parents as including confiscating and monitoring cell phones, while schools engaged in disciplinary action (Willard, 2011). Of note are parents who said they were unfamiliar with the technology and social media platforms used by adolescents, which indicates that parents are not able to engage with their child on the topic. Thus, when acknowledging that adults, as protective resources, do not seem to be available or beneficial to adolescents who engage in sexting, risk factors are of greater concern. These concerns further motivate the current research as a means to inform interventions by adult role-players.

In the existing body of knowledge on sexting, research methodologies tend to be mainly quantitative. Furthermore, a strong focus on prevalence and studies relating to risk factors was detected. Thus, the exclusion of the lived experiences of participants and nuances of sexting may have precluded a full understanding of the topic (Ringrose et al., 2013). Few studies have employed a theoretical stance to

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understand sexting, and even fewer have used theories that have been empirically linked to the behaviour in practice (Walrave, Heirman, & Hallam, 2014). Relatively little research in the South African context exists. The rationale of the study is thus based on the anticipation that gaps within the literature may be addressed by using qualitative methodology and the Theory of Planned Behaviour and by acknowledging the context of South Africa within the study.

My personal motivations for exploring sexting included my first-hand experiences of the effects sexting had on numerous adolescents I worked with as a counsellor in a South African school. I noted diminished emotional well-being, bullying, belittling, social exclusion and even sexual harassment in sexting cases. This was compounded by frequent complaints from adolescents about not being heard by the adults around them, who could not relate to their experiences. Practical, accessible information regarding the phenomenon seemed to be scarce and parents, teachers and psychologists at schools in my immediate network expressed similar sentiments. Having experienced the common desire of the above groups to ensure an informed response to instances of sexting, I found the topic worthy of further exploration.

My rationale for the study can thus be concluded as comprising of my personal motivations as well as undertaking to explore the variation in sexting behaviour and the intricacy of social motivational factors of sexting. The numerous risks of sexting as a behaviour, high prevalence rates, developmental factors associated with higher vulnerability to risks during adolescence and higher risks for females are coupled with a lack of access to adults as protective resources. These factors therefore motivate for fully acknowledging, exploring and understanding the topic in order to intervene appropriately and effectively. Viewing the topic from a qualitative perspective within the specific context of South Africa and being grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour aimed to meet these demands and therefore formed the rationale for the manner in which the study was conducted.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Adolescents have free access to technology with photographic and connectivity capacities. At the same time adolescents are undergoing developmental processes

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which are related to a tendency to engage in risky behaviour. High prevalence rates of sexting mean that numerous adolescents are exposed to risks. Females experience higher risks due to gender-based social pressures. As such, social ridicule, emotional distress, sexually risky behaviour and poor health behaviour such as substance abuse are associated with sexting. It is thus acknowledged that risks associated with sexting can be problematic for positive future outcomes for adolescents and further research is required to understand sexting within the South African context and from a qualitative, and thus personalised, perspective.

1.3. PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this descriptive case study is to provide an in-depth, qualitative investigation of the sexting experiences of a female adolescent in Cape Town, South Africa within her context. The focus of the interview was guided by the Theory of Planned Behaviour, and thus social, attitudinal and behavioural aspects of sexting experiences were highlighted. Risks associated with sexting were also acknowledged. It is anticipated that the knowledge developed in this study may have the potential to inform interventions that may assist in decreasing the number of adolescents exposed to harmful consequences of sexting.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was guided by the following primary research question:

- *What are a female adolescent's experiences of sexting?*

Secondary research questions were:

- What are the current theoretical and empirical perspectives pertaining to sexting behaviour among adolescents?
- What motivates an adolescent female to participate in sexting?
- What are the perceptions of a female adolescent on the consequences of sexting?

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1.5. KEY CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

1.5.1. Sexting

Sexting, involves "the sending or receiving of sexually explicit material (including written messages and images) via cell phone" (Rice et al., 2012, p. 668). Although some sexting definitions focus purely on the sharing of sexualised images, the operational definition used within this study includes sending and receiving sexually explicit text messages in the definition, in alignment with Karaian (2012) and Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones, and Wolak (2012). This was a choice taken in order to understand the behaviour in as broad terms as possible. Images can be self-produced or received through direct communication with the creator, but sexting can also involve forwarding and sharing images of others (Lounsbury, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2011). Sexting as a behaviour involves social, interactional processes such as "boys asking girls for photos in their bra, bikini or with naked breasts etc.; boys claiming to have such photos on their phones; [and] the negotiation of sexual propositions on digital devices" (Ringrose et al., 2013, p. 5).

1.5.2. Sexting experiences

As a noun, an experience can mean having "practical contact with and observation of facts or events" (Experience, n.d. OED), while the verb "experience" can mean to encounter or feel something. Within this study, *sexting experiences* are the contact the participant has had with the behaviour and the feelings and encounters associated with such behaviour.

1.5.3. Adolescent

An adolescent is defined as an individual experiencing a phase of life where a variety of developmental changes take place that allow for transition from childhood to adulthood (World Health Organization, 2014). The World Health Organization used age as one manner to define adolescence as being "between 10 and 19 years of age" (World Health Organization, 2014). However, adolescence is also defined by "biological, cognitive, psychological, and social" developmental processes and how these factors are connected, concurrent and interrelated (Lerner, Balsano, & Bobek, 2004, p. 12; World Health Organization, 2014; Roenneberg et al., 2004). One facet of adolescent development which is of particular importance to this study is the

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development of sexuality. Sexuality is considered “a core dimension of being human” and includes biological sexual development, physical sexual interaction, romantic relationships and attachment and the exploration of socially defined gender roles (World Health Organization, Pan American Health Organization & World Association for Sexology, 2000). Thus, this study defines an adolescent is an individual in the process of undergoing changes in multiple areas of development between childhood and adulthood and is between the ages of 10 and 19.

1.6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Theory of Planned Behaviour was utilised as a theoretical framework for this study (Ajzen, 1991). The theory and its relevance to the study are discussed in detail in Chapter 2. A description of the theory and the manner in which the theory has been used to guide the study are now given.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour was initially developed as a means to predict and explain behaviour, particularly health behaviour. In this study the Theory of Planned Behaviour was utilised as a means to demarcate and focus the exploration of the sexting experiences of a female adolescent and is discussed in depth in Chapter 2 with an accompanying diagram. The theory’s premise is that the best predictor of behaviour is the construct of behavioural intention, to which three types of beliefs contribute (Ajzen, 2011). These beliefs include *attitudes towards the behaviour; normative beliefs* (or beliefs regarding social factors); and *control beliefs* (or an individual’s beliefs concerning their perceived control over their involvement in the behaviour). Beliefs in each of these areas may also influence one another (Ajzen, 1991).

The Theory of Planned Behaviour is entirely centred on an individual’s personal beliefs and perceptions, which are therefore closely linked to an individual’s experiences. In this way, the theory is thus utilised to conceptualising the participant’s experiences of sexting.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour’s core premises seemed to align to major themes in international literature on sexting. It has been identified that sexting is deeply

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rooted in social norms, peer groupings and peer pressure (Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Ringrose et al., 2013) and thus aligns to the construct of *normative beliefs* within the Theory of Planned Behaviour. The theory's focus on an individual's perceptions of their control over the behaviour, or *control beliefs* links to another common theme in the literature: that of feeling coerced or pressured to engage in sexting (Walker et al., 2013). *Attitudes towards the behaviour* were seen to be an important factor in sexting whereby positive attitudes towards sexting were not only common but also increased the likelihood of engaging in the behaviour. Negative attitudes have the converse effect, as predicted by the theory's focus on behavioural beliefs (Dir et al., 2013). As such, the relevance of the theory to sexting was established and was therefore selected as the theoretical framework when exploring the sexting behaviour of a female adolescent.

1.7. PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVES

1.7.1. Epistemological paradigm

Interpretivism as a meta-theory was selected to contextualise the interpretation of the study and create a philosophical understanding to underpin acquisition of data (Ferreira, 2012). O'Gorman and MacIntosh (2015) argue that interpretivism is grounded in the philosophical concepts of ontology, epistemology and axiology, while the rhetorical structure and methodology also stem from the research paradigm within a study.

Ontology defines the nature of reality and within interpretivism, no "single true reality" exists (Ponterotto, Matthew, & Raughly, 2013, p. 39). Instead, reality is subjective, multiple and constructed within a context by an individual's personal perceptions and experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Epistemology describes the nature of the relationship between the researcher and participant, or the "knower and would-be-known" (Mertens, 2014, p. 10). Interpretivism acknowledges that the research process is interactional in nature and it is understood that this relationship is central to allowing the participant's experiences to be documented (Ponterotto et al., 2013). The participant's reality is explored by the researcher in a reflective, curious and respectful manner (Thorpe, 2013).

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Axiology explains how the researcher's values affect the acquisition of knowledge through research (Ling & Ling, 2017). Interpretivism understands that the researcher's values cannot be separated from the research and he or she should "attempt to suspend or bracket their perception and interpretation of reality in order to learn about the reality and lived experiences of their participants" (Ponterotto et al., 2013, pp. 49).

The *rhetorical structure* refers to the language used to describe research. Interpretivism aims at describing the lived experiences of the participant and as such, the language used within the study is personalised to the participant (Creswell, 2014).

Lastly, *methods* refer to the approach, techniques and procedures used during the research process (Mertens, 2014). Interpretivism, in general, utilises a qualitative methodological approach and techniques in order to gather the depth of information required to fully describe the phenomenon (O'Sullivan & Irby, 2014).

By accepting the interpretivist value of individual subjective realities, the exploration of a single participant's sexting experiences in this study is justified. The interpretivist acknowledgement of the importance of context is well aligned to the developmental and contextual aspects of the theoretical framework utilised. The depth of enquiry incorporated in qualitative methodologies was useful to fully describe the participant's perspective (Webb & Pollard, 2006). The interactional nature of interpretivist epistemology was carried out by means of a semi-structured interview and a reflective researcher's journal which allowed for acknowledgement and containment of researcher bias (Holloway & Galvin, 2017). The rhetorical structure of the study adhered to the language used by the participant in order to accurately explain the participant's sexting experiences (Ponterotto et al., 2013).

1.7.2. Methodological paradigm

The study utilised a qualitative methodological approach within an interpretivist paradigm and a single, descriptive case study design. Methodologies indicate what

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ideas are worth researching, how to conduct said research and ways to gather useful meaning from the research (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). Gathering data in the qualitative approach, as with interpretivism, needs to focus on individually constructed realities and a specific social context (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Knowledge was thus generated by studying a phenomenon from the participant's perspective and valuing the unique nature of the participant's point of view (Morgan & Sklar, 2012). Qualitative research is also interested in the depth of an experience, as this is essential to understanding human life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The approach taken in the study valued the participant's personal sexting experiences and the influence her context had on her sexting behaviour. The nature of the methodology allowed this information to be explored comprehensively.

1.8. RESEARCH METHODS

1.8.1. Research design

A single, descriptive case study design was used for this study to describe the phenomenon of sexting in the context in which it occurred (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This involved exploring the contextually based realities of a single participant using detailed, in-depth data collection methods from multiple sources of information such as the semi-structured interview (Yin, 2013). In exploring a single case, rich detailed information was obtained and the complexities of the individual case in relation to sexting experiences could be understood (Creswell, 2013).

1.8.2. Sampling and selection of research site

Purposive sampling was used in order to select an information-rich participant who was able to provide enough detail to answer the research questions. Thus, the unit of analysis was a single female participant who engaged in sexting and felt comfortable sharing her experiences thereof. Inclusion criteria were formulated according to the research questions and the participant's age, gender and experiences with sexting (Yin, 2013). The research site was selected by discussing numerous options for interview spaces with the participant. Both the participant and I agreed upon the use of a vacant psychologist's consulting room for reasons of neutrality, comfort, confidentiality and ease of accessibility (Gagnon, Jacob, & McCabe, 2015).

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1.8.3. Data generation and documentation

A descriptive case study design requires the use of more than one data collection source (Creswell, 2013). Thus, data collection and documentation took the form of a semi-structured interview, observations, a reflective researcher's journal and a member checking interview. A semi-structured interview was used to capture depth of information and allowed the participant to shape the conversation in both interviews (Galletta, 2013). Simultaneously, the interview remained on-topic due to the use of guiding semi-structured questions, whilst the researcher remained respectful and created a safe environment for the participant to share her experiences (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The interviews were documented by an audio recording and verbatim transcription. Observational notes were taken regarding facial expressions, tone of voice, and body positioning as a complementary data collection strategy. A reflective researcher's journal documented personal perceptions, biases and preliminary ideas on emergent themes (Creswell, 2014).

1.8.4. Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis was conducted on the content of the transcribed interviews, observational notes and reflective researcher journal. The process was guided by the steps described by Nieuwenhuis (2013). The preliminary steps taken were: preparing the data for analysis such as transcription; gaining a sense of the material by reading through it multiple times; and coding the transcribed data. Coding included processing the transcribed interview data, line for line, and breaking it up into "meaningful analytical units" (Nieuwenhuis, 2013, p. 105). Thereafter, analysis took place in which main and subthemes were created by grouping coded data. In some cases, segments of data were relevant to more than one category and were thus allocated to more than one subtheme (Nieuwenhuis, 2013). Connections between themes could then also be described (Saldaña, 2016). The data analysis strategy therefore constitutes inductive analysis whereby themes emerge from connecting pieces of data, as opposed to allocating data to pre-existing categories (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2014). A graphic representation of the data structure, including themes and subthemes, can be found in Chapter 4 (see 4.2.) In the final step of data analysis, themes were compared to existing literature to ascertain where the study

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may have contributed to the body of knowledge on sexting and suggestions on further research may be made (Nieuwenhuis, 2013).

1.9. QUALITY CRITERIA

Trustworthiness ensures the data gathered is a true reflection of the phenomenon and that the research holds value. Five criteria set for qualitative research – credibility, confirmability, dependability, transferability and authenticity – were adhered to. Strategies such as a member check, an audit trail, a reflective researcher journal and thick description were included to meet these criteria (Creswell, 2014). A member check included a second discussion with the participant, after the first interview was conducted and themes evaluated to discuss the participant's experiences of the interview. The discussion centred around which elements of the topic were particularly pertinent to her whether the themes identified were accurate and the correct emphasis was placed on the importance of specific themes. Further it the discussion explored whether the entirety of full ideas on the topic were present and whether the interview was a true representation of her experiences. Creating an audit trail meant keeping detailed notes of coding and analysis process so that another researcher may track the logic behind the determination of themes within the study in order to ensure a measure of objectivity (Amankwaa, 2016).

Credibility ensures that the data gathered is truthful and is a full description of a phenomenon. This was obtained by purposive sampling and detailed data collection methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, member checking was used to ensure that the participant's experiences were accurately and comprehensively described. Multiple sources of information such as observations, a semi-structured interview, a member checking interview and reflective researcher journal were further strategies used to ensure thick description and thus accuracy in depicting the participant's experiences (Creswell, 2014).

Confirmability implies the necessity of findings reflecting the experiences of the participant rather than my personal interpretations (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). An audit trail was utilised to allow for the possibility of external researchers confirming themes; a member check was done so the participant may confirm that her

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expressions had been recorded accurately; and a researcher journal was kept to monitor and reduce researcher bias (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Dependability refers to the consistency of the researcher in applying research methods and the findings of the research (Mertens, 2014). Triangulation, or the use of multiple data collection methods, and an audit trail were utilised to ensure that this criterion was met (Mertler, 2016).

Transferability refers to the ability to apply the research to other contexts. Although this is not generally an aim of qualitative research, thick description was utilised to allow for the possibility of comparison between the present research and other similar contexts. Such thick description was possible due to the purposive sampling used and the detailed interviewing process (Creswell, 2014).

Authenticity is the degree to which a study shows the potential to fairly describe a phenomenon without bias from a particular standpoint and ensures the participant's true voice may be heard (Mertens, 2014). Direct quotations were included in order to express the participant's lived experiences appropriately. Additionally, because females experience disproportionately more negative consequences of sexting, giving a voice to this group was a means of fairly representing the topic. Exploring sexting in a South African perspective also reduces the bias of the body of knowledge on sexting which, for the most part, describes the phenomenon in the developed world.

1.10. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical approval was sought and granted by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria (Ethics Number: EP 15/07/01, see page vi) based on research methods and factors included in the research process to ensure ethical practice. Informed consent was obtained, ensuring that the participant understood and agreed to participate in the study (Webster, Lewis, & Brown, 2014) (please see Appendix E for a copy of the informed consent form utilised). The participant was made aware that her participation was voluntary and she could withdraw at any time without any consequences (Willig, 2013). Confidentiality and

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anonymity was upheld by disguising the participant's identifying particulars, and securing the data by password protection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The principle of non-maleficence was upheld by utilising empathetic questioning, monitoring the participant's level of comfort and ensuring that the process would be discontinued should the participant feel uneasy at any point in time (Holloway & Galvin, 2017).

1.11. ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

The role of the researcher, as described by Maree and Van Der Westhuizen (2009, p. 37), includes: "preparing and structuring interviews", "conducting interviews", "analysing data" and "triangulating and/or crystallising data". Willig (2013, p. 328) adds that the researcher within "case study research [needs to] provide an accurate and detailed account of the case". When preparing questions for the interview, I noted all relevant aspects of the topic through an in-depth literature review while a semi-structured interview schedule was formulated to ensure that sufficient detail on the topic was collected. When conducting the interview, I made sure to use careful listening skills, documented observations and recorded the interview to allow myself as the researcher to take on the role of a "witness or reporter" (Willig, 2013, p. 328). I was considered the "primary instrument" for gathering information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 16) and therefore made use of empathy to connect with the participant and affirm the experiences shared (Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012).

My role as a researcher when analysing the data was to engage with the material in such a way that it connects with theory and "provide[s] insights that transcend" the documentation process (Willig, 2013, p. 328). I utilised various sources of information when analysing the data which allowed for triangulation and crystallisation of themes. Allocating themes within the data was a way in which to utilise the information gathered to make inferences and connections. By utilising the Theory of Planned Behaviour as an explanatory model and by linking the study to previous literature on the topic, I was able to make deductions about the information which meant the data could move beyond simple documentation.

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1.12. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The necessity of conducting the study was motivated by the possible danger posed to adolescents due to associated risk factors, seemingly high prevalence rates and increasing levels of the behaviour. Thus the study aims to contribute to the literature because a) there is relatively little qualitative research on the topic; b) there is little data specific to the South African context; and c) using the Theory of Planned Behaviour was useful to understand the topic from a theoretical perspective. Due to the nature of technological advances, the study also has the potential to d) update knowledge pertaining to sexting. The contributions were made by using a qualitative methodology which allowed for e) a focus on specifically the lived experiences of female adolescents, due to the unique nature of challenges they face. The significance of the study was therefore based on the possibility of contributing knowledge to the above areas of literature.

1.13. OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

CHAPTER 1: Orientation to the study

Chapter 1 outlines the background of the study, describes relevant key concepts, indicates the problem statement, purpose of the research and gives the research questions. A summary of the research methodology, theoretical components and ethical considerations is included.

CHAPTER 2: Literature review

Chapter 2 includes an examination of relevant literature on the topic of sexting. Areas discussed include the *background of sexting,* the origins thereof, definitions utilised and categories of sexting. *Risk factors* associated with sexting are described in terms of sexual health, mental health, social and legal risks as well as how to prevent and minimise these risks. The *South African context* is evaluated with regard to sexting while the *sexting experiences of adolescents* are discussed. Important *developmental factors associated with adolescence* are explored in terms of biological and hormonal changes, social development and emotional development. Lastly the *Theory of Planned Behaviour*, as the theoretical framework for the study, is discussed.

CHAPTER 3: Research design and methodology

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Chapter 3 describes the qualitative approach, interpretivist paradigm and research design. Thereafter the research design is discussed in terms of sampling and data collection and documentation, which includes a semi-structured primary interview and subsequent member checking interview, observations and a reflective researcher journal. Data analysis techniques and quality assurance criteria are considered. Ethical matters are considered along with the role of the researcher.

CHAPTER 4: Results and findings of the study

The results of the study are presented in Chapter 4 by describing the established themes. Major themes discussed include the participant's definitions and conceptualisations of sexting; the participant's perceptions of motivations for engaging in sexting; the participant's beliefs concerning the consequences of sexting; and the participant's ideas on protecting adolescents from the consequences of sexting. Subthemes in each of these areas are discussed and illustrated by means of examples from the data. Connections between the findings and literature are presented.

CHAPTER 5: Findings, conclusions and recommendations

Chapter 5 addresses the research questions and summarises the results. The limitations of the study are discussed and recommendations for practice and future research are made.

1.14. CONCLUSION

This chapter served as an introduction to the study. A brief exploration of the literature relevant to the study underpinned the rationale for the study which was described in terms of its possible contributions to the body of knowledge and the personal motivations of the researcher. The problem statement, purpose statement and research questions were presented and the key concepts of sexting, sexting experiences and adolescence were described. A brief description of the contribution of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, as theoretical framework to the study, was presented in addition to exploring the interpretivist epistemological paradigm. Research methodology, ethical considerations, the role of the researcher and

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significance of the study were delineated and an outline of following chapters was provided.

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CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 gave an introduction to, and overview of, the study. This chapter explores the available literature on the topic and enhances the focus of the study. Firstly, the background of sexting is presented with a discussion of the origins of sexting, how the behaviour is defined and its categories. Secondly, empirical studies which associate risk factors with sexting are discussed according to social, health and legal risks, and perspectives on protecting adolescents from risks are considered. Thirdly, an exploration of sexting in the South African context is given. Fourthly, positive and negative adolescent sexting experiences, along with adolescent perceptions of negating risks and perceptions of adult involvement, are reported. Adolescence, as a cluster of complex developmental processes, is discussed in light of the behaviour. Lastly, the Theory of Planned Behaviour as a theoretical framework is described and the relevance of the theory to the study is set out.

2.2. BACKGROUND OF SEXTING

2.2.1. Sexting origins and definitions

As discussed above, the primary definition of sexting used within the study is “the sending or receiving of sexually explicit material (including written messages and images) via cell phone” (Rice et al., 2012, p. 668). However, despite the concept of sexting being widely discussed, defined and researched, it is important to note that “sexting” is not a term that adolescents commonly use (Döring, 2014, p. 2). The expression is deemed to be constructed by adults. One participant described her perception of adults labelling sexting by saying: “I find with older generations, they want to name it, want to find out what it is and giving it the brand name, ‘sexting’ ... I don’t know – they just made a name for it” (Albury et al., 2013, p. 8). No one specific word was used as an alternative (Walker et al., 2013) but, instead, broad terminology such as a “special photo” (Ringrose et al., 2013, p. 7) was used by participants. Understanding the basic experiences and meaning-making of an individual cannot be separated from the vocabulary used (Sharifian, 2008) Therefore, despite it being noted that adolescents were able to understand and describe sexting along the same

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definitional lines as those used in research (Albury et al., 2013; Döring, 2014; Ringrose et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2013), it is important to be aware of the fact that researchers may, as a result, not be fully situated in the experiences of their participants. The importance of allowing the participant the opportunity to express herself and use her own language was therefore vital within this study.

Given the above background on how adolescents describe sexting, it has been discussed that the word “sexting” was constructed by combining the words “sex” and “texting”. As a fairly recent phenomenon; the word is described as initially being coined in 2005 (Chalfen, 2009). In 2009 the word “sexting” was nominated by the New Oxford American Dictionary as “word of the year”, indicating the rapid spread of the concept from when it was first described (Jolicoeur & Zedlewski, 2010, p. 2).

Wolak and Finkelhor (2011, p. 1) define sexting as “youth-produced sexual images”. Walker et al. (2013, p. 698) use the definition of “the production and distribution of sexually explicit images via technology”. Sexting is described as “transfer of sexually explicit photos via cell phone” by Strassberg, McKinnon, Sustaíta, and Rullo (2013, p. 1). What is common to these definitions is the focus on sexting as images alone. However, there has been some debate as to whether the definition of sexting should also include text-based sexual messages (Klettke, Hallford, & Mellor, 2014; Lounsbury et al., 2011). For the purpose of this study, eliminating the text-based aspect of sexting may exclude a large portion of the lived experiences of the participant and thus compromise the depth of the information gathered. Thus a broader definition, which incorporates both text-based sexual messages and sexually-charged images, is utilised.

As referred to in the definition by Walker et al., (2013), sexting may also include the act of forwarding images of individuals without their permission, in contrast to images remaining private between a consenting pair (Ringrose et al., 2013, p. 5). Forwarding images seems to be less frequent than is commonly thought, but may be used as revenge in a break-up or between males as another tool for gaining social status (Hasinoff, 2012; Lenhart, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2012; Ringrose et al., 2013). Wide public broadcasting of nude images was noted in some cases, where males used

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nude images of their sexual partners as a “profile picture” on a media platform (Ringrose et al., 2013, p. 5). Reasons for this practice included increasing their social status, but it was also a means of demonstrating power over a female’s reputation (Ringrose et al., 2013).

Some definitions highlight the various media platforms on which sexting can take place, such as “mobile phone messaging or through the internet on social networking sites, such as Facebook, MySpace and YouTube” (Lee & Crofts, 2015, p. 454). However, “the majority of attention has been directed toward sexting via cell phone” due to widespread use and easy access to the technology. Cell phones as the primary technological medium will therefore be the focus of this study (Lounsbury et al., 2011, p. 1). The technological and connectivity capabilities of cell phones are especially important when considering the behaviour. Using a cell phone allows for the immediate creation of images using a built-in camera. Both text messages and images can be easily created and stored on a device that allows for significant privacy by generally being held exclusively by the individual alone and secured by password protection. A cell phone can quickly and affordably disseminate the message or image through connection to a mobile network and the Internet (Silva, Teixeira, Vasconcelos-Raposob, & Bessab, 2016).

Broad definitions of sexting do not fully describe the varying range of behaviour experienced in practice (Ringrose et al., 2013). What has been noted about sexting, is that “the degree of sexualisation is quite variable and often low” (Döring, 2014, p. 1) indicating that the perceived severity of sexting may be unfounded in many cases. Sexting, beyond the act of sending nude images or sexually explicit text messages, is associated with nuanced social interactions. Sexting may involve the act of requesting images. In this case boys may ask for images of girls in their underwear, swimwear or partially naked in addition to fully nude, sexually explicit images as proposed by the above definitions (Ringrose et al., 2013). Sexting may include adolescent males feigning having images of females on their phones which may be for the purposes of determining social status between male peers or as a means to blackmail an individual for more images (Ringrose et al., 2013).

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2.2.2. Categories of sexting

It is argued by Wolak and Finkelhor (2011, p. 1) that adolescent sexting could be divided into two distinct categories of "aggravated" and "experimental" sexting. *"Aggravated sexting"* includes incidents of adults being involved in sexting with a minor or where abusive elements occur, including "extortion, threats" and "creation or sending or showing of images without the knowledge or against the will of a minor who was pictured" (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011, p. 1). It has been recognised that adults engaging in sexting with minors is relatively uncommon and that most sexting takes place between peers (Lippman & Campbell 2014; Ringrose et al., 2013). It is for this reason that sexting involving adults is not intended as the focus of this study.

Distributing pornography from other sources (such as the internet) is argued as being relatively uncommon between adolescents and the motives for consuming this type of media is unrelated to the mostly romantic motivations for sexting. This type of pornography is thus deemed superfluous to the discussions within this study (Döring, 2014). Similarly, describing sexting as a juvenile crime of creating and distributing child pornography (Lounsbury, et al., 2011; Judge, 2012; Ricketts, Maloney, Marcum, & Higgins, 2015; Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011) also does not align with the primary motives of adolescents engaging in sexting (Döring, 2014). Furthermore, criminal conceptualisations of sexting are considered overly punitive, and due to the often low levels of sexualisation of sexts, are considered irrelevant to both the lived experiences of adolescents (Karaian, 2014) and the conceptualisation of sexting in this study.

"Experimental sexting" includes youth sending pictures of themselves to establish or continue romantic relationships or to gain attention (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011, p. 1). Lenhart (2009) has established that three scenarios for sexting are the most common and includes the sharing images between romantic partners; distributing images shared within a relationship to others; and sharing images with a person in the hope of becoming romantically involved. Burkett (2015) found that sexting was used for non-sexual purposes and in everyday interactions such as for humour, bonding or feedback on appearance (Burkett, 2015), where these images are often minimally explicit. Differences in the motivations for sexting between genders are noted, where

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males seem to use sexts to initiate physical contact or for arousal. Females tend to use sexually explicit text messages to communicate sexual needs and delineate boundaries to physical sexual contact which may be more difficult to express in person (Brown, Keller, & Stern, 2009; Hasinoff, 2012; Richards & Calvert, 2009; Ringrose et al., 2013). The above scenarios seem to align more closely with "experimental sexting". Thus, sexting, as an act between two adolescents, peers, or partners of a similar age for the purpose of connecting sexually, seems to be a more useful typology for the study.

Sexting, within this study can thus be summarised as follows: it is considered an emerging trend connected to technological advances and includes both visual and text-based sexual content with a wide variation in sexual explicitness. Motivations for sexting may be related to romantic pursuits or be coercive in nature. The legal view of sexting, along with pornographic conceptualisations of sexting, is considered irrelevant to the experiences of adolescents. The importance of being aware of the participant's language use is highlighted.

2.3. RISK FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SEXTING

Although the negative outcomes discussed below could be considered "risks", it should be noted that causality cannot be directly proved without experimental designs, which are difficult to create and are not present in the literature. Thus the associations between sexting and negative outcomes should be noted as being possibly related yet not directionally causational (Rice et al., 2014). Despite this, the potential for negative outcomes as a result of sexting remains and the imperative to avoid this in adolescence is acknowledged.

2.3.1. Social risks and sexting

Many consequences of sexting, including social, emotional and legal consequences, are inevitably related to the forwarding, exposure or distribution of an individual's images beyond the intended recipient. As such, this aspect of sexting behaviour may be considered one of the most severe risks (Lenhart, 2009; Strassberg et al., 2013). Forwarding images is cited pervasively in the literature as a concern (Döring, 2014; Drouin, Vogel, Surbey, & Stills, 2013; Lenhart, 2009; Lounsbury et al., 2011; Mitchell

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et al., 2012; Ringrose et al., 2012; Strassberg et al., 2013). Forwarding sexts would take place when an individual, without the consent of the original creator, sends on an images to others who were not the original intended recipient (Strassberg et al., 2013). Public exposure of images has also been documented by Ringrose et al. (2012), including displaying an image or evidence of a text message in a virtual public forum, such as Facebook or Blackberry Messenger (BBM) profile pictures, and not necessarily forwarding to specific individual recipients. The direct viewing of images from a cell phone, instead of the digital forwarding of images, was also noted. In most cases it seemed that males tended to expose the sexts of females and not conversely. Furthermore, the mere suggestion of an individual's sexting behaviour, rather than factual evidence, was sufficient for the individual to experience negative social repercussions regardless of whether the accusations were truthful or not (Ringrose et al., 2012). Thus, mechanisms relating to the pressure to sext, as discussed above, should additionally be taken into account when the social consequences of sexting are explored.

International literature on sexting has focused closely on some serious cases of the social impact of sexting, including harsh bullying and harassment. As mentioned earlier, these social experiences were attributed to causing a victim to commit suicide. Although the number of cases as severe as the presented example seem to be limited, it is a clear illustration of the profound impact social factors may have on an adolescent engaging in sexting. As such, the emotional consequences of sexting described below, seem to be directly related to social factors (Angelides, 2013).

Karaian (2012) lists additional social risks, such as humiliation, social isolation and cyber-bullying. Adolescents themselves seem to be aware of the social risks associated with sexting, citing embarrassment if private images are shared, "sexual shaming" and "damage to reputation" as some of the associated risks (Albury et al., 2013; p. 8). A specific theme of social gender norms indicates that females, in particular, experienced being labelled by peers as a "slut" for participating in sexting, or a "prude" for avoiding it (Lippman & Campbell, 2014, p. 382). It was therefore expressed by female adolescents that they felt themselves to be in a "lose-lose" situation when participating or not participating in sexting (Lippman & Campbell,

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2014, p. 382). The above labelling resulted in damage to an individual's reputation amongst peers. An individual's future reputation may be placed under in jeopardy when joining the employment market due to the possibility that open access to sexual images of an individual may be made accessible to employers and paint the candidate in a negative light (Angelides, 2013). Adolescents also seemed conscious of punitive repercussion by parents or teachers should their images be exposed (Albury et al., 2013).

2.3.2. Risky sexual behaviour, physical and mental health risks

Participating in sexting has been strongly associated with increased likelihood of engaging in physical sexual behaviours such as oral, anal and vaginal sex (Houck et al., 2014; Rice et al., 2012; Temple & Choi, 2014). Additionally, earlier sexual debut was found in adolescents who sexted (Rice et al., 2014; Van Ouytsel, Walrave, Ponnet, & Heirman, 2014; West et al., 2014). Concern over the above is warranted due to the ancillary risks of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (Van Ouytsel et al., 2014).

Differences in the types of sext sent and the likelihood of engaging in physical sexual behaviour were found in one study. Those who sent sexual images were more likely to engage in sexual behaviour than those who sent sexually suggestive text messages (Houck et al., 2014). Although it might be expected that a passive sexter (receiver) may be less likely to engage in physical sexual activity than a sender, this was not the case where both groups showed similarly increased likelihood of physical sexual engagement when compared to non-sexting peers (Houck et al., 2014; Schloms-Madlener, 2013).

Other factors of sexuality that were associated to a larger extent with adolescents who sexted, in comparison than those who did not, included having multiple sexual partners (Dake et al., 2012; Temple et al., 2012; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2014) and having multiple concurrent sexual partners (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2014). It was noted that unprotected sex was more common in adolescents who sexted (Dake et al., 2012; Benotsch et al., 2013; Rice et al., 2012).

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Other health risks commonly associated with sexting include substance abuse, where significantly higher rates of drug and alcohol use were present in adolescents who sexted (Benotsch et al., 2013; Dake et al., 2012; Dir et al., 2013; Temple et al., 2014). Sexual intercourse while intoxicated was also higher in adolescents who sexted (Temple et al., 2012).

Research regarding mental health concerns seem to be predominantly focused on the potential for suicide, of which rates of suicide attempts and suicidal ideation were higher in those who had sexted than in those who did not (Dake et al., 2012). Adolescents also appear to acknowledge that "provoking suicide" is one of the associated risks of sexting (Kopecký, 2011). Higher rates of depression, (Dake et al., 2012; Englander, 2012; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010a) and anxiety were found in those who had sexted (Englander, 2012). Feeling afraid, embarrassed, shamed or upset as a result of exposure to sexting was also experienced by some adolescents (Karaian, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2012).

Contrary to these findings, in Temple et al.'s (2014, p. 35) investigation of sexting and mental health, it was concluded that although there were markers for negative mental health outcomes, these outcomes could not be causally linked to sexting. Despite the mixed findings on mental health risks associated with sexting, the severity of possible risks, such as suicide, necessitates attention to this aspect of the topic.

2.3.4. Legal risks of sexting

Many studies conducted explored sexting through a legal lens (Willard, 2011; Eraker, 2010; Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2012, Ostrager, 2010). Although this narrow conceptualisation falls outside of the definition of sexting used in this study, the consequences for adolescents remain, and therefore need to be acknowledged. Legally speaking, sexting in adolescence falls into the category of production, distribution and possession of child pornography in most countries, even if it is self-produced (Ostrager, 2010). In some recent cases children have been charged as juvenile offenders, prosecuted in court and faced with the possibility of jail time or needing to register as a sex offender.

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Although the law has the intention of protecting adolescents, it is acknowledged in many cases that the legal route pertaining to sexting is outdated, inappropriate and detrimental, especially for those prosecuted during adolescence (Ostrager, 2010). These consequences remain legally binding for life and this is of significant concern when the prevalence of the behaviour is considered.

2.3.5. Preventing and minimising risks associated with sexting

The suggestions by existing studies on how to effectively support adolescents in the realm of sexting are herewith presented. It is argued that sexting education should be considered in a similar way to sex education. Research conducted on sex education has found that abstinence-only strategies are ineffective. Preference is instead given to programmes which offer adolescents numerous measures by which to protect themselves sexually (MGrath, 2004). In the same way, sexting interventions should be broad and targeted at both abstinence and safer sexting practices in order to realistically protect adolescents from harmful consequences (Albury, Hasinoff, & Senft, 2017).

As a fundamental step, adult role-players are encouraged to engage in self-reflection to ascertain whether their own views regarding sexting may be judgemental and exclusionary and thus detrimental to fostering supportive connections with adolescents. It is necessary to accept that adolescents are likely to explore sexually and sexting may be a part of this (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010b; Lenhart, 2009). Instead of punishing their behaviour, adults should divert their attention to empowering adolescents rather than policing them (Döring, 2014). Some suggestions for the latter include helping individuals develop self-respect; skills in avoiding peer pressure; and reasoned, conscious decision-making strategies (Albury et al., 2017; Döring, 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010b).

Adults conducting psycho-education programmes for adolescents regarding the risks associated with sexting is recommended by some authors (McEachern, McEachern-Ciattoni, & Martin, 2012; Theodore, 2011). However, Döring (2014) comments that adolescents are often already aware of the risks posed and thus adult-administered psycho-education is often ineffective. Instead, educating parents on the concepts,

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platforms, mechanisms and risks posed by sexting may place them in a better position to conduct discussions with their children and make them more knowledgeable about how to monitor their child's phone effectively (McEachern et al., 2012; Theodore, 2011).

Communicating that the victimisation of peers is unacceptable and deconstructing sexual double standards may be a more systemic intervention strategy to protect adolescents from the consequences of sexting (Döring, 2014). Hasinoff (2016), in a seminal TED Talk on sexting, argues that systemic interventions should focus on the notion of consent. Instead of punishing those who engage in the behaviour, those who violate the privacy of others without their consent should be regarded far more seriously than is currently the case. As with recent discussions on rape culture, the concept of consent involves asking for explicit permission to perform sexual acts and abstaining from those acts if permission is denied. If sexting is considered a sexual act, as is the case in many definitions discussed above, forwarding an individual's images without permission would be considered as violating an individual's bodily privacy. With this mind-set, conceptions of how to deal with sexting may be vastly different.

It was noted that the nature of technology itself could be exploited where adults, or indeed peers, may use the very platforms utilised for sexting to disseminate information and run intervention programmes to prevent sexting (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010b). The nature of technology may also be advanced. One suggestion included changing the nature of file formats so that privacy protections are embedded; such as PDF documents, which may not be copied. This may assist in preventing forwarding or copying and would be accompanied by a message stating the lack of permission for the image to be shared.

Peer advice is argued as being under-utilised and psycho-education interventions spearheaded by peers may be more accessible and relevant (Döring, 2014). Peers advise one another to ensure pictures are anonymous by excluding identifying features, only sexting within a trusting relationship, ensuring sexting is reciprocal and that one person is not the only one with images, and threatening legal action. As a

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supplementary strategy, messages regarding abstinence from sexting may be better received from peers (Albury et al., 2017).

2.4. SEXTING WITHIN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

In addition to establishing the definitions, conceptualisations and implications of sexting, it is important to contextualise sexting within South Africa. Research on the use of mobile technology indicates that most South African adolescents have access to cell phones. In one study conducted in a resource-constrained area, 97% of participants had made use of a cell phone within 24 hours of being interviewed, even if they did not necessarily own one themselves (Kreutzer, 2009). Cell phones, as an affordable and accessible tool for communication, have been seen as a target for development by cell phone manufactures and service providers (Kreutzer, 2009). Moreover, South Africa has exceeded growth expectations with regard to cell phone use and access to the internet (Brown, Cajee, Davies, & Stroebel, 2003). Personal communication and using an instant messaging service were among the important reasons for South Africans to use a cell phone (Bosch, 2008; Kreutzer, 2009), while adolescents were found to spend a significant portion of their day using the technology (Dlodlo, 2015; Swanepoel & Thomas, 2012). As is evident from the age of the above referenced sources, the likelihood of current pervasive infiltration of cell phone technology is high.

Limited research on sexting has been conducted in South Africa. Studies which had other areas of focus did identify the presence of sexting and raised concerns thereof where calls for additional exploration of the topic have been noted (Beger, Sinha, & Pawelczyk, 2012; Muller, 2014). Swanepoel and Thomas (2010) claim that the instant messaging platform of Mxit, which was developed in South Africa, is used frequently by South African youth and found that sexualised content was often communicated through this medium (Swanepoel & Thomas, 2012, pp. 111). Bosch (2008) found that Mxit was used by females to interact in a romantic manner with males. These interactions were, in many cases, sexualised and included “taking suggestive or nude photographs, and engaging in phone sex” such as sending descriptions of sexual acts in text-message format (Bosch, 2008, p. 54). High prevalence rates (Muller, 2014; Schloms-Madlener, 2013) and sexually risky

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behaviour were found in relation to South African adolescent sexting (Schloms-Madlener, 2013). Similar to international literature, themes of socially imposed gender norms and more negative consequences for females who engaged in sexting were present in South African literature mentioning sexting (Bosch, 2011; Muller, 2014). Sexting as a tool for exploring sexuality and for use within trusting relationships was also found as a theme (Bosch, 2011; Muller, 2014).

Legal consequences of sexting in South Africa noted that the country's legal system is unprepared to appropriately handle the behaviour (Badenhorst, 2011; Beger et al., 2012). Disjuncture between adults, who were perceived as technologically inept and punitive, and South African adolescents was noted. This was seen as a point of concern due to the inability of parents to pre-emptively intervene in sexting behaviour and the increased motives for adolescents to hide their sexting behaviour and therefore precluded support from adults (Govender & Skea, 2015; Muller, 2014; Schloms-Madlener, 2013; Sooryamoorthy, 2015).

Cell phone technology is evidently an important part of South African adolescents' lives and its use seems to be on the increase (Swanepoel & Thomas, 2012). Additionally, limited research has confirmed the presence of sexting in the South African context and themes present in the available data seem to match international findings. However, further research is required in order to confirm common themes and to explore the topic thoroughly, thereby warranting this study.

2.5. SEXTING EXPERIENCES OF ADOLESCENTS

The following section summarises the literature citing the experiences adolescents have with sexting. As such, the section comprises literature communicating the importance of exploring the perceptions of adolescents. Both positive and negative beliefs and experiences of sexting were present in the literature and are discussed below. Narratives on how adolescents navigated sexting as a risky behaviour, and perceptions regarding the role of adults in harm prevention, are reported.

2.5.1. The necessity of adolescent narratives in sexting research

The vital role of adolescent experiences in this study comes as a challenge to

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treating children as “objects” in research (Bond, 2010, p. 13). In order to explore the experiences of participants, rather than those of a researcher, it is argued that participants need to be given a voice. Often this is done through qualitative research, which makes accurate and extensive exploration of the perceptions of adolescents possible. It additionally allows participants to be included in research relevant to on aspects of their experience that define their lives (Livingstone & Haddon, 2012). Research which exists to explore the topic in a way that is respectful of the participants’ sexting experiences are therefore valued for their alignment to the aims of this study and are furthermore explored (Bond, 2010; Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Ringrose et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2013).

2.5.2. Positive adolescent experiences of sexting

Many adolescents believed sexting to be common practice (Lenhart, 2009; Muller, 2014; National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy; 2008). As one participant noted: “It’s so common, we all do it!” (Muller, 2014, p. 137). A majority thought sexting was “not a big deal” (Lenhart, 2009, p. 14; Lipmann & Campbell, 2014; Muller, 2014). Significant positive experiences were associated with sexting where participants noted that positive experiences or expectations of sexting increased the likelihood of participating in the behaviour (Dir et al., 2013). Thus, perceived positive attributes of sexting could also be closely aligned to the motivations behind sexting.

Motivations for sexting seem to be linked to various situations within an existing relationship or desired relationship. The former may include using sexting in an attempt to express interest in a relationship with another individual or to maintain the attentions of a suitor (Lenhart, 2009; Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011). Within existing relationships adolescents may use sexting as a way to make the relationship more interesting or fun, or develop trust and intimacy (Dir et al., 2013; Hasinoff & Shepherd, 2014; Muller, 2014; Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011). Other perceptions include seeing sexting as a way to experience pleasure; as entertainment; to feel confident about one’s body; or to get attention for one’s body (Dir et al., 2013; Henderson & Morgan, 2011; Klettke et al., 2014; Kopecký, 2011; Lipmann & Campbell, 2014; National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008; Walker et al.,

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2013).

Adolescents describe sexting experiences as a way of exploring their sexuality or as sexual experimentation (Chalfen, 2009; Dir et al., 2013; Muller, 2014; Walker et al., 2013). Dake et al. (2012, p. 13) take a theoretical stance to explain these experiences by saying: "it may be that sexting is a natural outgrowth of sexual experiences and may be one way young people express their sexuality through technology". This sentiment is shared by other authors (Hasinoff, 2012; Karaian, 2012; Lee & Crofts, 2015; McLaughlin, 2012). Sexting as relating to development aligns to Wolak & Finkelhor's (2011) description of "experimental sexting" where motivations for sexting are seen to be driven by a desire to experiment sexually during adolescence.

Some other benefits attributed to sexting experiences by adolescents include considering sexting as "safe sex" due to the fact that physical risks of "actual sex" such as pregnancy or STIs are not applicable (Chalfen, 2009, p. 263). Adolescents who were separated by distance when going on holiday viewed sexting as a means to replace sexual contact (Walrave, Ponnet, Van Ouytsel, Van Gool, Heirman, & Verbeek, 2015). In studies conducted in the USA on adolescents, some mentioned that sexting makes it easier, especially for females, to be more assertive in making their sexual needs known in a relationship (Lenhart, 2009; National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008).

2.5.3. Negative adolescent sexting experiences and risks encountered

Despite seemingly carefree attitudes, some adolescents interviewed in the USA viewed sexting as being "over the line" or "wrong" (Lippmann & Campbell, 2014, p. 381). Adolescents across the world were keenly aware of the risks that sexting posed (Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Ringrose et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2013). Of the risks previously discussed, some that were most salient to adolescents were legal aspects, where some avoided sending sexts out of fear of legal prosecution or getting into trouble at school or with parents (Chalfen, 2009; Lipmann & Campbell, 2014; Strohmaier et al., 2014; Walker et al., 2013). Other negative consequences of sexting which adolescents wished to avoid included feeling embarrassed, uncomfortable,

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ashamed or guilty. Peer denigration was considered by adolescents as the most severe and prevalent risk factor of engaging in sexting.

It was consistently found in studies conducted in the USA, the UK and Australia that females cited significantly more negative repercussions for engaging in sexting. Perhaps as a result, females also seemed to be more aware of and focused on the negative outcomes of sexting than their male peers (Englander, 2012; Dir et al., 2013; Henderson & Morgan, 2011). Females vocalised experiences of "feeling coerced, threatened, or bribed by boys to produce and send images" (Walker et al., 2013, p. 699). Females conveyed feeling pressured to sext due to seeking a relationship with the male requesting sexual images, seeking to maintain contact with this male, or to avoid being publically exposed or shamed (Walker et al., 2013; Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011; Ringrose, Gill, Livingston, & Harvey, 2012).

Females described carrying the blame for incidents, despite being pressured to engage in sexting by males. Instead, males were celebrated for sexting where those with more pictures from more females carried higher status in their male peer group (Albury et al., 2010; Lee & Crofts, 2015; Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Ringrose et al., 2012; Walker et al., 2013). In the USA, adolescent males also cited experiences of pressure by their same-sex peers to sext as a means of maintaining their social status (National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008). It was found that the pressure placed on females in numerous contexts was immense and created significant discomfort (Englander, 2012; Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Ringrose et al., 2013; Temple et al., 2012; Walker et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2013). Aspects of "aggravated sexting" as described by Wolak and Finkelhor (2011) in the above section as a model of describing motivations behind sexting may apply here. In this light, experiencing pressure to sext may be part of the reason for engaging in the behaviour.

It appeared that for adolescents in the USA, those who did expect negative outcomes from sexting were less likely to engage in the behaviour. However, the issues of being aware of consequences and expecting consequences to apply to themselves should be separated, as some adolescents believed that these consequences would

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not apply to them personally (Dir et al., 2013). As a result, awareness of consequences did not always prevent engagement in the behaviour; one participant expressed that sexting became more appealing because of the excitement caused by the associated illegality (Walker et al., 2013).

2.5.4. Adolescent experiences of navigating sexting risks and adult involvement

When experiencing risks associated with sexting, ingenuity was shown by adolescents in negotiating these risks. Some examples of how females avoided being pressured into sexting include feigning being in a relationship or claiming to have insufficient phone credit to send images. Other strategies included needing to develop a strong sense of self to avoid being broken down by possible rumours being spread and the social harassment that resulted. It was also noted that females alerted external resources, such as school management, to deal with the problem but found they were blamed for their individual actions instead of being assisted in managing the problem, further perpetuating gender inequality (Ringrose et al., 2013). Although showing the ability to avoid the risks associated with sexting, females expressed that this was not always possible and being victimised despite using the above strategies remained.

Adolescents expressed that sexting is “largely concealed from the adult world” (Bond, 2010, p. 15). One participant in a South African study noted “adults have no idea!” (Muller, 2014, p. 137). It was found that adolescents experience adults as unapproachable regarding sexuality in general and that many adolescents felt there was no safe adult to confide in when difficult experiences or bullying resulted from sexting (Ringrose et al., 2013). Adolescents avoided talking about sexting for fear of punishment in the form of losing access to technology (Walker et al., 2013). Moreover, accessing or managing a child’s phone was described by adolescents as impractical (Ringrose et al., 2013) and had no influence on dissuading a child from engaging in sexting (Campbell & Park, 2014; Lenhart, 2009). It is therefore alarming that from the perspective of adolescents, parents are not accessible as a protective resource pertaining to sexting (Bond, 2010; Campbell & Park, 2014; Lenhart, 2009; Muller, 2014; Ringrose et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2013).

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2.6. ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

During adolescence a complex range of developmental processes are experienced, including biological and hormonal, social and emotional development. All of these factors interact and play a role in the topic under investigation and therefore need to be considered.

2.6.1. Biological and hormonal changes

The physical body of the adolescent undergoes significant changes towards sexual maturity. Puberty is characterised, among other physical changes, by rapid physical growth, development of external sex characteristics (such as breasts in females and facial hair in males) and reproductive organs reaching maturity (Forbes & Dahl, 2010). Further, the influx of gender-specific sex hormones of testosterone and oestrogen during adolescence creates an increased desire for sexualised interaction due to the ability to successfully reproduce, (Christie & Viner, 2005). Adolescents may then turn to the technological tool of a cell phone to meet their desire for sexual contact, which may then result in sexting.

Adolescent brain development has been more closely observed through brain imaging in the last 20 years (Galvan et al., 2006). Behaviour linked to adolescence can now be understood in light of still developing brain structures, which in turn make this group more susceptible to risky behaviour (Casey, Jones, & Hare, 2008; Crews, He, & Hodge, 2007; Steinberg, 2010). Brain regions associated with understanding social interactions and emotions, especially in peer relationships, develop significantly in adolescence (Paus, 2005). During this point of development, perceptions of peers and interactions with peers also seem to have a significant effect on decision-making, especially in tasks with associated risks. It proposed that adolescents may ignore risk factors due to being preoccupied with the perceptions of their peers (Casey et al., 2008; Steinberg, 2010). Considering sexting as a risky behaviour, associated peer pressure and a heightened awareness of peer perceptions; brain developmental factors may be involved in motivating adolescents to sext.

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Further studies have noted that during adolescence, growth in brain structures associated with sensation-seeking is increased. Conversely, structures associated with impulse control develop slowly and are therefore relatively under-developed in adolescence (Steinberg, 2010; Sturman & Moghaddam, 2011). Casey, Jones, and Somerville (2011, p. 21) argue that "braking and accelerating in the adolescent brain" is problematic, where the "acceleration" of sensation-seeking drives cannot be moderated by impulse-control "braking" systems.

Additionally, adolescence seems to be a period in which dopamine systems are highly active. Dopamine systems are linked to reward systems in the brain, which may be a reason for the possible beneficial and rewarding outcomes of risk-taking to be over-emphasised during adolescence (Chambers, Taylor, & Potenza, 2003). Adolescents seem more prone to exhibiting an optimism bias, perceiving that they are immune from negative consequences, or that others are more likely to experience adverse outcomes than themselves, further distancing them from making reasoned decisions about sexting (Lapsley & Hill, 2009).

Thus, the perception that adolescents need to be protected from the risks associated with sexting is not unfounded due to the above concerns regarding the influence of brain development on decision-making in this age-group.

2.6.2. Social development: Peers, romantic relationships and group dynamics

Relationships between parents and adolescents change as a result of the shift towards emotional independence. Decreased parental control and monitoring is common as adolescents are prepared by their parents to take on increased responsibility for themselves (Brown, 2016). There is a significant increase in the amount of time spent with friends and less time spent with family (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). As relationships with peers become increasingly important in an adolescent's life, Smetana et al. (2006) argue that three types of peer relationship emerge: peer friendships, social groupings and romantic relationships.

Peer friendships, the first type of peer relationships, have been shown to increase in importance as teenage friendships become closer, more intimate and more

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supportive through childhood (Nickerson & Nagle, 2005). Campbell and Park (2014, p. 20), when investigating sexting, found that “involvement in sexting was positively predicted by connectedness to peers through mobile communication and negatively predicted by connectedness to family”. This indicates that the expected relational progression of adolescents moving away from the family unit towards peers may play a role in sexting.

The second type of peer relationship developed during adolescence is forming same-aged peer groupings. In these groups broader societal norms and gender expectations are created and enforced (Smetana et al., 2006). Socially, boys as a group tend to encourage each other to pursue interactions for the sake of pure sexual gratification. Females within same-sex peer groupings are punitive towards their peers regarding sexual engagement (Kreager & Staff, 2009). Additionally, females in society as a whole seem to suffer more from peer-related consequences than males when engaging in sexual behaviour (Smetana et al., 2006) and thus double standards for male and female sexuality within peer groupings are evident. These inequitable gender expectations and resulting consequences are thus also present in sexting (Jewell & Brown, 2013). As discussed in a previous section, it has been confirmed that females experience harsher consequences for sexting while males, seem to experience increased social standing and praise for the same behaviour (Bosch, 2011; Ringrose et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2013). Thus social standards within sexting seem to mirror general gender norms within society, as described above.

The third adolescent relational area is romantic relationships (Smetana et al., 2006, p. 268). It was found that by Grade 10 interactions with romantic partners were more frequent than with any family member or friend (Laursen & Williams, 1997). Adolescents characterise these relationships in terms of “passion and commitment” (Rubin et al., 2006, p. 154). Connolly and McIsaac (2011, p. 189) found that adolescent relationships become more intimate and sexualised with age and are characterised by behaviours such as hugging, kissing in addition to more sexualised intimacy such as genital contact. These behaviours are also accompanied by emotional feelings of intimacy, attachment, love and trust (Connolly & McIsaac, 2011,

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p. 189). When examining sexting behaviours, it is noted that the behaviour begins to emerge in early adolescence and becomes increasingly prevalent in older adolescents. Thus, the behaviour being associated with age-related romantic relationship developments is a possibility (Klettke et al., 2014). Additionally, it has been found that sexting most often occurs within existing or desired romantic relationships, indicating the importance of this developmental aspect in sexting behaviour (Lenhart, 2009). It is also plausible that sexting is as an extension of sexualised intimacy expected in this age group.

2.6.3. Emotional development

Adolescence is a vital stage of developing an individual's personality. With differentiation and independence from the family in adolescence comes a need to define oneself individually (Christie & Viner, 2005). In Erikson's theory of personality development, adolescence is a process of identify formation, of which sexual identity is a facet while adolescents attempt to answer the question "who am I?" (Weiten, 2007, p. 431). If an adolescent is in the process of defining him or herself, and their world is heavily influenced by technology, it is then possible that adolescents use the medium of sexting as a means to construct their sexual identity (Hasinoff, 2012).

Despite being an individual process, identity development is often influenced by peers, who at this time of an individual's life are pivotal (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001). They are likely to compare themselves to peer group members and the context where development takes place is also likely to affect the individual's concept of who they believe themselves to be (Christie & Viner, 2005). Contextually, there are concerns that identity development may be influenced by a highly sexualised modern society, which in turn may cause an over-emphasis on sexuality in a developing adolescent identity and thus increase rates of sexting (Gabriel, 2014).

In terms of emotional development, it has been found that self-esteem generally decreases during adolescence, especially in females. This gender difference has been attributed to differences in socialisation of males and females in terms of body image; the relative importance thereof; and differences in hormonal and physical maturation (Robins & Trzesniewski, 2005). Literature on sexting has confirmed that

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one of the drives behind sexting is to attract attention and to feel self-confident about one's body. Conversely, poor self-image has also been established as one of the negative consequences of sexting (Dir et al., 2013). Emotional developmental factors associated with adolescence may therefore influence and interplay with motives and consequences associated with sexting, especially when self-confidence is considered.

Emotional instability, emotional reactivity and lower levels of emotional regulation also seem to characterise adolescence (Steinberg, 2007; Steinberg & Morris 2001). As such difficulties with emotional regulation have also been linked to depression in adolescents (Alloy, Abramson, Walshaw, Keyser, & Gertstein, 2006; Silk, Steinberg, & Morris, 2003). Both emotional regulation (Houck et al., 2014) and depression (Temple et al., 2014) have been found to be correlated to sexting and it is therefore possible that sexting may contribute to and exacerbate already-present emotional difficulties associated with this life phase.

Thus, sexting as a risky behaviour may be understood in terms of a) physical and brain development, b) social development and c) emotional development. Brain development indicates that adolescents seek sexually pleasurable experiences without engaging in the necessary informed decision-making process to fully evaluate the situation. Further mitigating carefully considered action is the focus of adolescents on the rewards of sexting and perceptions of peers, rather than fully accepting the risks. The influence of physical development, increased romantic relationships, which drives adolescents to seek sexual contact are further noted along with the influence of identity formation and emotional instability and reactivity.

2.7. THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR

2.7.1. Introduction, history, criticisms and applications of the Theory of Planned Behaviour

Utilising a guiding framework when conducting research may help to navigate the topic (Ferreira, 2012). The Theory of Planned Behaviour forms the theoretical framework utilised in this study (Ajzen, 1991, p. 179) and is represented in Figure 2.1. This section will firstly, as an overview, outline how Figure 2.1 explains the

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Theory of Planned Behaviour while noting the history, criticism and applications of the theory in other areas of research are described. Following this is an in-depth exploration of the core principles. The section is concluded by presenting the rationale for using the theory in this study.

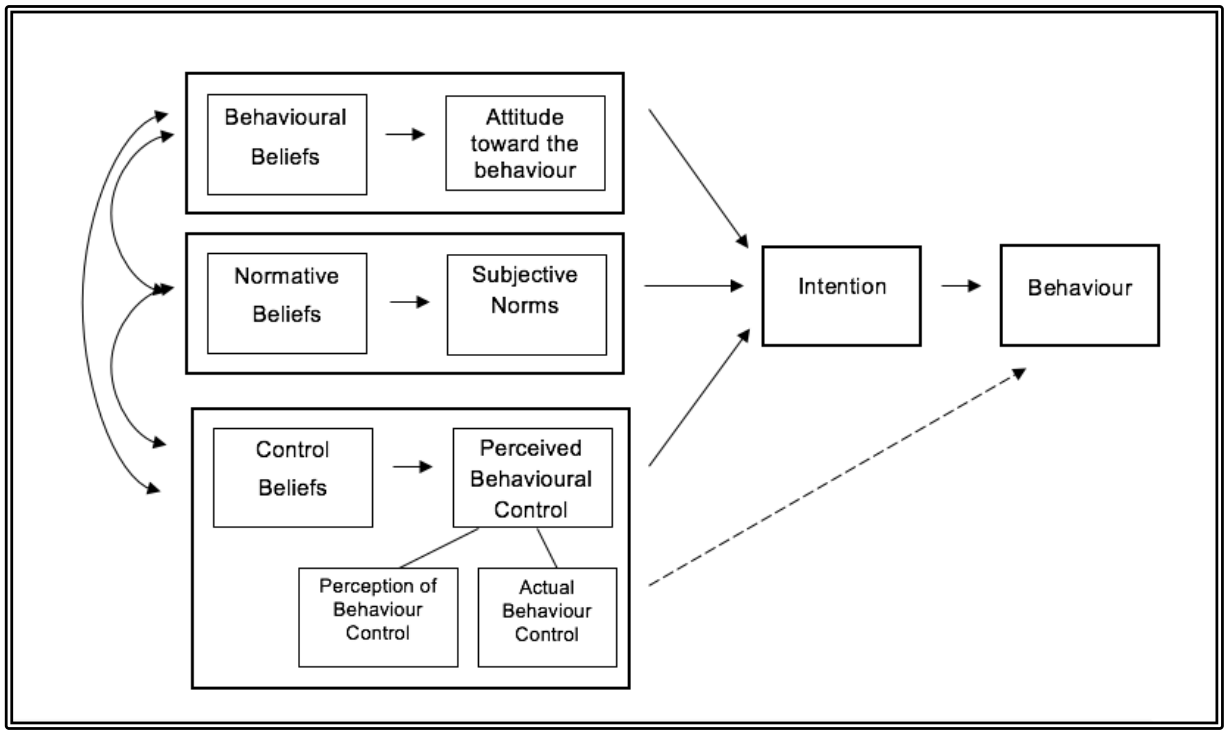

Figure 2.1. Schematic representation of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Adapted from Ajzen, 1991, p. 182)

Figure 2.1 depicts the core premise of the Theory of Planned Behaviour: that human behaviour is "guided by three kinds of considerations" (Ajzen, 2002, p. 665). These three areas of belief – *behavioural, normative* and *control beliefs* – can be seen on the left side of the figure. When the individual's perceptions and evaluations in each of the three areas are combined they form an overall positive or negative "aggregate" belief, namely *attitudes towards the behaviour, subjective norms* and *perceived behaviour control* (Ajzen, 2002, p. 1). As depicted by the culminating arrows, the three types of belief formulate *behavioural intention*, or the likelihood that the individual will perform the behaviour. As shown by the hyphenated line, *perceived behavioural control* can occasionally directly mediate behaviour, where the physical availability of resources necessary for engaging in the behaviour may hinder access to the behaviour (Conner & Sparks, 2005).

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The Theory of Planned Behaviour is an evolution of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) where the most notable addition is the concept of *perceived behavioural control*. Initially, the Theory of Reasoned Action "assumed that most human social behaviour is under volitional control and, hence, can be predicted from intentions alone" (Ajzen, 2002, p. 676). However, it was noted that an individual does not always have complete control over their behaviour, nor believes they can personally control the behaviour themselves, and thus the concept of *perceived behavioural control* was added to the later model (Godin & Kok, 1996).

The theory has been intensely criticised by Sniehotta, Presseau and Araújo-Soares (2014) to the extent where they believe the theory should be retired. One of their major criticisms is that the theory is too simplistic to adequately explain, nor predict, the complexity of human behaviour. Authors believe more nuanced factors, outside of those described in the model, in fact cause variations in behaviour. Further, it is argued as being difficult to evaluate the theory through experimental design and as such cannot allow for the development of useful interventions. Studies using the theory have combined the model with additional measures, which Sniehotta et al. (2014) believe to be indicative that the theory is not useful. Ajzen (2014) defended these criticisms by noting that in many cases the theory was over-simplified which therefore excluded factors which could have predicted the behaviour such as cognitive feedback loops on how behaviour influences cognition and beliefs. The possibility of oversimplifying sexting behaviour when using this theory was negated by the use of open-ended and qualitative research methodologies. Additionally, the current study did not attempt to predict sexting behaviour using the theory, nor experimentally evaluate the theory. The effects these criticisms may have had on deterring the use of the theory in this study were thereby negated. Instead the theory proved valuable in narrowing the focus on possible contributing factors to sexting behaviour and providing a framework in which to understand and explore these factors.

The theory's predictive validity has also been proved, contrary to Sniehotta et al.'s (2014) assertions, in its extensive use in empirical studies since its development in 1988 (Ajzen, 1988). As such numerous studies and literature reviews have noted the

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value of the theory's dimensions in explaining variations in behaviour (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Conner & Sparks, 2005; Godin & Kok, 1996; Sutton, McVey, & Glanz, 1999). Meta-reviews analysed numerous studies using the theory in predicting addictive behaviours (such as smoking, alcohol and drug use) (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Conner & Sparks, 2005); exercise and dietary behaviour (Povey, Conner, Sparks, James, & Shepherd, 2000); and sexual behaviour (such as the use of a condom and safe sex practices) (Albarracin, Johnson, Fishbein, & Muellerleile, 2001; Hardeman et al., 2002).

2.7.2. Core principles of the Theory of Planned Behaviour

Behaviour, as is noted in the title of the theory, forms the foundation of the model and "consists of (a) an action (or behaviour), (b) performed on or toward a target or object, (c) in a particular context, (d) at a specified time or occasion" (Ajzen, 1988; as cited in Conner & Sparks, 2005, p. 170). This indicates that the behaviour can vary significantly within the same individual and between individuals (Trafimow & Findlay, 1996). Within different behaviours, "the relative importance of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control in the prediction of intention is "expected to vary" according to the specificities of that behaviour (Ajzen, 1991, p. 185). Thus, the role contextual variables play in behaviour is vital in understanding human behaviour from the perspective of the model.

Despite contextual variables being important, the core of the model is individual beliefs. The subjective experiences and perceptions of an individual are argued to shape all antecedents to behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) and as a result the model is highly personalised. It thus also needs to be acknowledged that an individual's beliefs are not necessarily accepted generally by others within the context. Ultimately, the model takes individual perceptions and variations thereof into account and can thus be applied to a broad range of circumstances.

2.7.2.1. Behavioural intention

To begin with, the theory cites that the individual is most likely to perform a behaviour based on their *behavioural intention*. Empirical evaluations of the theory confirm this premise. Figure 2.1 demarcates this principle by depicting behavioural *intention* as

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directly preceding the behaviour. The construct of *intention* describes an individual's plan or decision regarding performing a behaviour and his or her levels of motivation to engage in, and follow through on, a behaviour (Conner & Sparks, 2005). Phrased otherwise, behavioural *intention* is "how hard people are willing to try [and] how much of an effort they are planning to exert" when performing a behaviour (Ajzen, 1991, p. 181). Empirically, *intent* has been found to be the strongest predictor of actual performance of a behaviour (Ajzen, 2011). Each of the three beliefs of which intention is constructed are discussed below.

2.7.2.2. Behavioural beliefs and attitudes towards the behaviour

The first type of belief includes *behavioural beliefs,* which in turn culminate in an *attitude towards the behaviour,* which has been described as "the degree to which a person has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation or appraisal of the behaviour in question" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). The individual will examine the consequences of the behaviour and whether or not they believe those consequences will apply to them when engaging in the behaviour. It is noted that an individual may not necessarily evaluate the consequences of the behaviour each time when performing the behaviour, but may instead use previous evaluations (Conner & Sparks, 2005). Additionally, it is likely that only some beliefs regarding a behaviour are salient at a specific point in time, indicating that certain aspects of the behaviour may not be cognitively attended to (Ajzen, 1991). Therefore, it is important to note that individuals may not evaluate their participation in a behaviour actively, comprehensively, accurately nor regularly. Thus, although a reasoned process may be included when partaking in a behaviour, this is not always the case, and spontaneous or uninformed decisions may be made (Ajzen, 2011).

2.7.2.3. Normative beliefs and subjective norms

The second type of belief is *normative beliefs* which, once evaluated by the individual, encompass *subjective norms. Normative beliefs* are described as an individual's "perceptions of specific significant others' preferences about whether one should or should not engage in a behaviour" (Conner & Sparks, 2005, p. 174). This includes the perceived social pressure to perform or not perform the behaviour. The individual's motivations to comply with the specific wishes of the other person (or

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people) also need to be considered when examining *normative beliefs* and *subjective norms* (Conner & Sparks, 2005). This dimension thus includes a strong focus on societal values, which indicates the impact social environments have on an individual's behaviour.

2.7.2.4. Control beliefs and perceived behavioural control

Lastly, the third type of belief is *control beliefs* and "refers to people's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour of interest" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 183). The combination of all beliefs regarding the control an individual has over a behaviour is called *perceived behavioural control. Perceived behavioural control* is then divided into two aspects, namely 1) *actual behaviour control* and 2) *perception of behavioural control. Actual behaviour control* is described by Ajzen (2002, p. 667) as "facilitating conditions". This includes the external resources and opportunities available to an individual which increase or decrease the possibility of performing a behaviour (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). Some general examples of *actual behaviour control* include the time an individual has available, how others cooperate with or impede the behaviour and the availability of physical resources (Conner & Sparks, 2005). How *actual behaviour control* may be represented in sexting behaviour may include, most basically, whether or not the individual has a phone or if they have sufficient credit to send texts or images.

As demonstrated in Figure 2.1, behavioural control can in some instances directly mediate performance of the behaviour. In these cases, it is the notion of *actual behavioural control* that applies, whereby external barriers or access variables predict the behaviour. It is argued that "people will tend to perform […] behaviours they have control over, and not perform behaviours they have little or no control over" (Conner & Sparks, 2005, p. 172). Thus, in instances where an individual has no control over a behaviour, their beliefs and intentions may be irrelevant to performing the behaviour where external physical barriers or access variables predict the behaviour instead. An example of how this may apply to sexting is if an individual does not have a phone they will be unable to sext, and in these instances their attitudes and intentions regarding the behaviour are irrelevant. However, as is discussed in the literature above, most adolescents do have easy access to the technology needed to

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sext. Thus, the study focuses less on the direct link between *actual behaviour control* and the behaviour and more on the three sets of antecedent beliefs.

The second aspect of *behaviour control* is a psychological construct that has been compared to Bandura's concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982, as cited in Ajzen, 1991) which has been termed *perception of behavioural control.* As an internal construct it includes the confidence an individual has in their ability to perform the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). *Perceived behavioural control* also relates to the individual's certainty that their behaviour will result in the consequences they are expecting. Thus, only those consequences which the individual has acknowledged are taken into consideration when they make a decision. Some examples of *perception of behavioural control* include "knowledge, skills, will-power" (Conner & Sparks, 2005, p. 189). With regards to sexting this may include needing to exercise significant self-control to avoid sexting, despite being pressured. It may include knowledge about, and attention to, the consequences sexting may have. Having the interpersonal skills necessary to avoid negative reactions from another individual requesting sexual images may form part of an individual's will-power and thus their *perception of behavioural control*.

As can be seen in Figure 2.1, all of the antecedents mutually affect one another (Ajzen, 1991). For example, beliefs about how others feel about the behaviour (*subjective norms*) may increase or decrease an individual's perception of peer pressure, which then in turn needs to be moderated by an individual's self-control (*perception of behavioural control).* If an individual's friends feel that sexting is fun or exciting the person may be more inclined to feel similarly. They would therefore need to exert more self-control to avoid engaging in the behaviour. Thus subjective norms influence perception of behaviour control. Another example may be that behavioural beliefs, including the evaluation of the consequences of the behaviour, would be influenced by an individual's knowledge in this regard. If an individual does not have knowledge of the legal repercussions of sexting (*perception of behavioural control*), then they are not able to take this into account when considering the consequences of their behaviour and thus affecting their *behavioural beliefs*.

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2.7.3. Applications of the Theory of Planned Behaviour in existing sexting literature and value for the study

Minimal research has been done on sexting using theoretical models to explain the phenomenon (Walrave et al., 2014). A few quantitative applications of the Theory of Planned Behaviour exist in relation to sexting (Champion & Pedersen, 2015; Hudson, Fetro, & Ogletree, 2014; Hudson & Fetro, 2015; Walrave et al., 2014). A discussion of these studies follows.

It was established that *subjective norms*, especially those of romantic partners and peers, were the strongest predictors of adolescent sexting behaviour (Champion & Pedersen, 2015; Hudson et al., 2014; Hudson & Fetro, 2015; Walrave et al., 2014). Associations with peers who engaged with the behaviours also resulted in an increase in the behaviour, indicating the influence of social norms on the behaviour (Marcum, Higgins, & Ricketts, 2014). These findings align with the social developmental processes taking place in adolescence. However, it was found in one study that the main reason some individuals engaged in sexting was their own personal wish to do so, rather than perceived social pressure (Hudson & Fetro, 2015). This may be evidence for the claim that within varying situations and for different individuals, the weight of the three types of belief may differ.

Adolescent *behavioural beliefs* concerning sexting were found to be a significant predictor of the behaviour. Positive perceptions of the behaviour were highly prevalent in the observed populations and resulted in increased intention to perform the behaviour (Dir et al., 2013; Champion & Pedersen, 2015; Hudson et al., 2014; Walrave et al., 2014). Behavioural beliefs, according to the theory, are shaped only by consequences that are salient to the individual and it seems as though individuals attended less to negative consequences of sexting (Dir et al., 2013; Champion & Pedersen, 2015). Champion and Pedersen (2015) hypothesise that high rates of positive attitudes to sexting may be as a result of many individuals never experiencing the negative consequences of sexting. However, the development of the adolescent brain may additionally play a role whereby reward structures and sensation-seeking are disproportionately developed and may cause an adolescent to ignore the negative consequences of sexting. The theory's awareness that only

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salient consequences affect decision-making aligns with developmental understanding of adolescence and helps to explain adolescent sexting behaviour.

Perceived behavioural control was also confirmed as a relevant predictor of sexting behaviour (Hudson et al., 2014; Walrave et al., 2014). External factors which an individual did not have full control over, such as the behaviour of others, showed an influence on sexting behaviour. Factors such as being in a close relationship, perceiving a trusting bond and believing that the privacy of the interaction could be preserved indicated a higher intention to perform the behaviour (Hudson et al., 2014; Walrave et al., 2014). Adolescent developmental knowledge, where an increase in romantic intimacy and formation of trusting bonds is expected, is a useful addition to this theoretical perspective (Walrave et al., 2014). Low self-control was found to be another facet of behaviour control which was a predictor for engaging in sexting (Marcum et al., 2014). This can again be linked back to adolescent brain development and less developed impulse control. Self-esteem, as a measure of intrinsic perceived behavioural control, seemed to impact on reasons for sexting but not on the level of sexting behaviour (Hudson & Fetro, 2015).

The Theory of Planned Behaviour has been able to successfully predict sexting behaviour according to three belief dimensions, as demonstrated by the above discussion. Subjective norms relating to romantic partners and peers are especially relevant to sexting, while positive attitudes towards the behaviour are not only common but a significant factor in engaging in the behaviour. With regards to control beliefs, external factors such as the behaviour of others, did seem to play a role in determining whether an individual would sext. It is possible to see the contribution of a developmental perspective on adolescence to understanding sexting behaviour.
The value of Theory of Planned Behaviour for the study can be ascribed to the efficacy of the theory when applied to sexting quantitatively and its ability to describe various dimensions of complex human behaviour. The theory focuses on individual, subjective experiences and contextually situated knowledge, which are at the core of the study. The Theory of Planned Behaviour is additionally valued for the ease with which it can be integrated with developmental perspectives regarding adolescence as a vital aspect of conceptualising the sample group of the study. Thus the novel

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application of a qualitative methodology, guided by the Theory of Planned Behaviour, contributes to the body of knowledge on adolescent sexting.

2.8. CONCLUSION

This chapter explored the literature available to contextualise sexting by looking at sexting origins and definitions, categories and risk factors associated with sexting. Sexting in the South African context was noted by looking at the nature of technology and cell phone use in the country, which confirmed themes present in international literature. The experiences adolescents have with sexting as described by existing international literature were surveyed. Contributions of the various dimensions of adolescent development to sexting behaviour, such as biological, hormonal and emotional factors, were considered. The Theory of Planned Behaviour was outlined and emphasis was placed on the value of using the theory for the study.

In Chapter 3 the research process is described in detail and explores paradigmatic approaches, research design and methodologies including data collection, analysis and the interpretation process. The research process is explained in terms of the selected research design and methodology. All of the choices made are justified in terms of the research purpose. Lastly ethical considerations are explained and along with how quality assurance strategies were implemented.

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CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 discussed pertinent sexting literature which explored the background, origins, definitions and categories of sexting, the associated risks, sexting in the South African context and the experiences cited by adolescents. Adolescent development was considered to ensure a grounded understanding of the participant's life phase, while the Theory of Planned Behaviour was utilised to guide the study theoretically.

In this chapter details of the paradigmatic, theoretical and methodological choices made within the study are presented. Considerations regarding the suitability of the theories selected, and the research process followed in accordance with the research focus, are described. Lastly, my role as a researcher, quality criteria and ethical considerations are discussed.

3.2. PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVES

Paradigms within research, as broad theoretical frameworks, ensure the research forms a "coherent whole" (Carey, 2013, p. 28). Interpretivism was selected as the research paradigm and the research methodology was informed by a qualitative approach.

3.2.1. Epistemological paradigm: Interpretivism

As discussed in Chapter 1, interpretivist ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetorical structure and methodology were utilised. As such it is noted that reality is constructed through social interactions which are contextually bound, in a subjective manner. It was acknowledged that no single reality exists (Creswell, 2014). The study ensured that the participant's individual reality was not only respected but explored in depth (Creswell, 2014). Investigating the numerous social and contextual facets of an individual's reality allows for a comprehensive understanding of the topic at hand (Mertens, 2014).

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Acknowledgement of the participant's reality included noting the language she used to describe her experiences and herself which was included as excerpts from the semi-structured interview and member checking interview. Interpretivism acknowledges that it is not possible to separate the researcher's subjectivity entirely from the research. In this light quality assurance criteria, reflexivity and the reciprocal, interactive nature of the researcher–participant relationship was emphasised (Holloway & Galvin, 2017; Mertens, 2014). I acknowledged my own stance on the research through a reflective researcher journal (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The main benefits of using interpretivism within the study arise from the applicability of the paradigm's principles to the research questions. Where the participant's subjective experiences of sexting were the area of focus within the study, the value placed on individual realities within interpretivism applied. The participant's reality could be expressed in her own words with minimal intrusion through the use of a semi-structured interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interpretivism highlights contextual and social aspects of knowledge creation which, when acknowledged within the study, allowed for a holistic exploration of sexting (Nieuwenhuis, 2012).

3.2.2. Methodological paradigm: Qualitative approach

A methodological paradigm is selected "based on the nature of the research problem and the questions that will be asked to address the problem" (Creswell, 2012, p. 11). The qualitative methodological approach was used within the study as it is considered the most appropriate way to gather information in the interpretivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; O'Sullivan & Irby, 2014). The research problem was well suited to qualitative research methodologies due to the need to understand the experiences of individuals in relation to sexting behaviour (Creswell, 2012). "Rich, thick description" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 229) and "a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2012, p. 16), made possible by the selected methodology, were beneficial in exploring the sexting experiences of a female adolescent. A qualitative research methodology allowed for holistic exploration of sexting, which included a focus on developmental and contextual factors (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

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One of the caveats of qualitative research, as within interpretivism, is the possible influence of the researcher's biases (Creswell, 2014). From a positivist perspective, validity and reliability may also be questioned in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014; Willig, 2013). It is acknowledged that due to differing philosophical underpinnings in qualitative research, quality criteria take the form of trustworthiness, which were addressed by research design choices methods and steps. Despite possible disadvantages, the researcher's skills can also be considered an advantage in qualitative research (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) where my ability to be flexible, engage respectfully with the participant and possession of good observation abilities contributed to effective qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). When working with the data, an enquiring stance and an ability to work inductively were therefor necessary (Miles et al., 2014).

3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

A single descriptive case study design formed the research design for this study. The design was selected as a means to study an individual unit comprehensively. A "unit of analysis" comprises of the participant's case, which defined the specific area of focus (Creswell, 2014, p. 60). The use of a single individual was guided by the limited scope of the study as a mini-dissertation. Another motivating factor for selecting this research design and methodology was Creswell's (2013, p. 102) argument that "more than one case dilutes the overall analysis" and means that each case will have "less depth". A descriptive case study aims for rich detail and eliciting the individual's narrative which fully describe the life-world of the participant (Abma & Stake, 2014). This can be seen in the investigation of multi-layered themes and using verbatim quotations from the interviews.

Sexting in adolescence is acknowledged as a complicated human behaviour relating to various interlinking areas of adolescent development, social relationships and context (Walrave et al., 2014). Of note in the case of sexting is the necessity to acknowledge the role of the technologically-charged society in which sexting takes place as well as the social dynamics of adolescence. Case studies are particularly suited to acknowledging the complexity of human behaviour and contributions of

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social and contextual variables, thus contributing to the holistic focus of the study (Yin, 2013).

A common criticism of the descriptive case study design is the inability to generalise results to a broader context, where a single case cannot be assumed to be representative of the entire phenomenon (Cronin, 2014). This study is limited to one participant's perspective, and does not aim to generalise the results, nor explain or describe the phenomenon entirely. Instead, the depth of analysis used allowed for sufficient information to compare the study to other studies that may share similar characteristics.

3.4. RESEARCH PROCESS

Figure 3.1 illustrates the research process followed.

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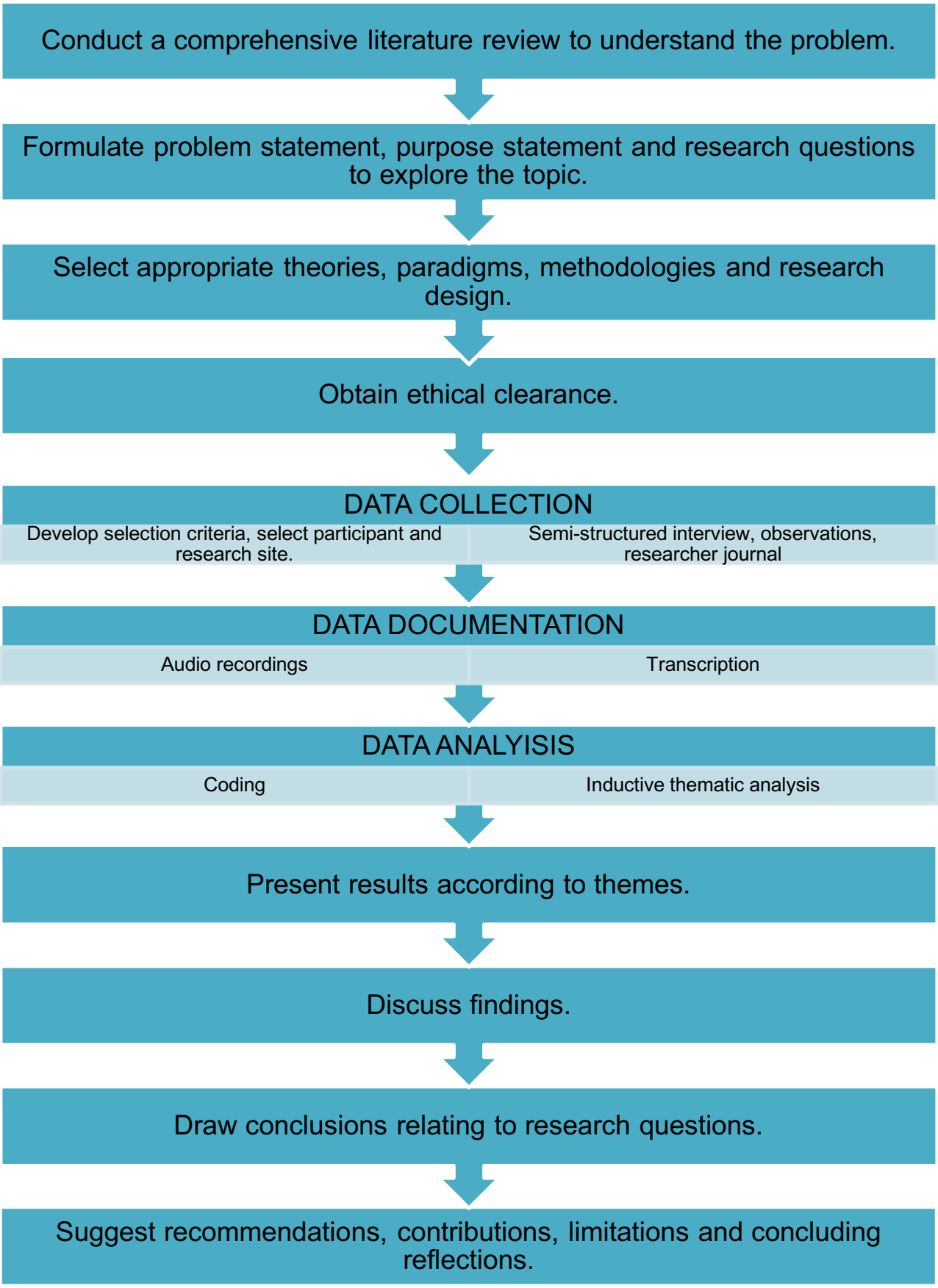

Figure 3.1. Schematic representation of the research process

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3.4.1. Sampling and selection of the research site

Purposive sampling and inclusion criteria were used to select the participant for the study.

The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- The participant had to have personally experienced sexting.
- The participant had to be female.
- The participant could not be younger than 18 years of age, in order for her to consent to the research of her own volition.
- The participant should be younger than 19 years so as to fall within the category of “adolescence” as defined by the study.

The underlying principle of purposive sampling is that “cases are selected purposefully to fit the study” (Palinkas et al., 2016). Purposive sampling was used to select an individual based on the rationale that the individual is the best source of information on the topic and that the “phenomenon of interest [was] strongly represented” (Mertens, 2014, p. 332). It was noted that she had the depth of experience necessary to adequately answer the research questions (Ritchie, Lewis, Elam, Tennant, & Rahim, 2014). Thus intensity sampling, a type of purposive sampling, was used to create the inclusion criteria used for the study (Carey, 2013).

In order to create a pool of possible participants to select from, I held small group discussions with age-appropriate females who were invited to attend through a notice placed in a school. Within these small group discussions I described my research interest and the process they would be involved in should they choose to participate. Participants could thereafter make contact with me in order to express their interest in participating. Subsequently, a brief preliminary discussion was held with various potential participants to select an individual with the most suitable knowledge, experience of the topic and comfort in discussing the research questions.

Difficulties with sampling may include reluctance of participants to participate due to the sensitivity of the topic discussed (Mertens, 2014). However, the participant selected for this study showed interest in the topic and openness in discussing her

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experiences, which negated difficulties of access. Her openness may have instead benefited the study, allowing the topic to be explored in more depth (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). Purposive sampling has been further criticised for including possible sampling bias whereby individuals may not represent the true nature of the phenomenon in a generalised sense (Lucas, 2014). However, this criticism is challenged by the nature of interpretivist research whereby generalisability in the positivist sense was not part of the aims of this study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Depth of exploration with a relevant participant was considered more valuable for the study.

The research site was jointly selected by the participant and the researcher based on criteria that ensured suitability for the interview. The site selected was a vacant psychologist's consulting room used after hours. It was of primary importance that the participant felt at ease during the interview. The physical space, with comfortable seating and a warm, inviting atmosphere, served to ensure a sense of safety in the discussion. The space needed to be neutral to decrease any power imbalances that might be present. Additionally, confidentiality on two levels was required. Firstly, the participant was able to access the site without needing to interact with others and secondly, discussions could not be overheard. The site was also easily accessible and in close proximity to the participant's home (Gagnon et al., 2015).

3.5. DATA GENERATION AND DOCUMENTATION

The use of semi-structured interviews was the primary means of collecting data for the study, with observational notes and a researcher journal contributing supporting evidence. Interviews were documented with an audio recording followed by a verbatim transcript. Written observation notes and my thoughts during the research process were documented in a reflective researcher journal.

3.5.1. Semi-structured interview

Data was collected in a semi-structured interview where open-ended questions allowed the participant to fluidly describe her experiences (refer to Appendix A for the questions used to guide the semi-structured interview and Appendix B for interview transcript.) Following this interview, a member checking interview was conducted as a means to confirm themes established in the first interview (see Appendix E for

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transcript of member checking discussion). Semi-structured interviews are often characterised by a relaxed, conversational style of interaction with high rapport (Yin, 2013). This style benefited me as the researcher, as the topic of sexting was at times sensitive and thus a trusting environment was necessary to ensure the comfort of the participant and to elicit a complete narrative. The interview schedule was established in such a way that opening questions were of a less sensitive nature in order to allow the development of trust between the participant and I. The data collection strategies, the manner in which the questions were framed and the use of a confirmatory member checking interview allowed the participant to express personal beliefs and experiences and explore her social and contextual realities, adding depth to the exploration (Seabi, 2012).

A weakness of the semi-structured interview may be social desirability bias, where the individual may express what they feel the researcher wants to hear rather than their true experiences (Yin, 2013). To counter this, I made use of open-ended questions to allow the process to be driven by the participant. Additionally, I explained to the participant that the intention of the research was to understand her experiences. It was thus necessary to ensure a respectful, non-judgemental stance when conducting the interviews. An additional criticism of the semi-structured interview is that the verbal format can pose language challenges (Creswell, 2014). In order to overcome this, a participant with well-developed self-expression abilities and shared a first language with myself was selected.

In order to accurately document the semi-structured interviews, audio recording and verbatim transcription were used, with the informed consent of the participant (Creswell, 2013). This meant that an audit trail was created to increase the trustworthiness of the data collected (Morse, 2015).

3.5.2. Observations

Observations are argued as being integrated into the interviewing process but none the less, when explicitly noted, they can contribute further richness to research data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Observational field notes recorded directly after the interview described the participant's responses, reactions, body language, tone of

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voice and facial expressions, and any other observations of interest to the verbal interview content. Observation notes thus contributed to social and contextual awareness on the topic (Creswell, 2014). Because observations were explicitly recorded, they further contributed to making an audit trail, as well as triangulation and crystallisation (Morse, 2015).

3.5.3. Reflective researcher journal

A written reflective researcher journal was kept as a way for me to document reflective notes, such as my personal perceptions, feelings and potential biases. The journal was also utilised to note preliminary ideas on themes and interpretations which emerged through the interviewing process. Earmarking pieces of novel information not before noted in the literature was also possible. Thus, the reflective researcher journal was used as a tool to assist in making meaning out of the data and again contributed to an audit trail (Creswell, 2014).

3.5.4. Audio recordings and verbatim transcription

In order to accurately document the semi-structured interviews, an audio recordings were utilised with the informed consent of the participant. Audio recordings have the benefit of preserving data which may then be accessed numerous times at a later stage (Creswell, 2014). The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and included other audio observations such as pauses or laughing, which added further depth of understanding to the emotions expressed by the participant (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). The process of transcription allowed for increased familiarity with the data and an understanding of the nuances of the discussion (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Having a written copy of the interviews allowed for ease of reference and for the coding of the data during the data analysis phase (Creswell, 2014).

3.6. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Figure 3.2 describes the steps taken during data analysis and interpretation.

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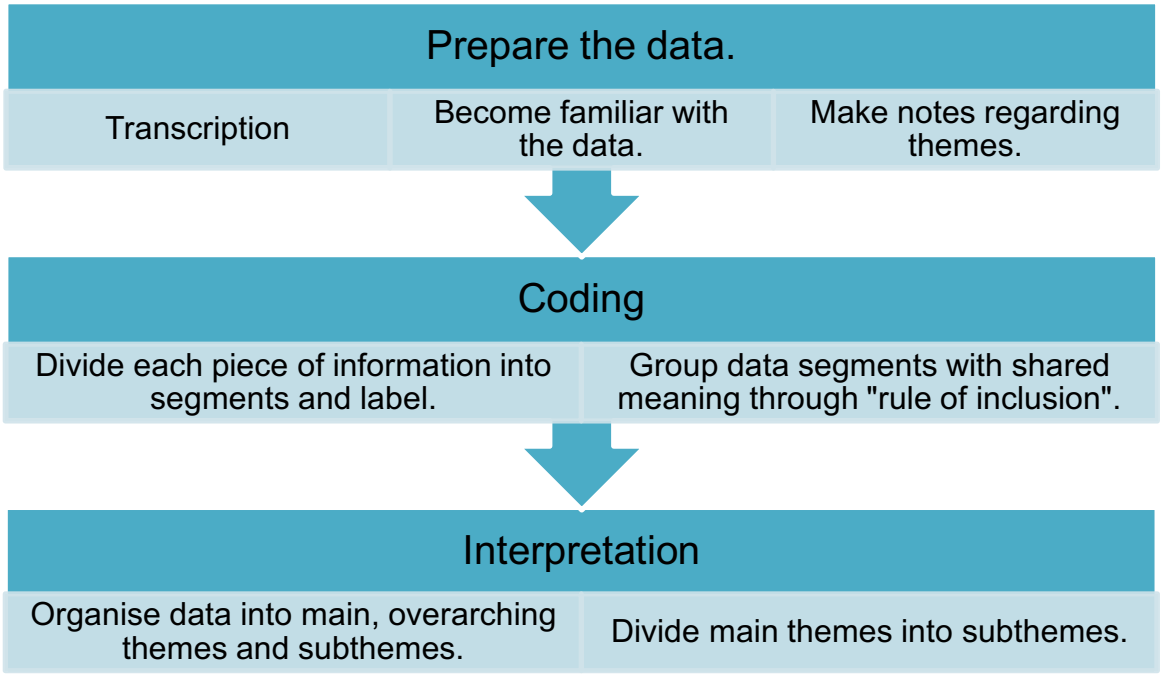

Figure 3.2. Schematic representation of the data analysis and interpretation process

The purpose of the data analysis process was to organise the information in such a way that meaningful, higher-order assumptions could be made (Saldaña, 2016). Thematic, inductive data analysis was conducted to make sense of the data, which entailed “going from the particular or the detailed data […] to the general codes and themes” (Creswell, 2012, p. 238). Inductive analysis is defined as being “data-driven” (Saldaña, 2016) which indicates that themes are created from the data, rather than being pre-determined.

The process of data analysis began by preparing the data by creating transcriptions and becoming familiar thereof. Thereafter, I read through the data numerous times to become further accustomed to the information. Notes were added to existing thoughts within the researcher diary regarding possible emerging themes. Coding entailed dividing each piece of information into segments and giving them a label (Creswell, 2012) (Please see Appendix B for examples of coding and Appendix C for the coding key). Segments of data which shared meaning were grouped into themes where a “rule of inclusion” described the cohesion between data segments (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 127). Main themes were identified within which subthemes were

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organised (Creswell, 2012). In some cases, data could be given more than one label and thus allocated to more than one category (Nieuwenhuis, 2013).

The benefit of this comprehensive method of analysis was that the data could be fully explored and nuances of the participant's experiences uncovered. "Holistic analysis" and "embedded analysis" acknowledged the complexity of the data and did not separate the case from the context (Creswell, 2013, p. 100). There was the potential for the researcher to introduce personal bias by identifying and attending to selected themes only. However, this method required that all of the data be coded, categorised and then re-checked, which reduced the possibility of selective attention. The method also increased trustworthiness by allowing for a member check and an audit trail to overcome the challenge of researcher bias (Creswell, 2014).

3.7. QUALITY CRITERIA

Trustworthiness is the qualitative equivalent of rigor (Morse, 2015). It can be broken down into five areas, namely: credibility, confirmability, transferability, dependability and authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Triangulation is a term used for including more than one source of data in order to increase trustworthiness of a qualitative study (Carter, Bryan-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe & Neville, 2014). It was necessary to include a range of quality assurance criteria within the study in order to ensure the data was valuable and meaningful. Additionally, any contributions to the topic of adolescent sexting could be justified by the methodology included. Triangulation of sources included a semi-structured interview, observations, a researcher journal and a confirmatory member checking interview. Further strategies such as a member check, an audit trail, accurate data recording and thick description were specifically incorporated to overcome possible barriers posed by methodological choices. Trustworthiness is therefore discussed below according the four areas of credibility, confirmability, transferability and dependability.

3.7.1. Credibility

Credibility relates to whether or not the information and themes gathered are an accurate and complete description of the phenomenon (Cope, 2014). A member check was useful in confirming whether themes were relevant and accurate to the

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participant's experiences. The participant was also able to add vital information which had not originally been included (Morse, 2015). Tentative themes that the researcher observed during the discussion were presented to the participant at the end of the interview for discussion. This assisted in guiding the researcher on the participant's perceived areas of importance. The use of sound recording and observation notes supported accuracy in detailing the interviews to ensure minimal meaning was lost (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013).

3.7.2. Confirmability

Confirmability aims to ensure that what the participants have shared is not the subjective interpretation of a single researcher and that similar findings would be established if another researcher analysed the same data (Cope, 2014). The constant comparative method of data analysis, as developed by Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007), creates an easily followed audit trail for another researcher to confirm themes. A reflective journal was used to track researcher subjectivity and was another means used to increase confirmability within the study (Nobel & Smith, 2015). Notes regarding possible themes were made after the interview and during analysis; these were in turn qualified by ensuring that the data, from the participant's point of view, matched the identified themes. A member check was carried out with the participant, and the data recorded and replayed to ensure that the themes were true to her meaning-making (Anney, 2014; Guest et al., 2013).

3.7.3. Dependability

Dependability is the third requirement for trustworthiness and includes consistency on the part of the researcher in using the selected methods (Yin, 2013). Documentation of the interviews by sound recording and observation during the interviews, and personal reflection on performance by the researcher, were used in order to ensure the methods were applied consistently (Morse, 2015).

3.7.4. Transferability

Transferability relates to the ability of the research to be applied to other contexts through connecting common attributes (Amankwaa, 2016). Removing context from qualitative research renders it meaningless and it is argued that context-neutral

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generalisations are not possible in qualitative research (Cope, 2014). Instead, the contextual factors associated with the research are emphasised by thick description (Anney, 2014). This is done in order to identify common themes between research contexts and therefore establish links. In using the qualitative method of in-depth interviewing, thick description was inevitable. This study also focused on documenting contextual factors, thus increasing the transferability of this study by ensuring contexts could be compared. The literature review conducted for this study revealed overall themes. These themes were either confirmed or differences were discussed, therefore comparing contexts of various studies and increasing transferability (Anney, 2014).

3.7.5. Authenticity

Authenticity may be considered the degree to which a study holds integrity and is considered a manner in which the study contributes to fairly representing the topic in the existing body of knowledge (Mertens, 2014). Authenticity has numerous components, many of which are most relevant to studies focusing on groups of individuals and communities. Those aspects of authenticity most relevant to the study included, to begin with, fairness, which evaluates all of the possible viewpoints and ensures each has an opportunity to be voiced (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010). By utilising a flexible, open-ended interview the participant was able to express all facets of her viewpoints. The study focused on a female adolescent's perspective due previous literature describing the presence of gender inequalities in sexting as a phenomenon. The study may therefore increase fairness in the body of knowledge by giving a voice to a possibly marginalised group and finding ways to intervene so that such inequalities may be resolved (Gubrium, Krause, & Jernigan, 2014). Additionally, ontological and educative authenticity aim for participants to become more aware of the complexity of the phenomenon they are involved in and to acknowledge the social context in which they find themselves (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010). This was included in the study through semi-structured questions exploring the social dynamics experienced by the adolescent when sexting. The depth of exploration allowed for the expression of the complexity and subtle nuances of the participant's experiences (Shannon & Humbacher, 2014).

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3.8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations were considered to be of the utmost importance in this study and measures were taken to ensure the study maintained high ethical standards. Firstly, ethical approval for the study was applied for and granted by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria on 1 September 2015 (ethics number: EP 15/07/01). A copy of the ethical clearance certificate is included (see page vi). Secondly South African laws were consulted and acknowledged when utilising the ethical guidelines of Annexure 12 of Regulation 717 of the Health Professions Act (Republic of South Africa, 56/1974). Thirdly, the American Psychological Association's general principles for ethics were also consulted (Allan, 2016).

3.8.1. Informed consent

Informed consent involves ensuring the participant understands what the study is about, what their participation means and their rights. Full transparency regarding the study meant that all aspects of the study were discussed, including the nature of the topic, the possibility that this may be a sensitive topic and the potential for experiencing difficult emotions (Willig, 2013). Further, the participant's rights to privacy, confidentiality and anonymity, and permission to record the research and anonymously disseminate the information gathered, were agreed upon (Republic of South Africa, 56/1974). The participant's roles and responsibilities as well as my own were explained. The participant consented, in writing, to engage in the study based on this information (Republic of South Africa, 56/1974). The process of informed consent was respectful of the participant's right to autonomy, or the ability to make her own decisions (Holloway & Galvin, 2017). As the participant was above the age of 18, parental consent was not necessary. A copy of the informed consent document can be found in Appendix D.

3.8.2. Voluntary participation

By having preliminary discussions with a group of participants where the sensitive nature of the topic was noted and allowing the participants to make contact thereafter in order to participate in the study, voluntary participation was thereby encouraged. During the informed consent process, the participant was reminded that her

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participation in the study was voluntary and that should she wish to withdraw from the study at any stage, no consequences would result and no further contact with the researcher would be necessary (Willig, 2013).

3.8.3. Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity within research ensures that the participants' identity will be protected and information gathered during the interviews will not be disclosed. Both of the above contributed to upholding the participant's right to privacy (Mertens, 2014). Confidentiality was attained by selecting a location for the interviews which ensured privacy and that the participant's discussion would not be audible to others. The audio recordings of the interviews were electronically stored on a secure site with two password controls required to access the information. Exceptions to the rule of confidentiality and disclosure were explained in terms of rare legal demands for the information and in order to protect the participant, or anyone else, from harm. Permission for disclosure will be requested from the participant in these instances. Only in extreme circumstances, and against my recommendation, will this information be released without the participant's consent (Republic of South Africa, 56/1974).

Anonymity was achieved by ensuring the participant's name and identifiable information were not disclosed during the documentation and reporting of the research and a pseudonym was used. Any identifying information was known solely by the researcher and stored securely (Holloway & Galvin, 2017).

3.8.4. Privacy

In addition to keeping information gathered through the research confidential, the participant's right to privacy within research involves "a right to control the disclosure of what they deem to personal or non-public information about themselves" (Punch, 2014, p. 47). In order to respect this, the participant was encouraged to share only information she was comfortable sharing and not to feel pressured to disclose any information at any point. She was informed that if any questions felt intrusive she should notify the researcher and questioning would be discontinued.

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3.8.5. Protection from harm

When conducting this research, the principle of non-maleficence was applied so that the participant was not exposed to harm of a psychological or physical nature (Allan, 2016). As discussed above, a preliminary introduction to the study meant the participant was aware of the potentially sensitive nature of the study and agreed to participate in light of this knowledge. It was explained that if the participant felt uncomfortable, she should express this and the process would be discontinued immediately without any consequences. The participant was made aware of external support services that would assist her in the event that she may become distressed. In order to enact the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution, the dignity and rights of the participant were respected at all times, by remaining empathetic and respectful of the participant, thus protecting her from unfair discrimination (Republic of South Africa, 56/1974).

3.8.6. Trust

A relationship of trust within research is important to ensure the participant feels comfortable within the process and thus is not harmed. A respectful, empathetic stance was used within the interviews and interview questions were developed in such a manner that rapport was built and so that the participant felt at ease (Punch, 2014). Deception was not necessary at any stage of the research process, which further facilitated trust. The participant completed a member-checking process and was thus consulted and felt part of the process (Morse, 2015). Overall, the research was conducted and reported in a truthful way. This includes acknowledging the study's limitations and the work of others by using an appropriate referencing style (Republic of South Africa, 56/1974).

3.9. ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

Within qualitative research, the researcher is considered the primary tool for gathering data. Reflexivity requires an acknowledgement of the researcher's role in all elements of the research (Anney, 2014). Thus it was necessary for me to acknowledge the part I played in the research. I enacted the following roles during the research process:

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- Be aware of, and attempt to overcome, my own personal biases in every phase of the research.
- Obtain ethical clearance for the study and ensure all ethical principles were adhered to at all times during the research process.
- Thoughtfully construct an interview schedule to answer the research questions and be informed by the literature explored.
- Compassionately interact with the participant to create a safe environment for her to express her experiences, in addition to using my skills as a researcher to elicit a contextually-bound narrative of the participant's experiences.
- Analyse the data to uncover meaning.
- Connect the findings to existing literature and establish areas of contribution, future research and recommendations.
- Strive for trustworthiness by including a member check, triangulation, an audit trail and reflexivity in the study.

3.10. CONCLUSION

In this chapter the paradigmatic, theoretical and methodological choices made within the study were justified according to the focus of the study, whereby the exploration of the personal reality of the participant, depth of enquiry and contextually situated knowledge were made possible. My role as the researcher was discussed in addition to measures taken to ensure quality. Discussions regarding ensuring adherence to ethical guidelines concluded the chapter.

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CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 3 the paradigmatic, theoretical and methodological facets of the study were discussed. This chapter presents the results of the study. Results were determined by coding and analysing data collected by means of a semi-structured interview, member checking interview, observations and a reflective researcher journal. Data analysis and organisation resulted in four themes: firstly, the participant's definition, conceptualisation and categorisation of sexting; secondly, the participant's perceptions of motivations for engaging in sexting; thirdly, the participant's beliefs concerning the consequences of sexting; and lastly, the participant's ideas on the protection of adolescents from negative consequences of sexting. Each of these themes are divided into subthemes and, in some cases, further detail is described in additional categories. As confirmation of themes samples of data in the form of direct quotes from the participant's narrative, observational notes in brackets, reflections from my researcher journal and comments from the member checking process are included. Following the presentation of the results the findings are described, where the data collected is compared to existing literature to establish confirmations and contradictions, identify silences and describe new contributions to the body of knowledge on sexting.

4.2. OVERVIEW OF RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Figure 4.1 orientates the reader to the overall structure of the data and how themes, subthemes and categories correspond with one another. Following this, a section is dedicated to each theme which includes a summarising table with details of subthemes and categories.

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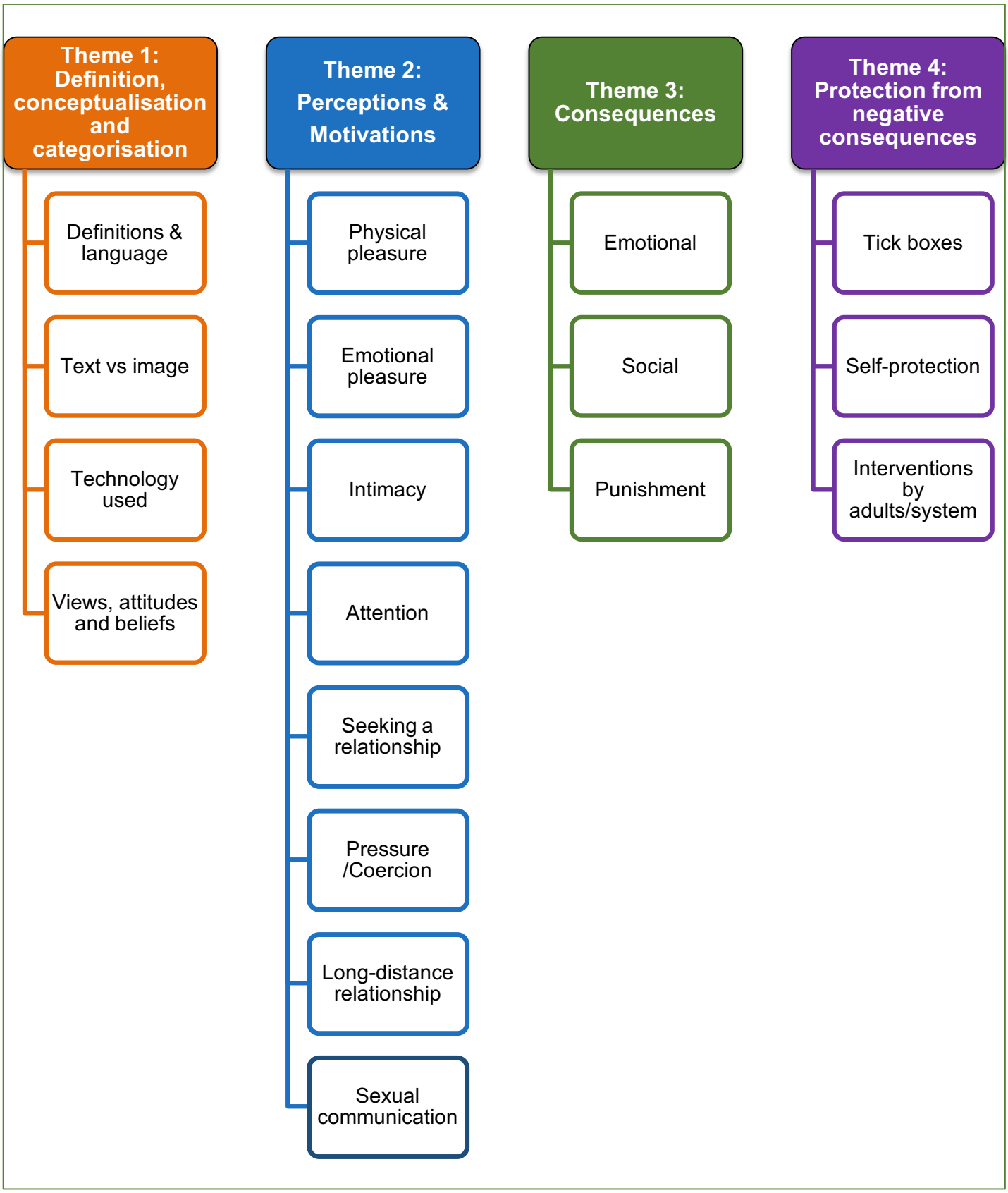

Figure 4.1. Schematic representation of the data structure

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4.3. THEME 1: THE PARTICIPANT'S DEFINITIONS, CONCEPTUALISING AND CATEGORISING OF SEXTING

Table 4.1. Schematic representation of Theme 1 and corresponding subthemes

Theme 1: The participant's definition, conceptualisation and categorisation of sexting			
Subthemes	**Inclusion criteria**	**Exclusion criteria**	**Literature control**
Subtheme 1.1: The participant's definition and vocabulary used to describe sexting	Data related to how the participant defines sexting and the vocabulary used	Any data irrelevant to the basic definition of sexting or the vocabulary used by the participant pertaining to sexting	Chapter 2 Section 2.2.1.
Subtheme 1.2: Text-based versus image-based sexts	Data describing the content, nature and uses of image-based and text-based sexts	Any reference not related to the specificity of the content, nature and uses of text-based or image-based sexts	Chapter 2 Section 2.2.1. New contributions
Subtheme 1.3: Technology used in sexting	Data related to the software and hardware used for sexting	Any reference not related to the specified use of technology in sexting	Chapter 2 Section 2.2.1 New contributions
Subtheme 1.4: Views, beliefs and attitudes regarding sexting	Data describing the participant's personal views, beliefs and attitudes about her own and other sexting behaviour	Any data irrelevant to the participant's personal views, beliefs and attitudes about her own and other sexting behaviour	Chapter 2 Section 2.5.2 and 2.5.3

4.3.1. Subtheme 1.1: The participant's definitions and language used pertaining to sexting

The first subtheme includes how the participant defined sexting and the language she used. Her definition of sexting included both sexual messages and sexual images and was expressed by her remark: "I understand it as you know like uhm (pause). Talking to each other like (pause) uhm … Like 'what would you do if I was …' like that kind of thing. And also sending photos and stuff".

The language the participant used when describing sexting seemed to differ from the terminology used in the literature. In commented in my researcher journal "*the participant was conscious of using the word 'sexting'. Her tone and tentative way of using the word seem to show that she has not used this word frequently and it is not part of her daily vocabulary*". When I asked for her definition of sexting she described

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the phenomenon indirectly, without using a specific term, by saying "***it*** is […]" [emphasis my own]. At one point she clarified a question I had asked by attempting to use the language I had presented to her by saying "sexting? That thing?" By using the word "thing" her comment seemed to indicate a dissonance between her conceptualisation of sexting and the language I used. Instead, the participant spoke of "funny photos" "sending photos of yourself", or sending "naked pictures". During the interview I acknowledged her language use and tried to incorporate this into my interview when I stated "it's good for me to use your words […] I just want to… use your understanding"

4.3.2. Subtheme 1.2: The content, nature and uses of text or image-based sexts

Subtheme 2 included a more detailed discussion of text-based and image-based sexts and the associated uses of each. When differentiating between the two types of sext, she described sex messages as "foreplay" where a sexual conversation would be subsequent to sending images. She commented: "it wouldn't always turn into like us … like … having a conversation like 'oh let me take your pants off'. Like that kind of thing. It would just be photos. Like that's sexting as well when you just send like a … like a … even like a bikini or whatever. That's still sexting".

Sexual text messages seemed to include written descriptions and propositions of physical sexual encounters. This supposes that text-based messages were more sexually charged than some instances of sending image-based sexts. My surprise at these results was represented in my reflective researcher journal, where I noted "*I didn't think text-based sexts would be very common because of the visual nature of cell phone communication. It was interesting to me to see that these messages were used essentially as phone sex and were highly explicit*".

When speaking about image-based sexts she noted: "I would just send him like cute … like 'oh look I like how my body looks today' or whatever" or "I would say 'I got a new bra' or whatever and he would be like 'oh show me' and I'd send a photo." The former shows how sexting could be part of daily interaction and was not necessarily a sexual encounter. Her comments also described the varying nature of sexting content within photographs and the variability in explicitness. Later, she clarified the type of

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images sent could be "in a bikini, like pushing boobs together, the one was like in a bra and underwear. But my friend she was topless." Videos were also included in her defining sexting when she stated "the one was a video actually".

4.3.3. Subtheme 1.3: Technology used in sexting

The next subtheme explores the various technology and platforms involved in sexting as raised by the participant. It was clear that a wide range of technology and social media platforms were a part of the participant's life and sexting behaviour when she mentioned three types of cell phone instant messaging communication platforms, namely; Mxit, BBM and WhatsApp. She also described Skype as a computer-based program which was used more infrequently.

When speaking about Mxit, the participant showed significant insight into the possible evolution of sexting in South Africa due to the fact that the cell phone-based instant messaging platform was developed in South Africa. She noted: "with Mxit I remember they would have these like really like sexual groups and you could like message people and then you can like contacts and then people would sext, and I feel like maybe that's how sexting is quite rife in South Africa because of those groups and then people would send photos and they became very like […] people were cool doing that. And then maybe it just carried on to like BBM and WhatsApp now". Her comment alludes to constant changes in communication technology and thus the uptake of instant messaging platforms such as BBM and WhatsApp by adolescent populations to explore sexuality. It is necessary to note that sexting is therefore not stagnant or bound to specific technology. Possible future interventions need to be cognisant of this factor.

Hardware components of the technology used also seemed to be relevant to the participant's experiences of sexting. She described the image quality of a camera by saying "it was a Blackberry so there wasn't very good megapixels or whatever". In this instance, the quality of the image played a role in identifying the individual in the image. Image quality was thus connected to the reputational consequences for the individual described and thus highly significant to sexting. Further, the use of a high-end, professional camera for the purpose of creating high-quality images was also

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noted by the participant, when she recalled an incident: "this one girl who would like literally take a DSLR camera and put on the high heels and like take photos like that". In this instance the purposeful use of high-end technology was perceived by the participant as being tied to the objective of the sender creating the images. In this case she believed the sender was trying to captivate male attention and show herself as being sexually alluring. As such the image quality made the images more attractive. The deliberate use of quality technology seemed to attract a negative reputation for the described individual.

4.3.4. Subtheme 1.4: The participant's personal and perceptions of peer's views, beliefs and attitudes concerning sexting

The participant regularly stated that she did not have negative experiences with sexting, which is justified by her statements that "I don't think sexting is bad" and "I felt very chilled about it". It appeared that she perceived others to feel the same way with her comment "people they like it, people like sexting". Despite her own positive experiences with sexting she was keenly aware of the negative consequences, which emerged as a strong theme in the interview. Her negative perception of the sexting behaviour of others was evident in her comments "you now making a bad choice" and "that's a bad idea". In my reflective researcher journal, I said: "*It seems like the participant first believed her own sexting to be unproblematic and although she seemed to maintain this belief, the discussion around the negative experiences of others seemed to show her reconsidering the risks associated with her own behaviour, although to a seemingly minor degree*". Thus, there seemed to be discord between the participant's beliefs regarding her own sexting behaviour and those pertaining to the behaviour of others.

She seemed to believe sexting was common, as she said "a lot of people do it". She believed sexting was to be expected from adolescents and was thus "a normal thing". This sentiment was further highlighted by her stating: "that's what people do. Like that's what kids do these days". In the member checking phase, the participant commented "*when we spoke I really realised like how much it is happening*". Sexting was seen as requiring little effort where she noted: "like sexting, like can easily happen". She followed up this statement by noting that the rapid and effortless nature

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of sexting could mean that parents were left entirely unaware of their child's participation thereof. She remarked: "I mean you will probably just be watching TV and your child is in their room sexting. Like it is so easily done".

4.4. THEME 2: THE PARTICIPANT'S PERCEPTIONS OF MOTIVATIONS FOR ENGAGING IN SEXTING

One of the prominent themes that emerged was the reasons for sexting. At times the participant's reasons differed from those of others whom she described. Her views on the experiences of others are, however, discussed throughout. It is important to note that the participant herself experienced numerous motivations for sexting and it is then assumed that other adolescents would have similar experiences. It is therefore imperative to acknowledge that a wide variety of motivations apply and various combinations of motivations may be relevant for one individual and may not necessarily apply to each adolescent.

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Table 4.2. Schematic representation of Theme 2 and corresponding subthemes

Theme 2: The participant's perceptions of motivations for engaging in sexting			
Subthemes	**Inclusion criteria**	**Exclusion criteria**	**Literature control**
Subtheme 2.1: Physical pleasure	Data related to physical and sexual pleasure received from sexting.	Any data not referring to the sexual pleasure associated with sexting	Chapter 2, section 2.5.2.
Subtheme 2.2: Emotional pleasure and positive emotional experiences	Data describing emotional pleasure and positive emotional experiences derived from sexting	Any reference to positive emotional experiences with sexting except for feelings of intimacy	Chapter 2, section 2.5.2.
Subtheme 2.3: Intimacy	Descriptions of sexting being linked to intimacy and trust	Any reference which does not refer to sexting in relation to intimacy and trust	Chapter 2, section 2.5.2.
Subtheme 2.4: Getting attention	Data describing the use of sexting in order to get or maintain attention	Any data not applicable to using sexting in order to get attention	Chapter 2, section 2.5.2.
Subtheme 2.5: Seeking or maintaining a relationship	Data describing how an individual may be motivated to engage in sexting due to seeking or maintaining a romantic relationship	Any data irrelevant to the motives of using sexting to seek or maintain a romantic relationship	Chapter 2, section 2.5.2.
Subtheme 2.6: Feeling pressured or coerced into sexting	Data describing how an individual may be motivated to engage in sexting due to being coerced or pressured	Any data irrelevant to the description of being pressured or coerced into sexting	Chapter 2, section 2.5.3
Subtheme 2.7: Long-distance relationship	Data describing how sexting may be motivated by a long-distance relationship	Any data which does not describe a long-distance relationship and the impact this may have on motivations to sext	Chapter 2, section 2.5.2
Subtheme 2.8: Sexual communication	This subtheme describes how an individual may use sexting to express their sexual needs.	Any data which does not refer to using sexting as communication of sexual needs	Chapter 2, section 2.5.2 New contributions

4.4.1. Subtheme 2.1: Physical pleasure

The participant said that a motivating factor for adolescents engaging in sexting could be to experience sexual pleasure. In her own experience, it did seem as though her boyfriend found the images pleasurable, in light of her comment: "it was more for him

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because […] I wouldn't have used the photos and like played with myself […] but like but I'm sure he did. (laughs)". It seems as though the participant believed that for her boyfriend, sexting was related to masturbation, but this did not play a role in her own experiences of sexting. It was further emphasised that her involvement in sexting was for his pleasure rather than her own, as depicted in her statement of "I was just playing along for [him] to be honest. It's not really my vibe. Like I liked it when he sent me photos and stuff but I wouldn't use it for 'purposes'". I commented on this in my researcher journal: "*the participant acknowledges that sexting is for her partner's physical pleasure and seems to be motivated by increasing his sexual pleasure despite not being sexually aroused herself*". The participant also alluded to her beliefs that males in general found sexting sexually pleasurable, while this motivation was less common for females.

4.4.2. Subtheme 2.2: Emotional pleasure and positive emotional experiences

Instead of finding sexting sexually pleasurable she noted that for her, "it was just like emotionally nice" and "it's just sweet to do. Like it's like … I dunno I just think its … I thought it was cute". She also noted that "it was still fun, like I still felt naughty". Additionally, sexting allowed for the positive emotional experience associated with the expression of her self-confidence. When feeling attractive or positive about her body she would send images to express this. She described instances where "[she] like[d] how [her] body look[ed]" which was a catalyst for her sending images. The contrary was also true, where she avoided sexting when she didn't feel attractive. The above shows that the participant may not have felt sexual pleasure from sexting but the act was enjoyable for her because it created excitement and emotional connection.

4.4.3. Subtheme 2.3: Increasing intimacy in a relationship

Linked to feeling emotional pleasure from sexting were motivations for sexting relating to increasing emotional connections between romantic partners such as within her own relationship. Due to the long-distance nature of the relationship she felt "he was far away but we still could have that intimacy". She described the situation by saying "ooh this is cute! I get to see you naked still (laughs)". She felt the trust between the two of them was emphasised by sexting, as in her statement: "the

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relationship … it just like showed that we had like another level, like we … because that's a bit awkward, I was always like, sexting is so awkward but we could do it so freely". She said: "I feel like that also made him feel better because he like, knew I was able to like … I was trusting him that much like with those things of me". This statement further emphasises her feeling the bond to her boyfriend was strengthened while sexting and the act of sharing her nudity with him was intimate and special. During the member checking phase this remained an important for the participant where she reflected "*sexting was fun because of the type of relationship I was in*".

4.4.4. Subtheme 2.4: Getting attention

Using sexting as a means to gain attention was one of the factors the participant described as motivating individuals to engage in the behaviour. Although not relevant to the participant's motivations for sexting, she noted two ways in which seeking attention played a role in the sexting behaviour of others. Throughout her descriptions the participant described females sending images to attract male attention and at no point described males using sexting to get attention, indicating differences in the motives each gender may have for sexting. I described this in my researcher journal by saying: "*females seem to be typecast as looking to males for attention through the use of the sexualised medium of cell phone communication*". The two types of attention-seeking motivators for sexting included the active seeking of attention and attempts to retain the attention of male suitors. Each type of attention-seeking behaviour seemed to be judged or evaluated differently and according to differing levels of severity.

In the first instance of seeking attention, the participant described her experience with an older female adolescent who was seeking recognition from, and interaction with, males. Her perception of this female was that she was distributing unsolicited sexual images, carefully constructed for the explicit purpose of attracting attention. She described the actions of the female by saying: "I know this one girl who would like literally take a DSLR camera and put on the high heels and like take photos like […] like literally photographic photos, like she was trying to be photogenic and stuff […] taking time to make these photos look good and then send them to these guys". The participant viewed this behaviour in a highly negative light, remarking: "you now

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making a bad choice, you just being an idiot". Further, being older, she felt this female "had to have known what she was doing" and "should also realise". Thus, she seemed to feel that this female, because of her age, was taking unnecessary risks and as a result, her behaviour could not be excused.

The second type of attention-seeking described by the participant was present with younger female adolescents of around 13 or 14 years of age who partook in sexting due to a desire to maintain romantic contact with a, generally older, male. Thus, the behaviour seemed to create a type of indirect pressure to engage in sexting. She described this type of situation by saying "for girls, like the attention is nice, so when a guy asks for photos and he is giving you attention, you're like 'okay well I want to keep the attention so I'm gonna send him the photos". She further alluded to the pressure females felt by saying: "she obviously likes the attention from this guy and when he asked her for photos, she obviously felt pressure to do it". During member checking she said "*girls want to be in a relationship and that's where sexting comes in*". In these circumstances, the behaviour was viewed by the participant as "being silly" where the adolescents' age and feeling pressurised seemed to frame the behaviour as less severe.

4.4.5. Subtheme 2.5: Seeking a relationship

As suggested in the above observations, females seem to engage in sexting due to seeking a relationship with the male requesting the images. This sentiment is represented in the following excerpt from the interview: "maybe you sending them these photos is gonna make him want to be like … be in a … a relationship with you (questioning tone)". However, she seemed to believe that males exploited females' desire to be in a relationship in order to get images when she said: "I'm not just being rude to guys, but like young boys especially, they just want the photos, they don't want anything with you".

4.4.6. Subtheme 2.6: Feeling pressured or coerced into sexting

The above discussion also notes the pressures females felt pertaining to sexting, which then formed a reason for engaging in sexting. The participant clarified that it was females who experienced pressure from males, as it seemed to be only males

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who requested images. She justified this in her comment: "it's more the guy, like it's more … girls … I don't think girls would like go asking for photos to be honest. From my point of view and of the situations I've heard, it is always the guy. It is always the guy that would be like 'Oh, please send me a photo', or like 'don't you want to send me a photo?' Like it is always the guy who is the catalyst whatever".

Participating in sexting due to feeling pressurised is a theme for both the participant and others whom she encountered. When contemplating the experiences of others, she stated: "I think some people do feel pressured to um (pause) sext definitely". She emphasised that the influence of older males on younger females was pertinent when she noted: "especially when it's a young girl and an older dude and he is talking to you if he wants a photo from you, you will do it". She reiterated this idea by saying "with that other girl ... She was so young. She was just like talking to an older guy, I feel like she was just pressured". This type of comment was further present in the member checking phase where she said "*its really sad when young girls sext because older guys pressure them*". An excerpt from my researcher journal showed my own consideration of this theme: "*the participant mentions numerous times that older males seem to be utilising unequal power relations in order to get sexts from younger females*".

Ways in which males exert pressure on girls to send sexts included calling their dedication to the relationship into question. The participant mentioned: "you always hear those stories with the guys are like 'but you don't really like me then' or guys being like 'oh, if you do it, you love me'". She described a method by which males manipulated females to send images: "they will talk to you in a certain way. Like I feel like guys like coax ... is that the word? Like coax you into … like they are like 'hey sweetie, how you doing?' […] and that makes it easier for the girl to do it because they're like 'oh okay … there's something happening here.' And then they will do it. Then they're screwed". Again, the threat of losing a relationship seemed to be a prominent topic. The manner in which males extracted images from females seemed to be experienced by the participant as coercive and underhanded, especially if one refers to her comment of "guys are wolves". My researcher journal reflected: "*the participant seemed to feel a sense of irritation and slight disgust at the covert manner*

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in which males get and share sexts from females, especially when considering unequal power relationships".

In her own experience of pressure when sexting, she spoke of her boyfriend requesting an image where she told him: "my body doesn't feel good. So I'm not gonna send you a photo". Feeling pressured was manifested in her saying: "that's the only time I was like, ag I feel like I should but … I don't want to do it". She also seemed to feel guilty about not sending images due to his feeling "a bit insecure … like 'why is she all of a sudden not wanting to send me a photo?'". This guilt exerted further pressure on her: "see, now he feels like shit because I'm not doing it so like maybe I should".

4.4.7. Subtheme 2.7: Long-distance relationship

Her unique circumstance of being in a temporary long-distance relationship with her boyfriend while he was on a school exchange programme seemed to be the participant's main reason for sexting. When first asked about her experiences of sexting she noted: "I have participated in it, (laughs) my boyfriend left to Switzerland for two months once. So …". She described being "very against" sexting but the unique situation she found herself in seemed to reframe the behaviour for her. However, she noted that sexting happens "only when you're in Switzerland", perhaps indicating that the behaviour was only acceptable to her because of the long-distance relationship. Sexting seemed to be a way in which to ensure the sexual bond between the two was maintained, as demonstrated by her statement: "I would just do it … ja kind of to keep it alive".

It appeared to have occurred to the participant that sexting may have been a way for her to try and prevent her boyfriend from establishing sexual connections with others. She voiced her concerns: "obviously because he is away there's always those like worries, what if he is with someone else […] even though it's different because it's my photos and some other girl's actual thing (laughs and looks down) I was still … like … with him." However, she noted that despite the above concerns she "didn't do it so he wouldn't hook up with anyone else". Instead she felt that she was "still giving him so like you know … me", or remaining sexually connected with him. The former

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statements may point to a conflict experienced by the participant where her concerns regarding the security of her relationship over a long distance were matched with positive feelings of connection and enjoyment as a result of sexting.

4.4.8. Subtheme 2.8: Sexual communication

Sexting was considered useful by the participant for expressing sexual needs which may otherwise have been difficult to communicate in person. She stated "it could be a way of exploring because you will finally say something you were too shy to actually act on". Sexting seemed to be a platform where an individual could test a partner's receptiveness to sexual acts, and proved to be such a platform. Furthermore, text-based sexting could be a way to discuss new ideas regarding sexual physicality in a more comfortable format, which may then be the impetus for trying those acts physically. The above is evident in her comment: "and then you will know by her or his reply if they are keen on what you just said" and "then you try it out".

4.5. THEME 3: THE PARTICIPANT'S BELIEFS CONCERNING THE CONSEQUENCES OF SEXTING

The third theme identified concerns about the consequences of sexting. The participant identified some consequences which she had experienced vicariously in her peer group; but it is important to note that the participant herself did not experience many consequences personally. The participant was, however, able to give insight into the social consequences of sexting by describing her role as a peer-group member. In this way the participant could describe her experiences of being on the "delivering end" of social consequences.

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Table 4.3. *Schematic representation of Theme 3 and corresponding subthemes*

Theme 3: The participant's beliefs concerning the consequences of sexting			
Subthemes	**Inclusion criteria**	**Exclusion criteria**	**Literature control**
Subtheme 3.1: Emotional consequences	Data related to negative emotional experiences as a result of sexting	Any data not referring to negative emotional experiences related to sexting	Chapter 2 section 2.3.2. New contributions
Subtheme 3.2: Social consequences	Descriptions of negative social consequences of sexting in the following three categories	Any reference to material other than social consequences of sexting	Chapter 2 section 2.3.1.
Category 3.2.1: Negative judgements of sexting behaviour	Data relating to negative judgements peers may have of an individual's sexting behaviour	Any data that does not reference negative judgements of sexting behaviour	Chapter 2 section 2.3.1.
Category 3.2.2: Labelling, victimising and current and future reputational damage	Descriptions of ways in which peers responded to sexting behaviour of others, including labelling, victimisation and current and future reputational damage	Any data not relevant to peer responses to the sexting behaviour of others including labelling, victimisation and current and future reputational damage	Chapter 2 section 2.4.1
Category 3.2.3: Four types of exposure	Descriptions of ways in which the images of others are exposed outside of their intended audience	Any reference which does not include the exposure of images outside of their intended audience	Chapter 2 section 2.3.1 New contributions
Subtheme 3.3: Punishment	Descriptions of punishment by parents, teachers, schools or legal systems	Any data which does not refer to punishment of sexting behaviour by parents, teachers, schools or legal systems	Chapter 2 section 2.3.4 and 2.5.3

4.5.1. Subtheme 3.1: Emotional consequences of sexting

Emotional consequences were pervasive in the participant's narrative. Such an example was present in the participant noting how an individual might experience "a break to her like, confidence and ego", which indicates that sexting may have negative effects on an individual's view of themselves. Of specific intensity in the discussion was the notion that others knowing about one's sexting, or indeed others viewing sexual images of oneself without one's consent, would be shameful and

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embarrassing. The emotional consequences of sexting were viewed as being more intense for a younger female. She could identify with the shame of others seeing one's genitals by saying: "that poor girl she hadn't even entered high school yet and we've seen her vagina". Her comments indicated sympathy for individuals who had experienced exposure and the resulting embarrassment and was reiterated by her stating: "it's just so sad, shame, like she made a bad choice and now everyone has seen her naked". My observation notes mirrored the participant's concern regarding the negative emotional consequences of sexting: "*when speaking about the negative experiences of a younger female the participant would often sigh, shake her head, frown and make use of her tone of voice to express her sadness and anger regarding the situation*".

In her own situation she described the potential of having individuals, such as acquaintances, parents or teachers, knowing (or hearing) about her sexting as "awkward". The violation of her privacy appeared to be most upsetting for her if others were to view the images directly. Hearsay of her sexting behaviour did not seem to bother her. However, when compared to the incident with a younger female, she seemed to feel that because she was older and in a committed, long-term relationship, others would find the behaviour more understandable. The social consequences, and emotional impact to herself, would thus be less. She felt her behaviour was justifiable to herself and others, which she demonstrated in her remark: "I don't actually care what you think because I've been with him for so long". However, directly thereafter she admitted: "I would have cared I guess". It seems that through the process of more closely considering the potential consequences of her nude images being exposed, she became aware that this would be distressing and unpleasant regardless or her age or long-term relationship. This was also represented in my reflective notes post-interview, where I commented: "*the participant was able to use the interview to reflect on her own sexting behaviour*".

She voiced concern about the potential for sexting to be related to suicide where individuals might not be able to endure the emotional fallout of sexting, including the embarrassment of being publically exposed. She wondered if these individuals, due to not having the capacity or resources to handle the situation, might wish to end their

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lives. She reflected her personal identification with feeling emotionally overwhelmed when dealing with peer denigration from an incident unrelated to sexting, where she describes her own contemplation of suicide as a means of coping. She said: "I've had like times where I actually don't want to deal with it. Like maybe I should just kill myself. I don't want to deal with it. I don't have to feel it. Like I don't have to get through this crap".

4.5.2. Subtheme 3.2: Social consequences of sexting

4.5.2.1. Category 3.2.1: Negative judgements of sexting behaviour

When finding out about an incident involving sexting, dismay and severe judgement was evoked in the participant and her peers. She shared a comment made by her friends when they heard about an individual's engagement in sexting by saying: "'what the fuck?' This girl … Why would you do that? That's so bad". Her own initial reaction to finding out about the incident was described: "I was like 'this crazy bitch like … why would you do that?'". However, the participant also reflected on the profoundly negative impact her judgement, and the judgement of others, might have on those who sexted, and noted: "it is not good to judge". Subsequently she seemed to have changed her views on the described situation: "about a year or two after that I actually met her and I was really nice to her. Like I didn't like judge her in any way". It should be noted that the judgement shown towards the sexting behaviour of others was in stark contrast to how the behaviour seemed quite acceptable for herself and within her friendship circle, as discussed below.

4.5.2.2. Category 3.2.2 Labelling, victimising and current and future reputational damage

Peers responded to those who had engaged in sexting by labelling and victimising them. As a result, reputational damage occurred. She noted: "the problem is people will see it as 'what a slut'" and "you just look bad". Furthermore, she described how an individual would get "such a bloody bad rep[utation]". As in the above statement, it was common for females who engaged in sexting to be labelled "sluts" and thus be defined as being sexually promiscuous. The disparity between how females and males were labelled was evident in her comment that "this is the issue with society, is like girls get labelled sluts, boys get labelled like uhm … players …, not players but

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like 'oh they're so cool', you know … they get all the girls, whereas with girls it's like 'oh they are trash'".

The reputational damage of being labelled as sexually promiscuous led to social victimisation. The participant described how peers responded to sexters by attempting to seek out, identify or, in some cases, victimise the individual who had engaged in sexting. She commented: "because we had seen all these photos of her and we wanted to know which girl she was". She spoke of an incident where the anonymity of cell phone messaging allowed an individual to bully another individual virtually. She described how peers were not likely to say anything directly, in person, or "they would not have necessarily have been rude". Instead, it was common for rumours to be created and the person would have been discussed among peers surreptitiously. Thus, the spreading of rumours regarding an individual's sexting behaviour was common. She described this by saying: "So that's how people react, like they hear your name and then they remember that story, and they tell everyone that story". From her observations, it seems that victimisation could be fostered by the indirect nature of cell phone communication and that rumours and covert discussions about an individual were more common than face-to-face confrontation.

The consequences of reputational damage seemed not to be limited to the high school years where the individual was conscious of the permanence of the images and the associated long-term reputational damage. She described the potential harm sexualised images may do to future career prospects by her comment: "this girl is like an aspiring model and she's a bit of like a fitness, like a bit famous on Instagram for being like hot and like fitness and whatever, and is like if they still have that photo of her boobs and her face, that's really awkward. Like that's negative for her because what if she were to become famous or something and people are like 'well look at this photo of her I have back in the day', like that's the negatives. You know, your past can come back and bite you".

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4.5.2.3. Category 3.2.3 Four types of exposure and exposure within the participant's group of friends

A primary concern raised by the participant was the exposure of the images outside of the intended audience. How adolescent males shared images received from females within their male peer group was a strong theme within the interview. The participant did not mention forwarding sexual images between cell phones, as was common in the literature. Females were described as being less likely to share images "it's definitely is more the guy […] girls are more like … not shy about it, but ja they are more likely to keep it to themselves […]. But I think most of the time the girls wouldn't even say anything, you know what I mean? So ja, I feel like the guy's photo wouldn't really get out there".

Exposure of an individual's private images or descriptions of their sexting behaviour could happen in four different ways. The first manner of exposing images was allowing a peer to directly view the image from the cell phone of the originally intended recipient. She relayed that this type of sharing happened between males: "because guys do. They will show it in the bathroom. They will show all those photos". The identification of the specific location where image sharing took place was important to note as a point of intervention within the school context. She described an addition incident where a male peer shared images of a much younger girl with the participant and her female friends. She said "he just showed us. We didn't ask him. He was like 'check this girl sending me these photos'. Like it's a bad thing". This indicates that not only did he share the images without the sender's consent, but that he shared the images with individuals who were not willing participants in viewing the images.

The second manner in which images were seen by those who were not the intended recipient was public viewings, or "slideshows". The participant described one experience by saying: "this is like a thing, like with boys. They literally put a slideshow on the TV and they like went through these photos of these girls […] They literally just put it on, they thought it was so funny, and I was like […] 'that's ridiculous'. They just got so many photos from girls." Again the lack of willingness of those being shown the images was evident. She further detailed: "it was two brothers and one of their

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friends and then there was me and my friend, so it was five of us, and they just put it on and they were like laughing like 'oh look at all these photos we get sent' like they literally had a memory stick of these photos of these girls (serious tone, frowning)". The manner in which the images was shared seemed to indicate that the act of sharing was amusing to the males and further, an element of shaming those who had sent images seemed to be present. It also seemed as though this type of group sharing was common, according to the following comment: "I mean if they were just freely showing us, they were probably freely showing a bunch of other people too and it's like … (click of tongue) sad." My observational notes commented on her tone of voice regarding these instances as being irritated and angry and I noted the click of her tongue and frowning, all of which seemed to show her disapproval of the actions of her male peers.

The third way in which images may be seen by unintended recipients seemed to be accidental. One example which the participant was concerned about was if her boyfriend's "phone [was] stolen and then there's a bunch of bloody photos of [me] on the interweb". She therefore showed awareness that despite the trusting relationship she had with her boyfriend, she could still face exposure without him being involved in distributing the images. Further accidental access to private images occurred due to the common practice of friends "going through phone[s]". By noting that friends would commonly look at the general pictures stored on a phone, she described that amongst the other images, friends may encounter her sexts. She explained this by saying: "if my friend is on my phone I'd be like … just be careful *Lucas is away, right. (laughs)". Another example was her saying: "I had a friend as well. The one time, we plugged her phone into the TV and then she was like 'oh shit wait guys, I don't know if that's okay'. Like just in case the naked … (laughs)".

The fourth way in which the sexting behaviour of others could be exposed occurred through hearsay. Exposure thus took place regardless of whether images were seen by others. In these cases, rumours about the possibility of images seemed to be as damaging to the individual's reputation as would the images being directly viewed. This was illustrated in her narrative: "if someone was talking about her they might have been like 'oh I heard there are these naked photos of her.' So that's how people

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react, like they hear your name and then they remember that story, and they tell everyone that story". She said "there's no proof […] I think there are some people would just like take the person's word for it […] especially if you're close to the person who's telling you, you're gonna just believe them, you not gonna think they're lying to you for any reason." Her own judgement of a female who had allegedly engaged in sexting was formulated by her "hear[ing] about her sending photos". Through this limited information she described this individual by saying: "it's a bit easy", demonstrating a view of the female as being sexually promiscuous despite a lack of proof of the behaviour being judged.

The participant's experiences of image exposure within her group of friends was described in significantly different terms to the above instances. I reflected on this in my researcher diary: "*the safety of the relationship with her friends allowed for a vastly different peer context, where sexting, and even the sharing of friends' sexts, was seen as acceptable*". My observations noted that the participant frequently laughed when talking about exposure within her group of friends, possibly indicating that she viewed these instances as being funny, rather than of serious concern. Viewing each other's private images, as a nonchalant event, and openly knowing about the sexting behaviour of her friends was evident in her body language and comment of "I know a lot of my friends participated in it (shrug of shoulders)". She described conversations about sexting with her friends by saying: "with friends and stuff I was like chilled. Like I made a joke about it and I was open about it". The jovial nature of these interactions, was represented in her remark: "like the one time my friend's boyfriend went also away for like three months and they were like Skyping and she flippin screen shotted when he'd like pulled his penis out. And she showed me the photo! (laughs, excited tone of voice)". There seemed to be no judgement of her friend's behaviour in the manner in which she shared her experiences. This was in stark contrast to how she found the behaviour unacceptable in others. Openness regarding sexting was exclusive to her friends and she felt uncomfortable when considering the possibility of teachers or acquaintances seeing her sexts. Furthermore, in a serious tone she stated: "I wouldn't want my family going through my phone".

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In the above subtheme, the influence of social dynamics seems prominent. With her friends, the participant seemed to be comfortable with her private images being seen. Numerous descriptions of exposure of images were present. The participant's narrative indicated she did not approve of images being shared between males and was especially dismayed by the public display of images, especially when those exposed to the shared images were not voluntary participants. She described the latter as "terrible" and "you don't do that, that's so wrong, it's ridiculous. You shouldn't do that".

4.5.3. Subtheme 3.3: Punishment

The participant explained the types of punishment, implemented by authority figures such as the law, the school and teachers and parents, which individuals might experience as a result of sexting. The participant felt that all of the punishment measures pertaining to sexting behaviour were ineffective and irrelevant. My reflective journal noted: "*protective mechanisms need to be put in place for adolescents as the current actions of adults seem to be perceived by the participant as fruitless*". However, the participant's ideas on how these protective figures could be effective in their support of adolescents were innovative and insightful and are discussed in Subtheme 4.

The participant described how the school and parents searched and confiscated cell phones of adolescents in response to sexting. Monitoring of cell phones by parents was a common tool used to prevent sexting. Punishment specific to the school, as noted by the participant, included disciplinary hearings and notifying parents. She also stated that the school may have a "flippin meeting in the hall about it" where the principal would scold the learners about the inappropriate nature of their behaviour. She described how teachers would say that "sexting is wrong, like completely wrong". Her tone and the content of her comments demonstrated her feeling that the above interventions were unsuccessful in managing the behaviour.

Additionally, the participant cited a case where legal action was taken by the families of two adolescents who had engaged in sexting. Charges of creating and distributing child pornography and defamation of character were cited by the participant. She

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viewed this situation in a serious light and showed concern for all involved. She also expressed relief that she and her boyfriend were above the age of 18 when they sent sexual images between themselves. She stated that she had not known about the legal consequences of sexting during high-school, but that having this knowledge may be effective in deterring individuals from sexting. During member checking the participant conveyed that "*the legal stuff is pretty serious*".

4.6. THEME 4: THE PARTICIPANT'S IDEAS ON THE PROTECTION OF ADOLESCENTS FROM NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF SEXTING

The participant described ways in which numerous individuals could contribute to assisting adolescents to avoid the harm associated with sexting. Her comments during member checking reflected her concerns where she noted "*something needs to be done for them*". These included suggestions for individuals and interventions which incorporated protective peers and adults. Within my researcher journal I noted: "*the participant is keenly aware of how peers can punish one another and due to this empathy seems to want to be able to protect others*". Her empathy could possibly be seen as the driving force behind the suggestions she describes, as presented in Table 4.4.

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Table 4.4. *Schematic representation of Theme 4 and corresponding subthemes*

Theme 4: The participant's ideas on protection of adolescents from negative consequences of sexting			
Subthemes	**Inclusion criteria**	**Exclusion criteria**	**Literature control**
Subtheme 4.1: "Tick boxes"	Data related to criteria the participant believes need to be met to avoid negative consequences of sexting, as demarcated by the categories below	Any data not referring to criteria to be met before engaging in sexting in order to avoid negative consequences	New contributions
Category 4.1.1: Relationship	Data relating to the participant's beliefs regarding necessary aspects of a relationship to avoid negative consequences of sexting	Any data irrelevant to the participant's beliefs regarding necessary aspects of a relationship to avoid negative consequences of sexting	Chapter 2 section 2.5.2. New contributions
Category 4.1.2: Age	Data relating to the participant's beliefs regarding an individual's age to avoid negative consequences of sexting	Any data irrelevant to the participant's beliefs regarding necessary aspects an individual's age to avoid negative consequences of sexting	New contributions
Subtheme 4.2: Self-protection	Descriptions of ways in which the individual has protected herself, or ideas on how others may protect themselves, from negative consequences of sexting	Any reference to material other than mechanisms for self-protection from the negative consequences of sexting	Chapter 2 section 2.5.4. New contributions
Subtheme 4.3: Interventions by protective adults and systems	Descriptions of ideas regarding interventions by parents, teachers or schools to protect adolescents from negative consequences of sexting	Any data which does not refer to ways in which parents, teachers or schools may protect adolescents from negative consequences of sexting	Chapter 2 section 2.3.5. and 2.5.4
Category 4.3.1: Interventions by parents	Data relating to ideas for interventions by parents to protect adolescents from negative consequences of sexting	Any data unrelated to ideas by which parents may protect adolescents from negative consequences of sexting	Chapter 2 section 2.3.5. New contributions

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Category 4.3.2: Interventions by teachers	Data relating to ideas for interventions by teachers to protect adolescents from negative consequences of sexting	Any data unrelated to ideas by which teachers may protect adolescents from negative consequences of sexting	Chapter 2 section 2.3.5.
Category 4.3.3: Interventions by peers and schools	Data relating to ideas for interventions by schools to protect adolescents from negative consequences of sexting	Any data unrelated to ideas by which schools may protect adolescents from negative consequences of sexting	Chapter 2 section 2.3.5 New Contributions

4.6.1. Subtheme 4.1: "Tick boxes"

The participant did not have any negative experiences with sexting but believed that the set of circumstances she found herself in made her behaviour acceptable and protected her from the negative consequences she identified. She felt that some factors may decrease the risks associated with sexting and thus possibly protect individuals from consequences. She stated that "there's like all these boxes you have to tick", which indicated that if certain criteria are met, sexting would be more acceptable. In my researcher journal I noted: "*the participant used the opportunity of the interview discussion to process what she felt made her sexting acceptable. She organised these thoughts, and reflected on the number of criteria by labelling them 'boxes to tick'*".

4.6.1.1. Category 4.1.1: Relationship

The first of these "boxes" includes the nature of the relationship between oneself and the individual to whom the sexts are being sent. Some relevant factors are the existence of a formalised relationship, the nature of the relationship, the length of the relationship and the character of the partner to whom one would send sexts. She noted that the existence of a formalised relationship was necessary in order for an individual to not be judged for their sexting behaviour: "when you are sexting with someone you not even in a relationship with and then they showing these photos. You just look bad". She described how an individual may be in the courting stage of a relationship, which did not constitute a formal relationship from her perspective. Merely being in a relationship was also not sufficient and that the dissolution of a relationship could in fact be the catalyst for images being released.

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Instead, she felt a relationship should be defined by commitment, trust and stability. She described the climate of her own relationship in these terms by saying: "it has to be someone you really like care and trust and you know that they won't let that out". The fact that this was one of the first things the participant recalled from the interview during member checking shows the importance she placed on it where she said "*like there just has to be that trust*". The length of her own relationship seemed to be relevant to her feeling secure when sending the images as the relationship had lasted for two years before they began sexting. She seemed to want to warn others against engaging in sexting outside a long-term relationship in her statement: "if you have been dating for a week … like that's nothing to go by". She felt that being the type of person her boyfriend was, he would remain respectful of her privacy regardless of whether they remained in a relationship and this ensured safety when sending sexts, which she emphasised by her comment: "I know that. For a fact."

4.6.1.2. Category 4.1.2: Age

The age of the female sending the images was also an aspect which the participant felt needed to be considered. Noting significant pressure on younger females to send sexts to older males, she felt that "maturity" was necessary when making decisions of such magnitude. She felt that when an older girl engaged in sexting she "had to have known what she was doing". She showed concern for the well-being of younger adolescents in her comment: "I don't think it's good for their development just because of the negatives that there could be". This comment highlights participant's perception that sexting may have if an individual engages in the behaviour during this important developmental phase.

4.6.2. Subtheme 4.2: Self-protection

The participant described some ways in which an individual could protect themselves when engaging in sexting. She noted that one could use the technology to one's advantage in order to avoid being pressurised into sexting by disconnecting from a conversation. She stated: "like it's on the phone, you can like just switch off your phone". She also described how an individual could be easily identified if their face was in the image, and felt that "at least if your face isn't in the photo you can still deny

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it. You can still be like 'that's not me'". Even within the perceived security of her relationship she avoided sending images which included her face to protect herself if the images were released accidentally. She described another protection strategy whereby she used images of her partner as insurance to prevent her own images being released. She stated: "also, you better get some stuff back so if anything goes out … You've got to have some ammo". She reiterated this threat by saying: "I will just go show all your friends then".

4.6.3. Subtheme 4.3: Interventions by protective adults and systems

The participant was creative and innovative strategies that adults such as parents and teachers, in addition to punishing individuals for engaging in sexting, could use intervene and protect adolescents from sexting. Peer support, through her demonstration of empathy towards others experiencing negative consequences of sexting, is also relevant.

4.6.3.1. Category 4.3.1: Interventions by parents

Instead of parents checking their children's phones for possible images, which could be easily deleted, she proposed that parents instead monitor the contacts the child has on their phone. This would foster conversations about who would be appropriate for their child to interact with. These conversations were envisioned as: "if they like go through your phone and they see like who's this guy, like who's that person, then they can like delete the number and be like, 'that's not actually … I don't think you should even be having contact with this person'".

4.6.3.2. Category 4.3.2: Interventions by teachers

Some teachers were found by the participant to be understanding and supportive. The adolescent alluded to the potential value of teachers' experiences by saying: "because they know, teachers probably go through this many times where they see these like girls … mostly girls … being taken advantage of […] So like I think they aren't happy with it just because they know, they've seen the situation is there". Creating open and trusting relationships between adolescents and teachers, where punitive measures are de-emphasised, may provide a platform for discussions regarding sexting. Such discussions may allow teachers to share their concerns and

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warnings with adolescents, and therefore be a more effective way of deterring the behaviour. Reflections on my role as an educational psychologist and teacher were present in my researcher journal. I acknowledged the participant's comments and stated: "*in my work with adolescents I have been open to any conversations presented by learners. However, through reflecting on the participant's narrative I believe that the type of explicit conversations indicated by the participant would have been important*".

4.6.3.3. Category 4.3.3: Interventions by peers and schools

The participant felt that if she had known about the legal implications of sexting she may have been able to engage the school and teachers so as to intervene and protect those whose images had been shared with her. She said: "because I only found out the legal thing about a year ago, if I had known like I would have probably gone to a teacher and like said this guy has photos of a young girl, can you please take his phone". This indicates that from the participant's perspective, educating adolescents about the legal aspects of sexting within the school context may make them more likely to avoid sexting. Additionally, this excerpt highlights the possibilities for schools, teachers and peers to collaborate to protect adolescents from the consequences of sexting and possibly even prevent engagement in the behaviour. The participant showed characteristics of having the initiative to intervene within the school context and concern and empathy for those affected by sexting, especially young females. In this way, she highlighted how supportive peers may foster empathy in the peer group, and this be the catalyst for avoiding the negative social consequences of sexting. Her nurturing nature may give rise to supportive peer-to-peer relationships for those victimised.

4.7. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The following section compares the results of the study to the existing literature explored in Chapters 1 and 2 and references are made to discussions in the literature review. Confirmations, similarities and contradictions to the literature are noted while highlighting new contributions gathered. Areas where either existing literature, or this study, left "silences" are discussed. Comments regarding future research opportunities are noted. A table summarising the contributions the study has made to

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the literature may be found in Chapter 5 (see Table 5.1, section 5.4.). Suggestions regarding future research are summarised in Table 5.2 (see section 5.5.2).

4.7.1. Theme 1: Definitions, conceptualisation and categorising sexting

In this section I review the participant's understanding of definitions of sexting and associated categorisation and technological considerations. Overall, definitional aspects and views, beliefs and attitudes of sexting presented in the following section coincide with existing literature. However new contributions regarding the nature of text-based sexts and technological considerations, especially in South Africa, also emerged.

4.7.1.1 Definitions and vocabulary used by adolescents pertaining to sexting behaviour

The operational definition used in this study includes sexually charged written electronic messages (*text-based* sexts) and sexually explicit visual content communicated via a cell phone (*image-based* sexts) (see 1.1) as defined by Rice et al. (2012). The definition of sexting used by the participant spontaneously coincided with the above definition. This was beneficial as the validity and relevance of the concept to the participant, and therefore the study, was confirmed. As discussed in the literature, dissonance with the terminology of sexting as used in the academic conceptualisation of sexting was present in the participant's narrative (see 2.2.1). It was important to attempt to utilise the participant's language and future research, aimed at exploring connections between the language used by adolescents and their experiences of sexting, may be useful.

4.7.1.2. The uses and differences of text-based or image-based sexts

The participant's descriptions of the variation of content and level of sexualisation of *image-based* sexts aligned with the literature (see 2.2.1). What the study adds in this area, firstly, is a description of the content and nature of *text-based* sexts, as was not previously explored in existing literature. The findings indicate that *text-based* sexting was seen by the participant as highly sexualised, describing imagined sexual interactions in detail as well as being used for sexual foreplay. Secondly, the different purposes of the two formats, due to the varying explicitness of images and texts, is

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an additional novel contribution to the topic. She confirmed that *image-based* sexts may be used for non-sexualised purposes in everyday interactions in addition to sexualised purposes (see 2.2.1), but argued that text-based sexts would only be used for the purposes of sexual arousal or an alternative to physical sexual contact. Thirdly, the participant's description of how the two types of sexting may be used in conjunction with one another, where *an image-based* sext may precede a *text-based* sexual conversation between partners, provides additional knowledge of the topic of sexting.

The fine nuances established in this interview, especially regarding *text-based* sexting, therefore act as a valuable resource in understanding adolescent sexting in a new light, especially when considering the legal implications thereof. *Image-based* sexting forms the base of legal punishment as it is classified as child pornography (see 2.3.4). It is troubling then, that text-based sexts seem to be overlooked due to the one-sided focus on image-based sexts, despite this medium carrying highly sexualised content. This information again calls into question the validity of legal punishments for sexting if only a section of the behaviour is addressed. The knowledge developed in this study could highlight the disadvantages of using a narrow focus of sexting in an attempt to understand and police the behaviour and motivate for further research in this area. Because the aim of the study was not to explore different types of sexts, future studies which establish whether the participant's experiences and perceptions of *text-based* sexts can be generalised to other individuals and contexts should be explored.

4.7.1.3. Technology used in sexting

The findings of this study relating to the technology used for sexting confirmed discussions in the literature (see 2.2.1). Despite the use of a cell phone being commonly described in the literature, the specific hardware capabilities, such as the quality of the camera, were not raised in existing research. The implications of the image quality of cameras are that individuals may, or may not, be identified in sext images which is evidently a noteworthy concern if sext exposure is considered. Furthermore, higher-quality camera images were viewed by the participant as more effective in attracting the attention of the recipient. As such, the specificities of

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hardware components of cell phones are important to note when exploring sexting behaviour, and the participant's experiences were valuable in shedding light on this. Although a range of software platforms were discussed in existing studies (see 2.2.1), the evidence from this study indicates changes in the use of various instant messaging channels for sexting take place in conjunction with changes in technology. For example, initially Mxit was used, then BBM and now Skype and WhatsApp. The implications this raises; – that the behaviour is constantly changing and is closely tied to technological trends and developments; should be noted.

The participant's conceptions of how sexting may have evolved in South Africa specifically are new and astute contributions. She described how the nature of Mxit, a specifically South African instant messenger application, may have contributed to sexting behaviour in South Africa. The participant described Mxit allowing for the creation of unmoderated chat groups populated by strangers in order to share sexual images or have sexual conversations. She alluded to the possibility that Mxit may have been a historical catalyst the development of sexting as facilitated by the various technological platforms relevant at the time. The history, evolution and nature of sexting within South Africa was therefore understood on a deeper level and should be explored further in the future.

4.7.1.4. Views, beliefs and attitudes concerning sexting

Existing ideas from previous literature, where sexting is considered by adolescents to be common and to be expected within their age group, were represented in the current data (see 2.5.2.). Sexting being viewed in a casual light, while concurrently being seen negatively as a "bad idea" as described in other studies, was confirmed by the participant (see 2.5.3.).

4.7.2. Motivations for engaging in sexting

The results of the study concerning motivations for sexting serve to confirm existing knowledge. This points to an alignment between the experiences of numerous adolescents in varied contexts, with the study further confirming the validity of themes in international literature to this single case in the South African context.

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4.7.2.1. Sexting as emotional and physical pleasure

Experiencing various types of emotional and physical pleasure and increasing intimacy were commonly cited in the existing literature as a motivating factor for engaging in the behaviour (see 2.5.2.). Differences between the types of pleasure sought by males compared to females were confirmed in the literature. The participant seemed to believe that females were driven by the emotional pleasure of sexting in a relationship in addition to seeking relationships, and seeking or maintaining male attention. This was in contrast to males being more motivated by sexual pleasure (see 2.5.2.).

4.7.2.2. Seeking attention, attracting or maintaining a relationship and pressure or coercion in sexting

Literature explored commonly cited the use of sexting to seek attention and to attract or maintain a relationship (see 2.5.2). The participant voiced her perceptions of the sexting motivations of others along the same lines, with the study thus confirming this theme. Of the other possible motivations for sexting presented in existing studies, females being pressurised by males to partake in sexting was pervasive (see 2.5.3). The participant made multiple references which corroborate this theme. It was also noted in previous studies that males experienced pressure by their friends to engage in sexting (see 2.5.3). This narrative, however, did not appear in the interview. Perhaps this may be because the participant is female and therefore not directly exposed to the same-sex peer pressure male adolescents may experience. In future studies it may be useful to explore the experiences of peer pressure in adolescent male sexting experiences.

4.7.2.3. Sexting in a long-distance relationship and for sexual communication

It was found that the participant's circumstance; of being in a long distance relationship for a period of time; was tied to her motivations for sexting, which helped confirm the existing findings of other studies (see 2.5.2). Sexting has been cited as a way in which individuals can communicate sexual needs due to the more indirect and less threatening nature of the medium. The results of the study showed that the participant's sentiments mirrored this previously noted assertion. However, using

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sexting to get new ideas to try in a physical encounter was not previously mentioned in the existing body of knowledge.

4.7.3. Consequences of sexting

The participant was aware that engaging in sexting might carry significant negative consequences, as indicated by the results. Some consequences discussed in the literature were not mentioned by the participant, such as mental health risks and risky sexual behaviour. However, the participant did explore how the emotional and social consequences of sexting may be detrimental to individuals, thus aligning with themes in current literature. It is important to note that despite being aware of many negative consequences of sexting, the participant did not have any negative sexting experiences herself.

4.7.3.1. Emotional consequences of sexting

The content gathered pertaining to the emotional consequences of sexting was also reflected in the body of knowledge on sexting. Confirmation that sexting may lead to shame, embarrassment and suicidal thoughts was obtained when exploring the participant's narratives. Additionally, the participant's views aligned with the literature when citing discomfort about parents or teachers knowing about the sexting behaviour (see 2.3.2).

What was specific to this study, and thus a novel contribution, was the participant's views that emotional consequences for younger females would be more severe and her empathy towards these individuals. She seemed to feel the consequences of engaging in the behaviour as a result of being coerced were harsh and unjust. Additionally, the unique, individual nature of the study provided insight into the participant's reflective processes. In the course of the interview, the participant demonstrated a shift in her thinking. She initially said that she "didn't care" what others thought, but during the discussion the realisation came to her that in fact she would care, and feel an emotional impact as a result. Although not a contribution which could be generalised, the value of the interview may lie in exploring sexting and the contemplation thereof as deeply personal. It may thus highlight the value of

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adolescents reflecting on their individual behaviour and may be explored further in future research.

4.7.3.2. Social consequences of sexting: Judgement, labelling, victimisation, reputational damage

The social consequences of sexting raised by the participant, including negative judgement of sexting behaviour, labelling, victimisation and current and future reputational damage, are all discussed in current sexting literature (see 2.3.1 and 2.5.3). The study thus served to confirm these themes.

4.7.3.3. Social consequences of sexting: Exposure or distribution of sexts

The results of the study indicate that the participant viewed the exposure of sexts outside of the intended audience as common, severely unpleasant and accompanied by negative consequences. This aligned with sentiments expressed in existing literature (see 2.3.1). However, it is important to note that the participant herself did not experience exposure of her sexual images.

Most local and international literature seems to tie sexting inextricably to the exposure of images and thus severe negative consequences, although some studies have noted that exposure of sexts is less common than popularly perceived (see 2.2.1). It seems as though the severity of instances where individuals have been exposed, and the resulting negative consequences, have attracted unbalanced attention (see 1.1). The outcome is the focus in the current body of knowledge, almost entirely, on instances of negative experiences of sexting. There is a large silence regarding those who have not experienced exposure or negative consequences. It is not possible to fully understand or measure how many adolescents avoid negative experiences of sexting, as the literature has not explored this dimension of the topic.

Therefore, what was especially valuable for the study was an acknowledgement of the experiences of an individual who did not have her images revealed to anyone except the intended audience and thus did not experience any negative consequences. Furthermore, this study has identified a large gap in the literature on

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sexting and the acknowledgement that existing knowledge on sexting may be partial and biased.

In contradiction to descriptions of forwarding of images to the cell phones of others in existing studies, descriptions thereof were not present in this study (see 2.3.1). This silence may be as a result of the participant not personally experiencing this behaviour; it does not necessarily indicate that the behaviour does not exist. In order to confirm or deny the existence of the behaviour in the participant's environment, discussions with more individuals, especially male adolescents, would be necessary.

Instead of describing forwarding messages in the above manner, the participant confirmed the descriptions present in existing literature by citing direct viewing of images from a cell phone, publically displaying images and exposure through rumours or hearsay (see 2.3.1). However, the literature regarding the specific mechanisms of exposure of images is sparse. New contributions to the body of knowledge on the nuances of social processes involved in sharing sexts emerge from the study. Specifically, the results described the locations where direct sharing of sexts may take place, such as within the male bathrooms at a school. The participant contributed to understanding of her own context, where public sharing of images did not seem to take place on virtual platforms as described in the literature, but rather on televisions or through "slideshows".

Importantly, a silence in the literature was identified when the participant described an additional mechanism by which images were exposed, namely accidental exposure, thus contributing to understanding adolescent sexting. The participant described the practice of friends viewing the images on each other's phones and accidently coming across nude images. She also voiced concern about the possibility that a cell phone may be stolen and thus images could be released, therefore providing novel insight into how sexual images could be unintentionally viewed. This practice seems to contradict the literature describing cell phones as password protected, private and thus conducive to sexting (see 2.2.1). The specificity of this information is embedded in the participant's context and is socially embedded making it relevant to creating interventions to avoid exposure of individuals and to curb

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sexting behaviour in general in the context mentioned. However, it may also be relevant to explore this information within other contexts.

The participant did not consider exposure of images among her group of friends in a serious manner, which contradicts both the literature available and her own accounts, where exposure behaviour is considered undesirable and risky (see 2.3.1 and 2.5.3). The safety of her group of friends may be emphasised in her narrative, but this may also point to a blind spot regarding her own behaviour.

4.7.3.4. Mental and sexual health risks

Risky sexual behaviour and mental health concerns (2.3.2) were not raised by the participant and thus constitute a silence in the study. A lack of discussion pertaining to the negative mental health effects of sexting by the participant herself may be due to the fact that the participant did not experience her images being exposed to others. The participant's motivations for sexting, as primarily driven by her long-distance relationship as opposed to feeling pressure or to seeking a relationship, may also have protected her from negative sexual health risks. She was in a monogamous relationship and was older when engaging in both sexting and sexual intercourse, thus negating many of the sexual risks associated with sexting in adolescence (see 2.3.2). Future research may differentiate between groups most vulnerable to experiencing risks associated with sexting. It would also be necessary to note whether certain groups of individuals may avoid risks due to their motivations and circumstances around their sexting behaviour.

4.7.3.5. Adolescent experiences of punishment for sexting by parents, schools and the law and the efficacy thereof

Descriptions of punishment by parents and schools, as given by the participant, were common to the literature explored. As in the narrative of the participant and themes within the current body of knowledge on sexting, adult interventions are commonly considered ineffective (see 2.3.5 and 2.5.3).

Legal risks are comprehensively cited in the literature and in some studies serve as the primary concern about adolescent sexting (section 2.3.4). The results indicate

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that the participant was aware of these consequences, but they were not applicable to her because she was over the age of 18 when she created the images. Should she have been younger than 18 years old, this may have been more of a concern for her. She was aware this would be a relevant consequence for others. This finding therefore aligns with the literature, where adolescents were aware of the legal consequences of sexting and cited this as a negative consequence thereof (see 2.3.5). Although the participant was aware of the legal consequences of sexting her knowledge was limited and further research is needed to explore the level of knowledge other individuals may have in this regard.

4.7.4. Protection from the consequences of sexting

4.7.4.1. Individual protective measures concerning negative consequences of sexting

Like the participants in existing studies, the participant in this study contributed novel ideas on how an individual could protect themselves when engaging in sexting (section 2.3.5). The participant's concept of a "checklist" of protective factors aligned with the acknowledgement in previous studies that numerous, complex factors are required to protect adolescents who sext from negative consequences. The participant's specificity about the formalisation and length of a relationship, the nature of the partner with whom one sexts and the age at which one sexts contributes new information on adolescents' perceived safety measures when sexting. Her mention of trust within a relationship confirmed this theme within the body of knowledge on sexting (see 2.3.5).

Her individual contributions to ideas on self-protective mechanisms within sexting included switching off one's phone in order to escape the pressure of sexting. Furthermore, her comments regarding anonymity (by avoiding showing one's face in images) and the necessity of having images of the sexting partner as "ammunition" (to threaten retaliation if images were to be distributed) link to the suggestions made by adolescents in previous studies (see 2.3.5). It would be possible to gather numerous suggestions regarding protection mechanisms within sexting by holding discussions with numerous individuals, thus motivating future research in this regard.

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4.7.4.2. Suggestions made to schools, teachers and parents for effective sexting interventions

Findings of the study indicate astute suggestions made by the participant in respect of how schools, teachers and parents could effectively intervene to prevent sexting or avoid associated harm. These suggestions were unrelated to any specific questions posed during the interview, indicating that this was an area of interest and concern to the participant, thereby highlighting the value of the individual nature of the participant's contributions. Her suggestions link closely to those present in the literature (see 2.3.5). Despite not being versed in the literature on the topic, the participant's narrative highlighted the value of her contributions by confirming existing knowledge. Future research with more individuals may develop additional suggestions on how parents, teachers and schools may intervene in sexting.

The results indicate that her encouragement of parents, teachers and schools engaging in conversations about sexting seemed to be common in all of her suggestions. These discussions should be emphasised as the literature contains relatively little exploration thereof. Additionally, the specific suggestions made by the participant relating to parents discussing the contacts their child engages with, was a useful contribution which may be applied more broadly. Despite some authors arguing that adolescents are already aware of the consequences of sexting, the participant said that this was not the case for her, especially regarding the legal implications of sexting (see 2.3.5). A contradiction of the literature was therefore uncovered regarding this specific context. Her comments motivate for the exploration of the efficacy of psycho-education programmes concerning the legal implications of sexting her individual context (see 2.3.5).

Acknowledgement of peer support in sexting interventions emerged as a result of the participant's caring disposition, and thus constitutes a unique contribution to sexting literature from the perspective of this participant as an individual. It was valuable to see that she showed deep empathy for those affected by the negative social consequences of sexting, and that her approach in this regard often differed vastly from that of her peers. Developing compassion and empathy in all parties involved in sexting has been mentioned by other authors and may be useful not only in

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understanding the experiences of adolescents but also helping to protect and support them (see 2.3.5). As such, the detrimental results of sexting may decrease if negative responses by peers are removed (see 2.3.5). Her suggestion on developing peer interventions, such as encouraging peers to report those with sexual images on their phones, is an addition to the knowledge on methods by which peers can be used in sexting interventions. Further research on the efficacy and mechanisms of implementation of peer-based interventions is therefore necessary.

4.8. CONCLUSION

This chapter presented themes, subthemes and categories established when analysing the data developed from a semi-structured interview. Findings were then presented, where themes were compared to relevant existing literature and similarities, inconsistencies, “silences” and new knowledge contributions were highlighted with an emphasis on areas where future research may expand knowledge on the topic.

Chapter 5 summarises the study by considering the results in terms of the research questions. Contributions and limitations of the study are presented and recommendations regarding future interventions and research are proposed. Finally, concluding reflections are offered.

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CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 presented the results of the study, according to four themes. The findings were discussed in order to place the data in context alongside the existing research explored in Chapter 2.

In this chapter a summary of the preceding chapters is presented. Conclusions are drawn regarding the research questions. Recommendations are made for interventions targeted at adolescent sexting and future practice, in addition to suggestions for future research. Limitations of the study are acknowledged and the chapter is concluded with some reflective remarks.

5.2. OVERVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 introduced the reader to the topic of sexting and the rationale and motivation for the study. Research questions were presented along with the problem statement and purpose statement. Theoretical, paradigmatic, research design and ethical considerations were introduced while the potential significance and role of the researcher were presented.

Chapter 2 explored the relevant literature on sexting. This included sexting origins, definitions, categories and characteristics. The risks associated with sexting and prevention or minimisation of risks was discussed. Thereafter sexting in a South African context was investigated, along with the experiences of adolescents pertaining to sexting. In order to understand the life-phase of the participant, adolescent development stages were reviewed and their impact and influence on sexting behaviour were discussed. Finally, the theoretical base, in the form of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, was presented.

Chapter 3 focused on the paradigmatic perspectives of interpretivism and the qualitative approach. The research design of a single, descriptive case study with purposive sampling was presented. The data-gathering techniques of a semi-

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structured interview, observations, a reflective researcher journal and member checking interview were cited. Data analysis, quality criteria, ethical considerations and the role of the researcher were considered.

Chapter 4 presented the results of the study according to themes, subthemes and categories. The four themes established include the participant's definition, conceptualisation and categorisation of sexting; the participant's perceptions of motivations for engaging in sexting; the participant's beliefs concerning the consequences of sexting; and the participant's ideas on protecting adolescents from negative consequences of sexting. Findings were then presented according to each theme to establish confirmations, contradictions, silences and new contributions when compared to existing literature.

5.3. CONCLUSIONS

In this section conclusions regarding the study are presented by first addressing each of the secondary research questions and thereafter, the primary research question.

5.3.1. Secondary research question 1: What are the current empirical and theoretical perspectives pertaining to sexting behaviour among adolescents?

5.3.1.1. Current literature on sexting

The focus on existing literature served to identify themes present in order to understand sexting, in addition to finding areas where the study may add to the body of knowledge. It was noted that most of the research was conducted quantitatively. Many studies focused on statistical correlations between sexting behaviour and numerous risk factors. It was identified that fewer sexting studies were conducted in a qualitative manner, thus forming the first motivation for the selection of the study methodology. In the qualitative studies examined, themes such as positive and negative adolescent sexting experiences and ways to navigate sexting risks were present. Females seemed to have more negative experiences with sexting and the social consequences thereof than males, a motivation for the selection of a female adolescent participant in my study.

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Literature was explored in relation to adolescent development to ensure a full understanding of this life phase. Most studies did not use specific theoretical frameworks when studying sexting. Thus, the Theory of Planned Behaviour selected and was explored to ground the study appropriately. Furthermore, the study examined sexting within a South African context and the small amount of literature on this topic was discussed. As such, the limited literature relevant to the context of South Africa served as the fourth contribution of the study. Finally, as a recently conducted study, the current research may add to a constantly changing area of research; most of the studies were conducted more than a year ago.

5.3.1.2. The Theory of Planned Behaviour applied to an adolescent female's sexting experiences

The Theory of Planned Behaviour was used to guide the study and the findings are thus considered according to the theory. The dimensions of attitudes towards the behaviour, subjective norms (or social components) and control aspects of sexting are presented from the perspective of the participant.

When considering the participant's *attitude towards the behaviour*, it was necessary to consider whether her evaluations were positive or negative. Further, the role her evaluation of the consequences of sexting played in shaping her attitudes to sexting needed to be explored. The participant's attitude towards her own sexting behaviour was positive. She seemed to feel that the negative consequences of sexting were not relevant to her; instead positive associations with sexting behaviour such as increased intimacy and emotional pleasure were cited. It seems then that her positive evaluation of the behaviour posed no hindrance to engaging in sexting. In turn, her attitudes towards sexting are likely to have affected her behavioural intention and thus completion of the behaviour. The Theory of Planned Behaviour's dimension of attitude towards the behaviour seems to be a relevant partial explanation for this participant's engagement in sexting.

Aspects of social influences within sexting were continually present in the participant's narrative, and this dimension of the Theory of Planned Behaviour thus showed good potential to explain this adolescent's sexting behaviour. The

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participant's *normative beliefs* were evaluated based on a) peer pressure experienced, b) perception of whether others view the behaviour as desirable or undesirable and thus whether the behaviour should be enacted, and c) the desire of the individual to comply with the perceptions of others. *Normative beliefs* encompass all social figures within an individual's life. Thus the impact of friends, her peer group as a whole, parents, teachers and her school are all discussed.

The participant did not describe experiencing peer pressure to engage in sexting herself, nor within her group of friends. However, the participant did cite males coercing females into participating. Incidents of this nature may have been between two individuals within a private conversation and thus seemingly free from explicit peer pressure to engage in sexting. However, the common discourse of males pressurising females into sexting indicates the possible presence of peer pressure as relating to gender inequalities.

Others viewed the behaviour in a negative light, according to the participant. Her own disapproval of the sexting behaviour of others outside her group of friends supports the view that sexting is not approved of in her social context. The negative social experiences of belittling, labelling and passing judgement within the broader peer group further evidence the possibility that the behaviour is considered, to a certain extent, to be undesirable. However, conflicting messages exist whereby, sexting is not disapproved of within her own group of friends and females may be pressurised to participate in the behaviour, thus potentially framing the behaviour as acceptable.

Whether or not adolescents wish to comply with the view that the behaviour is undesirable is therefore similarly complex. Parents, teachers and schools are portrayed by the participant as strongly disapproving of the behaviour. She implied that other adolescents showed disregard for the wishes of parents, teachers and schools when sexting. The participant, as an individual, showed little interest in complying with the wishes of parents, teachers, the school or even her peers with regard to her own sexting. However, at a later stage she also admitted that she did not wish to experience negative outcomes in this regard.

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The complexity of social factors influencing sexting makes it difficult to make direct judgements on their impact on the actual performance of sexting behaviour. It is noted that, based on the participant's remarks, pressure experienced by females does seem to play a significant role in sexting for others. For this specific participant, pressure to sext seemed not to be present, which indicates this aspect of subjective norms is unlikely to have played a role in her behaviour. However, her friendship group approving of sexting, coupled with her disregard for the views of others such as peers or parents, both seem to be factors of subjective norms contributing to sexting behaviour. The study was able to explore the unique experiences of the participant's subjective norms and hint at those relevant to others in her context. The qualitative methodology used assisted in understanding that subjective norms cannot be applied in blanket fashion, as many dimensions are multi-faceted, contradictory and complex.

Perceived behaviour control is discussed according to the two components of a) *actual behaviour control* and b) *perception of behaviour control*. *Actual behaviour control* indicates that external resources are available for the individual to partake in the behaviour. The participant indicated that cell phones with good-quality cameras, software and instant messaging applications meant that opportunities for sexting were numerous and were thus facilitated by the context. Impediments to sexting according to this dimension would include removing access to the technology. As was suggested by the participant, this would be only method by which a parent could fully prevent the behaviour, but the frequency thereof was low. *Actual behaviour control*, and the easy access to cell phones, seems not to play a large part in variation in sexting behaviour in light of the participant's perspectives. Similarly, *perceived behaviour control* seems to play a minor role in sexting behaviour. The issue of the confidence an individual feels about their ability to perform the behaviour is less relevant to adolescent sexting, as this age group has been shown to be more than proficient in using the technology. Other internal processes associated with *perceived behaviour control,* such as will-power, may play a role in the sexting behaviour of those who are pressured into sexting. The participant described her sexting behaviour as well-reasoned and refused to participate when she did not feel

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comfortable. This further indicates that this aspect of the theory is less relevant to this case.

Thus, the Theory of Planned Behaviour helped to guide the study and was evaluated for its value in explaining the findings presented. Attitudes towards the behaviour seemed to have potential value in explaining adolescent sexting behaviour. Normative beliefs were present in a large proportion of the results the theory helped to explore the complexity of normative beliefs within sexting. Despite this but it was not possible to clearly delineate which aspects of the theory may have been relevant to engaging in the behaviour. Actual behaviour control seemed to play a minimal role in explaining sexting behaviour, but it was acknowledged that factors such as having a phone removed would clearly inhibit the behaviour. Will-power seemed to be the only major factor of perceived behaviour control which, based on the participant's descriptions, may be related to sexting behaviour.

The theory was therefore useful in focusing the study on some aspects of the behaviour which showed relevance in this case. Although it is possible that some dimensions of sexting were not fully appreciated due to the narrowed focus of the theory, it was not the primary aim of the study to evaluate the theory. However, the theory did provide depth of insight into how each of the factors of the model played a role within sexting. By delving into each factor complexity and contradictions were explored in depth and aided in further understanding adolescent sexting.

5.3.2. Secondary research question 2: What motivates an adolescent female to participate in sexting?

Discussions regarding motivations for sexting emerged in the interview with the participant. She was aware of her own motivations for sexting but also commented on perceived reasons why others may sext. It is therefore necessary to note that the participant's experiences and perceptions are subjective. Further investigation with more adolescent females may reveal alternative motivations for sexting. However, as an age-appropriate, valuable informant, her perceptions and experiences of her peers' behaviour and the alignment thereof with the literature seem to hold a high level of validity. Overall, adolescent motivations for sexting behaviour, including those

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of the participant and of her peers, were physical and emotional pleasure, intimacy, seeking attention, seeking a relationship, feeling pressured or coerced, being in a long-distance relationship and for communication of sexual needs.

The findings of the study indicate that the participant's personal motivations for sexting included emotional pleasure, intimacy, maintaining a long-distance relationship and using sexting as a tool to communicate her sexual needs. She also noted that within her relationship, acknowledging and attending to her boyfriend's physical sexual pleasure derived from sexting was a potential motivator for her sexting behaviour. Despite experiencing mild pressure to engage in sexting, the presence of this factor was not sufficient to cause her to engage in the behaviour. She seemed to consider herself as a responsible sexter with valid motivations for engaging in the behaviour and thus relatively free from the potential negative consequences of sexting.

She considered situations she had encountered within her social context as a means to identify and formulate the reasons driving the behaviour of others. In these contemplations she discussed a vignette of a young female adolescent sexting with an older male adolescent. Within this setting the participant believed the female's sexting behaviour stemmed from the desire to be in a romantic relationship with the older male and as such the female would sext to seek attention and interaction with the older male adolescent. This female might sext to maintain attention already received and she may feel pressured or coerced by the potential for a relationship. In these instances, the prototype of the young female seemed to play a comparatively passive role to the older male, who actively sought to exert pressure on the female to send sexts to fulfil his sexual pleasure. This female was thus portrayed as being blinded by the perceived rewards of being in a potential relationship, which skewed her motivations. As a victim, she was portrayed as not thinking clearly about her actions and resulting consequences, no being able to make these decisions due to immaturity and could therefore be taken advantage of.

Another vignette described the motivations of an older female adolescent who intentionally created unrequested, yet sexually appealing images for the purposes of

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seeking male attention. This was a single case and seemed to be relatively uncommon. The female seemed to play more of an active role in sexting behaviour, and because of this was deemed a “slut” rather than, as in the previous example, a “victim”.

As alluded to in the above discussion, reasons for engaging in sexting seem to be distinguished by an adolescent’s gender. Males seem to exert pressure on females and seek sexts to fulfil sexual desires. In contrast, females seem to engage in sexting for emotional and relationship reasons and, in most cases, do not initiate sexting.

5.3.3. Secondary research question 3: What are a female adolescent’s perceptions of the consequences of sexting?

The findings of the study referring to the negative consequences indicated firstly that the participant had not experienced negative consequences of sexting herself. Despite being keenly aware of the severe consequences experienced by others, it appeared as though she felt invulnerable to experiencing those consequences herself. This was emphasised by her comments that her only fear regarding sexting was someone else accidentally viewing her boyfriend’s phone or his phone being stolen and her images being released in this way. She felt she had met certain criteria for her sexting to be safe, as discussed in 4.6.1. However, it is also possible that her cognitive dissonance from potentially harmful outcomes may be explained by adolescent brain development. In light of the discussion in section 2.5.1, the rewards of sexting for the participant (fostering connection and experiencing emotional pleasure) may have caused the consequences of the participant’s behaviour (emotional, social and punishment consequences) to be under-emphasised and thus considered to be something that would not happen to her. Her lack of concern for the risks associated with sexting may also be a demonstration of the optimism bias (Lapsley & Hill, 2009), where she perceives that “it won’t happen to me”.

The participant described a range of consequences for others who sexted, including negative social and emotional experiences and punishment. Importantly, it seemed as though individuals would only suffer consequences if others, outside of the intended audience, found out about their sexting. Thus, social consequences were

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the main risks associated with sexting and began with the exposure of one's images. Such exposure could happen accidentally, by directly viewing an image on a phone, in a public viewing or through hearsay, and would result in judgement, labelling, victimisation and reputational damage in both the present and future. Negative emotions and risks of suicide as a result of being unable to cope with negative social responses to sexting were cited as consequences which others may experience.

Punishment of sexting behaviour, which would be implemented by parents, teachers and schools, also necessitated that others would somehow find out about the behaviour. Punishment for sexting involved monitoring and removal of access to a cell phone, scolding by the school in a school meeting or by individual teachers and school disciplinary hearings. The participant was also aware of the legal consequences of sexting which she described through a situation she had encountered between an adolescent couple in her context.

An overarching theme in the participant's narrative was the inequitable consequences that males and females would suffer. It was noted that females were labelled, treated poorly by their peers and even punished more harshly while boys were considered "cool". Males were also perceived to be more likely to share images than females and might then be considered the source of negative consequences for females. Thus, the negative outcomes of sexting for female adolescents need to be differentiated from those experienced by males.

5.3.4. The primary research question: What are an adolescent female's sexting experiences?

The findings of the study indicate that the participant's experiences of sexting could be grouped according to her conceptualisation and definitions of sexting, the motivations of herself and others for engaging in sexting, her perceptions of the negative consequences associated with sexting and her discussions regarding contributions to future interventions to protect adolescents who engage in sexting.

Important contributions from existing literature and theory served to inform the current research, especially the already documented experiences of other adolescents,

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which meant it was possible to explore the participant's experiences of sexting. Due to the theoretical, paradigmatic and methodological choices made in the study, the participant's experiences of sexting were framed closely according to the context she functioned in, especially social relationships and the context of her school. The participant's personal understanding and conception of sexting were explored in order to discover her individual reality, which was represented by the experiences she described. The depth of exploration within the study allowed for the topic to be fully comprehended from this individual's viewpoint. Rich descriptions presented her experiences in light of how she conceptualised sexting. Furthermore, the depth of the study showed how she understood motivations for sexting for herself and others and the consequences thereof that were perceived and experienced. Lastly, the participant was able to grapple with her ideas of how to prevent adolescents from experiencing the risks of sexting and may have contributed significantly to how interventions within her context may be constructed effectively.

5.4. CONTRIBUTIONS

To begin with, this study adds to limited existing research on sexting in South Africa. Secondly, the study adds further depth to qualitative research on sexting experiences globally, with a focus on female perspectives. Thirdly, the study augments sexting literature underpinned by a strong theoretical grounding. Fourthly, the study contributes to literature on the application of the Theory of Planned Behaviour to sexting. Fifthly an updated perspective on sexting is made possible. Lastly, the research allowed for themes in international literature to be confirmed and added previously undocumented portions of data, as summarised in Table 5.1 according to the four themes present in the study.

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Table 5.1. A summary of new insights into sexting gathered from the study

A summary of new insights into sexting gathered from the study	
Theme 1: The participant's definition, conceptualisation and categorisation of sexting	- The nature and uses of text-based sexts - The implications of good-quality hardware such as cameras - Sexting takes place on whichever instant messaging platforms are popular and as a result evolves with technological advances. - The advent of sexting in South Africa may be linked to Mxit.
Theme 2: Motivations for engaging in sexting	- Differentiating male and female motivations for sexting - Using sexting to develop new ideas to try during physical sexual encounters.
Theme 3: Consequences of sexting	- Consequences of sexting for younger females may be different and more severe. - The presence and possible uses of self-reflection regarding sexting behaviour - Exploring the experiences of an individual who has not had negative sexting experiences, nor experienced the forwarding of her private images - Locations where direct sharing of images was prominent: male bathrooms - "Slideshows" and television as means by which images were publically shared - Processes accidental exposure of images - Light-hearted views on exposure of images between friends
Theme 4: Protection from consequences of sexting	- A checklist for safer sexting - Specificity of the type of relationship and nature of partner with whom sexting takes place - The age at which one sexts - Switching off one's phone to escape pressure to sext - Parents discussing contacts stored on their child's phone to prevent sexting - Encouraging peers to report others with sexts on their cell phones to police sexting in schools

5.5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The section below contains recommendations regarding interventions and future practice. Thereafter, recommendations for future research are made.

5.5.1. Recommendations for intervention and future practice

The study serves to inform future practice by firstly acknowledging that sexting is indeed common within the adolescent social grouping of the participant and secondly that negative experiences result for female adolescents engaging in the behaviour.

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Interventions in this regard therefore have the potential to prove valuable to this population group. Thirdly, acknowledging that current management of sexting is sparse, inappropriate and ineffective serves as an impetus to develop and implement informed sexting intervention strategies. Finally, knowledge of motivations and the consequences of sexting for this adolescent female may serve to ground future practice in the experiences of adolescents rather than theoretical knowledge. Such future interventions may be informed by the participant's identification of numerous important role-players such as peers, parents, teachers and schools.

When considering the participant's descriptions and the literature on sexting intervention programmes (see 2.3.5) it seems as though two types of risk prevention strategies can be utilised. The first involves strategies to encourage abstinence from sexting and the second includes developing safer sexting practices. As the participant mentioned both types, it seems as though a holistic intervention for sexting should also involve both preventative and safer sexting practices. The core premise of effective future interventions of both types seems to lie in a) involving all relevant role-players and systemic interventions; b) ensuring all role-players are informed of all dimensions of sexting; c) involving adolescents themselves as a vital component in peer-prevention and self-empowerment; d) ensuring open communication and increased discussions regarding sexting; and e) utilising the power of technology as a protection tool. Below are suggestions aimed at targeting different role-player groups.

5.5.1.1. Support strategies including adults and parents

The participant raised the value of communication between parents and adolescents when describing an envisaged intervention of parents monitoring and discussing the contacts their child has on their phone. Although not previously mentioned in literature, this intervention may facilitate discussions about how the adolescent interacts with others and whether or not these interactions are appropriate. Not only do these conversations open up communication between child and parent but may also encourage reasoned decision-making about ways in which adolescents communicate with peers. Similar discussions with teachers may serve the same purpose and in turn possibly dissuade the individual from sexting.

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5.5.1.2. Support strategies for adolescents as individuals and peers

The participant frequently described a situation where a passive younger female felt pressured by an older male adolescent to sext. Assertiveness training has shown efficacy in increasing female assertiveness in sexual encounters and avoiding unwanted sexual advances (Brecklin & Ullman, 2005; Ofole, 2011). Thus, in this instance it may be useful to empower young adolescent females to develop assertiveness and self-confidence and thus, no longer play a passive role in sexting.

Adolescent males need to develop an understanding of their coercive power and the unjust manner in which it may be used. Males should be encouraged to develop reflective skills, which will enable them to acknowledge the one-sided gratification sexting may involve and remain respectful of females, especially those most vulnerable to coercion. Interventions utilising peer support in education programmes and at a societal level are discussed below. Such discussions are advocated for by Sen and Östlin (2007) who argue that argue that discussions with boys are necessary to transform harmful masculine norms.

5.5.1.3. Support strategies involving education programmes and the use of technology

The participant indicated that information about legal aspects of sexting would have been beneficial for her, as she was unaware of these facts until the value of that information had been lost. Encouraging adolescents to abstain from sexting may thus be fostered through education programmes aimed at describing the risks involved, especially the legal risks as referred to by McEachern et al. (2012) and Theodore, (2011). I would like to suggest, however, based on the finding of the study which noted strong peer influences, that abstinence messages may be better communicated by adolescent peers, or similarly aged individuals. To this aim, those who have witnessed or experienced negative sexting consequences may be a vital resource in communicating the personalised effects to others as a means to deter the behaviour and serve as empathetic support. The participant noting the lack of knowledge by adults advocates for the education of adult role-players on the mechanisms, tools and technology involved in sexting to better position them to

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prevent sexting as originally suggested by McEachern et al. (2012) and Theodore (2011) in section 4.7.4.2.

The pervasive use of various types of technology within adolescent groups mentioned in the interview points to the value that these platforms may have in intervening in sexting. The findings of the study thus concur with suggestions made by Hasinoff (2016) to protect adolescents involved in sexting by using file formats which prevent sharing sexts and reflect privacy statements. Hinduja and Patchin (2010b) argue for the use of technological platforms themselves to provide psycho-education regarding sexting. Utilising this suggestion in combination with the understanding that peer support interventions may be more applicable and accessible to adolescents advocates for the use of electronic peer support groups or electronically communicated peer counselling.

5.5.1.3. Support strategies at a societal and discursive level

Societal discursive shifts seem to be necessary when acknowledging the participant's descriptions of inequitable consequences of sexting based on gender as advanced by Hasinoff (2016) and Ringrose et al., 2013. Furthermore, the participant's descriptions of the acceptability of peers denigrating others and the lack of understanding of consent regarding sexual matters needs to be challenged by systemic interventions.

In the descriptions cited by the participant the differences in treatment of males in females in sexting cases are not acknowledged which indicates that these inequalities may therefore not be addressed. One way in which to foster acknowledgement of the differential gender treatment may be to hold conversations within classrooms and schools where issues of contention may be raised. Following discussions of this nature, policies which explicitly cite reasons for the presence of differing standards for males and females should be implemented. Such differences may be, for example, medical treatment due to differences in biological functioning (Sen & Östlin, 2007). Where differences in treatment, especially when the punishment of sexting is considered, declaration of equality should be noted.

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Sexual consent, permission and privacy should be discussed broadly, but also in application to sexting. Highlighting that sharing sexts constitutes violation of personal privacy and the legal implications this may have may be effective in demonstrating the severity of such behaviour (Hasinoff, 2016).

The above serves to acknowledge that despite all possible interventions to ensure abstinence from sexting, the possibility remains that some adolescents may still send sexts. These systemic interventions thus acknowledge that these individuals still deserve respect and dignity and the betrayal of privacy is not permissible. An additional measure to protect all adolescents from all types of social denigration is to communicate that the behaviour is entirely unacceptable and not tolerated. Instead, adolescents may be redirected to develop empathy for an affected individual and valuable peer support may therefore be encouraged. Although this may not prevent an adolescent from experiencing all the negative consequences of sexting, the severity thereof will significantly decrease and may help to avoid associated severe consequences such as instances of suicide.

In conclusion, and in light of the information gathered during the study, interventions for sexting should be targeted at all role-players including adolescents, parents, teachers, schools and systems. Interventions should be aimed at both preventing sexting and supporting those who have sexted in order to handle the negative consequences they may experience. Interventions should focus on education of all role-players about the multi-dimensional nature of sexting. Additionally, adolescents should be empowered, made conscious of the effects of their behaviour on others and encouraged to show empathy to their peers. Their contributions to developing and carrying out intervention programmes should not be underestimated. Opening communication lines between all role-players, utilising technology in this light and conducting macro-level discussions on present gender discourses are further intervention strategies identified in the interpretation of the above data.

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5.5.2. Recommendations for future research

Suggestions regarding future research on adolescent sexting are described in the following section where specific research suggestions were established when analysing the findings of this study. These suggestions may be found in Table 5.2.

The study focused on the perceptions and experiences of a single adolescent female. Her experiences were not a complete picture of the experiences of all females though the study included the participant's frequently cited personal perceptions of the experiences of others. Additionally, the participant was interviewed at a single point in her life and her current age and experiences may not be fully descriptive of the sexting experiences of individuals at different stages within adolescence. Therefore, future research of the same depth with numerous individuals would help to understand the sexting experiences of females more generally from a first-hand perspective. Although females seem to be most adversely affected by sexting, the behaviour cannot be seen in isolation from males and thus research from a male adolescent perspective is imperative. In order to ensure the full picture of sexting is understood, the opinions of all additional role-players such as parents, teachers and schools should be explored. Developing, implementing and evaluating a comprehensive, holistic programme on adolescent sexting would be the ultimate way in which to apply and test current knowledge while honing intervention practices.

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Table 5.2. A summary of suggested areas of further research garnered from the findings of the study

A summary of suggested areas of further research garnered from the findings of the study	
Theme 1: The participant's definition, conceptualisation and categorisation of sexting	- Whether the language used by adolescents when referring to sexting is related to how they experience sexting - Further exploration of the nature of text-based sexts - How sexting develops according to trends and advances in hardware and instant messaging platforms - The implications of the South African platform of Mxit on sexting behaviour in South Africa
Theme 2: Motivations for engaging in sexting	- An exploration of the differentiation of motivations for sexting between genders
Theme 3: Consequences of sexting	- Investigating the value of self-reflection on sexting practices, leading to acknowledgement of potential consequences the behaviour may have for an individual - The need to explore and highlight the experiences of adolescents who have not experienced negative consequences of sexting, nor had their images distributed, as a means to holistically understand the phenomenon of adolescent sexting - Considering the forwarding of sexts, especially from a male perspective - Questioning whether factors such as an individual's circumstances and motivations for sexting would mediate the risks experienced - Whether knowledge of the legal risks of sexting influences the likelihood of engaging in sexting
Theme 4: Protection from consequences of sexting	- Gathering numerous suggestions from various adolescents regarding self-protection when engaging in sexting, or avoidance tactics when pressured to sext - How adults such as teachers and parents may be more supportive to adolescents engaging in sexting - Which mechanisms adults may use to effectively intervene in sexting - How the utilisation of peers may be effective in sexting interventions

5.6. LIMITATIONS

The study was limited by the small sample size and isolated gender and age of the participant. This means that the study is not representative of the entire phenomenon and is subject to the perceptions of the participant. As a result, the study cannot be generalised. Future research with more participants may assist in confirming the established themes in order to generalise the findings more broadly.

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Of significant concern to this study was social desirability bias which may be a potential limitation for research on sensitive topics such as sexuality. It is thus important to acknowledge the possible presence of social desirability bias, which is the tendency for participants to cite narratives which they feel would be more socially appropriate and avoid discussion of behaviour which may be viewed unfavourably by others. Discomfort during the interview may have played a role in the participant censoring her experiences, thus producing an incomplete or incorrect account of the phenomenon. A comfortable, relaxed style of interview, beginning with unobtrusive questions and utilising a private venue, ensured that the participant remained at ease and felt secure in expressing her sexting experiences. As a result, the participant appeared to be expressive and engaged in the interview process. However, it is not possible to ascertain the full effect of how social desirability bias or discomfort with the topic may have caused the participant to restrict expression of her most personal experiences. It was also fully acknowledged that the participant should retain her right to privacy and thus feel able to restrict the information she shared.

5.7. FINAL SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

The study explored, in depth, the sexting experiences of a female adolescent in Cape Town, South Africa. Sexting literature has primarily focused on associated risks and prevalence estimates in quantitative studies, which meant that there were few studies connected with the lived experiences of adolescents in relation to sexting. In this study I aimed to specifically capture a female adolescent's experiences of sexting by qualitative means. Numerous developmental factors associated with adolescence, especially the increased focus on sexuality and social dynamics, were found to be present in the sexting experiences of the participant and thus needed to be acknowledged while being grounded in strong theoretical concepts.

The results indicated that, from the perceptions of the participant, adolescents within her context experience a wide range of motivations to engage in sexting. Acknowledging the complexity of sexting arises when each individual may experience numerous combinations of motivations and pressures when engaging in sexting. Furthermore, adolescents experience multiple consequences of engaging in sexting. Again, the dynamic nature of human behaviour is reflected in the social

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consequences adolescents face when partaking in sexting, which are intertwined with other repercussions experienced. The study was able to explore intricate details of how the behaviour was experienced by an individual. As a result, the participant was able to develop suggestions on how to effectively intervene in sexting behaviour with the hope of acknowledging motivations for sexting while decreasing the negative effects thereof.

As a researcher I needed to be aware of my novice status and put in place various means to monitor and improve my research capacity, such as engaging in constant reflection and continual research. Furthermore, I found myself needing to be aware of and challenge my biases, such as assumptions around gender expectations in sexting, and an originally narrow focus on the risks of sexting. The research allowed me to reflect on the role I played as an adult with whom adolescents discussed sexting and the importance of my empathy and respect. I needed to take note that my responses to these individuals would constitute how they experienced adult involvement in sexting and this may have either supported, or isolated, them as a result. Processing my past roles also allowed me to take heed of how I would personally interact, and possibly intervene, with adolescents in the future.

Thus, the study showed the necessity of considering sexting holistically. As such, it was required that the current research explore and take heed of negative consequences of sexting, recognise developmental factors associated with sexting in adolescence and at the same time remain respectful of adolescents' experiences and desires. All of the above resulted in a comprehensive exploration of the sexting experiences of female adolescent in Cape Town, South Africa.

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APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What does it feel like being a teenage girl?
- How would you describe your sexuality as a teenage girl?
- What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of sexting? What do you think it is?
- How do you feel about it?
- What are your experiences with sexting? Can you describe any situations?
- Were there any positive aspects?
- Were there any negative aspects?
- Are there any people's opinions you were concerned about regarding sexting? Why?
- How would friends, peers, parents or teachers and your friends react if they knew?
- Could you tell me about any incidents of other people sexting that you heard about?
- What were your responses?
- What were the responses of your friends?
- How did, or would, you or your friends react to the person involved?
- Can you think of any reasons why you or others would sext?
- Do you think it's easy to sext? What makes it easier to sext?
- What would make it more difficult to sext?
- Do you think there is pressure to engage in sexting?
- What risks are there?
- Could sexting be a part of developing as a teenager?
- Do you think there is anything specific about your school that influences your experiences of sexting?
- Do you think there is anything specific about South Africa that influences your experiences of sexting?

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APPENDIX B: CODED VERBATIM TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW

	Irrelevant content: Rapport building discussion
M	So when I say sexting, what do you understand of that?
K	I uhm. I have participated in it. (laughs) My boyfriend left to Switzerland for two months once. So…
M	Okay
K	I understand it as you know like uhm (pause) Talking to each other like **pause** uhm… Like "what would you do if I was…" like that kind of thing. And also as in sending photos and stuff.
M	Okay. Okay cool. That's pretty similar to my definition.
K	Great
M	So my definition is basically sending naked picture, or semi naked picture or picture that are quite suggestive
K	Mmmhmmm (nodding)
M	And then kind of sex messages
K	Ya. Foreplay.
M	Over uhm the phone. But basically the main component is using a phone.
K	Yes. Yes.
M	Uhm. Ya so that's kind of my idea of it. So If one of your friends were to explain sexting how do you think they would explain it?
K	I think the same to be honest.
M	Oh okay.
K	Ya I think like we all… ya. They would say the same thing.
M	So you have the same definition?
K	Ya and I know a lot of my friends participated in it. So ya. Its quite a thing. But you've just got to make sure its with the right person.
M	Okay
K	Otherwise it can end up… Like actually. Sorry you were asking a question.
M	No its okay. Go for it.
K	Like shame. Oh this is like uhm. This one guy in my class when we were probably in grade 10. Or grade 9. He was like showing us these naked pictures of this girl that she had sent him and she was in grade 8. Uhm… And like… she had like… it was so gross.. she had like an alien spray bottle and she had like put it up… like her vagina and she was sending him these photos. No she was in grade 7 and we were in grade 9. And I felt so bad for this girl because it was like my… our entire class has now seen this chick naked and with stuff up her and she hasn't even come to high school yet and like now when she gets there everyone is going to be like oh that's the girl who…. (pause) that's why I'm saying you have to do it with the right person. You cant just be talking to someone and send it. It has to be like your boyfriend or something. Like even that ends up bad sometimes. But uhm.
M	Ya
K	Like I just thought of that story like a bad sexting experience.
M	Ya no no no definitely.
K	That poor girl
M	That is definitely what I am interested in. That's what I want to hear about. So when you talk about uhm it has to be with the right person. What does the right person look like?
K	Well with me I was always very against it. Like mmm… Even like sometimes in the beginning of the relationship with my boyfriend uhm. Like I didn't like wanna like send like bikini photos or anything just because its like we're still new. I don't want like all of a sudden… Or also just because I don't want someone going on his phone and its not his fault but they go through his photos and there I am… like naked. Uhm so only when he… we had been together for about 2 years when he went to Switzerland and when we were.. we would like joke around or whatever (typing motion) and I could trust him. So that's how I know. I think that has to be the right person. Or just someone you genuinely… you just got to believe that they really wont… I always… I feel like it has to be a relationship. But also a relationship like if you have been dating for a week…like that's nothing to go by. It has to be someone you really like care and trust and you know that they wont let that out. And also you better get some stuff back so if anything goes out you gotta send some… You gotta have some ammo. (laughs)
M	(laughs)
K	Uhm ya. Does that make sense?

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M	Ya. Ya.
K	The right person. You have to have a proper relationship. It mustn't be some random person on the internet like I mean… if you want to but like. I don't see the point in that?
M	So it seems like it getting out is a really bad thing.
K	Mmm. Well that guy I know who would… he… he showed us. We didn't ask him. He was like "check this girl sending me these photos" like it is a bad thing because its just bad for your rep. Like that poor girl she hadn't even entered high school yet and we've seen her vagina.
M	Mmmm
K	Its definitely. I don't think sexting is bad… you know if I hear my friend is sexting with her boyfriend I am like whatever. Buts its when you sexting with someone you not even in a relationship with and then they showing these photos. You just look bad
M	Ya
K	Like why is she sending you photos like that when you not even like… you just talking. Ya. You not… That's when sexting is bad I think. But I think sexting is pretty like a normal thing.
M	okay
K	For people to do
M	Okay
K	(laughs) A lot of people do it. I don't do it anymore. I'm like not… I'm like "ag only when you're in Switzerland"
M	Okay
K	(laughs) ya
M	Amd why do you think people do it?
K	Well uhm… (pause) that's the thing… because if I think about my situation I'm like you know, he was far away, like it was… I would just be like… I wouldn't… I wouldn't like… I would just send him like cute… like oh look I like how my body looks today or whatever. Or like he would… Or I would say I got a new bra or whatever and he would be like "oh show me" and I'd send a photo. Uhm. But Uhm. Like with that other…. Sorry I just lost the question
M	No No.
K	Uhmmm. Sorry can you repeat that you just… I;ve like lost my…
M	Uhm… why do you think people do it?
K	Well I guess for pleasure (laughs)
M	Ya
K	Uhm. And its nice when like with me and my boyfriend like when he was away uhm I mean. To be honest I didn't really like… I didn't really get much out of sexting. It didn't like turn me on. Like he probably whatever'ed to it. (laughs) But I was like "meh".
M	(laughs)
K	I was just playing along for you. To be honest. Its not really my vibe. Like I liked it when he sent me photos and stuff but I wouldn't use it for purposes. I just thought it was like "ooh this is cute I get to see you naked still". (laughs)
M	(laughs)
K	Uhm… But like that girl if I think about her situation because she wanted attention. You know what I mean? From him?
M	Mmm
K	And like Uhhm.. like I also… Like my friend. She also… she was like speaking to this guy and he would ask for photos and she would send them and its like obviously cos you are hoping for a maybe hoping for future relationship. Maybe you sending them these photos is gonna make him want to be like… be in a… a relationship with you? I think that's what they were doing.
M	Mmmm
K	If I think about i. Ya. But on my point of view… Like it was because he was far in my position. Uhm. Ya. When I did it.
M	Ya. So it was kind of a part of keeping the relationship going?
K	Ya! Like I well I mean cos he would always like…. So I was like… "okay if you want to". (laughs) You know, whatever. It was nice to also keep… ya like it wouldn't always turn into like us… like… having a conversation like "oh let me take your pants off". Like that kind of thing. It would just be photos. Like that's sexting as well when you just send like a…
M	Ya

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K	Like a… like a… like a… even like a bikini or whatever. That's still sexting. So I would just do it…ya kind of to keep it alive and its just sweet to do. Like its like…. I dunno I just think its… I thought it was cute and he really liked it and he appreciated it. Uhm and I appreciated it as well. So… but that's because it's a relationship. It's a different thing when its you with some random person its like… why?
M	So you kind of have answered this question but did you ever feel pressured.
K	Uhm. To like sext? That thing?
M	Mmm
K	Like sometimes like uhmmmm… pressured… Like I don't feel… Okay like actually there was a time where my boyfriend went away a little while ago and he like kind of like said like "oh don't you want to send me a photo" or whatever and I didn't feel pressured because I said to him, I was like "to be honest… not really keen. I don't really want to send you a photo" like just because like I don't… I don't feel hot right now. Like I don't wanna
M	Mmm
K	I don't wanna… My body doesn't feel good. So I'm not gonna send you a photo.
M	Ya
K	And then he was obviously a bit bleak about it… like he wasn't…. like trying to make me feel bad so I would send a photo…. I think he was just like got a bit insecure like why is she all of a sudden not wanting to send me a photo? So I didn't feel pressured then but that's the only time I was like, ag I feel like I should but… I don't want to do it. But I've never really .., but I think some people do feel pressured to um (pause) sext definitely, like especially when it's a young girl and a older dude and he is talking to you if he wants a photo from you, you will do it, like ja
M	And why do you think they would do it?
K	Because well in my case, like that's what I'm trying to explain to you is like when I went to high school, all of a sudden I had all this attention that I never had, and I was like what the hell is this, like this is so cool, like people think I'm hot like what, the hell. So I feel like they just do it because they think .., like with me with that guy, like I thought like you know.. relationship, like I really liked him and thought a relationship would come out of it you know. So I was hooking up whatever but it wasn't like that, he was just in it for the like ., like, so I think people do it hoping it will… get a relationship out of it. Guys honestly like, I'm not just being rude to guys, but like young boys especially they just want the photos, they don't want anything with you. Like my friend, he just showed everyone like you don't do that, that's so wrong, it's ridiculous. (whisper: soft tone) (laughs) You shouldn't do that.
M	Okay. That makes a lot of sense.
K	laughs
M	So let's go back to that time where you did send sexts with your boyfriend,
K	Ya?
M	Would there... so you've spoken a little bit about the positive aspect in terms of: it was kind of fun and… what positive aspects do you think that there were?
K	Mmm (thinking) Well it was nice because umm (pause) you know, for him… I mean.. like, okay it sounds weird but obviously because he is away there's always those like worries, what if he is with someone else. But I didn't do it so he wouldn't hook up with anyone else, but it was also like nice, because I'm still giving him so like you know me (hands), so it's not like he's gonna go and be with someone else, even though it's different because it's my photos and some other girl's actual thing (laughs/awkward) , I was still .., I honestly didn't feel too negative about it at all. Like the positives were… uhm… ja I was keeping alive while he was away, it was nice for him because obviously .., (laughs) not for me like I don't .. (hands), it's just not my thing. But it was still fun, like I still felt naughty. What else was there? Ja like I said just with you know.., and let me think (pause) Other positives… I guess it was kind of .., and in a way but just because of our relationship it just like showed that we like, like we had like another level, like we .., like because that's a bit awkward, I was always like, sexting is so awkward but we could do it so freely, like we were just like throwing it out whatever, so that's the positives ja.
M	It sounds almost like .., the fact that sexting was possible in your relationship almost showed how close it was?
K	Ja! (excited tonee) because to be honest, I've always been like "I don't know how people sext, like how do they do it", like it's so awkward. But then with him it was like so chilled like it was like "okay!" I didn't feel awkward .., it was just ja, like I didn't have any negatives towards that at all to be honest, which I feel bad because you probably would like to know the negatives …

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	(laughs) (reflecting on what myself as the interviewer needs to get out of the interview)
M	It's good that you .., I'm glad that you had a positive experience, ja that's good to know
K	Some people have terrible experiences. But also ja the only negative I could think of .., what I was obviously worried about is someone going through his phone or like his phone getting stolen and then theres a bunch of bloody photos of me on the interweb. That was the only negatives that I could like think of. Also ja and I was just like .., luckily because we had a close relationship, ~~I knew like if we were to have broken up or fought he would not turn around and be like, oh well look at her, like I know (emphasised) that. For a fact~~. That's why I was so okay with it, because I know him. And I know he wouldn't be like that and also like I said I had the ammo too (laughs) so I will just go show all your friends then. Uhm I'm a bitch. (laughs) ahhh kidding. (minimising the serious tone?)
M	Okay, and if you think about other people, so were there any negative aspects that. You don't think there were?
K	No definitely, if I go back to that girl again, that's so negative for her. She got such a bad, we all had like .., how embarrassing knowing that people saw your (hands).., and like my one friend, the one I .., I think I spoke about her, she also sent photos to this one guy she was talking to, but now the one time when we at those guy's house, they literally (angry tone), I kid you not, they had like a memory stick of photos of girls that girls had sent them. And there was a few girls that we knew on there and now this girl is like an aspiring model and she's a bit of like a fitness, like a bit famous on Instagram for being like hot and like fitness and whatever, and is like if they still have that photo of her boobs and her face, that's really awkward. Like that's negative for her because what if she were to become famous or something and people are like well look at this photo of her I have back in the day, like that's the negatives. You know your past can come back and bite you. And then ja like I said, but ja it was so bad with them. This is like a thing, like with boys. They literally put a slideshow on the TV and they like went through these photos of these girls, not all of them are like naked, some of them were just like provocative (angry). But this is like people …, like they were about the age of like 13/14 and it was like, the one girl was like in a bikini, like pushing boobs together, the one was like in a bra and underwear. But my friend she was topless. So they didn't put that one on… I don't think... or did they? I cant remember. They literally just put it on, they thought it was so funny, and I was like I can't believe all these girls sent him these photos, is like that's ridiculous. They just got so many photos from people .
M	So were they sharing them between each other?
K	Ja well it was .., so it was two brothers and one of their friends and then there was me and my friend, so it was five of us, and they just put it on and they were like laughing like "oh look at all these photos we get sent" like they literally had a memory stick of these photos of these girls …
M	So girls had sent them to those people …?
K	To those guys… ya. And then they just .., *(showed other people?)* but they probably, I mean if they were just freely showing us, they were probably were freely showing a bunch of other people too and it's like (click of tongue) sad. Shame like those poor girls. Like they probably like "oh this guy likes me you know, let me just send a photo". And then… (hands open) ja, that's the thing. I was lucky enough to like straight about that. I didn't ever sent like funny photos or whatever to guys. Like the only guy I was my boyfriend now, and when I knew it was like okay, like I knew I wasn't gonna ja…. I was lucky that I didn't …, because people don't realise, they think it's okay and it's not, like it really can .., it's like you don't know the person well, you don't know actually .., you just have to take their word for it and their word isn't much. Especially when its teenage boys… they're terrible ja. (laughs)
M	Okay, and what do you think .., these questions, a lot of the questions that I might ask might be similar to what we've already spoken about. And if you feel like you've already answered it then just say oh ja I remember I spoke about that. But sometimes if I ask a question in a slightly different way then you might think about it a slightly different way or more information may come out of it. ..(unclear). So I don't mean to become harping on it ..
K	I keep forgetting the questions.
M	No, It's fine. Its fine. Do you think there's anything that makes sexting easier?
K	thinking, uhmm well uhmmm) Well, like makes it easier to do?
M	Yes.
K	Well in my point of view with my relationship, like .., it made it easier for me because I knew I could trust him, and I was okay with it, and I was actually like I can do it, I always was like I would never, never sext .., but with him I was like.. okay. And also because he was away, he

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	was far away it was easier, just because it was like .., ja it was just nice to do something, but we didn't do it like often.
M	Why do you say it was easier when he was far away?
K	Just because like I wouldn't .., (thinking) I guess because like I don't see the point in sexting if he's down the road, like because he lives very close from me and it's like what's the point, like I could just come to your house and we can really do it so (laughs).., ja because he was far away it made it easier because it just like ...,. But also if I think about it (soft tone), my boyfriend is very ..(unclear) and very jealous, and I also felt like me, I didn't do it to like prove him something, but ja just me sending those photos and stuff, I feel like that also made him feel better because he like, knew I was able to like .., I was trusting him that much like with those things of me. You know what I mean? So that was like I guess I was also trying to like help his self-esteem in a way.
M	So it was actually about him as well?
K	Well to be honest like .., ja it was more (emphasis) like .., ja it was more for him because like I said because not to be rude I wouldn't have used the photos and like played with myself (laughs). Like not to sound funny but like but I'm sure he did. (laughs) But ja like it was, but it was fun for me too, I would have never done it if I didn't want to. I did think it was cool, I thought it was naughty, and it was nice to just have like, still have like that kind of ..,(pause) like that .,. (pause) what do you call it, not sex, like the sex but like he wasn't like far away, like I mean, he was far away but we still could have that intimacy if I make sense ja.
M	Ya definately
K	Uhm I'm just trying to what else makes sexting easier .., ja is all I can really think of. But if I think about other people's situations, I feel like (pause)., if I think about girls because because I am just thinking about how my mind used to be. What makes it easier for the girls to do it is when the guy is like, (changes tone, coaxing, soft tone) "Oohh" like they will talk to you in a certain way. Like I feel like guys like coax... is that the word? Like coax you into like they are like "hey sweetie, how you doing?" like tatata, and that makes it easier for the girl to do it because they're like "oh okay... there's something happening here." And then they will do it. Then they're screwed.
M	Do you think in those situations, do you think the girls feel pressured into it?
K	Yes I feel like some of them are pressured into it (firm tone of voice), in turn because I think you know you always hear those stories with the guys are like "but you don't really like like me then" you know. Like if you not sending me these photos. Because that's a real thing, like people do that (serious tone). So even when my boy friend.. when I.. When he went away, he went away for like two weeks like he got a bit offended that I didn't want to, and like.. I didn't feel pressured, but I also did feel a bit like .., I was like "see, now he feels like shit because I'm not doing it so like maybe I should" (levels of pressure, mild pressure). But like that .., I don't feel like that's a bad pressure. I don't know. But definitely I feel like some people are pressured into it and I just don't know how. Like it's on the phone, you can like just switch off your phone, you shouldn't feel like pressured. But also you always hear those stories of like guys being like "Oh, if you do it you love me like". Ya… (doubting/serious tone)
M	Okay so do you think that that's a possibility?
K	I do think that the people do it because they are pressured definitely. (firm tone) ja. And for girls like the attention is nice, so when the guy that asked me for photos and he is giving you attention, you like "okay well I want to keep the attention so I'm gonna send him the photos". That's definitely like a thing.
M	We've spoken a little bit about .., like I guess pleasure. And you spoke more about it being like sexually pleasurable for the guy …
K	Ja
M	Do you think that's a generalisation? So in your case you said it was more like gratifying for your boyfriend than it was for you, it was for you in different ways kind of more emotionally and more .. relationship wise, but do you think in general that's the case?
K	No, I just think that I don't get turned on by like photos, to be honest because like my one friend the other day said something, she was like you know so and so hasn't ever orgasm? Not even by herself. and I think she means like using photos whatever and like playing with herself, but like I don't do.. Like it's just not my thing (self pleasure, boys using it for sexual pleasure). So I feel like it's not really a generalisation because I'm like maybe that's just not what turns **me** on, like I'd rather like be us. It just doesn't. Its not my vibe. I don't know why, its just like, a photo doesn't do much for me.

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M	So do you think that it is kind of for pleasure for girls as well?
K	The sexting? I think (pause, thinking) it could be like .., but for me it was like .., it was a bit of a pleasure but it wasn't a pleasure in that way, it was a pleasure in like, it was just like emotionally nice, like it sounds weird.
M	I get that
K	But I think for some girls… like maybe they are, but I'm not actually sure. I haven't really spoken to my friends very much about that. But I think definitely for some people, just for me it's not really my thing. Different strokes for different folks (laughs).
M	Okay so were you concerned about what others think in terms of when you were sexting with your boyfriend?
K	Not really because (pause). Like if my friend is on my phone I'd be like… just be careful *Lucas is away, right. (laughs) Like not ..,. also I had a friend as well the one time, we plugged her phone into the TV and then she was like oh shit wait guys, I don't know if that's okay. Like just in case the naked … So it's like with me I felt very chilled about it, obviously I wouldn't want my family going through my phone, but with friends and stuff I was like chilled. Like I made a joke about it and I was open about it, it was like be careful what you might see, like don't go into my chat with *Lucas. Kind of thing, so I was open about it …
M	But you didn't want your parents to find out?
K	No, no, not my dad. Ja like not because, I would find it awkward them knowing that I am sexually active, even though I'm 19 but like .., it's still, I don't want my dad to know that.., he knows but ja.
M	Think about when you were in high school, was there anyone else's opinion you might have worried about besides for your friends and your dad?
K	With the sexting? Well if I think… like because… it was my boyfriend, no. Because I was like it's my boyfriend, so.. But if I were to say do it, like sexting some other guy, like just a guy on the side, I would be worried about people finding out, because I would be like .., because I .., is not good to judge but I'm just like that's a bad idea. Like you shouldn't be sexting someone that you're not .., you know like if just chatting like it's just too… like not easy but it's like it is .., You are giving so much of yourself away already. Which is rude but .., So I would .., so if it wasn't a relationship, because I was in a relationship I felt like it was chilled. But if you are out of one I feel like I would be worried. I guess my close friends it would be fine but like you know your acquaintances or like someone else I would be like oh I don't want them to know, this is awkward, I don't want them think that of me"
M	Okay that makes sense. What about teachers?
K	Um (pause). I guess in high school it is weird. Like it's like you are young, you don't think you're young, but you're young. Like you think of yourself as a big little girl. So I guess ja I wouldn't obviously want the teachers knowing. But I also felt better because I mean when we sexted, we were like in a relationship, we'd been in a relationship for two years. So it was like in a way it's like I don't actually care what you think because I've been with him for so long, so but …
M	Okay …
K	I would have cared I guess, it would have been really awkward, if they were like found the photos or .. (Oooh … squeak)
M	How do you think they would have reacted, teachers I mean?
K	To me, like in my story? My little .., I don't they're very, like there was one or two teachers that are very much chilled, like we had this one teacher who was so open and I feel like she would like kind of understand and say ja that's what people do. Like that's what kids do these days. But then the other ones would be like that's very wrong. Like you shouldn't. And also because they know, teachers probably go through this many time where they see these like girls… mostly being taken advantage of. Like guys, because guys do. They will show it in the bathroom. They will show all those photos. They will show dadada. So like I think they aren't happy with it just because they know, they've seen the situation is there, is like now everyone's seen your vagina like … (serious)
M	So you think it's almost like concern ..?
K	Yes. I think so. Because just for the person's sake, because… I'm not generalising but it is mostly the guys who do it, like they are the ones who like showing everything around, and like the small girls, there's always, you always see it happening where like a young girl is taken advantage in that way and like they know that, so obviously they gonna be concerned with

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	sexting, they gonna be like .., because apparently they can .., the school can actually confiscate your .., you not allowed to have porn on your phone at school, I know that. It's like a weird…, like they can search it and like you will get in trouble. Why is that, do you know?
M	Okay. I'm not exactly sure about the legality of that but I do know that if you … Okay say you're under the age of 18 and you take a picture of yourself
K	(gasp) Oh!
M	… when you're naked. It's actually child porn.
K	Yes! I've actually heard that …
M	So when you're sending that, that is distribution of child porn, when you take a photo is creation of child porn even though it's of yourself,
K	it's still… (contemplative, look of shock, covering mouth)
M	It's still porn, so if somebody else has that on their phone, then they are in possession of child porn ..
K	Hey! I was 18 so I was good! (sigh) (laughs)
M	But being under the age is illegal, I'm not sure, I think if there is illegal activity on the premises that a school can intervene. I'm not 100% sure of the legality of that. But a lot of schools also have a policy so a lot of schools get their kids to sign it when they come in to say if you are on school property and you making use of an electronic device and you have this on your phone we have the right to confiscate it. And you can also be charged for it.
K	Hectic.
M	I don't think it happens that often but it can happen ..
K	I actually heard of a story once where this girl, I think she sent a photo to her boyfriend or someone and he showed people and the parents tried to sue the boy. But then the girl got a counter suit for distributing child porn, when it was herself but it was child porn, hectic hey .., and the guy didn't get in trouble because …
M	And I'm glad that you actually mentioned about the whole legal aspect because a lot of people have no idea about it, and I think it's easy to forget about that …
K	Yeah, people go and do their own thing, but that's funny like you know if I had known that in school… Because I only found out the legal thing about a year ago, if I had known like I would have probably gone to a teacher and like said this guy has photos of a young girl, can you please take his phone. Because the poor girl, like I actually should have done it, but I didn't. But like just to .., like for her sake. Because it's just so embarrassing, like it's just so sad, shame, like she made a bad choice and now everyone has seen her naked.
M	So from what I'm hearing from you is not necessarily that she is like a slut or a whore whatever those words that you mentioned earlier …
K	Ja sorry ..
M	No, no, no like it's good for me to use your words, I'm not saying them because they're bad words I just want to kind of use your understanding …
K	(you are using) My language .. (laughs)
M	So is not necessarily that she is falling into that category with those labels, but more she's made a bad choice.
K	That's the thing, is like, but that's the problem is people will see it as "what a slut" but then you would think about it and it's like she's not a slut, she hasn't slept with the guy, she's just making a bad decision, she's probably just .., that's why I always think about how I used to feel like, she obviously likes the attention from this guy and when he asked her for photos, she obviously felt pressure to do it, like I don't like, that's the thing, is like I don't think it's .., But then these other girls, I know this one girl who would like literally take a DSLR camera and put on the high heels and like take photos like that. And them I'm like… and would send it to like guys… and it's like okay she's not a slut because she's not sleeping with them. But it's still a bit like… no… its like distributing photos of yourself. That's when I'm like that sucks. But when it's a young like with that girl I told you about, that's when I feel bad. Because then I'm like I really do feel like she was being silly but when the guy I just told you about, like taking those .., like literally photographic photos, like she was trying to be photogenic and stuff. That's when I'm like, you now making a bad choice, you just being an idiot, like you know. Like, you taking time to make these photos look good and then send them to these guys. Ja but then… but that girl actually is quite a bit of a (laughs).., she's slept with like 70 guys, not 70 she's. Shes hooked up with like 80 and slept with like 30. It's terrible. And she's like my age, it's insane, but I'm just like woooah. That's when I'm judgy because I know how she is like, like I knew she had been with a lot of guys and then hearing about her sending photos I'm like it's a bit easy.

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M	Okay, so it depends on the person, it depends on the age?
K	Ja, I feel like .., it was just terrible like you shouldn't say that because you don't know, but I do feel like it depends on the age of the person because the girl who was taking the really good photos she was in like grade 10. And also like I said she'd slept around, like she'd already been with a few guys and with .., Whereas with that other girl, she was so young (emphasis), she was just like talking to an older guy, I feel like she was just pressured ja. But the other girl she knew, she had to have known what she was doing, like you know. And you know like, at that age you should also realise that guys are wolves and that they will just say things to you to get things out of you, you know, so ja.
M	Ja that makes a lot of sense.
K	Just let me know if I'm mumbling ..
M	No no no. It's so good to hear all of this. So say for example you were in high school.
K	Yes. Thank god I'm not. (laughs)
M	Okay let's talk about, not you, let's talk about say that girl that you were talking about, the one who was in Grade 7 and sent her pictures around. So how did your friends react to that situation?
K	Well they were also like "what the fuck" like this girl, like why would you do that. Like that's so like bad. Like they probably would have called her a slut. And that's the sad thing is that she's not a slut, she just made a really bad decision. So ja that's also the issue, that's why I'm saying this poor girl with such a bloody bad rep. Because people all saw that she's sent all these pictures of her naked body to this guy and is like obviously she's gonna be labelled a slut, like because you are so willing to send photos of yourself, and he was probably the first guy she ever did it to like, I mean I don't know, but like that's actually the sad thing as well. But now I remember actually I knew her cousin and I actually told her cousin just so he knew. Not in like a rude way like "I just wanted to let you know Tyler, this guy had photos of your cousin", and shame his poor face was like whaaaa? (illustrated face of shock,) But I mean like I thought it was good to know just so he could like tell her parents or something. Because she shouldn't have you know like maybe take her phone away or something, like so she doesn't do it again. You know, don't make the same mistake all the time.
M	Okay, so you spoke a bit earlier about how .., I'm sorry I'm jumping around a bit, but you spoke there about taking her phone away.
K	Ya.
M	So are there any specific things that would make it more difficult to sext? We spoke about making it easier, like the trust in the relationship and those type of things …?
	Uhm (pause) Well I guess not having trust would make it difficult, not having a phone would make it difficult, what else would make it difficult to sext .., (pause) ja like trust issues (pause. Like as in what would you ., can you give me an example of what you would say, just so I know… sorry .. Well I think like if those are the things that come to mind that's what's most important. Ja obviously you can't sext if you don't have a phone.
M	Yes (laughs)
K	Yes that's the thing, if your parents checking your phone it could help but you could also just delete the things. What could make it more difficult to sext is, yes, ja, if your parents monitor your phone. But you can totally get away with that, you really can. Maybe then like… ja (pause). Or even them monitoring your contacts and stuff. Because if they like go through your phone and they see like who's this guy, like who's that person, then they can like delete the number and be like, that's not actually .., I don't think you should even be having contact with this person. That's all I can really think about sorry.
M	Do you think there's any ways to kind of stop it from happening?
K	Sexting?
M	Ja.
K	The child just can't have a phone. Like that's the only thing. It's like sexting, like can easily happen. I mean you will probably just be watching TV and your child is in their room sexting. Like it is so easily done. Honestly the only way I could think of is not having a phone, is just .., unless you can like make the phone the ban using certain words and then they cant sext. (laughs) Like you can't use these words, but ja I honestly think the only .., because people they like it, people like sexting. (laughs) Ja.
M	Ja that's interesting I'm glad to hear it from you. Okay so let me just read this question to you. Think of a situation where someone you know, or someone you've heard about, that is not yourself, had an experience with sexting. What did you hear about the situation and what

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	happens? So you've spoken quite a bit about that girl, and, so what did you hear about the situation?
K	Didn't hear much, he literally just was like look at this girl. He just said like ja she sent me photos. It was quite a long time ago.. like four years ago, but ja he was like "ja look at this girl". And then obviously people were like judgy like "what the fuck? Why would she do that? Why would she send photos? But then like my if my friends talk about sexting… Like the one time my friend's boyfriend went also away for like three months and they were like Skyping and she flippin screen shotted when he'd like pulled his penis out. And she showed me the photo! (shock/excitement/embarrassment). And I was like "I do not want to see your boyfriend's penis thank you very much!" So that was like chilled, because that's the thing, she was in a relationship with him so we would like joke about it .., like if she said like. Oh! Oh actually its quite funny, when I go through her phone, she will be like "Oh shit no! No, actually .," (laughs loudly) and then I don't really care because I'm like oh well it's fine, you know. But when .., I think that's the thing, like when you're not in a relationship it's just .. it's judged. It really is. Because it's like, why do you have that photo like why? You shouldn't. Ja that's the only thing I can think of. That's the thing, if you think about the two situations, it's the same thing, they were both sending photos of each others' (hands). But she wasn't with that guy, she didn't really know him. My friend was with her boyfriend for like… a while… so it was cool. That wasn't good… (weighing hands) like …
M	That's really interesting.
K	But I also might like, some people might just think sexting is bad completely. And ..(unclear) they might even think what I did was bad. They would be like "what the fuck that's so wrong", like "you sending photos of yourself", like it's just my opinion obviously.
M	Who do you think would think about that that way?
K	My dad (looking down) .., I think, I can't think of anyone being like to me, like "you shouldn't have done that". Just because they know like my relationship ..,But I honestly think it's people are only weird when a person is not like in a solid bond with the person they are sexting with .., Because I can't think of anyone off my head that would be like, think that sexting is wrong, like completely wrong. But I guess like the teachers maybe, like if you think about them because they see bad experiences all the time. And like ja, so I guess the only people I can think about would be teachers and stuff, just because they. And I also think it's like, I just think it's not great when you like very young. (strong tone) Because also and even if you're dating guy in Grade 8, (strong tone) like you know, your relationship is probably not gonna last, he's gonna have these photos of you and like it's not a good thing. So I also feel like it depends on also maturity, like age level, like you got to be older, you got to be .., like in a solid relationship with someone, you have to. There's like all these boxes you have to tick. You need to be… because obviously ja you don't want to be a little ja .., ja you just don't want someone having those photos of you. Like I said like with my friend that one photo, what if she becomes famous and now there's this photo, and this guy is going to release and say like ja look at her when she was like 13 .., sending me photos of her boobs, like you know.
M	Ja. That makes sense. Okay. So if you think about that situation and say your friends heard about it and all that, how do you think your friends would react to the person?
K	The girl?
M	Yes.
K	Hmmm (pause). I think (pause). If I, okay I first I was like… This girl… Can I think first about how I would react? At first I was like… I was like "this crazy bitch like why would you do that?. And then actually about a year or two after that I actually met her and I was really nice to her. Like I didn't like judge her in any way. But she probably, like when she went to high school we were all wondering who she was. Because we had seen all these photos of her and we wanted to know which girl she was .., So like that's how they would have reacted. They would have looked for her, they would have tried to pick her out of the crowd. But I think they would not have necessarily have been rude, but (emphasised) they would have .., like you ***(rumours***)know if someone was talking about her they might have been like oh I heard…. these naked photos of her. So that's how people react, like they hear your name and then they remember that story, and they tell everyone that story. Ja.
M	Did she have her face in the pictures?
K	Well… the one was a video actually. The one with the alien spray. She is in front of a mirror, but she had very like .., she had a very thingy fringe and had dark dark hair, so you could tell by the video like that it was her. Like I mean… it was definitely her with the hair and stuff. So

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	she wasn't… and it was a blackberry so there wasn't very good megapixels and whatever, but you knew it was her, but you could tell from the video and see that it was her. So it wasn't ..,to be honest it was quite long ago, so I can't remember, but I don't remember really seeing her face very well …
M	But you could remember, but it could definitely be her ..?
K	I could definitely associate it with her ja. Especially because she had that fringe and she had the black hair, so you'd be like okay that's obviously her.
M	Okay. Do you think having a face on or off of the picture is a thing?
K	What do you mean like a thing?
M	Like… do you think its .., that people think about that when they're sending sexts?
K	I did. I… I was a bit like… I don't really want… I would send like maybe a photo of my body. Just because even though it was my boyfriend I was still like you know… just if someone.. I just don't want my face. But then he will be like please send me a photo of your face because he was like "I love you" like, he was like "I think you're beautiful like I want to see your face" (something in my eye). Ja, so sorry I lost my …
M	Having your face in the picture?
K	Ja I think that is a .., I don't think that you should put your face in the picture. I don't. But I did once or twice, just because he like asked like "do you mind?". But it definitely is a thing, because at least if your face isn't in the photo you can still deny it. You can still be like "that's not me". That's why it's good not to do that. But I think it is a thing, because also like the guys might be like "oh but I want to see your face", and that's like not good because then everyone knows that it's you. Unfortunately.
M	And do you think people, even though someone's face is or isn't on the picture, do you think that matters about people say about it? Like if it is actually .., say for example there's no face, on it but the guy says "oh this girl sent me this picture", do you think people would be like "okay she sent the picture". Or do you think they will be like oh but there's no face no. It might not be her
K	I guess, I would be like show me the chat. Like I wanna see it's actually her, I wouldn't .., ***(rumours)*** I don't think I would believe it straight away, to be honest. I would be like, but how do I know I know? I can't, there's no proof. I would definitely say like I wanna see the chats. Because I think there are some people would just like take the person's word for it and be like "oh okay". Especially if you're close to the person who's telling you, you're gonna just believe them, you not gonna think they're lying to you for any reason. Ja.
M	Okay, how do you think the school would respond if there was an incident, say for example, and the school found out and all of that. How do you think the school would respond?
K	Well I would hope that they would give the boy, well its not really the boy. Well it is the boy. I think they would obviously they would probably have a flippin meeting in the hall about it definitely, they would probably also …
M	With the learners from the school?
K	They probably ja, because there was this one incident where there was like a whole like sexual harassment vibe going around where these boys where they would cut off pubes and put it in sandwiches when the people weren't there or they would just like put their penis on tables. I don't know weird things. And they had like one day the principal was like "I'm sick of this …" because the guys were saying something about their cocks. The principal said "cock" in assembly, he was like, I wasn't there, my sister told me about. So I would assume like maybe with sexting if there was like an actual situation that they would make a big deal about it. And I would .., they would probably.. definitely… get the parents involved, and I would hope that they would give the boy a disciplinary hearing. Because ja… the girl sent it, and it's bad, but the thing is she is going to deal with much more kak, than a disciplinary hearing. Because if he did show people these photos it's embarrassing for her, ***(reputation)*** it's like a break to her like, confidence and ego. You know maybe she should get a hearing too because she also was distributing child porn or whatever. But ja… the schools would be .,. it is weird though. But maybe there would also be more like (pause) they would, maybe they would actually ban cellphones in class because the thing is they've actually, *at *Fig Hall they've uhm you're allowed to go on your phone at break time,* but at one point you were never allowed on your phone. So I think like it would happen at *Fig Hall maybe they would like revoke that, they would be like now you can never go on your phone. Because that would prevent the child from showing other children his phone like the photos. Ja.
M	Do you think it would happen that a guy's photo would be shared?

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K	Well I guess my friend showed me a picture of her boyfriend's penis (speaks softly laughs). I think it could definitely happen, but it's not .., it really, I'm not just being sexist but it definitely is more the guy, like it's more .., girls I don't think girls would like go asking for photos to be honest. From my point of view and of the situations I've heard, it is always the guy. It is always the guy that would be like "Oh, please send me a photo", or like "don't you want to send me a photo?" Like it is always the guy who is the catalyst whatever. But I think girls maybe they would, they would be like oh look at this photo, but I also feel like girls are more like .., not shy about it but ja they are more likely to keep it to themselves unless you get someone who is like very willing to show. But I think most of the time the girls wouldn't even say anything, you know what I mean? So ja I feel like the guy's photo wouldn't really get out there. Unless if it was like me and he was showing my photos I would be like okay, well here's his. Like …
M	And do you think he would suffer the same consequences as the girl?
K	No unless he has like a small penis or something (laughs). No I don't think so. This is the issue with society, is like girls get labelled sluts, boys get labelled like uhm… players .., not players but like "oh they're so cool" you know, they get all the girls, whereas with girls it's like "oh they are trash". So ja I don't think the guys would have the same consequences at all. Like it would be very different.
M	Ja okay, so in the literature that I've done on sexting there is quite a bit of research about this. We've spoken about the legal risks, but then there's also risks in other areas, what other risks do you think that there could be?
K	In sexting?
M	Yes
K	Well the legal risks obviously. (pause) Well obviously risk to your reputation. And like I spoke about my friend like your future reputation, because like what if you are, obviously you have what these like celebrities and then all of a sudden their past comes out to bite them. And people are like "oh wow but you actually did that". Ja, so I guess it could just ruin your reputation that could come back to bite you in the future. What also freaks me out is if it is a bad situation, like *Sonja that girl I told you about, if she found out that so many people had seen her photo if I was her I would probably want to kill myself ***(emotional consequences)***. So I feel like there's that issue where the kid might actually want to .., they won't know how deal with it, if their photo becomes more out there that they would actually .., . Because I've had like times where I actually don't want to deal with it . Like maybe I should just kill myself I don't want to deal with it. I don't have to feel it. Like I don't have to get through this crap, so there's definitely that ja. But ja that's what I can think of as the bad ..
M	Okay that makes sense. Do you think sexting could be a way to express yourself?
K	There are like girls or guys whatever who are really open with themselves and like are okay with it, and yes like if you want be a porn star then like that could be your way of expressing yourself, like getting yourself out there. But like with me no. No, I wouldn't see how to express myself out to be honest …
M	What would you say would be expressing yourself if ..?
K	: I don't know, I guess some people maybe it feels freeing or something …
M	Ja or like, I think we live in a world where you can create who you are as a person. So like on Facebook for example, you can put up all the pictures that you think defines you, so like for example your fitness friend, so she would put up pictures of her being fit and running and you know like the muscles and the protein shake and you know that whole thing, so like you almost creating or designing yourself. So sexting could possibly .., like I'm asking if that would possibly be "a thing" ..?
K	I can't see myself expressing myself through it, I mean there's other girls who like are so .., which is actually good for them in a way, like I spoke about that girl who was taking all those photogenic photos and I can send to so many guys but then it's like what about all the guys who were the same as her, they just a guy. So it's like actually good for you, you're like being… having control of yourself that you want to do, that's how you want to express yourself, that's how you want to be but for me no. I can't see how I can express myself through that. ja .., but definitely not naked, ja I don't know.
M	Okay that makes sense. Could sexting be a part of developing as a teenager?
K	I wonder, it could be. But it's dangerous like it's just that there's ., you really, you can have a very bad experience with that, and it can really… like… I said about that girl, I mean she came to high school and people had seen her naked, like how awkward. With me I had a good experience with it, I was with my boyfriend who was so chilled, no one, I mean even if people

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	know I don't care, like as long as they don't see the photos, ja, I don't know if it's .., I don't think it's good for their development just because of the negatives that there could be. Because people don't realise it, they just take someone's word, and they just like think okay they're saying I'm cute, they saying I'm pretty, so I should do it but ja so I don't actually know, I don't actually think it's good for children. If you think about like it's not great.
M	And could it be a way to explore relationships?
K	I guess ja. Like I said you know because then it like shows how close you are and it's like you can actually do that like I was sort of so awkward, and like I would never do that. Like ja, so it could be a way to explore relations. Also if you think about it, you know some people might be too embarrassed to say they want to do something in the bedroom, but if its on phone, and not to your face they might like make a comment like "ooh I do this to you" and then it's like if you do that to me? And then you try it out. So it could be a way of exploring because you will finally say something you were too shy to actually act on and then you will know by her or his reply if they are keen on what you just said. So it could be a way of actually ja like …
M	Okay ja, that makes sense. That's quite an interesting… I never thought of it like that. Do you think there's anything specific about your school that influences sexting in general?
K	That there's boys and girls, no …
M	And do you think that has a kind of .., do you think that there's more sexting because of that or ..?
K	Ja because you can .., okay let's say there lesbian relationships and gay relationships, but I mean in like at school, you can get someone's number, like you can get a lot of people's number, there was BBM at a stage and people were like exchanging BBM contacts dadada, then you have people and you are talking to a lot of people and then you were able to sext more, so like I guess in a way school is like that, because if you are at a all girls school and you are not lesbian, you're straight you know you don't really have as much contact with guys as you would in a co-ed school, but also if you are in a all girls school you might also do it more, like I actually don't ja. But you just, I feel like you're more likely to get someone's ..(unclear) a capability if you gonna ..(unclear) because you having more people's contacts.
M	Don't you think there's anything specific about South Africa that would influence this?
K	pause) No, not really but I guess maybe .., was mxit all over, or was mxit ?
M	I think mxit is South African.
K	Because with mxit I remember they would have these like really like sexual groups and you could like message people and then you can like contacts and then people would sext, and I feel like maybe that's how sexting is quite rife in South Africa because of those groups and then people would send photos and they became very like people were cool doing that. And then maybe it just carried on to like BBM and Whatsapp now but you can't really get a Whatsapp group like that. (technological platforms)
M	Well that's really insightful I didn't think of that at all.
K	Ja because they would have those like groups, you know those over 18 groups.
M	Yes I know what you are talking about. Ja I think that really makes a lot of sense that actually connects to South Africa, it makes it as a South African thing?
K	Ja that's what I asked I was like actually the thing about mxit. Mxit is South African. ix it .., is ..(unclear)
M	Thank you. That is some very useful information. Okay.
K	Do you think there's anything that you want to add or ask or anything like that?
M	Not really I just I just hope I helped ..
K	Yes you definitely helped, you've given me a lot of good information
M	Sorry I have such a bad memory, I will be talking and would be like I actually can't remember ..

- Sections of the transcription have been removed as they were not relevant to the specific topic of sexting and were therefore not coded.
- *Names changed to ensure anonymity of participant and to hide any identifying details.
- Information contained within brackets indications actions or observations.

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APPENDIX C: KEY OF CODES AND ASSOCIATED COLOURS

Language and definitions used
Beauty standards
Herself getting attention
Others getting attention
Being physically attractive
Sexual exploration
Participant as self reflective and empathy for others
Self soothing
Reason: getting into a relationship
Getting hurt by being led on to be in a relationship
Long distance
Pressure to sext
Victimisation
Self confidence
Taken advantage of (because of age or because thought would have a relationship)
Bad reputation
Age and concern about young females
Rumours
Slut/labelling
Teacher as resource
Teachers know better/ from experience/trying to protect them
Punishment
Information on possible future interventions from participant
parents
Serious relationship
Friends
Bad choices: embarrassing, emotional consequences, suicide, teachers finding out, Illegal
Positive experiences with sexting
Comments relevant to developmental processes in adolescence
Peer grouping
Common /easy/normal/accepted
Criteria needed for it to be safe/acceptable
Boyfriend: Length of relationship
age
trust
Motivations
Girls and pleasure
For his pleasure
Emotional pleasure
fun
Protecting his feelings
attention
Hoping for relationship
Intimacy and trust
Cute/sweet
Concerned about cheating, keeping relationship going in that regard Different way to engage sexually or maintain a relationship
Coax/sweet talking
Self protection
Boy initiating
Teenage boys

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Already sexually active, added to physical sexual relationship, lower replacement for physical sex, Sexual communication, safer way to communicate, Sexting transferring to real life sexual contact
~~Breaking up~~
Technological platforms
Girls have worse consequences, gender inequality
Context
Factors of context in South Africa
Factors of context in Specific school
Factors of context in a Co-ed school

*Coding colours in the transcription may not match codes used with the final themes and thus the colours used within Chapter 4 may not match.

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APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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CONSENT FORM

Study Title: *The sexting experiences of female adolescent.*

Principal Researcher: Ms Michelle Ireland

The Research Team:

Name/Degree	Phone Number	E-mail
Ms. Michelle Ireland Masters Student in Educational Psychology	0722686090	michelleeireland@gmail.com
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Counselling support services- Hope House, Bergvliet: 021 715 0424

1. Researchers' Statement:

You have the option of participating in a research study. This is a consent form. It provides a summary of the information the research team will discuss with you. If you decide that you would like to take part in this study, you would sign this form to confirm your decision. If you sign this form, you will receive a signed copy for your records.

2. What you should know about this study:

- This form explains what would happen if you join this research study.
- Please read it carefully. Take as much time as you need.
- Please ask the research team questions about anything that is not clear.
- You can ask questions about the study any time.
- If you say 'Yes' now, you can still change your mind later.
- You can quit the study at anytime.

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3. What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of the study is to explore teenage sexuality development and the phenomena of sexting. The study aims to understand how teenagers perceive sexting and how their context and peers influence their sexting behaviour.

4. Why do I have the option of joining the study?

You have the option to take part in this research study because we believe your knowledge and experiences may be important in enriching knowledge on adolescents and how the experience sexting. Participation will be voluntary and you may refuse to take part in the study or stop at any time without giving any reason. We respect your rights to make your own decisions and will respect if you do not wish to participate any longer. If you decide not to participate or want to stop taking part in the study after you have said yes, this would not affect you in any way.

6. If I agree to join this study, what would I need to do?

If you join the study, you will be asked to participate in some discussions around sexting. This discussion will help us gather information on the topic of sexting while ensuring you safety and comfort at all times.

7. How long would I be in the study?

If you take part in study you will be asked to participate in three discussions each of approximately an hour long over a maximum period of a month. If you join the study, you can decide to stop participating **at anytime for any reason**. If you do decide to stop, you would need to discuss this with Ms. Michelle Ireland to make sure that your safety is ensured.

8. What are the potential harms or risks if I join this study?

There is a potential for you to become emotional during the discussions conducted in the study but we do not see the study as being harmful or risky in itself. If any problems do arise, we will have discussions about the problem and we will make sure you feel comfortable to continue in the study. One the first page the contact details of Hope House are provided should you need counselling. Your identity will be kept anonymous and any information that we get from the study will be kept private.

9. What are the potential benefits if I join this study?

We hope this study will benefit you in terms of exploring yourself and your identity as well as understanding your sexuality. There are no financial benefits to this study.

11. How would you keep my information confidential?

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All of the information that we get from the study will be kept strictly confidential and will only be available to the research team. No information will be shared with anyone else. The only exception will be if there is a serious problem about your safety of the child or the safety of any other person, in which case we are required to inform the appropriate agency. If such a situation arises, we will make every effort to discuss the matter with you before taking any action. All the information we get from you or in the process of the study will be stored in password-protected files and your name and identity will be disguised.

12. What would my signature on this form mean?

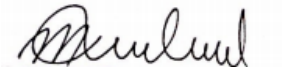
Your signature on this form would mean:

- The research study has been explained to you.
- You had a chance to ask all the questions you have at this time. All your questions have been answered in a way that is clear.
- You understand that the persons listed on this form will answer any other questions you may have about the study or your rights as a research study participant.
- **You have rights as a research participant. We will tell you about new information or changes to the study that may affect your health or your willingness to stay in the study.**
- By signing this consent form, you do not give up any of your legal rights. The researcher(s) are not relieved of any liability they may have.
- You agree to take part in this research study.

Printed Name of Research Participant	*Signature of Research Participant*	*Date*

18. Researcher's Signature

I have fully explained the research study described by this form. I have answered the participant and will answer any future questions to the best of my ability. I will inform the person taking part in this research of any changes in the procedures or in the possible harms/possible benefits of the study that may affect their health or their willingness to stay in the study.

Michelle Ireland		*18/07/2017*
Printed Name of Researcher Obtaining Consent	*Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent*	*Date*

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APPENDIX E: MEMBER CHECKING

M	Please can you reflect on which themes in the interview that stood out most for you, or were the most important?
K	*I remember the main themes being sexting in relationships, trusting the person you have sent it to and why girls do it. Also the legal implications.*
M	Okay, and what do you remember about each of those?
K	*Well for me, in my relationship, sexting was fun because of the type of relationship I was in. Like there just has to be that trust. We had such a close bond which was really important.* *I think people do it because its fun. But it can also be really bad because of the pressure. So its not good for everyone to sext. Like its really sad that young girls sext because older guys pressure them. I think it happens because girls want to be in a relationship and that's where sexting comes in.* *The legal stuff is pretty serious. It was something I hadn't really thought about before. It was good we discussed that. Like kids can get in a lot of trouble and that will stick with them for the rest of their lives.*
M	Did you think about anything we discussed after the interview?
K	*When we spoke I really realised like how much it is happening with young girls. And it really worries me. Something needs to be done for them because it can be so bad for them.*
M	(I then shared the diagram structure of the themes and discussed what each theme meant) Of the themes I shared with you, I know that not all of them were directly about you, but do you think there is anything in that diagram that you don't think were themes from our discussion?
K	*No. I think we discussed all of that.*
M	Is there anything we discussed that you feel I left out?
K	*No, not that I can think of.*

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APPENDIX F: REFLECTIVE RESEARCHER JOURNAL

The following section includes excerpts from my reflective journal in 3 areas of self-reflexive notes, notes from directly after the interview and notes made during data analysis and coding.

Reflections on my own behaviour:

- *The participant was conscious of using the word 'sexting'. Her tone and tentative way of using the word seem to show that she has not used this word frequently and it is not part of her daily vocabulary. I needed to be careful of the words I used so as to make sure I was on the same level as her. I also needed to find a way to communicate with her on the topic. She didn't seem to use another word to replace sexting and instead spoke about it indirectly so I also began to avoid using the word "sexting". This meant that the participant would often have to clarify with me about what I was asking her by saying "the sexting?" or "with the sexting" after questions posed regarding the behaviour. It became easier to use the vocabulary which we had now begun to share as it was a mechanism for the concept to be communicated clearly and effectively.*
- *I know that I conducted this research out of concern for adolescents, like those who I worked with previously. I needed to remember that the study was not about the experiences of those who I worked with but instead to focus on what the participant was sharing with me during the interview, but also looking at the data with fresh eyes and without preconceptions from the literature review or from my own experiences.*
- *I needed to think about how I had acted in the past with adolescents who sexted and whether or not I contributed to the possible feelings that adults are not trustworthy. Although I was shocked and concerned when I first heard about these instances in the past, my manner of working with empathy and respect with all my clients hopefully did not cause this type of alienation. It was important for me to therefore be non-judgemental and respectful of this participant from the start. In my work with adolescents I have been open to any conversations presented by learners. However, through reflecting on the participant's narrative I believe that the type of explicit conversations indicated by the participant would have been important. Thus, I can see it would be*

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important for the participant that protective mechanisms need to be put in place for adolescents as the current actions of adults seem to be perceived by the participant as fruitless

Notes from directly after the interview:

- It seems as though the participant often referred to young girls in negative sexting incidents. *Females seem to be typecast as looking to males for attention through the use of the sexualised medium of cell phone communication and were often portrayed as not being able to help themselves because of the desperation to be in a relationship. This concerned me as I feel it is unfortunate that these girls feel they need to define themselves based on being in a relationship, especially at such a young age and that the need is so strong that they may put themselves in serious danger as a result.*
- It seems like she identifies with the young female group, possibly from her own past experiences of victimisation during this time in her own life. *The participant is keenly aware of how peers can punish one another and, due to this empathy, seems to want to be able to protect others, especially young girls.*
- *the participant mentions numerous times that older males seem to be utilising unequal power relations in order to get sexts from younger females. females seem to be typecast as looking to males for attention through the use of the sexualised medium of cell phone communication*
- Her comments about text based sexting came as quite a surprise to me. *I didn't think text-based sexts would be very common because of the visual nature of cell phone communication. It was interesting to me to see that these messages were used essentially as phone sex and were highly explicit. I wonder if there would be any differences in how the participant experienced text-based sexts and how a male would experience them. Perhaps her boyfriend would have seen it in a different light.*

Notes made during data analysis:

- *During the interview I felt that the participant had really thought about her sexting behaviour and was quite convinced that her behaviour could actually*

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be seen as quite responsible. However while analysing the data I can see that there are contradictions in her comments. It seems like the participant first believed her own sexting to be unproblematic and although she seemed to maintain this belief, the discussion around the negative experiences of others seemed to show her reconsidering the risks associated with her own behaviour, although to a seemingly minor degree. The participant used the opportunity of the interview discussion to process what she felt made her sexting acceptable. She organised these thoughts, and reflected on the number of criteria by labelling them 'boxes to tick'. She seems to have justified the behaviour to herself I by ensuring she ticked all of the boxes she created herself. I wonder if there are any boxes that others would prescribe which she has not ticked or whether her behaviour was indeed as "responsible" as sexting can be.

- *It stood out to me that the participant seemed to feel a sense of irritation and slight disgust at the convert manner in which males get and share sexts from females, especially when considering unequal power relationships. This was important because discussions on sharing of sexts were common. Perhaps her frequent mentioning thereof shows her increased concern on this specific behaviour which seems to be a symptom of gender inequality.*
- *When thinking about gender inequality, the participant did not seem to include herself in the effects of feeling pressured but in fact she did experience slight pressure from her boyfriend where she felt guilty that he may question the relationship or something he had done in order for her to refuse sending him sexts. The participant acknowledges that sexting is for her partner's physical pleasure and seems to be motivated by increasing his sexual pleasure despite not being sexually aroused herself which seems to show inequality in itself. Gender roles, of a female being responsible for a male's pleasure and feeling guilty as a result of not meeting these roles may be playing out to an extent in her experiences.*

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