

Let's Talk About Sext: Gendered Millennial Perceptions of Sexting in a Cyborg Society

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ABSTRACT

In a cyborg society where people exist both organically and via technology, sexual expression and interaction via technology has become 'normal'. The controversy surrounding sexting stems from contemporary literature and media portraying it as coercive, harmful and unacceptable, with particular reference to young females. Qualitative data on this phenomenon is extremely limited and biased, potentially resulting in unjust limitations and restrictions. This study investigates Millennial sexting behaviour by considering general and gendered perceptions of sexting to better understand the phenomenon; its risks, benefits, and the practice itself. An exploratory mixed methods study amongst university students ($N = 579$) revealed expected and unexpected findings. Respondents acknowledged sexting's risks, while the benefits of and motivations for sexting were emphasised with little evidence of negative pressure. It is argued that the benefits of sexting greatly outweigh the potential risks, but moreover, that sexting is a primarily feminist practice that holds much promise. The need for sexual education and awareness of sext-consent is examined, as theoretical and policy implications are discussed.

Keywords: female perspectives, cyborg, Millennial, sex, sexting, technology, cyberfeminism

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	8
1.1. Structure of Dissertation	11
2. LET'S TALK ABOUT SEXT LITERATURE.....	13
2.1. Introduction.....	13
2.2. On Millennials: Generation Y Me	14
2.2.1. Family and failure to launch.....	15
2.2.2. Special Me	15
2.2.3. Cyborgs.....	15
2.2.4. Millennial sexuality	16
2.3. Tech and Sex	16
2.3.1. Phone sex: Sex V 2.0.....	17
2.3.2. The threat	18
2.3.2.1. Perceptions.....	20
2.3.2.2. Motivation and prevalence	20
2.3.2.3. Legal and Policy Implications	21
2.3.3. Gender and motivations.....	23
2.4. (Post)Feminism Online: The Cyborg	24
2.4.1. Understanding Cyber-Feminism.....	25
2.4.2. The Feminist Sexter	28
2.4.3. Theoretical considerations.....	28
2.5. Conclusion	28
3. RESEARCH METHODS.....	30
3.1. Specific Aims and Hypotheses	30
3.2. Procedure and Instrumentation.....	31
3.2.1. Research Design: Exploratory mixed method	31
3.2.2. Preparation	32
3.2.3. Quantitative: Online questionnaire.....	33
3.2.3.1. Participants and sampling	33
3.2.4. Qualitative: Focus groups.....	34
3.2.4.1. Participants and sampling	35
3.3. Data Collection and Analysis.....	36
3.3.1. Quantitative.....	36
3.3.2. Qualitative	36
3.4. Limitations and Ethical Considerations	37
3.4.1. Quantitative.....	37
3.4.2. Qualitative	37
4. QUANTITATIVE RESULTS	39
4.1. Millennial Tech Habits.....	39
4.2. Defining 'Sexting'	40
4.3. Thoughts On Sexting	41

4.4. Men/Women Who Send Sexy Photos Are	44
4.5. Young People Sext Because	45
4.6. Rate Personal Relevance	47
4.7. Why Might You Be Concerned About Sending Sexy Messages or Pictures?	51
4.8. Your Experience of Sexting	52
4.9. Conclusion: A summary	53
5. QUALITATIVE RESULTS	55
5.1. Millennial Sext Habits.....	55
5.1.1. <i>The 'exchanges'</i>	55
5.2. Defining Sexting	55
5.2.1. <i>Not porn, not sex</i>	55
5.3. Men/Women Who Sext Are...And Other Sex Differences	57
5.4. Young People Sext Because... ..	58
5.4.1. <i>Easy and accessible</i>	58
5.4.2. <i>Less to stress about</i>	58
5.4.3. <i>Proximity</i>	59
5.4.4. <i>'Normal' sex issues</i>	59
5.4.5. <i>Exploration and experimentation</i>	60
5.4.6. <i>Sex positive media and pop culture</i>	60
5.5. Personal Relevance and Experiences	61
5.6. Thoughts & Concerns	62
5.7. Conclusion	64
6. DISCUSSION	68
6.1. Understanding Sexting: A Re-Cap of Findings and Literature	68
6.2. Sexting & Cyborg Feminism: A critical discussion	73
6.3. Bottom-Line: Theoretical Framing of Sexting	76
7. CONCLUSION	80
7.1. Future Research & Recommendations	81
7.1.1. <i>Sext-Ed</i>	81
7.1.2. <i>Policy implications</i>	82
REFERENCES	84
APPENDIX A: Questionnaire	A1
APPENDIX B: Questionnaire Advert	B1
APPENDIX C: Focus Group Questions.....	C1
APPENDIX D: Consent Forms	D1
APPENDIX E: Focus Groups Advert.....	E1
APPENDIX F: Tables and Graphs	F1

TABLES AND FIGURES

Pg. 39	Figure 1: Participant Tech Habits
40	Figure 2: Sexting is... (Definition)
43	Figure 3: Men feel pressured to send naked selfies
43	Figure 4: Women feel pressured to send naked selfies
48	Figure 5: I send semi/naked pictures (by origin)
50	Figure 6: I enjoy getting pictures like this
41	Table 1: Sexting definition by respondent sex
46	Table 2: Young people sext because... (Chi-Square by Gender)
53	Table 3: Respondents' sexting experiences

Appendix F

F1	Figure F.S.1: Participant Sex
	Figure F.S.2: Participant Race
	Figure F.S.3: Participant Age
	Figure F.S.4: Participant Origin
	Figure F.S.5: Participant Relationship Status
F2	Figure F.1: There is pressure among people my age to post/send sexy pictures/texts, by sex
	Figure F.2: Personal sexy messages/pictures usually end up being seen by more than just those to whom it was sent
	Figure F.3: Sending sexy messages/pictures can have serious negative consequences
F3	Figure F.4: Sending sexy messages/pictures is quite normal
	Figure F.5: Sexting in a committed relationship is normal and healthy
	Figure F.6: My friend(s) have sent sexy pictures of themselves to someone, or posted it online
F4	Figure F.7: Young people are more likely to have phone sex or sext before having sex in real-life
	Figure F.8: Phone-sex or sexting can replace real life sex
	Figure F.9: Females who send sexy photos are...Flirty
F5	Figure F.10: Men/Women who send sexy photos are...Hot
	Figure F.11: Females who send sexy photos are...Funny
	Figure F.12: Guys/Girls who send sexy photos are...Slutty/loose
F6	Figure F.13: Men/Women who send sexy photos are...Slutty/loose
	Figure F.14: Young people sext because...they want to flirt/show interest
	Figure F.15: These pictures I get are unsolicited
F7	Figure F.16: I enjoy getting pictures like this

- Figure F.17: I enjoy sending pictures like this
- Figure F.18: Someone has shown me a naked selfie sent to them by another person
- F8* Table F.1: I send naked/semi-naked pictures (Chi-Square by Demographics)
- F9* Table F.2: I receive naked/semi-naked pictures (Chi-Square by Demographics)
- F10* Table F.3: Pictures are unsolicited (Chi-Square by Demographics)
- F11* Table F.4: I enjoy getting pictures like this (Chi-Square by Demographics)
- F12* Table F.5: I enjoy sending sexts (Chi-Square by Demographics)
- F13* Table F.6: I have been shown a private naked selfie (Chi-Square by Demographics)
- F14* Table F.7: Why would you reconsider sexting?

TERMINOLOGY

In this dissertation, tech-speak or Millennial expressions are at times used. To facilitate the reader's navigation, I offer the most commonly used below, along with their meanings:

<u>Term</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Dick Pic	A photo of male genitals
Nudes	Naked pictures
Millennials	Generation of individuals aged 15-35. Usually of Western middle-class background.
Online	Engaged over technology (internet, technological devices)
Phone Sex	The act of having sex over technology (virtual sex)
Real Life/Offline	What happens offline in the physical world (as opposed to online)
Selfie	A photo taken of oneself
Sext	Noun: a sexual text message. Verb: to engage in sexting. Sext always includes text messages, and may include self-produced images, video or voice notes of a sexually suggestive nature
Sexting	The act of engaging in private sexual text messaging. Can also include images, voice recording, and video.. <i>Note:</i> used interchangeably with 'cyber-sex'.
Tech	Abbreviation for Technology or Technological
Sext-Ed	An abbreviation for 'sext education', teaching individuals how to use sexting safely, likened to 'sex education' in schools which teach kids about the risks of unprotected sex, and how to have safe sex.
Sex	In this study, depending on context 'sex' can refer to 1) the act of sexual intercourse, or 2) participants' sex as a biological status (not to be confused with 'gender', which is an individual's self-identification with particular gender). The latter will mainly be used as a variable in the statistical analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

“The rapid development and adoption of online digital technologies has had a profound effect on the way young people conduct their social relationships. The emergence of sexting, or the distribution of sexually explicit photos and videos, has gained widespread attention and raised moral concerns. However, there remains little policy-relevant research on the prevalence of sexting and its impact on young people.” – Lee, Crofts, McGovern, & Milivojevic, 2015: 1.

We have become cyborgs; cybernetic organisms who exist through both organic and technological means. Our phones, computers, Facebook pages, and email accounts are no longer separate entities, but part of our being. Millennials, more than any other generation, are ushering in the cyborg-age, being the first technological natives to have been raised in an era with the development of new-media technologies such as the cellphone, MP3 player, and personal computer (PC).

Young Millennials, with their expressive nature and focus on self-presentation and connectivity, exist online socially, professionally, and sexually. The latter has become an important emerging issue for researchers and policymakers as some authorities have taken offence to the practice (Lee *et al.*, 2015). Sexting, interaction of a sexual nature over technological devices, has become so commonplace that the student respondents in this study depicted it as normal, and even healthy in a relationship.

Despite this, news media in Westernised countries, including South Africa and Australia, have expressed concern over sexting, often reporting that the practice of using mobile phones and laptops to exchange sexual images is leading to the moral downfall of young Millennials, in some cases even falling foul of child abuse material or child pornography laws (Lee & Crofts, 2015; Lee *et al.*, 2013; Salter *et al.*, 2013; Lee *et al.*, 2015). While sex between two consenting teenagers is legal (16 years and above), exchanging semi-nude or nude images while having consensual sext in the comfort and safety of their own homes is criminal, and has even led to some convicted teenagers being branded sex offenders (Walters, 2015).

When ‘normal, healthy’ behaviour is criminalised, behaviour that is part of the individuals’ being, it doesn’t stop the behaviour, but instead leads to shame, embarrassment, and keeping it a secret. It is here in the dark that the true danger lies, where the behaviour is

unregulated and the individual has no frame of reference for appropriate behaviour, subjecting them to many risks that could all be avoided.

Recent research has found the highly publicised risks of sexting (that young women and females are coerced or pressured into sexting, that sexters are morally grey, and that it is a practice that aims to extort and self-gratify) are mostly without merit. As this study finds as well, very little evidence of coercion and peer pressure to engage in sexting exists (Lee *et al.*, 2015). Instead, the practice is an enjoyable, consensual activity for both parties, and part of their intimate relationships. Only recently has one study suggested that we actually do not know enough about the practice or young people's perceptions of it to make these assumptions, with the findings suggesting that female sexters enjoyed sexting (Lee & Crofts, 2015).

This dissertation builds on this new platform of inquiry: investigating the phenomenon of sexting through Millennial perceptions, with particular focus on female perceptions, from the subjects themselves. This study argues on the premise that Millennials are essentially cyborgs who exist both technologically and organically, and who view sexting as part of their natural, normal sexual expression and development. Limiting this right to expression, is therefore an infringement and wrong in and of itself. The immediate goal of this dissertation is to contribute to our understanding of the phenomenon. However, the ultimate goal is not only to address the ban on sexting for teens who are of the consenting age (16+) but to lift the taboo of sexting altogether, and for older generations and authorities to understand sexting as such.

This study employed a mixed method approach to investigate Millennial sexting, by enquiring about respondents' opinions and perspectives of sexting, sexuality and how technology is changing the way people date. A previous study found students at University of Cape Town's (UCT) sexting prevalence to be on par with international statistics (Scholms-Madlener, 2013), while my findings additionally indicate their tech-habits to be almost identical to international Millennial figures, ergo in this instance my sample of UCT students were used as a representative sample for international Millennials.

An online questionnaire was successfully completed by 568 (*N*) UCT students, in which both male and female respondents shared their thoughts on sexting, sexters and Millennial

relationships. This was followed by two focus groups with, altogether 11 (*N*) female participants, which offered a more in-depth, conversational look at female perceptions of sexting as well as its benefits and risks.

Therefore, this study aimed to explore and investigate the landscape of Millennial sexting through the perspectives of Millennials themselves. Recent research and news media reported young people's sexting habits as a moral panic; a negative phenomenon (Lee *et al.*, 2015). This, along with the legal ramifications for being 'found out', is cause for real concern, especially considering that we do not know enough about the practice. Additionally, despite the moral panic and legal reactions to sexting, especially as a measure to protect the young female who is considered in need of protecting, very few studies equip effective qualitative measures to listen to Lolita's¹ voice.

It is only once we engage with an issue and in doing so give recognition to its existence and significance that we might start to explore its meaning and understand it; and it is only from such a place of understanding that we may be able to appropriately and usefully respond to it. Sexting does hold potential risks, but to understand how we may prevent them and protect our young people, we first need to understand its subject (the Millennial) and its manifestation.

The study looked at both overall, as well as specifically female perceptions of sexting and sexting behaviour. The findings can therefore be split between 1) overall findings regarding sexting behaviour (combination of male and female student responses), and 2) gendered perceptions and relations.

Although gender differences were found in motivations to, and perceptions of sexting, these were minimal and much less than hypothesised, especially concerning women being critical of sexting. Sexting was deemed a normal activity, which supplements rather than replaces a healthy sexual relationship between two consenting partners. Motivations to sext, as well as concerns which might hinder sexting were investigated. These findings are discussed against the backdrop of cyberfeminist pioneers, Plant (1997) and Haraway's (1991) vision for future feminist tech use, while concerns are raised where current policy approaches

¹ The sexualized young female character, derived from Vladimir Nabokov's book of the same name (1955). Het image is often used when referring to underage sexual, female beings.

fall short of meeting the needs of Millennial sexters' rights to expression, privacy, and protection.

1.1. Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organised around the following chapters:

Review of the Literature. I will begin this dissertation by providing the reader with an overview of the current debates in sexting literature, as well as an understanding of Millennials and how technology has changed the way we interact with the world. I will also consider feminist literature on sexting, which has been a major influence in gaining support for both anti- and pro-sexting movements in and out of academia.

Research Methods. In this section I start off by making clear my specific research question and objectives, and then go about describing the specific methodology I employed for this study. As this is an exploratory study that investigated a largely unknown topic, the decision to use both qualitative and quantitative methods was made to allow for more than one type of input. The quantitative phase was ideal for an overall perspective, likes, dislikes, and prevalence estimates, while the qualitative phase offered more in-depth insight into the psychological processes involved.

Quantitative Results. The results and significant findings from data collected with an online questionnaire are presented and briefly discussed in this section. The findings of the qualitative phase aimed to provide the general perceptions Millennials have of sexting and their experiences thereof, and followed mostly a similar format to previous international sexting studies who have become widely supported and cited (Associated Press (AP) & MTV, 2009; The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008). Subsequently my findings are compared to the results of these studies.

Qualitative Results. Presented in a similar themed structure as above, this section investigates sexting in a more in-depth level. Themes considered will be: 'Millennial sext habits' (the *how* of sexting); 'Defining sexting' (it's not porn, it's not sext – what is it?); 'Men/Women who sext are...' (and other sex differences); 'Young people sext because' (motivations for sexting); 'Personal relevance & experiences' (when and where sexting occurs); and 'Thoughts and concerns' (concerns and opinions surrounding sext).

Discussion. This section discusses the usefulness of the findings, while also placing it theoretically back into the literature examined at the beginning. In the light of my findings, I emphasise a serious reconsideration of current sexting legislation and theoretical frameworks used to research and analyse the practice. I review cyberfeminism, an interdisciplinary gender-related discourse which focuses on relations between users over the Internet, and new-media technology, theorising and critiquing imbalances, inequalities, and other wrongs (Consalvo, 2012; Sollfrank, n.d.).

2. LET'S TALK ABOUT SEXT LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

Ten years ago Josephine Ho (2003:1) in her keynote at the 3rd Asia Pacific Next Generation conference (titled: 'New relationships with the net') described how the development of technology and new ways to communicate has led to "*a new sexual revolution...raging on the virtual frontier of the internet, where personal anonymity and global access provide seemingly unlimited opportunities for sexual exploration.*" Cybersex, which she sees as a combination of communication and masturbation, has created a kaleidoscope of channels and choices for the user's wishes and desires, while meeting our universal need for connection with others. The perceived problem with this, however, is that cyber-sexuality has offered a welcoming and sometimes political space to those deemed 'not appropriate', such as the LGBTQI² community, and youths, with their "*fast changing sexual attitudes*" (2003:2). Nonetheless, cybersex, or sexting, is changing our definition of, and attitude towards, sex (2003:7). Sexting and cybersex has boomed in popularity since the advent of the smartphone. Today, just about every person has a smartphone, including adolescents.

Millennials today live online; this is their world (France & Holden, 2013). Despite knowing a great deal about technology and much about sexuality, our knowledge of how the two interact is still very limited. Social media has revolutionised the way young women make friends, flirt, date and have sex. The fairy-tale is no longer a 'meet-cute' at the book store, dating at the movies or over dinner and a kiss on the porch, today it is: 'meet a boy over Tinder, send him a sexy/goofy Snapchat, show him you're hot and popular with your followers and friends on Twitter and Facebook and pretty soon he'll want to Skype or FaceTime, which will lead to sex'. All of this, without having ever met him in person. No risk of pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases (STD). So where is the harm? What is the difference between young people taking off their clothes for sex, and taking off their clothes for a sext?

Sexting³, '*the practice of sending or posting sexually suggestive text messages and images, including nude or semi-nude photographs, via cell phone or internet*' (Arcabascio,

² Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, and intersex

³ First published in 2005, the word 'sext' (the combination of 'sex' and 'text') and its exact definition have since been debated, with different countries and fields (legal and psychological) using different definitions (Merriam-Webster, n.d.; Strohmaier et al., 2014).

2010), erupted in 2007 after the further development of cell phone cameras and social media applications or apps. However, the act of sexting is not new behaviour: '*we have been showing each other body parts for a long time - whether behind a bike shed or on a cave painting*' (Temple & Choi, 2014). Yet, overwhelming amounts of literature construct sexting as negative or as an epidemic harmful to youth, especially teen females who need protecting from this 'rampant exploitation' (Karaian, 2012).

Yet, what we do know about young people sexting comes from just a handful of surveys done with medium-scale samples from North America, the UK and a few from Australia, and a very small number of in-depth qualitative inquiries (Lee & Croft, 2015). From these, the general consensus is one of portraying sexting as having a negative nature, both in general and in its gendered dynamics (Lee & Crofts, 2015; Englander, 2012; AP & MTV, 2009; Strohmaier *et al.*, 2014; Phippen, 2009). In particular, the agreed notion is that young women are pressured, coerced and seduced into creating and sharing such content with males. But is this the consensus among young Millennials, or instead the perceptions of researchers based on closed-ended quantitative inquiries?

These strong negative discourses surrounding sexting have already started to impact legal reform, which begs the question: is this criminal and deviant behaviour that poses a risk to society? Or is it just an age-old impulse that has taken on a modern manifestation due to technological advances? I argue, in unison with a handful of recent studies, that we still know too little about the practice of sexting, and the experiences of young people who sext, to make such a call. Before we can understand Millennial behaviour, we first need to get to know the Millennial.

2.2. On Millennials: Generation Y Me

Millennials⁴ were born between 1980 and 2000 (and are now aged 15-35) and make up roughly 25% of the population (Howe & Strauss, 2003; Millennial Marketing, 2015). They are more open-minded, responsive, liberal, wellness-focused, are desirous of adventure and believe that 'useful is the new cool' (Goldman Sachs, 2015; Millennial Marketing, 2015; Keene & Handrich, 2010). Subsequently, today's teens are drinking, smoking and bullying less

⁴ Also known as the: Boomerang Generation (keep returning to parents' home), Peter Pan Generation (tendency to delay 'adulthood'), Generation Y, Generation Me (narcissistic, entitled) and Generation Why (because of persistence in asking 'why' things are the way they are) (Shaputis, 2004; Keene & Handrich, 2010).

(Sifferlin, 2015). Although Millennials are the most diverse generation yet (Pew Research Centre, 2014), here are some common key features:

2.2.1. Family and failure to launch

They are considered the children of the Baby Boomers and subsequently grew up in an era marked by wide spread birth-control (Sutherland & Thompson, 2001). Millennials have come of age during a time of technological change, consumerism, globalisation, and economic disruption, which has given them a different set of behaviours and experiences from that of their parents (Goldman Sachs, 2015). While they are much more morally aware, low employment, low income and crippling student loans have left them poorer than previous generations (Goldman Sachs, 2015). Consequently, Millennials are much slower to move out, marry, have children and buy a house (Goldman Sachs, 2015; Millennial Marketing, 2015).

2.2.2. Special Me

One of the most common themes in Millennial literature, is that they have been told, from birth, that they are special and unique, and encouraged to embrace this and follow their dreams (Eubanks, 2006). This has undoubtedly resulted in this generation's most significant weaknesses and strengths. Millennials are more narcissistic, entitled, overly self-confident and selfish, believing they are indeed special and unique, resulting in them being more stressed, sensitive to critique, and brittle (fearful and highly prone to shame) (Young-Eisendrath, 2008; UCLA, 2014; Twenge, 2006). Despite being more sheltered and expecting safety and support from society and its structures, they are self-orientated and individualistic (Howe & Strauss, 2003; Twenge, 2006). Millennials are also enthusiastically expressive and believe in 'personal branding' and self-promotion (National Chamber Foundation, 2012), which explains why 55% of Millennials have put a selfie online (Pew Research Centre, 2014).

2.2.3. Cyborgs

As regards technology, these are the first 'digital natives'; they value connection and are growing up in an 'always-on' digital world (Goldman Sachs, 2015; Eubanks, 2006; Keene & Handrich, 2010; Howe & Strauss, 2003). Millennials use the online world as a platform for communication and expression and are content creators and users, with 46% having posted original photos or videos online that they have created (Goldman Sachs, 2015; Millennial Marketing, 2015). For them, technology is not an independent entity, but the backdrop of

everyday life, requiring emergence on various platforms and over various devices (Sutherland & Thompson, 2001). Millennials are more willing to share personal information online, believing that the advantages of personal disclosure outweigh concerns about privacy (Anderson, 2010).

2.2.4 Millennial sexuality

Millennials are less bound by traditional sex roles. They perceive sexuality as fluid rather than dichotomous, and are more tolerant of different lifestyles, although they strongly dislike 'labels' (Winograd & Hais, 2008; Rolling Stone, 2014). Because they believe they are special, enthusiastic self-expression flourishes (Sutherland & Thompson, 2001; National Chamber Foundation, 2012), which arguably influences sexual expression. As mentioned, today's teens are having fewer babies, although experts are still unsure whether this is due to wide spread birth control, or due to a decline in sexual activity amongst teens (Sifferlin, 2015).

Sutherland and Thompson (2001: page) argue that 'kids are growing up younger', due to the early exposure to and mastery of technology, access to information and engagement in previously adult, or older children's, activities (sport, culture, politics). This has even apparently manifested in Millennials experiencing earlier physical maturity. 'Earlier exposure to images and ideas about sex, and encouragement from adults to pursue their personal desires has led to changing sexual morals among Millennials. They take sex less seriously, and are more likely to experiment with sex earlier, approve of premarital sex and be more accepting of casual sex, outside of any relationship context' (Twenge, 2006: page; Eubanks, 2006: 3). It should then be no surprise that 'sexting' is being seen by some as the new, and preferred, method of courtship (UptoDate, 2013).

2.3 Tech and Sex

"The Internet is a social, cultural, commercial, educational, and entertainment global communications system whose legitimate purpose is to benefit and empower online users, while lowering the barriers to the creation and the distribution of expressions throughout the world. As virtual reality technology advances, cyber sex will be on the cutting edge of opening up more space for differing views and practices." (Ho, 2003:7).

Sex is arguably one of the most fundamental human experiences. It's a physical connection, brought on by physical and (hopefully) emotional attraction, ensuring the survival of the human race through reproduction. From this understanding, how then can we begin to fathom cybersex? Before discussing my Millennial opinions on cybersex, let's review the literature.

2.3.1. Sex V 2.0: Cybersex the new and improved sex?

While sex online is arguably the safest sex, it might just be a sheep in wolf's clothing. It is a popular replacement for teenage sex, minus the stress of worrying about teen pregnancy and STD's, while allowing for multiple partners and experiences. All this, without requiring you to touch someone, leave your room, or be of a certain level of attractiveness (Pike, 2013). Technology already plays a major role in romantic relationships, with the latest figures showing a drop in sexual activity amongst college students, but a rise in phone sex and sexting (Fowler, 2013). Young people have always been curious about sex and the internet allows them to experiment with different personas and experiences with significantly less risk and embarrassment (France & Holden, 2013).

Despite the risk of leaking nudes (amplified by the crudely named '*Fapping*'⁵), revenge porn⁶, and Catfish⁷, many Millennials have had, or even prefer, relationships that exist mostly via tech, and experience personal meetings or approaching someone as being very daunting (Wayne, 2014; Strolia, 2014). Women have become more accessible to men than ever before, with a multitude of dating applications (apps) (e.g. Tinder, OkCupid and Match.com) and pornography being readily available through technology, often without age restriction and free. Thus, the question arises of whether sexting is possibly guilty of the sexual objectification of women?

Whether the above is true or not, women seem to be agreeing to it, with studies suggesting that young women take to sexting or posting sexually suggestive content, as a means of seeking validation or boosting self-esteem (Wayne, 2014). This has led to what neurologist, Dr. Neglash refers to as a 'one-sided relationship': where the individual only seeks

⁵ Leaking of celebrity nudes by hackers accessing their iCloud.

⁶ The intentional, non-consensual distribution of sexually graphic images without the individual's consent.

⁷ A person who poses as someone else online, a common phenomenon (Rolling Stone, 2014).

to sexually and romantically satisfy him or herself, which can all be done over the internet (with dating apps and pornography), without having to deal with the challenges and risks of three-dimensional dating (Wayne, 2014). Within existing relationships, Block (2010) suggests that sexting helps to 'keep the flame going' despite busy schedules and work, allowing you to be intimate with your partner while she's at the office and he's waiting in line at the bank. Age does nevertheless play a role, with 80% of singles in their 20s feeling that sexting and flirting over the phone is acceptable, compared to 75% of singles in their 30s, 69% of singles in their 40s, 55% of singles in their 50s and 43% of singles in their 60s (UptoDate, 2013).

Technology and the Internet have forever changed the way people communicate and co-exist and, with their explorative and inquisitive nature, teens are at the forefront of tech's cutting edge (Ruder, 2008). Considering that 96% of adolescents today possess cell phones, of which 83% have built-in cameras (7Online, 2015; Heussner, 2009), 'sexting's' popularity is really no surprise. Attorneys Marsha Levich and Riya Shah (in Arcabascio, 2010:page) on behalf of the Juvenile Law Centre asserted that *'[s]exting is the result of a unique combination of the well-recognized adolescent need for sexual exploration and the new technology that allows teens to explore their sexual relationships via private photographs shared in real-time'*. In addition, the media functions as a 'super peer group', making teenagers believe that everyone is having sex and sending nudes except them, as evidenced by the multitude of sexual themes in teen and young adult media (Strasburger, 2008). To young adults, sexting has thus been rendered a pleasurable, sexy, albeit somewhat risky pastime that is broadly accepted, making sexting even more attractive to teens (Lee *et al.*, 2013).

2.3.2. The threat

Sexting is not risk free – and Millennials know this. Many feel that the perceived risks and loss of privacy is outweighed by the benefits (Karaian, 2012). So is it right that adolescents are told by the law not to send nudes of themselves? The threat of sexting concerns: (1) the emotional and reputational damage that can stem from it (including ostracism, depression, humiliation, suicide, anxiety); (2) cyber-bullying and revenge-porn as a backlash; (3) that a paedophile will obtain such images and (4) that it leads to risky sexual behaviour (Scholms-Madlener, 2013; Esposito, 2011; Lee *et al.*, 2013; Rice *et al.*, 2012). Yet, no solid evidence links teen sexting and problematic psychological or health behaviours (Englander, 2012), leading some scholars to conclude that sexting is a normal developmental phenomenon; a modern

form of teenage flirtation and sexual exploration that holds little danger (Strohmaier *et al.*, 2014; Englander, 2012; Temple & Choi, 2014).

Lee and colleagues (2013) suggest that Millennial teens' vulnerability stems rather from their difficulty to adjust to the increased importance which sexual expression and exploration now have in their lives as they pass through puberty. Add to this, the new opportunities technology now offers, allowing for easy capturing, storing and sharing of information and images, that can all be encrypted and password protected, and you have a '*perfect storm*' (Arcabascio, 2010; Lee & Crofts, 2015). Additionally, teenagers are more easily influenced by their environments and their behaviour is often considered to be reckless, impulsive, ill-considered, and hormone-driven (in a word – *stupid*), making 'teenage' a problem in and of itself (Arcabascio, 2010; Ruder, 2008). The result has been serious and stringent legal and policy statutes stipulating '*that children who produce, distribute and receive naked or semi-naked digital images may face severe legal sanctions in many jurisdictions under a range of child pornography or child abuse laws*' (Lee *et al.*, 2013; Crofts & Lee, 2013).

Concerning technology and online interaction, experts warn that tech-addiction poses a real threat in that it has been linked to blunted social skills, difficulty deciphering non-verbal cues, intimacy problems in adulthood, and detachment from reality (Keene & Handrich, 2010; France & Holden, 2013). Another possible threat is 'online disinhibition', in which users online are more open and unrestrained than usual, often behaving in ways they never would offline (Trombley, 2009).

Overwhelmingly, mainstream publications, news media and popular culture represent females who sext as lacking in sexual agency, being victims of the 'pornification of a generation' (Karaian, 2012; Durham, 2008; Levine & Kilbourne, 2009; Scott & Sarracino, 2008). The '*Lolita effect*', refers to the apparently distorted and delusional myths about females' sexuality that are widely circulated in popular culture and that aim to limit, restrict and undermine females' sexual progress (Durham, 2008:12). Sexting is suggested to be derived from the perception that females and young women are hypersexualised by pop culture, and are therefore in need of protection from exploitation (Karaian, 2012). In this, young women are presented as both the victims of a deviant, predatory and/or criminal behaviour, and the villains in terms of their engagement in such gendered and sexualised interactions (Lumsden & Morgan, 2012). Yet, these laws and regulations are enforced top-

down upon young people and possibly result in doing exactly what they aim to prevent – removing agency, freedom, and empowerment. To determine this, Lolita's voice needs to be among those who decide on how to address the issue of sexting.

2.3.2.1. Perceptions

Ultimately, much of the threat of sexting stems from perceptions and beliefs about the activity, both supported and unsupported by research. Societal assumptions of what is considered appropriate construction and expression of childhood sexuality strongly underlie perceptions of sexting and its research and regulations (Lee *et al.*, 2013); yet, despite substantial media, legal and academic attention, our knowledge of the perspectives of young people is still limited (Lee & Crofts, 2015).

Previous researchers who attempted to investigate this, found that sexters were likely to use words like 'exciting', 'flirty', 'hot', 'fun' and 'trusting' in describing sexting, versus non-sexters who found it 'gross', 'uncomfortable' and 'stupid'. Also, while males had more positive sexting expectations and were more likely to describe sexting as 'hot', females were more critical and cautious, using words like 'slutty', 'risky', 'stupid' and 'dangerous' (AP & MTV, 2009:3; Ringrose *et al.*, 2014). Female caution and negative expectations of sexting seems to stem from a gendered double standard in which females are expected to present themselves as sexy and desirable, yet face moral condemnation and 'slut-shaming' if found out, as it more acceptable for men to be promiscuous than women (Ringrose *et al.*, 2014; Dir *et al.*, 2013).

2.3.2.2. Motivation & prevalence

Boredom that leads to looking for an ego-boost is often the reasoning behind sexts or posting sexually suggestive photos on social media or dating apps (Wayne, 2014). Neurologists suggest that finding out someone is interested (by 'liking' a photo, or 'swiping right' on Tinder) releases dopamine, creating a high which some people start to seek (Wayne, 2014). Device-to-device sexting, however, is usually to show interest (to flirt), at the request of a partner or in the practice of phone sex (Lenhart, 2009; AP & MTV, 2009; Strohmaier *et al.*, 2014; Phippen, 2009). Additionally, people in a relationship sext more than singletons, although sexting can occur over a variety of scenarios (Dir *et al.*, 2013; Lenhart, 2009).

Research into current literature suggests a strong correlation between taking selfies and narcissistic and selfish behaviours; traits that Millennials own more than any generation before ('Generation Me') (Sorokowski, et al., 2015). Millennials themselves agree that posting selfies online encourages their own narcissism and selfish behaviours, claiming that they do this to show off their 'impressive social lives', to get maximum likes and comments, to present themselves as attractive (and maybe make someone jealous or desire them) and because they genuinely believe that other people are interested in their lives (Wickel, 2015).

With regard to rates of prevalence, there are currently no consistent, reliable data available. Moreover, research into the prevalence of sexting is accused of often distorting or exaggerating findings, leading to public misperception (Lounsbury *et al.*, 2011). On the best estimate, approximately half of teens and 67%-80% of young adults have sexted; while women more often send nudes, men sexted more often and with more partners (AP & MTV, 2009; The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008; Cox Communications & National Centre for Missing & Exploited Children, 2009; Strohmaier *et al.*, 2014; Phippen, 2009; Dir *et al.*, 2013), while other studies found sexting rates as low as 15% in text messages and 3% in images (Lenhart, 2009; Livingstone *et al.*, 2011).

2.3.2.3. Legal and Policy reactions

Much of the panic surrounding sexting stem from an expressed fear that sexting will lead to young people engaging in real life sex, with some researchers even claiming this to be the case (Rice, *et al.*, 2012). This in turn fuels an 'abstain from sexting' discourse which mirrors the 'abstain from sex' discourse prevalent in middle class Western cultures. This discourse enacts an implicit form of censorship by linking messages of protection and self-respect to sex(t)ual abstinence (Karaian, 2012). In this, the young sexter is 'othered' as morally corrupt, even potentially dangerous to non-sexters.

Teenage sexting can have serious legal consequences, particularly pertaining to the exchange of sexually explicit photographs. The idea that sexting and naked selfies could ruin lives (especially that of teenage females) first emerged after the tragic cases of Hope Witsell and Amanda Todd, who, after having naked photographs of them sent around without their permission, were subjected to relentless bullying, ultimately leading to depression and suicide (Jacobs, 2013; Kaye, 2010). Following this, 'sexting' has been a burning topic for parents,

lawmakers, teachers, the media and health professionals, while a public outcry led to rushed efforts by law enforcement to create legislature to protect young people from this new threat.

Professor of Criminal Justice, Justin Patchin, argues that while it is undesirable for teenagers to exchange sexually explicit photos, it should not be a criminal offence when it occurs between similarly aged teenage lovers who only share with each other consensually, as there is no victim (in Walters, 2015). This followed the case where a 17 year old was tried and sentenced as an adult for having sexually explicit photos of himself on his phone, as well as for sharing them with his girlfriend (both 16 at the time). Experts harshly criticised the outcome, some saying that if states were to take their laws against sexting literally, *'tens of thousands of kids would be in jail and registered as sex offenders'* (Walters, 2015).

Although most minors prosecuted for sexting were in fact guilty of harassing another minor or of other aggravating factors above and beyond risky sexual behaviour, a considerable amount of debate is still happening on issues surrounding 'sexting', what it constitutes exactly, and whether the nature of the minors' relationship should play a part (Strohmaier *et al.*, 2014). However, despite underage (<18) sexting being unlawful, in the US only 18% of cases involving youth-created pornographic images (without aggravating circumstances) lead to an arrest (Wolak *et al.*, 2011). While no such statistics are readily available in South Africa, it is however illegal to possess and distribute such images of an under-18 year old as this is considered child pornography according to the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act (32 of 2007), and the Films and Publications Act (Comins, 2014). The former Act states: *'any person exposing or displaying, or causing exposure or display, of child pornography to a child is guilty of the offence of exposing or displaying or causing the exposure or display, of child pornography or pornography to a child;...adding...'if a child aids, abets, induces, incites, instigates, instructs, commands, counsels or procures another child to take and send such photo of the latter to the first child or another person, he or she will be guilty of an offence'*. A conviction may lead to a fine, imprisonment, or both as well as registration with the national register for sex offenders (The Department of Justice and Crime Prevention, 2014).

While the non-consensual distribution and creation of nudes depicting under-aged children is, and should be, illegal, Arcabascio (2010) argues that older teens⁸ who voluntarily sext are not child-pornographers and that seeing them as criminals is not reasonable. Criminal prosecution should be reserved for cases of non-consensual sharing, and sexual harassment, in which each case should be evaluated on its own individual merit.

2.3.3. Gender and motivations

As discussed, women are more likely to send selfies and nudes than men. There seems to be a gendered double-standard when it comes to young people sexting, with the most problematic motivation for sexting being pressure or coercion (Englander, 2012; Ringrose *et al.*, 2014; Lee & Crofts, 2015). Substantial research has claimed that the gender differences in sexting are entirely due to females being more likely to succumb to pressure to be coerced, blackmailed or threatened into sexting, often with negative outcomes (depending on the nature of the relationship) (Englander, 2012:4; Scholms-Madlener, 2013; The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008; AP and MTV, 2009). However, recent findings from qualitative inquiries suggest that this stems from isolated cases which rightfully draw much attention, but do not reflect the majority of sexting females and young women's experiences, who in fact are more likely to express motivations associated with desire and pleasure (Lee & Crofts, 2015).

Concerning 'pressure', Lee and Crofts (2015) differentiate between three categories, which overlap and intersect: individual, peer-group, and socio-cultural pressure. *Individual pressure* operates within individual relationships between sexting partners and is also the type most likely to become coercive. Here, pleasure and pressure are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as risk is both dangerous and exciting. Power relations are at play in this pressure. *Peer-group pressure* involves the dynamics of a particular social group that could be gendered, demographic and/or class and race related. Sexting may become so normalised within a group that it becomes a rule whereby it excludes those who do not participate in the activity, positively reinforcing sexting behaviours within the group culture (Ringrose *et al.*, 2014). *Socio-cultural pressure* is normative pressure originating from any broader social orders. Hetero-normative values and a second wave feminist backlash have been suggested

⁸ 15 and older, the age of Millennials.

as being behind the increasing sexualized and 'pornified' social and cultural contexts, where sexuality is explored and defined (Attwood, 2009; Gill, 2007). This creates situations whereby particular displays of femininity and masculinity are rewarded or positively received and the lines between objection and empowerment become blurred since self-objectification is often perceived as empowerment.

2.4. (Post)Feminism Online: The Cyborg

"Cyberfeminism is the alliance between women, machinery, and new technology. There's a long-standing relationship between information technology and women's liberation." – Sadie Plant, 1997

Sexting is a topic ripe with theoretical potential: you have gender, sex, technology, cyborgs and other hybrids; it's a very multi-disciplinary field that requires a multi-disciplinary approach. Much of the most effective theoretical approaches to sexting stem from feminist scholars, driven by a desire to determine how issues surrounding sexuality and equality are presented or threatened. Much of this feminist theoretical literature on sexting has depicted it as a practice that mirrors (even magnifies) traditional gender inequalities, objectifying young women and females (Attwood, 2009; Dir *et al.*, 2013; Durham, 2008; Karaian, 2012; Lenhart, 2009; Rice, *et al.*, 2012; Ringrose *et al.*, 2014).

Feminists have strongly argued that technology and science are patriarchal blights on the face of nature, and do not align with feminist values (Kunzru, 1997). Cyberfeminists, however, feel otherwise. Haraway (1991) has claimed that she'd rather be a cyborg than a goddess, and that she doesn't see much point in so-called 'goddess feminism' which urges women to move away from the modern world to discover their liberation and spiritual connection in Mother Earth (Kunzru, 1997).

The majority of female Millennials live within a postfeminist idealology - the belief that society is 'beyond feminism', as though feminist goals have been reached and we now live in complete social and political equality (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2008; Ringrose *et al.*, 2013). However, traditional gender roles and sexual harassment is still evident, online and offline.

My research requires an unpacking and examining of popular, contemporary (post)feministic ideas and views of popular culture as it is influenced by second wave feminism. The second wave feminist movement was highly criticized for its strong stance against the 'sexual objectification' of women which they claimed was pandemic (Attwood,

2009). The postfeminist movement was largely the result of this criticism, with many believing that the objectification of women is not as prevalent or negative, and that a women's sexuality is part of her power. In this, self-objectification (especially that of young women and females) is re-interpreted as the site of sexual liberation, value and pleasure and not oppression (Gill, 2007). In effect, postfeminism offers an evaluation of the struggle between viewing sexting as sexual objectification, or as liberation and agency, and how it relates to young women and females respectively (Ringrose *et al.*, 2013).

2.4.1. Understanding Cyber-Feminism

In the mid-1990s with the advent of the personal computer (PC), but before the popularity of cyberspace as a social space, cyberfeminism emerged as a new arena for critical analyses for gender and technology, but has since the early 2000s lost its appeal and use in feminist and academic discourses (Paasonen, 2011; Consalvo, 2012; History of Cyberfeminism, n.d.). While first-wave feminism concentrated on suffrage, and second wave feminism on equality on all fronts, third wave feminism developed largely from a point of critique of, often radical, second wave ideals. Cyberfeminism was originally situated within various strains of poststructuralist feminism, as it came at a time when second wave radical and cultural feminism was transitioning to post-structuralism (History of Cyberfeminism, n.d.). From this, cyberfeminism developed to evaluate, critique and theorize about online relations, especially pertaining to gender.

Many poststructuralist feminists at the time dabbled in cyberfeminism for a moment before moving on; one such author who is especially relevant here is Helene Cixous, who wrote extensively to urge women to write; to use language to actively and strategically intervene in the public sphere (Biesecker, 1992:89). Her famous words: "*Write your self. Your body must be heard*" (Cixous, 1975: 877) echo as strong as ever when considering female sexting; an act which in itself is allowing women to use language; and to let their bodies be heard. She argued that this will lead to new ways of thinking and living, essentially empowering the writer, but will need to start with the author embracing, even re-discovering, her body (Cixous, 1975; Sellers, 1986). Writing creates reality and is "*the very possibility of change*" (1975: 879); this is the basis of Cixous' argument, and why she urged young women to write, to create their own realities in their own words as a means to liberate their bodies and minds.

In 1994, cultural theorist Sadie Plant formally coined the term 'cyberfeminism' in describing her line of work, essentially creating the movement for young technologically savvy feminists who now had a platform (Consalvo, 2012; History of Cyberfeminism, n.d.). This soon grew in support, cumulating in the first Cyberfeminist International Conference at Documenta X in Kassel, Germany, during which women collaboratively constructed a definition of Cyberfeminism through the now famous '100 Anti-Theses', listing 100 things cyberfeminism is not in various languages (History of Cyberfeminism, n.d.). This deliberate move to not clearly define cyberfeminism has allowed a versatility that other feminisms lacked, but the lack of solidarity also allowed it to drift into obscurity. Few texts still remain as influential both academically and socially to the broader feminist movement, I have chosen the two most influential and significant, that of Sadie Plant and Donna Haraway.

Probably the greatest name in early cyberfeminism is Donna Haraway (1991), a socialist feminist who wrote the classic postmodern essay: 'A Cyborg Manifesto' which has largely been praised for developing cyberfeminism⁹. In this she describes a socialist, feminist cyborg whose existence challenges "*the singular identities and grids of control that work to contain women and other marginalized groups*" (Consalvo, 2012: 1). She uses this image of a cyborg to reject rigid boundaries between genders, between specie, and even between man and machine, and to criticise traditional notions of feminism, urging them to move beyond their limitations (Haraway, 1991). Haraway's (1991) cyborg image is a postmodern, socially constructed sense of being that challenges numerous layers of identity and existence, through this she urges women to assimilate themselves with technology and embrace it for its possibilities to develop themselves.

Modern people are becoming cyborgs as technology becomes part of our human existence, and as such we should be moving away from our human limitations and traditions in patriarchy, essentialism, and naturalism, which are all practices of domination over the 'other' (women, 'non-white', animals, workers, etc) (Haraway, 1991). She predicted that a high-tech culture would challenge these antagonistic dualisms, but has it really?

Plant's 1997 'Zeroes and Ones: Digital Women and the New Technoculture' focuses on the unheralded, critical contributions women had made to technology, arguing against the

⁹ Although her work has been cited in a variety of disciplines and continues to be influential, especially in technology and media related fields.

myth that women are victims of technological change. This manifesto celebrates the relationship between women and machines, urging the next generation of Ada Lovelaces to unapologetically embrace their place in a digital world as both creators, developers, and users.

Both Haraway (1991) and Plant (1997) argued that the cybersphere is not going anywhere and mankind will need to adapt to it, which will require women to be politically aware and savvy users, as cyberspace was deemed a primarily masculine space (and still is, for the most part). Women are urged to view cyberspace as a welcoming and familiar space where they can advance themselves and challenge male authority, breaking away from traditional restraints of identity (Plant, 1997; Consalvo, 2012; and Haraway, 1991).

It is a popular claim that cyberspace, with its absence of gender, race, ethnic, or ability labels, offers a social utopia to users, however, reality seems to be not as idealistic (Fredrick, 1999). Although online spaces have fundamentally changed the nature of communication and self-presentation, this is no label-free 'utopia'. Despite users often having the choice not to disclose their gender, gender is still a very significant factor online with which users choose to identify (either through avatar, profile, or username), leading to significantly different treatment and expectations, with thousands of online male users even catfishing as women (Clark-Flory, 2013).

Content online is largely user-generated and moderated, meaning that for the most part, cyberspace is unregulated unless brought to the attention of relevant authorities (usually page or application admin) by users. It is a bottom-up structure that gives a democratic and inclusive voice to the people (Gurak, 1995; Rice & Love, 1987; Sproull & Kiesler, 1991). Back in 1999, Fredrick posed the question: if online communication is non-hierarchical, more democratic, expressive, and inclusive, is it a feminist space? She argued that although it has potential, it is not, as real life power issues are still very evident online, largely due to the way women present themselves online through their less authoritative language use (language that is attenuate, apologetic, and personally orientated). It is exactly on language, that Haraway (1991) tasks cyborg politics to make the kind of ideological 'noise' (significant disruption/impact) that interrupts ongoing attempts of dominant discourses to describe the world in a 'common language', a task that, as Koerber (2001) argues, befalls each female online user.

2.4.2 The Feminist Sexter

So, if Haraway's (1991) vision for the future feminist cyborg was to be technologically proficient, able to engage with and challenge the "informatics of domination", and most importantly, to be savvy and politically aware users of technological systems (i.e. just using them is not enough), how does the Millennial sexter measure up? After considering this study's findings, this author would say: pretty darn well.

Sadie Plant (1997) first argued that despite previous feminists claiming the internet to be a 'male space', to female users it's a place free from traditional constraints, where women can experiment with identity and gain new avenues for claiming authority and power. While Millennials are reluctant to take on a label such as 'feminist' (or any label as a matter of fact), the principles Plant (1997) and Haraway (1991) envisioned for young women in the future are very much a reality in Millennial sexting behaviour, as my findings will indicate.

2.4.3. Theoretical considerations

Researching and analysing Millennial perceptions of sexting and online sexuality requires a theoretical framework that required me to request and assess individual representations of reality. A Foucauldian approach allowed me to conceptualise data as being individual 'truths', rather than representing the real world (Rabinow, 1991). It is only by uncovering and engaging with these individual truths that we may offer intervention, assistance and resistance to unquestioned dominant discourses or ideology, on behalf of alternative voices, ways of being, or ways of knowing (Weedon, 1987; Lee & Crofts, 2015). As such, the ideal theoretical framework through which to pursue research such as this will, instead of seeing participant responses as 'a window on reality', regard it as a medium through which individuals construct themselves as active and knowledgeable within their respective contexts (Jackson & Cram, 2003; Wilcott & Griffin, 1997).

2.5. Conclusion

Technology has altered the way Millennials do almost everything, including having sex. However, a discourse has been created around sexting as having a negative nature, stemming from male coercion and leading to a variety of negative effects. Following the shift suggested by Crofts and Lee (2015), I am of the view that by allowing young female sexters to create and

share their own discourses and motivations, more insight into this epidemic manifestation of Millennial sexuality might be gained.

In my literature I considered the Millennial in the centre of all this, and how he/she relates to his/her world through technology. I showed how tech has similarly changed the way Millennials interact sexually, pointing out the risks and concerns this might hold. Proving that sexting has become increasingly common, I discussed motivations behind the practice, as well as how (often incorrect) perceptions and legislature has framed it. In considering whether this is problematic, and what might be a more appropriate and theoretical framing of sexting, I discussed cyberfeminism and its applicability to sexting as an academic discourse. Drawing on early cyberfeminist fundamentals, it seems cyberfeminism holds promise for theoretically engaging with the topic, but this needs to be put to the test in my findings.

We are still not sure as to how technology influences perceptions of sexuality, or how it influences the manifestation of sexuality amongst Millennials. Is this sexual liberalism or is it oppressive hypersexualism? Is this just the next evolutionary step, or a threat to the moral fibre of society? This research investigated this by considering the perceptions and motivations of female Millennials – by letting Lolita speak.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

For the purpose of investigating this topic, a mixed method approach was applied, using an online survey followed by two focus groups. This allowed a more holistic representation of Millennial perceptions of sexting and sexters. Universities are eminently suitable places to access and research Millennials' liberal ideas and perceptions, and I therefore utilised UCT students as participants.¹⁰

3.1 Specific Aims and Objectives

This study sought to investigate how technology has influenced Millennial sexual expression, by looking at both general (male and female) Millennial perceptions, as well as more in-depth female Millennial experiences and motivations of sexting. The goal is to better understand sexting as a phenomenon and a practice, so as to better address the potential risks and harms and avoid the unnecessarily removal of agency and limiting of rights. This is in opposition to and critique of the current literature and regulatory frameworks that deem underage sexters as 'child pornographers', and wish to punish them as such, which is considered disproportionate and ineffective (Rice, *et al.*, 2012; Lee *et al.*, 2015).

This research tests the following hypotheses derived from the literature:

- Females are cautious and critical of sexting and have negative sexting expectancies.
- Females experience negative pressure¹¹ to sext.

It does so whilst exploring and articulating the following from a Millennial perspective:

- What are the benefits and threats/harms of sexting?
- Has technology changed the the way young people express themselves sexually and engage in intimacy? If so, how?
- What, if any pressures influence willingness to sext, or refrain from sexting?
- How do online relationships and sexual expression differ from real life?

¹⁰ Due to ethical considerations and limited resources, only 18 year olds and older were allowed to participate. See '*Participants and sampling*'.

¹¹ Pressure that amounts to consensual but unwanted sexting

3.2. Procedure and Instrumentation

3.2.1. Research Design: Exploratory Mixed Method

“Mixed methods research is an attempt to legitimate the use of multiple approaches in answering research questions, rather than restricting or constraining researchers’ choices (i.e., it rejects dogmatism). It is an expansive and creative form of research, not a limiting form of research. It is inclusive, pluralistic, and complimentary....” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 17).

A mixed method approach was selected which made use of an online questionnaire and focus groups. The online questionnaire was designed to be easy to follow with short questions which tested the respondent’s perceptions and experiences of sexting, and was open to all UCT students 18 years and older. Focus groups were also held for a more in-depth investigation into female Millennials’s thoughts on sexting, which was purposefully conversational and largely unstructured.

Utilising a mixed method research approach allows the researcher to construct knowledge about real-world issues based on pragmatism, which places more emphasis on finding the answer to research questions than on the methods used (Creswell *et al.*, 2012). In this study I employed an exploratory mixed methods design, purposed to using qualitative findings to help clarify and expand on quantitative results, because the latter results were intended to provide a general picture of the problem, but the qualitative ones would refine, explain and extend the general picture (Creswell *et al.*, 2012).

The desirability of multimethod research as a strategy is based on four observations (Mingers & Brocklesby, 1997: 492-495): 1) Narrow views of the world are often misleading, so approaching a subject from different perspectives or paradigms may help to gain a holistic perspective; 2) There are different levels of social research, and different methodologies may have particular strengths with respect to one of these levels. Using more than one should help to get a clearer picture of the social world and make for more adequate explanations; 3) Many existing practices already combine methodologies to solve particular problems, yet they have not been theorised sufficiently; and 4) Multimethodology fits well with pragmatism.

Exploratory research is ideally conducted for a problem that is not yet clearly define, in that we don’t yet know enough to make conceptual distinctions or post an explanatory relationship (Shields & Rangarjan, 2013). Exploratory studies primarily rely on qualitative

approaches, such as informal discussions or in-depth focus groups, in order to gain familiarity with a phenomenon or acquire insight into it in order to formulate more precise hypotheses. Given its fundamental nature, this type of research could even conclude that a perceived problem doesn't actually exist (Shields & Rangarjan, 2013), as is somewhat the case in this study where the problematized practice of sexting was greatly found to be not that much of a problem at all.

As this approach is used when the nature of the problem at hand is not clear, the outcomes can at times be unexpected and sway the direction of the research (Saunders *et al.*, 2007). An exploration such as this is best conducted with varying levels of depth, which is additionally why a mixed method was appropriate, combining simpler, structured questionnaires and in-depth, conversational focus groups. This gave me a more holistic picture of sexting from various perspectives and opinions without compromising on data quality.

Much can be learned from the mistakes of previous sexting research. Previously, research on sexting was primarily done through interviews via telephone calls. If under-aged participants were involved, this further required permission from a guardian. Lee and colleagues (2015) argue that this has not only led to underreporting, but also negatively influenced the validity and reliability of previous research due to the taboo on the topic. To my knowledge, this is the first mixed method study to be undertaken on the matter. Lee and colleagues have recently opted for online questionnaires (using Survey Monkey) and analysis through SPSS, deeming it to be the ideal method to go about researching the topic, which is very similar to my approach. Additionally, the focus groups helped to investigate the topic further, possibly illuminating issues researchers had not been aware of previously.

3.2.2. Preparation

An email address was created for correspondence during the research (research2melissa@gmail.com). In addition, the survey was uploaded on Google Forms online survey-software. It was pilot tested to make sure it functioned correctly without errors and recorded data correctly.

3.2.3. Quantitative: Online Questionnaire

The survey assessed the tech- and sexting-behaviour, perceptions of sexting and sexters, and sexting-motivations of 573 UCT students. This questionnaire (Appendix A) took the form of an online survey, so as to be easily accessible and because people generally are more comfortable sharing honest personal content online than face-to-face (Hiebert, 2013; Smart Survey, n.d.). Furthermore, having the questionnaire online meant that data collection and analysis used less time and fewer resources, and allowed for selective data analysis (Smart Survey, n.d.).

Participants were invited to take part in the study via email by means of an eye-catching advertisement (Appendix B) which provided all the necessary information (title, topic, link, benefits of participating). The survey was open from 6 September to 6 November 2015, after which I closed it and downloaded the data for analysis. In terms of online survey software, using Google Forms is freeware and secure, and also straightforward and easy to use to create and share the survey. The exported data was further analysed using SPSS (a software program for statistical analysis).

Although a qualitative measure is created for testing the views and opinions of a group, a qualitative component was required to fully satisfy the needs of this particular research topic. In this mixed method approach the quantitative findings provided an indication of areas that needed further qualitative investigation.

3.2.3.1. Participants and sampling.

Although the term Millennials includes teenagers (15>) and young adults, due to the sensitive nature of the research topic and the vulnerability of teenagers, no under 18 year olds were permitted to participate. The participants comprised a convenience (nonprobability) sample, which included males ($N=247$, 42.88%) and females ($N=327$, 56.77%), who were invited via UCT's 'Research Invitation'¹² initiative. Any student enrolled at the time at the UCT and who was willing and able to give their consent, was welcome. Of the

¹² Part of UCT's *Research and Innovation* in the Postgraduate student office which puts selected researchers in contact with UCT students. The researcher, after getting ethical clearance and faculty approval creates an email inviting students to participate in his/her research, stipulating what it's about and what will be expected of participants. After this email is approved, it's sent out to all UCT students through the Research Invitation Initiative's office.

total 576 (*N*) respondents, 8 were excluded for incomplete participation (i.e. withdrew their participation mid questionnaire), leaving a total of 568 (*N*=568). This is approximately 2.15% of the total UCT student population (University of Cape Town, 2014).

My sample seemed to be relatively representative in that half of the participants identified as white (50.5%) as compared to 33% of all UCT students, with 28.5% identified as African compared to 23.77% of all students. Approximately 18% of UCT students are international students whose race is not accounted for in UCT student statistics and could arguably add to the additional ratio of white or black students amongst participants. It is not known what the gender ratios are amongst UCT students. However, a study undertaken in 2013, which investigated student demographics across South African universities, indicated that 51.2% of students identified as female and 48.3% as male (Govinder *et al.*, 2013), with experts arguing that the percentage of female students is constantly climbing (Machika, 2014). This suggests the sample gender ratio was also very representative of the larger UCT student population.

The majority of participants were 21 years of age, followed by 19, 20 and 22 year olds, in order. Half came from a suburban background, 34% from an urban, and 15% from a rural area. Interestingly, on relationship status, most reported being in a serious relationship, with 38.4%. This might be in part due to people in a relationship being more likely to sext, and therefore being more interested in the research. See figures F.S.1 to F.S.5¹³ for full results.

3.2.4. Qualitative: Focus Groups

Following the quantitative phase of the study, two all-female focus groups were held. The drafted questionnaire (Appendix C) was semi-structured, although the styles of the focus groups were purposefully kept very conversational over tea, coffee and sweets. This allowed for easy follow-up questions and probing of ideas (Temkin, 2007). The focus groups assessed female perceptions of the construction of online identities, sexting pressure/motivation and the benefits and potential harms of sexting. Sessions were limited to 45 minutes each.

Using focus groups allows the researcher to 'capture people's responses in real space and time in the context of face-to-face interactions' (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005:899). It's an approach that is especially beneficial in social science research where it is not only fast,

¹³ Figures starting with 'F' can be found in Appendix F

economical, and efficient in obtaining in-depth data from multiple participants, but it also creates an environment which is socially orientated and gives members in the group a sense of belonging which increases participants' sense of cohesiveness (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Peters, 1993). This helps participants feel safe to share personal information (Vaughn *et al.*, 1996). The interactions between participants can also offer important data and lead to more spontaneous responses in a setting where they can discuss personal problems and possible solutions (Morgan, 1988; Butler, 1996; Duggleby, 2005).

As such, a focus group is an ideal instrument for in-depth probing of new areas of thought. Employing a semi-structured, conversational approach meant that participants had the opportunity to respond to one another's ideas and for me to ask follow-up questions (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Focus groups are less threatening for many research participants, and creates an environment which helps them to discuss opinions, ideas, thoughts, and perceptions (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Because this is a sensitive topic and because literature depicts sexting as being a possible female threat/harm, I chose focus groups that were all female, allowing investigation into gendered perspectives and opinions on sexting and technology's influence. Arranging gendered groups meant that I might potentially unlock a new insight not previously identified in literature in a space where participants are more comfortable to talk about the topic.

3.2.4.1. Participants and sampling

If participants identified as female and aged 18 or older, a message appeared on the last page of the survey asking whether they would be interested in sharing their thoughts and perceptions in a focus group, and if so, to provide an email address where I could contact them. These responses were collected in isolation from other data as to keep questionnaire responses anonymous. Two focus groups were held, the first with six participants and the second with five, which both fall in the ideal size for intimate focus groups (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

3.3.1. Quantitative

A positivist paradigm with a descriptive approach was involved in this phase, as collected data were analysed with IBM's SPSS¹⁴ software using t-tests and chi-square tests while also looking at descriptive, correlation and inferential statistics in deductive data analysis. Google Forms collected the data which was then exported to an excel document, from where it was cleaned and uploaded onto SPSS.

I present the most significant findings in this dissertation and compare my findings to existing literature to create a more holistic, multi-dimensional view of how technology has changed the perceptions and attitudes of teen sexuality, and highlight differences between how teen female sexters see themselves, versus how they are depicted in the literature.

3.3.2. Qualitative

Qualitative research has long been critiqued for not having standard data analysis methods (Onwuegbuzie *et al.*, 2009). As such I opted for a thematic data analysis, which is the most common analysis in qualitative research (Guest, 2012). This method emphasizes examining and recording themes within the data which are important to the phenomenon and research question at hand (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These themes then become the categories for analysis, which is performed through six phases of coding to establish meaningful patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These phases are: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

Thematic analysis, like grounded theory, aims to support (or reject) assertions with data, in the hope of constructing theories that are grounded in the data themselves (Guest, 2012). Furthermore, it is also related to phenomenology, in that it focuses on the human experience subjectively, emphasising the participants' perceptions, experiences, and feelings as the object of study (Guest, 2012). This approach is rooted in humanistic psychology, and argues that qualitative research needs to offer a voice to the 'other' allowing the respondent

¹⁴ Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) is a widely used statistical analysis program in the social sciences.

to discuss a topic in their own words, without the constraints of fixed-response questions (as found in quantitative studies).

As discussed in the literature review, this phase primarily employs a (post)feminist theoretical framework in designing and analysing the qualitative section of this research. This phase implemented an interpretive paradigm in two interactional qualitative focus groups that were audio-recorded for transcription and analysis. The qualitative aspect of the research was exploratory in nature, investigating females' perceptions of their own sexuality over technology and of sexting, both on a personal and societal level.

During the focus groups I took on a participatory role in addition to guiding the conversations and posing questions. This assisted me in exploring subjective feelings and assumptions that participants might have in a non-judgmental, conversational atmosphere, which was additionally why I offered refreshments. This section follows a more inductive approach, while thematic data analysis helped identify and categorise respondents' perceptions and opinions.

3.4. Limitations and Ethical Considerations

This is a sensitive topic and required a sensitive approach as such. Although informed consent was a prerequisite for both the survey and focus groups (Appendix D) and confidentiality was of the utmost importance, anonymity was not possible for the focus groups. Here follow the proposed study's limitations and ethical considerations.

3.4.1. Quantitative

Inaccurate or incomplete survey responses are a very real possibility among students (as with any participants), and therefore, simple language and short questions were used as far as possible. The questionnaire was set up to protect respondents' anonymity by not requesting personal or identifiable features. In the case of the email addresses for focus group participation, these were collected and stored separately from the rest of the data.

3.4.2. Qualitative

The most crucial expected limitation of the qualitative section was that participants might find it difficult to discuss sensitive or taboo topics openly (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

However, the female Millennials were true to their renowned openness and liberalism about sex and did not treat it as a taboo topic (Twenge, 2006; Eubanks, 2006: 3).

Limitations to taking a focus group approach are that (1) the results will not be generalisable beyond the group; (2) participants are reluctant to participate in a study to which they have to travel and as a result, 9 of the 20 who agreed to participate in the sessions did not arrive; (3) anonymity is not possible (although confidentiality is a serious consideration); and (4) in this instance, I had limited time to establish the rapport which should help participants feel more at ease and share more freely (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Temkin, 2007). Additionally, the quality of qualitative research is heavily dependent on the researcher's individual skill and easily influenced by personal idiosyncrasies and biases. As a fairly inexperienced researcher, this was a possible limitation to my research.

The following protective measures were additionally taken:

- a) All participants were informed that participation was purely voluntary, that there would be no compensation and that they were free to terminate participation at any time without any ramifications.
- b) In the quantitative stage, participation was completely anonymous.
- c) Collected data was treated respectfully and confidentially, in order to protect the identity and dignity of participants.
- d) A consent form had to be read and confirmed before any participation (Appendix D).
- e) In the qualitative study, the participants were informed that they would be recorded (audio) and that therefore that their participation would not be anonymous.
- f) At all times, any possibility of physical, emotional or psychological harm to any participant was avoided. In the highly unlikely case that harm might occur, I was prepared to take any necessary and reasonable steps to minimise the harm.

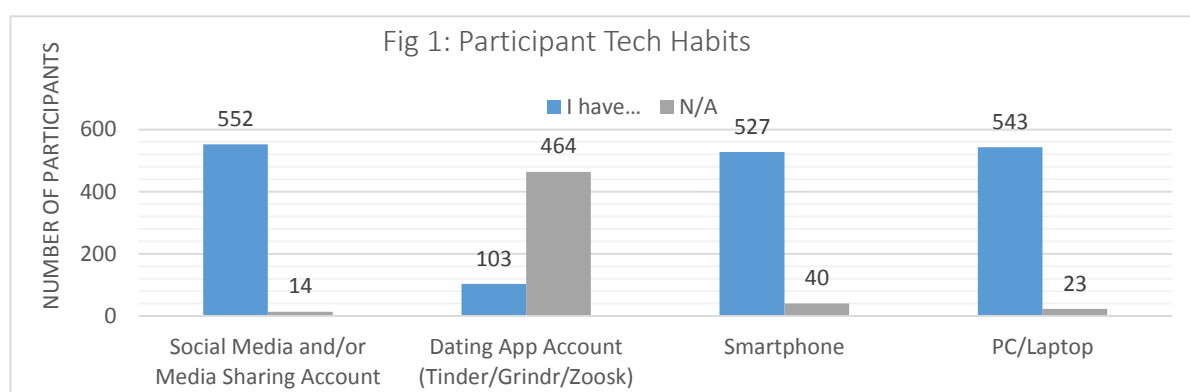
4. QUANTITATIVE RESULTS: QUESTIONNAIRE

A total of 568 (*N*) responses were captured from UCT students and analysed (after eight were excluded for incomplete participation). The questionnaire enquired about their tech habits, how they define sexting, and their thoughts and experiences of sexting. It also looked at motivations and possible hindrances to sexting. The aim was to determine general Millennial opinions and perspectives of sexting and was open to all UCT students aged 18-30.

4.1. Millennial Tech Habits

An impressive 97% of participants had social media or media sharing accounts (Facebook, Twitter, SnapChat, and/or a YouTube account), while 18% had an online dating account. With regards to the frequency of site visits, 78.4% reported being on Facebook at least once a day, while 22.4% were on Twitter at least once a day, 49% were on YouTube at least once a day and 19.5% were on SnapChat at least once a day. According to Milanovic (2015) these are four of the most popular social media and media sharing apps amongst young people.

With regard to tech devices, 93% reported possessing a smartphone while 96% had access to a personal computer or laptop, which might be an elevated figure due to their being students at a academic institution. Unsurprisingly then, 98.2% reported being on their phone at least once a day. While 93.1% went on their laptop at least once a day for class or work, 84.8% went on for entertainment or social media too.



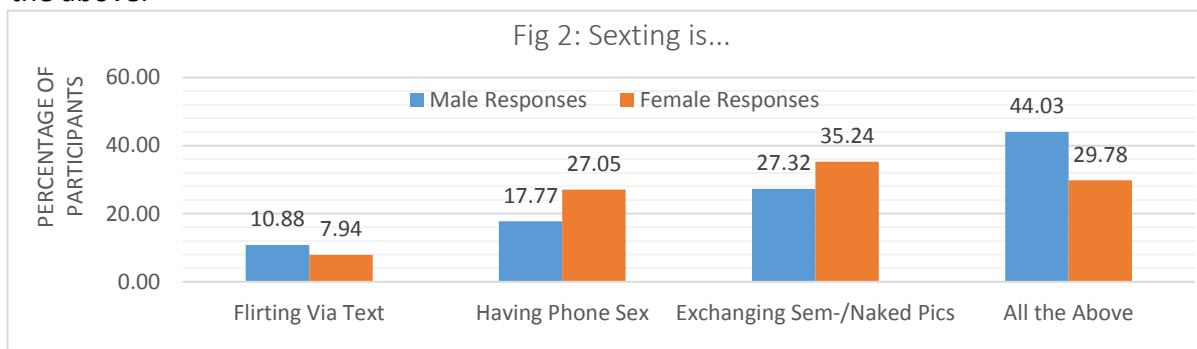
From the above illustration (figure 1) it can be safely established that the greater majority of respondents are typical tech-savvy Millennials who, as the literature suggests, use tech not as an individual entity, but as a backdrop to their everyday lives for a variety of reasons, over various devices and apps or sites.

4.2. Defining 'Sexting'

As there is much disparity sexting's definition in the literature, I wanted participants to share their idea of what sexting entails. From previous research, I estimated that most Millennials see sexting as either 1) flirting via texts, 2) having phone sex, 3) naked- or semi-naked pictures, or 4) all three options. Respondents were able to select any or all of the first three options, or just the last one. Figure 2 illustrates the results.

Most male respondents chose the latter (all the above), while the majority of female respondents felt sexting is the exchange of naked- and semi-naked pics (25.24%), followed by 28.78% who felt it was all the above, and 27.05% who felt it was having phone sex.

Individual 2 x 4 Chi-square tests were run for each of the four options to see whether the respondents' sex¹⁵ had a statistically significant interaction with the responses. The respondents' sex was not a statistically significant factor for whether participants felt sexting was 1) flirting, 2) having phone sex, 3) exchanging naked- or semi-naked pictures, or 4) all of the above.



Sexting is...Flirting. Male and female participants responded differently, significantly so, when defining sexting as flirting. A Chi-square test of independence indicated a statistically significant association between respondents sex and defining sexting as flirting, $\chi^2(1, N=568) = 5.96, p = .015$. The effect size was small, Cramer's $V = .10$. As illustrated in Graph 3.1, 10.88% of male respondents agreed, compared to 7.94% of females, that sexting can be defined as flirting via texts.

¹⁵ During the quantitative section, 'sex' will primarily refer to participant's biological sex status. This is similar to, although not the same as, gender.

Table 1: Sexting Definition by Respondent Sex

Sexting is...			...Flirting via Text Messaging	...Having Phone Sex	...Exchanging (semi-) naked photos	... All of the Above
Sex	Male	<i>n</i>	41*	67	103	120
		% within Sex	16.8%	27.5%	42.2%	49.2%
		% of Total	7.2%	11.8%	18.1%	21.1%
Female		<i>N</i>	32*	109	142	166
		% within Sex	9.9%	33.6%	43.8%	51.2%
		% of Total	5.6%	19.2%	25.0%	29.2%
Total		<i>N</i>	73	176	245	286
		% within Sex	12.9%	31.0%	43.1%	50.4%
		% of Total	12.9%	31.0%	43.1%	50.4%
		<i>P</i> -value	.015	.115	.701	.628

* signifies a statistically significant difference between male and female responses.

4.3. Thoughts on Sexting

Following this, participants were then asked to rate their agreement (or disagreement) on a Likert scale with various statements regarding sexting as derived from literature and previous studies. These were mostly derived from claims made in previous research and literature. I tested these claims by asking the subjects to rate their personal agreement to each. Chi-square tests of independence were run on a 2 x 5 cross-tabulation, of which the most significant findings are discussed below.

There is pressure among people my age to post/send sexy pictures/texts. Although not statistically significant at .037 ($X^2(4, N=567) = 8.14, p = .087; V = .120.$), it is interesting to note that the majority of male respondents voted 'Disagree' ($n = 72, 47.1\%$ of males), whereas the majority of females voted 'Agree' ($n = 105, 61.4\%$ of females). That so many female respondents agreed that there is pressure among Millennials to sext, compared to lower rates of male respondents ($n = 66, 38.6\%$ of males), supports the hypothesis that females are more critical and cautious of sexting than their male counterparts. See Figure F.1 in appendix F for full results.

Personal sexy messages/pictures usually end up being seen by more than just those to whom it was sent. In this case, it is important to note that there was no statistically significant difference between the votes of male and female respondents, as both responded equally in the majority towards agreeing and strongly agreeing (see figure F.2). This suggests that male and female respondents are equally aware of the risk of sexts being shared or leaked. 71.1% of participants (74.38% of female and 66.67% of male participants) agreed that private sexy

pictures usually end up being seen by others for whom it was not intended. This is later elaborated when asked whether they've been shown private sexts not sent to them, and their concerns with sexting.

Sending sexy messages/pictures can have serious negative consequences. Respondent sex was a significant factor in how they responded, $\chi^2(4, N=567) = 13.69, p = .008; V = .155$. Although both sexes reported in the majority 'strongly agreeing' that sexting can have serious negative consequences, females were even more inclined to strongly agree than males (see figure F.3). 86.42% of participants (90.12% of female and 81.48% of male participants) agreed or strongly agreed that sexting does potentially have serious negative consequences. This awareness of awareness of potential risk is noteworthy, especially considering participants consider sexting 'normal' (see below). Additionally this again supports the hypothesis that female Millennials are more critical and cautious of sexting than males, although both were notably more likely to agree than disagree, indicating an awareness of the potential dangers of sexting.

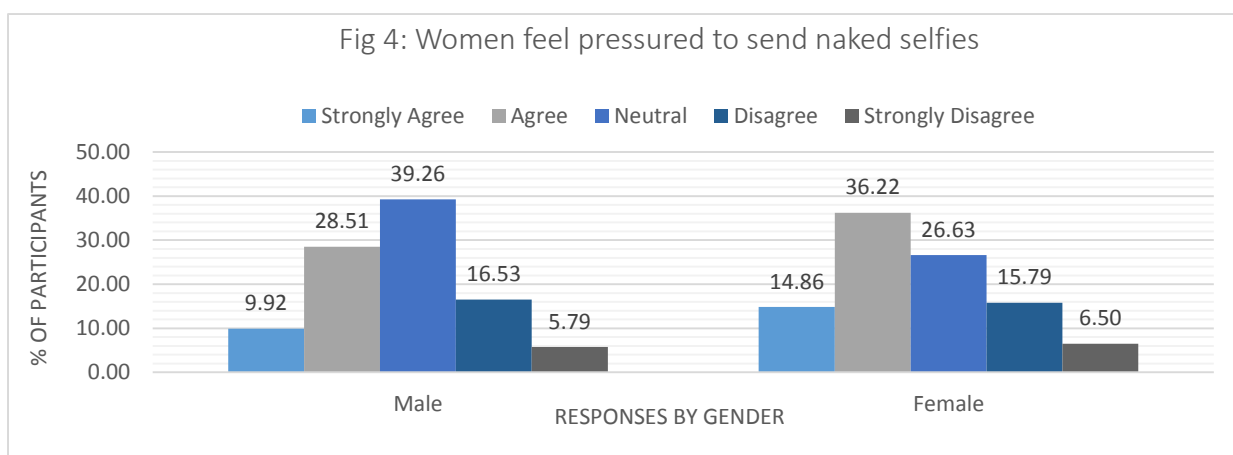
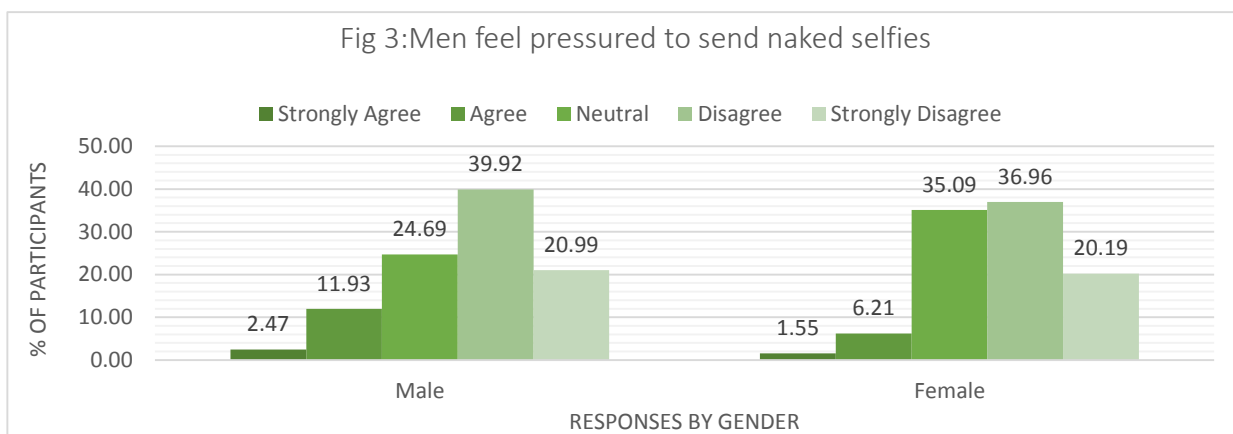
Sending sexy messages/pictures is quite normal. Similar to the above, there was no statistically significant interaction between respondents' gender and their response. It is interesting to note that the majority of respondents, both genders, 'agreed' that sexting has become normalised. 51.23% of female and 55.97% of male participants agreed or strongly agreed that sexting is 'normal'. See figure F.4 for results. Illustrating this, 55% of respondents indicated that they have friends who send or post sexy pictures of themselves. See figure F.6 for results.

Sexting in a committed relationship is normal and healthy. In an extension to the above, respondents were asked to rate whether sexting was normal and healthy within a committed relationship (see figure F.5). 70.5% of female and 66.67% of male participants claimed that sexting in a committed relationship is normal and healthy. That more female participants agreed refers us to female sexters' emphasis on having a trustworthy partner (as findings will indicate), which a committed relationship offers.

Males feel pressured to send naked selfies vs. Females feel pressured to send naked selfies. I wanted to establish whether male or females were perceived as being more pressured to send naked selfies, and how the gender of the respondent affects this response.

The results indicated a statistically significant association between score and gender, $\chi^2(16, N = 563) = 305.23, p < .001$, with the effect size a large, Cramer's $V = .74$. In addition, gender also had a significant effect on both responses independently: females feel pressured to send naked selfies $\chi^2(4, N = 565) = 12.20, p = .016$, while males also feel pressured to send naked selfies $\chi^2(4, N = 565) = 11.08, p = .026$.

It seemed that females were perceived as being significantly more pressured to send a naked selfie than males, of whom the majority of respondents did not experience this pressure. This might be due to male sexters more often being the requesters of sexts and females more often the senders, as the literature suggests and with which my qualitative findings concur, as illustrated in Figures 3 and 4 respectively .



Young people are more likely to have phone sex or sext before having sex in real life.

Although respondent sex was not a significant factor in responses, it is interesting to note that the majority of votes agree with the statement (together, 68.9%, agree and strongly agree). This supports qualitative findings that suggest that sexting has become a common prequel for

sex, especially amongst teenagers who have not had sex before, as a way of familiarising themselves and exploring or experimenting. Results in figure F.7.

Cybersex or sexting can replace real life sex. This question is significant for two reasons: firstly it was found that respondent sex was a statistically significant factor in responses, $\chi^2(4, N=567) = 12.82, p = .012; V = .150$; however it was not clear as to why these differences exist. Secondly, and most importantly, it is noteworthy that the majority of respondents strongly disagreed that sexting can replace real life sex. 78.09% of female and 82.72% of male participants felt that sexting cannot replace real life sex. See Fig 4.8.

4.4. Men/Women who send sexy photos are...

Male and female respondents were asked to rate males and females who sext (through sending sexy photos) on a Likert scale by giving possible adjectives that could describe them. These adjectives were derived from a major study called *Sex and Tech* with 1 280 teens and young adults across the US (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008). I split the question further by asking respondents to rate the adjective by the gender of the sexter. The most significant of these findings are discussed below and illustrated in Figures F.9 to F.12.

...Flirty. Respondent sex had a significant association with whether or not respondents found a girl who sexts as flirty, $\chi^2(4, N = 553) = 10.58, p = .03$, Cramer's $V = .14$, while the majority of male ($n = 135, 56.25\%$) and female ($n = 155, 49.52\%$) votes agreed. It seems male respondents were significantly more likely to report thinking that females who sext are flirty. See figure F.9.

Additionally, it is notable that although respondent sex did not have a significant effect on whether a sexting guy was considered flirty, both majorities fell within 'Agree' (male: 105, 43.75%; female: 164, 47.81%). This concurs with the findings by *Sex and Tech* which found 67% of respondents reporting that sexting is flirty (agree and strongly agree combined) (2009:10) compared to my data indicating 66.71% felt that a sexting girl is flirty, compared to 57.66% who felt a boy who sexts is flirty.

...Hot. Respondent sex was a strong and significant factor in whether or not respondents considered females who sext 'hot', $\chi^2(4, N = 548) = 4.04, p < .001$, Cramer's $V =$

.23. Although the majority of both sexes responded 'Neutral', this was followed by 'Agree' under male responses ($n = 56$, 23.53%), and 'Disagree' under female responses ($n = 74$, 23.87%). The same pattern is discernible, with the exception that the male to female distribution and ratio is uniform, whereas whether those females who sext are considered hot, male respondents voted more weightily in agreement. Results are depicted in figure F.10.

Essentially, males seem more likely to think females who sext are hot, but males who sext are not, while females were more likely to think females who sext are not hot; both sexes were more likely to disagree that males who sext are hot. While *Sex and Tech* found that 38% of participants reported that sexters are 'hot', 25.91% of the participants in my research felt that females who sext are hot, with only 15.26% regarding males who sext as hot. This might be due to the fact at the time of their study, undertaken in 2008 just after the 'sexting boom' in 2007, sexting was still very new and exciting, while by 2015 it has become more 'normalised' and familiar.

...Slutty/Loose. Respondent sex significantly influenced whether participants considered females who sext as 'slutty' or 'loose', $\chi^2(4, N = 554) = 11.14, p = .025$, Cramer's $V = .14$. Male respondents were more likely to agree or strongly agree ($n = 109$, 45.23%) than disagree or strongly disagree ($n = 45$, 18%), a pattern evident amongst female respondents also, with the exception that significantly more voted 'Neutral'. The same was found for whether males who sext are regarded as slutty/loose, $\chi^2(4, N = 549) = 11.61, p = .02$, Cramer's $V = .15$. As illustrated in figure F.12.

4.5. Young people sext because...

Lee and colleagues (2015) found that the most popular motivations for sexting were (in order): to be fun/flirty, to feel sexy and confident, as a sexy present for their partner, and because they received one. The table below (table 2) depicts a summary of the results of nine individual Chi-square tests (NET 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree') with the corresponding reason, by gender. Reasons with a * indicate that respondent sex was a statistically significant factor in that individual test.

Table 2: Young People Sext Because... (Chi-Square by Gender)

<i>Reason</i>		<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total (% of N)</i>
<i>They think it's fun/flirty</i>	<i>n</i>	221	293	514 (90.49%)
	% of Total	43.00%	57.00%	100%
	% within Sex	90.57%	90.43%	
	<i>p</i> -value			.979 ^a
<i>They want to flirt/show interest*</i>	<i>n</i>	207	274	481 (84.68%)
	% of Total	43.04%	56.96%	100%
	% within Sex	84.84%	84.57%	
	<i>p</i> -value			.005 ^a
<i>To get positive feedback or compliments</i>	<i>n</i>	202	277	479 (84.33%)
	% of Total	42.17%	57.83%	100%
	% within Sex	82.79%	85.49%	
	<i>p</i> -value			.337 ^a
<i>It makes them feel good/sexy</i>	<i>n</i>	203	261	464 (81.69%)
	% of Total	43.75%	56.25%	100%
	% within Sex	83.20%	80.56%	
	<i>p</i> -value			.773 ^a
<i>They are bored</i>	<i>n</i>	155	173	328 (57.75%)
	% of Total	47.26%	52.74%	100%
	% within Sex	64.05%	53.40%	
	<i>p</i> -value			.221
<i>They want to fit in</i>	<i>n</i>	128	194	322(56.69%)
	% of Total	39.75%	60.25%	100%
	% within Sex	52.46%	59.88%	
	<i>p</i> -value			.076
<i>They don't know how to flirt</i>	<i>n</i>	102	115	217(38.20%)
	% of Total	47.00%	53.00%	100%
	% within Sex	41.80%	35.49%	
	<i>p</i> -value			.363 ^a
<i>They feel they have to*</i>	<i>n</i>	75	155	230 (34.95%)
	% of Total	32.61%	67.39%	100%
	% within Sex	30.73%	47.84%	
	<i>p</i> -value			<.001
Total	N	244	324	568
	% of Total	42.96%	57.04%	100%

^a indicates Fisher's Exact Test statistics, as assumptions of Chi-Square have been violated (cell counts <5)

As before, respondents rated their agreement to the statement or reason on a 5-point Likert scale. For the purpose of this discussion and simplification of findings, I have selected and combined the scores for 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree', as per the method in *Sex and Tech* (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008).

Overall, the suggested reasons with which respondents mostly agreed are (in order): 1) they think it is fun/flirty (90.49%); 2) they want to flirt/show interest (84.68%); 3) they want to obtain positive feedback or compliments (84.33%); and 5) it makes them feel good/sexy (81.69%). The reasons least agreed with are 1) they feel they have to (34.95%); and 2) they don't know how to flirt (38.20%). Concerning respondent sex difference, one answer had an interesting result:

'They feel they have to' was derived from the multitude of literature references suggesting that young people sext because of pressure from friends, partners, and the media (through hypersexualised images and references in pop culture). Therefore, not only is it very noteworthy that only 34.95% agreed to this, it is further interesting to note that significantly more female respondents ($n = 155$, 47.84%) agreed to this than male ones ($n = 75$, 30.73%), $\chi^2(5, N = 568) = 22.58, p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .199$. See figure F.13.

'Other' was an open-ended 9th option, in which participants were requested to type a reason why they felt young people sexted that was not already amongst the eight listed options. All of these responses were categorised and summarised as follows:

- To bridge the gap of distance by offering intimacy and sexual closeness
- In the hopes that it will lead to real life sex
- Lack of confidence; insecurity in real life
- To satisfy the sexual urges, curiosities, and/or tensions young people have
- It's safer and more comfortable than real life sex for some
- To get to know a person sexually before/without having real life sex
- To keep a partner interested or keep a relationship exciting.

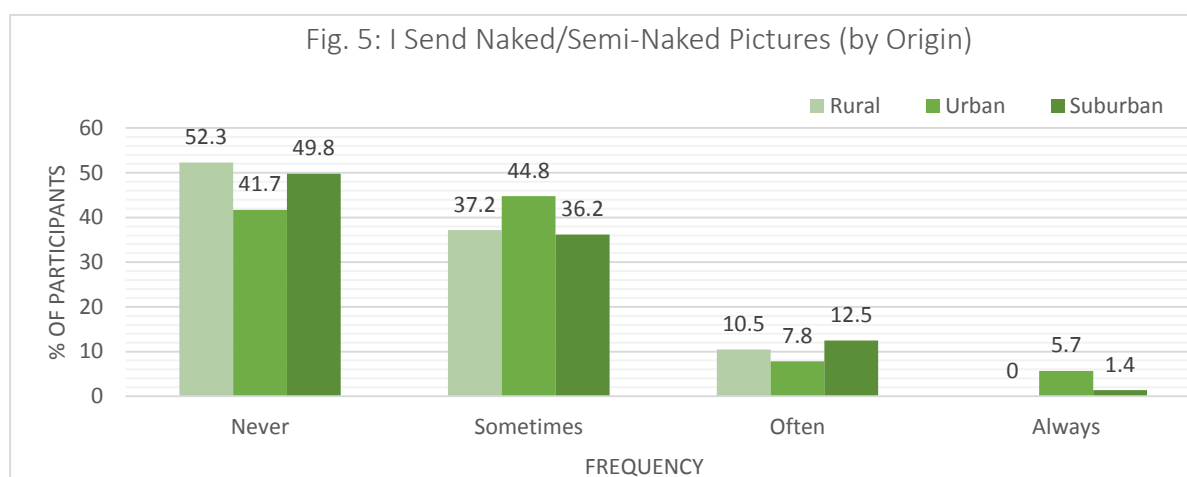
4.6. Rate Personal Relevance

Students were given various statements related to sexting and asked to rate their personal relevance on a scale of 'Never', 'Sometimes', 'Often', and 'Always'.

I send naked/semi-naked pictures of myself to my boyfriend/girlfriend/partner. Participants were asked to rate the following statements according to their personal relevance on 'Never', 'Sometimes', 'Often', and 'Always'. In addition to frequencies, I was interested to see if demographics (gender, origin, age, and relationship) had an effect on responses.

52.6% of participants have sent a naked or semi-naked picture, of which 39.3% reported 'sometimes' (as opposed to 10.6% often and 2.7% always). In addition to the table (table F.1 in Appendix F) with summarised results, the most relevant and significant findings are discussed below:

Origin: Origin was a statistically significant factor in reporting sexting, $\chi^2(18, N = 565) = 17.65$, $p = .01$, Cramer's $V = .16$. It appeared that coming from an urban background increases the likelihood that respondents would have sent sexy photos more frequently. Figure 5 below illustrates this.



Relationship status: For this section, due to low volume, I excluded respondents who identified their relationship status as 'complicated', leaving 'casual dating' (casual), 'serious dating' (serious), and 'married/engaged' (joined).

The respondents' relationship status was a statistically significant factor in sending sexy photos to their partners, $\chi^2(12, N = 564) = 34.40$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .14$. It seems that people in a serious relationship were more likely to send a sexy photo 'sometimes', while the majority of singletons (single persons) responded 'Never'. In total, 60.8% of students in a relationship reported to have sent a naked or semi-naked sext, while only 40.8% of singletons have. This agrees with previous research, also suggesting that singletons aren't the driving force of sexting as is often perceived (Lee *et al.*, 2015; Dir *et al.*, 2013; Lenhart, 2009).

I receive naked/semi-naked picture from my boyfriend/girlfriend/partner. Table F.2 illustrates the results by demographics for this statement, the below factors were significant:

Origin: Origin was a significant factor in receiving sexy photos, $\chi^2(18, N = 563) = 17.99$, $p = .006$, Cramer's $V = .13$. Similar to the above, respondents from a suburban background are

the least likely to receive a sext frequently, while the majority of urban and rural background participants responded 'Sometimes'. This might be due to suburban areas being more conservative, but literature is unclear on this.

Relationship status: Respondents' relationship status was a statistically significant factor for receiving sexy photos from their partners, $X^2(12, N = 562) = 24.78, p = .02$, Cramer's $V = .12$. It seems more singletons report receiving sexy photos than sending them (above), although the majority response remained 'Never'. The majority (64%) of respondents in a relationship again reported having received a naked or semi-naked sext, which concurs with the literature, suggesting that people in a relationship sext more than singletons. Moreover, it was interesting that the *type* of relationship apparently does not seem to have an effect on sexting prevalence.

These pictures I get are unsolicited (not asked for / out of the blue). Table F.3 illustrates the results by demographics for this statement, the below factors were significant:

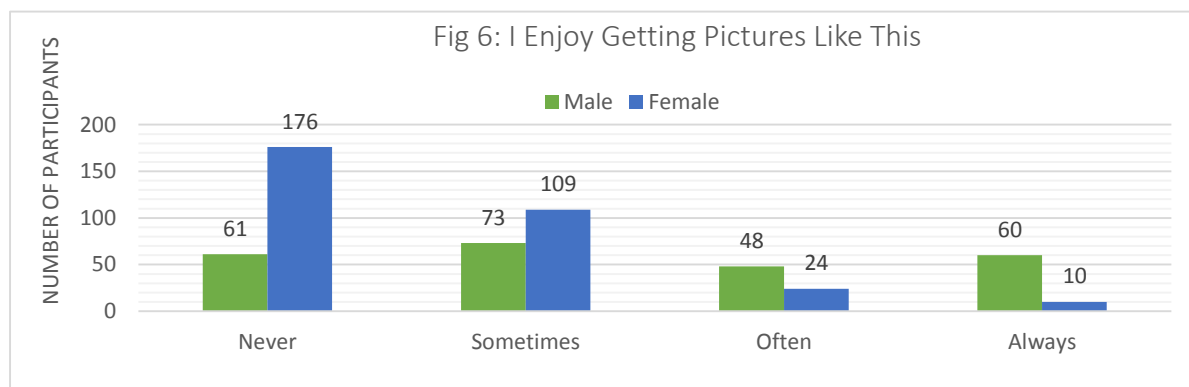
Respondent Sex: Female respondents were significantly more likely to receive an unsolicited semi-/nude picture more often than males, $X^2(3, N = 545) = 24.56, p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .21$. This agrees with the available literature, as well as with my qualitative findings that males are more often the initiators of sexting nude pictures. 23.1% of females claimed that such content is 'always' unsolicited, while 28.3% of male respondents claimed that they 'sometimes' received such content unsolicited. However, it is interesting to note that nearly half of both sexes claimed it was 'never unsolicited (51.5% male and 50.7% female). See figure F.15 for results.

Relationship status: Respondents' relationship status was a statistically significant factor in receiving unsolicited sexy photos, $X^2(12, N = 532) = 30.09, p = .003$, Cramer's $V = .136$. Singletons seem to be the majority group (i.e. 'Sometimes' to 'Always' (126/233, 54% of singletons), followed by respondents in serious relationships (87/203, 43% of serious daters).

I enjoy getting pictures like this. Table F.4 illustrates the results by demographics for this statement, the below factors were significant:

Respondent Sex: Males were significantly more likely to enjoy receiving semi- or naked pictures than female respondents, $X^2(3, N = 561) = 97.91, p < .001$ Cramer's $V = .42$. The notable difference is visible in the graph below, showing the sharp downward slope of female

responses compared to male responses, which seem to be more equally distributed (males: 30.17% 'sometimes', 19.83% 'often', and 24.79% 'always', while females: 34.17% 'sometimes', 7.52% 'often', and 2.13% 'always'). This concurs with both the literature and my qualitative findings that men seem more likely to enjoy getting sexy pictures.



Age: Age was a significant influencing factor, $\chi^2(18, N = 565) = 34.53, p = .011$, Cramer's $V = .14$, with 18 year olds being the most likely to enjoy it (65.5% enjoy it 'Sometimes', 'Often', or 'Always') whereas, interestingly, 20 year olds are the least likely to enjoy it (50% 'Never' enjoy it).

I enjoy sending pictures like this. Table F.5 illustrates the results by demographics for this statement, the below factors were significant:

Respondent Sex: Similar to previous results, it is evident that male respondents are significantly more likely to enjoy sending a sexy photo than female ones, $\chi^2(3, N = 559) = 7.98, p = .046$, Cramer's $V = .12$. I found that 51.04% of male and 58.18% of female 'never' enjoyed sending sexts, 7.14% difference. This is not something I came across in the literature, but it did emerge in the qualitative phase (that men like sending pictures of their 'manhood'). See figure F.17.

Age: Age was a significant influencing factor, $\chi^2(18, N = 565) = 29.48, p = .043$, Cramer's $V = .13$, with the same pattern as before: 18 year olds are the most likely to enjoy sending, while 19 and 20 year olds are the least likely to enjoy it. It is not clear what might cause this difference.

Someone has shown me a naked selfie sent to them by another person. Table F.6 illustrates the results by demographics for this statement, the below factors were significant:

Respondent Sex: Respondent sex was a significant factor in whether respondents reported having been shown a naked selfie sent to another person, $\chi^2(3, N = 565) = 8.72, p = .033$, Cramer's $V = .12$. A noteworthy 57% of males have seen someone else's private sext, compared to 44% of women. This is even higher than research that had previously suggested 42% of men and 28% of women had non-consensually shared a sext (UptoDate, 2013). This agrees with the notion surfacing in the qualitative findings that males are more likely to 'show off' sexts sent to them to other males. See figure F.18.

Age: Age was a significant influencing factor, $\chi^2(18, N = 565) = 34.88, p = .01$, Cramer's $V = .14$, with older respondents being less likely to have been shown a private naked selfie.

4.7. Why might you be concerned about sending sexy messages or pictures of yourself?

A previous study found that 75% of singletons believed that sexting could hurt their reputation, 75% their career, 60% their self-esteem, and 69% their relationships (UptoDate, 2013). Table F.7 summarises all the suggested reasons and scores in order from most agreed with, to least. The most agreed to reasons for concern for participants are, in order: 1) potential embarrassment (85% agreed), 2) regretting it later (82.4%), 3) it could hurt my reputation (79.6%), and 4) he/she might show it to someone else (72.2%). These are significant findings as previous literature had not investigated this, although some non-academic sources reported hearing of sexts being shared or leaked being a concern. Of all 11 potential reasons, three had a statistically significant interaction with respondent sex.

The reasons least likely to hinder sexters are: 1) a bad experience in the past (13.2%), 2) getting into trouble at school/university (19.9%), and getting into trouble with the law (28.5%). One might argue that a bad experience is unlikely to hinder sexting, due to very few participants having had a bad experience sexting. Additionally that fear of getting into trouble at one's school or with the law does not hinder sexting, does concur with some literature that suggests that criminalising sexting does not and will not deter teen sexting.

He/She might show it to someone else. Significantly more female respondents indicated this as a consideration (77%), while only 66% of male respondents agreed, $\chi^2(1, N = 568) = 8.19, p = .004$, Cramer's $V = .12$. This is a legitimate risk as was noted above: 57% of males and 44% of females reported having been shown a private sext not sent to them.

Could hurt my relationship or chances with someone. Respondent sex was a significant factor in the fear of sexting hurting a relationship or chances of one, $X^2(1, N = 568) = 4.12, p = .04$, Cramer's $V = .09$. Male respondents ($n = 162, 66\%$ of males) were interestingly more likely to agree to this statement than female respondents ($n = 188, 58\%$).

Had a bad experience. Respondent sex had a significant effect on whether a bad experience would hinder a respondent from sexting, $X^2(1, N = 568) = 7.89, p = .01$, Cramer's $V = .12$. Female respondents were significantly more likely to vote in favour of this reason (9.5% against 3.7% of males), which agrees with the hypothesis that females are more critical and cautious of sexting than males, however it is a rather small percentage.

4.8. Your experience of sexting

54.7% of participants are open to sexting if its with the right person, while 22.1% claimed they enjoy or don't mind sexting. A surprisingly small 12.2% claimed they will never sext, and 10.6% said they have sexted but didn't like it or regretted it. That approximately 77% of participants are open to sexting, albeit with conditions for some, is noteworthy. This strengthens the argument earlier that sexting is 'normal', and even healthy in a relationship.

Male and female respondents' reports of their sexting experiences were significantly different, $X^2(4, N = 565) = 21.10, p = < .001$, Cramer's $V = .19$. The majority of both sexes responded that they would be open to sexting only with the right person, although significantly more females chose this option (59%). This again supports the hypothesis that women are more cautious in sexting and linking to my qualitative findings too, which suggest that 'trust' is a crucial factor in whether they would be willing to sext arguably in fear that the recipient might show her sexts to someone else (as suggested above).

In addition, significantly more male respondents than female reported enjoying or not minding sexting (31%, to 15.2% of women). As Table 3 below indicates, 49% of male participants and 59% of female participants emphasised only sexting with the right person (presumably, someone they trust). Only 3.5% more females reported a bad experience (12.1%) than males (8.6%), which is similar to the 2.7% difference between male and females who reported that they have never nor will they ever sext. This tells us that, although females do seem to emphasise trust more, the experiences of sexting for male and female Millennials

are much more similar than anticipated, considering how literature depicts female's critical, cautious approach to it, and that they have negative expectations.

Table 3: Respondent's Sexting Experiences

			<i>I enjoy/ don't mind sexting</i>	<i>I have/will never sext</i>	<i>Only with the right person</i>	<i>Have sexted, but regret it/didn't like it</i>
Sex	Male	Count	76	26	119	21
		% within Sex	31.3%	10.7%	49.0%	8.6%
		% of Total	13.5%	4.6%	21.1%	3.7%
	Female	Count	49	43	190	39
		% within Sex	15.2%	13.4%	59.0%	12.1%
		% of Total	8.7%	7.6%	33.6%	6.9%
Total	Count	125	69	309	60	
	% within Sex	22.1%	12.2%	54.7%	10.6%	

4.9. Conclusion: A summary

The quantitative section of this study aimed to provide a snapshot of Millennials' perceptions of sexting, looking particularly at how male and female perceptions differ. This section provided valuable findings, some which concurred with existing literature but others which necessitated further exploration in the qualitative phase. My respondents seem to be adequately representative of the larger Millennial population who live their lives just as much online as off.

Gender differences in responding were found across most questions. The most important to note is that *female respondents* were more likely to report that Millennials today are pressured to post or send sexy content (while the male majority disagreed), despite their experiences of sexting being remarkably similar to male Millennials. It does seem that female Millennials are more cautious of sexting (as per the hypothesis), but there is little to support the notion that they are more critical of sexting or that they have negative sexting expectancies. That being said, females are more likely to receive unsolicited sexy or nude pictures sent to them and reported not enjoying sexting as much as males (although most didn't express a dislike for the practice). As in the focus groups, females emphasised care in selecting who to sext.

Male respondents in the meantime were more likely to report enjoying sexting, particularly when it comes to sending and receiving sexy pictures or nudes. They also reported not feeling under pressure to sext. An alarming 57% of male respondents have been shown

a private sext not sent to them, compared to 44% of females. They also think females who sext are 'hot', while neither sex thought males who sext are 'hot'.

In general, the *majority* of respondents define 'sexting' as flirting via text, having phone sex and exchanging naked or semi-naked pictures (although females were significantly less like to feel that flirting via text is sexting). They indicated an awareness that sexting can have serious negative consequences and felt that private sexts usually end up being seen by persons to whom the sext was not sent, resulting in having concerns about whether their sexting someone could lead to regret and embarrassment later. Despite this however, they suggest that sexting has become quite common, normal and even healthy in a committed relationship. In agreement with qualitative findings, participants also suggested that sexting has become a common prequel for real life sex, especially amongst teens, however feeling strongly that it cannot replace real life sex.

Regarding motivations, respondents suggested that young people mostly sext because it is fun, they want to flirt or show interest and to gain positive feedback that makes them feel good and sexy. Some added, in the open-ended option, that it also helps to bridge the gap of distance by offering intimacy; it is a fun way to explore and experiment as well as help them work on their insecurities; it offers sexual and romantic gratification and is more convenient and safe than casual dating and 'hookups'. Additionally, people from an urban background and/or in a relationship (whether casual, or serious) sexted more frequently.

What follows is a presentation and discussion of the qualitative findings, as collected from focus groups held with female students.

5. QUALITATIVE RESULTS: FOCUS GROUPS

A thematic analysis on the transcripts of the two focus groups revealed the following relevant themes arranged under the same categories as above: 1) Millennial tech habits, 2) Men/Women who sext are... and other gender differences, 3) Young people sext because..., 4) Personal relevance and experiences, and 5) Thoughts & concerns.

In this section, I let 'Lolita' share thoughts and ideas, I used direct quotes from the focus groups, which are indicated by italics.

5.1. Millennial Sext Habits

5.1.1. *The exchange*

'I'd like a picture of your body thanks, here's a picture of my boobs' - you know, exchange.'

Receiving a sexy message or picture immediately creates the expectation of reciprocation in sexting behaviours; it's a back-and-forth repertoire that all sexters seem to be familiar with. This is considered healthy, keeps both parties engaged as they build the scenario in turns, allowing their imaginations, emotions and desires to merge. It also adds to the comfort of sexting: knowing that both parties are equally engaged, reducing potential suspicion that one might share content. This has become acceptable sexting etiquette and veering from it is seen as disruptive and unwanted (Mulshine, 2014).

This turn-taking practice, although seemingly appropriate, also has a negative side; it may sometimes be used to pressure unsuspecting or initially unwilling parties to engage in sexting. This creates a suggested power imbalance which may make the sexting experience uncomfortable and undesirable.

'it's sort of like: I've shown you mine now show me yours, and I think that can put pressure on someone who's maybe not confident enough to say actually you know what I don't want to send you pictures of my boobs...'

5.2. Defining Sexting

5.2.1. *Not porn, not sex*

'[T]hey don't connect sexting with the sexual act so...it's not sex at all, it's okay.'

Sexting is still largely undefined, and many seem to prefer this vagueness. While some argue it to *'technically'* be sex, others claim it is not. The belief that sexting is not sex is argued because sexters often 'cheat' on their partners by sexting someone else.

'[T]o them it's not cheating because well, I'm not doing anything physically so it's okay.'

Respondents claimed that sexting between teenagers who identify as virgins is very popular, even amongst *'no sex before marriage types'*. Similarly, these sexters who identify as virgins but actively and regularly engage in sexting argue that *'it's not real sex'*, seeing it as a harmless type of foreplay. *'Real sex'* is seen exclusively as vaginal-penis penetration.

Listening to their responses it seemed that sexting, arguably in contrast with real life sex, often objectifies the person with whom one sexts, making it a somewhat selfish act. The focus is on one's own gratification, with your partner's being secondary. Bodies and acts are isolated and fragmented, allowing for behaviour and comments a person wouldn't necessarily do or say in real life. A female sexter would describe the lingerie she's wearing and how she's touching herself, all while watching a movie in pyjamas in the living room. Sexting is essentially just co-authored steamy lies and fantasy.

Therefore, if it is imaginary and self-gratifying, how does it differ from porn? Respondents argue that even though it's very superficial, it's still a joint activity.

'It's this random grey area in between (sex and pornography) because it's not pornography because pornography is basically equating to you finding an image, going okay yes, I like that go for it. With sexting you actually have to like give back and there has to be a repertoire which you don't even need with pornography, so it feels less (shameful/bad), because there's always that seedy undertone to pornography, like it's bad.'

Replace or supplement sex? Many respondents, in both qualitative and quantitative findings, argue that sexting is a fun supplement to a normal relationship. Although it cannot replace sex, it adds to the sexual component of a relationship, feeding into, and even enabling, real life sex. It also improves real life sex, as it creates a comfortable dialogue in which respondents can communicate what they want and what they're into.

'I think that sex is actually kind of revolutionised in that way through technology, that even if someone is on the other side of the world you can still kind of establish not the same intimacy but a similar type of intimacy so I think definitely used in the right context it can be a useful tool and very powerful tool.'

5.3. Men/Women who sext are... and other Sex Differences

'Look at me, I have an erection! Look at it, it's beautiful!' And it's really not.'

A favourite sexting contribution from male sexters is often a picture of his lower pelvic region (see Dick Pic Dilemma), to the dismay of female sexters. Male sexters in contrast love asking for and receiving sexy pictures. However, not sending dick pics does not seem to be the answer, as participants argued that it is not 'equal' and fair to expect women to share pictures of their naked bodies and boobs, if men only share their torso or cover their genitals. On this topic, one respondent added:

'That's not equal no; in no way. I always find it funny how it's easy for people to be like oh, just show your boobs but a guy is not going to just, like, whip out his ... send me his jones, you know.'

That being said, respondents suggest that males were most likely the initiators of sexting, and also usually the ones to request pictures. The photos that they send are usually of their torso or/and pelvic region and they respond very positively to sexy pictures from women (reinforcing and encouraging these). On what females send, one respondent argued that boobs usually comprise 'step one', with 'step two' being the entire torso to pelvic region from a frontal frame. Interestingly, the majority agreed that they never include their face in their sexy selfies. This is partly because they feel the man does not care about her face at that moment (and if they want to see it they can see her profile picture), as well as a fail-safe that if the photos leak they can deny that they are the subject.

Double standard? Echoes of the infamous societal double standards were a recurring topic...

'It's like when a guy sends you nudes it's no big deal but it's almost as if a girl has something to lose...'

Which elicited a tongue in the cheek response...

'Which is weird because actually the males have something to lose depending on the size that he has, naturally speaking you can't be like oh, she has small boobs you know like so what?'

This interaction seems to suggest that, although female sexters are constantly aware of 'having something to lose', it seems ironic because from the exchange of a 'dick pic' for a 'boob pic', the man could be shamed more than the female in terms of the physical properties

in the photos (referring to the general assumption that men with small penises are 'less manly', while critique of the size of breasts is not considered an insult).

'I think it is tied into how women's sexuality is viewed versus men are taught when you're horny you masturbate, don't worry. Females like go to hell, women don't get horny, what are you talking about? Women don't masturbate.'

Still, the female respondents argued that female sexters are burdened by constantly worrying about non-consensual sharing or leaking, while male sexters just do not seem to worry at all as if the threats do not apply to them. This while, interestingly, multiple participants reported having higher sex drives than their male partners.

5.4. Young People Sext Because...

5.4.1. Easy and accessible

Even for singletons, sexting offers sexual gratification at the touch of a button. Tinder, the dating app famous for its high volumes of sexters and suggestive photos, can offer a user quick access to an agreeable and willing partner with whom one can have steamy sext, and then never talk to again – with the option of not even knowing their real identity or revealing your own.

'It's so easy to get that gratification without actually having to be in a relationship, without actually having to put yourself out there and to get the deed done you're getting that stimulation, that physical gratification because you can do whatever you want [in] those messages and those pictures. You don't actually need to go out and meet the person and do that whole physical thing. You've got everything you need right there'

Respondents reported the convenience that sexting offers as one of its primary advantages. Female sexters are able to establish what they want, request it or make it happen, with a partner of their choosing, without ever leaving their room. If she is confronted with a disagreeable person, it's as easy as clicking 'exit' or 'next'.

5.4.2. Less to stress about: Emotionally and physically.

With sexting there is no stressing about contraceptives or whether the guy is going to take advantage of you (i.e. sexual acts that one is not comfortable with owing to pressure or force). Additionally, there is less of a risk of forming an emotional bond with a partner as there would be in real life where the two would have had to spend more time together before it

became 'acceptable' to engage in sexual activities. As such, there is less risk of getting attached, hurt or even offended.

'I also think possibly why sexting is on the rise is because the repercussions aren't as serious... so you don't necessarily form an emotional bond or a connection with someone via sexting whereas with the physical there's a lot more of that so it's not only that intimacy, the physical intimacy, but also emotional intimacy that sexting really just doesn't have.'

Sexting is also suggested as being a good method for young people who are more self-conscious to become more comfortable with their bodies and sexuality. This is particularly due to the fact that during sexting, partners are more vocal and complementary than they would be during sex:

'I like sexting [because] a lot of things are said that are not said...when you're actually having sex; because when you send a naked picture and the person responds and says: 'wow you are so sexy, you're so hot, I love seeing you naked', like all that stuff, they're like a lot of times are I guess sometimes aren't always verbally said when you're actually having sex.'

With women reportedly being more verbally skilled and attuned than men (Mulshine, 2014), it is simple to see why this is a major attraction to sexting for women, particularly when struggling with low self-esteem, as so many young people are. Male sexters of course know that women respond positively if they are made to feel sexy, and as such this behaviour is encouraged and reinforced. They are known as 'Generation Me' for their self-awareness after all.

5.4.3. Proximity

Proximity seems to be a predictor for sexting in relationships. Many reported in both the quantitative and qualitative measures that sexting was often used to help bridge the gap for intimacy across long distance. It offers closeness, intimacy, as well as sexual gratification for partners who cannot be with each other physically at that time, which might explain its popularity amongst high schoolers (who supposedly still live with their parents).

In addition to sexting, a sexy photo to a partner far away is also considered a 'something to remember me by' token by some, again in both qualitative and quantitative findings. Couples who see each other regularly or live together feel no need to sext because they 'could just have sex'.

5.4.4. 'Normal' sex issues

Very much the same pressure and issues young people go through in real life sex are identical for sexting. Fears that if you do not sext with him he will just move on to someone who will, arose in both the qualitative findings and the quantitative¹⁶, while pressure from hypersexualised media all add to the popularity (and pressure) to sext. It does seem to be part of the 'normal' sexual experiences young people undergo, though on a new platform.

'... if it's a girl she's likely to be using it as an excuse to not have sex or something: 'No, no let's do this instead', you know.'

Additionally, sexting is also considered by respondents to be an act in anticipation of sex.

'[S]exting is preparation for sex, the real thing. It's either I am going to sleep with you so you know, let's start thinking about what we're going to do to each other or it's I already slept with you, can't wait until the next time. This is what I'm going to do to you next time.'

5.4.5. Exploration and Experimentation

Sexting allows a person to explore their own sexuality, as well as experiment and explore sexuality in various contexts with (various) people, all on one's own terms. Consequently, in addition to offering personal exploration and experimentation, it also offers protection to a degree, where young people can develop their concept of sex, sexuality, and intimacy with significantly fewer risks and more possibilities.

'[T]here's that type of intimacy happening but just not in like the scary intimidating sort of way that a lot of people have constructed around sex.'

5.4.6. Sex positive media and pop culture

Media and pop culture always have a way of both reflecting and influencing young people.

'[Y]ou have all these magazines like Cosmopolitan and Marie Clare who are like: 'spice up your sex life, send sexy texts!' and you're like ja well, okay...'

The likes of Kim Kardashian and her sexual and graphic pictures on her social media were identified as setting inappropriate and unrealistic standards of self-presentation, especially online, that young women feel they *'...need to live up to. I need to because everyone*

¹⁶ The open-ended 'Young people sext because' had multiple participants suggesting that its used to keep the other party interested or keep the relationship exciting.

else is doing it...' This has infiltrated to the Millennial generational culture and values, as one respondent rightly argues:

'I think that we're just like a lot more sex positive, sex open generation and also there's so much in the media. If you watch any music video there's like a hundred naked females or whatever and so I think we're just a lot more comfortable with nudity and with sexual explicitly and that makes us probably more open to our sexual experiences.'

5.5. Personal Relevance and Experiences

Participants reported that the times during which they more most actively sexting was: 1) when they were virgins in high school, 2) during the first few months of a relationship, and/or 3) during long distance separation from her partner. Some even argue that now that they 'know what actual sex is like' or live with their partners/see them regularly, sexting is losing its novelty.

'This is before, when I was still a virgin actually and then once that was not applicable anymore I didn't see the need for sexting because I could just have sex.'

Participants were divided on whether sexting prolongs the period before having sex, or whether it encourages and enables it. Some argue that, especially with females, sexters might feel their gratification from sexting postpones their initial desires for sexual intimacy and arousal. This is partly argued as follows: *'they don't know what they're missing out on'*.

The other spectrum argues that sexting enables sex as young people develop a sexual awareness, identity, and confidence, becoming more comfortable with what they deem appropriate sexual behaviour. This is escalated with young persons' increased access to technology that parents may not yet fully understand.

Persona, anonymity, and online opportunity. It is hardly news that people tend to present themselves differently in real life from over a phone or the internet. Respondents argue that sexting makes it easy to take on a persona, through which they can say and do things they normally would be too scared or insecure to do/say. Essentially, one can be whoever one wishes to be online.

'...they feel like they can say whatever they want. They don't have to censor themselves... I think it's a more freeing quality... without having to have physical interaction and the face to face interaction and also I think when someone's not staring you in the face you're more

confident. You're able to say something that you wouldn't necessarily say to the person at the time. I think it's easier to take on a different persona.'

Respondents agree that part of the attraction of apps like Tinder, is the anonymity offered by the persona one adopts online, and the power of being able to control exactly how much about oneself you share and who you interact with. Female sexters are particularly drawn to the facts that 1) the fear and sting of rejection is significantly less online, and 2) that they can choose to engage and end conversations at their own whim. As such, both sexters hold even more power and control, benefit from more options and experiences, while being more protected in online sexting than real life sex.

5.6. Thoughts & Concerns

Unrealistic expectations. Many cautioned that sexting could create unrealistic expectations of what real life sex is like, similar to the cautions against pornography. With access to sexting being so openly and easily available with modern technology, one respondent warns about the risk for teens:

'There's not really much protection barriers for young people. You can find and talk to anyone basically anywhere and I think because of the freeness at which people start sexting it's almost like you're opening yourself up to something that you may not necessarily be ready for... you may or may not be emotionally ready for.'

Need for conversation. Respondents expressed an urgency for the taboo on sexting to be lifted, so that open conversation may develop on the matter with young adults and pre-teens on the dangers and benefits of sexting. Unhealthy sexual relationships, both online and offline, need to be better defined and shared so young people may know how to identify these and ask for help. This will only be achieved once sexting and sexuality become less frowned upon and more acceptable in the eyes of older generations; we need to provide these children with the tools to protect themselves:

'I think it's really important to create awareness about those type of things because even though some people say its harmless sexting, sometimes it can have really serious repercussion for people so I think it's really good that we actually came here and spoke about this to create a bit more awareness of it. [Its] kind of like the same as you can teach abstinence only in sex ed in high school... You can pretend like: 'sexting is horrible, don't ever do' it, and if that's the only thing you're going to say then good luck. How could having that be effective? ... If we can talk about it and say here are the pros and cons, here are ways to do it safely, and here are

ways to do it consensually. Let's open up that conversation instead of pretending that things don't exist. Let's talk about the things that do exist and are probably going to happen and let's make waves so that like kids and adults, it can be safe and healthy and have enjoyable experiences with that.'

Consent and the Dick Pic Dilemma. 'Sexting consent' is unheard-of; and as such I strongly feel it to be an area that needs attention.

[I]t's a good idea to start talking about consent; like a good way to talk about consent [is]... would you feel comfortable if we exchanged racy text. [Y]ou know like start to bring that up more and more so that way in becomes more ingrained in society that you're like 'oh yeah, consent', that is something that we should be conscious of.'

Sexting doesn't always create opportunity for sexual consent to be conveyed as in real life. A naked photo sent during a casual or even flirty chat could be considered an unsolicited and unwanted sexual advances that is both aggressive and non-consensual, often leaving the receiver uncomfortable and possibly even feeling violated. Many blogs and articles on sexting are urging young people to ask whether the person would like a photo and what they would like in the photo before sending it (Smolinski, 2011); however this is still far from common practice.

'You want one? Sure, just don't send me of your penis.'

The infamous 'dick pic', as it's referred to, was brought up multiple times, each time followed by comments poking fun at how undesirable and unappealing it is. Respondents explicitly expressed their distaste for it, with some even likening a sudden, unwanted dick pic to a form of sexual harassment:

'It's very disconcerting. You should never have to see an image like that, that you're not prepared for or that you weren't expecting and it's also like, I mean I don't want to say that it's rape but it's definitely a form of...[silently shrugs]'

In such a case, the sexual advance would be considered non-consensual. In real life sexual encounters, there is usually a lead up to the sex act through meeting, flirting, kissing, undressing. However, in sexting and online chatting it might be that the two could still be flirtily chatting, followed by a sudden dick pic (which is a surprisingly common sequence of events for online chatters), as if to signify to the female that he is turned on or in the mood. Although the dynamics and rules of sexting differ from that of sex, this behaviour is very risky and could easily be likened to non-consensual sexual engagements.

'[W]ithin three messages of back and forth - the next thing its dick pic and I want to do this'

Trust, regret, and shame. Trust was a recurring theme in discussing sexting. Respondents felt strongly that they need to be in a trusting relationship before engaging in sexting. This reluctance to sext should not be misunderstood as lack of desire to sext, as the desire certainly seems to be present; females are simply more wary and careful about with whom and what they share. However, as one respondent points out:

'Maybe I shouldn't say they don't care but it's more like if they trust their friend, they're going to show their friend... it's like they do care who sees it but they usually trust someone enough to show them that.'

In this, she brought up the view that sexting partners might feel safe because they are in a trusting relationship, while people with whom they are in a trusting relationship outside of their duo might also be exposed to it. As such, trust alone is therefore not enough to warrant protection from personal messages and images being shared.

Respondents added that when sexting and considering sending a sexy photo, they often hesitate in fear of the photo being shared, or leaked after the relationship ends, a threat and fear they argue that men do not experience. This is in addition to fear of being caught sexting, due to the gender double standard making sexting and being sexual a taboo for young women.

'...that is a gender thing as well. Women are really shamed and you mustn't sext because it's going to be everywhere... whereas he wouldn't even think twice about it.'

All respondents seemed to be very, even overly, aware of the risks that sexting holds. The recurring topic of sexts that are sent being 'out there forever', and that photos are often sent and shown around, are conveyed in a tone of urgency and solemnity. As mentioned in discussing teen sexting, respondents emphasised the need for young people to be aware of these risks.

5.7. Conclusion

Qualitative findings in summary. 'Millennial sext habits' looked at the *how* of sexting. Respondents suggest it takes place by means of turn-taking exchanges of text and/or pictures (although it can also include video and voice notes). These exchanges need to be one-per

turn, and be equal in content and contribution. This can lead to negative pressure to sext for an inexperienced sexter, as receiving a sext creates the expectation of an equal response.

'Defining sexting' sought to establish what sexting really is and where it fits into their sexual identity. Sexting is argued to not be equal to real life sex, as it is essentially imaginary and self-gratifying, but neither is it pornography as it is still a joint activity that requires human, social interaction. As in quantitative findings, it is emphasised that sexting cannot replace real life sex, but supplements the sexual element in a relationship.

With regards to gender differences ('Men/Women sext because...'), on what sexting entails, pictures usually include boobs with females and torso or penis with males. Males are suggested to more often be the instigators of sexting, often through a sexy photo. Participants argued that the fear of shame and regret affects females more than it affects males, although with 'no logical reason' for why women have 'more to lose' than men.

Next we considered *why* ('Young people sext because...'): what are the motivations for sexting amongst Millennial females? Respondents suggested 1) because it's easy and accessible, 2) has less physical risks, 3) has less emotional risks, 4) allows them to explore and experiment, and 5) due to their sex positive attitudes which originate from media and pop culture. Proximity seems to be a predictor for sex, with the desire to sext coming and going depending on whether the partners can be together physically (and privately) or not.

In discussing 'Personal relevance and experience', respondents reported being more active sexting *when* 1) they were virgins in high school, as a way of exploring sex, 2) at the start of a relationship, and 3) when they couldn't be with their partner (e.g. due to long-distance relationships). Online is *where* this all takes place. Cyberspace offers users the opportunity to 1) take on any persona or trait, 2) say what they want, 3) get what and who they want, 4) determine the level of anonymity they are comfortable with, and 5) has rejection sting less than real life.

Respondents rose some 'Thoughts and concerns' about sexting during the focus groups. The need for a 'sext education' for young teens is emphasised to teach them how to identify red flags and how to protect themselves. An open conversation is needed between authorities and youngsters, which requires removing the taboo of underage sexting, in order to discuss crucial issues on safety, negative pressure, and consent in sexting. Additionally,

some warned that young, inexperienced sexters might develop unrealistic expectations from sexting. The issue of establishing online consent, as well as the importance of having a partner one trusts was emphasised.

Discussion. The qualitative element of the study allowed for open dialogue into the practicalities and manifestations of sexting, as well as its concerns and appeals. Respondents were very open and comfortable with the topic, especially as a conversational approach was opted for, instead of a more structured one. Sexting was depicted as a double-edged sword, in that if used correctly it has the ability to be a powerful and positive tool, allowing young people to connect, explore, and satisfy their curiosity and desires. However, if incorrectly used it could equate to sexual harassment, intimidation and humiliation, which is why there is a need for a generalised understanding of sexting consent and etiquette.

The qualitative findings concur with literature depicting Millennials as enthusiastically expressive, sex-positive, self-conscious, morally aware and valuing connection. In addition, the quantitative findings demonstrate that while respondents are very aware of the potential risks of sexting, they are, however, more inclined to let the benefits outweigh the risks.

Interestingly, the notion of sexting being 'one-sided', although not to the extent of it being a one-sided relationship as Wayne (2014) suggests, did seem to be present in how respondents spoke of why they liked sexting and how they go about it. Sexting seems, especially for singletons, to be an act that seeks self-gratification for either romantic, sexual, or physical needs, or out of curiosity and exploration.

Nonetheless, it was evident that respondents also use sexting as a platform that empowers them, in that it allows them greater power over who they engage with, what they talk about, where the conversation goes, and what is and is not allowed. They emphasised how it allows them to convey their likes and dislikes in a way that is less risky and more open. Add this to the fact that they can get what they want, when they want, without leaving their room and without worrying about STD's, pregnancy and whether someone is going to take advantage, and it is easy to see why female Millennials are supporters of sexting. As such, it seems that sexting's empowerment capacity for young women has been greatly overlooked. The young women in my focus groups knew exactly what they like and do not like sexually,

both virtually and in real life, and convey this through their sexting behaviours, while also being able to protect themselves through anonymity.

Only two disadvantages came up in discussion: 1) the threat and fear of having a photo shared or leaked, and 2) that it might give teenagers unrealistic expectations of sex. While the former is still a strong hindrance for many, the pros to sexting appear to be great and varied.

6. DISCUSSION

How do we make sense of the research findings against the larger backdrop of academic literature and policy? This chapter seeks to discuss just that, starting with a brief re-cap of key findings, and explaining how my research fits into sexting literature; moving on to larger policy implications and theoretical sense-making. In this I aim to offer my findings as of practical use to policymakers, and present it as a new area of feminist thought and critique.

6.1 Understanding Sexting: A re-cap of findings & literature

This research set out to uncover two main categories of information: 1) the phenomenon of sext through Millennial sexting behaviour, and 2) gendered perceptions of sexting and its significance. Let's consider in summary what we now understand sexting to be:

What is sexting?

Sexting is a turn-taking exchange of sexual content, albeit text, video, audio, or commonly, photos. Sexting is a joint activity that feeds off biological, romantic, or curious desires that ideally has two consenting partners take turns to contribute to a sexual fantasy narration. The process can include text, pictures (usually of a sexual nature), video, and/or voice recording, and is mostly done by partners in a relationship (Lee et al., 2015). Both partners are expected to contribute equally in content, and build together towards a climax through imaginary dialogue and descriptions. Although it usually involves sex, this is not necessarily so as it can also just involve sexy flirty and enticing.

Who sexts?

Millennials consider sexting to be normal and healthy, especially in a relationship. More than half of participants have friends who have sent sexy pictures to someone else, while 53% have done so themselves. Sexting is especially popular amongst virgin adolescents who wish to explore sex and seek gratification for their sexual desires and curiosities. This can potentially lead to unrealistic expectations of sex, or even harmful situations for inexperienced, young sexters, which is why open dialogue is needed between them and authorities on matters of safe sext and help when needed. Sexual consent is also not yet clearly defined or negotiated in conventional sexting, and needs urgent attention.

Sexting is also very popular at the start of a relationship as partners get to know each other sexually, and will often precede real life sex. It's also ideal when there's distance involved but the desire for sexual intimacy is present. Sexting offers to bridge the gap of distance, is easy and accessible, and has less physical and emotional risks than real life sex. It allows the user to experiment and explore with their identity and sexuality, amongst other like-minded, sex-positive Millennials. Online you can be whoever you wish to be, say what you always wanted to say, and get what you want. It's a space with no traditional labels, where race, gender, dis/ability, ethnicity, even age need not hold you back from who you wish to express through your profile.

Why do people sext?

The biggest attraction to sexting is that it's fun and flirty. Users can sext to show interest, but also often sext to get positive feedback and feel good about themselves. Although females were perceived as slightly more under pressure to sext, respondents largely felt that young people sext because they want to, not because they feel they have to. This speaks to the literature (Karaian, 2012; Ringrose *et al.*, 2014) which has argued that sexual double standards which exist in the real world are transferred online through sexting, and that female sexters are pressured into sexting. My findings concur with Lee and colleagues' (2015) findings that this seems to not be the case for the vast majority of sexters, who do so willingly and in a consensual environment.

Millennials feel sexting is a good way to show interest, and to get positive feedback or compliments, making them feel good about themselves. Additional motivations for sexting include: 1) for the purpose of exploring and experimenting with their sexuality (especially when they were still virgins in high school), 2) curiosity, 3) to bridge the gap when two partners cannot be physically intimate, 4) sexual and romantic gratification, and 5) to convey to their partner what they like sexually and want (and do not want). In relationships, sexting was often either in anticipation of real life sex (i.e. exploring what it would be like) or in enticement for an ensuing sexual encounter. Sex-positive media and pop-culture was expected to play a large role in pressuring young people to sext, but this was greatly downplayed by respondents.

Is sexting sex?

Although sexting is deemed part of their sexual expression, it cannot replace sex.

That the human interaction of physical sex is deemed superior to the human interaction of cyber-sex (which in itself is seen as a form of intimate, human interaction, which is why it is preferred to pornography) is interestingly contradictory to the cyborg perspective which suggests humans can exist socially online. Additionally interesting is that sexting is likely to take place before real life sex, as is especially popular amongst high school –aged Millennials who identify as virgins. To them, it's a way to bridge the gap of distance between two interested, consenting partners who wish to be intimate, experiment, or are just curious and wish to explore their sexuality, all in the safety and comfort of their own rooms with the power to cease the interaction at any time.

It is exactly this power which, from a feminist theoretical point of view, makes sexting so appealing, especially to female sexters. Sexting is a turn-taking, co-authoring process where both parties contribute equally, and have equal stakes in the outcome. The actual content of the sexting was not the subject of this study, but rather the format and process. Both partners have the power to lead to interaction, and to back out if they feel uncomfortable. It is a space that allows both parties to ask for what they want, express a dislike for what they don't like, and get the satisfaction they desire by giving the other what they desire.

This turn-taking repertoire means that when one receives a sext, it creates the expectation of returning one of similar contribution (e.g. receiving a photo of your partner's naked torso, a text or photo of your face is not an appropriate response). For inexperienced sexters, this could create negative pressure to sext or return sexts. There is therefore a need to establish what consent looks like online. This is also crucial as many female respondents in both phases of the research claimed to receive unsolicited and often unwanted sexts. This is especially problematic when it is of a graphic, sexual nature, leaving the receiver feeling violated.

So what's the catch?

Sexting's biggest risk is that private sexts and pics are often seen by others. Although greatly minimised by sexting only with a trusted partner (Lee et al. 2015), this was rated one

of the biggest concerns for participants. Leaking or sharing of private sexts usually leads to regret and embarrassment, which female respondents felt affect them more than men, albeit illogical to them as to why (the idea that they have more 'to lose' than men).

Another potential threat to sexters is negative pressure, in which they are unwillingly pressured or made to feel they have to sext. This can originate from perceptions in the media or friends, but most commonly from another sexter, however research finds this is very rarely the case (Lee *et al.*, 2015). Receiving sext creates the expectation of a response, which can make the inexperienced sexter reluctantly join in sexting without wanting to. This again brings up the importance of establishing what sexual consent looks like and to foster a habit of getting a confirmation of consent before proceeding. However, negative pressure is rarely a motivation for sexting, as found by Lee and colleagues (2015) and confirmed in this study.

Gendered Perceptions

Even though Haraway (1991) argued that the cyborg would be free from the traditional restraints of gender roles, there are indications that male and female sexters sext differently, and have different perceptions of issues involving sexting. Although this study focused primarily on female perceptions, here are the gendered differences in perceptions my findings highlight:

Male respondents generally seem to enjoy sexting, especially the exchange of pictures, slightly more than females (although the desire to sext seems to be equal). They see sexting as flirting, having phone sex, and exchanging sexy pictures, and don't feel there's pressure among people their age to sext, although they seem to agree that females are more pressured than males to sext. They think females who sext are 'hot' and flirty, and reported sexting more frequently than females.

The majority reported having seen private sexts not sent to them, and in addition to concerns about leaking/sharing, embarrassment, and reputation damage, they were more likely to be concerned about sexting hurting their chances or relationship with someone. Additionally, their pic of choice is what is known as a 'dick pic' which seems to be very popular despite women's expressed distaste for it.

The most crucial and clear gender difference is that female Millennials are more cautious of sexting. They are more actively aware of potential risks, they are more concerned

with privacy, the trustworthiness of a partner, and are more likely to feel pressure to sext through: 1) the expectation created by receiving a sext or photo (interpersonal pressure from a partner, friend, or acquaintance), and 2) hypersexualised media and pop culture. As mentioned previously, Lee and Crofts (2015) identified three types of pressure to sext: interpersonal, peer-group, and socio-cultural pressure and although interpersonal and (although to a small extent) socio-cultural pressure was indicated by female respondents, pressure from friends or social groups do not seem to affect female sexters. As males are more likely to share private sexts with friends and have more sexting partners, this might be more applicable to them.

Females, whilst agreeing that sext will not replace real life sex, do seek it out at times to satisfy similar desires. This is especially relevant over long distance for people in a relationship and on semi-anonymous dating apps for singletons, which females can access at their own leisure, leading to some students suggesting that sext could prolong the need for actual sex in women. They also argued that males seem to sext for the opposite reason, as a way of enticing their partner in the hopes that real life sex will follow soon.

In contradiction to the findings of Ringrose, *et al.*, (2014) AP & MTV, (2009), females do seem to associate sexting with flirtatiousness, fun, desire, and pleasure, beyond just the physical gratification.

While it does seem that female sexters are more frequently the ones from who sexy selfies (naked or semi-naked photos) are requested and who seem to be more concerned about their sexts being leaked (hacked or non-consensually shared) than their male counterparts, they still report enjoying sex and have a sext drive that matches that of the males. This concurs with Lee and Crofts' (2015) findings that in contrast to previous literature, female sexters enjoy sexting, to which I would add: without losing sight of the potential risks. On the contrary, they even prefer sexting due to an awareness of the risks of real life casual dating and hooking up, with no worry or stress about the chances of STDs, pregnancy, or other issues such as date rape or harassment.

6.2 Sexting & Cyborg Feminism: A critical discussion

Feminism requires social and political awareness of structures of power and authority, especially pertaining to those in the 'lesser' (i.e. women, persons of colour, homosexuals, etc.). Early cyberfeminists argued that women can best empower themselves by becoming fluent in online communication, engaging in, and challenging, technological systems and practices (Consalvo, 2012). Additionally, in examining sexting through a feminist lens, the practice has three major theoretical components with which to grapple: the biological, the social, and the cultural.

Biology. For many traditionalists and conservatives, biology is the problem. The issue with sexting is essentially hormones leading to bad judgement. They feel that young people, especially teenagers, are driven by their hormones into sexting, or even that young males' hormones are the driving force behind the sexting craze. The truth is that biology equally drives young women to seeking a cyber-partner for some sexy online engagement. Female participants expressed a desire to sext, and knew what they wanted during sext. In addition to sexting partners exchanging photos of their biology, so as to entice the other, in such it is not the male, but the female herself taking power over her biological urges.

Although gender differences exist in *perceptions* of sexting, my research found that in the practice of sexting males and females had very much similar experiences and concerns. This agrees with former research which found an increase in the objectification and sexualisation of men and male bodies (Siibak, 2010), and that men and women were equally likely to engage in 'unwanted consensual sexting'¹⁷ (Drouin & Tobin, 2014). The authors argued that gender-role expectations played a large role, in that men are expected to want to sext (even if they didn't) and women were expected to not show a desire for sext (even if they did). As such, the classic double-standard had made its way into sexting. The question that we need to concern ourselves with, however, is whether these gender differences (whether reality and/or merely perception) are harmful to young Millennials. Is males

¹⁷ Where a partner consents to sex(t) to please their partner while not wanting to sext. Fairly common amongst young adults, it is easier to fabricate sext than sex, making it more popular in unwanted consensual sexual activity (Drouin & Tobin, 2014).

thinking females who sext are 'hot' truly objectifying them in a way that is harmful to either one's sexual or personal development and freedom?

Many feminist scholars might disagree with me (Durham, 2008; Karaian, 2012; Lenhart, 2009; Levine & Kilbourne, 2009; Rice, *et al.*, 2012; Ringrose *et al.*, 2014), but despite findings that sexting does have gender differences and objectifies one's partner (regardless of gender), I find this 'new normal' as not inherently harmful or problematic. Sexters have found a way to use it to their advantage, 'objectifying' themselves in order to flirt, get positive feedback, and make them feel good about themselves. Millennials value presentation and expression, and the vast majority do so willingly and consensually because they want to; because it's fun. Problematising this behaviour therefore is problematic in and of itself, whether it comes from feminist scholars, parents, or lawmakers – this is the new normal, and that's okay.

Social. The social element of sexting is one of the major lures for many young users. The interaction during sexting is so much more than biology, it's a social connection; a way to relate to one another. Being able to connect with a mutually interested person, no matter where they are, through fantasy dialogue, allows two persons to connect on an intimate level. Depending of course on their relationship, the two can relate to one another as lovers, bound by their mutual interest in the activity and each other. However, although this is (and should be) a mutual experience, it is possible for one to hold the social power¹⁸. This can come from forceful initiation by sending unwanted or/and premature explicit photos, or by controlling the conversation – dictating what needs to happen in the fantasy. From my research, it seems these cases are rare, but might need additional probing in future research.

Culture. Sexting is largely guided by cyber-cultural norms. The back-and-forth turn-taking, the 'exchange' of pictures, and that both parties need to be equally present and involved suggests that both parties have equal control and power. Sexting even allows the user to cease sexting, or even block another user if they at all feel they are not being mutually benefitted and/or respected. It is particularly due to cyber-sexting culture that I argue that sexting is a feminist *practice* that is void of labels, inclusive, expressive democratic, and non-hierarchical.

¹⁸ Social power is the ability to achieve goals even if other people oppose those goals.

Related is the notion that young Millennials have become 'hypersexualised' (Walter, 2010) and a 'pornified' generation (Karaian, 2012), of which my research has found little to no proof to warrant this notion. There is an awareness that sexting and visual displays of sexuality has become commonplace in social media, but that this has increased sexual activity or promiscuity is unfounded, with recent research even indicating a decline in college students having sex, challenging the notions the 'hook-up' culture associated with young Millennials (Fowler, 2013). Similarly, my research challenges this notion, supported by findings that people in relationships make up most of the sexting community where they do so consensually with a trusted partner.

Are we there yet? That female respondents are very aware of the threats of sexting, indicated by both the quantitative and qualitative findings, along with their questioning of why women are more cautious in sexting when men have just as much to lose as they do, speaks to the early cyberfeminist ideals of Haraway (1991) and Plant (1997). They are savvy and politically aware of relations regarding power and inequality, as female respondents pointed out issues that need attention and individuals who need protecting/empowering. They themselves embrace the cybersphere, as the sexting allows them to communicate what they want and don't want, and offers equal power to both parties involved. It is a space where traditional or physical labels have no power, unless you choose to reveal them, as the user has the ability to customize their online self-presentation.

On the basis of this, I very much argue that sexting is in itself a feminist practice that needs more attention from feminist scholars.

Stepford Sexter? One key feature of machines and robots are that they are programmed to do what their maker intends for them to do. Consider Ira Levin's 1972 satirical thriller '*The Stepford Wives*'; the tale of a young photographer who finds that the beautiful, submissive wives in a town are actually all robots programmed to please their husbands and beckon to their every whim. If we are going to argue that young females today ought to embrace the Millennial cyborg identity, to be part machine, in order to liberate themselves in this empowering feminist space – are we forgetting that robotic side of this new existence will hypothetically be programmed? What are Millennial cyborgs programmed to want, do, or say?

The question might sound like a science fiction plot, but one that needs investigation nonetheless. One cannot freely argue that a cyborg identity is the way of the future without considering the risks of societal programming, making young people believe they need certain products, that they feel certain emotions, and that they want certain goals. For the organic side, a cyborg existence is liberating and empowering, however, we still need to establish what it means for the technical side.

Poststructural feminist, Chris Weedon, argues that conforming behaviour is largely due to pressure and reinforcement from larger societal structures which influences one's subjectivity into believing that 'this is the way it should be', in avertedly adhering to the larger societal institutions' discourse of appropriate behaviour (Weedon, 1987). Weedon (1987) views society as a mechanism to control humans through societal constraints which reinforce inequalities and structures to serve the interests of powerful groups, all through the use of language and discourse. In such, the very thing that Cixous (1975) argued would be the liberation and development of women – language in writing – potentially could be restraining and limiting if the same discourses are used that are developed by larger, ruling societal structures.

This is an area that definitely warrants further investigation, as well as, as Haraway (1991) and Plant (1997) suggested, a sense of cyber-awareness or consciousness in its users. The issue of control and authentic freedom is one that still requires attention, and needs to be given priority in future feminist and poststructuralist work on cyborg-related issues.

6.3 Bottom-line: Theoretically framing sexting

So is sexting a platform which transfers already socially embedded patriarchal beliefs onto unsuspecting young sexters? Are women being exploited, pornified, and objectified through the practice, with or without their knowledge? Or do women consensually and freely enjoy sexting, engaging with it as a means to empowerment and gratification, on a playing field which sets them as an equal to their partner?

The answer, it seems, is neither. A functionalist feminist argument would be that it truly has the potential to be beneficial and amount to all the ideals set by early cyberfeminists such as Haraway and Plant. That is, however, if certain requirements are met. These requirements involve experience with technology, education, as well as socio-economic

factors, and access to these will determine whether cybersex is a tool of empowerment or manipulation.

To illustrate this, consider this example: two teenage females, one from the Cape Town middle-class suburbs, and the other from a rural township. The first girl will have had a quality education where she was exposed to, and trained in, technology from a young age. She knows how to navigate and protect herself online, while also growing up in socio-economic circumstances in which her equal standing to her male peers are confirmed and encouraged. The second girl was not as fortunate to be as empowered through a quality education, and technology experience. As such her identity, as it is influenced by her education, skills, experience, and values, is not as individualistic and empowered as the previous girl, which might mean that traditional patriarchy values will be transferred when communicating online.

This was the case in the early days of the internet, where both men and women were learning to use it in their respective places of work. In such instances, female users were significantly less assertive and more apologetic in their online communications than their male counterparts, which was argued to be a simple transfer of physical work gender relations online in discourse style and patterns of disparity and harassment (Haraway, 1991; Plant, 1997; Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2003). Early cyberfeminists developed largely out of a critique of this, which urged female users to gain the resources to develop their skills and identity as to empower themselves in their online use. Men were more tech savvy than women back then, and largely still are, appreciating it for its width and potential, while female users use it to enrich relationships and are more conscious of the risks of the internet (Pew Research Centre, 2005).

The Internet has been argued to foster gender equality, while others feel it also reproduces the larger societal gender status quo as most internet and tech resources, infrastructure and content is mostly managed and maintained by men (Herring, 2003). This in turn is suggested to strengthen what some refer to as the 'pornification of a generation' in which young female sexters are constructed as 'self-sexually exploiting' (Karaian, 2012). While many arguments in caution of sexting end here, history has shown that technology and the internet is nothing if not flexible and every-changing: a platform shaped by the user. Which brings us back to the sexter him/herself, and the external factors, institutions, or larger

societal systems which have created and reinforced these discourse or structures of classification.

Looking at these cultural, media, and sometimes even legal narratives of young female sexters, one crucial voice is often drowned out by the very institutions which claim to protect her: Lolita's. Karaian (2012) argues from a feminist poststructuralist viewpoint (Butler, 1997) that 'hegemonic cultural and legal discourses regarding sexting...employ a 'mechanism of censorship' that not only circumscribes 'the social parameters of speakable discourse, of what will and will not be admissible in public discourse', but also reifies teenage females as sexual objects to be seen and not heard' (2012:3). The taboo of sexting therefore is not merely an agent of regulation, but one of censorship which places young female sex(t)ual narratives outside the 'domain of speakability'¹⁹ (Butler, 1997:133). This not only silences them through removal of sexual agency, but prohibits movements of sexual education – such as one my research finds is crucially important but under-recognised.

In the end, to know whether a young women will fall prey to, or successfully benefit from cybersex and all it holds, one needs to ask: is she capable of navigating the scene successfully, own her space and identity, negotiate access and anonymity, and effectively identify risks and red flags if and when they arise? Just as I need to be taught to drive a car (technology) and learn the rules of the road (social interaction skills) before I can fully benefit from the opportunities of travelling independently, young women need to be taught to use the tech at their disposal and learn the rules – which counts for male users as well.

Third-wave (post)feminists have long been occupied with the central ideal to 'save Lolita' though liberating her from second wave restrictions and limitations to her sexuality, seeing it not as a tool of objectification, restraint, and male control, but a source of power (Durham, 2008; Karaian, 2012). Poststructuralists argue that the discourses we use to relate sexting is potentially harmful through censoring and essentially objectifying young female sexuality (Butler, 1996; Karaian, 2012). Cyberfeminists highlighted the potential of the cybersphere for empowerment, and equality – given certain prerequisites are met. In my research I find that although the former two arguments are valid to keep in mind,

¹⁹ Discourses which are not considered intelligible as it falls outside what is considered appropriate and understandable language, keeping in mind that language itself is a regulatory agent (Butler J. , 1997; Weedon, 1987).

cyberfeminism holds the greatest potential for practical use in identifying the empowering features young men and women require to allow sexting to become what it should be: a safe tool through which young people can develop their sexuality, satisfy their curiosities and desires, and explore relationship opportunities on a platform free of traditional (patriarchal and other) restraints.

7. CONCLUSION

With media stories about young people being criminally charged for sexting and the high rates of the 'immoral' behaviour, the phenomenon has become an important topic for researchers and policymakers. However, much of the research and media which informed policy had been misguided and failed to fully take into account young people's opinions and perceptions of the practice into consideration. The vast majority of sexters do so voluntarily, flirting and having fun, which can easily lead to shame due to the taboo on the practice placed there by authorities who think they're protecting the child. Sexting is not without risk, but this is minimal if both partners do so consensually. Policymakers should not outlaw this non-deviant act, but instead focus on problematizing the behaviour of those who breach the trust of their partner (Lee *et al.*, 2015; Walters, 2015; Ringrose, 2015).

Sexting is not just about the act and about sexual gratification; it is about exploration, intimacy, connection, and imagination on a playing field that is balanced, responsive, and liberating, especially for women. It is fun, and its back-and-forth turn taking repertoire means that both parties are equally involved and contributing. It is potentially safer than casual dating and 'hook-ups', and definitely more convenient.

Considering theoretically framing and placing sexting within a framework from which it can most effectively be engaged with and mobilised into proactive reactions, I find it alarming that although various scholars have attempted this from either a policy (Lee and colleagues, 2014; 2015) or feminist approach (Durham, 2008; Karaian, 2012; Lenhart, 2009; Levine & Kilbourne, 2009; Rice, *et al.*, 2012; Ringrose *et al.*, 2014), none have adequately answered the question: is sexting harmful? Additionally, the vastly varying results and conclusions of these studies have also left me unsatisfied that we have established an appropriate understanding of the phenomenon. This dissatisfaction inspired this research, which attempted through mixed methodology to establish some consensus, largely outside of any theoretical bias, and followed by an attempt to find a suitable framework from which to dissect the findings. The contradictory findings and conclusions of this study has indicated that there is still much to be done on sexting research, focusing especially on whether or not it is harmful or beneficial, and how policy needs to adapt to this (while keeping age groups and sexual maturity in mind).

To reiterate, I once again emphasise the need for sext-education to teach teenagers and young people proper sexting etiquette and guidelines to protect themselves, as well as supporting experts who advocate for the decriminalisation of sexting for consenting older teenagers. Additionally, I argue that sexting is a primarily feminist and potentially empowering practice for women who educate themselves on its risks and benefits.

7.1 Future Research & Recommendations

Future research on sexting and Millennial online behaviour needs to take the following into consideration:

Consent: A topic that has been particularly overlooked in previous research, is that of consent in sexting. There is a need to establish what consent in sexting looks like, as well as awareness thereof. It is alarming that so many respondents, especially female, reported unsolicited pictures and unwanted graphic images, to the extent that these are experienced as aggression and harassment. As discussed above, authentic freedom is of utmost importance, and establishing consent as commonplace will mean the user is not subjected to the other's desires, especially in cases of an uneven power balance, but that they have the full autonomy to accept or decline such a request.

Talk to males: There is a need for qualitative research with male teenagers and young adults on sexting and online dating in a manner similar to the focus group sessions and questions addressed in this study.

LGBTQ! Sexting: This study was primarily examining heterosexual relationships, and how sexting presents within it. Research into how heterosexual sexting behaviours differ from LGBTQ! sexting, might offer additional insights into the role that gender plays.

7.1.1. Sext Ed.

The fact that young people sext (just as it is true that young people have sex), is indisputable, irreversible and incurable. It has been proven time-and-time again that abstinence-only sex-education approaches do not work and as they do more damage than good, is it not time to consider that preaching sexting-abstinence might need to be reconsidered? At least two studies have suggested that only by accepting the normalisation of sexting, can clinicians, parents and educators start a dialogue with teens and young adults

on sexting, further suggesting that sexting and its associated risks be included in school-based sexual health/education curricula (Rice, *et al.*, 2012; Doring, 2014).

In accordance with a female respondent's plea, I argue that serious steps need to be taken to start including sext education in programmes with teenagers, giving them guidelines to keep protect themselves and offering an open, judgement-free environment if they need to ask for help. Teenagers need to know how to evaluate a person's profile for authenticity, what red flags to look out for and how to protect their own identity online.

Many parents and other relevant parties have been very explicit of their disapproval of sexting, with some countries, such as the US, even declaring it illegal. Many fear that lifting the taboo will significantly increase the prevalence of sexting. This is not unfounded and probably will; however, sexting is already too prevalent to ignore. For as long as authority figures refuse to accept this, young people will be put in uncomfortable positions, make decisions they will regret and even experience emotional or physical harm due to their unpreparedness for these new experiences. Teens need to be taught how to evaluate the situation, the requester's intentions, as well as their own desires before engaging in sext.

7.1.2. Policy Implications

Sexting, when used correctly with consent, is not harmful, and instead holds many benefits. By making it illegal for older teens (15+) to sext, policy makers are not only removing agency, but they are criminalising a normal, healthy act, which could in fact be a safer, better alternative to high rates of teen sex and pregnancies. Despite much media and popular discourse constructing young people sexting in terms of a moral panic (Lee *et al.*, 2015), sexting has become normalised, it is no longer a deviant act. As many experts claim, there is nothing criminal about two consenting teenage lovers privately exchanging personal messages and photos, as there is no victim (Lee et al, 2015; Walters, 2015). Seeing them as child pornographers is disproportionate, and inappropriate.

That being said, laws should protect individuals from non-consensual sharing and leaking of private messages, especially in cases of revenge porn, hacks, or cyber-bullying. In these cases there is a clear victim who has had their rights violated by a person who intends to cause them distress. Legislation dealing with this should be harsh and become familiar,

especially to teenagers and young adults who are still getting to know this new terrain, teaching them what is and is not acceptable.

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		- A Laptop/PC in my room	<input type="checkbox"/>					
6	Relationship Status	- Single - Casual/dating - Serious relationship - Engaged/Married	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>					
7	Sexting is when people...	- ...flirt via text messages - ...have phone sex - ...send naked or semi-naked photos of themselves to others - All of the above - None of the above (define in own words: _____ _____)	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>					
	<i>How often are you on...?</i>			At least once a day	Once in 3 days	Once a week	Once every 2 weeks	Once a month or less
8	Facebook							
9	Twitter							
10	YouTube							
11	Tinder/other dating Apps							
12	SnapChat							
13	Your smartphone							
14	You're laptop/PC for entertainment/fun/social media							
15	Your laptop/PC for school/work							
16	Other social media/app you frequent on (Please specify):							
	.1) _____							
	.2) _____							
	.3) _____							

	<i>Rate your agreement to the statement</i>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral / Don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
17	There is pressure among people my age to post/send sexy pictures/texts					
18	Personal sexy messages/pictures usually end up being seen by more than just those to whom it was sent					
19	Sending sexy messages/pictures is quite normal					
20	Sending sexy messages/pictures can have serious negative consequences					
21	My friend(s) have sent sexy pictures of themselves to someone/posted it online					
22	Sexting in a committed relationship is normal and healthy					
23	Sending a naked selfie is an appropriate way to flirt					
24	Girls feel pressured to send naked selfies					
25	Boys feel pressured to send naked selfies					
26	It's okay to show naked selfies you received to your best friend(s)					
27	Phone-sex or sexting is more common than sex in real-life					
28	Young people are more likely to have phone sex or sext before having sex in real-life					
29	Phone-sex or sexting can replace real-life sex					
<i>Boys and Girls who send sexy pictures are:</i>						
30	Cool					
31	Flirty					
32	Hot					
33	Lame/Stupid					
34	Bold/Confident					
39	Desperate					
40	Funny					

41	Immature				
42	Insecure				
43	Slutty/Loose				
44	Gross/Weird				
<i>Teenagers sext because...</i>					
45	They are bored				
46	They want to fit in				
47	It makes them feel good/sexy				
48	To get positive feedback/compliments				
49	They think it's fun/flirty				
50	They feel they have to				
51	They want to flirt/show interest				
52	They don't know how to flirt				
53	Other (Specify)	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>			
	<i>Rate personal relevance</i>	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
54	I send naked/semi-naked pictures of myself to my boyfriend/girlfriend/partner				
55	I receive naked/semi-naked pictures from my boyfriend/girlfriend/partner				
56	I get naked/semi-naked pictures from people I'm not in a relationship with				
57	These pictures I get are unsolicited (not asked for/out of the blue)				
58	I enjoy getting pictures like this				
59	I enjoy sending pictures like this				
60	Someone has forwarded to me a naked selfie sent to them by another person				
61	Someone has shown me a naked selfie sent to them by another person				
62	I have heard/seen a naked-selfie of mine being sent/shown to other people				

<i>Why might you be concerned about sending sexy messages/pictures of yourself? (Tick all that apply)</i>		
63	Had a bad experience	<input type="checkbox"/>
64	Could disappoint friends/family/teacher/coach	<input type="checkbox"/>
65	Could hurt my relationship or chances with someone	<input type="checkbox"/>
66	Could hurt my reputation	<input type="checkbox"/>
67	Could get into trouble with the law	<input type="checkbox"/>
68	Could get into trouble at school	<input type="checkbox"/>
69	Could hurt my chances of getting into university/a job if it gets out	<input type="checkbox"/>
70	Potential embarrassment	<input type="checkbox"/>
71	Regretting it later	<input type="checkbox"/>
72	People might think I'm slutty/loose in real life	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other:	

Let's talk about Sext?

My name is Melissa Meyer, and I'm doing my Masters in Criminology, but I need YOUR help for my research! I'm interested in Millennial (age 18-30) perceptions of sexting. This is a very new field of human interaction and research, and I want to know what you think!

Who: Any student between 18 and 30!

How: Please follow this link to participate: <http://goo.gl/forms/YOUpri7KTd>- It will only take 8-10 minutes of your day, and would be greatly appreciated!

*A consent form with more information will be on the link's homepage.
Alternatively, for more information you may contact me at:
research2melissa@gmail.com.*

Appendix C: Focus Group Outline

Herewith an outline of the questions I will look into in the focus groups to be held in August. The approach will be semi-structured and conversational, allowing for a free flow of ideas and feelings to possibly find other areas not identified in literature. The outline is subject to change depending on quantitative findings. Follow-up questions will be anticipated and probed further.

Question 1: Construction on Online Identities

As you might know, technology has completely changed the way we live and relate to one another; how we date, how we study, how we maintain friendships, etc. I'm interested in how technology has changed how Millennials (age 15-30, born between 1980 and 2000) express their sexuality. I am particularly interested in sexting or phone-sex.

1. Do you think technology has changed how Millennials express their sexuality and have sex? How so?
2. How do *online* relationships and sexual expression differ from real-life?
 - a. Do you think girls represent themselves differently when they sext than they would in real life? How so?
3. Do you think young people have more phone sex than normal real-life sex?
4. Research suggests that technology has made today's youth 'hypersexualised', what do you think about that?

Question 2: Sexting Pressure and Motivation

1. Concerning sexting, do you think there's a difference in what boys send, and what girls send? What are those differences?
2. Do you think girls or boys are more likely to send sexy photos? Why?
3. Why would you say boys sext, what are their motivations?
4. And girls, why are girls motivated to sext?
 - a. Research suggests that society makes girls feel pressured be present themselves as sexy and desirable, which is why girls sext – what are your thoughts on this?

Question 3: Pros and Cons to Sexting

1. With how relationships – meeting, dating, sex – are becoming more common over technology, what would you say are the potential benefits to this, if any?
2. What are the possible cons or harms that can come from this?
3. Recent research indicates that Millennials are having less children and less teen-pregnancies than ever before, but they are not quite sure why as there is a range of possible causes. Do you think technology has anything to do with this?

Question 4: Personal Reflection

1. Sexters:
 - a. Some believe sexting to be just as good, or better than sex IRL. What are your thoughts on this?
 - b. Do you think there's a difference between the length of time between meeting and sex online and offline?
 - c. What would you say are some of the *unwritten rules* about sexting?
2. Non-Sexters:
 - a. What were/are your motivations or considerations that keep you from exchanging content like this?
 - b. Have you ever been asked and refused? How did you go about that?

Problematizing Teen Sexting and Concluding remarks

1. Do you think *teenage* sexting, in general is a problem? How so?
 - a. How and by whom do think this should be addressed?
2. What do you think parents, teachers and researchers need to take into account about teenage sexting?
3. Is there anything else you would like to add?

<Thank-you, give details if they wish to add something later or have questions, closing>

Appendix D: Consent

INFORMATION

****Information in the research invitation email.***

My name is Melissa Meyer, and I am conducting the following study as part of my Masters in Criminology: “*Let’s Talk About Sext*”. The study aims to identify young Millennial (age 15-30) perspectives on sexting and phone sex, and the potential harms and benefits thereof.

If you are between the ages of 18 and 30, I would like to know what YOU think!

Please follow this link to participate: <link to be added>.

A consent form with more information will be on the link’s homepage. Alternatively, for more information you may contact me at: research2melissa@gmail.com.

‘If you have concerns about the research, its risks and benefits or about your rights

as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Law Faculty Research

Ethics Committee Administrator, Mrs Lamize Viljoen, at 021 650 3080 or at

lamize.viljoen@uct.ac.za. Alternatively, you may write to the Law Faculty Research

Ethics Committee Administrator, Room 6.28 Kramer Law Building, Law Faculty, UCT,

Private Bag, Rondebosch 7701.

Appendix D.1: Pilot Study

CONSENT FORM

****Consent form to be agreed to before participation.***

- Participation in this study is purely voluntary and there will be no compensation of any kind for participating.
- You are free to terminate your participation at any time without any ramifications.
- Responses will be treated with respect in order to protect the identity and dignity of participants.
- You may approach the researcher at any time during the study for questions or comments.
- The responses given will be used as part of a Masters research study.
- You know that this is a pilot study and that participation is not anonymous as I will require feedback.

(A) I have read the above conditions and give my consent

(B) I have not read the above and thereby will not participate.

Appendix D.2: Questionnaire

**Consent form to be agreed to before participating.*

CONSENT FORM

- Participation in this study is purely voluntary.
- Participation will take place online.
- You are free to terminate your participation at any time without any ramifications.
- Your participation is completely anonymous and no information requested can be traced to you.
- Responses will be treated with respect in order to protect the identity and dignity of participants.
- You may approach the researcher at any time during the study for questions or comments.
- The responses given will be used as part of a Masters research study.
- The questionnaire will investigate Millennial perceptions of sexting, and will take approximately 6-10 minutes.
- In the case where you email address is requested, this will be randomized and kept separate from your data. There is no way to match your email address to your participation, keeping it anonymous.

By continuing I confirm that have read the above conditions and give my consent

Appendix D.3: Focus Groups

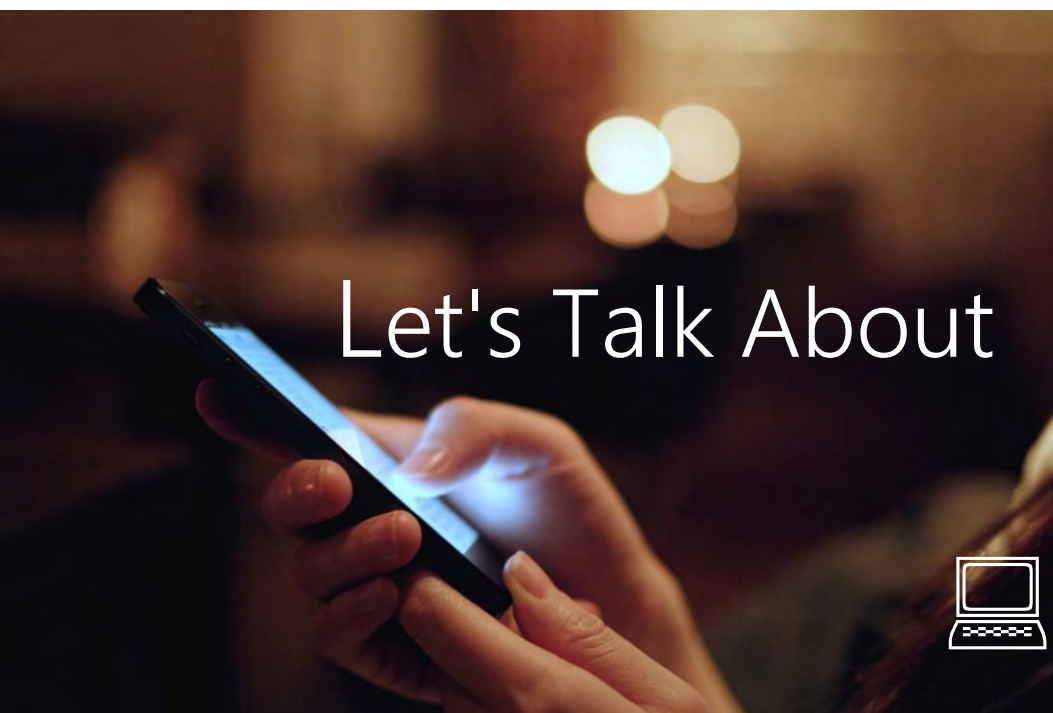
**Consent form to be agreed to before participating.*

CONSENT FORM

- Participation in this study is purely voluntary.
- Participation will be in a focus group, so your participation won't be anonymous to the other group members; however your feedback will be confidential and your names changed in the data.
- You are free to terminate your participation at any time without any ramifications.
- Responses will be treated with respect in order to protect the identity and dignity of participants.
- You may approach the researcher at any time during the study for questions or comments.
- The responses given will be used as part of a Masters research study and you will be audio recorded.
- The focus group will explore different questions, offering everyone opportunity to voice their opinions in a non-judgmental atmosphere where each participant respects the other's ideas as they will respect yours.

Please sign below to indicate that you have read and agreed to the above:

Signature: _____



Let's Talk About **Sext**

*Millennial Perceptions of **Sex and Tech** in Modern Dating*

Technology has changed the world forever – and I want to know how *YOU* think it changed the way youngpeople date.

You are invited to attend a focus group session to discuss and explore your ideas and thoughts on the topic.

 **Sessions:** Kramer Law Building, Law Faculty Middle Campus

1) Monday 21 Sept. 11h00 – 11h40, KRAM
4A

2) Monday 21 Sept. 14h00 – 14h40, KRAM
4A

For more info  research2melissa@gmail.com

Appendix F: Tables and Graphs

Qualitative Sample (S)

Figure F.S.1 Participant Sex

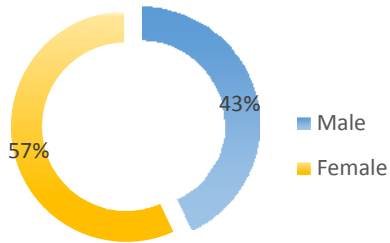


Figure F.S.2: Participant Race

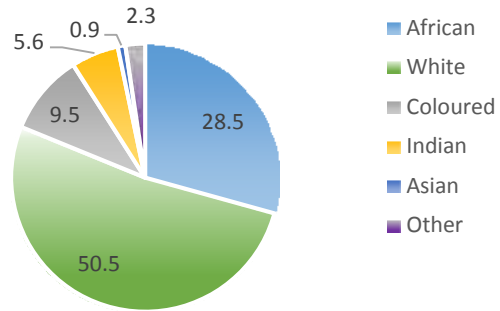


Figure F.S.3: Participant Age

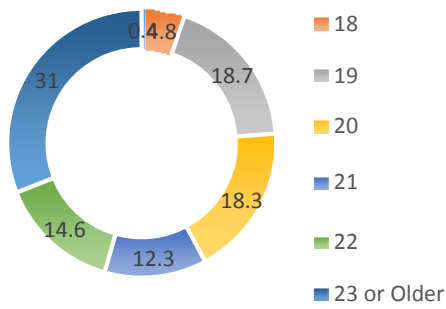


Figure F.S.4: Participant Origin

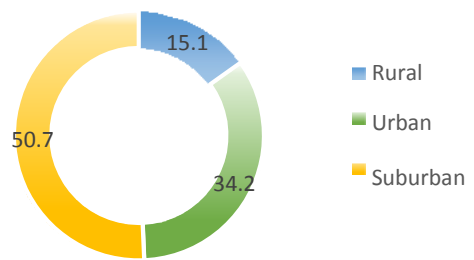
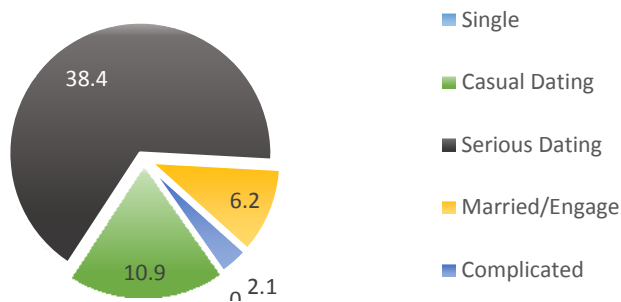


Figure F.S.5: Participant Relationship Status



Qualitative Findings

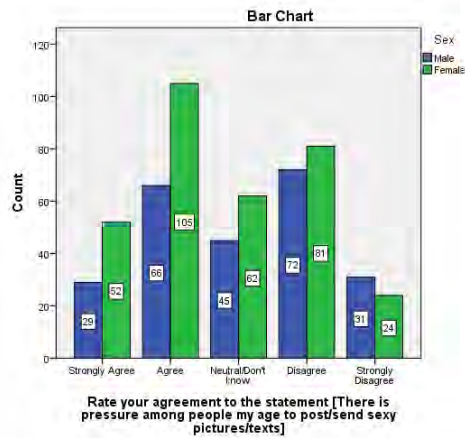


Figure F.1: There is pressure among people my age to post/send sexy pictures/texts, by sex

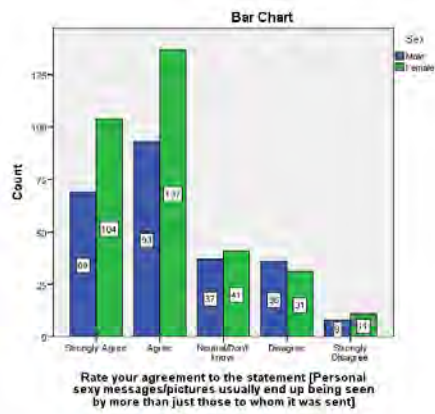


Figure F.2: Personal sexy messages/pictures usually end up being seen by more than just those to whom it was sent

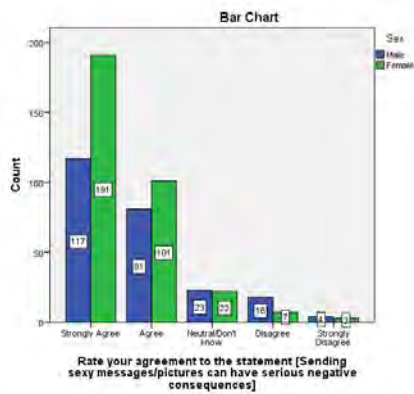


Figure F.3: Sending sexy messages/pictures can have serious negative consequences

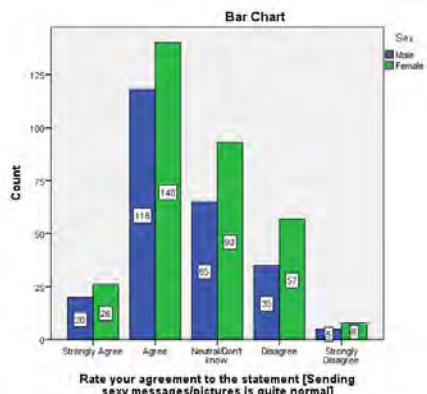


Figure F.4: Sending sexy messages/pictures is quite normal

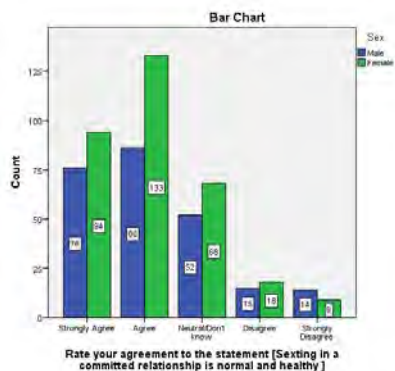


Figure F.5: Sexting in a committed relationship is normal and healthy

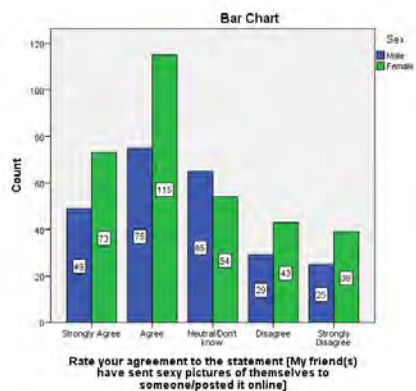


Figure F.6: My friend(s) have sent sexy pictures of themselves to someone, or posted it online.

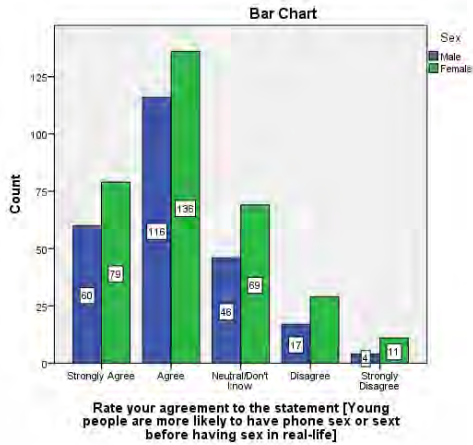


Figure F.7: Young people are more likely to have phone sex or sext before having sex in real-life.

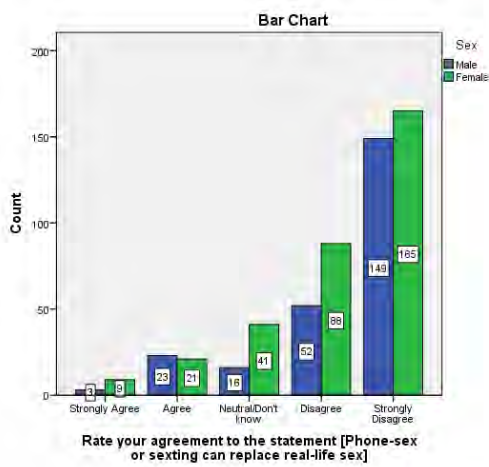


Figure F.8: Phone-sex or sexting can replace real life sex

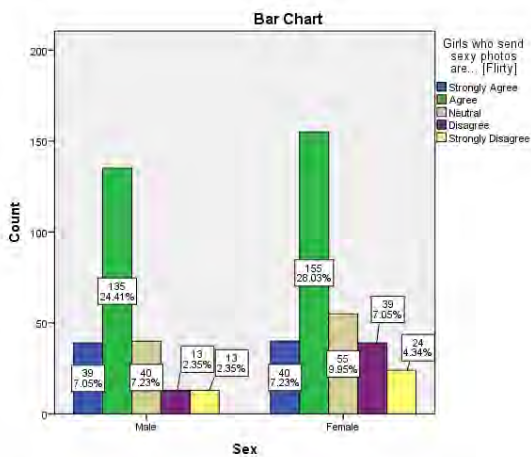


Figure F.9: Girls who send sexy photos are...Flirty

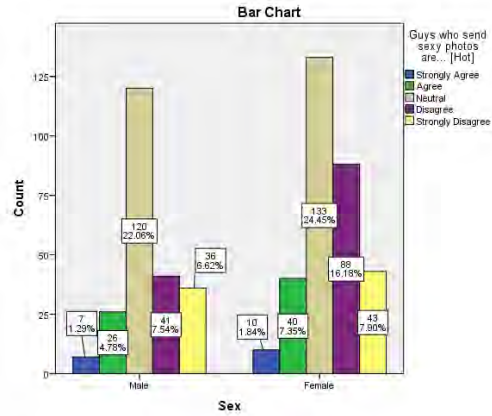
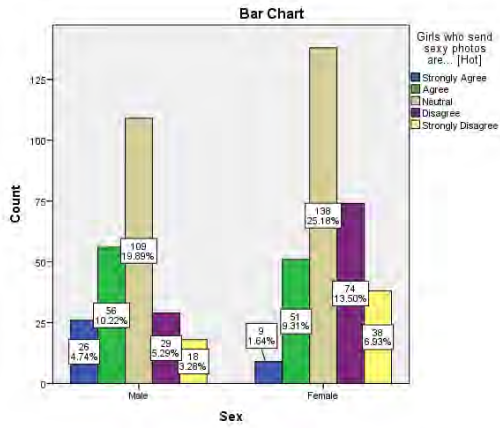


Figure F.10: Guys/Girls who send sexy photos are...Hot

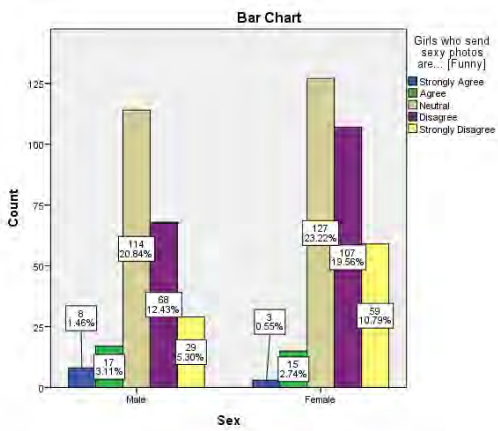


Figure F.11: Girls who send sexy photos are...Funny

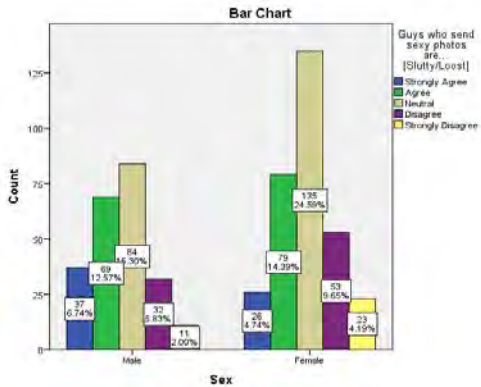
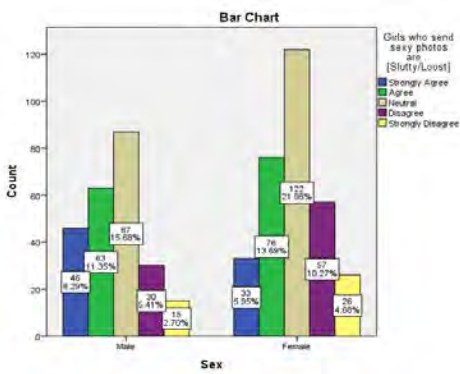


Figure F.12: Guys/Girls who send sexy photos are...Slutty/loose

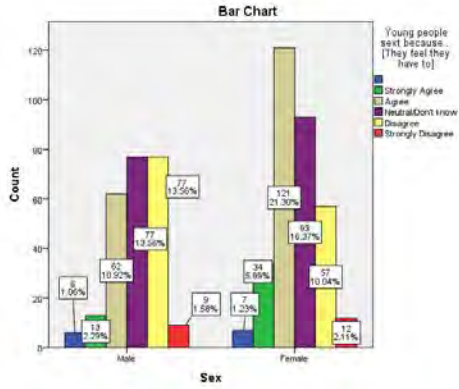


Figure F.13: Young people sext because...they feel they have to

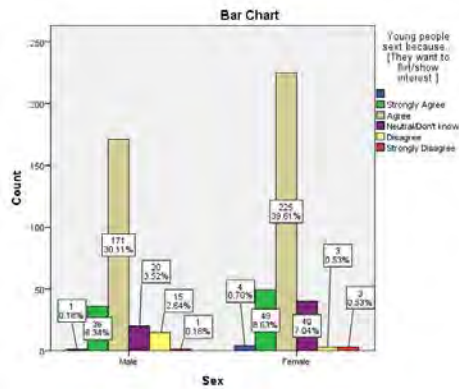


Figure F.14: Young people sext because...they want to flirt/show interest

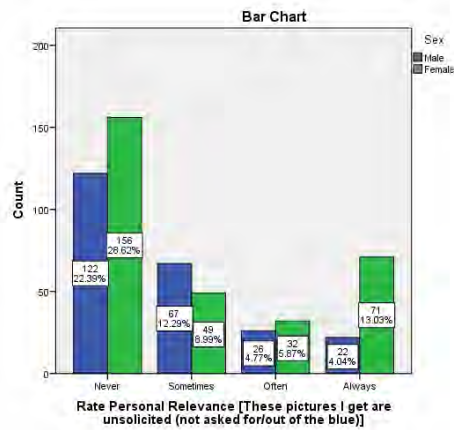


Figure F.15: These pictures I get are unsolicited

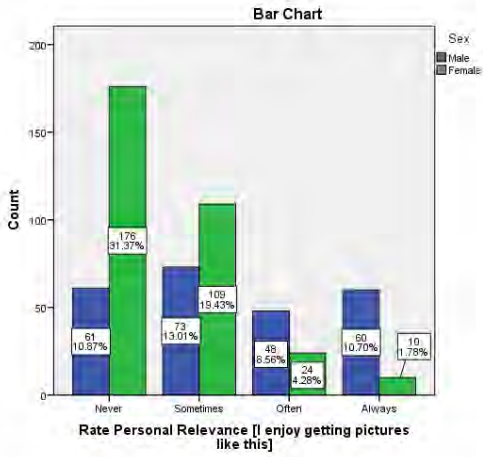


Figure F.16: I enjoy getting pictures like this

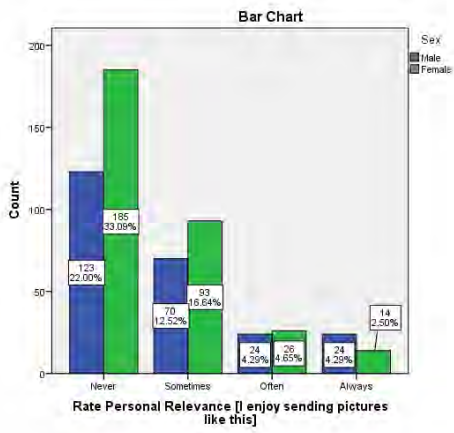


Figure F.17: I enjoy sending pictures like this

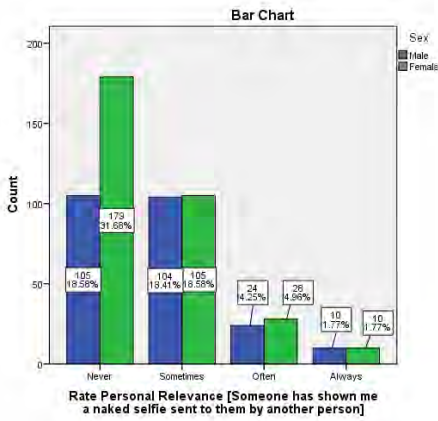


Figure F.18: Someone has shown me a naked selfie sent to them by another person

Table F.1: I send naked/semi-naked pictures (Chi-Square by Demographics)

Reason	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Total
Sex					
Male	120(49.6%)	95(39.3%)	22(9.1%)	5(2.1%)	242 (100%)
Female	148(45.8%)	127(39.3%)	38(11.8%)	10(3.1%)	323(100%)
<i>p</i> = .594	268(47.4%)	222(39.3%)	60(10.6%)	15(2.7%)	565(100%)
Age					
18	12(41.4%)	11(37.9%)	5(17.2%)	1(3.5%)	29(100%)
19	55(52.9%)	32(30.8%)	14(13.5%)	3(2.9%)	104(100%)
20	52(5%)	42(40.4%)	7(6.7%)	3(2.9%)	104(100%)
21	28(4%)	29(41.4%)	13(18.6%)	0	70(100%)
22	39(47%)	33(39.8%)	7(8.4%)	4(4.8%)	83(100%)
≥23	82(46.9%)	75(42.9%)	14(8%)	4(2.3%)	175(100%)
<i>p</i> = .459	268(47.4%)	222(39.3%)	60(10.6%)	15(2.7%)	565(100%)
Origin *					
Rural	45(52.3%)	32(37.2%)	9(10.5%)	0	86(100%)
Urban	80(41.7%)	86(44.8%)	15(7.8%)	11(5.7%)	192(100%)
Suburban	143(49.8%)	104(36.2%)	36(12.5%)	4(1.4%)	287(100%)
<i>p</i> = .007	268(47.4%)	222(39.3%)	60(10.6%)	15(2.7%)	565(100%)
Relationship Status*					
Single	141(59.2%)	76(31.9%)	20(8.4%)	1(0.4%)	238(100%)
Casual	29(46.8%)	26(41.9%)	6(9.7%)	1(1.6%)	62(100%)
Serious	79(36.4%)	97(44.7%)	31(14.3%)	10(4.6%)	217(100%)
Joined	15(42.9%)	16(45.7%)	2(5.7%)	2(5.7%)	35(100%)
<i>p</i> = .001	264(47.8%)	215(38.9%)	59(10.7%)	14(2.5%)	552(100%)
Total					
			N		568
			% of Total		100%

Table F.2: I receive naked/semi-naked pictures (Chi-Square by Demographics)

Reason	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Total
Sex					
Male	90(38.3%)	116(48.1%)	26(10.8%)	9(3.7%)	241 (100%)
Female	143(45.8%)	134(39.3%)	34(11.8%)	11(3.1%)	322(100%)
<i>p</i> = .387	233(41.4%)	250(44.4%)	60(10.7%)	20(3.6%)	563(100%)
Age					
18	11(37.9%)	13(44.8%)	4(13.8%)	1(3.4%)	29(100%)
19	46(44.7%)	41(39.8%)	11(10.7%)	5(4.9%)	103(100%)
20	47(45.2%)	43(41.3%)	10(9.6%)	4(3.8%)	104(100%)
21	24(34.3%)	34(48.6%)	11(15.7%)	1(1.4%)	70(100%)
22	30(36.1%)	42(50.6%)	7(8.4%)	4(4.8%)	83(100%)
≥23	76(43.7%)	76(43.7%)	17(9.8%)	5(2.9%)	174(100%)
<i>p</i> = .945	233(41.4%)	250(44.4%)	60(10.7%)	20(3.6%)	563(100%)
Origin *					
Rural	29(33.7%)	46(53.5%)	10(11.6%)	1(1.2%)	86(100%)
Urban	71(37%)	92(47.9%)	16(8.3%)	13(6.8%)	192(100%)
Suburban	133(46.7%)	112(39.3%)	34(11.9%)	6(2.1%)	285(100%)
<i>p</i> = .006	233(41.4%)	250(44.4%)	60(10.7%)	20(3.6%)	563(100%)
Relationship Status*					
Single	119(50%)	97(40.8%)	19(8%)	3(1.3%)	238(100%)
Casual	23(37.1%)	29(46.8%)	8(12.9%)	2(3.2%)	62(100%)
Serious	74(34.3%)	100(46.3%)	31(14.4%)	11(5.1%)	216(100%)
Joined	14(41.2%)	18(52.9%)	0	2(5.9%)	34(100%)
<i>p</i> = .006	230(41.8%)	244(44.4%)	58(10.5%)	18(3.3%)	550(100%)
Total					
			N	% of Total	568
					100%

Table F.3. : Pictures are unsolicited (Chi-Square by Demographics)

Reason	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Total
Sex*					
Male	122(51.5%)	67(28.3%)	26(11%)	22(9.3%)	237 (100%)
Female	156(50.7%)	49(15.9%)	32(10.4%)	71(23.1%)	308(100%)
<i>p</i> < .001	278(51%)	116(21.3%)	58(10.6%)	93(17.1%)	545(100%)
Age					
18	10(34.5%)	7(24.1%)	4(13.8%)	8(27.6%)	29(100%)
19	45(45%)	27(27%)	12(12%)	16(16%)	100(100%)
20	48(48%)	21(21%)	13(13%)	18(18%)	100(100%)
21	30(44.1%)	10(14.7%)	11(16.2%)	17(25%)	68(100%)
22	39(48.8%)	18(22.5%)	10(12.5%)	13(16.3%)	80(100%)
≥23	106(63.1%)	33(19.6%)	8(4.8%)	21(12.5%)	168(100%)
<i>p</i> = .52	278(51%)	116(21.3%)	58(10.6%)	93(17.1%)	545(100%)
Origin					
Rural	44(52.4%)	21(25%)	7(8.3%)	12(14.3%)	84(100%)
Urban	91(48.4%)	52(27.7%)	18(9.6%)	27(14.4%)	188(100%)
Suburban	143(54.4%)	43(15.8%)	33(12.1%)	54(19.8%)	273(100%)
<i>p</i> = .063	278(51%)	116(21.3%)	58(10.6%)	93(17.1%)	545(100%)
Relationship Status*					
Single	107(45.9%)	58(24.9%)	28(12%)	40(17.2%)	233(100%)
Casual	27(44.3%)	19(31.1%)	10(16.4%)	5(8.2%)	61(100%)
Serious	116(57.1%)	31(15.3%)	20(9.9%)	36(17.7%)	203(100%)
Joined	24(68.6%)	3(8.6%)	0	8(22.9%)	35(100%)
<i>p</i> = .003	274(51.5%)	111(20.9%)	58(10.9%)	89(16.7%)	532(100%)
Total					
				N	568
				% of Total	100%

Table F.4. : I enjoy getting pictures like this (Chi-Square by Demographics)

Reason	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Total
<i>Sex*</i>					
Male	61(25.21%)	73(30.17%)	48(19.83%)	60(24.79%)	242 (100%)
Female	176(55.17%)	109(34.17%)	24(7.52%)	10(3.13%)	319(100%)
<i>p < .001</i>	237(42.25%)	182(32.44%)	72(12.83%)	70(12.48%)	561(100%)
<i>Age*</i>					
18	10(34.5%)	14(48.3%)	2(6.9%)	3(10.3%)	29(100%)
19	41(39.4%)	21(20.1%)	19(18.3%)	23(22.1%)	104(100%)
20	52(50%)	35(33.7%)	10(9.6%)	7(6.7%)	104(100%)
21	30(44.1%)	23(33.8%)	10(14.7%)	5(7.4%)	68(100%)
22	31(37.8%)	25(30.5%)	10(12.2%)	16(19.5%)	82(100%)
≥23	73(42%)	64(36.8%)	21(12.1%)	16(9.2%)	174(100%)
<i>p = .011</i>	237(42.2%)	182(32.4%)	72(12.8%)	70(12.5%)	561(100%)
<i>Origin</i>					
Rural	41(47.7%)	26(30.2%)	10(11.6%)	9(10.5%)	86(100%)
Urban	72(37.5%)	67(34.9%)	25(13%)	28(14.6%)	192(100%)
Suburban	124(43.8%)	89(31.4%)	37(13.1%)	33(11.7%)	283(100%)
<i>p = .732</i>	237(42.2%)	182(32.4%)	72(12.8%)	70(12.5%)	561(100%)
<i>Relationship Status</i>					
Single	107(45%)	77(32.4%)	30(12.6%)	24(10.1%)	238(100%)
Casual	18(29%)	23(37.1%)	11(17.7%)	10(16.1%)	62(100%)
Serious	89(41.8%)	68(31.9%)	25(11.7%)	31(14.6%)	213(100%)
Joined	18(51.4%)	8(22.9%)	5(14.3%)	4(11.4%)	35(100%)
<i>p = .640</i>	232(42.3%)	176(32.1%)	71(13%)	69(12.6%)	548(100%)
Total					
				N	568
				% of Total	100%

Table F.5. : I enjoy sending sexts (Chi-Square by Demographics)

Reason	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Total
<i>Sex*</i>					
Male	123(51.04%)	70(29.05%)	24(9.96%)	24(9.96%)	241(100%)
Female	185(58.18%)	93(29.25%)	26(8.18%)	14(4.40%)	318(100%)
<i>p = .046</i>	308(55.10%)	163(29.16%)	50(8.94%)	38(6.80%)	559(100%)
<i>Age*</i>					
18	12(41.4%)	13(44.8%)	1(3.4%)	3(10.3%)	29(100%)
19	64(62.1%)	17(16.5%)	12(11.7%)	10(9.7%)	103(100%)
20	61(58.7%)	31(29.8%)	8(7.7%)	4(3.8%)	104(100%)
21	36(52.2%)	22(31.9%)	10(14.5%)	1(1.4%)	69(100%)
22	43(52.4%)	22(26.8%)	6(7.3%)	11(12.4%)	82(100%)
≥23	92(53.5%)	58(33.7%)	13(7.6%)	9(5.2%)	172(100%)
<i>p = .043</i>	308(55.1%)	163(29.2%)	50(8.9%)	38(6.8%)	559(100%)
<i>Origin</i>					
Rural	54(63.5%)	25(29.4%)	3(3.5%)	3(3.5%)	85(100%)
Urban	93(48.7%)	66(34.6%)	17(8.9%)	15(7.9%)	191(100%)
Suburban	161(56.9%)	72(25.4%)	30(10.6%)	20(7.1%)	283(100%)
<i>p = .080</i>	308(55.1%)	163(29.2%)	50(8.9%)	38(6.8%)	559(100%)
<i>Relationship Status</i>					
Single	148(61.9%)	61(25.5%)	17(7.1%)	13(5.4%)	239(100%)
Casual	36(59%)	20(32.8%)	5(8.2%)	0	61(100%)
Serious	99(46.7%)	67(31.6%)	24(11.3%)	22(10.4%)	212(100%)
Joined	17(50%)	12(35.3%)	2(5.9%)	3(8.8%)	34(100%)
<i>p = .056</i>	300(54.9%)	160(29.3%)	48(8.8%)	38(7%)	546(100%)
Total					
				N	568
				% of Total	100%

Table F.6. : I have been shown a private naked selfie (Chi-Square by Demographics)

Reason	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Total
Sex					
Male	105(43.21%)	104(42.80%)	24(9.88%)	10(4.12%)	243 (100%)
Female	179(55.59%)	105(32.61%)	28(8.70%)	10(3.11%)	322(100%)
<i>p</i> =.033	284(50.27%)	209(36.99%)	52(9.20%)	20(3.54%)	565(100%)
Age*					
18	10(34.5%)	13(44.8%)	4(13.8%)	2(6.9%)	29(100%)
19	42(40.4%)	38(36.5%)	17(16.3%)	7(6.7%)	104(100%)
20	52(50%)	33(31.7%)	14(13.5%)	5(4.8%)	104(100%)
21	39(55.7%)	27(38.6%)	4(5.7%)	0	70(100%)
22	39(47%)	40(48.2%)	3(3.6%)	1(1.2%)	83(100%)
≥23	102(58.3%)	58(33.1%)	10(5.7%)	5(2.9%)	175(100%)
<i>p</i> = .010	284(50.3%)	209(37%)	52(9.2%)	20(3.5%)	565(100%)
Origin					
Rural	44(51.8%)	33(38.8%)	7(8.2%)	1(1.2%)	85(100%)
Urban	90(46.6%)	73(37.8%)	22(11.4%)	8(4.1%)	193(100%)
Suburban	150(52.3%)	103(35.9%)	23(8%)	11(3.8%)	287(100%)
<i>p</i> = .659	284(50.3%)	209(37%)	52(9.2%)	20(3.5%)	565(100%)
Relationship Status					
Single	153(64.6%)	59(24.9%)	21(8.9%)	4(1.7%)	237(100%)
Casual	35(57.4%)	20(32.8%)	3(4.9%)	3(4.9%)	61(100%)
Serious	146(67.6%)	54(25%)	9(4.2%)	7(3.2%)	216(100%)
Joined	22(62.9%)	8(22.9%)	4(11.4%)	1(2.9%)	35(100%)
<i>p</i> = .618	356(64.8%)	141(25.7%)	37(6.7%)	15(2.7%)	549(100%)
Total					
				N	568
				% of Total	100%

Table F.7: Why would you reconsider sexting?

Reason	Sex						Total		
	Male			Female					
	n	% within Sex	% of Total	n	% within Sex	% of Total			
Potential embarrassment	204	83.60%	35.90%	279	86.10%	49.10%	483	85%	.41
Regretting it later	200	82%	35.20%	268	82.70%	47.20%	468	82.40%	.82
Could hurt my reputation	192	78.70%	33.80%	260	80.20%	45.80%	452	79.60%	.65
He/She might show it to someone else	161	66%	28.30%	249	76.90%	43.80%	410	72.20%	.004*
Could hurt my relationship or chances with someone	162	66.40%	28.50%	188	58%	33.10%	350	61.60%	.04*
Could disappoint important people to me	138	56.60%	24.30%	187	57.70%	32.90%	325	57.20%	.78
Could hurt my chances of getting into a university/job	129	52.90%	22.70%	176	54.30%	31%	305	53.70%	.73
People might think I'm slutty/loose	107	43.90%	18.80%	163	50.30%	28.70%	270	47.50%	.13
Could get into trouble with the law	63	25.80%	11.10%	99	30.60%	17.40%	162	28.50%	.22
Could get into trouble at school	48	19.70%	8.50%	65	20.10%	11.40%	113	19.90%	.91
Had a bad experience	21	8.60%	3.70%	54	16.70%	9.50%	75	13.20%	.01*

* indicates statistical significance at <