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How do young adults perceive sexting? A qualitative analysis on sexting in Italy and Germany.

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Abstract

The current dissertation focuses on the phenomenon of sexting as sexual practice into young adults' sexual life. In particular, Italy and Germany will be taken into account and into analysis through qualitative interviews with young adults. The target group's age goes from 22 to 26 years old. Country of origin and gender are the two differentiating features that will help me to answer my research questions: How is sexting nowadays perceived by this generation? Is there a difference in the way German young adults carry out this practice from Italian ones? And in general, why do people sext? A first analysis of the literature available showed a focus on under-18s and on the negative consequences, e.g. revenge porn, hence the importance of a research that focuses on this target and aims at answering such research questions. A section will be dedicated to sex education as well, the role that school, family and porn play in educating young adults to a healthy sexual life.

Introduction

The current dissertation provides an in-depth analysis on the position of sexting within young adults' sexual practices and life. The way they perceive the practice and, most importantly, if they have ever sexted will be thoroughly investigated, together with any difference that can be connected to country influence. Indeed, the research does not only focus on Italian young adults, but also on German young adults. In order to better frame my work a theoretical framework is presented in which experts' positions and works in the field are investigated. The interviews showed that participants dedicated more time than expected to analyse their sex education. Thus, a theoretical framework and an analysis on the topic felt necessary.

The first chapter is dedicated to the theoretical currents concerning sex education and sexting. First, the chapter investigates the role played by sex education in educating people towards a healthy sexual life. Sources for sex education can be found in several environments: schools, families, or even porn to name some. According to the World Health Organization (2010:20), sexuality education is defined as “learning about the cognitive, emotional, social, interactive and physical aspects of sexuality”. A well taught sex education leads then to healthy sexual behaviours and responsible choices about one's sexual development. One of the first environments that actually provide a sex education is school and, despite the possible positive outcomes, school-based sex education is indeed a contentious subject (Vivancos et al, 2013). One of the problems in this regard is that there are no standard guidelines on how to structure these programmes and, when they are actually present, they vary throughout the world (Chinelli et al, 2022). However, schools cannot be the only means but people ought to be provided other tools to ensure their rights for SE (*ibidem*). The literature on sex education also the role played by families. These together with schools share the mutual responsibility in helping the children to “attain sexual health and general well-being for the duration of their lives” (Pop & Rusu, 2015:398). Nevertheless, it is not an easy task to determine the extent of and to introduce effective elements for a proper parenting sex education. The research on the topic further encounters porn as one of the main sources for SE, but its actual consequences have been at the centre of the debate: to what extent is pornography helpful? Is watching porn a dangerous practice from which people have to abstain?

Experts here split into two opposite groups. On one hand, some claim that children should be taught about potential risks and positive outcomes of porn which can indeed be used as a source for SE. On the other hand, others perceive porn as providing a fake depiction of sexual practices, thus it cannot teach anything useful. A booster in sex education is indeed needed to further educate young people not only on STIs or on how to prevent pregnancies, but also on how to carry out healthy and positive sexual behaviours.

The first chapter goes on with a literary review on sexting. The main limits encountered here were that the research would mainly focus on minors and, in particular, on minors in the United States. Indeed, adequate research on an older target placed in Europe is much less present. One of the issues concerning the matter is the absence of a standardised definition of the term. Indeed, researchers opt for different explanations. For instance, some definitions include any kind of sexually explicit material as sexting content (Comartin, 2013; Reys et al., 2013), while others strictly stick to sexually suggestive pictures (Brown et al., 2009; Richards & Calvert, 2009). Most of the definitions, however, agree on the fact that the material is exchanged between two people via electronic devices (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017; Liong & Cheng, 2019). Research on the matter has mainly focused on under-18s because this target is particularly touched by the legal side, as sexting including minors has in some cases been considered child pornography (Ricketts, 2015). Nevertheless, sexting is perceived as problematic behaviour for adolescents as well. Moreover, the literature mainly focuses on whether sexting has a positive or negative influence on people. The theory identifies one major problem concerning sexting, i.e., that of sharing or forwarding the sexting messages to someone outside the recipient and sender (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones, & Wolak, 2011; Lippman & Campbell, 2014).

The literature available on sexting identifies differences in age and gender, in the way boys and girls sext and in the way they might be judged by non-sexsters. When it comes to age influence, the literature available show that older adolescents are more likely to sext than younger adolescents (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017). According to the existing research on sexting and gender differences, it is impossible to determine a standard trend on who tends to engage more in the activity. Some studies suggest a higher female rate (Livingstone, & Görzig, 2014; Ybarra, & Mitchell, 2014), other studies suggest boys

being more involved in it (Rice et al., 2012; Baumgarten et al., 2014; Van Ouytsel, 2014; West et al., 2014). However, one major difference was indeed identified in the perception people have of boys sexting compared to that of girls sexting. In fact, girls reported to have perceived more negative social reactions for having sexted and felt more judged than boys (Walrave et al., 2013). Moreover, studies show that girls are also more likely to be victims of the sharing or forwarding of their sexting material on the part of boys (West et al., 2014).

The section tries to answer the question “why do people sext?” by comparing studies on the topic. Indeed, findings provide a heterogeneous frame where reasons for sexting are much different. Some experts claim that adolescents feel pressure to sext exerted by peers and hence act according to their reaction to conform to the group (Rice et al., 2012). Other reasons for sexting are simply connected to behavioural and attitudinal factors. Indeed, people who are more extroverts with carefree attitudes are more likely to engage (Widman et al., 2021). Moreover, research proves that people sext in order to please the partner, to flirt, or to establish a sexual relationship (Drouin, 2015). The literature available further highlights that sexting mostly occurs within established romantic relationships.

As mentioned, the literature available tends to focus more on sexting as a negative activity from which people ought to abstain. This is to be framed in a context where sexting is perceived to harm one’s psychological health especially in case their sexting material gets forwarded or posted online. Although academic institutions might admit that sexting is not a problem per se, some schools are introducing programmes to educate young people on the topic. However, these programmes focus on sexting prevention proving once again that sexting is perceived as a danger and people ought to abstain from doing it. One of the elements considered by the theory is whether sexting is sexually objectifying or not. Some studies frame sexting as objectifying the bodies because the latter are perceived as objects to be judged by others according to aesthetic cultural standards (Calogero, 2012). On the contrary, studies supporting sexting as sexually liberating claim that people sexting experience sexuality with more openness and diversity (Weinberg & Williams, 2010).

The second chapter describes the methodology used for the current research which is based on the model of qualitative research. A work of this kind aims at establishing the reasons, the means, and the pattern of a specific behaviour (Della Porta, 2014). Contrary to quantitative research that aims at providing numbers on how many people carry out a particular attitude, qualitative research investigates the “how” and “why”. The interviews are perceived as the main tool to carry out research of this kind. Indeed, through this technique the researcher is allowed to access and collect the interviewee’s thoughts and observations on specific topics. Different factors drove me to choose sexting as the topic of the current dissertation. First of all the acknowledgment that sexuality is gaining a more accepted position within society. In fact, discussion, conversations, and depictions of the topic seem to occur more recurrently. Moreover, one must also frame sexting in a scenario in which mobile devices, Internet, and social media have become so pervasive to influence the sphere of sexuality. A further interest for the topic was strengthened by a first analysis of the literature available. This showed that research concerning sexting and European young adults might be needed and interesting. After a brief research on the topic and having opted for sexting as focus of my work, I then reflected on the purpose of the current research: What should my research aim at? The work aimed at analysing the young adults’ sexting behaviour. Not only did the research have to provide a general trend on whether young adults engage in the activity or not, but it also had to provide findings on how participants perceive sexting and how they carry it out. Is sexting treated as any other sexual practice or does it substitute physical sexual intercourses? Do young adults engage in sexting? Are there differences in the way German young adults perceive and carry out sexting from Italian young adults? These are the questions my work aimed at answering. Most of the work was devoted to the interviews, their structure, and their tracks. I believed such tool would have been the best in order to collect data that were as rich as possible in terms of details and explanations. The interview was divided into five main themes: demographic information on the participant; the use of social media; their sex education; their ideas and perception on sexting; last, their personal experiences with sexting. The interviews would mainly follow the structure, however other questions were further asked in order to go deeper into the participants’ answers based on what they said that I found interesting to investigate.

In addition, the decision to then conduct my research on adults aged from 22 to 26 years old was direct and clear. Indeed, I wanted to focus on an age gap familiar and that I believed would have been willing to discuss such a private topic. Furthermore, I opted for a broader target in terms of nationality and decided to use German young adults as participants. This decision came along with a period of mobility I spent in a city in South Germany, a city where I got to establish contacts with the German participants. All participants belong to and were contacted from peers, close friends, and classmates. Particular cases for the German subjects made it necessary for external support in contacting other participants. Once the subjects were decided I then contacted each of them personally during October through a standard message via WhatsApp. The message would briefly explain the topic and aim of my research and would then ask the person to take part in it. All people who were contacted provided affirmative and positive answers, none of them refused the request. Twenty people took part in the research, eleven participants come from Italy (five female, six male), the other nine from Germany (five female, four male). The interviews were carried out on the platform Zoom during the month of November and lasted from 45 minutes to one hour and a half. No particular reasons explained differences in the length of the interviews. The interviews with the Italian participants were carried out in Italian, whereas those with German participants in English. Such decision was based on personal matters concerning the fact that interviews in German would have not been so fluent nor would I have been able to go as deep as I did with the English language. German participants were nevertheless informed that they could have switched to their mother language if needed. All participants gave consent to the recording of their interview. This was needed to then transcribe all the interviews for the thematic analysis. In fact, each interview was then written down and the analysis was based on these transcriptions.

The third and last chapter of the current dissertation focused on the analysis of the data collected through the interviews. The analysis followed the pattern of thematic analysis, setting themes which were then divided into codes according to the theory proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Maguire and Delahunt (2017). The chapter provides first an analysis of the sex education the participants were provided with; the codes for this theme were: the perception of school-based sex education; the perception of parenting sex education; sex education through peers; porn as sex education tool and

other sources. After a first analysis of SE, the chapter finally addresses the research questions. First, the definitions of 'sexting' provided by the participants are investigated; this was helpful to then frame their perceptions and experiences. Second, the participants' perception on sexting is analysed; the theme was divided into the following codes: whether sexting is perceived positively or not; whether it is to be framed in exclusive relationships; whether there are any gender differences; and last, if and how conversations on sexting with peers were carried out. To conclude, the participants' experiences with sexting are analysed. Those participants claiming they have never sexted were then asked the reason why and if they would ever engage in the activity.

1. Theoretical background of sex education and sexting

This chapter, as first main section of the current dissertation, aims at clarifying the topics taken into analysis, i.e., sex education and sexting. These topics had been the focus of the interviews, the two main categories that were further divided into their questions and sub-questions as we will see in the last chapter. The role of the present chapter is hence to place the research within a theoretical frame that would consequently allow the research to be supported by a theoretical research and material. This chapter investigates the role that sex education has in the development of young people's sexual life. The position of school, family, friends, and porn will also be thoroughly analysed. Sex education is indeed no easy task but studies prove that families and schools ought to improve the way they address it to their children and students. A main section on sexting will then follow. Its features, challenges, and issues are the centre of the discussion, which is framed in a context that lacks a standardised definition. Indeed, the literature available has no fixed definition of what sexting is and this absence makes it already clear how heterogeneous the field of research on sexting is. Further differences on gender will be discussed as well as the role that sexting plays in sexters' mental health and in their perception of their body.

1.1 Sex education

Sex education (SE) played as key topic within the current research and the interviews, part where the interviewees spent most of their attention on. A section dedicated to sex education is hence necessary to then frame my work, what is in practice sex education? What do young adults learn from it? What are the challenges and issues related to that?

1.1.1 The role and challenges of sex education

Indeed, sex education comes from different elements, especially in such a digitalised and globalised century. As we will see in this chapter and in the last one, sources for sex education can arise in different environments, being that of the family, school, friends and even porn. It is nevertheless important to acknowledge the importance of sexuality education in one's life, teenagers should not only be taught about their health in general

but also about their sexual health. Before going deeper into the topics and comparing what other researchers carried out, it is important to provide a generally accepted definition of what 'sexual education' is and concerns. The World Health Organization, when defining such concept, relies on the explanation provided in the Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe, which defines 'sexuality education' as follows (WHO, 2010:20):

“Learning about the cognitive, emotional, social, interactive and physical aspects of sexuality. Sexuality education starts early in childhood and progresses through adolescence and adulthood. For children and young people, it aims at supporting and protecting sexual development. It gradually equips and empowers children and young people with information, skills and positive values to understand and enjoy their sexuality, have safe and fulfilling relationships and take responsibility for their own and other people’s sexual health and well-being.”

Learning about your own sexual health, sex and sexuality provides the tools to carry on positive and healthy sexual practices, indeed if adolescents are properly taught about it the outcomes in the long run are positive. In fact, teaching about sexual health is a tool to promote “healthy sexual development, reduce the negative consequences of risky sexual behaviours, and create a foundation for healthy adulthood” (Berglas et al., 2022:1). The ultimate goal for an appropriate sexuality education should be that of providing children and young people the necessary equipment, knowledge, skills and value that would then lead them to responsible choices about their sexual health and social relationships (UNESCO, 2009). According to the World Health Organization (2006:5), 'sexual health' is to be understood as:

“...a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.”

Many experts and educators have repeatedly called on governments to provide adolescents and young people with comprehensive sexuality education (Haberland & Rogow, 2015). However, such education should not be limited to a school-based teaching,

it should take place both in schools and in the person's community, it should begin as early as possible when considered at an appropriate age and aim at fostering mature decision making. Moreover, the role of sexuality education should be that of seeking to empower young people, especially those who are marginalised, to "see themselves and others as equal members in their relationships, able to protect their own health, and as individuals capable of engaging as active participants in society" (Haberland & Rogow, 2015:16). It is clear then that the role of sexuality education is not limited to the sexual sphere and to a conscientious behaviour in sexual practices, but it influences other spheres of one's life leading to a more self-consciousness as individuals in relationship with others.

A more comprehensive sexuality education does clearly clash with an abstinence-only education, where information regarding anything that does not concern abstinence is not provided. When it comes to interventions on the reduction of sexual risk, studies split into two groups: on one hand, some state that they are useless; on the other, others affirm they are useful resources. What is clear is that most of the studies show some reductions in targeted sexual risk behaviours (*ibidem*). As Haberland and Rogow (2015) claim, such findings appear at first to be encouraging, an improvement is however much needed for three reasons. First, the consequences and importance of the effect are typically quite modest. Second, it must be acknowledged that a big part of the studies fail to prove that the programmes actually lead to a positive change in even one behaviour. Third, most interventions are limited to the analysis of behaviours and to define success in behavioural terms as "evaluations that assess biological outcomes are more expensive and complex" (Haberland, & Rogow, 2015:17). In fact, it is suggested to analyse the results provided by the biological outcomes, i.e. what actually happens, instead of self-reports on behaviour change. Behavioural data are indeed an important element to collect and analyse, but the concern here is that they might be limited markers for the evaluation of success and they cannot consequently be used to inform conclusions about elements essential for such success. It must also be acknowledged that very few programmes have put an emphasis on gender and rights, even though there is much evidence that an empowerment approach in comprehensive sex education is particularly effective.

1.1.2 School-based sex education

Schools appear to be one of the main elements where the interviewees of the current research came to their first approaches with sex, sexuality, and, hence, sex education. However, sex education taught in schools can be seen as a “contentious subject” (Vivancos et al., 2013:54), even though it is generally perceived as having positive consequences on the learners’ knowledge (*ibidem*). Schools are indeed important in one’s academic path when learning about health, however, when it comes to school-based sex education there are no generally accepted guidelines or rules followed by schools in any Country and such programmes when present in schools vary throughout the world (Chinelli et al, 2022:2). It is clear and widely acknowledged that young people and teenagers, but also adults, learn about sex and sexual practices from different sources that are complementary to one another, and schools can be one of the many effective tools to teach students about healthy and positive sexual practices. One must also notice that school-based sex education (SBSE) is not and cannot be the only means through which people get their SE, as Kivela et al. (2013) claim young people ought to be given other tools to ensure their rights to sexual health and STIs prevention (Kivela et al., 2013). Moreover, a proper sex education ought to go beyond the mere explanation of the “undesirable consequences of sexual activities” (Chinelli et al., 2022:3), a SE towards a more comprehensive approach would consequently provide young people the tools to have more control on their sexual lives and on their environment. By doing so, teenagers and young adults in general could carry on healthier and more protected sexual practices. The skills and information learned help them not only to understand sex and what sex concerns, but also to enjoy their sexuality where respect and consent for themselves and others are main characters (*ibidem*).

The importance of schools and academic education in one’s life is worldwide acknowledged as well as schools’ role in one’s learning about health. Nevertheless, many school programmes lack to provide their students with adequate teaching regarding sex education. In fact, according to the 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2016), sexuality education programmes are not always included in school curricula that meet the basic educational standards and teaching programmes. The introduction of a more or less standardised school-based sexuality education is slowly being introduced,

however many countries' progress is strictly limited and proper or adequate programmes seem not to be the priority (Chinelli et al., 2022). This tendency to exclude a more comprehensive sex education from schools becomes even more clear as in 2020 only 23 out of the 49 European countries did not opt for programmes that explicitly address sexual orientation and gender identity in school curricula (UNESCO, 2020), with Italy being one of the countries that do not include SE in their school curricula. Even though studies have shown and proved that schools are the “most appropriate settings in which to provide young people with information about SE” (Chinelli et al., 2022:3), programmes of this kind have not been yet included in regular teachings. According to Chinelli et al (2022), sexual wellbeing has been defined in terms of seven different domains, which are:

- Sexual safety and security.
- Sexual respect.
- Sexual self-esteem.
- Resilience in relation to sexual experiences.
- Forgiveness of past sexual experiences.
- Sexual self-determination.
- Comfort with sexuality.

Chinelli et al. (2022) carried out a project framing sex education curricula in Italian secondary schools, during their survey the focus was on policy frameworks and educational projects on the prevention and control of STIs. The study was conducted in all the Italian regions between 2016 and 2020 (Chinelli et al., 2022). The results and findings provided by study depicted a highly heterogeneous picture, which was nevertheless expected by the experts who carried out the research. According to the findings, the schools into analysis do not provide all the same sexuality education programmes and curricula, much variation can be found instead. The goals of the SE programmes, how they are carried out (i.e. methods) and what they teach (i.e. content) change from school to school. However, such difference and heterogeneity is to be expected since the country lacks national standards for sex education programmes. The

heterogeneity lies not only in the programmes themselves but also in who or what provides such programmes, e.g. civil-society organisations (CSOs) organised more than the 60% of the school-based sex education programmes taken into analysis in the study (Chinelli et al., 2022). The research differentiates between metropolitan cities, central and northern regions in opposition to smaller cities and southern regions. Metropolitan cities, central and northern regions appeared to provide better structured programmes, whereas the second group were not the best served areas in terms of school-based sex education curricula. This is to be framed in a context where such programmes are not compulsory nor are there fixed national standards, these factors cause then inconsistency in the activities provided across the country. The survey in the study would also ask the students to express their opinions on who ought to be carrying out sex education programmes, who could be the best character to undertake such role. Here students suggested that external educators should replace regular teachers in providing school-based sex education. The same trend and opinion was revealed during a research carried out in the USA by researchers Astle et al. (2021). Researchers dealt with the professional figure that is supposed to teach and carry out such education, whether external figures or professors and participants expressed a preference for someone who is not their professor as that could cause some awkwardness (Astle et al., 2021). This lack of SBSE and the heterogeneity of the programmes lead then young people to have a very limited and little knowledge about sexuality and sexual health, indeed the Italian report has highlighted “how young people tend to overestimate their knowledge of sexuality and SRH” (Chinelli et al., 2022:10) and it has also shown “how widespread erroneous beliefs regarding sexuality are” (*ibidem*). A deeper analysis into the content of the programmes into account revealed that school-based sex education, when provided, would focus mainly on the following topics: risk prevention and/or other sexual health topics such as STI prevention and contraception. Positive consequences of a well-taught sex education do not limit to a person’s sexual practices and sexual health only, they involve a general wellbeing and self-consciousness in the personal relationships instead (*ibidem*). This is one of the reasons why SBSE ought to be a core subject in schools’ curricula, and it should include a promotion of a more positive and inclusive view of sexuality as a key part of human life.

Many scholars, Pop and Rusu (2015) being amongst these, share a widely accepted classification of sexuality education programmes that are normally provided in schools. In such classification three major categories can be distinguished (Pop & Rusu, 2015): abstinence-only SE programmes; abstinence-plus SE programmes; and comprehensive SE programmes. The first category refers to those programmes where abstinence is the one thing promoted, here children and adolescents are taught to abstain from engaging in premarital sexual activity. Educators who agree on promoting this kind of sexuality education provide scientifically inaccurate information that thus lack a much-needed empirical support; consequently, children are not taught about the use of condoms or of any other contraceptive method, nor do they learn where to find information about it. Programmes offering abstinence-plus SE curricula opt for a wider and more comprehensive approach including some kind of information on contraception and condoms, where however abstinence is still placed at the centre of their approach. Not engaging into premarital sexual activity is still depicted as the safest strategy and its role remains undisputed. The last category refers to those programmes that recognise sexuality education as a lifelong process, where abstinence does appear as the safest method in preventing unwanted consequences from sexual activity, but that is not described as their sole primary goal. Comprehensive SE programmes aim at teaching young people to develop their own “attitudes, beliefs and skills that are supposed to contribute to the sexual and reproductive health of a person, hence to an enhanced quality of life” (*ibidem*).

1.1.3 Families and parenting sex education

It can be useful and interesting to discuss specific research carried out by Measor (2004) from the University of Brighton on young people’s perception on sex education. What can be of further interest is then to compare the research, which was carried out in 1984, 1998 and 2003, with how one can experience sex education nowadays in a digitalised and completely globalised era. As we will see in the third chapter, that of the data analysis, when the interviewees were asked about their sex education and what sources were most helpful, they answered: family, friends and the Internet. The research conducted by Measor (2004) aimed at analysing young people’s sex education, how they had it, and how they perceive it. One of the first data showed by the paper is the difference on how boy and girls perceive and respond to sex education within school. Were there difficulties

during sex education teaching, they were always created by “male pupils” (Measor, 2004:155). These data show a similar picture to that provided by a “growing body of research which asserts that gender is influential in adolescent responses to sex, sexuality and relationships education” (*ibidem*). However, it is difficult if not impossible to find and provide a full explanation to this. Another important focus of the research is the family, how the family can provide sex education to the children. Here again a differentiation in learning / teaching between boys and girls is to be made, indeed however the access to information about the topic was different in any family. The teenagers interviewed showed particular significance to porn as a source of information, in particular to the boys (Measor, 2004:156). According to them, in fact, porn provides specific and visual information about sex. Moreover, boys “come to learn about sexuality from friends and from commercial sources, which may largely exclude adults” (Measor, 2004:164). Measor’s study showed how the two parts were treated differently depending on one gender to the other. For instance, the girls in the survey highlighted the importance that the female elements (mothers, sisters or aunts) within the family had in their sex education; the data collected showed how families, when and if teaching sex education, are more likely to provide information about the topic to their daughters rather than to their sons.

As thoroughly mentioned, although sexuality education is an important matter, it is still absent from school curricula in some countries. Moreover, those sex education programmes that are present are not supported by scientifically validated theories and often contain wrong information with “inadequate ecological implementation” (Pop & Rusu, 2015:396). However, school should not be the only element taken into the discussion when addressing sexuality education teaching and learning, there are indeed other players to be considered. Such factors can be the family, media and peer culture and have a considerable strong influence on young people’s education outcomes, however, in this case again, it is often argued that they have a negative influence (*ibidem*). School and family are two important environments when it comes to the children’s education. They share a mutual responsibility and purpose, that of helping the children “attain sexual health and general well-being for the duration of their lives” (Pop & Rusu, 2015:398).

We have seen how schools in many countries lack school-based sexuality education curricula or, when such programmes are present, they lack strong scientific bases. Bearing in mind that this causes schools to have a very limited impact on children in this sense, and that generally accepted standards are still hard to be found, families are considered as primary education agents also in the field of sexuality education (*ibidem*). Nevertheless, one must also consider that it is not easy to determine to what extent parenting programmes can be actually effective and what are the aspects to introduce when developing such education or intervention programmes, aspects that would determine the dimensions that can “contribute to the *effectiveness of parenting programmes in general*” (*ibidem*). Parenting programmes consist in a series of activities organised and directed by parents or legal guardians, the purpose and aims are those of helping the children to develop their protective factors in order to spot risks connected to uncorrected behaviours in sexual practices. Such consciousness in sex, sexuality and sexual practices can positively influence the development and health outcomes in children.

There are a series of features to consider for an effective parenting programme, scientifically validated theoretical basis and easy accessibility to name a few. Other important elements are how flexible and comprehensive the programmes are and also their duration and intensity. The importance of these and other factors is due to the weight they have in future consequences and in the long run, indeed such factors affect the effectiveness or success of a parenting sexual education programme in the outcomes of their children’s sexual health. However, it is important to highlight that considerable scientific investigation is still needed for many of these factors and for the relationship between them. Sexuality education is no simple or linear concept, it is much complex and multi-dimensional instead, therefore the designing of sex education programmes requires a similar comprehensive and multidimensional approach that takes into account the multi sided and various aspects of this subject.

1.1.4 Can the Internet and pornography teach sex education?

As said, schools are one of the main sources for sex education. Besides this, young people use pornography as a channel through which they learn about sex, sexuality and sexual practices. Nowadays, young people indeed have more access to online resources than

some years ago, meaning that the explicit sexual material on the Internet has also become easier to find. This phenomenon has been in the centre of the public debate for years: to what extent is pornography helpful for young people's sexual life? Is it such a positive phenomenon that sexually explicit media have become so easy to get? What can the effects be in the long run? One thing is however clear, that being the society's negative vision on pornography which is seen as having negative influence on young people's life, indeed under-18s are not legally allowed to access porn material. However, studies prove that children start watching pornography when they are 14 years old or even younger (Baker, 2016)

Many young people, whether teenagers or young adults, get easily access to this kind of content, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and some argue that this may cause negative outcomes in the development of their sexuality, in the way they experience sex and in their future relations. Researchers would here split into two groups, one that claim the use of pornography as useful means for sex education; the other claiming that pornography provides poor content for sex education causing a fake depiction of the sexual practices. Albury (2014) contributed to the topic with her article in "Porn Studies". She claims that porn education ought to be split according to the age of the person, a minor, someone under the age of 18 should be provided tools that "promote critical disengagement from pornographic texts" (Albury, 2014:173), while adults ought to be in the situation where they are able to learn from pornography, which would then "promote sexual learning – particularly in relation to safer-sex practices" (*ibidem*). It is of clear and general knowledge that the use of porn as academical source for sex education is still controversial, however one must also acknowledge its widespread use within our society. On one side, much research prove that porn "can also be a significant source of education for sex/gender diverse young people" (Albury, 2014:174); on the other, others claim that porn cannot be taken as source for sex education as it can provide negative (and false) depiction on gender representation, e.g. with the women's necessity to be always groomed. Another example can be seen in the way men experience their sexuality in heterosexual intercourses, where porn here influences in a potentially damaging way causing men to treat women with an aggressive approach (*ibidem*). The focus is also put on the tools teenagers have when facing sex education and pornography and the question here is not whether pornography ought to be used as means for sex education, but rather

whether teenagers have the necessary tools to safely learn from it (*ibidem*). However, when the discussion shifts its focus on pornography and adults, the outcome changes: here “sexuality education for adults has drawn on pornographic images and texts to engage learners” (Albury, 2014:175). One of the main issues within the debate is related to the fact that actors in the porn industry do not use condoms when filming, which is of course viewed as “pedagogical negative sense” (*ibidem*). As previously mentioned, and also as Albury claims, young people’s learning regarding sexual practices should not be limited to the vision of pornography, they should be provided tools to ‘read’ it as well as the opportunity to discuss about it instead (Albury, 2014:176). Porn education should be framed within dialogue between educators and learners, where the first can learn more about the latter’s sexual cultures, in both cases however some sort of dialogue about the matter would help to “extend their knowledge and understanding of the intersections between mediated representation and lived experiences of sex, sexuality, and gender” (*ibidem*). The whole debate revolving around pornography and education is indeed difficult and, in some cases, problematic; the two elements are strictly connected one another but the debate can follow two different paths: leaning towards an education through porn (porn as education) or an education on porn (education about pornography). Moreover, the academic research on the topic reflects the problematic and ambiguity of the issue itself, indeed it does not provide a “unified picture of what porn teaches, or what porn audiences might learn from it” (Albury, 2014: 178). One must also acknowledge that a change in this, i.e. in the way pornography is used as an education tool, would also mean a change in cultural rules and conventions about sex and sexual practices (*ibidem*). Since sex education programmes do not include some sort of porn literacy, a model or basis for it to be introduced in school-based sex education might be hard to find.

Under-18s have easy access to any content on the net and children are naturally curious, this drives them to seek material on the internet, something they do with natural ease due to their skills with modern technology. In addition, young people’s curiosity towards sex in particular may make it easier and faster for them to learn how to find material regarding this topic. However, most of the time no adult is supervising the child’s activities on the internet, even though everyone nowadays has access to it. Researchers are working in this sense, trying to analyse the effects of children’s exposure to online sexually explicit material, whether young people experience positive or negative

consequences in their sexual life in the long run. Such research is nevertheless limited and provides findings that clash with each other. Such heterogeneity and contradiction are caused by the limitations present in the field of research and by the “ethical constraints associated with experiments involving young people” (Bake, 2016:214).

One of the areas where researchers tend to focus more is that on the relation between pornography and women, and in particular how the vision of pornography may affect men’s attitude towards women within their sexual practices. As young people can learn things fast and easy, this may however cause them to learn some of what people recall being the negative sides or consequences of pornography viewing, e.g. women as sex objects. Research in the field have indeed shown and demonstrated how an increased frequency of exposure to online sexually explicit material (Peter & Valkenburg, 2009) and increased explicitness of such media (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007) share one main negative consequence. These phenomena are believed to negatively impact the way young people see women causing the belief that women are sex objects. This is one of the negative outcomes caused by an increased exposure to sexually explicit material, violence in sexual practices is another one. Even though research focus more on the negative outcomes of sexually explicit media, pornography and its related do also have potential benefits on young people, which have been however less commonly investigated (Baker, 2016). Such positive outcomes and benefits vary and can be seen in different environments in one’s life. Sexually explicit material can lead to positive behaviours and self-consciousness into one’s sexual life and they also teach on a biological level – e.g. how a certain sexual practice is carried out or how one’s body works or functions (*ibidem*). One of the features of pornography that is taken into account and discussed the most concerns the way actors carry out sexual practices and/or the way such practices are portrayed. Indeed, people ought to be able to detach the reality from the fiction depicted in porn as the actors should not be perceived as the ‘average’ man or woman (*ibidem*). This together with the infrequent use of condom makes it difficult for pornography to be seen

The researcher K.E. Baker (2016) carried out a study on online pornography and school-based sex education exploring the view and perception on porn of both students and teachers. The study gathered as subjects students and teaching staff of a small sample

of UK schools asking their perception on sexually explicit media, whether they would be perceived as harmful or not and the role of school in helping and educating young students about the potential harms. The survey first addressed young people about adults viewing pornography asking them whether that is a bad thing and most of the responses young people gave were 'unsure' and 'disagree' (Baker, 2016). Another point touched by the survey regarded pornography's depiction of the reality and whether the first offers a realistic representation of the latter. Most of the young people stated that the pornography they had seen "offered a realistic representation of typical sexual relationships" (Baker, 2016:223). Moreover, they also claim that the main difference between sex in pornography and sex in reality lies in the way the first "glamourises sex" (*ibidem*) while such sexual practices have in real life more feelings. On the contrary, when staff were asked about young people's perception of pornography and whether they could critically distinguish between fiction and reality, staff members' answers were mixed and heterogeneous. They claimed that such critical skills would depend on the level of knowledge and experience on behalf of the young person and also on how explicit the sexual material is. But how should schools place themselves into young people's education about online sexually explicit media? What should teachers and educators do? When asked these questions, the majority of students claimed that school ought to play a more active role in this. Indeed, students should be taught about the risks and consequences of viewing online sexually explicit media and be able to distinguish the reality from the fiction. When responding, they also provided examples and suggestions for teaching methods and the most commonly chosen one was peer-led discussions followed by a discussion in small groups which would be led by the teacher. Staff members expressed their opinions and agreed on the fact that schools ought to be playing a more active role in addressing the issue of online pornography, but they claimed that a partnership with parents in this kind of teaching would be best for the students. Moreover, staff considered small discussion groups to be the best frame where to place and carry out such teaching programmes. According to their opinion it would be better if the discussion groups were somehow homogeneous, separated into boys and girls and would be of a relatively small size. Nevertheless, staff members did not agree on who ought to be responsible for and take care of these teaching sessions on online pornography, some thought teachers to be the best figure in such role while others opted for external persons

to deliver the class. What was clear through the research was unfortunately that students and staff members do have different views on the topic. Such views concern both how to include pornography teaching into their curricula and who should lead the discussion, causing then teaching about risks of pornography even more complicated and difficult.

An interesting thematic and critical review on the literature available on adolescents' experience with online sex education was carried out by researchers Simon and Daneback (2013). Their research provides a thematic insight into the role of the Internet as source of information regarding sexuality (Simon & Daneback, 2013). After deep research into the existing literature about the topic, they found four distinct themes that often recur (Simon & Daneback, 2013):

- The prevalence of adolescents' engagement with sex information online
- What sex-related topics adolescents are interested in learning about online
- Quality assessment of adolescent targeted online sex information
- Interventions to increase sexual health knowledge via digital media

The results of the analysis showed that an increasing number of adolescents consistently rely on the Internet when it comes to sex information and sex education. A number of studies have also provided a list of the most addressed sex-related topics that adolescents search online. Two different methodologies are mainly used: a content analysis of the already existing material on websites regarding sexual health, and surveys or interviews to adolescents asking about their activities online. The topics that adolescents seek the most are different and several, but among the most commonly cited online sex education subjects of interest there are: sexually transmitted infections such as HIV, pregnancy, contraception, information about the body and sexual identity (Simon & Daneback, 2013). Nevertheless, the Internet is not always a trustworthy and truthful resource and can mislead to false sources of information causing an unfaithful explanation of facts. Although online information is not always easy to find and can lack quality, adolescents are able users of the online resources and are capable of distinguishing reliable information from those that are not. Even though it is not clear how and if adolescents have been taught to critically analyse and seek information on the Internet, they may adapt

the critical strategies learned in school that they would normally use when evaluating books or other media (Simon & Daneback, 2013). These studies can be a great tool for an insight into the design, use, and effectiveness of online sex education for young people and under-18s. Even though the analysis can be of great help for those who are trying to combine sex education with interactive digital media, they only represent a small sample of currently existing programmes. Due to the lack of standardised education and to the different sexual experiences people have, the terms connected to the sexual sphere may carry different meanings from one person to the other, causing then terms like “birth control” or simply “sex” to be differently perceived according to one’s experiences. The Internet works in a similar way inspiring new terminology as it rapidly evolves and develops; therefore it is important for teachers and educators approaching sex education teaching to deeply examine the language used in order to better choose their methodology for a maximised validity and success (Simon & Daneback, 2013). Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the Internet replaces for many adolescents classroom-based sex education. Indeed, young people may not be provided or have little access to sex education programmes, leading them to rely on online resources instead (*ibidem*).

1.1.5 Sex education in the LGBTQ+ community and the need for a booster

The discussion led until now based the facts on adolescents and young adults who experience heterosexual sexual practices, but how do young people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community receive sex education? Are there other sources from those used by people who do not belong to the community? LGBT teens are indeed left out when it comes to school-based sex education for different reasons. Different factors might be influencing this, discriminatory curricula indeed play a big role as well as lack of knowledge and information on the part of teachers and students, but also a fear for negative consequences from conservative and religious parties or activists in more conservative countries (Bittner, 2012). This absence of queer information and depiction has also been excluded from the sex literature available for young adults. In the past fiction, queer relationships and sexual experience, when present, depicted the situation in a total negative light. Here, the characters were negatively portrayed and they would experience some sort of negative consequences due to their sexual orientation. The analysis that Bittner carried out on the sources of informal queer sex education and on the

young adult literature showed a distorted depiction of the sexual relationships within the LGBTQ+ community. People experiencing any sexual practice were often connected to physical violence and instances of HIV/AIDS or any other sexually transmitted illness (Bittner, 2012). Nowadays things are slowly changing also thanks to the increase in positive publicity carried out by queer celebrities or celebrities supporting the community, leading then to a transform of the old, limited representations of queer youth sexuality. These representations begin now to portray a more truthful depiction of the reality where passages about sex, masturbation or erotic descriptions of the human body are included, and more authors are also willing to write texts of this kind. What Brittner (2012) argues is that the introduction of relationship dynamics is even more important than mere physical descriptions connected to sexual practices (*ibidem*). The depiction of love and the feelings start playing a bigger role as well and Brittner (2012) claims that there is a place, a gap to be filled in the sex education for queer young adult fiction (*ibidem*). This kind of fiction, be that of movies or novels, does play an important role to inform and educate and it is indeed easier for people to critically learn from this if they can recognise and reflect themselves into the characters. Sex education aiming at informing about the dangers of and at preventing sexually transmitted infections is certainly of big importance and is indeed much needed. However, it is equally important to teach about “more nuanced topics regarding sex” (Brittner, 201:359), such importance is stressed even more when it comes to educating queer students. Brittner’s research on young adult fiction and queer sex education in the United States highlighted once again the way queer sexuality is depicted where the negative implications are mainly stressed. It is clear than that queer young adults are not provided enough education and information about sexuality, sex and sexual practices and this leads to the need on the part of teens for complementary sources of information that are easier to access and more accurate. Here it becomes clear the need and importance to bring such type of education in schools, but opinions and ideas on this are very different and clash with each other.

One further element which researchers and educators are focusing on and stress is the need for a booster of sexual education, a further supplement round. Young people would normally receive their sex education during middle and/or high school years without any sessions or classes further on in their education. However, there are many reasons why a booster in sex education might be needed later on in one’s academic

journey or in their adolescents. Such booster or supplement round would aim at reinforcing and expanding previous knowledge and would shed light on new aspects of sex. Berglas et al. (2022) conducted a research on people in 9th grade (14-15 years old) in California and they examined the sexual health education received. They have further identified five themes that indicated a need for booster education. The project aimed to address the “gap in research on the need for and content of booster sexual health education” (Berglas et al., 2022:4), this can be reached through a perspective that would focus more on young people and on the staff supporting them. According to the young people in the study, the school-based sexual education they were provided with in middle school or early high school was very limited both in content and in purpose and hence did not have a big impact in the long run. This is supported by the fact that young people in the USA often “fail to receive the information and resources they need to support their transition to healthy adulthood” (Berglas et al., 2022:11). During the survey, professionals identified many different topics that, according to their experience, would be helpful in supporting the transition from teenager to adulthood. Such stating and findings highlight the critical gaps in sexual education and hence reinforce the need for a supplement round that could be able to reinforce and boost the education received earlier in school. Students and professionals suggested that a proper sexual education should include other topics beyond the typical focus on preventing pregnancy and STIs, some of this new content could analyse aspects regarding healthy relationships, consent, and gender and sexual identity (*ibidem*). Moreover, studies have shown that the learning of daily tasks and responsibilities such as career or financial planning have a connection with sexual education programmes, the theory claims that “these skills promote healthy decision-making and increase opportunities” (*ibidem*). The study eventually suggests five different themes that indicate that a booster in sexual education is much needed (Berglas, et al., 2022:6). Such indicators are: reinforcing of the already existing sexual knowledge; expanding of the traditional areas dealt by current sexual education; addressing any stigma within the community about adolescent health; preparing adolescents for the transition to adulthood; and last, introducing in schools curricula that directly address and normalise health issues.

It has been widely and thoroughly described how sexual education in general ought to be more comprehensive, open up to other areas, and ought to be carried out

throughout one's whole academic career boosting the already existing school-based SE. Students have proved their need and necessity to face other sexual topics beyond those dealing with STIs and condoms, some of the topics suggested are same-sex sexual relationships, masturbation or anal sex (Astle et al., 2021). The research carried out by Astle et al. (2021) among young adults and adolescents in a public university in southwestern USA proved once again the disappointment expressed by young people concerning the teaching style and methods for sex education in schools. In particular, they highlighted cases where professors were not sufficiently prepared, did not feel at ease or were apathetic. The staff teaching sex education programmes were visibly uncomfortable thus excluding from their teaching sessions those topics that would make them feel so leading to a lack in the students' preparation (Astle et al., 2021). The study focused on getting information on the quality of sex education in schools and aimed to obtain suggestions for improvements. Out of the 38 participants in the sample, only two of them reported their experience as "being helpful or somewhat helpful" (Astle et al., 2021:5). In this case as well, participants claimed that the most commonly received sex education focused on abstinence, STIs, reproduction/anatomy, puberty, or on no topics at all (Astle et al., 2021:6). Only a very small portion of the participants reported receiving instruction on birth control, condoms or any other contraceptive. However, when asked about the manner in which these programmes were carried out, many students stated that professors used scare tactics in their classes. Participants had some mutual suggestions concerning the improvement for such sexual education programmes and most of them agreed on the desire for a more holistic and comprehensive approach on sexual behaviour, that would include discussions over other different topics than those currently faced. Moreover, many students highlighted how 'old' the sex education received was, in the sense that it was unrealistic and outdated and would not reflect the development of society (Astle et al., 2021:7). It was for this reason that some of them found it impossible to connect with what they were being taught as they could not relate their experience with that. One of the main suggestions for improvement provided by participants regarded the inclusion of "discussion on same-sex sexual behaviours and sexual minority identities" (Astle et al., 2021:8). In addition, this study proved once again the need and desire for a booster in sex education, for some more frequent programmes in school and for this education to begin at a younger age. In general, it must be acknowledged that the participants did not feel

satisfied with the sex education they received as it was typically characterised by " scare tactics and information on abstinence, anatomy and STIs" (Astle et al., 2021:9): the sex education received was not enough to prepare them and to actually teach them what sex, sexuality and sexual practices mean or entail. Sex education is indeed a broad topic that goes beyond mere academic topics and teaching and has to be addressed with preparation and consciousness. It is something that is not limited to the sphere of one's sexual life, but it can help adolescents in their transition to adulthood and in their future sexual development and relationships.

1.2 Sexting

Digitalisation and globalisation pushed people towards a life where mobile phones and Internet play a gradually more important role. It is difficult to find nowadays someone who does not own a mobile phone and has no connection to the net, where self-created reality rules. One's personal spheres in real life mix then with what exists on the Internet, creating an overlapping of the two realities. Overall, owning a phone allows then people to take intimate pictures that are self-taken and the exchange of such pictures has become so easy and fast, and, most of all, cost-free (Reyns, Burek, Henson & Fisher, 2013). Moreover, the use of digital media has become so effortless and easy to access that they have now reached every sphere of one's personal life, including their sexual activities. Indeed, one can just think of how easy it is to access video pornography nowadays than in the pre-digital era, where one had to rent a video while now you only have to turn on your phone (*ibidem*). Another difference between the current era and the pre-digital one is the effort needed to produce a sexual self-portrait, which has become so immediate and effortless nowadays. In general, sexual activities carried out via the Internet have been technologically facilitated thanks to the advancement in the field (*ibidem*). The following section of the current chapter focuses on the production and exchange of sexual material, whether that being pictures, videos or simple text messages, i.e. sexting. A part dedicated to the literature available is important to frame such practice; negative consequences as well as positive and healthy ones will be analysed, but most literature to date has mainly connected such practice to risky and harmful behaviours (Döring & Mohseni, 2019). The term 'sexting' derives from the combination of the words 'sex' and 'texting'. The

etymology of the word may make one link sexting with the sending of text messages through cell phones that contain sexually explicit content. However, as we will see, the definition is not limited to written text messages but it also includes visual content. Differences in gender will also be addressed, is there a difference between how guys and girls perceive and carry out sexting? Moreover, a mention of the negative consequences on a psychological level will be investigated as well as the effects that sexting might have on one's perception of their body, is sexting an objectifying or liberating sexual practice? This and other features of this sexual activity will be addressed and investigated.

1.2.1 What is sexting?

Sexting is gaining importance and fame, or notoriousness according to some, as sexual practice among youths and adults. However, what is most known about sexting are the negative consequences that this activity can lead to or, better said, that an unconscious use of this activity can cause. The main negative consequence that research focuses on is usually that when the sexually explicit content of the messages is shared with others outside the sender and recipient. Later on in this section, the consequences of such action will be discussed, e.g. humiliation, cyberbullying, or harassment. Even though the rates of people who sext are growing, as well as the interest in the topic, the literature lacks one generally accepted definition of what sexting is. Authors indeed refer to different explanations of the practice, such explanations do share common features, but are heterogeneous. For instance, Comartin (2013:38) claims that sexting is a recent phenomenon that “involves the use of technology to send or receive sexually explicit messages and photos”. A definition of this kind directly excludes that the people who are sexting would exchange videos or other type of content, lacking however to define what the sexually explicitness in the messages actually is. The same absence of a clear definition regarding the content of the messages is provided by Chalfren (2009:258), who states that sexting “describes sharing sexually suggestive photos or messages through cell phones and other mobile media”. The issue of a clear, validated, and universal definition of the activity is one of the problems concerning sexting and the research on the subject. How broad should the definition of the term be? Should it strictly refer to two consenting people?

Most of the studies indeed claim that sexting requires sending and/or receiving some kind of message that contains some sort of sexually explicit content. Nevertheless, some studies analysing the rates between those who send and those who receive such messages proved that the latter are a bigger group (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017). Even though there is no scientific evidence of the reasons why the receiving rates are higher than the sending, some articles found correlations with age, gender, race, sexual behaviours, romantic relationships and other factors (*ibidem*). When addressing the content of the material exchanged, some studies only mention nude pictures saying that sexting can include the sending to or receiving of one's nude pictures from peers or other people (Brown et al., 2009; Richards & Calvert, 2009). Another interesting point of discussion on the definition of sexting is that concerning the subjects involved into the sexual practice. Reyns et al. (2013) do not mention who the sender and/or recipient might be claiming that "sexting, or 'sex texting', involves sending sexually explicit text messages or images electronically, primarily from one cellular phone to another but also via email attachments or instant messages" (Reyns, Burek, Henson & Fisher, 2013:1). The researchers also broadened the means used to sext, claiming that sexting includes messages that are sent electronically. On one hand, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2008) maintains a general and superficial definition of sexting stating that such practice includes an exchange of sexually suggestive content sent as text messages or through the Internet. On the other, Lenhart (2009) and Strassberg, McKinnon, Sustaãta, and Rullo (2013) limited the definition of sexting to sending sexually explicit or nude pictures of oneself through cell phones. Other studies support the definition of sexting that directly frames the material sent as images or pictures that are sexually provocative or in which the sender appears naked. According to the study conducted by Liong and Cheng (2019), who claim to have opted for a more encompassing definition of the practice, sexting is to be identified as the "sending of nude or sexually provocative pictures by an individual of himself or herself to another person through a cell phone and/or the internet" (Liong & Cheng, 2019:1). By claiming so, one limits sexting as the sending and/or receiving of one's picture. When analysing the rates of the content sent, data show a higher prevalence of a combination of text messages and text messages with images than images and images combined with videos (Barrense-Dias, et al., 2017). This proves that people who sext tend to send more written messages and/or

images than videos and images only. Nevertheless, none of the studies taken into account by Barrense-Dias (2017) mentioned audio messages as content exchanged.

Baumgarten et al (2014) opted first for a definition framing sexting as the “sending or posting of sexual photos or messages via electronic devices” (Baumgartner et al., 2014:3), replacing the ‘receiving’ with the ‘posting’ but not explaining if such posting involves a social media or not or whether it is to be intended as sending the material to someone. Even though it is difficult to find one standardised definition that could be adopted by each researcher, it could be however possible to opt for a somehow broad definition that includes different aspects of such an evolving practice. Indeed, Wolak and Finkelhor (2011) claim that the definition of the term itself developed throughout time as it first referred to the sending of sexual pictures via mobile phones (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011). Such definition changed due to the development of the field and practice referring now to a broader practice that includes the exchange of sexual messages via any electronic device (*ibidem*). The Internet and mobile phones have now reached such a broad use and convergence that it is difficult to avoid an overlap of the two when talking about them and framing them into the definition of sexting. Nevertheless, one must also acknowledge the importance of one fixed definition in order to properly study the topic and everything that revolves around it, such consensus regarding the definition could then set the right environment for an education that aims at assessing the activity, inform young people on the positive and negative sides, and make them experience sexting with a healthy behaviour. Indeed, all studies eventually agree on the use of the Internet and/or an electronic device to sext and agree on the fact that sexting is an electronic or virtual activity.

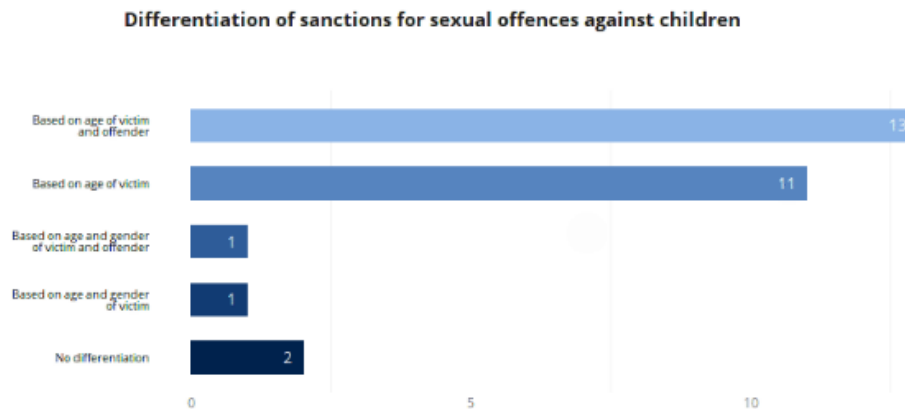
1.2.2 Features, problems and challenges of sexting

The importance of the Internet and of the new technologies in the current century is of general knowledge and can be seen in our everyday life. Such big evidence is even more clear in the adolescents’ life where technology plays an even bigger role in their communication with other peers and in the development of their communication skills (Reyns, Burek, Henson & Fisher, 2013). As said, technology has become so pervasive that it has brought changes to every field of one’s personal life, including the way in

which people carry out their sexual practices. This digitised environment has changed the context in which social contacts are established and relationships with others are perpetuated (*ibidem*). Moreover, the Internet is an important tool when it comes to defining one's sexual identity and it can be used to carry out our sexual exploration. Sexting is indeed one of the new influences introduced by the arrival of the Internet, mobile phones and social media, which are the three main elements of such practice as previously discussed through the definition of the term. Studies and research split here in two groups. On the one hand, considering the pervasiveness of sexual practices nowadays, sexting can be simply considered as one of these practices and as a harmless way to express desire for another person (Crimmins & Seigfried-Spellar, 2014). On the other, studies tend to focus on the negative consequences that can result from this activity, especially in the case where the material gets shared without consent: humiliation, revenge porn or harassment are just a few of such negative consequences (*ibidem*; O'Sullivan, 2014; Dake et al., 2012). Another important aspect to consider is that concerning the legal aspect of sexting. Such aspect becomes even more relevant when minors are involved as in some cases sexting results as and can be considered child pornography (Ricketts, 2015). This can help to explain the reason why most of the studies examining sexting have focused on sexting and minors and on the legal issues connected to minors who sext (Reyns, Burek, Henson & Fisher, 2013). Although most of the literature and literature review on sexting available put under-18s as centre of the discussion, it is proved that sexting is engaged by young adults as well. Döring et al. (2017) also claim that the literature available on sexual activities and sexting focuses on minors, and studies on adults are rare, identifying a research gap in this.

Sexting is indeed discussed as problematic behaviours for the adolescents, nevertheless research on adults is so limited that the prevalence rates and outcomes among this target are widely unknown (Döring et al., 2017). The age limit established in the studies has been determined according to the evidence that minors would be affected differently in case of consequences from adults in terms of "crisis management and legal issues" (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017:545). Such point of view is strengthened by the perception that minors are even more vulnerable when it comes to sexual experiences as they might be less conscious of what they are experiencing, of the limits of what they share online, and the importance of their private sphere. Among the European countries

there is no standardised law when it comes to sanctions for sexual offenders in case of child pornography. Sanctions can depend on different factors, e.g. age of the offender and age of the victims, such factors are not equally important in all the countries. Indeed, as Tab. 1.1 shows, the punishments are differentiated according to the importance that each element has in each Country.



Tab. 1.1 Differentiation of sanctions for sexual offences against children

Source: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/content/sanctions-sexual-offences>

Some of the Member States clearly differentiate between sanctions for sexual offences depending on the victim’s age. Other Member States, Italy and Germany being among these, differentiate the sanctions for sexual offenders based on the age of both the victim and offender where the sanction for the latter is obviously linked to the minimum age of criminal responsibility applied in each Country. In other Countries, gender is also a differentiating element for sanctions as the gender of both the victim and offender is taken into consideration (<https://fra.europa.eu/en/content/sanctions-sexual-offences>).

Barrense-Dias et al. (2017) suggest a division within sexters and claim that people who have sexted can be split into two categories: active and passive. The first category, active sexting, refers to the actions of “creating, showing, posting, sending, or forwarding to a third party” (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017:546); the second category, passive sexting, refers to the actions of receiving, being asked or asking and is considered to be more common or more reported and having a higher prevalence rate than active sexting. A study conducted by Temple and Choi (2014) provided a further element and reported that within the second category, i.e. passive sexters, 60% of the participants in their study had

been asked for a photo, while only 31% reported having asked someone to send them a picture (Temple, & Choi, 2014). The main problem with these categories and their definition is that some studies considered that forwarding someone's messages to others than sender and recipient was to be intended as sexting (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones, & Wolak, 2011; Lippman & Campbell, 2014). It is clear then that, according to such definition, sexting is perceived as a negative sexual practice, as deviant behaviour and a problem. Gordon-Messer et al. (2013) found a further division for people involved in sexting according to a large national sample of 18–24-year-old young adults in the United States. They subdivided sexting into four categories (Gordon-Messer et al, 2013):

1. Non-sexters, those who have neither sent nor received a sext.
2. Senders, people who have sent but never received a sext.
3. Receivers, those who have received but never sent a sext.
4. Two-way senders, people who have both sent and received a sext.

As previously mentioned, one potential serious risk concerning sexting regards the non-consensual and unauthorised sharing of the sexual context to someone who is not the sender or recipient, to a wider audience. This distribution is not limited to the showing of the content from the screen of one's mobile device, but it also includes forwarding the content or posting it online. What concerns and worries the most is the case where sexually explicit images are shared or sent online since such a behaviour could lead to reputational damage and to "subsequent bullying and cyberbullying victimization" (Van Ouytsel et al., 2018:2). It is impossible to determine the reasons that push someone to show or share one's sexually explicit images or messages, but peer pressure can be among these reasons. Indeed, one might share sexting messages in order to brag to friends about having received such sexting content (*ibidem*).

One of the main and best technological novelties for social media is the possibility on the part of the sender to send a sexual text or picture via message and then have it disappear once the recipient has watched it (Widman et al., 2021). Such safety is of great help and appealing for those who want to ensure that their messages get definitely deleted so that they cannot be forwarded, shared or shown to other people. The messages

exchanged between two people who sext can be different both in form and content. We have seen that there is no universal definition that sets the frame for how the content is exchanged and what the sexting content is. It can be via written texts, images, videos, or audio messages. Nevertheless, when the content of the messages is analysed, three top categories can be found: naked breasts, genitals, and completely nude (Widman, et al., 2021:181).

1.2.3 Gender and age influence in sexting

The literature available on sexting identified differences in gender, in the way boys and girls sext and in the way they might be judged by non-sexters. The analysis of the literature available carried out by Barrense-Dias (2017) showed that sexting is more prevalent among older adolescents than among younger ones, however the latter were more affected by the risk of being upset or harmed by this practice (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017). Nevertheless, when differences related to gender were to be made, some prevailing and sometimes opposite rates appeared. Indeed, some studies showed a higher female rate being involved in sexting (Livingstone, & Görzig, 2014; Ybarra, & Mitchell, 2014); while other studies proved boys being more involved in it and being more likely to sext (Rice et al., 2012; Baumgarten et al., 2014; Van Ouytsel, 2014; West et al., 2014). Nevertheless, if one goes deeper and divides between sending and receiving, they would see how rates here change and gender differences arise. Here, boys tend to be more likely to send messages than receiving (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017). Nevertheless, Gordon-Messer et al. (2013) found the opposite trend. According to their study, young men are more likely than their female peers to receive a sext without having sent one. The researchers claim that these results are due to the fact that young men receive pictures that were not meant to be sent to them but they were originally intended for someone else instead (Gordon-Messer et al., 2013). If one does not find fixed differences in the participation rates between boys and girls, differences for the transmission mode can indeed be reported. On one hand, boys tend to post pictures of themselves online rather than to send them directly to someone; on the other, girls are more likely to send the pictures to a particular person and not to share them online (*ibidem*). Analysing the content of messages can be helpful to further divide people who sext into three different groups. Houck (2014) names the three groups as follows: no sexting, text only, and photo with text. A gender difference

was found here as more girls than boys reported to have sent pictures of themselves. This theory was further proved by another study, conducted by Livingstone and Görzig (2014). The researchers claim that boys were more likely to receive sexual messages than girls and such difference lies in the fact that girls fear the risk of being harmed or embarrassed when receiving such messages (Livingstone & Görzig 2014).

Beside the differences found in the rates of sending and receiving between female and male sexters, a gendered hierarchy was found in the perception people have of boys sexting compared to that of girls sexting. Indeed, girls who sext experience more criticism and are treated more negatively than boys (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017). The study conducted by Walrave et al. (2013) supported such hierarchy claiming this judgement as one of the possible negative consequences of sexting. In fact, girls reported to have perceived more negative social reactions from peers towards sexting and felt more judged than boys (*ibidem*). These studies show evidence that girls tend to be judged more when they sext but they are equally judged when girls refused to sext and they were here considered as being “goody girls”, “prude”, or “stuck-up” (Lippman & Campbell, 2014). Other gender-based differences and disparities in terms of judgement were nevertheless further encountered. In addition to them, a gender difference was found for other factors related to sexting. A study analysed the consequences in terms of cyberbullying and found out that girls who reported being more likely to sext have significantly suffered from cyberbullying, whereas boys have not reported such injustice (West et al., 2014). Moreover, an interesting point of the study shows that boys only claimed that sexting was associated with excessive texting and with having participated in a physical fight during the last 12 months (*ibidem*). Others have also indicated that gender differences are a key factor in the study of the subject. Gender is indeed a central element in the understanding and the development of sexting (Ringrose et al., 2013; Lippman and Campbell, 2014). As mentioned, gender differences can be encountered in the motivations leading to sexting, in the content sent and even in the feelings perceived after sexting, whether them being negative or positive ones. In particular, girls reported experiencing more negative impacts caused by the gendered double standard of sexual reputation (Renold & Ringrose, 2011; Renold et al., 2015). This double standard occurs in the case where boys and girls are judged differently according to their gender although they have carried out the same action. When it comes to the online environment and to sexting in particular, girls are

more likely to be depicted with negative labels, for instance ‘slut’. Such labels are attributed to them for sending sexual images and they increase the already strong fear that the recipient of the sext message can forward and share the material which would be then of public domain (Ringrose et al., 2012, Wolak and Finkelhor, 2011).

Boys do not however experience such gendered double standard. Indeed, they can gain status and fame among their peers for having carried out the same behaviours (Willard, 2010). Wood et al. (2015) support this gendered double standard framing it into a European survey. Taking into account the case of sexting in different countries, the picture was quite heterogeneous showing for instance that in Italy and Cyprus, more than in other Countries, boys referred to have received more sexual images from their partners, whereas fewer girls reported having sent such images. Such findings might indicate that girls feel reluctant to openly report that they have sent sexting images (Wood et al., 2015). One further study also proved that a gendered double-standard is strong and much present (Baumgartner et al., 2014). According to the findings from the study conducted by Baumgartner et al. (2014), girls are often pushed and pressured into sending sexting images, and girls felt no approval on the part of other girls or boys when sending these sexting messages. In strong contrast, boys were not treated the same as it was perceived as “normal for boys to produce and show off with these images of themselves” (Baumgartner et al., 2014:4).

Barrense-Dias et al. (2017) claimed that the age ranges in their study of the literature available were so different that it was impossible to set a precise age range of the people engaged in sexting (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017). Moreover, samples focusing more on younger participants showed evidence that sexting is less prevalent in their sexual practices while studies on older participants stated that it is more prevalent for their target. Indeed, it is difficult if not impossible to establish a precise age standard when samples are so heterogeneous, but such age trend between older and young participants was found (*ibidem*). Studies proved that older participants were more likely to engage in this practice than younger ones, when associations between age and sex were encountered (*ibidem*). It is also important to mention that the way data are collected changes according to the way the research is carried out. The data collected could be different if the research opted for online surveys rather than pen-and-pencil questionnaires or face-to-face

interviews. The different means can affect and influence the answers, especially in the case of a sensitive topic like sexting where people are asked to openly talk about their sexual life (*ibidem*). In addition, it is worth mentioning that sexuality in general could be a sensitive topic especially among adolescents, hence the “social desirability issue in responses could also influence the results” (*ibidem*). For instance, one study (Rice et al., 2012) did not directly ask if the participants have sexted, they were asked if they knew someone who sexted. This study indirectly measured sexting rates showing that most of the participants knew someone who has sexted whereas around 15% of the participants openly said that they have sexted (*ibidem*).

Within the relationship between adolescents, sexuality and sexting, it is worth to mention that adolescence is a period of growth, where one discovers and establishes their independence and individuation and during which peers’ opinions and influence become of even stronger importance (Walrave et al., 2013). In this context, sexuality becomes one of the main actors and fields where teenagers discover the most. Bearing in mind the importance of conversations among peers and exchange of personal experiences or opinion, sexting can also be associated with peer pressure that can be directly or indirectly exerted (Rice et al., 2012). Adolescents feel then the pressure to sext and do so even if not in their will, their behaviour can change and adapt according to peer’s reaction and act accordingly in order to get that conformity to the group that is often a necessary condition in order to be accepted (*ibidem*). Peer pressure can be directly exerted in the cases where they push someone to sext or even after one has sexted pushing them to mock or harass the involved person. Such peer can be even more stressed due to the strong pervasiveness of social networks that make it possible for teenagers to put or feel pressure into their home environment and on a daily basis.

1.2.4 Why do people sext?

When it came to analysing the reasons why people sext and the motivation associated with sexting, researchers have found heterogeneous results. Widman et al. (2021) claimed that one of the main motivations was connected to attachment anxiety according to which people with attachment issues were more likely to “solicit sexual activity via text messages” (Widman et al., 2021:182). The same study proved that personality factors

influenced the motivations. Indeed, people who are more extrovert and out-going as well as people with fun and carefree attitudes also tend to engage more in sexting (*ibidem*). Other elements in terms of the motivations associated with sexting were found in other types of personal motivations, e.g. fun or partner request (*ibidem*). Other studies analysed the reasons that drive people to sext, proving that much of the sexting is carried out within a romantic or sexual relationship. The Sex and Tech survey carried out by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2008) investigated the reasons why teens sext. The most common motivation for sending an image was for fun or to flirt with the other person. All motivations can be framed within a sexual or romantic relationship between sender and recipient. Indeed, most of the girls said that the sexually explicit picture was sent as a 'sexy present' for their boyfriend; while others, both female and male participants, claimed that they sent a sexting image as a response to having received one from their partner. A big part of the female respondents stated that they have sent a sexting message as a joke or to feel sexy. The research carried out by Drouin (2015) also provides some motivations that lead people to sext. The researcher claims that the participants reported to have sexted for flirtation, foreplay, fostering intimacy, and fulfilling a partner's need (Drouin, 2015). The findings also showed that some people would sext in order to consent to "unwanted sexting to avoid conflict in their relationship" (Drouin, 2015:186), supporting the theory that claims that sexting mostly occurs among already-established romantic relationships. Unwanted sexting carried out to please the partner was particularly common among those people who suffer from anxiety or tend to avoid attachment to their partners. Moreover, the frequency of unwanted but consensual sexting was often related to anxious attachment, but people would sext in order to avoid arguments within the relationship (*ibidem*).

The findings in the survey from Mitchell et al. (2012) supported the fact that most of the sexting occurs within romantic relationships. Indeed, they found that most of the participants have sexted with a partner and about one third of the respondents claimed that the sexting occurred was a joke. Moreover, The Sex and Tech Survey (2008) proved that the majority of young people involved in sexting had a positive experience with the activity. The participants reported being amused, turned on, excited, and happy. The research from Cox (2009) also found evidence that most of the young people involved in sexting experienced no negative consequences. Nevertheless, not all people felt at ease

and had positive experiences when sexting. Under a quarter of the participants in Mitchell's survey claimed to have felt very (or extremely) upset, embarrassed or feared that their sexting image could have been forwarded to someone else. Similar findings were reported in the Sex and Tech Survey (2008), where some participants felt grossed out and turned off while sexting.

The study carried out by Gordon-Messer et al (2013) analysed sexting in a sample of young adults and it showed that it is a prevalent behaviour among the target of the research and, compared to other previous findings (for instance that of Lenhart, 2010), it provided evidence for slightly higher rates of sending and receiving. One reason that could explain this increase in the sexting rates might be found in the increasing use of technological devices and in the advancement of the field. Other findings of such research further support the perspective that sexting is now part of young adults' sexual relationship and that it is not necessarily correlated with riskier or safer behaviours. Sexting appears now to have a stronger relationship with sexual behaviours and to be included into them instead of being something extra. As we will see later on in the last chapter of the current dissertation, such findings and perspective are supported by the current study. Nevertheless, a difference here is to be made between teens and young adults. Some teens report that sexting is for them a substitute for physical contact (Gordon-Messer et al., 2013), while such perception is not shared by young adults. This will be another interesting point of discussion for the current research that will be developed further in the dissertation. Furthermore, the findings suggest that young adults who are "sexually active are more likely to sext than those who are not sexually active" (*ibidem*). Two possible theories might explain this finding (*ibidem*). On one hand, sexting is used to flirt with potential or dating partners who aim at establishing some sort of sexual relationships; on the other, young adults who already are sexually active, tend to engage more in a variety of sexual behaviours, including sexting.

Moreover, sexting was often associated with being sexually active as it mostly occurred between people who were in a relationship (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017). Sexting can be hence perceived and considered as being part of those sexual behaviours or practices that usually take place during sexual and romantic experimentation process. Other studies support such evidence, for instance that carried out by Van Ouytsel et al.

(2018). The study claims that, although sexting occurs in all types of relationships, the majority of people who sext tend to engage in such activity if they are dating or currently are in a romantic relationship (Van Ouytsel et al., 2018). Romantic partners are indeed the main characters when it comes to sexting, especially if they are in a long-distance relationship. Sexting can occur also in the case where partners exchange sexually explicit messages as proof of love or trust within a romantic relationship. But as said, the sexting content can be used as means to reach a romantic relationship.

1.2.5 Is sexting a positive or negative activity?

Sexting is often correlated to psychological health as the latter can be negatively influenced in the case of revenge porn or cyberbullying. Such negative activities can arise after the sexting images are forwarded beyond the original recipient. The media all over the world have frequently reported cases of cyberbullying and of teenage girls (once gain the accent and focus on the female part) who have even committed suicide after their sexting images have been shared online (Widman et al., 2021). Sexting can be placed as sexual behaviour in a larger sexuality context, but it can also be placed as risky behaviour in a larger cluster of negative or risky behaviours. The literature on sexting mainly provides focus on such negative or risky behaviours rather than seeing it as a neutral practice that does not necessarily lead to such consequences (Van Ouytsel et al., 2018). Even if sexting messages are sent within the context of a committed relationship, the content of the messages is sometimes forwarded, especially in case of cheating (*ibidem*). Nevertheless, the study carried out by Gordon-Messer et al (2013) provide opposite findings. Indeed, they claim that according to their research sexting is not associated with depression, anxiety, or self-esteem. Their participants equally reported similar outcomes for mental health indicators, whether they sext or not, proving that sexting is not a factor influencing mental health outcomes. However, they realise that “sexting could be problematic under some conditions” (Gordon-Messer, D., et al, 2013:305).

Another important element research is trying to focus on relies on education programmes on sexting that are especially tailored to minors and young people. For instance, in the United States, many sexting programmes have emerged in the last few years and a recent Google analysis on the hits for “sexting prevention” showed that the terms have been clicked almost 500.000 times. Nevertheless, despite the growing

importance of the phenomenon and the evidence that sexting is not a problem per se, these programmes focus on sexting prevention proving once again that sexting is perceived as a danger and people ought to abstain from doing it. Further education in the field is nevertheless necessary for people to then carry out healthy sexual behaviours. Concerning the relationship between sexting and sexual behaviour, researchers have proposed three different scenarios in which such relationship can develop. The first perspective claims that there is a tight correlation between sexting and risky sexual behaviours, the first causing the latter, e.g. early sexual initiation and a limited use of contraception (Brown, 2009:13). According to the second perspective, if people sext instead of having physical contacts, in this case such practice can be a safer sex behaviour (pewresearch.org/internet/2009/12/15/teens-and-sexting/). The third and last scenario frames sexting into romantic and sexual relationships where it may stand as new medium for the long-standing practice of photos sharing and would have hence no association with a safer or riskier behaviour (Chalfen, 2009). Moreover, some institutions including media reports and scholars have also suggested that there is a strong relationship between sexting and psychological well-being (Gordon-Messer et al., 2013). According to such theory, mental health is connected to sexting and to youth's motivation to sext. One of the main aspects that negatively affects one's mental health occurs in case the sexting messages are forwarded beyond the original recipient as well as in case people feel pressure and forced to sext. These elements do indeed cause a subsequent psychological distress (Gordon-Messer et al., 2013).

Sexting as sexual practice is also associated with one's sexual well-being in general. All sexual practices can be grouped and named according to the term "online sexual activities" (OSA). This is an umbrella term used to refer to all sexuality-related activities that occur both online and offline, e.g. online and offline dating. Being an umbrella term, OSA can be split into six main areas all of which have an equal effect on sexual wellbeing. The six types of OSA are: finding sexual advice online; finding sexually explicit content online; finding sexual partners online; finding sexual minority communities online; finding sex toys online; finding sex workers online. All these areas can improve or worsen an individual's sexual well-being (Döring & Mohseni, 2019). We have already seen how sexting is often directly connected with dangers and risks and such perspective provides literature that lacks studies where the feelings, sensations, or

motivations to sext are taken as centre of the analysis. Mass media have played a big role in framing and depicting sexting as a negative behaviour by speaking of a “dangerous sexting epidemic” (Döring & Mohseni, 2019:2) among adolescents. Such negative perspective works differently from a positive technology framework, which can be defined as “the scientific and applied approach to the use of technology for improving the quality of our personal experience” (Riva et al., 2012:70). One’s personal overall and sexual well-being is to be considered in this frame and as Williams et al. (2015:7) claim:

The task is not to identify what people are doing wrong and then to add something external to correct it (deficit approach), but to recognize the things that people do, or have done, well, along with the underlying, contributing strengths that allow for success. [...] Positive sexuality, then, is concerned with how people are, or can be, happy and fulfilled with their unique sexualities and sexual expression, which contributes to their overall wellbeing and quality of life.

The one-sided and negative standpoint on sexting gets in this way rejected, opting for a more neutral perspective on the matter. Nevertheless, framing digitally conducted sexual practices in a positive sexual framework or even in a positive technology framework does not aim at glorifying the activities or at setting the literature as a total opposite to the negative framework (Döring & Mohseni, 2019). All researchers can agree that sexting, as any other sexual practice, can have negative outcomes if certain circumstances occur, e.g. misinformation regarding sexuality and sexual health, sexual harassment and stalking online or infidelity and unsafe sex (*ibidem*). Indeed, positive outcomes ought not to be ignored in order to gain a more balanced and even complete picture not only of sexting but also of the means and ways in which adults express their sexuality online. There are indeed proofs that sexting carries a variety of positive outcomes, for instance sexual exploration, broadening of sexual horizon, identity validation, improved body image, finding sexual partners, enhanced intimacy in sexual relationships, improved sexual communication and so on (Döring & Mohseni, 2019). However, one must acknowledge that an increased empirical knowledge and research in this field would provide young people and adults the tools for a wise and healthy use of digital sources as means to develop their sexual well-being and consequently their happiness (*ibidem*).

Döring et al. (2017) collected a sample of adults from Germany and analysed the way their target use sexually related digital media. The Internet and mobile have become so pervasive and have penetrated at the level where it is impossible to avoid OSA and sexting. Older studies on the rates of people who have sexted have been mainly carried out using samples of adults from the United States. Such studies reported prevalence rates between 10% and 54% for sending sexting messages (*ibidem*). The quantitative online survey carried out by Döring et al. (2017) collected a sample of 1500 German users aged 18-85 years. The questions included in the survey regarded the target's sociodemographic characteristics, OSA and sexting prevalence and frequency, and perceived negative and positive OSA and sexting outcomes. Almost half of the participants reported being involved in sexting, and the sexting messages were mainly intended for their spouse or relationship partner. The findings prove once again that sexting is becoming more and more common among young people. Regarding sexting subtypes, participants reported having mostly sent sexual text messages rather than self-created sexual pictures or sexual videos. Nevertheless, when asked about consequences and outcomes, they reported to have experienced positive outcomes. Such finding clearly contradicts the perception that society has on sexting which is perceived as being a very risky and harmful behaviour (Döring et al., 2017:10). Moreover, Döring et al (*ibidem*) claim that "people who intensively practise OSA and sexting profit more from the benefits of sexual well-being but increase their risk of unpleasant experience at the same time". A too high consumption and use of sexting or any other online sexual activity consequently bring with itself negative outcomes, for instance people who use the Internet to seek sexual partners might be more likely to suffer from negative side effects like romance scams or sudden break-ups. The dimensions of the impact of sexting are indeed exaggerated by a polarisation of public and academic debates that portray sexual expression via digital media as something highly dangerous. Moreover, they often ignore the ambivalence of the phenomenon under discussion. The study provided by Döring et al. (2017) prove nevertheless that people do not have such a perception of sexting and do not always suffer from its negative outcomes.

As seen, European Countries do not have a standardised policy for sexting among young people and such policy is indeed underdeveloped (Wood et al., 2015). At present, both Europe and the United States apply serious legal consequences when minors send or receive sexual images, as, based on the law, it might be illegal to create, transmit or

possess a sexual image of a minor. There have been cases of young people being legally prosecuted, especially in the United States, for having carried out these activities (Schmitz & Siry, 2011; Lee et al., 2013). A comparison between the US and other countries like Germany showed that in the US law enforcement agencies have followed sexting episodes involving young people (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011), whereas the other countries such as Germany allow for non-prosecution in cases where the images have been taken and shared with the consent of the person depicted in the picture (Morris, 2014). The sexting rates indeed show that the phenomenon is a spread activity among different generations and that it is gradually growing and developing. However, studies exploring sexting rates have also highlighted different factors and elements that show the complexity surrounding the practice. The debate has mainly revolved around the possible risks and the notoriousness of the phenomenon, thus depicting sexting as a problem from which children have to abstain. As previously mentioned, much of the literature available on sexting has focused on the risks and negative outcomes connected to sexting and especially to young people sexting. The main risk taken into analysis has been that of the forwarding and sharing of the sexting messages, especially of images, to someone who was not intended to own such pictures. It is impossible to clearly discover the reasons why people decide to share one's personal sexting images, as previously said, people might feel pressure from peers or want to show off (Ringrose & Harvey, 2015). The distribution of the images can be used then to blackmail or as revenge porn. Moreover, partners decide to share the images mostly after a break-up where the partner has cheated on them and decide to use it as a means of humiliation for their own amusement (*ibidem*). Some researchers carried out studies focusing on a more positive approach towards the topic instead of placing the risks and negative outcomes at the centre of the discussion (Döring & Mohseni, 2019). Such studies have sought to "recast the debate away from risk to a more balanced account which seeks to acknowledge the role that sexting also plays in relation to pleasure and sexual intimacy" (Ringrose & Harvey, 2015:4). Indeed, most of the studies ignored the positive motivations that lead people to sext or excluded from their surveys something to address affirmative sexting experiences.

1.2.6 Sexting in Europe

The study conducted by Wood et al. (2015) provided a European picture of the trends in sexting, analysing the practice in five countries – Bulgaria, Cyprus, England, Italy, and Norway. The rates in Italy, over a sample of 252 participants, show that about 22% of young Italian people had at least one sent a sexting message, and that around 30% has received a sexting image from a partner. Nevertheless, about 17% of the participants reported having shared or forwarded their partner's sexting image with someone who was not intended to receive such picture. The findings reported by Wood et al. (2015) show that sexting is a quite spread sexual practice among young people's relationships and that the rates are increasing when young people go through adolescence. However, in opposition to what mentioned before about sexting being a means to flirt, the findings here did not prove the same. Despite the differences in rates in each Country, the majority of the young people who took part in the survey did not report engaging in sexting during their romantic or sexual relationships, regardless of the participants' age or gender. This goes against the "media presumption that sexting is now a routine aspects of young people's 'flirting' strategies and relationship cultures" (Wood et al., 2015:26).

Baumgartner et al. (2015) further realised the importance of a European picture and framework of the trends in sexting, how the practice is carried out among the Countries and how it is perceived. Research studying the phenomenon have mainly investigated the prevalence rates of sexting, and age and gender have been used as predictors. The differences in sexting according to gender or age up to here discussed may derive from particular features of the countries taken into account for the study on sexting. Indeed, several studies investigating sexting and its features have focused on analysing the behaviour in one specific country and some authors claim that the literature available miss cross-national comparisons (Baumgartner et al., 2015). Country context is indeed important to be taken in consideration in the study of sexting. As mentioned, some particular differences in prevalence and frequency of sexting among the countries may be influenced by specific features of a given country. For instance, studies conducted in more conservative countries may report lower rates than less conservative ones or countries with a higher internet penetration can provide evidence that sexting is more spread among adolescents as they have more opportunities to engage in this behaviour. Moreover,

predictors of sexting may vary across countries. Indeed, specific individual predictors might play a big role in some countries and influence the trends on sexting due to the importance of these characteristics in a given countries. The same features however may have a weak influence or even no influence at all in other countries where the given characteristics are absent (Baumgartner et al., 2014). Given this theory, Baumgartner et al. (2014) decided to focus their study not only on contextual factors related to sexting but also on individual factors across different countries, they claimed that such approach may “provide a more comprehensive picture of youth sexting” (Baumgartner et al., 2014:1). Hence, the aim of their study was that to analyse the factors that explain why adolescents sext, both on an individual level and on a contextual level. On the individual level, they considered age, gender, and sensations seeking; whereas on the contextual level, they investigated traditional values. They also decided to include other control variables, such as frequency of internet use, gross domestic product and broadband internet penetration. Although the study carried out by Baumgartner et al. (2014) broadens the research bringing the analysis onto other levels, it still faces the matter considering it as a deviant behaviour. Indeed, they claim that, even though only a minority of adolescents engage in this activity in many countries, it is still important to identify those adolescents who sext in order to “be able to effectively prevent this behaviour” (Baumgartner et al., 2014:4). Instead of focusing on ways to educate minors and adolescents to a healthy and conscientious use of sexting, the aim is to prevent this behaviour from happening. Their study supports the claim that sexting is an activity that is more widespread among older adolescents (16 and 17 years old), who are more likely to sext than younger adolescents (from 12 to 15 years old).

Moreover, individual characteristics have always been at the centre of attention as the only predictor to study not only adolescents’ online activities but also their sexting behaviour. Such individual factors are indeed important when trying to explain young people’s sexting behaviour, nevertheless other broader contextual variables are proved to be influencing the way adolescents perceive the online world with all its features and challenges (Baumgartner et al., 2014). Many studies revolving around adolescent development have developed the theory according to which the social and cultural context in which the children grow up are to be considered important elements that influence their behaviour (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Igra & Irwin, 1996). Cultural values are one of the

most important features of a society in a given country and they indeed influence one's general behaviour, especially that related to the sexual sphere. Such values are vast and broad, touch different aspects of one's life and are influenced by other aspects and institutions, such as schools, families, and media. These institutions support and fortify such values and hence influence the characters, attitudes, and behaviours of the individuals in a given society. Nevertheless, Baumgartner et al. (2014) opted to focus on one specific value rather than taking several values all together, namely traditionalism. The researchers provided first a definition of what 'traditionalism' is, opting for the definition provided by Schwartz (1994) based on the theory of basic human values. According to Schwartz (1994:22) traditionalism is defined as "respect, commitment and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide". European countries indeed share mutual cultural aspects, but despite the homogeneity of the States in many aspects, major differences in cultural values and in the perception of particular elements still persist (Baumgartner et al., 2014). A major dividing line between the countries is that splitting northern and southern countries. Baumgartner et al. (2014) claim that north-western European countries, such as Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, allow for more sexual permissive attitudes than southern European countries, such as Italy, and Eastern European countries, e.g. Poland. The differences in values are then reflected in the way people perceive sexual topics and in the way they are taught about them. For instance, school-based sex education programmes change from one country to another based on these value differences (Parker, Wellings, & Lazarus, 2009). In countries where traditional values are stronger, adolescents may then be less likely to engage in sexual behaviours, whereas adolescents in more modern or unconventional countries would be more likely to do it. Therefore, it may be possible that sexting is a less prevalent sexual practice in more traditional countries. Those studies focusing on one country and using fixed individual predictors for sexting behaviour implicitly assumes that "the effects of these individual factors are generalizable to other countries" (Baumgartner et al., 2014:6). It is however impossible to say that one individual level of predictors of sexting is valid in any other country besides that of the given research. These country characteristics may influence and have a direct effect on both the adolescents' behaviour in sexting and individual trends. Indeed, country features might moderate the effect of such individual predictors on sexting. These features change from one country to the other and makes it

then possible that some individual elements have stronger effects and consequences in sexting in one country than in another.

Baumgartner et al. (2014) differentiate between two types of countries, traditional and non-traditional. The first group is characterised by sexually restrictive features, whereas the second by a more sexually permissive perception. The latter has a more open view on the subject than the first, such difference in viewing leads then to different perceptions on gender-appropriate sexual behaviour (Baumgartner et al., 2014). Sexually permissive societies allow girls to express their sexuality in a freer way and the girls are also more likely to live sexuality in a more open-minded way. This hence leads to the theory according to which girls in this kind of society are more willing to sext. Nevertheless, in less permissive and more traditional countries, the same behaviour might be considered as inappropriate for teenage girls. It is in these countries where the notorious gendered double-standard is more present. Indeed, more boys than girls are more likely to engage in sexting (Baumgartner et al., 2014). According to Baumgartner et al. (2014), the inconsistencies in gender differences found in previous studies on sexting might be partly explained by the traditionalism of the country taken into analysis. The researchers also claim that as most of the studies analysing sexting have focused on one specific country, being that country most of the time the United States, it has not been yet investigated whether the same predictors are also valid as predictors of sexting in other countries. The study conducted by Baumgartner et al. (2014) aims then at investigating the trends and rates of adolescent sexting among 20 European countries as well as at examining individual next to country features that influence adolescents' sexting behaviour. It is worth mentioning here that, once again, the study focuses on teenagers and under-18s, ignoring an older target.

Before beginning with their study, Baumgartner et al. (2014) opted for traditionalism as a country characteristic and expected that such features could predict trends in sexting behaviour. Moreover, they assumed that sexting would have been less prevalent in more traditional countries and that such countries would have shown a more rooted gender differentiation both in the way the practice is carried out and in the way someone sexting is perceived from a non-sexter. The sample included about 15.000 adolescents in 20 different European countries. Their research proved once again the

difference in trends between boys and girls, where the boys are more likely to engage in sexting than their female peers and such difference was most pronounced in Italy and Germany. Sexting is a relatively new topic for research and has gained more attention in recent years, most of the studies have been based on samples and research carried out in the United States, resulting then that most of the knowledge about sexting is based on US studies (Baumgartner et al., 2014). Moreover, the knowledge of sexting across Europe is limited to little research, it is thus impossible to know whether the US findings can be adapted and generalised to European countries. The first main finding regarded age and sensation seeking as sexting predictors. Baumgartner et al. (2014) found that these are rather universal predictors and thus are valid also in Europe. Meaning that older adolescents and adolescents with higher levels of sensation seeking were more likely to engage in sexting. Traditionalism was however significantly important when predicting gender differences in sexting, showing that, in some Countries taken into analysis, more boys than girls tend to engage in sexting, being such countries for instance Italy and Germany. This predictor showed that more traditional countries are characterised by stronger gender differences and gendered double-standards. Indeed, girls felt more restricted in this sexual behaviour. The findings support the theory according to which girls are limited in expressing and living their sexuality in less sexually permissive and more traditional countries. Consequently, less traditional and more sexually permissive countries show less rooted and apparent gender differences or cases where such differences were even reversed (Baumgartner et al., 2014). The final finding of their study showed that country characteristics were less strong than individual ones. Indeed, country features had “no direct influence on adolescent sexting above the effects of individual characteristics” (Baumgartner et al., 2014:13).

1.2.7 Is sexting sexually objectifying or liberating?

One further element considered when analysing the risks and consequences of sexting is the effects it has on body image. Does sexting contribute to a positive and liberating self-body perception? Or does it negatively affect it? People do not have direct interactions through sexting, which is considered a “mediated sexual interaction” between individuals (Liong & Cheng, 2018:1). Moreover, Hasinoff (2013) claims that sexting is also a form of media production as one produces their own sexual representation in the presence of

others. Such mediated interaction and nature of sexting has led to a debate whether sexting has a positive influence on the way people perceive themselves and their bodies and hence whether it promotes objectification or sexual liberation. Objectification occurs in the case when the body is perceived as an object to be judged by others according to cultural body standards (Calogero, 2012). On the contrary, sexual liberation means experiencing sexuality in the way one sees as best, far from sexual restrictions and conventions but aimed at enjoying sexual activities expanding sexual horizons with greater sexual openness and diversity (Weinberg & Williams, 2010). As seen up to now, there are totally different views on the nature of sexting, thus the literature available lacks a standardised theory on sexting, whether it is a positive phenomenon with positive impact on individuals or not (Liong & Cheng, 2018). Researchers claiming that sexting is an objectifying activity argue that sexting “inevitably involves objectification of one’s own body, as sexters see and judge their own bodies through the pictures” (Liong & Cheng, 2018:1). Researchers belonging to the other perception of sexting, i.e., as liberating sexual practice, claim that engaging such activity can empower one’s sexual self-perception as sexters have more control than in physical situations over their sexuality and their body behind the digital device, especially for those who have not much sexual experience (Liong & Cheng, 2018). Those who depict sexting as objectifying also suggest that such objectification of one’s body is inevitable in sexting because the sexting pictures are taken according to body and beauty aesthetics that are supported and shaped by the media. Such aesthetics is then replicated in the pictures as the person has the desire to conform to these beauty standards and ideals (Liong & Cheng, 2018). Indeed, people sexting, when they are taking pictures of themselves, rely on the sexy images they have seen online and act according to the models they find attractive (*ibidem*). Sexting becomes then more an imitation of sexy images found on mainstream media and it entails “the monitoring of one’s body to achieve standards of sexual attractiveness” (Liong & Cheng, 2018:2). On the contrary, some researchers consider that people can, through sexting, explore their body and sexuality as it involves a self-portrait and depiction of one’s own nude or nearly nude body. Through this activity, people can find ways for self-expression and sexting is “a virtual form of sexual experimentation” (*ibidem*). By taking sexually explicit images of your own body, you have direct control on it and, although some sort of aesthetic trends are recreated, you get to look at a body that is indeed different from the ideal body of the

consumerist society (Liong & Cheng, 2018). Sexting allows for more freedom in sexual experimentation and expression, people are indeed provided with a space where they can try new things without shame. Such absent of shame leads then to the achievement of sexual liberation (*ibidem*). For this reason, sexters may feel more comfortable with their nude bodies than nonsexters, they may be more sexually open and sexually satisfied, elements that contribute to have positive experiences with sexual activities (*ibidem*). Moreover, one could also acknowledge that online activities in general allow for more freedom in expression (Hertlein, Shadid, & Steelman, 2015). Such freedom is particularly important for people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community where sexting becomes then one way through which they can express their sexuality in particular designated online platforms. This online depiction of the offline relationships allows them to avoid judgement and negative comments (*ibidem*). However, as Liong and Cheng (2018) suggest, there is the possibility that “people feel comfortable displaying their nude bodies to others because they are confident that they can achieve the ideal body standard” (Liong & Cheng, 2018:2).

The study conducted by Liong and Cheng (2018) on the topic show that their findings suggest that sexting is both a sexually objectifying and liberating activity. The sample of participants was a group of 500 students from Hong Kong. Some participants supported the theory claiming that sexting objectifies the body. Indeed, they stated that they developed body shame as they felt that their bodies were constantly monitored and that their physical appearance was constantly compared to cultural standards. On the contrary, others supported that sexters feel more comfortable with their nude bodies than nonsexters. Nevertheless, it must be mentioned here that none of them proved that sexting leads to “higher levels of body control beliefs” (Liong & Cheng, 2018:5). In fact, participants who sext tended to compare their body, appearance, and posture with the sexualised depictions of people they find in the mass media. Liong and Cheng (2018) claim that such tendencies make people develop an “objectified consciousness within themselves” (*ibidem*). Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that sexting is not only a representation of one’s sexualised body, but also an experience of perception and expression of the sexters’ own bodies. This difference is explained by the fact that sexters take their own nude pictures (*ibidem*). Moreover, if it might be true that on one side being

watched triggers a feeling of objectification, on the other, it arouses an “exhibitionist pleasure and playfulness” (*ibidem*).

According to the findings from the study of Liong and Cheng (2018), sexting is not perceived whether only sexually objectifying or sexually liberating, it can be both instead. On one hand, it locks the person into some beauty standards that are rooted in their society; on the other, it consists of a “subjective pondering of the sexter’s nude body and sexual agency” (*ibidem*), meaning that individuals express and identify their sexuality also through sexting. According to the objectifying-liberating dichotomy, sexters would be then framed either as victims of a culture that sexualizes people’s bodies or as powerful and active subjects that have full control on their sexuality (*ibidem*). Liong and Cheng (2018) also claim that previous research have undermined the potential that sexting has in empowering young people both on themselves and on their sexual sphere. Indeed, as previously mentioned, most academic research studies have only focused on sexting as risky or problematic behaviour considering sexting as a problem per se. Moreover, Liong and Cheng (2018) suggest that future studies, sex educators, and sexuality professionals ought to make good use of this phenomenon in this digital era in order to help young people to empower themselves rather than strictly focusing on the negative aspects of sexting. Sex education should be implemented in this sense, helping young people to develop awareness when exploring their bodies and their sexuality and to provide them tools to do so in a more autonomous way.

It must be acknowledged that the body of research focusing on sexting has been growing and developing over the past years (Van Ouytsel, Walrave, Ponnet & Temple, 2018). However, this is not enough as additional work is indeed to be carried out for a better understanding not only of the practice itself, but also of the context in which this modern phenomenon takes place. Such better knowledge could then help to better assess the potential of sexting and its consequences. It is indeed of good help if the field could be provided with a more consistent literature and studies on sexting, which would make then possible a comparison of the findings and results across studies (*ibidem*). Moreover, a deeper insight into the potential benefits of sexting both for the sexters themselves and for their relationship ought to be explored, this section has shown that up to date literature mainly focuses on negative outcomes and risks connected to sexting. The studies on

sexting should also be implemented towards an older target in the sense that samples of participants ought to be taken from older adults (*ibidem*). Indeed, most research on sexting focus on samples from participants that are minors ignoring the role that sexting plays in older adults' sexual life. In addition, not enough studies have investigated the characteristics and reasons that drive or press people into sexting as well as the motives of those who then decide to share or forward the content of sexting messages. One further field that needs to be addressed in the research on sexting is that concerning the education on the subject to under-18s (*ibidem*). Institutions, families, and schools ought to be given tools to educate adolescents in the challenges and help them to safely engage in sexting. Future research on the way these institutions perceive the subject is needed in order to understand how to respond to risky and negative situations caused by unsafe sexting. Indeed, it is important to investigate the way families and schools face the subject and they ought to educate children towards a safe, healthy sexting where consent from both parties is at the centre (*ibidem*). Nevertheless, educators, parents, and institutions in general should break the idea that sexting per se is harmful or a problem and that education in the field ought to teach children to abstain from it (Rice & Watson, 2016). Such educating figures should understand young sexters more and engage more in a dialogue with them to investigate their views on the risks as well as the benefits they gain from this sexual practice. By doing so, such educating figures could have the tools, skills, and strategies to help children in the development of their sexuality and in avoiding risk (*ibidem*). To conclude, it is of worldwide knowledge that sexting is a difficult topic to address, especially when it comes to analysing it within minors' sexual sphere, and that it evolves and changes very fast.

2. Methodology of the current research

This chapter serves as a theoretical frame of the qualitative research. It is divided in two different parts: first a theoretic part on the qualitative interview and a practical part on my project. This first part focuses on the research as a theoretical concept, in particular you will be provided a brief explanation of what the quantitative research is, as opposed to the quantitative research. Then the latter will be thoroughly discussed also by comparing it to the quantitative research, as many researchers describe the first by its ‘not being quantitative research’. The main features described are data collection methods, subjects of the research, the relationship between the subjects and researchers, and finally the role of the theory within the qualitative research.

The following part of the chapter is dedicated to my work and my research. In particular, this section will describe the process and its steps by explaining elements of the before and during the time dedicated to interviews. The process will be thoroughly described in its parts. I will explain why sexting became the research topic, the reason(s) that drove me to use such topic as focus of my work; I will then analyse the subjects of the project, the reasons I chose such target and how I contacted them; last an in-depth of the interviews will be presented: how did I structure them? What topics did I cover? These and other elements are in that part discussed.

2.1 An introduction to quantitative research as opposite of the qualitative research

When it comes to analysing and classifying what the research is and its types, researchers may not all agree on the same classification. Indeed, the latter changes accordingly to the criteria used to classify research types used by researchers or educators (Sukamolson, 2007). However, in the present dissertation, an analysis of the types of research may not be useful to the readers bearing in mind the work and its aim.

One main difference within this field is, nevertheless, worth to be made, that between quantitative and qualitative research. Both belong to the same field and focus on the types of information sought, but they work following two different paths. The main

question a researcher ought to ask themselves when facing and beginning a project may be “To what kind of information am I aiming to?”. The answer to such question may change the choice of which type of research they will conduct, whether quantitative or qualitative.

There is not a fixed definition of what quantitative research is, as suggested by Sukamolson (2007), one can find different explanations that are generally accepted by researchers and educators instead. As this is not the circumstance to analyse the quantitative research deeply and thoroughly, the proposal of a suitable definition is limited to one. One of the interesting definitions available in the material on quantitative research is that suggested by Matthews and Ross (2010:45). They claim that “quantitative research methods are concerned with collecting and analysing data that is structured and can be represented numerically”. When discussing the goal of a quantitative research, Melissa J. Gorzen (2017:12) states that one of the main aims of this kind of research is to “build accurate and reliable measurements” that can be later suitable to carry out a statistical analysis.

In this relies on the main difference between quantitative and qualitative research. The latter, as we will see later in this chapter, focuses on and provides insight into the reasons why some specific patterns in people’s behaviours are carried out. The first focuses on numbers and data that can be measured. In the case of the current dissertation, if this work had been conducted accordingly to the parameters of a quantitative research, some of the likely research questions would have been: How many people have sexted? Or how many people have sexted only with their partners?

As said, quantitative research follow direct, quantifiable and neat questions and allow for a collection of data for measurements, e.g. percentages or proportions. As the current research is carried out based on a qualitative research model, a further analysis into the features, challenges and problems of quantitative research may not be worth a discussion. The element that is important to highlight bearing in mind the goal of this work is, indeed, the qualitative research. What researchers, educators and experts mean with qualitative research, how they work with that, its features and challenges will be thoroughly and appropriately discussed in the further sub-sections of this chapter.

2.2 The role of qualitative research

The current research is based on the model of the qualitative research, hence a section dedicated to this kind of analysis where its features and role are explicated may be needed and helpful to understand the frame of the following chapters. As mentioned in the previous section, research based on a qualitative methodology seek the reasons (why) and the way (how) some things or behaviours are carried out. It is of widespread knowledge how important qualitative interview is and how big its use can be, it has to be particularly acknowledged its central role played within the political and social sciences (Della Porta, 2014). As for the definition of what quantitative research means, it is equally difficult to find a fixed explanation. Indeed, this kind of research is extremely composite at the point where it is considered a residual category, defined by its “not being a quantitative method” (Della Porta, 2014:7, translated by me).

According to the sociologist Della Porta (2014), the qualitative interview is one of the main features of the empirical research, yet the theory available lacks proper information regarding the topic (Della Porta, 2014). What Della Porta states in her writing is that “despite its relevance, there is a certain lack of ‘user manuals’ capable of guiding the main decisions related to its use” (Della Porta, 2014:6, translated by me). Such statement makes it clear that despite the importance of the qualitative interview, a work in filling the theoretical gaps is to be carried out.

This provides a further differentiating element between the qualitative and quantitative research, where the latter can count on more literature or, as Della Porta calls it, on more ‘user manuals’. On one hand, the latter offers generally accepted rules, norms, and standards to follow when researching according to a quantitative analysis. On the other, researchers who attempt to follow some standards or rule regarding the qualitative analysis split into two groups. Those who act according to the norms set out for the quantitative research on one side; and those who refuse to accept the already existing norms for the qualitative analysis on the other (Della Porta, 2014). The first group claim that the qualitative analysis is to be framed in a scientific background as the quantitative analysis, hence following (or imitating?) its rules. The second group denies the existence

of some rules of the qualitative analysis, rules that already exist or that are somehow generally accepted, stating that this kind of analysis follows a creative approach within a creative framework and hence should not follow fixed norms and standards (Della Porta, 2014:6).

As previously mentioned, the quantitative and qualitative research are the main techniques for researching and equally important are the methods to them connected and related. One difference to be added to those already described lies in the number of cases considered. A research based on a quantitative analysis “covers, by definition, a high number of cases, while qualitative research is often based on studies that take deeper into account one or few cases” (Della Porta, 2014:7, translated by me). It is now evident and clear that a quantitative analysis bases the research and work on collecting data and numbers.

One further feature that characterises qualitative research is the use of the so called “soft” methods, which work in an opposite direction compared to the “hard” techniques used in quantitative research. One may have already noticed how some contrasts between qualitative and quantitative research can be marked using the opposition between the two. There are indeed different elements that distinguish the two types of research; as one can see in Table 2.1, these are some of the main differences between quantitative and qualitative analysis when it comes to define: the kind of knowledge, the images of the social reality and the goal of the results. The following categorization is based on a list presented by the researcher Halfpenny (1979:799) and later adapted by Della Porta (2014:10, translated by me).

Tab. 2 Differences and stereotypes between qualitative and quantitative research

	Qualitative	Quantitative
Kind of knowledge	Soft Subjective Political	Hard Objective Value-free

	Speculative	Hypothesis testing
	Grounded	Abstract
Images of the social reality	Flexible/fluid Exposes actors' meaning	Fixed Imposes sociological theory
Goal of the results	Idiographic	Nomothetic

Source: Halfpenny (1979:799) and Della Porta (2014:10).

Della Porta (2014) focuses then her introduction regarding the qualitative interview on the differences between the latter and the quantitative one, where the features of the qualitative research are set out from its not being quantitative research. However, it may not be worth to bring into focus such differentiation, hence the following sections of this chapter will only focus on the features and characteristics of the qualitative research alone.

As said, qualitative analysis is based on “soft” methods that allow the researcher to perceive (and hence analyse) the objective society through their own subjective categories (Della Porta, 2014). When it comes to the image of the social reality taken into account for the work, this is flexible and fluid and can be “build by the actors themselves” (Della Porta, 2014:9). The result is something that is characterised by its subjective features and that is analysed through a process that builds hypotheses. The ultimate goal of the qualitative research is then that of producing an idiographic, i.e., specific, knowledge (*ibidem*).

Tab. 3 The research project in the qualitative research

Dimensions	Qualitative method
Research strategy	Non structured
Shape of the research project	Flexible

Relationship between theories/concepts and research	Emerging
Type of concepts	Orientated
Relationship between the cases	Look at the interaction processes
Selection criteria	Substantive representativeness; paradigmatic cases
Data collection methods	Adapted (can vary for any unit of analysis)
Data aggregation	Cases (capital letter) and <i>casing</i>

Source: Della Porta (2014:15, translated by me)

The table above presents the main elements considered when drafting the research project, i.e., how to structure the research, how to collect data and how to analyse such data. As the table shows, the procedure discussed is quite flexible allowing the researchers to develop their theories and concepts during the work and not before. When it comes to decide the main topic and focus of the research, this kind of analysis aims to an empirical problem. However, many researchers and Della Porta herself claim that “the definition of the central topic of the research ought to be delayed as much as possible, so to be developed in tight connection with the work on the field” (Della Porta, 2014:15, translated by me). Last, being the processes of social interaction more important, the main concepts of the analysis are set and defined during the research itself. Such concepts would then allow for a non-standardised instrument for data collection.

Tab. 4 The qualitative research in the work on the field, data analysis and data presentation

	Qualitative Research
<i>On the field</i>	
Relationship researcher/object	Close

Relationship researcher/subject	Intern
<i>Data analysis:</i>	
Kind of data	Words
Nature of the data	Rich, deep
Procedures for data analysis	Informal: to interpret
Kind of knowledge	Comprehension
Relationships between dimensions	Mutual comprehension (internal)
Centre of attention	Classification
Explanation on how	Meaning
Context	Bonded to the content
<i>Data presentation:</i>	
Format	Dense narration

Source: Della Porta (2014:16, translated by me)

Della Porta creates a further division between work on the field, data analysis and data presentation (Tab.4). Furthermore, the relationships with object and subject are much tangled: some even suggest that researcher and subject ought to be and work so close that the researcher may be then able to look the world “through the subject’s eyes” (Della Porta, 2014:16, translated by me). Moreover, this kind of research favours the narration bringing the focus of the analysis onto the words that are perceived as chaotic and not organised data. A deeper discussion on the relationship between researcher and subjects will be analysed later in this chapter.

2.2.1 The interviews as data collection technique

The main tool available for researchers to collect data is the interview, which are indeed the most widespread techniques to collect data of any kind (Della Porta, 2014). As Della Porta also claims, “the interviews have been a fundamental research method within social sciences” (Della Porta, 2014:17, translated by me). There are various definitions of what the interviews are, but one can define them as a conversation where the researcher has a leading and guiding role to encourage the subject to give particular information. Nevertheless, it is generally acknowledged the importance that interviews have in creating empirical knowledge: through this technique the researcher is allowed to access to and collect the interviewee’s thoughts and observations on specific topics (Della Porta, 2014).

As previously described, one main difference between qualitative and quantitative research is the flexibility of the first when it comes to the research project or the research questions for instance. Qualitative interviews are once again more flexible and less fixed or structured than the quantitative ones. Such flexibility allows for deeper research into the interviewee’s point of view, who hence provides richer and more detailed answers (Della Porta, 2014). Moreover, this feature of the interviews, i.e., their flexibility and being open, makes it even possible to test and confirm hypotheses, or even to form new ones. According to Della Porta, interviews are hence particularly suitable for “the study of groups and phenomena that are considered to be marginal, for those that lack written sources” (Della Porta, 2014:18, translated by me).

Furthermore, what makes the interviews a brilliant and even more useful technique is their being ‘low-cost’ in terms of time and resources investment. Once again, Della Porta underlines the importance of such technique, when researchers want to go deeper into someone’s point of view. Through the interview, the interviewer has the tools to thoroughly analyse how people see, face, and perceive the world, how they build their identities, and how they feel their emotions. Having these pieces of information, one can then build (or rebuild) the social processes taken into account.

Researchers and experts have normally divided the interviews as follows (Della Porta, 2014:37-38, translated by me):

- Guided interviews against free interviews, having the first a well-organised list of questions and the latter no outline.
- In-depth interviews (that face several topics in a flexible way) in opposition to more focused and structured ones on particular topics.
- Interviews to privileged witnesses focusing on gathering information against those conducted with different social groups.
- Interviews with elites in opposition to those with ordinary people.
- Last, individual against group interviews.

One further classification of interviews can be made, that between the *life stories* and group interviews. Group interviews (Della Porta, 2014), as the name suggests, consist of discussions within small groups of people where the researcher acts as moderator. The group is not however asked to individually answer the questions set by the moderator, the group ought to start a conversation and discuss the topic among each other instead. This kind of interview is particularly useful when analysing and investigating collective dimensions. In interviews set as *life stories* (Della Porta, 2014), the interviewees talk about their life as if they are providing a report, and the researcher can, not only collect data about the subject, but also collect data about the subject's environment and background as well. Thanks to such features, the *life stories* are particularly suitable in the analysis of political socialisation and identity construction for instance.

Some sort of scheme or fixed standards are nevertheless needed when it comes to deciding the structure of the interview. A written outline of the interview is indeed much necessary to the researcher to keep track of the topics covered during the interview. However, being such scheme flexible and open, the interviewer can leave some designated spaces for the explanation of topics or phenomena that were not expected at the beginning of the interview. Such explanation can happen through some questions and answers that are obviously not structured. When the researcher begins then with elaborating an outline of the interview, it may be useful (but also suggested) to proceed following three steps (Della Porta, 2014):

- To decide and list the topics that the researcher perceive as important, these topics will then be covered during the conversation.
- To organize these topics according to a hierarchical order.
- To put these topics into questions or stimuli.

One last point that may be needed to underline concerns the order of the questions, the literature suggested by Della Porta (2014) is going to be, once again, our basis. The questions in the interview ought to be in some sort of organised and planned order, going from not so deep topics to deeper ones. Indeed, the questions should also follow the order of the topics previously set. Nevertheless, the interviewer is suggested to begin with a clear explanation of the aim of the project and the topics that they will be covering during the conversation. As said, the questions should follow an order where the difficulty of the questions increases, difficulty is here to be intended as level of personal topics. Indeed, a good relationship between researcher and subject ought to be outlined before facing more difficult questions. It will be later in this chapter explained that this is what happened in the case of the current research, where subjects were put more at ease and some sort of relationship between interviewer and interviewee was reached between asking more personal and difficult questions.

After explaining the aim of the research and the topics covered during the conversation, a more generic question can be asked to make the person feel more comfortable and confident in that situation. Such situation plays the role of the icebreaker, but it is then important to “focus the attention as soon as possible on the central research topic” (Della Porta, 2014:59, translated by me). One further important decision relies in the length of the interview in terms of time: how much time should it last? There is no precise amount of time of how long an interview should be, it can indeed change depending on different elements. One last suggestion given to the researchers concerns the recording of the interview. In fact, it is a good and useful choice to record the whole interview in order to write everything (or what needed) down.

2.2.2 The subjects of the research

The decision of the research subjects must rely on wise choices and people ought to be contacted in a direct and clear manner as analysed later in the current section. Two different categories are usually the researchers' main choice: informers and those belonging to the field taken into analysis for the research (Della Porta, 2014). Informers are usually people who are expert in a given topic, who would provide a detailed reconstruction of certain places or situations through the interview. When the researcher has to contact an informer for their research, the choice on who to contact relies on the informer's level of knowledge: it is more likely that a researcher decides to contact an informer who knows well and has studied more about the given topic, someone who is interested in the research and can be of good use. However, researchers can also opt to choose someone who directly belong to the population taken into analysis. Finally, within this differentiation one last example can be done. As previously analysed in this chapter, one can distinguish for instance between interviews with elites and interviews with ordinary people, e.g., if a researcher is researching on social movements, they can carry out their interviews with leaders of the parties or with activists.

In any case, whether the choice be on informer or on the other category, some criteria and rules on how to practically decide who to interview must be outlined. One could also decide to focus the research on specific categories that might be easier to be accessed. When a researcher does so, the explanation is the aim of the research itself: in this case, the goal is to select those groups where the given processes are more likely to happen (Della Porta, 2014). One last standard can be that of choosing their subjects based on the heterogeneity of the group, where different people with different features coexist. Some differentiating features could be gender and age, occupation, or level of education. As we will see later in this chapter, this last standard has been the one used within the current research, where the subjects have been differentiated according to gender and country.

The number of interviewees is another element that can easily change, there is not indeed a fixed number of how many people need to be interviewed as this can depend on different factors. This element can change according to the number of resources available to the researcher or even to how deep one aims to go with their research (Della Porta,

2014). If the researcher works together with a group, the number of interviewees will be obviously higher than that of someone working alone. It is however clear that if the number of the interviews is high, the research can go deeper into the topic and thoroughly analyse it. Having said this, Della Porta (2014) suggests one proper criterion to decide the number of subjects: when one reaches the so-called ‘knowledge saturation’, i.e., when no new information is added.

Once the researcher has outlined the group of subjects to interview, the next step is to decide how to contact them as there are different “potentially available recruitment strategies” (Della Porta, 2014:75, translated by me). One can opt for one of the following strategies (*ibidem*):

- Through convenience sampling
- Through snowball sampling
- Through target population

By contacting the subjects through the first method, researchers reach out to people they already know (the method used in the current study); through the second method, researchers ask to each interviewee a list of likely contacts; through the third method, researchers directly connect with the target group by posting announcements or ads (*ibidem*). Nevertheless, the way one contacts their subjects changes accordingly on the personal relationships the researcher has or on the social group they are in.

Once the person carrying out the study has decided their subjects, the order in which to contact them must also be planned. Researchers must nevertheless be aware of the importance of the first contacts they have with the subject, especially within the field of qualitative interviews (Della Porta, 2014). In the case of the snowball sampling, it can be useful to first contact the people who are immediately available, and later open the sampling to other people. The importance is given by the fact that people might accept not that easily as the topics are interesting but also difficult and personal. Interviewees can feel excited to take part in such a project, but also scared when facing the questions related to their personal sphere, for this reason it is important to be as transparent and clear as possible when establishing the first contacts. Going the qualitative interviews

deeper into one's personal experiences, it is a researcher's duty to clearly explain the goal of the research, as well the topics but, most importantly, how one's anonymity will be guaranteed. One can do so for instance by giving the possibility to read the interview or parts of it.

2.2.3 The relationship between researcher and subject(s)

The relationship between researcher and subject has been mentioned above, here this connection will be better analysed. What is important to mention here is the role of the interviewer themselves. Indeed, the researcher ought to be an outside observer during the interview without interfering or influencing the participant's discourse and answers. However, researchers should reach a certain level between discretion and participation or involvement. The interviewer has in fact "the responsibility of judging when an answer is sufficient or requires specifications" (Della Porta, 2014:18, translated by me). When saying 'discretion', it is meant that the researcher does not normally provide their own opinion or position on the topic. However, it can happen that the interviewer says informal or colloquial expressions like 'yes, yes' to show "interest and respect for the interviewee's words" (*ibidem*), both interviewer and interviewee are however active parts during the interview.

We can easily state that the interviewer's role is not so simple since they cover a variety of difficult jobs that include "inform about the purpose and modalities of the research, reassure the subject in relation to the research itself, legitimise the research, explain its meaning." (Della Porta, 2014:84, translated by me). As for the interviewer, who plays an active role during the conversation, the interviewee ought to be an active participant and the relationship between the two parts is important to have a smooth and pleasant conversation and to collect reliable and truthful data. Bearing this in mind, researchers often use strategies similar to those used in surveys because by doing so they are able to have some control on the subject and get the reliable and truthful data mentioned.

As previously said, it is not easy to maintain a balance on the part of the researcher who may tend to intervene during the conversation. A role of total outsider is not difficult to maintain but also useless for the research purposes: the interviewer ought to "lead the

interview with a firm hand, avoiding expressing their own opinion on the topics addressed” (Della Porta, 2014:85, translated by me), these control and leadership are however limited. Both parts, i.e., interviewer and interviewee, are actively participating in the interview. One of the main elements that leads to a good interview is the trust between researcher and interviewer (Della Porta, 2014), it is important to hold on to this trust from the first approaches until the end of the interview and this trust is particularly instrumental within qualitative research where people are asked to openly talk about personal matters. The first approaches are hence the first steps where the researcher ought to seek to build this kind of relationship with the subject(s) and so to establish trust.

During the conversation, the interviewer should lead and follow the interviewee’s flow of the conversation without trying to anticipate their answers or interrupt the conversation, leaving the proper space to the interviewee instead. As mentioned, the researcher’s neutrality is another key element in the qualitative interview. Indeed, during an interview the researcher ought to find a balance between an empathic role and a detached one. On one hand, the researcher should be emotionally involved and should create an empathic atmosphere to make the participant feel comfortable; on the other, they should be detached enough to let the interviewee speak freely without interruption or influence. Della Porta suggests some useful strategies to use when guiding and leading the conversation (2014:89, translated by me):

- To offer interpretations by asking the subject to comment on them.
- To play the role of the devil’s advocate by facing the interviewee with extreme or opposite points of view.
- To present hypothetical situations, e.g., ‘what would you do, if...’.
- To ask the interviewee to define an ideal situation: for instance ‘in your opinion, how could this problem be solved?’.

One last mention is worth to be made, that of formality and informality. In this case as well, the researcher ought to aim to reach a balanced level of informality and formality within the relationship with the subject. On the issue, Della Porta (2014:90, translated by me) states “a certain formality in clothes and speech, for example, is useful,

because it helps the interviewee to place the interviewer in their role as a scientist, who can therefore ask personal questions out of professional curiosity and who will keep their promise of confidentiality.”. However, is the researcher too formal, they risk being perceived as too far or detached and hence the subject will not feel comfortable to freely speak; therefore, some sort of informality reassures the subject and allows the researcher to be perceived as a familiar and close figure.

2.2.4 How does the theory place itself in the qualitative interview?

One first element that opens the research is the theory on the given topic, in fact a researcher should first face the theory regarding the matter and then plan a draft of the research. According to many researchers, answering some theoretical questions is “an instrumental step to develop important tools for the research, like the research outline” (Della Porta, 2014:22, translated by me). After going through the literature of the topic, it is also easier for the researcher to develop their theoretical research questions and hence decide the methods and techniques that aim to answer such questions.

The source of a research is usually draft on a particular sensibility, attention, or interest that the researcher develops for a certain topic or social issue. The role of a theoretical research is more important than what one could think. A good theoretical basis and structure also provides validity to the research and avoid to “undertheorize” (Della Porta, 2014:24, translated by me) the problem. A researcher is then able to structure the project and to know what they are looking for, what their purpose is. For this reason, “a research project should not only be justified by the social relevance of the problem investigated, but also by looking at its theoretical relevance” (*ibidem*, translated by me), in the sense that doing some theoretical research and reading help to link the social problems to sociological theories.

The social importance of a given problem should also be supported and hence strengthened by its theoretical importance and its investigation should pass first through the latter. Such connection and passage are done through reading and researching. Theoretical research offers the researcher themselves and the reader as well the tools to read the social issue. The importance of this step is highlighted also by the fact that it provides general perspectives on the topic so that strong ideas and hypotheses are

conceived. Is one provided the tools and instruments to analyse a social problem by the theory, it is then possible to put the research in a context and direction, the theory gives hence the starting points for future hypotheses.

However, as previously discussed, once the fixed theory sets the techniques and strategies, these can change during the research. According to Della Porta (2014:25, translated by me), she claims that:

“It has, in fact, often been suggested that qualitative research favours a context of discovery over a context of testing, i.e. that it is more apt to generate ideas than to test them; that it prefers contextualised rather than parsimonious theories; and that it is oriented towards understanding rather than prediction”.

Having said this, it is however important to say that there is not absolute correspondence and connection between research technique, methodology, epistemologies and theory, even though it has been noticed that those researchers who favour or mainly tend to conduct qualitative research do have “theoretical leanings” (Della Porta, 2014:30, translated by me). According to what the theory and previous works suggest, the qualitative research is usually leaning towards understanding the environment and society that surrounds the researcher, who would then aim to see such society through the subject’s eyes and point of view. The ultimate goal is then to analyse the given society and issues within their social contexts (Silverman, 2006).

2.3 The methodology of the current research

As previously mentioned, researchers who opt for qualitative research do not aim to collect numbers, they aim to collect the reasons, the means, or the ways something is carried out instead. In my case, the purpose of the current analysis and hence of this dissertation is not that of providing numbers on how many people have sexted or how many people have not. Indeed, my goal is that to analyse how sexting is perceived by young adults aged from 2 to 26, if (and how) they carry it out as something well integrated into their sexual practices or whether it is perceived with scepticism or misinformation. A particular focus of the research is dedicated to the differences, if there are any, in the way Italian people and German people perceive sexting.

The results of my research and the outcome of my analysis will be later in this dissertation well explained. Nevertheless, different elements need to be pointed out for a better understanding of the scenario in which I carried out the interviews and later analysed the data collected. Some of the elements discussed are, for instance, the reason (or reasons) that drove me to opt for such topic, i.e. sexting; the type of means used to collect the data and to carry out the interviews; and the subjects of such interviews.

2.3.1 Sexting as the topic of the research

Sex and everything that rotates around it have gained a partially accepted position within society for what concerns the discussion about the topic and its depiction. One could see that in the movie industry with the rise in the number of tv-series regarding sex and its practices – “Sex Education” to quote one, often mentioned during the interviews as we will see later in the following chapter. Throughout my university career and through the relationships with peers I have noticed how sex and its related topics have become more “acceptable” as topics in our conversations and discussions. In the case of such conversations, what was clear for many was that several people do not know enough regarding the topic and often speak out of misinformation or ignorance – where ignorance is here to be understood as lack of knowledge. Indeed, not only is there a lack of information when it comes to sexual practices, but also a lack of the availability of the information itself. This will be thoroughly explained in the following chapter, for instance in the case of the answer to the question “What do you think that ‘sexting’ means?” most of the interviewees did not know what to say.

One must also picture this scenario within a more technological background where phones, Internet, and social media have spread among the society reaching the point where they modify our daily life, whether this be a positive or negative aspect is not to be discussed in these circumstances (Drouin, 2015). The importance of computer-mediated communication is constantly growing and it has now also become a vehicle for sexual interactions, as in the case of sexting (*ibidem*). Indeed, the elements I have just mentioned have been contributing to bring a change into our lives towards a more digitalised routine where one sees the Internet as a key player. One of the influences brought by this digitalisation can be noticed within the field of sex and with the case taken into analysis, being that of sexting. Sexting without the Internet would not even exist, and

such discussion could not even be taken into account. As we saw in the previous chapter, there is no fixed standardised definition of what sexting is and the field is quite heterogeneous. In general, one can agree that sexting occurs when people send and receive sexually explicit content via Internet or any electronic device (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011; Comartin, 2013; Reys et al., 2013; Liong & Cheng, 2019).

Different factors contributed to the choice of this topic as the focus of my dissertation. First, the importance of the topics themselves and a more normalised perception of them. Second, the penetration of the Internet and hence of social media into people's daily lives and actions. Last, as seen in the previous chapter, a lack of information regarding how young adults perceive sexting and a comparative analysis between two countries, i.e. Germany and Italy. This has made me acknowledge that a change in this could help to avoid misinformation and ignorance and prevent negative actions or consequences from happening (e.g. unwanted sharing of one's personal pictures or unrequested 'dick pics').

2.3.2 Who are the subjects?

After a brief analysis on the literature available on sexting and its features, the choice of what to focus my dissertation on was clear. The decision on conducting research on this came consequently and naturally. I find the topic of sexting challenging, interesting, and fascinating, especially when placed in a context to me familiar. Working with my peers gave me the chance for a deeper thinking and a better understanding on the topic. Last, having the chance to compare two important countries such as Italy and Germany increased the already deep interest and challenge. The next step was to pick the subjects according to their features, to pick the means to contact them and to decide how to collect the data.

For what concerns the subjects of the research, I wanted to focus my work on a generation that I know and that would have openly spoken in a discussion in this direction. Talking about private topics such sex and sexting is not easy and could make people feel uncomfortable or not at ease. Hence, the choice of interviewing people my age, my peers, seemed to be the best. This decision came along with the acknowledgement that it would have been also easier to contact them, being them part of my friends, classmates, or co-

workers: talking with someone who trusts me, as they see me as their peer, about topics that could be delicate for some, could have helped to obtain more reliable and truthful data. It has been previously highlighted how important it is to set a relationship based on trust to collect truthful and reliable data. The aim of my work was not that to collect quantitative data on the rates of sexting, but to analyse its features among Italians and Germans. My focus is that to investigate how these young adults perceive sexting, how they carry it out or, if that was not possible, why they have never sexted. In fact, some of the topics and related questions were: What do you think about sexting? How do you perceive it?

However, I did not want my research to focus only on a relatively small target in terms of nationality and features. Indeed, the research ought to aim at a broader and wider target, bringing and adding something new to the literature available. As discussed in the previous chapter, from the analysis on other articles or on the information at hand it was clear that one may tend to focus more on sexting regarding minors as they are the main subject when it comes to (il)legal matters within the sex environment. The current research analyses sexting among about twenty people aged 22-26, regardless of their cultural or educational background.

The choice of using peers as subject of the interview was then followed by the awareness of spending a semester abroad at the University of Freiburg (Germany) as an Erasmus student. I wanted to gain the greatest possible advantage from this experience in another country and link it to the first ideas regarding this dissertation. The target of the interviews has then been opened not only to Italian subjects, but to German ones as well. The interviews would have been conducted to Italian alongside to German people. The country of origin became together with the interviewee's gender the other distinguishing feature.

The semester in Germany made it possible to establish contact with people who would likely be later part of the current research. In both cases, i.e. with Italians and Germans, I have found those who could have been interviewed among the circles of friends or classmates, people who know me or patronise mutual places. Indeed, the Italian participants were friends or classmates, in general people who know me well and I know well. I have excluded those people who I considered too young or too old, for instance

friends who are 19 or 20 years old and those who are 27 or older. For what concerns the German participants, the first people contacted were those met during my mobility in Freiburg im Breisgau or even before during other experiences abroad. Obviously, the pool of likely Italian respondents was larger than the German one and after contacting direct German friends I realised that I needed some external support to find the rest of the participants. I was lucky enough to receive help from friends and acquaintances who made it possible to also contact their friends. Once the sample of participants was decided I personally contacted each of them via messages. Being most of the participants in the circle of close friends or acquaintances, I have sent each of them a text via WhatsApp through a standard message claiming the topic and aim of my research. I quickly explained that my research was on sexting, in particular on young adults, and as I was carrying out qualitative research, I would have liked that person to take part in it. The participants were contacted during the month of October and they all replied affirmatively to the invitation to take part in the interview. It must be said that at first, I contacted more Italian people than needed and I then proceeded with the interviews with the participants who replied first and were immediately available for the interview. Knowing the importance of the first approach, this ought to send a clear message on the research explaining the topic and the focus as well as guaranteeing the interviewee's anonymity. How easy the availability of likely interviewees and the means to contact them were of somehow considerable importance for my work, as it would have meant that the part of collecting data could have been carried out in a reasonable amount of time.

Once decided the nationality of the subjects it came alongside clear that the focus of this research had slightly moved towards a comparison between the two countries taken into account, i.e. Italy and Germany. Together with an analysis of how each group carries out and/or perceives sexting, the aim and intent of my work also became that of comparing the two nationalities and using such elements as a distinguishing feature. To enrich the work, I set up the subjects' gender as a further distinguishing feature. After this short organisation and planning, the outcome was satisfying: I had a research topic, research subjects and within the latter further distinguishing features that would have then allowed me to set the analysis on different levels.

Consequently, the subjects of the analysis were divided into those with the German nationality and those with the Italian one. Within this division a further subdivision has been made between female and male interviewees. A total of twenty people has agreed to take part in the project. Within this group, eleven subjects are Italian (five identify themselves as women; six identify themselves as men) and the remaining nine are German (five identify themselves as women; four identify themselves as men). No further relevant distinguishing features were then identified.

2.3.3 Interviews, questions, and their structure

One main choice was then to be made regarding the tool I would have used to collect the data. It was clear that this work would have followed the structure of the qualitative research, but doubts arose as to what could have been the suitable tool. One fear was that people would not feel comfortable when asking to talk about sex, sexting, and their experiences and this drove them to opt for an anonymous questionnaire via Google modules at first. I relied on this decision at first due to the (wrong) idea that the subjects would have agreed to talk about the topic and would have told their experiences in an easier way. As at first I followed the path of an anonymous questionnaire through Google modules I set myself three goals: the questionnaire ought to be direct enough to make people immediately understand the questions; it ought to be also broad enough to make them provide a quite rich answer; and last, it ought to be not too long. The questionnaire was divided as I then divided the interview. A first part was dedicated to demographic features and to the use of social media, which were followed by a section on sex education, then on the ideas and perception on sexting and last on their personal experiences. The first problem I encountered here was that it was impossible to already determine the sub-questions I could have asked the participants to go deeper into their answers, how much would have they written? Would have they paid enough attention? The survey was combined of both multiple-answer questions and open questions and it would have been delivered directly to the participant as URL via WhatsApp message. Nevertheless, such decision was then reassessed bearing in mind that an interview could have brought to richer data in terms of details and explanations. Indeed, if I had opted for a written questionnaire sent to the participant, already decided elements of the research should have been changes, the research question to begin with. A first choice on an

anonymous questionnaire was based on a belief a questionnaire of this kind could have brought to a more reliable range of data collected as the subjects might have felt freer in replying with truthful answers.

However, I had to acknowledge that such data would have been limited to a short mere answer provided by the interviewee without a deeper understanding of the answer itself. In opposition to this, an interview conducted in person or via online platform could have allowed for deeper and wider answers, solicited where needed. On one hand, when presented with a written questionnaire, a person would limit the answer strictly to what is written in the question without going deeper into it. On the other, an interview can allow to collect more data and to deeper inspection into the person's feelings and ideas. In fact, in this case the interviewer has the power (and also duty) to ask for deeper explanations of the answers given if they feel the necessity. As said, the participants were contacted via WhatsApp with a standard message explaining the topic and aim of my research and asking them to take part in it. The message would already claim and assure the participant's anonymity once I would have analysed the results.

Having acknowledged this and having finally opted for an oral interview, the channel where to conduct it was then to be decided. Beside the pilot interview that was conducted face-to-face, all the other interviews with the subjects were conducted via the online platform Zoom. Each subject was personally contacted, and a meeting was then planned. Once the contact with the participants was established and they agreed to the interview, we planned the day for the interview and they were provided with the link for a Zoom meeting, where then all the interviews, one by one, took place.

As analysed in the previous section, there is not a standard on how long an interview ought to be and the current study proved it. In fact, the interviews did not have a fixed or set up length, their duration changed from one interview to another, but in average they would last from 50 minutes to one hour and a half. There are many or relevant factors explaining the change in duration, this, however, will be analysed in the following chapter. The participant was asked if they would give consent for the recording both before starting the recording and after, so to have a confirmation of such agreement. All the interviews were recorded to make it then possible to write the interviews or parts

of them down. The recordings helped to listen again to some parts in order to better understand what the participant stated and the tone or pace of their voice.

The interviews were conducted in about 45 days during the months of October and November, each of the interview followed a more or less fixed pattern of questions. A change in the order of the questions would appear only in two cases. First, having the person already replied to a following question while providing the answer for another one, in this case only the confirmation of such answer was then asked. Second, being the last part different according to one's sexting experiences, the questions in such parts were asked accordingly to that. As the subject sexted, they were asked to describe the last situation where they sexted or one situation they particularly remember; has the subject never sexted, they were asked the reason why.

For what concerns the questions, the interview was divided into different parts according to the topics that were perceived as relevant to the aim of this dissertation. In particular, the subjects were asked to answer questions divided into five parts, where each part had then different main questions together with their sub-questions to go deeper into each answer. The five parts are as follows:

1. demographic information.
2. the use of social media.
3. sexuality and sex education.
4. ideas and position on sexting.
5. personal experiences with sexting.

When asking for demographic information, the interviewee would set up first their nationality (German or Italian) and then their gender, being these two the distinguishing features taken into account. This section together with the second, i.e. the use of social media, were meant not only to collect information regarding the person, their background and their habits with social media, but also to make them feel comfortable and at ease when speaking. In particular, the second section would ask for information on the social media mostly used by the subject, the reasons, and the role such social media play in their

life. Being these two parts of the interview a brief introduction, the interviewer was not asked to spend much time on them.

The third, fourth, and fifth parts were then the relevant ones where I would have collected the required answers that would have been the data later analysed. A section on sex education was important to start to introduce the topic of sexting and to allow the interviewee for some time to feel comfortable when talking about sex. This part of the interview focused on the sex education that the interview had, whether at school, within the family or through other channels (e.g. friends and the Internet). Moreover, this also helped to set out the environment in which the subject grew up and was an instrument to understand some things that they would have later in the conversation said. This section turned then out to be a main one as the interviewees spent a relatively big amount of time in replying to these questions.

Following sex education, sexting was, finally, the focus of the last two sections. As the goal was also that to make the interviewee feel comfortable and in a safe place, it was decided to begin with some questions regarding the topic in general and to go through personal experiences later. In particular, the subjects were asked to provide a definition of what sexting is according to their experiences, ideas, or perceptions; they were then asked to explain their position towards the practice and, in concrete, what they thought about it. Such an open and wide question allowed the interviewee to provide a consequently open and wide answer. In some cases, they were guided through their answers as some of them did not know how to put into words something that does not usually require an explanation but is just 'done' instead. This also brought to a bigger amount of available data that would have been then one of the main parts of the analysis.

The interview would then close with questions on the interviewee's personal experiences, whether they be of a direct contact with sexting or not. The subject was here given the chance to end the interview via anonymous questionnaire or go on with the conversation and none of them opted for the first option. The anonymous questionnaire was organised in the same way as the last part of the interview. After guaranteeing the anonymity of their answers, they all felt comfortable enough to proceed with the interview face-to-face. In particular, the subjects were asked to describe the last time they sexted (if they have sexted) and in case the subject felt comfortable, they were also asked to provide

details on who they sexted with and how the experience went (e.g. was there an exchange of multimedia content? Did you then masturbate? What kind of pictures have you received/sent?). Should the case be that the subject has never sexted, they were asked to explain the reasons they have never done it and if they would be willing to sext if in what they perceive as the 'best situation'. All the participants seemed happy to have taken part in the interview, appreciating the topic and the way the discussion was carried out. As mentioned, participants were asked consent to the recording of their interview. All participants agreed and all interviews were recorded; consequently, I listened to each recording and wrote down each interview. This was a necessary step in order to carry out the thematic analysis of the interviews. In fact, such analysis was carried out starting from the transcription of each interview. The following section closing this chapter is providing a theoretical approach to the analysis that is later on proposed.

2.4 Theory of the thematic analysis

Researchers can adopt different approaches to analyse the qualitative data they have collected. Although most of them stick to one of these styles, Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2014) claim that a proper data analysis “combines appropriate elements and techniques from across traditions and epistemological perspectives” (p.2). This approach makes it clear that it might lead to better results if researchers do not exclude particular techniques out of personal discomfort or prejudices (*ibidem*). The variety of these techniques is to be framed in a context where the data are also collected through a variety of activities, although the most common ones are data generated in in-depth interviews, focus groups, or field observations (*ibidem*). Indeed, the data collected are different and come from different sources (*ibidem*). The three basic types are text, images, and sound. The first type is by far “the most common form of qualitative data analyzed in the social and health sciences” (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2014:7).

The way then the analysis is planned and carried out depends on the type of data collected as well as on the approach taken and on the outcome expected (*ibidem*). The main types of analysis are the exploratory and the confirmatory one. However, the latter is used less in social and behavioural research than the first (*ibidem*). Tab. 2.4 shows the

main elements that differentiate an exploratory (or content-driven) analysis to a confirmatory (or hypothesis-driven) one.

Tab. 2.4 Summary of Differences Between Exploratory and Confirmatory Approaches to Qualitative Data Analysis

Exploratory (“content-driven”)	Confirmatory (“hypothesis-driven”)
For example, asks: “What do x people think about y?”	For example, hypothesizes: “x people think z about y”
Specific codes/analytic categories NOT predetermined	Specific codes/analytic categories predetermined
Codes derived from the data	Codes generated from hypotheses
Data usually generated	Typically uses existing data
Most often uses purposive sampling	Generally employs random sampling
More common approach	Less common approach

Source: Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2014)

A researcher following an explanatory study would carefully and thoroughly read the data, seeking keywords, themes, or ideas that are then needed in the analysis, which is afterwards carried out (*ibidem*). Researchers following a confirmatory or hypothesis-driven analysis set the research in a frame where ideas and hypotheses are main elements. The categories for the analysis are determined before the analysis is carried out, without considering the data (*ibidem*). Moreover, the goals of the two types of research are also planned differently. Exploratory research normally works with research questions, while confirmatory research with hypotheses. One further difference lies in the approach towards target samples and data sources. On one hand, explanatory studies are based on non-probabilistic samples of participants and generate primary data (*ibidem*). On the other, confirmatory studies are based on probabilistic samples of participants and on

already-existing sources (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). As mentioned in the previous section of the current chapter, theory is needed to frame the research and to provide directions on the data examined and on how they are investigated. For instance, texts can be linguistically analysed, meaning that the structure, the meaning of the text itself, and the meaning of the words are the elements of the analysis. However, a text can also be analysed as source of the individuals' experiences. Here, the participants' perceptions, feelings, and behaviour are investigated (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2014). Such is the case of the current research. The decision on how to analyse the data is also led by the way such data are collected and structured, for instance, free listing or pile sorting are indeed different from structured or semi structured interviews (*ibidem*).

Thematic analysis refers to the “process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data” (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017:3352) and it requires a lot of involvement and interpretation from the researcher. Thematic analyses are flexible as they are not tied to particular theoretical perspectives. Such flexibility allows researchers and experts to diversify their work (*ibidem*). The thematic analysis of a research is not limited to a linguistic analysis but it investigates the ideas and themes. Indeed, identifying such themes is the aim of a thematic analysis (*ibidem*). Themes are the “patterns in the data that are important or interesting, and use these themes to address the research or say something about an issue” (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017:3353). Themes are then implemented into codes, which usually represent the identified themes. Moreover, strategies for thematic analysis vary according to the length of the items to investigate. Indeed, most of the qualitative research is based on the transcripts of data that are collected through in-depth interviews or focus groups that normally last from 1 to 2 hours.

Moreover, the interpretations and themes are to be supported by the actual data, thus the aim is to “describe and understand how people feel, think, and behave within a particular context relative to a specific research question” (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2014:11). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest a guide composed of six steps for a thematic analysis. As a first step, the researcher has to become very familiar with the data by reading the transcripts. In the second phase, the data are organised and initial codes are generated. The third step is where themes are searched and the codes can be gathered in such themes. In the fourth phase, the researchers review, modify, and develop the initial themes identified in the previous step. The fifth phase better defines the themes, while in

the sixth and last step, the researcher writes down the results and, as in the case of the current research, writes down the related section of the dissertation.

To conclude, thematic analyses encompass pieces of other theories, such as grounded theory, positivism, interpretivism and phenomenology, and it sums these up into one methodological framework (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2014). This approach is a rigorous (*ibidem*) but inductive set of techniques aimed at transparently and reliably identifying and investigating themes that are obtained from the textual data. The ultimate goal is to present as accurately and completely as possible the stories and experiences shared by study participants (*ibidem*).

3. Analysis of the results on sex education

This third chapter is going to analyse the data collected through the interviews I carried out. This thematic analysis is going to be divided into themes and each theme further divided into codes. The first two themes focus on sex education, on the sources of sex education and its role namely. I believe a section dedicated to sex education is needed to frame the answers that are provided for the questions on sexting. Here, the elements that were perceived as providing sex education will be investigated, such as school-based sex education, parenting sex education, porn, and other sources. The role and future of sex education are also topics of this analysis: is the sex education provided in schools enough? Or should families play a different role? Again, was the sex education received sufficient? In order to ensure the participants' anonymity their names have been changed and no personal data will be provided.

3.1 Sex education and its sources

As said in the first chapter, sex education aims at providing people with information, skills, and tools to understand and enjoy their sexual life towards a healthy sexuality (WHO, 2010). In this sense work is done by institutions such as families and schools. Although a SE with theoretical and scientific basis is normally provided in schools, there is no standardised programme which, if present, changes across the world. In this section, participants were asked to explain the sex education they were provided, in any context possible. The two groups of participants, Italian and German participants namely, provided homogeneous data. The main answers here provided as sources for sex education were: schools, families, peers, porn, and other sources.

3.1.1 School-based sex education

Schools were indeed the main element for SE provided by the participants. Experiences and conversations with peers made me expect answers here that would highlight the fact that schools might not have been the best teaching roles when it came to sex education. Participants here were asked what the sources of their SE were and as they all mentioned

schools as one of such sources, they were then asked to further discuss the role schools had. The teaching programmes and the teaching figures were investigated, as well as what they learned from this and what they would change.

The answers provided by the Italian participants were mostly homogeneous, most of them agreed on the type of education received, on the context, outcomes, and possible developments. In particular, Italian respondents claimed to have received some sort of classes where they were taught about sexuality. Such classes were sometimes included into their science programmes and other times they were separated seminars with experts from outside the school. The classes were held between elementary and middle schools, so when the students were around 10 to 14 years old. Such meetings would not repeatedly nor often take place. In this sense, some participants claimed that they found it uncomfortable that these classes would investigate things that none of them had yet experienced. Indeed, as they had yet not experienced sex and sexuality, such topics seemed so far from them and a discussion in that sense was difficult. To support such perception, other participants claimed that the sex education classes in school did not analyse the matter thoroughly and deeply, probably because they had such little experience with sex that it would have been difficult and probably not that helpful to go deeper into the topics.

It might be interesting to point out that seven out of the eleven subjects, affirmed that they felt they had not received a real sex education. According to some participants, it was difficult to discuss the sex education they received as it was hard for them to recall and remember what they did. For instance, one participant claimed:

“Unfortunately I don't have much to say, because I don't feel I have had sex education in the strict sense of the term”. (Adriana, F, 24 y.o., Italy)

When asked what she meant with “the strict sense” she said that, according to her ideas and experiences, sexuality education deals not only with sex but with everything that is involved when someone faces sex for the first time. According to her experience, sexuality as she perceives it is discussed little and badly.

When it came to the discussion on the topics taught during these programmes, the participants agreed once again with the answers. They all claimed that the classes focused

on two topics: body anatomy and precautions. However, in this way, the ‘sexual pleasure’ information was left aside and totally ignored. The professors would stress the fact that women can get pregnant and how that happens, focusing then only on penetration and heterosexual sex. In this regard, few participants said that the SBSE they received lacked information about female masturbation, something that is, according to them, often mentioned to male peers. They suggest that masturbation is a controversial topic when it comes to female pupils who then struggle to find information on that and find themselves comfortable in doing it, whereas boys are almost naturally let to know that they can provide themselves pleasure by doing it. Moreover, one participant claimed that she has never received any sexual education class beside biology class on anatomy and she adds:

“At school we never had lessons on sexuality and probably never even when we did get to the anatomy part and the male and female reproductive organs, it also happened that it was skipped as a chapter precisely because maybe the professor or professor in question was ashamed to talk about human anatomy, which is a very bizarre thing, but I remember that even at the level of anatomy nothing so let alone sexuality”. (Adriana, F, 24 y.o., Italy)

Other participants highlighted this idea claiming that the sex education they got would deal with sex and sexuality as something strictly ‘scientific’. The Italian SBSE programmes were not of abstinence-only kind, in fact none of the participants mentioned abstinence as an element taught. However, they all claimed that the lessons would focus on contraception and, in particular, on condoms to avoid pregnancies and STIs. In this case, one male participant affirmed that these classes were useful for him when it came to protections and contraceptives, which were indeed the only thing he can recall from those seminars. Although most classes were held by the science professor, some participants said that they had an expert giving them these classes, e.g. someone from the red cross or a doctor.

Some participants mentioned two further elements that might be interesting, one is the embarrassment during these classes and the other is the role played by religious education in schools. Some participants claimed that they did not feel at ease nor comfortable during those classes and this made the discussion on sex education difficult. Having someone belonging to another generation made the students feel more detached from what they were learning. As previously mentioned, professors would often skip a

dialogue of this kind as they felt embarrassed and not comfortable, claiming however that shame should not be present in a discussion on something so natural like sex. Moreover, other participants added that these classes were perceived as a joke by their class, probably as they wanted to hide some embarrassment they were feeling. In both cases and in others, it appeared clear that the professor's figure was not the best suited for this role thus they did not face these classes with the required seriousness, but with jokes and laughter instead. However, one participant went against this perception. Indeed, one participant claimed that having his professor teaching was a key element for his learning and it was comforting, not embarrassing. Moreover, almost half of the participants (4 out of the 11 participants) mentioned religious education and added that they would rather delete this hour from their learning programmes and dedicate time to other teachings, such as sex education, which they find more useful.

The findings that came out during the conversations about SBSE convey the perception that SBSE was not very useful and participants do not have clear memories of it. For instance, one participant stated:

“My sex education was so meaningful that I don't even remember it”. (Sara, F, 24 y.o., Italy)

In addition, one participant said that finding out what sex and penetration are was a bit shocking for him. He is among the few people who agree that sex education received in school must have indeed helped, although he also claims that “it was not so breakthrough” (Tommaso, M, 24 y.o., Italy).

Participants did not limit to list what went wrong with their SBSE, but they also discussed the possible means through which such programmes can improve. They indeed realise that they are facing a controversial topic, some participants highlighted the fact that it is not easy to talk about sex with minors who belong to different backgrounds and families, especially during their puberty, a period of life known to be difficult. It is indeed not easy to fix a standardised programme accepted by families as well. However, some participants claim that schools should be more present in this regard, more pervasive, and teachers should definitely be less embarrassed when discussing sex education. Some participants suggest that schools could introduce fixed and scheduled teachings carried

out by experts who are more prepared and who could assist standard professors. In addition, it was suggested that someone who is not your own professor and who is available to talk about sex education without shame could help to create a 'safe space' for the students where they can freely open about their curiosities and doubts. The booster in SBSE discussed in the first chapter is a common pattern among some of the interviews. In addition, the idea that students ought to be provided more classes was supported and on the topic it was said:

"I wouldn't want it to be a one-off thing, so that you do it once in your life and that's it. But that it was more fixed". (Matteo, M, 23 y.o., Italy)

He also claimed that for schools to change their approach towards sex education, society has also to change. Moreover, school-based sex education ought to overcome mere explanations on how penetration works and on the consequences of unprotected sex. SBSE should also educate students towards the idea that bodies are not limited to reproductive matters but are also aimed at feeling pleasure. One participant mentioned two important elements: respect and consent. She suggested that SBSE should indeed explain about how sex works and about the importance of protections but should also focus on the act where respect and consent between people should rule.

When it came to conducting and analysing the interviews with the German participants, differences were identified. The answers provided by the participants were quite homogeneous. SBSE was also held during biology class and in most of the cases carried out by their biology professor. Such classes would normally take place from 4th to 10th grade so when the participants were 9/10 years old, 12/13 years old or 15 years old. In two particular cases, the parents had to sign a consent and inform the children about the topics prior to the class. In the first case, the parents had to sign a consent form so that the children could be allowed into the class; in the second case, the children had to be informed prior to the class as professors wanted their students already had some pieces of information about the topic.

The content of the classes touched three elements: male and female body anatomy, how to avoid pregnancies, and protections. However, in general, all the participants claimed that they already knew about sex when they first approached it at school. All the

participants agreed on these three topics and did not remember that they dealt with any other matter. Some participants affirmed that they were provided with a strictly theoretical and anatomical side of sex education, here they learned about topics like erections, pregnancies, protections. However, they claim that they would have liked to learn about other things too, for instance sexual orientation and sexual identity. Another problem was related to the professor providing the class. In some cases, the professor was not well prepared nor did they have their students' trust, for instance it was claimed that the main problem for some participants was that they did not have a good professor.

Some participants could not perfectly recall the sex education classes they had, how these classes were, and the content, whereas most of them agreed on the fact that these classes were in some way useful to them. Few interviewees claim that the SBSE they were provided with was sufficient to develop their knowledge on sex and sexuality but they realise that these classes lacked information on oral sex and diseases caused by that. Moreover, this perception was further supported by participants highlighting the usefulness of SBSE adding that they do not feel to belong to that group of people who state that the sex education they received was completely useless. Nevertheless, shame and laughter were present also among German participants. For instance, it was said that, although SBSE was useful, classes would laugh about it making fun of the content and of the professor. However, this did not help and made the classes less helpful and useful. Different participants supported this fact claiming that it was common not to take these teachings seriously, but to laugh and play with the condoms instead.

No participant mentioned their region of origin as influencing, whether positively or negatively, their sex education besides one male participant. He was the only person to have mentioned his region of origin as an element that influenced his sex education. He comes from Northern Germany, where, according to him, people are more open when it comes to nudity. In fact, they are used to going to nude beaches and in general to nude bodies. This helped it during SE as he already knew about the male and female anatomy taught during these classes.

One further element mentioned during the interviews was masturbation. Some female participants affirmed that they suffered the absence of an education in this sense during the development of their sexuality. Indeed, boys and girls are treated differently

here and female participants felt ashamed when they got to know what masturbation is and that girls also do that. To support this perception an example of the movie industry was mentioned, where the audience is always provided the stereotypical image of the guy masturbating who gets caught by someone, but such image never depicts girls. Moreover, they further claimed that they were not provided with a proper sex education and that the main problem was the limited topics they dealt with. Indeed, the classes lacked information on broader and more modern topics, e.g., non-heterosexual sex and sexual practices. Indeed, findings show that SBSE does not deal with the topics deep or thoroughly enough. For instance, one participant said:

“I think we’re in the wrong age. I think it’s important if you’re going to the puberty to know something, but it’s an age nobody knows anything. You’re too shy to ask things and so on. This is not interesting for me and so you don’t listen or it’s not so. Yeah, I think it should be after that also a little. Yeah, and just. I think it’s also only light. It’s not so deep”.
(Wanda, F, 22 y.o., Germany)

The interesting element highlighted by most of the participants is that the classes were quite active and students were asked to participate. For instance, it was claimed that this was the thing that helped the most and made those classes more interesting. Moreover, in few cases the class was separated between boys and girls, the two groups would face the topics differently and this also helped.

When participants were asked how and if they would improve anything in SBSE they got, most of them said that a booster is much needed. For instance:

“I think so in school and I thought it was nice to have also. Be sexually educated later because I mean with like 12 13, everything is so uncomfortable you know it’s puberty, yet everything is uncomfortable and cringe”. (Sophie, F, 24 y.o., Germany)

One further suggestion provided by the participants concerned the introduction of discussions on other aspects of sexuality. They agreed on the need to introduce broader topics that are not strictly related to penetration and hence heterosexual sex, but that such topics could be more inclusive and also investigate the pleasure that the act itself can generate. Participants claim that sex education is also a means for self-expression and provides an image of sex that is too ‘clean’ in the sense that it does not provide a real depiction of sex and of its aspects, e.g., dirty thoughts. Finally, one participant suggested

that she would have appreciated it if other students a bit older than her would have shared their experiences in sex. She framed this suggestion in a context where students get to learn about sex from someone who belongs to a generation that is too far from them and into which they cannot reflect themselves nor feel represented.

To sum up and conclude, German and Italian participants have mutual experiences and perceptions on the sex education they were provided with in schools. Indeed, most of the elements discussed by Italian participants were then shared by German ones and the two countries are similar in the way they provided SBSE, in the content, and structure of the classes. Both programmes were held during science or biology class, where students were from 9 to 14 years old but after that they did not further receive any sex education and this was an issue to most of them. However, German classes seemed to be more active as they involved students with group projects and presentations. Nevertheless, German participants also mentioned and highlighted more the feeling of embarrassment or shame felt during these classes. In both cases, it must be acknowledged the difficulty to introduce a standardised SE that would fully satisfy students.

3.1.2 Parenting sex education

Families have also been mentioned as sources for sex education, for some people more than for others. Parents or one parent, usually the mother, have played a role in their children's sex education, some of them with just a talk on protections whereas others with a more present discussion. Expectations on Italian participants were the same as those concerning SBSE. Being Italy a quite conservative and a not so sexually permissive country (Baumgartner et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2015), I expected that the Italian participants would have not referred to their parents as a leading element in their sex education. This was indeed the main trend, although exceptions arose.

The main trend in findings here suggest that most of the participants have not received sex education from their parents. For instance, few participants claimed that their parents have never provided them with sex education as they trusted them and believed that was not needed. Among those who never had a discussion with their parents, two participants even claim that the topic was and still is a taboo within their family. The female participant realised that things have evolved in time and that now they can face

the topic in a superficial way, and she perceives it as a positive development. Hers is an interesting case as, according to what she said during the interview, her family appears to be the one of the most conservative among those of the research and she was also the only person to mention religion as reason for this block. Being sex a taboo in her family she also has felt limited in a discussion on this topic with peers or other people and, during her interview, she recalled feeling uncomfortable during her adolescence. She claimed:

“I mean the fact that my mother is ashamed to talk about sex obviously gets to me too, I assimilated. So I had to, I then found myself having to make a journey on this point of view [...], even simply introspective, personal to normalise the issue a little”. (Giovanna, F, 24 y.o., Germany)

Other findings proved that for some participants a conversation or dialogue on sexuality arrived later on, once they started having sexual experiences. Indeed, they did not receive any kind of parenting sex education informing them on what sex is, on the risks, and on the pleasure, but they would start receiving the recommendations especially on protections when they had their first girlfriend or boyfriend. For instance, one participant addressed a before and after, how the conversation with his parents changed after he had his first sexual experience. However, in this case as in others, the focus of these conversations or recommendations was protected sex in order to avoid pregnancies or STIs.

Another big part of the participants claimed to have received some sort of ‘speech’ from their parents, which would however remain on a superficial surface. Such speech would include recommendations on precautions and safe sex without going into details about sexuality. Findings also show that such speech was most of the times provided by the mother. In general, participants mentioned some level of embarrassment when sex was related to adults. They did not talk with their parents about their doubts or curiosities on sex, but they claimed that in general they would not speak with any adult on the topic. One female participant highlighted the fact that only her mother would give her recommendations on sex, for instance “be careful”, while her dad was totally absent as sex education teaching figure. She also added that she was treated differently from her brother who is a few years older than her and was provided with more freedom than her.

Although many participants got their sex education speech from their mothers, one participant claimed to have received it from his father. The participant claimed that his mother gave the input for the conversation which was then carried out by his father. He described the conversation as something not particularly comfortable. By the time this happened, he had his first girlfriend and his father, being the male figure of the family, informed him on the precautions needed in order to avoid unwanted pregnancies and STIs. Once again, the only topic discussed was contraception.

One interesting case that is different from the general trend is that of a female participant who had a different experience with parenting sex education, in particular with her mom. The participant claimed that she and her parents have always discussed sexuality. When she started having doubts on sex (around 10/11 years old), she started to talk with her parents about them and up to now she sees them as the main source for her sex education. However, she admitted that these conversations were filtered by the decency towards her parents and that she would find more comfort in speaking with her mom, probably due to gender-related reasons.

When asked if they would change the way their parents sexually educated them and if they would have liked their mother or father to play a bigger role, answers varied: some participants claimed that they would have liked their parents to be more present, whereas others affirmed that they are satisfied with how things were carried out. Few participants claimed that it was not necessary for their parents to sexually educate them more as everything turned out fine but they also agreed on the fact that they could have been more present as a source for SE. It was mentioned here a difference with schools, where parents ought to be a 'safe space' with a more open-minded approach towards the topics, whereas schools deal with these topics from a more scientific point of view. One participant added:

“Maybe parents' fears can be filtered down to their children and so it might not be crystal-clear information that makes you develop your relationships point so I'm glad I developed it on my own but parents should help you experience it in more if serenity”. (Luna, F, 24 y.o., Germany)

She also claims that her friends have the same experience concerning parenting sex education. On the contrary, another participant claimed that she would have liked her

parents to be more present in her sex education but she realises that she and her parents belong to two totally different generations and this makes it hard to have conversations on such a delicate and controversial topic.

The answers provided by German participants were quite homogeneous in this case as well. The main trend proves that German young adults did not receive parenting sex education either, although some mentioned that they knew that, if needed, they could have talked with their parents. Other findings show that parents would rather give recommendations such as “be careful” or “use protections” instead of providing a broader and deeper sex education.

Some participants said that they never had a conversation on sexuality with their parents or ‘the talk’ but rather some sentences like “be careful” and “use protections”. However, one participant feels fine with the fact that she did not talk about that with her parents also because she chose that, she chose not to ask them when she had doubts and to ask someone else like peers instead. But it is indeed always good to know that parents are open to a conversation in this sense. The same perception was at the beginning shared by other participants. They claimed that their parents never sexually educated them but they have been open about it and they knew that they could ask them if they needed to know something. Indeed, one participant said:

“So I think my parents were always like quite open about it and away that we didn't have like the talk, but [...] if I wanted to know something I knew that I could talk to them. And I feel like they did a very good sex education because they were like [...] open about it but like not too direct like they didn't give too much information but also not too little”.
(Martha, F, 23 y.o., Germany)

For instance, she recalled a particular episode when she was a child and she read in a newspaper an article about oral sex. The participant claimed she found it disgusting and asked the mother about that, who then explained to her what oral sex is adding then that she should never force herself to do that if she would not feel like but that it is common that people do it. The same participant also highlighted one main important teaching provided by the parents, that of queer relationships. Indeed, her parents have never separated heterosexual and non-heterosexual relationships but always talked about

“people who love each other” (Martha, F, 23 y.o., Germany). This helped her to perceive sexuality in a much more positive way.

Other participants also received no parenting sex education but claimed to be ok with that as:

“I could imagine it's kind of weird to get all that information from your parents like I don't want to share experiences with my dad”. (Derek, M, 23 y.o., Germany)

Data show that some participants could not remember if they had discussed sex education with their parents although they claimed to have a good relationship with them. Indeed, several participants affirmed not to have had any parenting sex education. One last participant addressed the absence of a parenting sex education to the fact that his family is quite prude and conservative, but he did not mention any religious matter.

Within parenting sex education, German participants supported the trend that mothers are usually the parent who embarks on a discussion on sexuality with their daughters. For instance, some female participants claimed that they discussed about sex with their mothers. One of them reported a few examples of such discussions which would aim at exchanging experiences on sex. Another participant also claimed that when she needed to talk about such topics, she would do it with his mother. However, she also stated that she prefers to talk about sex and sexuality with her peers.

As for school-based sex education, findings for parenting sex education are quite homogeneous for both Italian and German participants. Some differences yet arose. Indeed, provided both groups no parenting sex education, Italian participants claimed they experienced the topic within the family as a taboo. On the contrary, according to most German participants, although they also did not receive any sex education from their parents, they knew they could have talked with them if they wanted. One main mutual finding is that related to the recommendations that both Italian and German parents made. In fact, instead of providing a thorough conversation on sexuality, parents opted for shorter recommendations for their children, like “be careful” and “use protection”.

3.1.3 Sex education through peers

Findings also suggested that young adults get, as a source for sex education, their peers and especially conversations with peers on personal experiences. No particular expectations preceded the data collected, as it is of widespread acknowledgment that people might rely on friends to share their experiences and receive suggestions. Moreover, all of the participants, both those from Italy and those from Germany, mentioned sex education through peers although some claimed it was more useful than for others. However, no participant said that they have never had conversations with peers on sex and sexuality.

According to one participant sex education through peer conversation is perceived as self-education because she would independently inform and ask her peers. However, findings prove that participants would address their friends with this kind of conversation only after they had sexual experiences, not before. Indeed, all of the participants mentioned such theory and supported it saying that discussions on sexuality arose after experiences. It is however clear to everyone that such conversations were important in order to gain other perspectives on the same sexual practice, indeed it was claimed:

“Many things, I may have understood through my own or my peers, or even simply through a conversation with them”. (Adriana, F, 24 y.o., Italy)

When asked on which occasions such conversations would take place, all of the participants agreed that they would not talk about sex before having had practical experiences. Moreover, some participants claimed that they would only talk about sex with those friends who already had sexual experiences so as to share her stories with them. In particular, they would ask them how their first time went, what, and how they felt. Few participants highlighted the importance of conversations on sexuality not only with friends but also with partners. Furthermore, they claimed that when they started having sexual experiences, they had limited perception and ideas on how broad sexuality might be and conversations with peers in this regard helped them to overcome such limits.

Many participants claimed that they started having conversations on sexuality as soon as they had their first sexual experience. However, one participant affirmed that in her adolescent or early adulthood she did not talk with her friends about sexuality

probably because, according to her perception, she had her first experience quite late and she was ashamed. In fact, she said:

“And for a long time I never spoke about it, partly because I had always been ashamed to speak about these things, partly because I had done nothing until a certain point, meaning I could not speak, meaning I felt I had no right to speak or felt inferior.” (Sara, F, 24 y.o., Italy)

However, according to her and comparing her statements with those from other participants, she seemed to be one of the few people who did not particularly rely on their friends during their sex education. In fact, she claimed that sexuality was perceived as a taboo within her circle of friends, thus such conversations would not take place as often as they did for other participants. The same feeling and perception was supported by another female participant who claimed that she would normally feel embarrassed when conversations on sexuality took place as her family perceived the topic as a taboo and influenced her perception as well. Hence, when her friends started to talk about their sexual experiences, she did not feel comfortable to share hers nor to take part in the conversation.

As for parenting sex education, data show that participants experienced a ‘before’ and ‘after’ to conversations with peers as well, such conversations would indeed occur before having had experiences but changed after them. According to the participants, the ‘before’ would include them and their friends watching porn and then discuss it in a superficial and goliardic way. The ‘after’ conversations occurred once they had their first sexual experience and they would focus on sharing details on such experiences.

In general, findings prove that the participants addressed those peers who had already had sexual experiences. To support such perception, it was said:

“We would chat maybe with someone who was clearly more experienced than me and say, I mean also because I kind of experience sex a lot”. (Tommaso, M, 24 y.o., Italy)

The participant then added that, during his adolescence and his early adulthood, he perceived his friends as a ‘safe space’ where he knew he could talk about sexuality without feeling judged. In fact, he could not do so within his family who, on the contrary, considered sexuality as a taboo.

Two interesting points of view, that were not expected, arose during some of the interviews concerning the tone and content of the conversations. For what concerns the content, some participants suggested that the conversations with peers were filtered and would only mention macho and virile things that however did not reflect the reality. Regarding the tone, some participants claimed that they would not talk about sex and sexuality in a serious way, they would rather joke about it. For instance, it was said on this tone:

“Let's say [...] as a joke, without ever dealing with these topics in a serious manner, that is, not even with friends”. (Alessio, M, 25 y.o., Italy)

The main trend in findings indeed proved friends and peers to be one of the most useful sources for sex education, however one particular case suggested the opposite. One participant claimed that he did not share particularly much with his friends. He said that this might be partially explained by the fact that he was the first amongst his friends to have had sexual experiences and would have hence felt uncomfortable if he had asked or talked about it with his inexperienced peers. He then added:

“Mainly I was talking to my partner, maybe comparing myself with other realities, I did not compare myself with my friends because I was the slightly younger one in such a situation, so I did not find in them a valid comparison”. (Alberto, M, 26 y.o., Italy)

The data collected suggested further interesting findings concerning gender differences on different levels: in the way guys and girls talk about sexuality and in the way boys and girls get information on sexuality. Indeed, it was mentioned a major difference between female and male peers concerning masturbation. One female participant claimed that guys perceive masturbation in a much more natural way than girls although both genders have their natural instincts towards masturbation. She also reported a difference in the way the two groups address the topics. On one hand, the guys faced the discussion in a much freer way; on the other, girls almost avoided the topic or faced it feeling embarrassed and uncomfortable. Nevertheless, it is interesting to mention the fact that none of the participants said that sex education through peers was their only source for sex education.

The data collected from German participants did not provide much different findings than those from Italian participants. Some participants better investigated the role peer education had while others remained on a superficial level; for some participants, peer conversation on sexuality played a bigger role in their sex education, whereas for others it was much more marginal. Only a few participants did not directly mention peer conversations as a source for their sexual education, although, once asked, they admitted having shared experiences with her friends. Moreover, they also provided differences in the way they would talk about sexuality when/if they and their friends have a partner from when/if they do not have a partner. In particular, one participant claimed that, in the first situation, they would not go into details of their experiences mostly to protect their partners' privacy; in the second situation, they would tend to share more details as they are not emotionally attached to that person. However, when directly addressed those conversation and asked her if she could remember one particular situation, she could not remember and added:

“I don't remember like that. I would specifically go to someone and ask like how that, but it was more like a natural conversation and then you would ask. Or maybe comment and share what what you know”. (Sophie, F, 24 y.o., Germany)

Although the general trend showed that participants have had positive experiences when talking with peers about sexuality, one participant claimed that peers, especially classmates, did not play any positive role in her sex education. According to one participant, she attended a very conservative school where people would judge each other and would not carry out conversations on sexuality, which was indeed considered a taboo. She claimed that this perception and this mentality influenced her and that was for her an issue. Indeed, this experience made her feel wrong during those occasions where she would have conversations on sexuality as if that environment taught her that such conversations are negative and bad. The same participant said that later on in her adolescence she met a more sexually permissive group of friends from another city and such group would address the topic in a totally different way. According to what she said during the interview, these friends discussed about sex positivity, sexuality, and women. She indeed realised that these conversations helped her the most to have a positive perception and approach towards sex. Participants claiming that they did not talk about

sexuality with their friends were not many, but few participants supported this perception and claimed that they would not face conversations of this kind with their peers.

General trends show that those who had negative experiences in sex education within school or families had consequently troubles when carrying out conversations on sexuality with peers. For instance, one participant, who was not allowed into sex education classes in school, claimed that his classmates joked about sexuality and would not take the topic or the conversations seriously. He also added that he did not want to ask them about the content of the SE classes as he did not want them to know that he was not yet well informed on sex. He added:

“At all, it was just like the embarrassment wasn't from talking about sex [...]. It was asking my peers for knowledge because we were a rough school. [...] It would be so uncool to even ask”. (Derek, M, 23 y.o., Germany)

As previously mentioned by another female participant, this male participant was also lucky to have met, later in his adolescence, a group of people who were willing to carry out conversations on sexuality and to share their experiences. Indeed, he admitted that peer learning was the best tool he was provided with because he was given the possibility to share experiences with people who were his same age and not an older and detached professor.

It was quite common for participants to not recall the exact content of the conversations or any particular conversation they had. Few participants mentioned the fact that they indeed had conversations with peers but were not able to better investigate the role their friends had in their sex education, especially in their early adolescence. Both participants claimed that the conversations changed throughout the years and that now they address the topic more often. However, among all the participants, they discussed the role of their peers in sex education the least.

Data collected from the interviews with German participants also prove that gender differences exist when it comes to conversations with peers on sexual experiences. In this case as well, differences arose on different levels: on the way boys and girls are educated; on the level of education; and on the notorious gendered double standard

discussed in the first chapter. One participant when talking about such gender differences claimed:

“I like say that and that females are also more educated than males, it's probably because you have to carry out the child and everything and girls feel and fear more the consequences”. (Sophie, F, 24 y.o., Germany)

This participant assumed that girls are more educated than their male peers as girls are more aware of possible consequences which would directly affect them. Other participants also supported these gender differences, introducing a gendered double standard in the way people judge girls. One participant said that, especially in her school, girls tended to be more judged than their male peers who would equally experience sexuality. She also said:

“Also this whole you know Oh yeah, if a boy sleeps with many women, he's a hero. But the other way around she's a slut like generally speaking. And yeah, people were not cool about that.” (Martha, F, 23 y.o., Germany)

As for the previous cases, rates for peer conversations on sexuality among Italian and German participants are quite homogeneous except for a few findings. In general, all the participants agreed on the fact that they are more likely to talk about sexuality and sexual experiences with their peers rather than with their parents and, although some do not recall any particular conversation, they all claimed to have carried out a conversation of this kind at least once. Both groups also addressed feelings like shame or embarrassment during the conversations which were, in some cases, filtered and not taken seriously. One major finding proved that gender differences are present and perceived in both groups but only mentioned by girls. However, one difference showed that Italian participants directly mentioned friends or peers as source for sex education while German participants addressed the topic after they were asked about it.

3.1.4 Sex education through porn and other sources

This section of the interview dedicated to sex education ended by asking the participant if there were other sources for sex education besides family, peers, and school. Porn and the Internet were two other main elements throughout the participants' process of sex learning and, as investigated in the first chapter, participants provided both positive and

negative side of porn-learning. The Internet is also considered a tool of self-learning and the fact that it provides broad and heterogeneous content helped the participants to look for particular pieces of information. During the interviews, other elements for sex education were mentioned, for instance movie industry, newspapers, and personal experiences – which are also perceived as the thing that taught them the most.

All the Italian participants mentioned porn as an element that was present throughout their sex education process, some of the interviewees automatically and directly addressed the subject, others were asked to discuss the matter, some investigated porn more deeply, while others in a superficial way. The findings here prove, as the first chapter thoroughly investigated, that porn does represent one of the tools available to learn about sex and sexuality. Participants perceived this as self-learning and, for instance, one male participant said that porn is helpful as one has an immediate visual response to doubts and curiosities they have on sex. In general, the interviews made it clear that young adults have the ability to acknowledge that porn might not be the best tool for sex education as it could provide a false depiction of reality. Some participants claimed that, although they learnt from porn, they also believe it wrongly reflects and depicts the real side of sex. According to one participant's experience, one of the false depictions suggested by porn relates to the size of the penis and the fact that, in porn, a bigger penis directly brings actors to feel more sexual pleasure. When investigating these negative elements in porn, the participants also mentioned the depiction of penetration as the main, if not only, means to feel pleasure. These same downsides of porn were discussed by other participants, making it clear that porn is not perceived in a positive way although they all agreed that it played some kind of educational role during their early adolescence. Other participants supported this last perception also claiming that porn depicts people who always reach the orgasm through penetration and, what they consider being the worst element, actors never wear condom. Such a problem leads adolescents watching porn to undermine the role condoms or any other contraception have in sexual intercourses.

The tone of the conversations on porn was in general negative and did not tend to present porn as a positive activity. One participant referred to porn as tool for her sex education with shame and embarrassment claiming that when she was in her early adolescence she did not admit watching it and learning from it. However, she then

understood that porn was and is not a resourceful tool from which to learn and that she watches it now with much more consciousness claiming:

“So you make expectations based on what you see though. It's only when you're older that you have another awareness, you can understand, you can split things up and act. Is this just for entertainment or can I do this? Yes, but with someone I know”. (Sara, F, 24 y.o., Italy)

Moreover, several participants supported the idea that people should not learn from porn in the sense that adolescents should be provided with more tools for their sex education and not be ‘forced’ to learn from porn which they perceive as only source available or as the only source they can rely on. On the contrary, other participants claimed that porn can be useful as one is provided with an immediate visual response and seeing what you can do during a sexual intercourse might help those who have not yet had any experience. In fact, one participant said that porn was for him the only source from which he actually learned something before having had sexual experiences, he claimed:

“As I had never seen anyone doing it [...], you kinda repeat and copy what you see”.
(Matte, M, 23 y.o., Italy)

The participant’s perception was supported by other participants who also agreed that porn can teach people on how to carry out some sexual practices. Their conversation on the topic had a positive tone and connotation on porn, although they realised that porn might not always reflect what happens in reality. Findings also prove that participants would not use porn as sex education tool once they started having sexual experiences, for instance some participants said that they would only learn from porn before their sexual experiences.

Together with porn, the Internet was often mentioned during the interviews. However, as for porn, participants did not particularly investigate its role as they claimed they did not have much to say about it. Few participants immediately quoted external inputs for their sex education, television and social media namely. One participant then investigated more their role when asked to and she claimed that she would:

“Take inspiration from other situations heard in the circle of friends seen on television and also develop independently what is right and wrong in certain behaviours”. (Luna, F, 24 y.o., Italy)

As the conversation proceeded in this sense, she mentioned movie and tv series industries as contributing to providing inputs for her sex education. She particularly addressed the tv series Sex Education, which was also addressed by another male participant. Some participants referred to social media as helping them to develop their sexual knowledge. It was said:

“Social from a quasi-scientific point of view I also have an explanation of the risks perhaps from a legal point of view of permissible behaviour or chronicles i.e. facts that happened”. (Luna, F, 24 y.o., Italy)

Another participant provided an interesting point of view on the difference on sex education between her generation and that of her parents highlighting how easy and immediate it is nowadays to access information on sexuality. The participants claimed that young adults are provided with more tools (social media to name one), that they tend to ask themselves more questions and hence to seek more answers. Nowadays, adolescents and young people in general are more exposed to social media and such intense exposure leads to both positive and negative consequences. On one hand, it is easier to obtain information and it is indeed positive if people are well informed on sexuality in order to carry out a healthy sexual life; on the other, being more exposed makes social media a place where judgement towards users is too strong. Moreover, the participant highlighted the fact that social media and the Internet in general might also provide material with poor content which could lead people to acquire false learning. Among these, she claimed that the Internet gave her the perception that sex pleasure had a gendered double side and according to this double side sex aims at making the men feel pleasure. It was said:

“Initially, when I first related to or came into contact with sex in general, for me it was that the fact of enjoying, of coming was mainly for male and not for female”. (Adriana, F, 24 y.o., Italy)

In general, participants mentioned social media pages that deal with sexuality concerning not only female but also male features and anatomy. In this sense, some

participants said that they would mainly address this kind of social media pages as they wanted to learn not only about the female or male body and how to feel pleasure herself, but also on the partner's bodies and how to make them feel pleasure. Indeed, they claimed that neither school-based sex education nor parenting sex education provided information of this kind. The same behaviour was adopted by participants who claimed that they sought information they could not be provided with in school or within family, female masturbation and sexual pleasure namely. She also added that the Internet provided her with most of the information she currently has on sexuality and that sex and sexuality do not follow universal rules on sexual pleasure but each person likes different things instead, and she claimed this to be the best teaching the Internet provided her with. The findings proved that the Internet was perceived as an alternative source where participants could seek information they would not ask their parents or teachers.

Findings prove Internet and porn to be one of the most discussed sources for sex education, especially when participants wanted information that was not provided by the school or the family. Together with them, experience was often quoted by the participants as being the most effective tool. The participants claimed that they learned the most from their first proper physical approach with a partner. Indeed, such experience was useful the most if shared with a fixed partner, whether a girlfriend or a boyfriend. For instance, when referring to the things she learnt during her relationships it was claimed:

“There it was my second main source of information. It was my first boyfriend with whom I started to discover sexuality in a relationship and it was there that I started to understand, not only my body, but also how it works”. (Giulia, F, 24 y.o., Italy)

Few participants supported the findings according to which experience was the participants' main source for sex education. Such findings also prove that both female and male participants perceive experience as one of the most useful tools. It is also important to mention that this perception was shared by most of the interviewees and, opposite to some topics that were investigated because I asked about them, the participants themselves addressed the matter.

Findings concerning German participants did not provide a heterogeneous picture and were in line with those previously identified. According to German participants, the

Internet did not play much of a role within their sexual education. Some of them mentioned the Internet as a tool within this regard but none of them investigated its role. Some participants said that social media were perceived as a positive source where they could share their experiences more openly and investigate more delicate topics, such as sexual identity. The conversations on the topic highlighted also in this case that the Internet was used as an ‘alternative’ tool for pieces of information that the participants were not provided with in school or within the family. Such information would refer to certain body parts or on how to carry out particular sexual practices. However, one participant claimed that she did not use the Internet as source for her sex education and that she would rather ask her mother or peers; whereas another participant said that he would rather look on the internet and click on random pages rather than going directly to porn, and added:

“Just type the things you're interested in on Google. [...] Sometimes I mean when you're young, you're just clicking on the first thing. Well, I guess about some unserious things, some articles. I don't guess about porn or information just or forms or entertainment, I guess”. (Patrick, M, 26 y.o., Germany)

Some participants did not mention porn among the sources from which they learned about sex and sexuality, no gender differences were in this case identified as both female and male participants agreed on this perspective. Moreover, few participants claimed that they did not use porn as a source for sex education as they already knew that it was not a reliable source and hence would have not been useful.

One participant admitted that he addressed porn before having had sexual experiences and that he got to learn the most out of it. He described his experience in this regard and said that he and his friends would also watch it together and then talk about it, and this is how his learning process was. However, he also recognised the fact that porn has downsides and might not be the most resourceful and reliable learning tool available. Indeed, he claimed that one might learn unreliable and unrealistic feature of sex and he added:

“Well like self-educating that's it's like a very interesting topic for everybody. Yeah, when you get like 14 you're super horny you want to understand what's going on and super interesting. Of course, you'd pop on the private mode on your browser and search some

shit about your dick. How to how to have sex? How this and this works and and how to use toys? And shit you educate”. (Derek, M, 23 y.o., Germany)

Only one participant investigated more thoroughly the role porn had in his sex education and the way he now perceives it. It must be said that the participant does not have a positive perception on porn and discussed the topic with a negative tone. The first issue he encountered with porn is the absence of condoms during sexual intercourses, highlighting a negative depiction of porn. However, he claimed that porn was the source from which he learned the most during his adolescence but that he regrets it, adding that he should have learned from experiences instead. Indeed, when he grew up, he realised how porn was negatively affecting his sexuality and hence decided to stop watching it. When investigating the role porn had in his sex education and in particular when describing one episode, the participant claimed:

“For example, when I remember that I when I saw porn like the first time when I was, I think it was when I was 12 years old or something like that's a way too young. [...] And nowadays I don't I don't watch porn since 2019. So, for three and for almost four years now, I don't watch porn anymore because I really think it's it has a negative effect on your psyche and it can make you addicted and also affects your impotence”. (Johannes, M, 22 y.o., Germany)

When asked to investigate more the role porn had in his sex education, the elements that he learned and that would provide an unfaithful depiction of the reality he referred to a particular episode and claimed:

“One example when I when I was younger watching porn I thought in doggy style it must be anal sex. But then [...] I zoomed in or something, I found out somehow and that some other porns I watched or something. But I would have loved to find that out myself”. (Johannes, M, 22 y.o., Germany)

Furthermore, going on with the interview, he also suggested a solution to this ‘bad porn’ claiming that he has started watching ‘good porn’. Such material provide a more reliable depiction of the reality whereas standard porn that most people watch depicts sexual violence and, according to him, is made for cisgender heterosexual men. One main point he discussed related the use of condoms for both girls and boys, indeed, he claimed how the ‘good porn’ introduced the use of condoms. In fact, on this occasion it was the

first time he saw people in porn using contraceptives and also learned about the existence of female condoms.

As for Italian participants, findings concerning German interviewees proved that experience was helpful during the development of sex and sexuality, although it was not equally discussed or investigated. Indeed, those participants who addressed experience were directly asked to do so but in general the ideas and perceptions were much homogeneous. According to some participants, experience was the main tool available to them to discover sex. Moreover, one participant when asked about investigating more the role of experience in their sex education, especially with fixed partners, claimed:

“I think in my experience is also. I think what I gained like because I had like a couple one night stands. But I think then when my first relationship I think because you have a partner. And then that is when I gained my most confidence too. Because you share and you talk and I always think in a relationship it's important to talk about like your sexual preferences, what you like me, what you don't like”. (Sophie, F, 24 y.o., Germany)

However, few participants provided negative tales on their experiences with partners. One female participant claimed that she experienced negative episodes during one of her first relationships as he was more experienced than her and this made her feel uncomfortable. This led to a negative perception of sexuality that was then improved by the following relationship. Another female participant shared a similar story. She said that a past relationship did not make her discover sexuality but gave her several insecurities instead.

Two female participants also mentioned three further sources that provided them with inputs on sexuality and sex education. One of them said that she would get information on sexuality from different ‘standard’ sources, e.g. movies where she would watch scenes of sexual activities and claimed:

“Exactly because I mean also like you see so many movies and they're like, oh, kissing the neck looks nice there maybe if I try it out, it's nice too, so it's just some small things”. (Sophie, F, 24 y.o., Germany)

To conclude and sum up, findings prove once again how porn is negatively perceived as a source for sex education although young adults admit having learned from

it. Porn might be indeed helpful at the beginning of one's sexual life, however it does not provide a reliable or faithful depiction of how sex in reality is. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that all the participants reached this awareness once they were older and had more experiences. Such experiences play an important role in the development of young adults' sexual life, with no differences between female and male young adults. It must also be acknowledged that participants claimed to have learned the most from experiences with fixed partners. Other sources for sex education were identified in the Internet and social media, which give space to young adults for a more open and freer discussion on sex and sexuality. Minor sources were also mentioned, such as movies, tv series, fanfictions, and newspapers.

4. Analysis of the results on sexting

A main section is then dedicated to the topic of the research, i.e., sexting. The themes here focus on the definition of sexting provided by the participant and in particular if the participants gave a clear definition of the term or if they were not sure and needed help to define what sexting is. The perception of sexting is also going to be investigated, in particular if the participants perceive sexting as a positive or negative practice, the context (i.e., the relationship between sexters) where sexting is more suitable, if there is a gendered double standard or any kind of gender difference connected to sexting. One last section is then dedicated to the experiences the participants had with sexting, if they had any. The questions, answers, and the analysis are to frame in a context where they aim at providing a description on how young adults aged from 22 to 26 perceive sexting. Once again, the participants' anonymity their names have been changed and no personal data will be provided.

4.1 Definition of 'sexting'

One of the main issues I have first encountered was that related to the absence of a standardised definition of the term 'sexting'. Indeed, as discussed in the first chapter, experts opt for various explanations of what sexting is and entails, and, for this reason, I wanted to introduce a section in the interview dedicated to this issue. The first part of the interview on sexting directly addressed the definition of sexting, the participants were here asked what sexting is, according to their perception of the practice and their experience. Asking the participants what sexting means was necessary to then frame the experience they had and to see if and how much they knew on the topic as one of my first expectations related to the low level of knowledge young adults have on sexting. Answers here slightly varied in the content and tone of the participant but share indeed mutual elements. As we will see, some answers were more completed whereas others needed support in defining some of the features belonging to sexting. It was indeed interesting to see how participants put effort in providing a suitable definition and, in many cases, they asked for help. The first chapter proved how definitions vary but some elements recur.

Most of the definitions provided address some erotic content sent via electronic device or via the Internet.

The analysis of the answers followed four main criteria: the content of sexting; how such content was delivered; the people involved in the activity; and the purpose of sexting. Not all participants provided elements fulfilling each criterion and, in some cases, further answers were required while in other cases I did not want to influence the participant in providing an answer or definition they may have disagreed with. In some cases, participants directly asked me to help them in the definition or to clarify some features.

Tab. 5 Definitions of 'sexting' provided by Italian participants.

	Content	Means and instrument	People involved	Purpose
Luna (F, 24 y.o.)	As a sexual intercourse	Social media	-	-
Adriana (F, 24 y.o.)	As a sexual intercourse	Social media / photos / videos / text messages	Two people	Feeling sexually excited
Giulia (F, 24 y.o.)	As a sexual intercourse	Text messages	-	-
Sara (F, 24 y.o.)	With an erotic background	Text messages / photos (not necessarily)	-	-

Giovanna (F, 24 y.o.)	As a sexual intercourse	Anything that can be exchanged via phone	-	-
Matteo (M, 23 y.o.)	Replicate a sexual intercourse	Text messages / calls	-	-
Tommaso (M, 24 y.o.)	Sex through multimedia content	Photos / videos / text messages	-	-
Carlo (M, 23 y.o.)	Sexual intercourse	Videos / photos / calls	Individuals who like each other	-
Alessio (M, 25 y.o.)	Sexual content	Videos / photos / text messages	-	-
Antonio (M, 22 y.o.)	Sexual conversation	Social media	-	-

Alberto (M, 23 y.o.)	Flirting	Text messages / videos	-	-
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Tab. 5 provides a general observation on the answers provided by the eleven Italian participants, such answers were grouped according to the criteria and, as one can see, not all the participants provided in their answers the element(s) fulfilling each criterion. The main thing that one can notice is the fact that most of the participants claimed that sexting replicates a physical sexual intercourse which is, however, electronically carried out. A difference can here be identified with the definitions provided in the first chapter, where experts claimed that sexting occurs when there is an exchange of sexually explicit or sexually suggestive material (Chalfren, 2009; Reyns, Burek, Henson & Fisher, 2013). Some exceptions supported the theory claiming that the sexting material exchanged has a sexual, erotic, and provocative nuance.

The fact that participants referred to sexting as an online sexual intercourse makes it clear that the aim of such activity is that of a physical intercourse, i.e., feeling sexual pleasure. However, one participant directly addressed the matter claiming that the ultimate goal of sexting is to be sexually excited. The answers provided were homogeneous in all criteria. All participants agreed that sexting is like “having sex through the phone” (Carlo, M, 23 y.o., Italy) and that the content can be exchanged through different means. For all participants, the mobile device is indeed the instrument through which sexting material is sent. The theory here embraced a bigger definition claiming that the sexting material can be sent via any electronic device or via the Internet. On the one hand, participants implicitly agreed that sexting is done using the Internet because, as we will see later on in the current chapter, those participants who have sexted all used social media. On the other, other participants mentioned social media as one of the platforms where sexting can take place. The main data provide findings proving that sexting can be carried out via normal text messages, through videos, and pictures. Although few participants also conveyed that people can sex via calls, the main trend proves that calls are not included in sexting. Such trend can be explained by the fact that

participants see the etymology of the term. Indeed, few participants claimed, sexting is to be seen as the union of the words ‘sex’ and ‘texting’ thus it includes messages exchanged via texting.

As mentioned, only one participant directly mentioned the purpose of sexting, i.e., to feel sexually excited. Most participants did not provide data on the people involved in the activity either, only two out of the 11 subjects mentioned as sexters are two people who like each other. Indeed, the sexting content addresses the fact that the people involved like each other in the sense that they exchange material that arouses the other person. Indeed, all the participants agreed on the fact that the sexting pictures do not necessarily have to portray a naked subject but portray anything that makes the sender feel comfortable and that makes the recipient feel sexually excited. Two participants had troubles in providing a definition for ‘sexting’ and it is worth mentioning that one of them has also never sexted. In fact, such impediment in finding a proper definition can be addressed to the fact that he has never sexted and hence had no practical experience to use as basis for an explanation of the practice.

Data collected from the interviews with German participants did not generate heterogeneous findings nor were they much different from those generated through the interviews with Italian participants. In general, the answers provided by the participants were quite homogeneous with some slight differences in the content and means through which sexting is carried out.

Tab. 6 Definitions of ‘sexting’ provided by German participants.

	Content	Means and instrument	People involved	Purpose
Sophie (F, 24 y.o.)	Dirty talking / sexually explicit	Text messages / photos	Two consenting people	-

Martha (F, 23 y.o.)	Sexual connotation	Pictures and videos	-	Sexual pleasure
Erica (F, 22 y.o.)	Erotic talk / sexual intercourse	Text messages / pictures	-	-
Gretha (F, 22 y.o.)	Sexually explicit	Social media / pictures / videos / text messages	-	Sexual pleasure
Wanda (F, 22 y.o.)	Sexually explicit	Text messages / photos	-	-
Derek (M, 23 y.o.)	Sexually explicit	Text messages / pictures / videos	-	-
Johannes (M, 22 y.o.)	Replicate a sexual intercourse	Social media / text messages	With the person one intends to have such intercourse with.	-

Patrick (M, 26 y.o.)	Sexually explicit	Text messages	-	-
Alex (M, 22 y.o.)	Sexual / erotic content	Everything that can be sent electronically	-	Sexually arousing / fulfil each other's sexual desire

Findings address sexting as the sending and receiving of sexually explicit material. Such material can include dirty talking, sexually explicit videos or pictures. Such explicitness of content does not necessarily mean that the sender is naked but can also picture the sender in underwear. Indeed, the sexting messages ought to include the sexual practices the people involved in the activity would like to do in a physical sexual intercourse. For instance, it was said that people who sext send each other:

“Nasty stuff you want to put into practice”. (Derek, M, 23 y.o., Germany)

One participant provided an interesting point of view on how sexting is to be carried out. According to her ideas and experiences, she has perceived sexting as an erotic talk following a script that describes what the two people would do if they were together. Indeed, all participants agree with the finding that sexting is connected to the exchange of sexually explicit material, whether that being pictures, videos, or explicit text messages.

When it came to mentioning the people involved in the activity, not all participants clarified the feature. Indeed, only two out of the nine participants directly mentioned the people who sext. One participant claimed that sexting normally takes place between two consenting people. Her perception provides an interesting point of view as she was the only one out of 20 participants to mention consent as the main element within sexting. Another participant claimed that sexting is to be carried out with the person you intend to

do those practices with as, according to his answer on the definition of the term, sexting is a sexual intercourse that takes place online through an electronic device. Findings prove that the purpose of sexting is to feel sexual pleasure, to feel sexually aroused and excited. Indeed, few participants claimed that sexting ought to make the participants feel good by fulfilling each other's sexual desires.

Two participants mentioned the importance of respecting the willingness of the other person to receive and send such sexually explicit messages. One of them discussed the perception of 'dick pics'. She claimed that sending an undesired 'dick pick' is not sexting, but is to be perceived as sexual harassment instead. Another participant also addressed the issue regarding the unwanted receiving of sexting messages and claimed:

“We have to be cautious when when you send messages like this, because you don't know how it affects the other person”. (Derek, M, 23 y.o., Germany)

Findings prove that young adults know what sexting is although few data show that a theoretical definition of the practice is not clear to everyone. Contrary to the previous sections, no major differences were identified between the Italian and the German participants. Both groups perceive sexting as a sexual intercourse that takes place online where the participants send each other sexually arousing messages in order to make the other person feel sexually excited. The content of sexting has strong sexual connotations and can be of different kinds, as well as the means through which the content is sent. Indeed, two people can sext by sending and receiving pictures or videos, but also written messages that follow a script of what would happen if the people were physically in the same place. The main element is indeed a mobile device and without it no sexting could take place. It is also worth mentioning that no difference was identified between male and female participants.

4.2 How do participants perceive sexting?

In this section of the interview, participants were asked about their thoughts, ideas, and perceptions towards sexting. Answers were homogeneous among both groups of participants. The main idea that drove this section was to investigate the perception the

participants have on sexting. Whether sexting is perceived as a positive or negative sexual practice and the role it has in young adults' sexual life. Is sexting still perceived as something people ought to abstain from? Have young adults integrated sexting in their sexual practices or does it count as an alternative to physical sexual intercourse?

4.2.1 Is sexting perceived as a positive or negative practice?

Data collected provided findings showing that participants identified both positive and negative aspects of sexting. However, most of the participants have a negative perception of the practice. In many interviews, when participants were asked what they think about sexting and how they perceive it, most of them immediately investigated the negative side of the practice. Participants were also asked if they believed that sexting has positive and negative sides. As we will see, most of the participants addressed sexting as an alternative to those relationships living a physical distance and such situation belongs to the positive features of the practice. On the contrary, findings on the negative elements of sexting were identified within those cases where the sexting messages are shared or forwarded to other people. Furthermore, there is a low percentage of participants who claimed that sexting per se is not a problem.

In this case as well, data collected from the Italian interviews were homogeneous and investigated interesting features of sexting. Indeed, participants identified positive elements of the practice and, as mentioned, the main trend is that of perceiving sexting as a positive activity in the case of a long-distance relationship. Some participants addressed this trend claiming that sexting can “delete” a physical distance lived by people who are in a long-distance relationship. They added that they perceive sexting as an alternative to “more standard” sexual practices, according to their point of view sexting is not to be included as those sexual practices one would normally carry out with someone but is to be seen as something “extraordinary”. Other participants supported such perception according to which sexting is a valid alternative for situations where the partner cannot be physically there.

One participant provided a further point of view on the positive elements of sexting. Beside supporting the findings on sexting and long-distance relationships she also mentioned the fun and enjoyment one would feel when sexting. Indeed, she claimed

to perceive the practice also as means to flirt with the purpose of establishing a sexual relationship. A similar point of view was given by other participants, both male and female. They agreed with the idea that sexting is indeed sexually exciting and appealing for those who enjoy it. Such sexual excitement is compared to the pleasure one used to feel through the old porn magazines claiming that the sphere of sexuality has developed according to technology and society. It is thus normal that people have new means to experience their sexuality. People indeed experience online and offline sexuality in a different way. One of the differences can be identified in the content of what people say during sexting or during a sexual intercourse and such difference is, one of the positive features of sexting. In fact, some participant claimed that sexting gives the possibility of knowing new people and of saying things one would probably avoid saying in a physical sexual intercourse.

As introduced, most of the data provided findings supporting a negative point of view and perception of sexting. Participants admitted feeling sceptical and having controversial feelings towards the practice. They stated she would not feel at ease to talk about such topic as they was not provided any kind of information on sexting and hence perceives it as something too far from their knowledge. In fact, they claimed that their controversial feelings and scepticism are to be blamed on the fact that it is a topic people do not talk about, nor academically nor among friends. During one conversation, one participant said:

“Because let's say it is a less known practice, less talked about and above all I think more related, to the stigma and the risks. [...] and above all yes for the fact that you have been known has been for the negative effects it has brought”. (Luna, F, 24 y.o., Italy)

The main trend on the negative side of sexting concerned the issue of forwarding or sharing sexting messages to someone who was not intended to receive such messages. Indeed, such problem was, in some cases, the only situation in which sexting is perceived as a negative activity. A female participant addressed the stigma around such issues and in particular the way news on revenge porn are perceived or accepted among the society. According to her point of view, society blames and judges the victim for having sent such sexting messages instead of investigating the reasons why the recipient would share such personal material with someone else. Indeed, she claimed that such events eventually

bring people to develop a negative perception towards the practice. It is important to highlight that such issue does not concern the act itself of exchanging sexually explicit messages but is rather a possible consequence caused by people who are not properly educated. One participant also added that if this is to happen to her, i.e., her sexting messages get shared, it would be psychologically devastating for her. Other participants supported this perception, for instance, when asked about their perception on sexting, one claimed:

“I do not judge, in the sense that it is something that if one likes it, it is right to do it. I don't like this practice and I also consider it a bit dangerous”. (Giulia, F, 24 y.o., Italy)

Such feeling of danger is identified by another male participant who claims that he strongly disagrees with people who engage in such practice. During the interview, he repeatedly addressed the cases of revenge porn that he heard through the news where victims suffered from depression, although he was not able to provide names of the people involved in such events. He maintained a strong negative tone during the section of the interview on sexting and it is important to mention the fact that, as we will analyse later, he is one of the few participants not to have ever sexted. Another female participant addressed the news events, without mentioning any case in particular. In particular, she mentioned cases where the sexting content was posted online due to feelings of anger and revenge after the sender ended the relationship with the recipient.

Sexting is not only connected to the negative consequences repeatedly up to here mentioned, but also to a lack of trust in social media in general. Indeed, some participants addressed social media to a lack of privacy according to which, once you send some material, you do not know where such material is stocked and conserved. A participant connects this negative perception of sexting to a negative perception of social media where the lack of privacy makes everything less safe. Sexting is once again perceived as an uncomfortable practice where one's privacy is not respected. She claimed that knowing that the ex-boyfriend had sexually suggestive pictures of hers was a source of anxiety and concern as she did not know whether he could have shared such material with someone else. Furthermore, he is the only one to have mentioned some sort of sessions carried out in school where students were provided with information on sexting which regarded, however, revenge porn. In fact, instead of informing the students on what sexting is and

entails, instead of providing them the tools for a healthy sexting behaviour, they were immediately presented with a notorious consequence of such practice, influencing their perception on sexting.

Another interesting perception provided by the Italian participants concerned the idea that one would engage in sexting as they do not have the possibilities to have a physical sexual intercourse with that person. In this case, sexting is once again perceived as an alternative to physical intercourses but with a negative connotation. For instance, some participants supported this trend stating that one would engage in sexting in the case they cannot engage in physical intercourses or in the case they do not have a particularly active social life. Although sexting is a normal development of sexual practices that changed according to society, some participants perceive people who sext as people who are too lazy to spend time with the person they are sexting with. One claimed:

“Then in my opinion in 2022 it's normal to have something like this because we are more used to being on our phones than in bed together, people are more used to spending time on their mobile phones sending each other these things, these messages, these shenanigans. Compared to actually spending time together and making what has been sent virtually real. So I don't share that, but I consider it normal”. (Alessio, M, 25 y.o., Italy)

He provided a further perception of sexting connected to the physical pleasure one would feel during sexting. He claimed that, if a guy receives a sexually explicit picture from the person he likes and then this guy masturbates on the picture, the same guy will then lose interest in meeting the person and in having a physical intercourse with them. Such point of view hides the idea that sexting is not perceived on the same level as physical intercourses but it is something people ought to abstain from if they want to then engage in a physical sexual intercourse. Other participants addressed such idea that the online activity is to the detriment of the offline activity. According to few participants, people who engage in sexting too much lose perception of reality by abusing the online activity.

Although revenge porn or the sharing of one's sexting material were the main topics throughout some interviews, one particular participant did not mention such an issue as a negative element in sexting. He assumed that sexting does not always lead to

physical sexual interactions and he perceives it as an issue. In particular, if sexting as online sexual intercourse is the only form of sexual intercourses one has. He said that you might:

“Find yourself then maybe choosing to just sext via tinder, in a way I think it could become a little bit [...] pathological as a thing at a certain point, the moment you no longer have control over it, because actually it could be extremely fulfilling to have on the other side anyway a person that you are not [...] obliged to see, you are not obliged to date, you are not obliged to interact with”. (Antonio, M, 22 y.o., Italy)

As said, this section of the interview first addressed general ideas and perceptions that the participants have on sexting, and only after they were asked about the positive and negative aspects. Not all participants introduced the topic investigating the issues of the activity. Indeed, some of them highlighted the fact that they do not have a particular position on sexting nor is it a problem per se. For instance, one female participant stated that she does not fear the act itself but the negative consequences brought by a misbehaviour on the part of the recipient. The same idea is shared by another male participant. Nevertheless, he claimed that sexting is underestimated and not given enough importance as people engage in the activity as an alternative to physical sexual intercourse, whereas the online and offline interactions ought to be on the same level. Indeed, engaging in sexting as an alternative is adopted by a female participant who openly claimed that, although she does not particularly enjoy sexting, she engages in the practice in case her partner is physically far from her and hence cannot have a physical interaction with her. However, the same male participant also claimed that he himself would engage in such activity in the case he cannot physically meet such person, especially in the case he is sexually excited. He added:

“If I can actually have sex, I wouldn't give a damn about sexting. If I had the chick I could see her, as much as I want to, and so on about sexting I would objectively care little”. (Tommaso, M, 24 y.o., Italy)

It is important here to mention that, as we will see later on in the analysis, such participant has only engaged in sexting with girls he has never met and who live in other countries. Such data can in fact prove the fact that his ideas and what he said during the interview are based on his personal experiences.

Findings concerning data collected from the interviews with German participants were also homogeneous, they did not show particular differences among themselves and with the data collected from the Italian participants. In this case as well, participants investigated the positive and negative elements concerning sexting and they also provided their own position towards the practice. The first and main positive element identified was that of sexting within long-distance relationships as well, i.e., cases where physical interactions cannot take place and are hence substituted by this activity. Indeed, some participants highlighted the fact that sexting can help to maintain the relationship natural and keep the intimacy although the partners cannot be physically together. One participant supported the importance of the sexual part within a relationship and, if two people are in a long-distance relationship, sexting can be a good alternative to physical sexual intercourses and can also enhance the trust and intimacy in the couple. Intimacy and trust are not the only elements that are strengthened by sexting in this type of relationship, but also loyalty. In fact, one male participant claimed that sexting might help partners to remain loyal to each other by fulfilling their sexual needs or desires within their couple. Indeed, sexting as a healthy activity for long-distance relationships was considered by many participants the only positive aspect of sexting and they could not identify any further one. However, some participants stressed how important it is to eventually satisfy a more physical sexual need, that sexting cannot fully meet. To support the trend on sexting being good for long-distance relationship, one stated:

“I think it's a good thing because before my boyfriend now I had another boyfriend I was. I had two years long long distance. OK, so. It was good to have, like not to forget that we are not just friends. Yeah, so this is also a part of our relationship”. (Wanda, F, 22 y.o., Germany)

Beside being helpful in a relationship of this kind, sexting can also be a source of fun and sexual pleasure. In case people enjoy sexting, they indeed feel sexual pleasure through the activity itself although it is not necessary for the sexters to masturbate. On the matter, some participants introduced the topic of sexting as positively normalising sexuality. The participants explained such positive influence with the fact that sexting becomes part of one's daily life leading then to a normal approach of sex and sexuality. One further claimed:

“I mean for sure, especially when you're in long distance. I could imagine that you know it makes you feel close with the other person like stay in touch. And, well, sexuality is something good, so if it like pleases you or whatever you masturbate to that and that makes you feel good, go for it. Maybe it also like normalizes sexuality”. (Martha, F, 23 y.o., Germany)

Although the general trend shows that participants have a negative perception of sexting, one participant stressed how sexting is a positive activity leading to positive outcomes instead. One female participant can be identified as the only participant with an exclusively positive perception of sexting. This can be explained by the fact that she has never had negative experiences concerning sexting and she experiences the matter with a healthy behaviour. The participant claimed that sexting is indeed a positive sexual practice as it gives you sexual pleasure and it makes you feel closer to the other person because you know that in that moment that person is thinking about you. Such thought indeed enhances one's self-love and self-confidence. However, she pointed out that such sexual pleasure does not have to be connected to masturbation, which in fact does not necessarily have to take place during sexting and it is not its main purpose. Instead, she stressed that the purpose of sexting is to have fun, to feel pleasure and enjoy the moment with someone you like.

Moreover, sexting is also perceived as strengthening the bond between the sexters, especially if they aim at establishing a romantic or sexual relationship. For instance, one male participant stressed such aspects of sexting and he highlighted the fact that sexting can make two people feel closer through this kind of communication. In fact, he pointed out one important element: the person he would sext with. He affirmed that he would not sext with anyone but with girls, being him heterosexual, that he likes and with whom he would like to establish a sexual relationship. Indeed, sexting framed in a context of this kind gives importance and meaning to the person.

Negative aspects of sexting can indeed be collocated within activities like that of sharing, forwarding, or posting one's sexting material without their consent. Such issue is indeed the most discussed among the interviews, also in the case of German participants. Some participants claimed that this problem is to be connected also to a lack of privacy in general that is deleted when social media get involved. Indeed, the

participants stressed out the importance of trusting the other person. Such topic is addressed by other participants as well and according to them trust should be the basis of a sexual interaction of this kind. However, some participants claimed that, although you trust the person you are sexting with, you never know what can happen on the Internet. They broadened the concept of trust not only to people but also to the Internet in general, stating that the Internet and social media are as vulnerable as people because they could get hacked.

Contrary to people who have mixed and controversial feelings towards sexting, some participants only stated that sexting is a negative activity and that they disagree with such practice. For instance, one participant has a strongly negative perception of sexting and that she equally disagrees with it out of safety reasons. Such safety reasons are not limited to the forwarding or sharing but also include the unique fact that the sexting material exists online and one should not trust it. It is worth mentioning that she is the only one among the German participants to give sexting such a strong negative connotation. Such feeling might be connected to the fact that she attended a very conservative school and this influenced her path in her sex education. Moreover, some participants also added that sexting takes away the ‘fun’ from physical sexual intercourses. Such perception is connected to the idea that sexting plays as an alternative or substitute to physical interactions. On the matter, one claimed:

“I don't really do it because I don't feel like it. I don't like the idea of being a screenshot in the group. It is part of why I don't like it and it also takes the fun from the real life because I enjoy that talk more in real life. But I don't think it's bad at all. Like if you like it, keep doing it”. (Derek, M, 23 y.o., Germany)

The same participant also stressed the importance of respecting one’s pace and tone in the sense that, if you live far from the person you want to sext with, you might not know what their mood is or if it is a suitable moment for sexting. Hence, you might start a sexting conversation by sending sexually explicit messages or pictures that the recipient is not ready to accept. Although the participant recalled positive elements of sexting, he has a strong negative perception of the activity adding that it can be an issue for people’s mental health. According to his perception, sexting can have negative results in one’s mental health in the case where one sexter expects the other to be exchanging sexting

material or to have such type of relationship just with them, while in reality the other sexter is doing the same with other people. In fact, he claimed:

“If I'm texting to somebody and [...] we're texting each other. It could be that in her world she's only texting with me and she thinks that it's like mutual between just me and her, but I could be typing this to 50 other people. [...] She has different rules. She has a different view of the things. Then the person could be super hurt and could trigger trauma and shit. And I mean that's kind of what happens within our age group”. (Derek, M, 23 y.o., Germany)

The difference between online and offline sexual intercourses is further stressed by other participants highlighting that offline physical sexual interactions are much better than sexting. Other participants mentioned the fact that if you sext with someone and had not had physical sexual intercourses with that person, you might set too high expectations that might not be satisfied. Participants claimed that sexting might lead to the possibility that a physical intercourse with the same person is not as enjoyable and pleasant as sexting. Other participants then claimed that they would rather only have physical sexual interactions and direct contact and would not sext. According to their perception, sexting is not something added to physical sexual intercourses but rather something that substitutes them, as previously investigated. Indeed, this is to be added to the fact that most of the participants do not trust the Internet out of privacy and safety reasons. These two issues combined make the participants easily renounce sexting and would rather engage in only physical sex.

The main trend concerning negative aspects of sexting is connected to trust issues, a general lack of trust towards the person they would sext with. Some participants suggested that sexting, according to their ideas, has more negative than positive aspects. She mentioned a lack of trust together with mental issues. One particular participant claimed that sexting might be particularly troubling for one's mental health in the case of someone who is not comfortable with their body, who receives sexting pictures and feels forced to send something back. She also claimed that she does not particularly enjoy sexting but this is not connected to negative experiences or perceptions. However, she also claimed that she would not feel comfortable knowing that someone owns pictures depicting her in sexually explicit poses. She addressed this sense of being uncomfortable with a lack of trust in the other person and she claimed that a possible partner would not

need a picture of her as they can directly have physical sexual intercourses. The same sense of discomfort and uneasiness is shared by another participant. She also would not be comfortable in doing sexting. However, the only case where she would consider sexting is in a long-distance relationship. Her ideas and statements are to be framed in a not positive sexual background. Indeed, she also mentioned some sexual insecurities caused by a previous relationship that have now influenced her approach toward sexting. The same participant added a further difference between a physical offline and an online sexual intercourse. She explicitly said that she fears sexting as you lose control over the material once you send it, such unbalanced control would not take place in a physical intercourse.

Few participants admitted that sexting is not a problem per se. In fact, as long as people engage in sexting out of sexual pleasure and, most importantly, with consent, it is a much more positive activity with equally positive outcomes. The topic of consent among sexters was addressed only by one participant and the same participant was also one of the few to mention that sexting is not a problem per se. A similar approach was shared by another participant. The participant did not immediately show whether he has a positive or negative perception of the practice, but only claimed that people ought to carefully approach sexting in the same way you approach a physical intercourse.

As seen, answers provided by the two groups are quite homogenous. It is interesting to see how young adults perceive sexting as a substitute or alternative to physical sexual intercourses and not as something that is added to them or that can be equally carried out, like foreplays. Indeed, young adults share a general negative perception of the practice although they also admit sexual pleasure as being an involuntary positive outcome of the practice. Such negative perception is caused by a lack of trust and fear that the other person might share or forward their sexting material to someone who was not intended to receive such material. However, this issue was mostly investigated by the female participants and especially among Italian female participants. No further gender differences were identified.

4.2.2 Is sexting to be framed only in exclusive relationships?

Participants were asked if they believed that sexting ought to take place within particular relationships. Data here can be divided into two main groups. On one hand, participants claimed that it is better that only people committed in an exclusive relationship carry out such practice; on the other, findings prove that anyone can engage in sexting as long as consent is shown by both parties. In general, all participants provided a theoretical idea on any sexting context and a practical example on the situation in which they would actually engage in sexting. Indeed, the last is a committed relationship.

The main findings prove that Italian participants have no preconceived ideas or opinions on which relationship is the most suitable to sext. Indeed, participants claimed that everyone can engage in that activity with whomever they want. However, participants also claim that they would engage, and have engaged, in sexting only with someone they are in a romantic relationship with. In general, they would not sext with someone they have just met although they claimed not to perceive such behaviour as ethically wrong nor that they would judge who acts in this way. Few participants stated that, according to their experience, sexting comes within the couple especially when they are in a long-distance relationship. They also added that the only situation in which they would engage in sexting with a stranger is in case total anonymity is guaranteed. On the same topic, another participant provided a further point of view. She claimed that sexting with strangers would make her feel less judged and would then be willing to exchange more explicit content. Indeed, the important thing is that both parties are willing to engage in sexting. On sexting with strangers she claimed:

“That 'you don't know me, so you can't judge me' mechanism is triggering and I'm [...] more serene, safer. [...] there's no precedent, maybe there won't even be a continuation then. So, maybe sometimes it's easier to have casual sex, sometimes it's easier to do casual sexting too”. (Adriana, F, 24 y.o., Italy)

Other participants support the findings according to which sexting is to be carried out within a committed relationship. For instance, it was claimed that being in an exclusive relationship gives both parties the possibility to know each other, to know what they like so as to take the best out of sexting. Moreover, other participants explained their idea on sexting in committed relationships and claimed that they would sext only with a

partner since trust is for them the main element and it could be established only in exclusive and committed relationships. Such trust is in fact needed in order to have the insurance that the recipient will not share or forward his sexting material. Other participants agreed that trust is the main element for sexting to be carried out and such trust can only be developed and encountered within the couple. They also claimed that they would not sext with people they have just met and do not know. Trust is to be accompanied by understanding and harmony within the couple, and, most importantly, distance. Participants claimed that trust, consent, and distance are the three elements that are necessary and added that, in case the partner sends sexually suggestive pictures, the conversation would not continue in that sense and they would not engage in sexting.

Some participants agreed with the idea that there are no contexts or relationships that are more suitable than others for sexting. It is indeed important that both parties show consent and willingness to the activity. On the matter, one affirmed:

“I don't think there are any more appropriate contexts than others, not least because one then follows one's own will a little and applies it where one feels like it, and then it certainly involves the will of two people as usual”. (Alberto, M, 26 y.o., Italy)

As thoroughly investigated, a recurrent topic is that of long-distance relationships, which are mentioned in this situation as well. Indeed, many participants claimed that the most suitable context or relationship for two people to sext is if there is a physical distance or they cannot meet for any reason. Other findings support such theory with a difference: a committed relationship is not necessary for sexting, but a distance is. Findings also prove that participants would engage in sexting to flirt with someone they are sexually attracted to and with someone they aim at establishing a sexual or romantic relationship. Such perception is further strengthened in the case the participant has already had a physical sexual intercourse with that person, although they are not in a relationship. A participant showed the importance physical interactions have over online interactions, proving once again that sexting is subordinated to physical sexual intercourses and not equally considered as sexual practice. It is now clear that sexting has the best outcomes and best situation in the case of long-distance relationships.

Data and findings on German participants provide a similar picture, where participants claimed that anyone can engage in sexting but they would only sext with a partner in a committed relationship. In this case as well, trust plays an important role. Indeed, on the same topic, some participants claimed that, although sexting is not to be framed in specific contexts, they would rather engage in it with a partner, someone they trust. In fact, they believe trust can be established and developed only with a partner claiming that they have the same approach with physical sexual intercourses. Participants added that, out of personal experiences, they would only sext with a partner being a partner someone they trust.

It is worth saying that many participants provided their answers framing sexting as the exchange of sexually explicit pictures. Is the material sent different from pictures or videos, participants changed their approach to the answers. In fact, if sexting remains on the flirting level, some agreed they would engage in the activity outside a committed relationship. In general, findings prove that trust and consent are the main elements to consider when engaging in any kind of sexual intercourse, both online and offline. Indeed, few participants claimed that parties must feel comfortable in such activity. They added that, if possible, they ought to talk about it before engaging in sexting so that they know they share the same ideas and perceptions, but most importantly they both have to show consent. Other participants also agreed that it is better to engage in sexting within a relationship. For instance, one participant added that, within committed relationships or marriage, sexting comes naturally as partners know well each other, they know what to do or say to sexually excite each other and know that consent is there. He also introduced the topic of unwanted but willing sexting in the sense that the girl does not want to send the pictures but out of pressure does it anyway. He added:

“You're sure like if you were in a relationship marriage. Probably goes without saying, but it's like if the other partner consents and is cool with it, then you could be strangers. [...] Just gets complicated when [...] for example, the girl wants me and she wants to send me those pictures. She she doesn't feel really feel comfortable to send pictures, but she wants me so bad that she does it anyway”. (Derek, M, 23 y.o., Germany)

The main trend in finding suggests that anyone can engage in sexting as long as they feel like. However, being in a committed relationship might help people to feel more

comfortable in carrying out sexual practices, sexting included. One participant stressed that, in his opinion, sexting is not appropriate at the beginning of a relationship, but only after a certain point. On this matter, some participants claim that a committed relationship is not necessary as long as you know the other person, even in a superficial way. Indeed, they perceive it dangerous to sext with someone you have never met. According to one participant trust is for him not to be considered as a necessary sexting element. Indeed, he considers the situations per se and the atmosphere in a particular moment more important. He is the only participant among the German ones to claim that he would rather engage in sexting with a person he likes and he would like to establish a sexual relationship with. He added:

“I think more important is the the flirty situations you had together and there can be after meeting the person once or twice and [...] after meeting once or twice, you don't really have trust, I would Say, but if you had this flirty situation and you already experience that with that person, you can have this flirt then you can extend this flirting to texting and then it can evolve into sexting, right?”. (Johannes, M, 22 y.o., Germany)

A minor trend proves that participants perceive sexting as a frequent activity among couples in a long-distance relationship. Participants supporting such perception also added that trust is necessary for them and they would reach that with a potential partner in a committed relationship. They also claimed during the interview that they would also not sext with someone they did not have a sexual intercourse first with.

Trends interestingly show how answers would change when participants talked out of perceptions or personal experiences. Indeed, this can be analysed in those participants who provided the standard answer: anyone can do what they want, but I would do it only with a partner. In general, findings prove that young adults perceive sexting as a sexual practice to carry out within the couple or with someone they trust. Such practice becomes even more necessary in case of long-distance relationships. Indeed, Italian participants mentioned this case more often than German participants who, however, showed low rates of participants claiming that they would engage in sexting in order to establish a romantic or sexual relationship. It is also worth noting that no gender differences were identified here.

4.2.3 Gender differences

Participants were asked, in this section, whether they believe that sexting entails gender differences. Such gender differences are indeed present especially when it comes to the forwarding or sharing of sexting material; as we will see, this was the main trend in findings investigated by Italian and German participants, with no major difference between male and female participants. Other trends show that participants perceive gender differences in the way the female and male bodies are perceived leading thus to differences in the way the pictures are exchanged.

Out of the eleven Italian participants, only one male participant claimed that he does not perceive gender differences within sexting probably because such differences are not present when he engages in the activity and provided his opinion on the matter based on his personal experiences. Indeed, many participants based their answers on the perception they have on society in general, on other spheres of sexuality (e.g., physical sexual intercourses), and on pieces of news they heard. All participants agreed that sexting does entail gender differences of different kinds. The male participant claimed that there are no differences in sexting. In fact, people act according to what they like or dislike, rather than exchanging sexting content or acting according to gender differences.

Other participants connected sexting with sexuality in general and provided then differences encountered in that field that can be identified within sexting as well. Such differences are based on the perception that sexuality has roles, according to which men are the dominating one leading the women. This leading role would include the way sexters approach the practice, i.e., the men asking for it or introducing the topic, and the kind of pictures requested on the part of the men. On the topic, one participant claimed that people are used to perceiving men as controlling over situations of this kind adding that:

“We are used to thinking that it is man who dominates. That is, just as a conception, that is, in general. Then I am much happier when things change. In short, but in general the common thought is this, that is, the man is the one who dominates the woman is the one who is dominated”. (Giovanna, F, 24 y.o., Italy)

Such a point of view is to be added to the main trend in findings, i.e., the gendered double standard. According to this standard, male and female sexters are judged differently because of their gender: a woman engaging in such activity would be given a negative nickname whereas a man would not be affected by the same treatment. In this case, most of the participants based their answers on personal experiences or cases in newspapers. For instance, one claimed:

“If one were to know about a person, i.e., a man being sexy and a woman being sexy, surely the man would be praised, the woman would be punished or otherwise mocked or judged, that is, generally misjudged”. (Adriana, F, 24 y.o., Italy)

An answer of this kind was provided by several, almost all, participants. They all agreed that people knowing of a woman engaging in sexting would judge her negatively but would not have the same reaction to a man. One participant provided a personal anecdote affirming that it has happened that her friends would look at girls’ sexting pictures which were not intended to reach them and would negatively judge such girls. The same perception is shared by male participants, showing that this kind of trend is not tight to particular gender reasons. In fact, one male participant stated:

“Certainly if you take a picture of a girl you immediately give her a certain attribute, the male almost indifferent. He might have problems and all, but it's a lighter thing in my opinion, I mean there double standards”. (Matteo, M, 23 y.o., Italy)

The other main trend in findings suggest that participants perceive a main difference connected to gender when it comes to the forwarding or sharing of one's sexting content. Indeed, such issues affect mostly women as, in some cases, their sexually suggestive pictures are shared with people who were not intended to own such material. Participants in this case highlighted the difference in the two genders: men usually forward women’s sexting material without their consent. Moreover, participants never mentioned cases depicting an opposite scenario, i.e., women sharing men’s sexting pictures, although they also stated that cases must have happened. One participant claimed that this issue leads girls to approach sexting in a more cautious way also because the female body tends to be more objectified than the male body. Hence, the perception of a picture depicting a woman’s body in a sexually suggestive pose is different from that of a man’s body. This perception is supported by participants claiming that the news

highlighted this difference as women are usually subjects of such pieces of news on the issue. Moreover, they claimed that one main problem regarding this issue is that the focus of the event is normally on the woman depicted in the pictures, owner of such material, and not on the person sharing the sexting content. The first tends to be negatively judged, while the latter ignored. In fact, one participant claimed:

“I have never seen, or if I have I have seen a few times, a man being subjected to external pressure due to sexting, that is, it is more the consideration of the girl as a ‘slut’, so let's say there is a clear inequality there between the female gender and the male gender, that is, it is dealt with in a way that is clearly unfavourable to the female gender”. (Alessio, M, 25 y.o., Italy)

Other findings prove that gender differences can be encountered in the pictures exchanged while sexting. Such trend is based on the idea that female and male bodies are perceived differently in terms of aesthetic and sexual pleasure. Women's body is often connected to aesthetics and to being more sexually exciting than the men's bodies. Such theory concerns general sexuality and was hence identified in sexting as well. In fact, some participants claimed that women put more effort in the pictures they sent, a thing that might not equally happen for male sexters.

Some participants also added that such difference is not that relevant as people send what they believe to be more sexually exciting for the other part, however they also admitted that the female body is often connected to beauty and sexuality, that it is more sexually attractive. One participant suggested that women have more ways to sexually please men both on a physical and on a visual level, through pictures, in this case. Indeed, he compared sexting with porn, which usually portrays only a few parts of the male body, i.e., chest and genitals, whereas girls are portrayed in a broader way, e.g., including their lips and eyesight. According to the participant, the same happens in sexting. However, there is no trend investigating differences on the way sexting is introduced and initiated. A participant claimed that, according to his experience, girls are more likely to send pictures, while another claimed that men usually begin a conversation of this kind. It is worth highlighting that the first opinion was shared by a male participant while the latter by a female, probably meaning that their gender leads them to perceive things in a different way.

Data collected from the interviews with German participants provided less trends than Italian participants. Answers here were more homogeneous and direct. The main trend concerns, in this case as well, a difference in forwarding or sharing one's sexting content. Indeed, participants claimed that women are more likely to be the victims of this act as former male partners share their private pictures to people who were not intended to receive them. However, participants also agreed on the fact that sexting itself does not directly imply gender differences but the content is created according to what sexters like and find sexually arousing. One participant provided an episode on this issue. She told about a video that began to circulate in her school depicting a girl masturbating. On the same level, the participant highlighted also how in most cases this issue affects women and the news on this depict women. In her interview, she claimed:

“I think also in general, like you know, those videos and photos or sexual stuff or rumors would always go around and then blaming the girls. [...] what I know like also like for example in my school this one girl had her first time on a soccer field and everybody was talking about the girl but nobody about the guy”. (Sophie, F; 24 y.o., Germany)

The fact that women are more likely to be victims of non-consensual forwarding leads female sexters to approach the practice with more attention and consciousness, maybe also in a slower manner than male sexters. On the matter, participants added that the fact that girls suffer more such consequences makes them feel more vulnerable than guys when sending sexually explicit material as female sexters know that such material might be used against them. However, being more cautious when sexting makes it more valuable when they sext, participants perceive it has a lot of value when a girl sends him sexting messages. Moreover, participants further supported such gender differences claiming that the reaction to the pictures is also different. According to some participants, the worst that could happen if a man's pictures are leaked is that people might advocate the size of his genitals, whereas girls are much more judged and experience a strong victim blaming. On the matter, one claimed:

“I think women are more careful about it, out of safety reasons too, because if they get leaked well their whole career can be like influenced. While, man, don't think a lot about the consequences”. (Martha, F, 23 y.o., Germany)

In general, participants agreed that women are subjects and victims of the stories they hear about sexting material being shared, and for this reason women are more careful and conscientious in engaging in the activity. However, they have never heard about men's sexting pictures getting shared or forwarded or even posted online. According to all participants women are in general more careful when approaching sexuality as they suffer more the consequences of negative behaviours.

Another trend provided by the data collected regarded the role played during this kind of interaction. According to some participants, men tend to have a more leading and dominant role when it comes to sexual intercourses both online and offline. According to such roles, men lead the conversation and make requests, whereas women tend to be more sexually objectified. Such perception is supported by some participants who also claimed that men and women tend to act according to some roles and men usually embark on more leading ones. However, it is the couple that set such roles. Indeed, they stated that it is easier not to have roles or to switch roles with someone you know, hypothetically a partner, whereas one might tend to stick to predetermined roles and step back to a 'female role' with someone you do not know. On the topic, one said:

"I think for the picture request that more men are more likely [...] to request something because they are more likely to send something so they want to get something in return. And also to put it the other way around, I think the women are best likelihood want to see those pictures". (Patrik, M, 26 y.o., Germany)

Findings indeed prove that participants perceive society and sexuality as objectifying women's bodies. Indeed, some participants find that the female body is more sexually objectified than the male body and this influences the way sexting is perceived and carried out. Few participants mentioned unwanted 'dick pics' claiming that this is one of the cases where men try to strengthen some kind of dominating role. In fact, they also suggested that, according to their perception, guys usually introduce a conversation leading to sexting. Participants perceive men as having a more dominating role than women. They also stated that the gendered patterns one might attribute to physical sex might be also attributed to sexting, e.g., when the guy ejaculates the sexual intercourse is over. Other participants highlighted how negative sending unwanted 'dick pics' is. According to their point of view, men sending this kind of material when it is not asked

for attack women with their nudity as consent is not shown. Moreover, the participants who mentioned unwanted 'dick pics', and no participant in general, mentioned scenarios depicting an opposite situation, i.e., that of women sending unwanted, unrequested, and non-consensual sexually explicit pictures.

One important trend proves that also German participants perceive that a gendered double standard can be identified regarding sexting. Indeed, as the female body is perceived differently than the male body, such different perception leads to heavier and stronger judgement on the part of society towards female sexters. Indeed, not only are women more likely to be victims of revenge porn, but they are also not equally judged as their male peers for carrying out the same sexual practice. On the issue, one said:

“Society puts more judgment puts my judgment on. And then on female people to expose naked in public and also to be to be to have sex with many people and stuff like that. It's still it's a big I think less than our generation, but I think in older generations it's always seen more negative for the woman exposes herself. Also like was Instagram that men can show nipples and women can't stuff like that”. (Johannes, M, 22 y.o., Germany)

Several participants support the perception according to which women are negatively judged if people know they are sexting, especially in the case their sexting material is shared or forwarded with someone who was not intended to have such material. During some interviews with female participants, they also provided examples of such gendered double standard during conversations with peers. Some participants said that she identified such scenarios in discussions with her friends, both male and female, who would negatively judge female sexters and call them with negative nicknames, e.g., 'slut'. The participants also stated that their friends would follow some patterns when they sext or when they approach girls, however such friends admit that a girl ought not to adopt nor follow the same approach as they would consider it as a negative behaviour.

To sum up, findings on gender differences are quite homogeneous in both groups of participants. Indeed, the main trend shows that participants perceived a gendered double standard according to which female sexters are negatively judged and called with nicknames such as 'slut', whereas male sexters are not equally considered. One further important trend in findings shows that women are most of the times victims of the sharing or forwarding of their sexting pictures on the part of former partners. Another trend proves

that sexuality in general implies roles according to which men lead the interactions and women are more subordinated. Such pattern is then replicated in sexting, where men introduce and lead the conversation, and try to impose themselves as more dominating figures. Moreover, data provide interesting findings: unwanted ‘dick pics’ are often referred to as a negative behaviour on the part of men, however no participant mentioned unwanted pictures sent by female sexters. Such finding might support the theory according to which female bodies are more aesthetically pleasant, hence receiving a female sexually explicit picture is more sexually exciting than a ‘dick pic’.

4.2.4 Conversations on sexting with peers

In this section participants were asked about the way they carry out conversations with their peers on sexting and if it is a widespread activity among their groups of friends. The aim was that of analysing how participants face a conversation on sexting compared to conversations on sex or sexuality in general, which was investigated earlier in the current chapter. As we will see, findings show here that sexting is perceived differently from physical sexual intercourses and this is reflected in the way conversations on the topic are addressed. Sexting is seen as more private and hence less discussed, indeed participants, both Italian and German, do not particularly address the topic with their peers.

Findings concerning the interviews with Italian participants prove that sexting is not a recurrent topic nor a widespread practice among their peers. In fact, findings can be split into two main trends. On one hand, participants never face the topic, thus they cannot know whether their peers engage in the activity; on the other, participants rarely discuss sexting and suppose their friends have at least once engaged in the activity. Indeed, some participants claimed that they would not talk about sexting and hence do not share possible personal experiences related to the activity. According to some participants, such behaviour is to be explained by the fact that friends might feel ashamed if sharing sexting experiences and she does not engage in conversations of this kind as she does not want her peers to feel uncomfortable. The participants further added that such scepticism towards sexting might be due to a lack of conversation on the topic, indeed the matter is not normalised and is addressed with negative emotions instead. They also claimed that because sexting is often connected to its negative consequences, people tend to avoid a

conversation on the topic as if they do not want peers to know they engage in this activity. Indeed, more dialogue and information on sexting would lead people to face the matter in a more normalised and freer way. One the issue, one claimed:

“I don't really know, because we don't talk about it. But because actually it's not something I do very frequently and a lot of times I don't pay attention to it and so well, I don't even talk about it or anyone. I've never talked about it, I tell you honestly”. (Sara, F, 24 y.o., Italy)

Findings proved once again that sexting as online sexual intercourse is subordinated to physical sexual intercourses which are perceived as being more important. Moreover, few participants claimed that this is to add to the perception that sexting is a much more delicate topic than physical sex so that people tend to be more private on their personal experiences. Another trend in findings shows that, although participants do not often carry out conversations on sexting with their peers, they claimed that their friends have at least once engaged in the activity. However, all participants in this situation affirmed that sex and physical sexual interactions are more or less recurrent topics. One of them, when asked whether sexting is a widespread practice among his friends stated:

“That I know of, yes, in the sense. I don't know if they all do, but those cases where there were couples who had to separate for one reason or another. I don't know she leaves for Erasmus. She goes back to the south, so I don't know. There is, there has been more or less always for the cases I know this thing. For a long time already”. (Carlo, M, 23 y.o., Italy)

Another trend in findings shows that participants carry out conversations on sexting with their friends. The focus of such conversations is not always that of personal experiences but also about general features or pieces of news concerning revenge porn. Those participants claiming that they would carry out conversations on sexting where they would exchange personal experiences affirmed that they would do so with few closest friends. Furthermore, according to one participant such conversations would exclusively take place when she and her friends are not in a relationship. Indeed, they would normally tend to protect their partner's privacy and avoid talking about sexting experiences. In general, although some participants address the topic more than others,

all of them claimed that their friends have at least once engaged in sexting. In this case as well, the difference in the perception of sexting and that of physical intercourses is identified. Indeed, participants further claimed how sexting is not a recurrent conversation and is not addressed in the same way as sex. For instance, one participant when asked if they carry out conversations on sexting and conversation on sex in the same way, answered:

“In a different way, absolutely. I mean in the end I tell you sex, at least from my point of view is more positive, that is when he tells me about sex, I mean I see it as a more positive and more interesting thing”. (Alessio, M, 25 y.o., Italy)

One participant provided an interesting point of view. He claimed that his peers would split into two groups that address conversations on sexting in two different ways. On one hand, some share sexting experiences and perceptions; on the other, others claim that they would never engage in such activity. The participant stated that these two types of perceptions belong to people who also perceive sexuality in a different way. The first group face sex and sexuality with a more open minded perception, they talk about it and share experiences. The second group are more closed towards sexuality and do not live nor experience sex in the same way.

Data on German participants are more homogenous and less vary. Indeed, findings can be grouped into one main trend: participants normally do not address conversations on sexting with their peers, neither on general features nor on personal experiences. Few participants claimed that they and their friend do not often face the topic, they might mention it from time to time. As one Italian participant previously stated, in this case as well the participants affirmed that they would not share their sexting experiences because they would engage in the activity only within a committed relationship. Hence, they would not address the topic in order to protect the partner's privacy. Although they claimed that sexting is not a taboo, they also stated that there is not enough conversation on it and thus they do not know whether it is a widespread activity among their friends. Participants affirm that, since they do not address the topic, they do not know if their friends engage in the activity or not. Other participants stated that, although they also do not carry out conversations on sexting, their friends would occasionally engage in it as they admitted it. It must be mentioned that most of the

participants further supported the difference in the way physical sexual intercourses and sexting are addressed. Indeed, the first are much more present in the participants' conversations with peers, whereas the latter is not equally perceived and discussed. The main reason for such difference is that sexting is perceived as being more private and delicate. For instance, one participant said on the issue:

"I don't think so because [...] what I could imagine is like that sex thing is for two people, maybe something more personal. [...] And most of my friends told me about their sexual experiences, like yeah, physical stuff. But I think if they're like sexting with a person for them, it's more private or personal. That's what I experienced". (Erica, F, 22 y.o., Italy)

Only one participant out of nine claimed that sexting is a recurrent topic in the conversations with his friends. In fact, such conversations are of great help to him in order to gain other perspectives and gain consciousness on the matter. However, he added that most of his friends have never sexted or would normally not sext, they would rather flirt. To conclude, he provided an episode, interesting but of negative connotation. He claimed that some friends tend to show each other girls' sexting material. Nevertheless, the participant did not provide an example of these situations nor did he explain the reaction the group have had.

To sum up the main findings in these sections, data collected from the two groups are similar but not the same. The main findings on Italian participants show that sexting is a topic present in their conversations, either in the form of general information or personal experiences. Two trends were identified here: no conversations at all or occasional conversations. In general, people who address the topic stated that their friends have sexted at least once; those who do not address the topic could not answer the question "is it a widespread activity among your group of friends?". Data on German participants show a similar scenario. However, no participants, except for one, said that they address the topic in their conversations with peers. The main reason here was to protect the partner's privacy or because they find the topic too personal and delicate. Only one participant out of nine affirmed that sexting is a recurrent topic. No particular gender difference was identified here.

4.3 Have you ever sexted?

This section of the interview investigated the experiences participants have had with sexting. Out of twenty participants seventeen participants have, at least once, sexted. One non-sexter belonged to the Italian group, the others to the German one and these participants were male. It might be interesting to highlight these results in comparison to the participants' perception of sexting previously investigated. Although participants openly claimed not to be against the practice, they all mainly investigated the negative and risky outcomes almost ignoring positive ones. The data and findings up to here identified were mainly based on speculations and perceptions participants have on the practice. On the contrary, they were here asked to describe the last time, or a particular time they remember, they sexted. A first section is going to investigate the context, person, means, and feelings of those who have sexted; a second section is going to analyse the reasons why the three participants have never engaged in the activity.

4.3.1 Participants' personal sexting experiences

The current section investigates the situations in which participants have sexted. The topics discussed are going to be the context in which they sexted, the relationship they had with the person they sexted with, and the feelings felt during the practice. In a few cases participants claimed they have never sexted, in such cases they were asked the reason(s) why they have never engaged in the activity. Mutual patterns were identified for both groups, although differences arose. Such patterns and differences will be investigated.

Data collected from the interviews with Italian participants show that they have engaged in sexting mostly within a romantic or sexual relationship. Indeed, the two contexts that were identified the most were that of a committed relationship and a situation in which sexters have had sexual intercourses or aim at establishing one. Seven out of eleven participants claimed they have sexted with a romantic or with a sexual partner. Two participants stated they have engaged in the activity only within an exclusive committed relationship. Only one participant affirmed that he has engaged in sexting with people he met online, claiming:

“Girls I've never seen in my life. I met them on 'Tandem' and then the conversation would move to Snapchat or Instagram”. (Tommaso, M, 24 y.o., Italy)

Participants provided an interesting point of view on the social media used to sext. Although WhatsApp has been identified as the most used social media, participants often mentioned Instagram for the fact that it gives users the possibility to send pictures that can be seen once and cannot be screenshotted. It is important to say that strictly female participants identified Instagram as a more secure social media as they felt more safe and felt they had more control over the situation. Indeed, this supports what participants in general have up to here affirmed, i.e., that women acknowledge more the risks and fear more the consequences of sexual practices and hence carry out sexting in a more conscious way. One female participant claimed on the issue:

“Because on Whatsapp I didn't feel comfortable with the fact that the photos would remain, and on Instagram there was the possibility of noticing whether or not photos would be screened and everything, so I had a way of checking the other person's behaviour as well”. (Luna, F, 24 y.o., Italy)

When asked to describe their last time or a particular situation when they sexted, participants provided quite homogeneous experiences. As previously mentioned, ten out of the eleven participants claimed they have engaged at least once in the activity. Later on in the chapter, non-sexters' experiences are investigated. For what concerns sexting experiences, most cases described a conversation that began with a request from one party to send a sexually explicit picture or to be together with the other party in order to have a physical sexual intercourse. In general, sexting conversations started with less sexually suggestive content and went on with more sexually suggestive material. Findings show that such material was mostly identified with sexually explicit text messages and pictures. The messages were perceived as some sort of script describing a physical sexual intercourse between the two parties, they would re-enact what they would do from foreplays to penetration. Text messages were supported by pictures and videos depicting the parties in sexually suggestive poses. Participants claimed to have sent and received pictures or videos framing genitals and other body parts or while masturbating. Indeed, all participants claimed that the visual material exchanged was more or less always sexually explicit.

Moreover, findings provide four different scenarios in which sexting took place: within a committed relationship; within a sexual relationship; in both cases sexting was carried out because sexters were distant or sexting was then followed by a physical sexual intercourse. Indeed, participants shared experiences concerning sexting with a committed partner with whom they had an exclusive relationship. On the contrary, other participants provided experiences concerning sexting outside romantic relationships. However, participants in this situation also claimed to have had physical sexual intercourses before engaging in sexting. In both cases, i.e., those of a romantic or a sexual relationship, sexting was carried out to fill and overcome a distance between the participant and the other person. Indeed, some participants claimed to have had a long-distance relationship or cases in which they sexted when they or the other person were on a trip, or in general far from each other. This supports the previously discussed theory according to which sexting is engaged if physical sexual intercourse cannot be carried out. On the contrary, findings prove that sexting was carried out prior to a physical sexual intercourse between the parties.

Findings also provide an interesting distinction from what female participants said on the material they have sent and what male participants said on the material they have received. Indeed, female participants claimed they have sent sexting pictures that were less sexually explicit than those received. In particular, some affirmed that they did not agree to send pictures framing them naked, the pictures framed the participants in underwear or hiding their faces instead. Moreover, they claimed that they have received pictures or videos more sexually explicit from the male sexter. Indeed, they said that such material would frame the other person completely naked and / or while masturbating, something female participants did not record and send. To sum up the general trend, it was said:

“So the photos were um full, him, all nude, And yes, let's say even genitals. I mean, close-up. Completely naked him, I never sent completely naked, though. Vagina never, I sent breasts, not whole”. (Luna, F, 24 y.o., Italy)

However, male participants did not support such perception. In fact, they said to have received pictures and videos that were equally sexually explicit as those they sent. Data prove that there is a strong difference between what female participants claimed to

have sent and what male participants claimed to have received from female sexters. However, not being the focus of the current dissertation, such difference was not supported by theoretical suppositions. Nevertheless, two points of views might explain it. First, as thoroughly investigated earlier in this chapter, participants highlighted how females perceive more the risks and fear more the consequences related to sexting and hence carry out such practice with more limits. This can be applied to the way female participants also discuss the topic and use the same limits when sharing their experiences. The second theory might be connected to the fact that such research is limited to a relatively small number of participants. Indeed, it is impossible to determine to what extent such difference in findings is a solo case strictly related to the current dissertation or can be imposed on general trends as well.

Participants also investigated the feelings related to sexting, whether before, during, or after the activity. Perceptions, experiences, and answers were homogeneous also in this case. Indeed, findings show that participants did not necessarily feel sexually excited when engaging in sexting. Most of the participants claimed to have felt sexually excited while masturbating, however they also affirmed that they would not always masturbate. Such findings show that an orgasm is not the ultimate goal of such practice, but the ultimate goal is having fun and pleasure (not necessarily sexual pleasure) instead. Moreover, many participants often mentioned feelings addressed to the emotional state of the other person, sometimes a romantic partner other times a sexual partner. One participant mentioned that it would increase his sexual pleasure knowing that his partner was feeling sexually excited while sexting thanks to him. It was said:

“This thing of knowing that the partner is sexually excited causes a certain excitement for me personally”. (Alberto, M, 26 y.o., Italy)

However, in other cases, the thought of the other person and their feelings was a source of discomfort for the participant. A small trend shows that participants would pay much attention to the person they are sexting with. In particular, they would ask themselves whether the other person is enjoying what they are sent, whether they are also feeling sexually excited, and even whether they are alone or showing the material to someone else. One particular case showed a participant fearing to have exceeded in the explicitness of the sexting material sent. He was afraid to have sent pictures and videos

that were too sexually explicit that made the other person feel uncomfortable. The participant said during the interview:

“Maybe I actually showed a little too much respect for her. So it made me a little uncomfortable after a while. The fact that I didn't get quite the same feedback about it”.
(Tommaso, M, 24.y.o., Italy)

In general, female participants addressed fear as one of the feelings related to sexting. In fact, some female participants said that while sexting they were afraid that the other person would share their sexting pictures. In some cases, the participants claimed that they were more relaxed after the activity once they saw that everything went fine; in other cases, other participants did not feel better and also claimed that mobile devices are an impediment for a full enjoyment of the practice.

Findings on Italian participants and sexting did not provide a particular trend on who tends to engage more in sexting or who tends to approach it, whether boys or girls. In some cases, female sexters introduced the conversation and began sending sexually suggestive pictures; in other cases, male sexters directly asked for material of that kind or sent it. On the same level, no particular trend on which gender tends to send / receive more sexually suggestive material was identified. On one hand, some participants, both female and male, claimed to have received more material from the sexual or romantic partner; on the other, other participants stated that they tended to send more material to the other party.

The interviews with German participants did not generate data that were as rich as those collected through interviews with Italian participants. Indeed, German participants did not deeply investigate their experiences and decided to share them on a superficial level. In one case, a participant did not agree to share her sexting experience and, besides saying that she has at least once engaged in the activity, she did not provide any other detail. This is to be added to the fact that two out of nine participants have never sexted, meaning that the data collected are necessarily less than those from the Italian interviews. In general, findings here were very similar to those previously investigated, in terms of context in which sexting was carried out and feelings.

Findings show in this case as well that sexting is carried out in two contexts, one being that of a romantic relationship and the other that of a sexual relationship. The main trend supports the theory according to which sexting is mainly carried out within a romantic committed relationship; however data highlight that sexual relationships are also scenarios for this kind of activity. Indeed, five participants claimed that they have sexted with a partner, whether girlfriend or boyfriend; two among them and other two said that they have engaged in sexting with someone who was not their partner but with whom they had a sexual relationship. These findings support the scenario in which physical sexual intercourse comes prior to online sexual activities, e.g., sexting. Moreover, those participants claiming to have sexted with a partner also added that sexting came along with a situation of distance where both the participant and the partner were far from each other. For instance, what one participant said can sum up other participants' answers:

“I've only sexted with my boyfriends and during our long-distance relationship”. (Wanda, F, 22 y.o., Germany)

German participants did not show particular preferences on the social media used to sext, nor did particular gender differences arouse. In general, WhatsApp is in this case as well the most used means, while Instagram and Snapchat were preferred in cases where the participants did not want their pictures to remain on the other person's mobile device. Indeed, these two social media allow users to send pictures or videos that can be seen only once and cannot be screenshotted, and participants claimed that they felt more safe in using them.

Data collected from the interviews with German participants show that written messages are the most exchanged sexting material. Such messages would describe and put into words how a physical sexual intercourse between the two parties would be carried out. Some participants claimed that their sexting experiences would follow a 'script' framing what they would do if they were together. Sexting was described in this way:

“Like a script of sex more or less. Yeah, like what you should do right now and how I would feel if you did this and that and so on”. (Erica, F, 22 y.o., Germany)

Moreover, no particular trend was identified concerning the pictures exchanged. In some cases, participants stated they have sent pictures that were not too sexually

explicit and that would frame their body parts in underwear, but in general not naked. In other cases, participants claimed to have sent and have received explicit pictures, such as ‘dick pics’ or the partner’s breast. As previously mentioned, participants referred to experiences involving a romantic or sexual partner, meaning that in any case physical sexual intercourses were preferred and came prior to sexting. In particular, sexting was more common in situations of long-distance relationships in which the online sexual practice would substitute a physical one. However, as not enough data were collected, it was impossible to determine trends on rates concerning sending and receiving sexting material. Indeed, I was not able to set gender differences on who tends to begin or introduce a conversation leading to sexting. Data show female participants to have begun with sexting, other data that male participants were the first to send sexting material. On the same level, no particular trends concerning men sending / receiving more sexually explicit material to and from female sexters were identified. All participants claimed to have both received and sent sexually suggestive sexting messages.

When it came to describing how they felt, German participants provided almost the same answers. In fact, they claimed that they have indeed felt sexually excited as sexting is a pleasant moment. In general, they provided positive answers and experiences. Some participants supported what previously said on feeling good and sexually excited knowing that the other part feels the same thanks to you. Indeed, they highlighted how important it is to sext with someone you have a connection with as it provides positive feelings. One participant claimed:

“I felt good, it was nice knowing that he was thinking about me. [...] Nobody is interrupting right now. It was actually a moment between us. [...] I know this person and I know how his skin feels like, how he breathes and this gives a warm and cozy feeling. [...] not just erotic stuff”. (Erica, F, 22. y.o., Germany)

Findings also show that masturbation is not necessarily connected to sexting meaning hence that it is not its ultimate purpose, supporting findings from the Italian interviews. Moreover, few participants eventually affirmed how sexting is subordinated to physical sexual intercourses as, in case of distance, it is ‘better than nothing’. To support the trend, one participant claimed:

“It was like better than being horny all the time. But it was like better than nothing, honestly”. (Derek, M, 23 y.o., Germany)

One last female participant provided an interesting point of view claiming that she sexted in order to please the boyfriend. In fact, she did not want to engage in the activity but did so because the boyfriend would have liked to and she knew he would have enjoyed it.

Few participants supported a trend that was identified for sex education as well, i.e., that of how their perception on the topic changed according to the development and increase of their sexual experiences. Indeed, they claimed that having more sexual experiences gives them the possibility to feel more confident in sexting and to have more imagination in the sexting messages since they know better what they like or dislike. As previously mentioned, one participant decided not to share her experience on sexting and beside saying that she has at least once sexted, she did not provide other details. This can be connected to the fact that the participant attended a conservative school where sexuality was perceived as a taboo and claimed that this influenced her perception on the topic. Such thing might have led her to feel limited in sharing her sexting experience with me.

To sum up, seventeen out of twenty participants claimed to have engaged at least once in sexting. Trends show that participants have mostly sexted with a romantic or sexual partner, people they already had sexual encounters with. This highlighted that participants tend and prefer to sext with people they know, people they have met at least once, and that a physical sexual intercourse has to be carried out prior to the online one. It is also worth mentioning that few participants in both groups sometimes did not know if they have sexted or if a particular situation was to be framed as sexting. This might show how sexting is still a sexual practice that people do not know much about and that is indeed difficult to precisely frame or to explain.

4.3.2 Why haven't you ever sexted?

As mentioned, only three out of twenty participants said that they have never sexted. In particular, one Italian participant and two German participants. It is worth highlighting the fact that only male participants claimed to have never sexted. This shows a higher rate

of female participants having engaged in sexting. Not having investigated the trend makes it difficult if not impossible to analyse the reasons for this rate. Few female participants claimed to have sexted in order to fulfil their partner's desire, whereas no male participant has mentioned such perception. This might explain the reason why more female than male participants have engaged in sexting.

According to the 25-year-old Italian participant, he has never engaged in the activity due to a lack of trust in people and in social media. Indeed, he fears the risk of his sexting material being shared or forwarded to someone who was not intended to receive it. He added that he has never considered sexting as sexual practice, claiming that he would rather have physical sexual intercourses. Although he said to have once received a sexually suggestive picture from a girl, he did not reply with equal material. However, he was not able to explain such decision, he just said that for him sexting is not an option. Nevertheless, when asked if he would ever engage in sexting, he claimed that the only situation for him would be that of a long-distance relationship. When asked the reasons why he has never sexted, he answers:

“But it's firstly because trusting is good, but not trusting is better. And then because I've never considered it a practice, I mean as I told you before, I don't like too much using social networks than this thing here, I prefer to see people in person live and the same thing with girls when I have certain experiences I prefer much more in short, to have them in person and in a real way than its on the phone”. (Alessio, M, 25 y.o., Italy)

The two German participants provided similar answers. Indeed, one of them highlighted the risks and negative consequences that an unhealthy and wrong sexting behaviour could lead to. According to his point of view, the risks are too high than the advantages. He also claimed that sexting might be an option in case of distance between the two parties and one reason he has never sexted might be because he has never had long-distance relationships. In fact, he affirmed that he would sext in case of a committed relationship and if he cannot physically be with his partner. It was said:

“First, I consider the risk higher and the disadvantages also. And yeah, well I I think I only had one person I trusted that much into doing it, but we lived really close together. [...] It wasn't just not necessary”. (Patrick, M, 26 y.o., Germany)

The other participant explained his lack in sexting experiences with a lack in sex education. In fact, he connected this to the fact that he grew up in a much conservative and prude family in which sexuality was perceived as a taboo, claiming:

“First of all, it's still like from a family side raised a little bit prude. I try to be sexual open as I can because I think it's just reasonable and cool. But still like there are some tendency tendencies inside me”. (Alex, M, 22 y.o., Germany)

This perception influenced the way he experiences the sexual sphere leading him to be not so open. This is to be added to the fact that he has simply never felt like sexting and he has never felt like there was a proper situation. He also agreed to the idea that he would sext in case of a long-distance relationship and since his partner has always lived close, he has never experienced the need to sext.

Conclusions

This work aimed at providing an in-depth analysis on the way young adults engage in sexting and on possible differences connected to cultural reasons. Specifically, I wanted to investigate the role sexting plays in Italian and German young adults' sexual life, whether it is perceived and carried out as standard practice or as 'extra' substituting physical sexual intercourses. Moreover, targets belonging to two different nationalities made it possible to compare the results and to investigate any difference connected to cultural matters. As previously mentioned, once I began the interviews, I realised the importance participants gave to sex education. Indeed, the section of the interview dedicated to this topic emerged as being rich in details and experiences. Thus, I believed that a theoretical section and an analysis of the topic were much needed.

Findings concerning sex education are quite homogenous in both groups and highlight the fact that young adults get their sex education from different heterogeneous sources, which can be academically valid or from their everyday life. The first source mentioned was school. The general trend shows that young adults are not satisfied with the SBSE they were provided with and have a negative perception to the point that some participants claimed they do not recall having had sex education in school. A minor distinction between German and Italian participants is to be made. The latter provided more negative opinions than the first. Indeed, contrary to Italian participants, few German interviewees claimed that the SBSE they were provided with was helpful for them. Moreover, findings suggest that SBSE in both countries is limited to a relatively small pool of topics, anatomy and contraceptives namely. Such topics ought to be, however, broadened to other matters and issues concerning people's sexual life, such as female masturbation, sexual identity, or in general non-heterosexual sexuality. A general trend also shows that SBSE is provided too early in one's academic journey. This is supported by the fact that both German and Italian participants often mentioned feeling embarrassed, ashamed, and uncomfortable during these classes. Feel students uncomfortable during these classes, such teaching programmes are not as valid as they should be. On the issue, young adults stress the importance of a booster in SBSE where students are provided these teachings also further on in their adolescence.

Another trend in findings proves that parents were not the main leading role when it came to young adults' sex education. Indeed, data are mostly homogeneous in this case as well as the two groups provided similar answers. Both groups of participants claimed that they were not provided particular sex education from their parents. The main reasons for this were connected to shame and to sexuality being a taboo in particularly conservative families. Findings would split into two different trends. On one side, participants mentioned a conversation they had with their parents but that would strictly focus on contraceptives; on the other, parents would rather make recommendations, for instance "wear a condom" or "be careful". Parenting sex education, as school-based sex education, would strictly focus on contraception instead of informing the children on any topic concerning sexuality.

As for the previous cases, data collected on the role of peers in young adults' sex education are quite homogeneous in both groups, although few differences arose. In general, findings prove that young adults are more likely to face conversations on sexuality with peers rather than with adults and all participants affirmed that they have, at least once, addressed a conversation of this kind with their friends. Indeed, friends are perceived as a safe space where conversations on sexual experiences can be carried out with trust and freedom. One minor difference between German and Italian young adults lies in the fact that the first did not address peers in the same way Italians did. According to German participants, conversations with peers on sexuality were not as common as for Italian participants who investigated the topic more. The trend could not have been, however, applied to one participant who addressed peers in a negative tone and connotation claiming that she had negative experiences. Findings and trends on sex education in general prove that female and male young adults experience it in different ways. Females face the topic with more seriousness than males who, however, face their sexuality earlier than their female peers. Several times during the interviews, female participants highlighted the fact that their male peers would address the topic joking and laughing about it and that, for instance, they got to know about masturbation before. Indeed, female young adults are not provided with information on masturbation but are often said that "girls don't do that" instead. Such gender differences were perceived and identified from both Italian and German participants.

The last findings on sex education concerned porn and other sources. As seen in the theoretical chapter, porn as source for sex education is a controversial matter and most of the times perceived as an issue. The main trend identified through this research proves that young adults used porn as source for their sex education, especially among Italian participants. Porn has been one of the easiest and fastest means through which adolescents can learn about sexuality and participants admitted that they got to learn some features concerning sex through porn. German participants did not address porn as much as Italian participants did and faced the topic after I directly asked about the role porn played in their SE. Although young adults learnt from porn, their perception on the matter changed growing up. Indeed, porn provides a false and unreliable depiction of reality. In general, it focuses on the male pleasure, on penetration, and it lacks contraception. In this case as well, and especially among Italian participants, the unfaithful elements in porn were mostly highlighted by females. Once again, such gender differences might be connected to the fact that, according to the participants' experiences, women are more sensitive to these topics. The Internet in general is often mentioned as a fruitful source of information together with social media. Indeed, young adults strongly rely on these two sources when seeking information on sexuality because social media offer several different accounts and young adults can address what they believe to be the best for them. Another important trend shows that experience is the main source for sex education, with no difference based on the participants' nationalities or gender. To conclude the analysis on sex education, it is worth saying that the environments in which young adults grow up reflect the way they perceive and experience sexuality. Indeed, young adults who grew up in families where sex education was a taboo experience consequences, for instance they feel limited in carrying out conversations on sex and also in experiencing sex itself.

A section dedicated to the participants' definition of sexting was needed to frame their experiences. The general trend shows that participants struggled to find a linear, synthetic, and reliable definition of what sexting is. This then helped to understand some of the answers provided concerning their experiences. Indeed, some participants claimed that they did not know if they have ever sexted as they could not precisely frame some behaviours they had. Indeed, young adults do not have clear in mind what sexting is, besides knowing that it includes texting and sexually explicit pictures. Since they do not know precisely what sexting is, it is difficult for young adults to say without doubt if they

have ever engaged in it. There are no particular differences between the two target groups. In general, participants first provided a short standard answer claiming that sexting entails one's naked pictures, but then provided a broader answer through following questions I asked, e.g., "Do you think sexting includes sexually suggestive text messages?". No main difference was encountered between the two target pools who identify 'sexting' as the exchange of sexually suggestive material through a mobile device. Such sexually suggestive material replicates a physical sexual intercourse that the two parties would have if they were physically together at that moment. Findings also show that people who have never sexted also struggle to say what sexting is, highlighting the importance experience plays in understanding what particular sexual practices are and entail.

Data collected concerning the participants' perception on sexting suggest that young adults perceive both the positive and negative aspects of such sexual practice. It is important here to say that participants were not guided nor influenced towards particular answers. Findings highlight the fact that sexting is not equally perceived as the physical sexual practices. Indeed the main trend suggests that young adults connect sexting and its positive outcomes within long-distance relationships. In fact, despite little data on sexting providing sexual pleasure and excitement, most of the data depict sexting as having a positive influence if the two parties cannot meet and cannot have a physical sexual intercourse. These trends prove that young adults do not perceive sexting as something added or well-integrated to their sexual life, but sexting is an alternative instead. This trend is supported also by the way young adults talk with peers about sexting and in the way they carry it out, as we will shortly see. Moreover, one further trend supports those experts claiming that sexting is perceived as a negative sexual practice. In fact, the topic was often addressed to its negative consequences, especially those of forwarding and sharing one's sexting material. Although participants mentioned positive features of sexting, they mostly and mainly investigated its risks and harmful consequences showing that when such topic is mentioned young adults often think of and address its negative side. No differences connected to nationality were identified here, proving that German and Italian young adults share the same perception and ideas. One difference was nevertheless identified between Italian males and females. The latter guided the interview investigating the negative side, i.e., sharing or forwarding the pictures. On the contrary, boys mentioned and addressed the topic only when asked about the negative sides of

sexting. This supports the theory that, being girls most of the time victims of harmful sexting behaviours, they are more sensible and are more likely to face this issue.

Sexting positive features and outcomes are strictly connected to the contexts in which sexting is or ought to be carried out. As said, young adults perceive sexting as a solution to cases in which the two parties cannot be together – whether due to a long-distance relationship or other reasons. Although participants claimed that people can engage in sexting with whomever they want, they all claimed that they would sext with someone they have a romantic or sexual relationship with. It is worth saying that many participants provided their answers framing sexting as the exchange of sexually explicit pictures and this influenced their opinions. With no difference connected to nationality-matter, young adults would engage in sexting in the case of a long-distance relationship or if, in general, they cannot meet the other person and being in a committed relationship is not strictly necessary. Other elements are more important, such as: trust between the parties and consent. As long as one feels to sext and consent is shown, sexting can occur in any situation. Once again sexting subordination to physical sexual practices is shown. Findings also suggest that young adults would engage in sexting to flirt with someone they are sexually attracted to and with someone they aim at establishing a sexual or romantic relationship. Such perception is further strengthened in the case the participant has already had a physical sexual intercourse with that person, although they are not in a relationship. Indeed, as we will later see, sexting is to be framed in a situation where a physical sexual intercourse is to take place.

Moreover, gender differences can be identified in sexting as in any field of sexuality. One main gender difference lies in the unequal way society judges women and men for carrying out the same sexual practices. Young adults strongly perceive and unfortunately replicate such gendered double standard, e.g., they have conversations with peers in which they negatively call girls for having sexted. In the current research, both groups identified this gendered double standard but Italian female participants stressed it more. Indeed, they reported and investigated the issue more than their male peers. However, such gendered trend was not encountered among German participants. The other main gender difference is identified in the fact that women are most likely to be victims of non-consensual forwarding or sharing of their sexting messages. This might be

connected to the perception that the female body is more sexually exciting than the male body. Such perception leads to different reactions on the part of young men when they see a male or female body, which is perceived as being more aesthetically pleasant.

Findings prove that sexting is treated differently from physical sexual practices. During the research, I wanted to investigate the way sexting is not only perceived by the participants themselves but also by their friends, in their conversations. Analysing this would have provided the way sexting is actually addressed in bigger contexts, i.e., among peers. Indeed, findings proved that young adults do not address sexting as much as they do with other sexual practices. This proves once again the subordinated position of sexting within the sexual sphere. The main trend shows that sexting is not a recurrent topic and, when participants were asked if their friends engage in the activity, they claimed that they do not know as they never face the topic. Since sexting is not a much-addressed topic, this makes it also a delicate matter for people to face who then tend to be more private on their personal experiences. The technological nature of the practice and its lack of physical touch might be the reason why sexting is subordinated to physical sexual intercourses. However, there is no particular reason why young adults do not address the topic, some claim to protect the partner's privacy, others for shame. It might be interesting to analyse whether and how this different perception will change over the years should technology gain an even more pervasive role.

Personal experiences provide a practical sight on what participants had up to here claimed. Despite the fear of the risks or harmful behaviour, findings prove that Italian and German young adults engage in sexting although some with more sexually explicit material than others. A romantic committed relationship is indeed the main context in which sexting is engaged, especially in the case of long-distance. In fact, data show that young adults are more likely to sext if they cannot meet their partner and, in order to maintain the sexual element, opt for sexting. Other contexts in which young adults tend to engage in sexting are that of a sexual relationship or when one aims at establishing one. In any case, physical sexual intercourse prior to sexting seems to be a necessary element. This supports the up-to-here thoroughly investigated theory according to which sexting is a subordinated sexual activity. In fact, the general trend, besides one exception, shows that sexting does not occur if the parties had not had a physical sexual intercourse before.

Furthermore, the situations in which Italian and German participants tend to engage in sexting can be categorised in four different scenarios: in case of a romantic relationship; in case of a sexual relationship; in any relationship as long as it is long-distance; and if the sexters engage in sex afterwards.

Moreover, few gender differences were identified. Among Italian participants, more females addressed one particular option in social media where one sends a picture that can be seen once and is then deleted. This is a source of safety and privacy on the part of female sexters who are afraid that the other person owning their sexting material might share it. However, such gender differences were not identified among German participants. No particular trend or reason might explain why Italian males do not address the issue as much as German males. There is one other interesting gender difference concerning sexting among Italian participants. Female Italian participants claimed that they sent material that was less sexually explicit than the material they received, e.g., they did not send naked pictures but would always wear underwear whereas they received pictures of male genitals or while the other person was masturbating. However, male participants did not support this trend by saying that they sent more sexually explicit material. Instead, they claimed that the material they sent and received was equally explicit, meaning that female sexters have equally sent naked pictures or material depicting them masturbating. This might be, once again, explained by the fact that females suffer and fear more the risks of harmful sexual behaviours and of negative judgement. Thus, they do not open as much as their male peers on their personal experience in order to prevent any judgement the other person might have, in this case.

A small trend highlighted the fact that sexting is equally initiated by female and male sexters, no finding shows who is more likely to begin sexting or who engages in the activity more. Both female and male Italian and German young adults equally initiate and engage in the sexual practice. For what concerns the material, young adults exchange both written and visual material, such as messages describing a physical sexual intercourse or pictures and videos of body parts, genitals, and / or while the sexter is masturbating.

To conclude, the current research shows that sexting is indeed a widespread practice among young adults and such practice has both its positive and negative features.

However, despite the high rates of young adults engaging in the activity, sexting is not integrated into sexual practices and is not perceived equal to a physical sexual intercourse. This is further supported by the fact that young adults engage more in physical sexual intercourses than in sexting. The current work indeed has its limits. First, the data collected from the German interviews were not as rich as those from the Italian interviews. Such difference can be connected to the fact that German participants were less (Italian participants: 11; German participants: 9) and that the level of confidence was lower as they might not know me as much as the other target pool. This might have led me to collect smaller data and them to open less than they would have with a closer researcher. Moreover, more German participants claimed to have grown up in conservative or prude environments – those being families, friends, or academic environments. This has indeed influenced the way they perceive, experience, and talk about sexuality leading them to not have sexted or not thoroughly discussed their experiences. One last limit of the current research lies in the language used in the interviews with German participants. In fact, the interviews were not carried out in the participants' mother language, i.e., German, but in English. This might have caused them to feel limited in expressing their ideas and opinions, whereas Italians felt more confident and provided richer data. Research in the field is indeed needed to further provide interesting data and trends on young adults engaging in sexting on a broader level.

Appendix

This section of the current dissertation provides the track of the interview, which would begin with a short description of the research. As previously mentioned, I mainly worked according to this structure but the interviews did not precisely follow this track. Other questions were asked based on personal taste following the answers of the participants.

Track of the interview

Introduction: Hi, thank you for participating in the interview. The following survey is part of my final dissertation for my MA at Università degli Studi di Padova. The questionnaire aims to test out young people's perception on sexting. The aim of the project is to investigate the features of sexting within the sexual practices of today's generations as well as differences in behaviors connected to cultural reasons. The survey is totally anonymous, it won't collect nor share any personal data. The survey is in English. If you don't at feel ease in replying some questions, you can just say in "I don't feel like answering".

Part one - demographic information.

- Tell me about yourself, who you are, what you do etc.
 - Age:
 - Gender:
 - Sexual orientation:
 - Area of origin (country and area):
 - Educational qualification and job/current occupation:
 - Educational qualification and job of your parents:

Part two - social media.

● Please tell me about the social media you use the most, why. The role they play in your life.

- Which social media do you use the most: Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, LinkedIn, Telegram, Snapchat, Others

- What do you use social media for: Entertainment, Information, Communication, Other)

- On average, how many hours a day are you connected to social networks?

- Has social media improved our lives?

- Have they influenced and/or changed your life? In what way?

Part three - sexuality

● Can you tell me about your sexual education? How it was, when etc.

- What do you think was the main source of your sexual education? School, family, friends, porn, internet, social media, other

- How did your sexual education take place? In what way and in what situation?

- Do you think the sexual education you received was sufficient to understand the advantages and dangers of sexual practices?

- If YES, what do you think is best?

- If NO, what do you think needs to be changed and improved?

Part four - sexting.

● In your opinion and experience, what is meant by 'sexting'?

● What are your attitudes and ideas towards this practice?

- Do you think there are downsides? Which ones?

- Do you think there are positive sides? Which ones?
- Many people claim that in many areas of modern society men and women are differentiated and treated differently according to their gender, do you think that in sexting such differences take place? (e.g. expectations of photos sent, consequences).
- Is sexting a widespread practice within your circle of friends?
 - Is this generation aware of what sexting is and what it entails? Or is there too much misinformation or ignorance?
 - Do many friends around you do sexting? Is it considered taboo or do you talk about it?
 - Do you think that sexting, to be such, should only include full nudity?
- Finally, in your opinion and experience, do you think that there are relational contexts (e.g. married couples, exclusive relationships) that are more appropriate than others in which to carry out this practice (i.e. sexting)?

[From here we either continue with the interview if the interviewee* is comfortable with it or we move on to the anonymous questionnaire].

I will now ask you to tell me about your personal experiences with sexting.

- The first thing I will ask you is if you have ever done it.
 - If you have never done sexting, what were your reasons or motivation for not doing it?
 - If yes, with whom?
- Can you describe the last time you did sexting?
 - When
 - With whom
 - Where

- How
 - What social media did you use
 - Why you did it
 - What emotions you felt
 - How did you feel afterwards
 - Was it natural or was it required/forced

 - Would you do it if you knew there's a channel 100% safe?
 - Would you do it again?
 - Did you have any negative experiences? Your friends?
 - In general, when you did sexting what kind of photos/videos did you send and/or receive?
- Is this a practice you habitually carry out?
 - Which social media do you usually use or would you use for sexting?

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<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2009/12/15/teens-and-sexting/> [25.01.2023]

Riassunto

La presente tesi fornisce un'analisi approfondita della posizione del sexting all'interno delle pratiche e della vita sessuale dei giovani adulti. Diversi elementi sono stati analizzati nel corso del presente lavoro, il modo in cui i giovani adulti percepiscono questa pratica, se hanno mai fatto sexting, e eventuali differenze collegate al paese d'origine. Infatti, la ricerca non si concentra solo sui giovani adulti italiani, ma anche su quelli tedeschi. Per inquadrare meglio il mio lavoro, viene presentato un quadro teorico in cui vengono indagate le posizioni degli esperti e i lavori sul campo. Dalle interviste è emerso che i partecipanti hanno dedicato più tempo del previsto all'analisi della loro educazione sessuale. Pertanto, si è ritenuto necessario proporre una parte teorica e un'analisi dell'argomento.

Il primo capitolo è dedicato alle correnti teoriche riguardanti l'educazione sessuale e il sexting. In primo luogo, il capitolo analizza il ruolo svolto dall'educazione sessuale nell'educare le persone a una sana vita sessuale. Le fonti per l'educazione sessuale possono essere trovate in diversi ambienti: scuola, famiglia o anche porno, per citarne alcuni. Un'educazione sessuale ben impartita porta quindi a comportamenti sessuali sani e a scelte responsabili sul proprio sviluppo sessuale. Uno dei primi ambienti che forniscono un'educazione sessuale è la scuola e, nonostante i possibili risultati positivi, l'educazione sessuale a scuola è un argomento controverso (Vivancos et al, 2013). Uno dei problemi a questo proposito è che non esistono linee guida standard su come strutturare questi programmi e, quando presenti, cambiano in tutto il mondo (Chinelli et al, 2022). Tuttavia, la scuola non può essere l'unico mezzo, ma è necessario fornire alle persone altri strumenti per garantire loro una valida educazione sessuale (ibidem). La letteratura sull'educazione sessuale indaga anche il ruolo svolto dalle famiglie. Tuttavia, non è un compito facile determinare fino a che punto dovrebbe arrivare un'educazione sessuale fornita in ambito familiare e ugualmente difficile è introdurre elementi efficaci per una corretta educazione sessuale dei genitori. La ricerca sull'argomento individua ulteriormente il porno come una delle principali fonti di educazione sessuale, ma sul tema, gli esperti si dividono in due gruppi opposti. Da un lato, alcuni sostengono il porno come possibile fonte di educazione sessuale; dall'altro, altri sostengono l'opposto sottolineando la falsa percezione della realtà proposta dal porno. alcuni sostengono che le persone

dovrebbero essere istruiti sui potenziali rischi e sugli esiti positivi della pornografia, che può effettivamente essere utilizzata come fonte di educazione sessuale. È necessario un potenziamento dell'educazione sessuale per educare ulteriormente i giovani non solo sulle IST o su come prevenire le gravidanze, ma anche su come mettere in atto comportamenti sessuali sani e positivi.

Il primo capitolo prosegue con una rassegna letteraria sul sexting. I principali limiti riscontrati sono stati che la ricerca si sarebbe concentrata principalmente sui minori e, in particolare, sui minori degli Stati Uniti. In effetti, una ricerca adeguata su un target più adulto in Europa è molto meno presente. Una delle questioni che riguardano la questione è l'assenza di una definizione standardizzata del termine. In effetti, i ricercatori optano per spiegazioni diverse. Ad esempio, alcune definizioni includono qualsiasi tipo di materiale sessualmente esplicito come contenuto del sexting (Comartin, 2013; Reys et al., 2013), mentre altre si limitano a immagini sessualmente suggestive (Brown et al., 2009; Richards & Calvert, 2009). La maggior parte delle definizioni, tuttavia, concorda sul fatto che il materiale viene scambiato tra due persone tramite dispositivi elettronici (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017; Liong & Cheng, 2019). Le ricerche sull'argomento si sono concentrate principalmente sui minori di 18 anni perché questo target è particolarmente toccato dal punto di vista legale, in quanto il sexting con minori è stato in alcuni casi considerato pedopornografia (Ricketts, 2015). Tuttavia, il sexting è percepito come un comportamento problematico anche per gli adolescenti. Inoltre, la letteratura si concentra principalmente sul fatto che il sexting abbia un'influenza positiva o negativa sulle persone. Il problema principale collegato al sexting riguarda la condivisione o l'inoltro del materiale a qualcuno al di fuori del destinatario e del mittente (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones, & Wolak, 2011; Lippman & Campbell, 2014).

La letteratura disponibile sul sexting individua differenze di età e di genere, nel modo in cui i ragazzi e le ragazze fanno sexting e nel modo in cui potrebbero essere giudicati da chi non fa sexting. Per quanto riguarda l'influenza dell'età, la letteratura disponibile mostra che gli adolescenti più grandi sono più propensi a fare sexting rispetto a quelli più giovani (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017).

In base alle ricerche esistenti sul sexting e sulle differenze di genere, è impossibile determinare una tendenza standard su chi fa più sexting. Alcuni studi suggeriscono un

tasso femminile più elevato (Livingstone, & Görzig, 2014; Ybarra, & Mitchell, 2014), altri studi suggeriscono che i ragazzi sono più coinvolti (Rice et al., 2012; Baumgarten et al., 2014; Van Ouytsel, 2014; West et al., 2014). Tuttavia, è stata individuata una differenza sostanziale nella percezione che i ragazzi hanno del sexting rispetto alle ragazze. Infatti, le ragazze hanno riferito di aver percepito reazioni sociali più negative per aver fatto sexting e di essersi sentite più giudicate rispetto ai ragazzi (Walrave et al., 2013). Inoltre, gli studi dimostrano che le ragazze hanno anche maggiori probabilità di essere vittime della condivisione o dell'inoltro del loro materiale sexting da parte dei ragazzi (West et al., 2014). La teoria cerca di rispondere alla domanda "perché le persone fanno sexting?" confrontando gli studi sull'argomento. In effetti, i risultati forniscono un quadro eterogeneo in cui le ragioni del sexting sono molto diverse. Alcuni esperti sostengono che gli adolescenti sentono la pressione a fare sexting esercitata dai coetanei e quindi agiscono in base alla loro reazione per conformarsi al gruppo (Rice et al., 2012). Altre ragioni del sexting sono semplicemente legate a fattori comportamentali e attitudinali. Infatti, le persone più estroverse e con atteggiamenti spensierati sono più propense a fare sexting (Widman et al., 2021). Inoltre, le ricerche dimostrano che le persone fanno sexting per compiacere il partner, per flirtare o per stabilire una relazione sessuale (Drouin, 2015). La letteratura disponibile evidenzia inoltre che il sexting si verifica soprattutto nell'ambito di relazioni sentimentali consolidate.

Come già detto, la letteratura disponibile tende a concentrarsi maggiormente sul sexting come attività negativa da cui le persone dovrebbero astenersi. Ciò va inquadrato in un contesto in cui si ritiene che il sexting possa danneggiare la salute psicologica di una persona, soprattutto nel caso in cui il suo materiale sexting venga inoltrato o pubblicato online. In generale, il sexting è percepito come un pericolo e che le persone dovrebbero astenersi dal farlo. Uno degli elementi considerati dalla teoria è se il sexting oggettivizza o meno. Alcuni studi inquadrano il sexting come un'oggettivazione dei corpi perché questi ultimi sono percepiti come oggetti da giudicare da altri secondo standard culturali estetici (Calogero, 2012). Al contrario, gli studi a sostegno del sexting come sessualmente liberatorio sostengono che le persone che fanno sexting vivono la sessualità con maggiore apertura e diversità (Weinberg & Williams, 2010).

Il secondo capitolo descrive la metodologia utilizzata per la presente ricerca, che si basa sul modello della ricerca qualitativa. Un lavoro di questo tipo mira a stabilire le ragioni, i mezzi e il modello di uno specifico comportamento (Della Porta, 2014). A differenza della ricerca quantitativa, che mira a fornire numeri sul numero di persone che mettono in atto un determinato atteggiamento, la ricerca qualitativa indaga il "come" e il "perché". Le interviste sono percepite come lo strumento principale per condurre una ricerca di questo tipo. Infatti, attraverso questa tecnica il ricercatore ha la possibilità di accedere e raccogliere i pensieri e le osservazioni dell'intervistato su argomenti specifici. Diversi fattori mi hanno spinto a scegliere il sexting come argomento della presente dissertazione. Innanzitutto, il riconoscimento che la sessualità sta acquisendo una posizione più accettata all'interno della società. Infatti, le discussioni, le conversazioni e le rappresentazioni dell'argomento sembrano essere più ricorrenti. Inoltre, bisogna inquadrare il sexting in uno scenario in cui i dispositivi mobili, Internet e i social media sono diventati così pervasivi da influenzare la sfera della sessualità. Un ulteriore interesse per l'argomento è stato rafforzato da una prima analisi della letteratura disponibile. Da questa è emerso che una ricerca sul sexting e sui giovani adulti europei potrebbe essere necessaria e interessante. Dopo una breve ricerca sull'argomento e dopo aver scelto il sexting come focus del mio lavoro, ho riflettuto sullo scopo della ricerca attuale: A cosa dovrebbe mirare la mia ricerca? Il lavoro mirava ad analizzare il comportamento dei giovani adulti in materia di sexting. La ricerca avrebbe dovuto fornire dati su una tendenza generale sul fatto che i giovani adulti si impegnino o meno in questa attività, ma doveva anche fornire risultati su come i partecipanti percepiscono il sexting e su come lo praticano. Il sexting è trattato come qualsiasi altra pratica sessuale o sostituisce i rapporti sessuali fisici? I giovani adulti si dedicano al sexting? Ci sono differenze nel modo in cui i giovani adulti tedeschi percepiscono e attuano il sexting rispetto ai giovani adulti italiani? Queste sono le domande a cui il mio lavoro ha cercato di rispondere.

La maggior parte del lavoro è stata dedicata alle interviste, alla loro struttura e alle loro tracce. Ho ritenuto che questo strumento fosse il migliore per raccogliere dati il più possibile ricchi di dettagli e spiegazioni. L'intervista è stata suddivisa in cinque temi principali: informazioni demografiche sui partecipanti; l'uso dei social media; la loro educazione sessuale; le loro idee e percezioni sul sexting; infine, le loro esperienze personali con il sexting. Le interviste avrebbero seguito principalmente la struttura, ma

sono state poste altre domande per approfondire le risposte dei partecipanti sulla base di ciò che hanno detto e che ho ritenuto necessario indagare. Inoltre, la decisione di condurre la mia ricerca su adulti di età compresa tra i 22 e i 26 anni è stata diretta e chiara. Infatti, ho voluto concentrarmi su una fascia d'età che mi era familiare e che ritenevo sarebbe stata disposta a discutere di un argomento così privato. Inoltre, ho optato per un target più ampio in termini di nazionalità e ho deciso di utilizzare come partecipanti giovani adulti tedeschi. Questa decisione è stata accompagnata da un periodo di mobilità che ho trascorso in una città della Germania meridionale, dove ho avuto modo di stabilire contatti con i partecipanti tedeschi. Tutti i partecipanti appartengono e sono stati contattati tra coetanei, amici intimi e compagni di classe. Casi particolari per i soggetti tedeschi hanno reso necessario un supporto esterno per contattare altri partecipanti. Una volta decisi i soggetti, ho contattato personalmente ciascuno di loro nel mese di ottobre attraverso un messaggio standard via WhatsApp. Il messaggio spiegava brevemente l'argomento e lo scopo della mia ricerca e chiedeva poi alla persona di partecipare. Tutte le persone contattate hanno dato risposte affermativo e positive, nessuna ha rifiutato la richiesta. Venti persone hanno preso parte alla ricerca, undici provenienti dall'Italia (cinque donne, sei uomini), le altre nove dalla Germania (cinque donne, quattro uomini). Le interviste sono state effettuate sulla piattaforma Zoom nel mese di novembre e sono durate da 45 minuti a un'ora e mezza. Non ci sono ragioni particolari che spieghino le differenze nella durata delle interviste. Le interviste con i partecipanti italiani sono state condotte in italiano, mentre quelle con i partecipanti tedeschi in inglese. Tale decisione si è basata su questioni personali relative al fatto che le interviste in tedesco non sarebbero state così scorrevoli e non avrei potuto approfondire come ho fatto con la lingua inglese. I partecipanti tedeschi sono stati comunque informati che, se necessario, avrebbero potuto passare alla loro lingua madre. Tutti i partecipanti hanno dato il loro consenso alla registrazione dell'intervista. Questo è stato necessario per trascrivere tutte le interviste per l'analisi tematica. Infatti, ogni intervista è stata poi trascritta e l'analisi si è basata su queste trascrizioni.

Il terzo e ultimo capitolo della presente dissertazione si è concentrato sull'analisi dei dati raccolti attraverso le interviste. L'analisi ha seguito lo schema dell'analisi tematica, stabilendo temi che sono stati poi suddivisi in codici secondo la teoria proposta da Braun e Clarke (2006) e Maguire e Delahunt (2017). Il capitolo fornisce innanzitutto

un'analisi dell'educazione sessuale fornita ai partecipanti; i codici per questo tema sono stati: la percezione dell'educazione sessuale a scuola; la percezione dell'educazione sessuale dei genitori; l'educazione sessuale attraverso i coetanei; il porno come strumento di educazione sessuale e altre fonti. Dopo una prima analisi sull'educazione sessuale, il capitolo affronta infine le domande della ricerca. In primo luogo, vengono analizzate le definizioni di "sexting" fornite dai partecipanti, utili per inquadrare le loro percezioni ed esperienze. In secondo luogo, viene analizzata la percezione dei partecipanti sul sexting; il tema è stato suddiviso nei seguenti codici: se il sexting è percepito positivamente o meno; se deve essere inquadrato in relazioni esclusive; se ci sono differenze di genere; infine, se e come sono state effettuate conversazioni sul sexting con i coetanei. Per concludere, vengono analizzate le esperienze di sexting dei partecipanti. Ai partecipanti che dichiarano di non aver mai fatto sexting è stato chiesto il motivo e se si sarebbero mai cimentati in questa attività.

I risultati relativi all'educazione sessuale sono abbastanza omogenei in entrambi i gruppi e mettono in evidenza il fatto che i giovani adulti ricevono la loro educazione sessuale da diverse fonti eterogenee, che possono essere valide dal punto di vista accademico o dalla vita quotidiana. La prima fonte citata è la scuola. La tendenza generale mostra che i giovani adulti non sono soddisfatti dell'educazione sessuale ricevuta e ne hanno una percezione negativa, al punto che alcuni partecipanti hanno dichiarato di non ricordare di aver avuto un'educazione sessuale a scuola. Va fatta una piccola distinzione tra i partecipanti tedeschi e quelli italiani. Questi ultimi hanno fornito opinioni più negative rispetto ai primi. Infatti, contrariamente ai partecipanti italiani, pochi intervistati tedeschi hanno affermato che l'educazione sessuale scolastica loro impartita è stata utile. Inoltre, i risultati suggeriscono che educazione sessuale scolastica in entrambi i Paesi è limitata a un gruppo relativamente ristretto di argomenti, ovvero anatomia e contraccezione. Tali argomenti dovrebbero tuttavia essere ampliati ad altre questioni e problematiche riguardanti la vita sessuale delle persone, come la masturbazione femminile, l'identità sessuale o in generale la sessualità non eterosessuale. Una tendenza generale mostra anche che educazione sessuale scolastica viene fornita troppo presto nel percorso scolastico. Ciò è confermato dal fatto che sia i partecipanti tedeschi che quelli italiani hanno spesso parlato di imbarazzo, vergogna e disagio durante queste lezioni. Se gli studenti si sentono a disagio durante queste lezioni, questi programmi di insegnamento

non sono validi come dovrebbero. A questo proposito, i giovani adulti sottolineano l'importanza di un richiamo all'educazione sessuale scolastica in cui gli studenti ricevano questi insegnamenti anche più avanti nell'adolescenza.

Un'altra tendenza nei risultati dimostra che i genitori non sono stati i principali protagonisti quando si è trattato di educazione sessuale dei giovani adulti. In effetti, i dati sono per lo più omogenei in questo caso e i due gruppi hanno fornito risposte simili. Entrambi i gruppi di partecipanti hanno affermato di non aver ricevuto dai genitori una particolare educazione sessuale. Le ragioni principali sono legate alla vergogna e al fatto che la sessualità è un tabù in famiglie particolarmente conservatrici. I risultati si dividono in due tendenze diverse. Da un lato, i partecipanti hanno menzionato una conversazione con i genitori, ma strettamente incentrata sulla contraccezione; dall'altro, i genitori preferiscono fare raccomandazioni, ad esempio "usa il preservativo" o "fai attenzione". L'educazione sessuale dei genitori, come quella scolastica, si concentrerebbe esclusivamente sulla contraccezione invece di informare i bambini su qualsiasi argomento riguardante la sessualità.

Come per i casi precedenti, i dati raccolti sul ruolo dei coetanei nell'educazione sessuale dei giovani adulti sono abbastanza omogenei in entrambi i gruppi, anche se sono emerse poche differenze. In generale, i risultati dimostrano che i giovani adulti sono più propensi ad affrontare conversazioni sulla sessualità con i coetanei piuttosto che con gli adulti e tutti i partecipanti hanno affermato di aver affrontato, almeno una volta, una conversazione di questo tipo con i loro amici. In effetti, gli amici sono percepiti come uno spazio sicuro dove le conversazioni sulle esperienze sessuali possono essere portate avanti con fiducia e libertà. Una piccola differenza tra giovani adulti tedeschi e italiani sta nel fatto che i primi non si rivolgono ai coetanei come fanno gli italiani. Secondo i partecipanti tedeschi, le conversazioni con i coetanei sulla sessualità non erano così comuni come per i partecipanti italiani, che hanno approfondito maggiormente l'argomento. Il trend non poteva essere applicato, tuttavia, a una partecipante che si è rivolta ai coetanei con un tono e una connotazione negativi, sostenendo di aver avuto esperienze negative. I risultati e i trend sull'educazione sessuale in generale dimostrano che i giovani adulti di sesso femminile e maschile la vivono in modo diverso. Le donne affrontano l'argomento con maggiore serietà rispetto ai maschi che, tuttavia, affrontano

la loro sessualità più precocemente rispetto alle coetanee. Più volte, durante le interviste, le partecipanti femminili hanno sottolineato il fatto che i loro coetanei maschi affrontavano l'argomento scherzando e ridendo e che, per esempio, avevano conosciuto la masturbazione prima. In effetti, alle giovani adulte non vengono fornite informazioni sulla masturbazione, ma spesso viene detto che "le ragazze non lo fanno". Questa differenza di genere è stata percepita e identificata sia dai partecipanti italiani che da quelli tedeschi.

Gli ultimi risultati sull'educazione sessuale riguardano il porno e altre fonti. Come visto nel capitolo teorico, il porno come fonte per l'educazione sessuale è una questione controversa e il più delle volte percepita negativamente. La tendenza principale identificata attraverso questa ricerca dimostra che i giovani adulti hanno utilizzato il porno come fonte per la loro educazione sessuale, soprattutto tra i partecipanti italiani. Il porno è uno dei mezzi più facili e veloci con cui gli adolescenti possono imparare la sessualità e i partecipanti hanno ammesso di aver appreso alcune caratteristiche del sesso attraverso il porno. I partecipanti tedeschi non hanno affrontato il tema del porno come quelli italiani e hanno affrontato l'argomento dopo che ho chiesto direttamente il ruolo che il porno ha avuto nella loro educazione sessuale. Sebbene i giovani adulti abbiano imparato dal porno, la loro percezione in materia è cambiata crescendo. In effetti, il porno fornisce una rappresentazione falsa e inaffidabile della realtà. In generale, si concentra sul piacere maschile, sulla penetrazione e manca di contraccezione. Anche in questo caso, e soprattutto tra i partecipanti italiani, gli elementi infedeli del porno sono stati evidenziati soprattutto dalle donne. Queste differenze di genere potrebbero essere legate al fatto che, secondo le esperienze dei partecipanti, le donne sono più sensibili a questi argomenti. Internet in generale è spesso citato come fonte di informazione fruttuosa insieme ai social media. In effetti, i giovani adulti si affidano fortemente a queste fonti quando cercano informazioni sulla sessualità perché i social media offrono diversi account e i giovani adulti possono rivolgersi a quello che ritengono essere il migliore per loro. Un'altra tendenza importante mostra che l'esperienza è la fonte principale per l'educazione sessuale, senza alcuna differenza in base alla nazionalità o al genere dei partecipanti. Per concludere l'analisi sull'educazione sessuale, vale la pena dire che gli ambienti in cui i giovani adulti crescono riflettono il modo in cui questi percepiscono e vivono la sessualità. Infatti, i giovani adulti cresciuti in famiglie in cui l'educazione sessuale era un

tabù subiscono conseguenze, ad esempio si sentono limitati nel condurre conversazioni sul sesso e anche nel vivere il sesso stesso.

Una sezione dedicata alla definizione di sexting dei partecipanti era necessaria per inquadrare le loro esperienze. La tendenza generale mostra che i partecipanti hanno faticato a trovare una definizione lineare, sintetica e affidabile di cosa sia il sexting. Questo ha aiutato a comprendere alcune delle risposte fornite in merito alle loro esperienze. Infatti, alcuni partecipanti hanno affermato di non sapere se hanno mai fatto sexting perché non riuscivano a inquadrare con precisione alcuni comportamenti tenuti. In effetti, i giovani adulti non hanno ben chiaro cosa sia il sexting, oltre a sapere che comprende l'invio di messaggi e immagini sessualmente esplicite. Non sapendo con precisione cosa sia il sexting, per i giovani adulti è difficile dire con certezza se lo hanno mai praticato. Non ci sono particolari differenze tra i due gruppi target. In generale, i partecipanti hanno dapprima fornito una breve risposta standard, sostenendo che il sexting implica la visione di foto di nudo, ma poi hanno fornito una risposta più ampia attraverso le domande successive che ho posto, ad esempio: "Pensi che il sexting includa messaggi di testo sessualmente suggestivi?". Non è stata individuata alcuna differenza principale tra i due gruppi target che identificano il "sexting" come lo scambio di materiale sessualmente suggestivo attraverso un dispositivo mobile. Tale materiale sessualmente suggestivo riproduce un rapporto sessuale fisico che le due parti avrebbero avuto se fossero state fisicamente insieme in quel momento. I risultati mostrano anche che le persone che non hanno mai fatto sexting faticano a dire cosa sia il sexting, evidenziando l'importanza dell'esperienza nel comprendere cosa siano e comportino particolari pratiche sessuali.

I dati raccolti sulla percezione del sexting da parte dei partecipanti suggeriscono che i giovani adulti percepiscono sia gli aspetti positivi che quelli negativi di questa pratica sessuale. È importante sottolineare che i partecipanti non sono stati guidati o influenzati verso risposte particolari. I risultati evidenziano il fatto che il sexting non è percepito allo stesso modo delle pratiche sessuali fisiche. In effetti, la tendenza principale suggerisce che i giovani adulti collegano il sexting e i suoi esiti positivi alle relazioni a distanza. Infatti, nonostante pochi dati sul fatto che il sexting procuri piacere ed eccitazione sessuale, la maggior parte dei dati dipinge il sexting come un'influenza

positiva se le due parti non possono incontrarsi e non possono avere un rapporto sessuale fisico. Queste tendenze dimostrano che i giovani adulti non percepiscono il sexting come qualcosa di aggiunto o ben integrato nella loro vita sessuale, ma che il sexting è invece un'alternativa. Questa tendenza è supportata anche dal modo in cui i giovani adulti parlano di sexting con i coetanei e dal modo in cui lo praticano, come analizzeremo a breve. Inoltre, un'ulteriore tendenza avvalorata gli esperti che sostengono che il sexting è percepito come una pratica sessuale negativa. In effetti, l'argomento è stato spesso affrontato in relazione alle sue conseguenze negative, in particolare quelle dell'inoltro e della condivisione del proprio materiale di sexting. Sebbene i partecipanti abbiano menzionato le caratteristiche positive del sexting, ne hanno analizzato soprattutto i rischi e le conseguenze dannose, dimostrando che quando si parla di questo argomento i giovani adulti pensano e affrontano spesso i suoi aspetti negativi. Non sono state individuate differenze legate alla nazionalità, dimostrando che i giovani adulti tedeschi e italiani condividono la stessa percezione e le stesse idee. È stata tuttavia individuata una differenza tra maschi e femmine italiani. Queste ultime hanno guidato l'intervista indagando l'aspetto negativo, ovvero la condivisione o l'inoltro delle immagini. Al contrario, i ragazzi hanno menzionato e affrontato l'argomento solo quando è stato chiesto loro quali fossero i lati negativi del sexting. Ciò supporta la teoria secondo cui, essendo le ragazze il più delle volte vittime di comportamenti dannosi del sexting, sono più sensibili e più propense ad affrontare questo problema.

Le caratteristiche e i lati positivi del sexting sono strettamente legati ai contesti in cui il sexting viene o dovrebbe essere praticato. Come detto, i giovani adulti percepiscono il sexting come una soluzione ai casi in cui le due parti non possono stare insieme, sia a causa di una relazione a distanza che per altri motivi. Sebbene i partecipanti abbiano affermato che le persone possono fare sexting con chiunque vogliano, tutti hanno dichiarato che farebbero sexting con qualcuno con cui hanno una relazione romantica o sessuale. Va detto che molti partecipanti hanno fornito le loro risposte inquadrando il sexting come scambio di immagini sessualmente esplicite e questo ha influenzato le loro opinioni. Senza differenze legate alla nazionalità, i giovani adulti farebbero sexting nel caso di una relazione a distanza o se, in generale, non possono incontrare l'altra persona e non è strettamente necessario avere una relazione seria. Altri elementi sono più importanti, come la fiducia tra le parti e il consenso. Finché ci si sente di fare del sexting

e si dimostra il proprio consenso, l'attività può avvenire in qualsiasi situazione. Ancora una volta si evidenzia la subordinazione del sexting alle pratiche sessuali fisiche. I risultati suggeriscono anche che i giovani adulti fanno sexting per flirtare con qualcuno da cui sono attratti sessualmente e con qualcuno con cui intendono stabilire una relazione sessuale o romantica. Tale percezione è ulteriormente rafforzata nel caso in cui il partecipante abbia già avuto un rapporto sessuale fisico con quella persona, pur non avendo una relazione. Infatti, come vedremo in seguito, il sexting va inquadrato in una situazione in cui deve avvenire un rapporto sessuale fisico.

Inoltre, le differenze di genere possono essere identificate nel sexting come in qualsiasi altro campo della sessualità. Una delle principali differenze di genere risiede nel modo ineguale in cui la società giudica le donne e gli uomini per aver messo in atto le stesse pratiche sessuali. I giovani adulti percepiscono fortemente e purtroppo replicano questo doppio standard di genere, ad esempio, hanno conversazioni con i coetanei in cui definiscono negativamente le ragazze per aver fatto sexting. Nella ricerca attuale, entrambi i gruppi hanno identificato questo doppio standard di genere, ma le partecipanti italiane lo sottolineano maggiormente. Infatti, hanno riferito e indagato il problema più dei loro coetanei maschi. Tuttavia, questa tendenza non è stata riscontrata tra i partecipanti tedeschi. L'altra principale differenza di genere è stata individuata nel fatto che le donne hanno maggiori probabilità di essere vittime di inoltro o condivisione non consensuale dei loro messaggi di sexting. Ciò potrebbe essere collegato alla percezione che il corpo femminile sia più sessualmente eccitante di quello maschile. Questa percezione porta a reazioni diverse da parte dei giovani uomini quando vedono un corpo maschile o femminile, più piacevole dal punto di vista estetico.

I risultati dimostrano che il sexting è trattato in modo diverso dalle pratiche sessuali fisiche. Durante la ricerca, ho voluto indagare il modo in cui il sexting viene percepito non solo dagli stessi partecipanti, ma anche dai loro amici, nelle loro conversazioni. L'analisi di questo aspetto avrebbe fornito il modo in cui il sexting viene effettivamente affrontato in contesti più ampi, cioè tra coetanei. In effetti, i risultati hanno dimostrato che i giovani adulti non affrontano il sexting come fanno con altre pratiche sessuali. Questo dimostra ancora una volta la posizione subordinata del sexting all'interno della sfera sessuale. La tendenza principale mostra che il sexting non è un argomento

ricorrente e, quando ai partecipanti è stato chiesto se i loro amici praticano questa attività, hanno affermato di non saperlo perché non hanno mai affrontato l'argomento. Poiché il sexting non è un argomento molto affrontato, questo lo rende anche un tema delicato per le persone che tendono a essere più riservate sulle loro esperienze personali. La natura tecnologica della pratica e la mancanza di contatto fisico potrebbero essere il motivo per cui il sexting è subordinato ai rapporti sessuali fisici. Tuttavia, non c'è un motivo particolare per cui i giovani adulti non affrontano l'argomento: alcuni sostengono di voler proteggere la privacy del partner, altri per vergogna. Potrebbe essere interessante analizzare se e come questa diversa percezione cambierà nel corso degli anni, se la tecnologia dovesse assumere un ruolo ancora più pervasivo.

Le esperienze personali forniscono una visione pratica di ciò che i partecipanti hanno sostenuto fino a qui. Nonostante la paura dei rischi o dei comportamenti dannosi, i risultati dimostrano che i giovani adulti italiani e tedeschi si dedicano al sexting, anche se alcuni con materiale sessualmente più esplicito di altri. Una relazione romantica è in effetti il contesto principale in cui si pratica il sexting, soprattutto in caso di relazioni a distanza. Infatti, i dati mostrano che i giovani adulti sono più propensi a fare sexting se non possono incontrare il partner e, per mantenere l'elemento sessuale, optano per il sexting. Altri contesti in cui i giovani adulti tendono a praticare il sexting sono quelli di una relazione sessuale o quando si mira a stabilirne una. In ogni caso, un rapporto sessuale fisico prima del sexting sembra essere un elemento necessario. Questo avvalorava la teoria, finora ampiamente studiata, secondo cui il sexting è un'attività sessuale subordinata. Infatti, la tendenza generale, a parte un'eccezione, mostra che il sexting non si verifica se le parti non hanno avuto un rapporto sessuale fisico in precedenza. Inoltre, le situazioni in cui i partecipanti italiani e tedeschi tendono a praticare il sexting possono essere classificate in quattro diversi scenari: in caso di relazione romantica; in caso di relazione sessuale; in qualsiasi relazione purché a distanza; e se i partecipanti fanno sesso in seguito.

Inoltre, sono state individuate poche differenze di genere. Tra i partecipanti italiani, un numero maggiore di donne si è rivolto a una particolare opzione dei social media, che prevede l'invio di una foto che può essere vista una sola volta e poi cancellata. Si tratta di una fonte di sicurezza e di privacy per le donne che fanno sexting e che temono che l'altra persona che possiede il loro materiale possa dividerlo. Tuttavia, questa

differenza di genere non è stata individuata tra i partecipanti tedeschi. Nessuna tendenza o ragione particolare potrebbe spiegare perché i maschi italiani non affrontano la questione tanto quanto i maschi tedeschi. C'è un'altra interessante differenza di genere riguardo al sexting tra i partecipanti italiani. Le partecipanti italiane hanno affermato di inviare materiale meno sessualmente esplicito di quello ricevuto, ad esempio non hanno inviato immagini di nudo ma hanno sempre indossato biancheria intima, mentre hanno ricevuto immagini di genitali maschili o mentre l'altra persona si masturbava. Tuttavia, i partecipanti di sesso maschile non hanno sostenuto questa tendenza, affermando di aver inviato più materiale sessualmente esplicito. Al contrario, hanno affermato che il materiale inviato e ricevuto era ugualmente esplicito, il che significa che le donne hanno inviato ugualmente foto di nudo o materiale che le ritraeva mentre si masturbavano. Questo potrebbe essere spiegato, ancora una volta, dal fatto che le donne soffrono e temono maggiormente i rischi di comportamenti sessuali dannosi e di giudizi negativi. Per questo motivo, non si aprono tanto quanto i loro coetanei maschi sulle loro esperienze personali per evitare qualsiasi giudizio che l'altra persona potrebbe avere, come me in questo caso.

Una piccola tendenza ha evidenziato il fatto che il sexting è iniziato in egual misura da donne e uomini, ma non è emerso chi è più propenso a iniziare a fare sexting o chi si impegna di più in questa attività. I giovani adulti italiani e tedeschi, sia maschi che femmine, iniziano e si impegnano nella pratica sessuale in egual misura. Per quanto riguarda il materiale, i giovani adulti si scambiano sia materiale scritto che visivo, come messaggi che descrivono un rapporto sessuale fisico o immagini e video di parti del corpo, genitali e/o mentre l'utente si masturba.

In conclusione, la ricerca attuale mostra che il sexting è effettivamente una pratica diffusa tra i giovani adulti e che tale pratica presenta caratteristiche sia positive che negative. Tuttavia, nonostante l'alto tasso di giovani adulti che si dedicano a questa attività, il sexting non è integrato nelle pratiche sessuali e non è percepito come uguale a un rapporto sessuale fisico. Ciò è ulteriormente supportato dal fatto che i giovani adulti si impegnano di più nei rapporti sessuali fisici che nel sexting. Il presente lavoro presenta dei limiti. In primo luogo, i dati raccolti dalle interviste tedesche non erano così ricchi come quelli delle interviste italiane. Questa differenza può essere collegata al fatto che i

partecipanti tedeschi erano meno numerosi (11 partecipanti italiani; 9 partecipanti tedeschi) e che il livello di fiducia era più basso, poiché forse non mi conoscevano così bene come gli altri target. Questo potrebbe avermi portato a raccogliere meno dati e a farli aprire meno di quanto avrebbero fatto con un ricercatore più vicino. Inoltre, un numero maggiore di partecipanti tedeschi ha dichiarato di essere cresciuto in ambienti conservatori o puritani - famiglie, amici o ambienti accademici. Questo ha effettivamente influenzato il modo in cui percepiscono, vivono e parlano di sessualità, inducendoli a non fare sexting o a non discutere a fondo delle loro esperienze. Un ultimo limite della presente ricerca risiede nella lingua utilizzata nelle interviste con i partecipanti tedeschi. Infatti, le interviste non sono state condotte nella lingua madre dei partecipanti, cioè il tedesco, ma in inglese. Questo potrebbe averli fatti sentire limitati nell'esprimere le loro idee e opinioni, mentre gli italiani si sono sentiti più sicuri e hanno fornito dati più ricchi. Una ricerca in questo campo potrebbe essere interessante necessaria per fornire ulteriori dati e tendenze interessanti sui giovani adulti che praticano il sexting a un livello più ampio.