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## Le sexting et les adolescent-e-s

Barrense-Dias Yara

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**Thèse de doctorat ès sciences de la vie (PhD)**

présentée à la

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par

**Yara BARRENSE-DIAS**

Master en droit en sciences criminelles, mention criminologie et sécurité de  
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Dre. Caroline Jacot-Descombes, experte  
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Lausanne  
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<b>Président·e</b>	Monsieur	Prof.	Chin Bin	<b>Eap</b>
<b>Directeur·trice de thèse</b>	Monsieur	Prof.	Joan-Carles	<b>Suris</b>
<b>Expert·e·s</b>	Madame	Dre	Françoise	<b>Narring</b>
	Madame	Dre	Caroline	<b>Jacot-Descombes</b>
	Madame	Dre	Marie	<b>Bergström</b>

le Conseil de Faculté autorise l'impression de la thèse de

**Madame Yara Barrense-Dias**

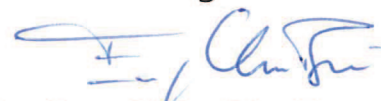
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Prof. Chin Bin Eap

## **Affiliation**

### **Directeur de thèse / superviseur**

Prof. Joan-Carles Suris, Groupe de recherche sur la santé des adolescents (GRSA), Département d'épidémiologie et systèmes de santé (DESS), Centre universitaire de médecine générale et santé publique, Unisanté, Lausanne, Suisse

### **Expertes**

Dre. Françoise Narring, Unité Santé Jeunes, HUG, Genève, Suisse

Dre. Caroline Jacot-Descombes, Santé Sexuelle Suisse, Lausanne, Suisse

Dre. Marie Bergström, Institut national d'études démographiques, Paris, France

### **Président**

Prof. Eap Chin-Bin, Département de psychiatrie, Neurosciences psychiatriques, Pharmacogénétique et psychopharmacologie clinique, CHUV, Lausanne, Suisse



*"On a besoin d'intimité pour construire les fondations de l'estime de soi, mais la construction complète de celle-ci passe ensuite par le désir d'extimité. [...] Il est pour nous le processus par lequel des fragments du soi intime sont proposés au regard d'autrui afin d'être validés. [...] Le désir d'extimité est inséparable du désir de se rencontrer soi-même à travers l'autre et d'une prise de risques."*



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## Résumé

Les technologies et Internet tiennent aujourd'hui une place omniprésente dans la vie et le développement des jeunes. De nouvelles pratiques sont récemment apparues présentant, notamment, des enjeux en termes d'usage des technologies et de gestion de l'identité numérique. Parmi ces pratiques, le *sexting*, défini comme un échange électronique de contenu personnel à caractère sexuel. Le sexting s'est fait connaître à la suite de cas dramatiques de jeunes filles ayant mis fin à leurs jours car elles avaient été harcelées sur la base d'une photo intime diffusée sans leur accord. Cette thèse a pour objectifs de mieux comprendre et définir le sexting tel que pratiqué par les jeunes et ses dérives, d'explorer la prévention et ses besoins, et d'obtenir des données détaillées sur la pratique en Suisse.

Premièrement, nous avons effectué une revue de la littérature pour déterminer comment cette pratique avait été définie jusque-là. Une des conclusions de ce premier article a été un manque de consensus quant à la manière de définir et de mesurer le sexting. Nous avons ensuite mené une étude qualitative avec des jeunes âgé·e·s de 16 à 21 ans et des adultes ressources avec, parmi les sujets abordés, celui de leur définition du sexting. Dans ce deuxième article, un des résultats principaux a été l'écart de perception et d'opinion quant à la pratique entre les jeunes et les adultes, ces derniers la jugeant plus négativement. Le troisième article a porté sur la prévention et ses besoins. Ainsi, 48 jeunes âgé·e·s de 13 à 18 ans ont donné leur avis sur une série d'énoncés concernant la prévention. Cinq profils de prévention ont pu être déterminés et les énoncés sur le fait d'intégrer des discussions sur la pression qui peut être exercée ou subie pour obtenir ce genre de contenu et le harcèlement étaient les plus positivement évalués. Le scénario d'une fille-victime et d'un garçon-auteur, pourtant très utilisé dans les campagnes de prévention, n'a pas été apprécié par les participant·e·s. Finalement, nous avons intégré un questionnaire sur le sexting dans le cadre d'une enquête nationale. Le quatrième article de cette thèse porte sur le partage non consenti d'un contenu intime reçu avec d'autres personnes. Plus de 15% de notre échantillon ont rapporté avoir été auteurs d'un tel acte, les garçons (21%) étant davantage représentés.

Les conclusions de cette thèse proposent des recommandations en termes de recherche et de prévention, avec un accent particulier sur la réorientation des messages afin de cibler les auteurs, les dérives telles que les formes abusives et non consensuelles de sexting, et les témoins.



## Summary

Nowadays, the use of the Internet and new technologies is ubiquitous in everyday's life and in the development of youths. New behaviors have recently emerged, including challenges in terms of technology use and digital identity management. One of these practices, *sexting*, can be defined as an electronic exchange of personal sexual-related content. This practice came to light after dramatic cases of girls having ended their life after being harassed because of an intimate photo that was forwarded without their agreement. This thesis aims to better understand and define sexting as practiced by young people and the problems that could be linked to it, to explore prevention and its needs, and to obtain detailed data on this practice in Switzerland.

First, we conducted a literature review to determine how this practice had been defined so far. One of the conclusions of this first article was a lack of consensus on how to define and measure sexting in research. We then conducted a qualitative study with young people aged between 16 and 21 and reference adults (teachers, parents) with, among the topics discussed, their definition of sexting. In this second article, one of the main results was the difference in perception and opinion about the practice between youths and reference adults, the latter judging it more negatively. The third article focused on prevention and its needs. Thus, 48 youths aged between 13 and 18 gave their opinion on a set of statements about prevention. Five prevention profiles were identified, and the most positively evaluated statements were those related to integrating discussions about the pressure that can be used or experienced to obtain this type of content and about the harassment. The scenario of a girl-victim and a boy-perpetrator of a nonconsensual forwarding, a scenario that is widely used in prevention campaigns, was not appreciated by the participants. Finally, we included a questionnaire on sexting as part of a national survey on sexual health and behaviors among young adults. Based on it, the fourth article in this thesis deals with the non-consensual sharing of intimate content. In our sample, more than 15% had shared intimate content received from another person with others without consent, with males (21%) being more represented.

The conclusions of this thesis offer recommendations in terms of research and prevention, with a focus on redirecting the messages on perpetrators, problems such as nonconsensual and abusive forms of sexting, and the role of witnesses.

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## 1. Introduction

Le choix de ce sujet de thèse s'est fait à la suite d'une discussion avec le responsable de la Division Prévention de la Police Cantonale Vaudoise de l'époque, Monsieur Gaudard, qui avait créé un jeu sérieux (serious game) sur l'identité numérique destiné aux élèves de 8<sup>ème</sup> année Harmos (11-12 ans). Ce jeu utilisait l'histoire d'une jeune fille dont l'image intime qu'elle avait envoyée à son petit ami avait été diffusée à plus large échelle par celui-ci, entraînant moqueries et harcèlement. Le scénario typique de ce qui était appelé le *sexting*. Cette thèse a alors débuté avec une question très générale et relativement basique : Qu'est-ce que le sexting et quels sont les problèmes qui peuvent survenir avec les jeunes ?

Le but général de cette thèse est ainsi de mieux comprendre le sexting chez les jeunes afin de pouvoir, notamment, mieux appréhender ses dérives mais également le sens donné à cette pratique. En plus d'une approche de l'objet de cette thèse comme pratique, le sexting est également considéré par rapport à sa terminologie et sa définition scientifique. Pour répondre à ce but général et obtenir un panorama complet de compréhension au niveau de la pratique et du terme, plusieurs méthodes ont été utilisées : une revue de la littérature scientifique, une recherche qualitative, une recherche quantitative et une recherche utilisant une méthode mixte (qualitative-quantitative). Quatre articles reprenant ces différentes étapes ont été publiés ou soumis pour publication dans des journaux à politique éditoriale et constituent cette thèse. Ce travail a également permis d'assurer un lien fort avec les professionnel·le·s du terrain en les sensibilisant à ce genre de problématiques passant, notamment, par l'animation d'ateliers et de participer à des projets de prévention comme l'élaboration d'un spot de prévention en partenariat avec la Brigade Jeunesse de la ville de Lausanne, la Police Cantonale Vaudoise et l'Unité de promotion de la santé et de prévention en milieu scolaire (PSPS).

### 1.1. Contexte

Selon la dernière enquête JAMES<sup>1</sup> sur l'utilisation des médias par les jeunes âgé·e·s de 12 à 19 ans en Suisse, 99% rapportaient posséder leur propre téléphone portable et 96% l'utiliser tous les jours. Dans cette même étude, 94% des jeunes ont rapporté être inscrits sur au moins un réseau social, Instagram (87%) et Snapchat (86%) étant de loin les plateformes les plus souvent mentionnées, même parmi les jeunes de 12-13 ans (73% dans les deux cas).

Ces chiffres illustrent la place omniprésente que les technologies et Internet tiennent aujourd'hui dans la vie et le développement des adolescent·e·s et jeunes adultes. L'essor des Smartphones, l'apparition de nouvelles applications et la connectivité quasiment illimitée influencent le contexte social dans lequel les jeunes évoluent<sup>2-6</sup>. Leurs interactions, leurs relations et leur développement se voient alors confrontés à de nouveaux défis, quand bien même de nombreuses opportunités leur sont également offertes par ces nouveaux médias.

Durant cette transition qu'est l'adolescence, les jeunes sont également amenés à découvrir leur sexualité et celle des autres. Ces outils connectés les accompagnent aujourd'hui dans ce processus exploratoire et peuvent alors influencer leurs expériences interactives<sup>4,7,8</sup>. Dans un tel contexte, les échanges se voient également facilités et peu restreints<sup>5,9</sup>. De nouvelles pratiques sont ainsi apparues au fil des années présentant, notamment, de nouveaux enjeux en termes d'usage des technologies et de gestion de l'identité numérique<sup>2</sup>. Parmi ces pratiques, celle du *sexting* qui peut être définie, de manière très succincte, comme un échange électronique de contenu personnel à caractère sexuel.

## 1.2. La pratique du sexting

### 1.2.1. Historique

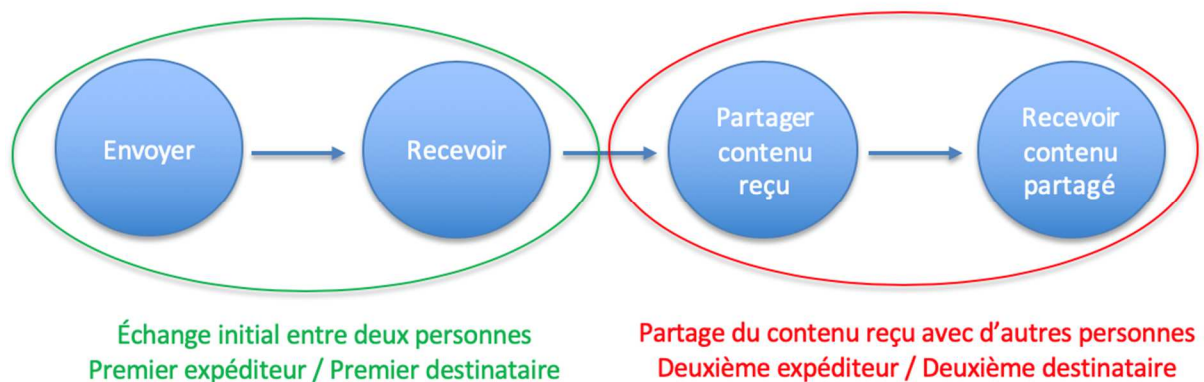
Le terme *sexting* a été créé par une journaliste australienne en 2005<sup>10</sup>. Ce terme, issu d'une combinaison des deux termes anglais *sex* et *texting*, avait alors été utilisé dans une rubrique fictive illustrant les déboires extraconjugaux d'un mari s'adonnant, entre autres, à l'envoi de photos intimes avec d'autres femmes. La première utilisation de ce terme n'était donc pas directement rattachée à la pratique des jeunes. Néanmoins, depuis, il a été repris et réutilisé par la recherche, la prévention et la presse, et ce même en français<sup>11-13</sup>, pour parler essentiellement de la pratique des jeunes.

Le sexting s'est principalement fait connaître du grand public à la suite de cas dramatiques relayés par la presse<sup>14-16</sup>. Ces cas concernaient des jeunes filles ayant mis fin à leurs jours à la suite de harcèlement basé, notamment, sur une photo intime qu'elles avaient envoyée à leur petit ami et qui avait été diffusée plus largement à d'autres personnes sans leur consentement.

La première étude scientifique ayant présenté des chiffres sur cette pratique a été conduite aux États-Unis en 2008 auprès des 13-26 ans<sup>17</sup>. Quatre actions avaient alors été analysées séparément (Figure 1):

- Envoyer son propre contenu en tant que premier expéditeur (= envoyer) ;
- Recevoir en tant que premier destinataire un contenu qui lui était destiné (= recevoir);
- Partager le contenu reçu d'une autre personne en tant que deuxième expéditeur (= partager contenu reçu);
- Recevoir un partage / un contenu qui ne lui était pas destiné en tant que deuxième destinataire (= recevoir contenu partagé).

Figure 1. Les quatre actions analysées dans la première étude en 2008 (USA)<sup>17</sup>



Les participant·e·s âgé·e·s de 20 à 26 ans avaient alors davantage rapporté ces quatre actions comparé·e·s aux participant·e·s âgé·e·s de 13 à 19 ans. Néanmoins, cette différence se remarque davantage dans les premières actions d'envoyer et de recevoir que dans les actions relatives au partage à des tiers démontrant que, proportionnellement, les partages sont plus fréquents chez les plus jeunes (Figure 2 - Figure 3).

En plus de distinguer les actions, cette première étude avait également séparé les supports ou les types de médias : les messages texte sans image *versus* les images (photo et/ou vidéo), les messages texte ayant été plus souvent (ou facilement) rapportés.



Figure 2. Pourcentages des participant-e-s relatifs aux messages texte sexuellement suggestifs lors de la première étude en 2008 (USA)<sup>17</sup>

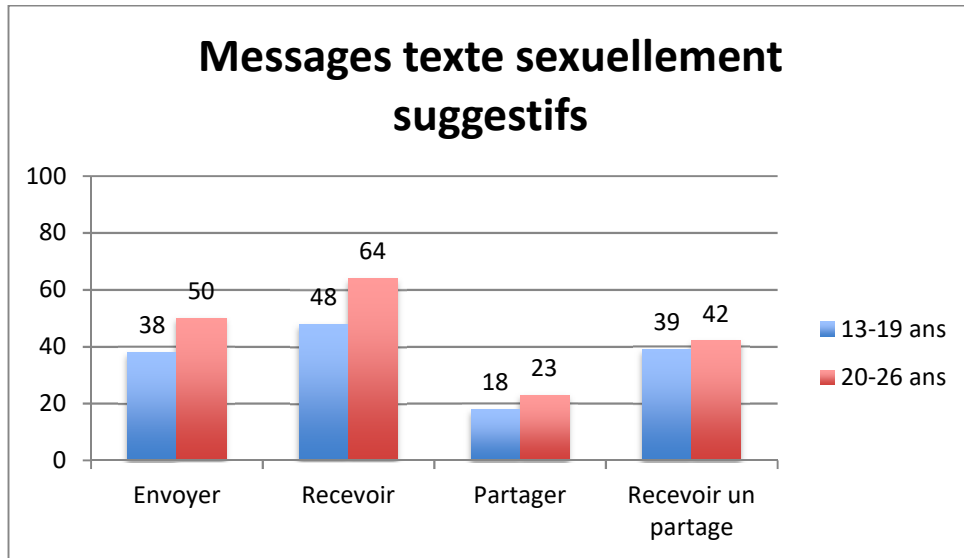
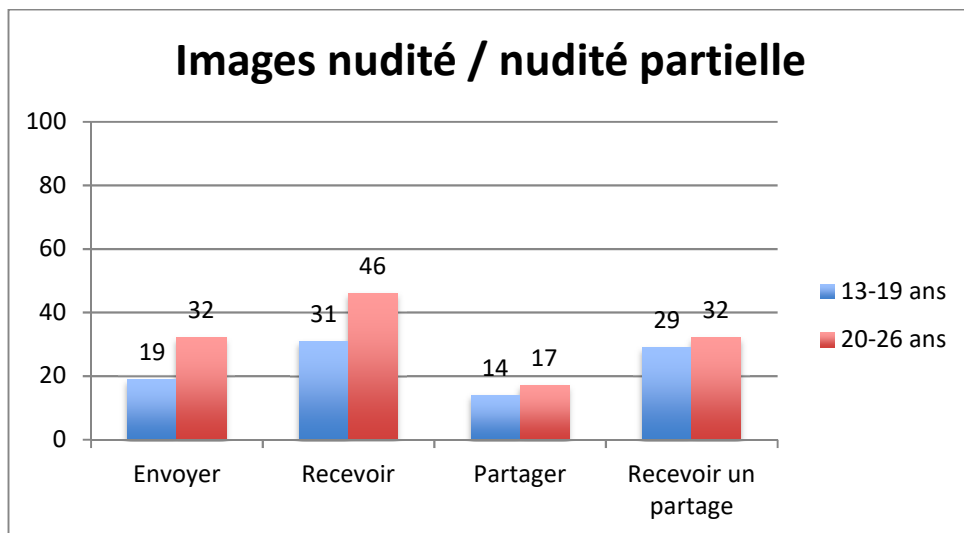


Figure 3. Pourcentages des participant-e-s relatifs aux images de personne nue ou partiellement nue lors de la première étude en 2008 (USA)<sup>17</sup>



En revanche, peu de précisions avaient été apportées quant au contenu utilisant des notions relativement larges telles qu'un message texte sexuellement suggestif et une image illustrant une personne nue ou partiellement nue.

### 1.2.2. En Suisse

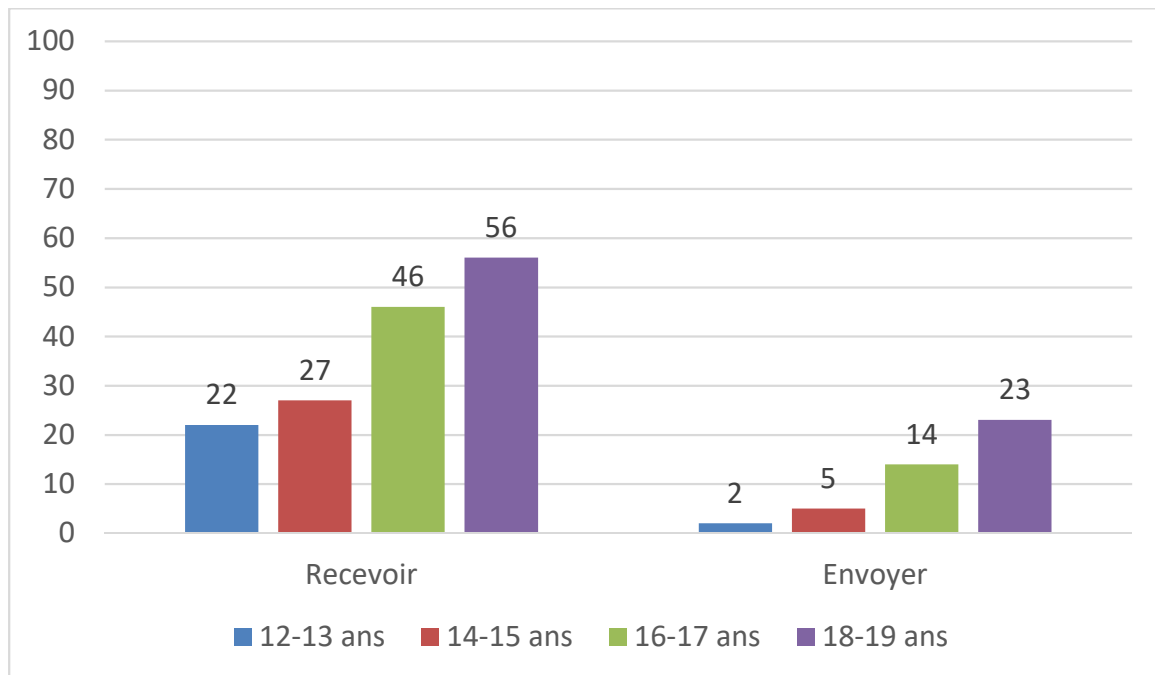
En Suisse, depuis 2012, l'étude JAMES<sup>1, 18, 19</sup> a intégré une question (puis deux dès 2014) sur ce qui a été défini comme du sexting dans le cadre de cette recherche : soit le fait d'envoyer (et de recevoir dès 2014) une photo ou une vidéo érotique ou aguicheuse de soi-même. Ainsi, comparée à la première étude qui analysait quatre actions, l'étude JAMES ne s'est focalisée que sur les deux premières, soit le fait d'envoyer et de recevoir. Si pour le fait d'envoyer la précision que la photo ou vidéo doit représenter la personne qui envoie (*de soi-même*) permet de ne pas confondre cet envoi avec un éventuel partage non consenti, cela s'avère moins clair pour le fait de recevoir. Il n'est ainsi pas possible de déterminer si le contenu a été réceptionné en tant que premier ou deuxième destinataire.

La dernière étude JAMES<sup>1</sup> parue en 2018 a établi que 12% des jeunes interrogés (12-19 ans) ont déjà envoyé une photo ou une vidéo aguicheuse ou érotique d'eux-mêmes et 40% en ont déjà reçu une. Deux hypothèses peuvent être formulées pour expliquer cette différence de taux entre le fait d'envoyer et de recevoir. La première peut se trouver dans un biais de désirabilité sociale. Il est en effet certainement plus aisé de rapporter en avoir déjà reçu plutôt que d'en avoir déjà produit et envoyé. La deuxième vient de cet effet boule de neige que le sexting peut parfois entraîner. En effet, pour un seul premier envoi, il peut y avoir plusieurs récipiendaires dans le cas d'un partage non consenti à des tiers. Cette différence de taux s'est déjà vérifiée dans d'autres études avec des taux supérieurs pour le sexting passif (recevoir) comparé au sexting actif (envoyer, partager)<sup>20, 21</sup>.

Tout comme la première étude menée en 2008, le manque de précision concernant le contenu peut également être relevé dans l'étude JAMES. En effet, les questions utilisées font référence aux termes *aguicheur* et *érotique* sans qu'aucune définition supplémentaire ne soit donnée aux répondant-e-s pour établir le contenu exact des échanges.

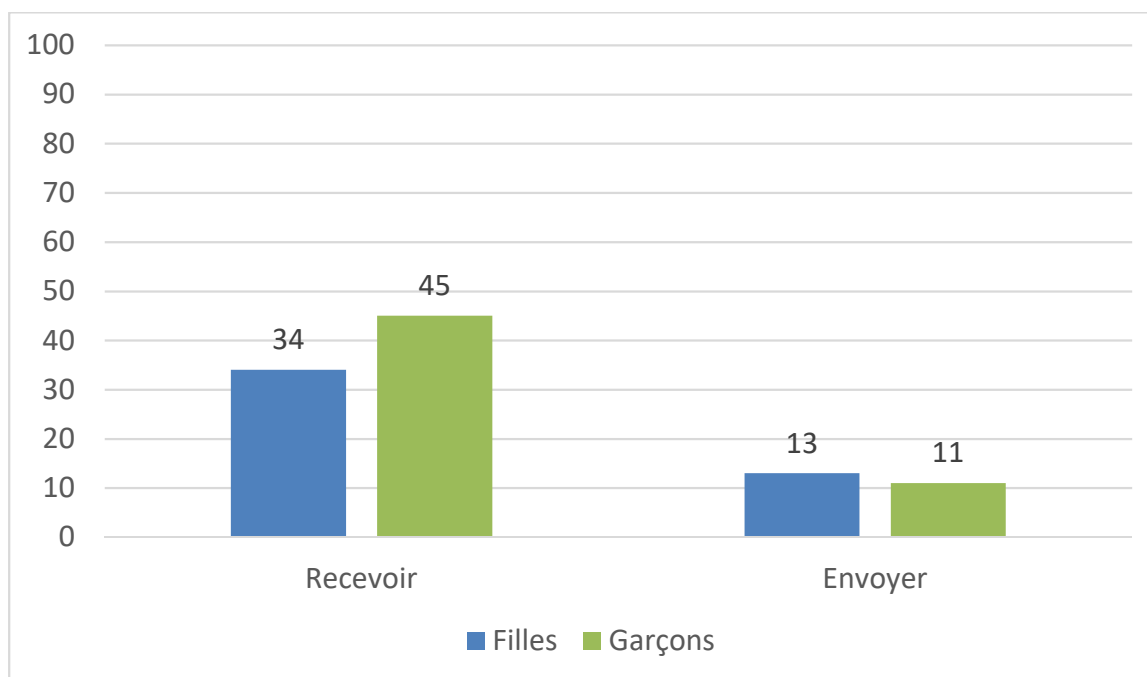
Sans surprise, notamment au regard du développement sexuel et relationnel des jeunes, la pratique du sexting augmente avec l'âge avec, par exemple, un quart des 18-19 ans rapportant avoir déjà envoyé une image d'eux-mêmes contre 2% des 12-13 ans (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Données études JAMES 2018: recevoir - envoyer une photo ou vidéo aguicheuse ou érotique par âge<sup>1</sup>



L'étude JAMES semble démontrer une différence de genre quant au fait de recevoir ce genre de contenu avec davantage de garçons rapportant cette pratique (Figure 5). Cette différence pourrait s'expliquer par le fait que les garçons seraient plus susceptibles de demander ce genre de contenu<sup>22</sup> et/ou qu'ils se retrouveraient davantage dans des scénarios et des chaînes de partage non consentuel. En revanche, il semblerait qu'il n'y ait pas de différence entre les filles et les garçons quant au fait d'envoyer sa propre image.

Figure 5. Données études JAMES 2018: recevoir - envoyer une photo ou vidéo aguicheuse ou érotique par sexe<sup>1</sup>



En 2017, nous avons profité d'une enquête nationale sur la sexualité des jeunes adultes<sup>23</sup> (24-26 ans) pour intégrer un questionnaire sur la pratique du sexting afin d'obtenir des chiffres plus détaillés et explorer davantage le contexte de ces échanges (contenu, destinataire, motivations, etc.). Nous avons également comme objectif de combler le manque d'études et de chiffres quant au partage non consenti<sup>24-26</sup>. Cette étude a permis de montrer que cette pratique était relativement fréquente chez les jeunes adultes. En effet, plus de 50% des participant-e-s ont rapporté avoir déjà envoyé une image (photo / vidéo) sexy<sup>1</sup> d'eux-mêmes et plus de 62% en ont déjà reçu. Tout comme l'étude JAMES, une différence de genre a pu être observée pour le fait de recevoir (69% des hommes *versus* 55% des femmes) mais pas pour le fait d'en avoir déjà envoyé (49% des hommes *versus* 52% des femmes). Les chiffres sur le partage non consenti sont détaillés dans le cadre de notre quatrième article (Annexe 6 p.155).

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<sup>1</sup> Le terme sexy a été défini de manière large afin de pouvoir ensuite le développer dans les questions de développement : coquin, sexuel, habillé, partiellement nu, nu, etc.

### 1.2.3. Sa définition, ses controverses

Depuis la première étude menée en 2008<sup>17</sup>, les recherches scientifiques n'ont cessé d'augmenter. Pour exemple, jusqu'à fin 2008, 300 résultats étaient disponibles sur Google Scholar lors d'une recherche du terme *sexting*. Une même recherche effectuée en juin 2019 présente dorénavant plus de 16'000 résultats (date de recherche 11 juin 2019), démontrant le fort intérêt que cette pratique a suscité en seulement 10 ans.

Malgré cette augmentation de publications scientifiques, des controverses existent encore quant à la manière de définir et mesurer le *sexting*<sup>20, 27-31</sup>. Ce manque de cohérence a d'ailleurs récemment été présenté comme un des défis entourant les études sur la pratique du *sexting*<sup>32</sup>. Des discussions existent, notamment, sur le fait de considérer le *sexting* comme une activité sexuelle normale ou comme un comportement abusif et dangereux dont l'issue dramatique est inévitable et dont il faudrait alors se prémunir<sup>27, 28, 33, 34</sup>. Cette distinction s'illustre également dans les deux types de discours qui considèrent la pratique du *sexting* : le discours normatif et le discours déviant<sup>26, 28, 35-38</sup>. Dans le discours déviant, le *sexting* est défini comme un comportement négatif et le partage non consensuel est alors directement intégré dans la définition. Ce discours s'illustre par une approche d'abstinence de la pratique dans le cadre de la prévention. Au contraire, le discours normatif considère le *sexting* comme une activité sexuelle et les conséquences négatives potentielles ne font partie ni de la pratique en tant que telle, ni de sa définition.

De plus en plus d'auteurs utilisent et appellent à utiliser deux catégories ou sous-groupes d'actions pour éviter l'assimilation de la pratique du *sexting* à ses possibles dérives<sup>39</sup>. Plusieurs termes ont ainsi été utilisés pour parler de l'échange initial privé : *sexting* primaire<sup>40</sup>, *sexting* expérimental<sup>34</sup>, *sexting* consensuel<sup>41</sup> ou simplement *sexting*<sup>25, 26, 42</sup>. Et d'autres termes ont été utilisés pour les dérives du *sexting*, notamment lorsque le contenu reçu est disséminé : *sexting* secondaire<sup>40</sup>, *sexting* aggravé<sup>34</sup>, *sextbullying*<sup>41</sup>, *sexting* non consensuel ou partage<sup>25</sup>, vengeance pornographique ou partage non consensuel<sup>26</sup>, et dissémination<sup>42</sup>.

Malgré cette séparation entre pratique et dérives et malgré le fait que le *sexting* se soit principalement fait connaître à cause des partages non consentis et des diffusions massives, la recherche et la prévention se sont pourtant avant tout focalisées sur les deux actions de

l'échange initial: envoyer et recevoir. Dans une récente méta-analyse, Madigan et al.<sup>25, 43</sup> ont ainsi trouvé que parmi les 39 études incluses dans leur analyse et portant sur la pratique du sexting chez les jeunes, seules 9 s'étaient intéressées au partage à des tiers. De même, les auteurs<sup>26</sup> d'une revue systématique de la littérature n'ont trouvé que 6 études portant sur la vengeance pornographique (*revenge porn*) et le partage non consensuel. Parmi ces 6 études, une a restreint sa question à des images de parties génitales, deux n'ont pas spécifié les récipiendaires du partage et aucune étude ne s'est intéressée aux motivations, démontrant que même lorsque cette possible dérive est étudiée, le contexte ne l'est que très rarement.

Ainsi, au début des études menées sur le sexting et jusqu'à récemment, il était avant tout question de déterminer les taux de prévalence de cette pratique et ses associations avec d'autres comportements à risque<sup>20, 29, 44-47</sup>, notamment sexuels, comme le fait de ne pas se protéger lors des rapports sexuels ou de contracter des infections sexuellement transmissibles<sup>21, 48-51</sup>. L'approche adoptée avait alors tendance à considérer cette pratique d'un point de vue exclusivement négatif utilisant une perspective du risque<sup>28, 52, 53</sup>. Depuis, néanmoins, cette activité a également été considérée positivement dans une approche développementale et expérimentale<sup>54-58</sup>. Le sexting a, notamment, été étudié comme un moyen de renforcer l'affection, l'intimité et la confiance entre deux partenaires<sup>59, 60</sup>, de draguer et flirter<sup>61</sup>, de pratiquer une forme de préliminaires<sup>57, 62</sup>, d'exprimer ses désirs, ses envies et ses sentiments<sup>58, 63</sup>, d'avoir une alternative à un contact en face à face<sup>62, 64</sup> et d'aider à la construction d'une image positive de son propre corps<sup>65</sup>.

#### 1.2.4. Ses dérives

Le risque principal du sexting, et c'est notamment pour ce genre de cas que le grand public a eu connaissance de cette activité, consiste à partager et à diffuser un contenu reçu avec d'autres personnes sans consentement. Le terme anglais *revenge porn* a souvent été utilisé pour parler de ce problème. En effet, la plupart des cas connus concernait le cas d'une personne qui partageait une photo intime de son partenaire à la suite d'une rupture.

D'autres dérives doivent également être mises en lumière, notamment le fait de recevoir des contenus non sollicités. Dans ce cas, il n'y a pas vraiment d'échange mais le sexting est imposé à une personne. Deux scénarios sont alors possibles, celui d'une réception de contenu dans le

cadre d'un partage non consenti, dans ce cas la personne se retrouve dans une chaîne sans n'avoir rien demandé ou celui d'une personne qui envoie une photo d'elle à quelqu'un, de manière imposée et sans accord au préalable. Dans le deuxième scénario ce sont surtout des étrangers ou des personnes jamais rencontrées en vrai qui s'adonnent à cette pratique.

Finalement, un autre problème entourant la pratique du sexting et pouvant se référer aux actes sexuels de manière plus générale est la pression qui peut être exercée pour convaincre une personne de passer à l'acte et d'envoyer ce genre de contenu. L'approche typique fait référence à une forme de chantage affectif<sup>64</sup>. Les filles seraient particulièrement touchées par cette forme de pression pour envoyer ce genre de contenu<sup>10, 66, 67</sup>. Dans ce contexte, certaines personnes s'adonneraient à la pratique du sexting de manière consentante alors même qu'elles en auraient pas réellement envie. Une étude de 2014<sup>3</sup> s'est ainsi intéressée à ce qu'ils ont appelé le sexting consenti mais non désiré / non voulu (*unwanted but consensual sexting*). Ce terme fait référence aux expériences sexuelles non désirées (*unwanted sexual experiences*) et à cette zone grise qui se situe entre ce qui est considéré comme un viol au sens légal et une relation sexuelle désirée et consensuelle. Dans cette étude, plus de 50% des participant·e·s ont rapporté avoir consenti à envoyer un message texte ou une image sexuelle dans le cadre d'une relation alors qu'ils ne le voulaient pas vraiment. L'hypothèse que les femmes seraient davantage enclines à céder pour pouvoir maintenir la relation ne s'est pas vérifiée dans cette étude, les hommes et les femmes rapportant quasiment les mêmes taux de sexting consenti mais non voulu.

### 1.3. Etat des lieux de la prévention

En plus de l'augmentation des publications scientifiques, les campagnes de prévention autour du sexting se sont également multipliées. Dans le cadre de cette thèse, un état des lieux non exhaustif en Suisse et au niveau international a été mené pour explorer les différentes approches utilisées, notamment en termes de messages et de cibles. Tout comme la définition du sexting, les approches préventives se distinguent également sur la base du discours déviant ou normatif.

En effet, deux stratégies ont pu être relevées : des messages d'abstinence (Sexting Abstinence Message) et des messages pour une pratique plus sûre (Safer Sexting Message)<sup>28</sup>. La première

stratégie consiste à défendre une abstinence totale de la pratique afin d'éviter tout risque. Dans un tel contexte, les messages sont adressés directement aux victimes potentielles afin qu'elles évitent d'envoyer une première image. Une des premières campagnes qui s'est concentrée sur la pratique du sexting vient d'Australie et s'appelait *Think U Know* (tu penses savoir). Dans le cadre de cette campagne, un spot de prévention et un guide éducatif présentaient l'histoire de Megan, une jeune fille qui décide d'envoyer une photo de sa poitrine à son petit ami. Ce dernier la partage avec toute la classe, y compris l'enseignant, et les camarades réagissent alors violemment contre Megan. Cette campagne a par la suite été vivement critiquée parce qu'elle se focalisait exclusivement sur la victime des violences et l'erreur qu'elle avait commise en envoyant une telle photo :

*« 'Think you know what happens to your images? Who will see them? How they will affect you? Think again.' The tag-line addresses only one subject – the 'you' who produced the initial image [...]. In the absence of context the video appears to be a **morality tale**: the story of a foolish young woman who 'thought she knew' (but should have known better) and was victimized as an inevitable result of her own actions [...]. At the same time, they are held responsible, as self-governing subjects, for predicting, evading and/or managing this risk: a model of 'crime prevention' in which **perpetrators of abuse or violence are strangely absent.**» (p. 464-465)<sup>60</sup>.*

La deuxième stratégie consiste à adopter une approche de réduction des risques, soit le safe ou safer sexting, c'est-à-dire une pratique du sexting plus sûre. Dans le cadre de ces préventions, des manières de se protéger ou de réagir sont alors proposées. Un autre type de message utilisé dans cette stratégie consiste à sensibiliser aux problèmes ou aux dérives du sexting comme le transfert de contenu à d'autres personnes sans accord, à la pression qui peut être exercée pour obtenir ce genre de contenu, au chantage et au harcèlement qui peuvent s'en suivre et s'adresse alors plus particulièrement aux potentiels auteurs de ces problèmes.

Dans la majorité des campagnes, si les problèmes potentiels relatifs à la pratique sont parfois mis en avant, ils le sont surtout du point de vue de la victime et de l'auteur. De plus, c'est essentiellement le scénario d'une fille victime et d'un garçon auteur qui est utilisé, risquant de stigmatiser davantage les filles victimes qui le sont déjà<sup>28, 35, 60, 66</sup>, notamment par rapport



aux réactions des pairs. En effet, il a été démontré que les discours tenus envers une personne victime d'un partage non consensuel étaient davantage négatifs et violents lorsque celle-ci était une fille<sup>10, 58, 67-69</sup>

Finalement, très peu d'actions ont intégré les témoins ou complices dans le cadre d'un cas de sexting qui tournerait mal. Leur place est pourtant importante dans une telle problématique, soit parce qu'ils agissent en continuant à partager ou en participant aux moqueries, soit parce qu'ils ne réagissent pas.

Pourtant, il semblerait que les jeunes ne soient pas toujours au clair sur ce qui est permis de faire ou pas, notamment en tant que récipiendaire secondaire et témoin : « *Mais ça dépend. Enfin moi si je suis la première personne à qui la photo est envoyée je vais quand même penser à la personne qui l'a envoyée et je vais me dire bon ok, c'est moi qui ai le pouvoir en main donc je me dis aller je suis gentil avec elle je la supprime. **Mais si la photo a déjà tourné dans tout le collège [...], c'est déjà mort donc...*** » (Garçon, 17 ans)<sup>70</sup>

En Suisse, une campagne nationale portant spécifiquement et exclusivement sur le sexting avait été lancée en 2013 par ProJuventute : *Stop sexting* (Figure 6). Cette campagne avait alors adopté une approche d'abstinence s'adressant exclusivement aux potentielles victimes de partage. Le slogan de la campagne était : *Le sexting peut te rendre célèbre. Même si tu ne le veux pas du tout*. En plus de cette campagne, d'autres projets ont été et sont encore menés mais le sexting reste surtout présenté de manière transversale et est intégré dans des campagnes de prévention plus larges sur l'utilisation d'Internet ou la gestion de son image numérique.

Figure 6. Affiche de la campagne ProJuventute 2013-2014



<https://www.projuventute.ch/Kampagnen-Poster-Sexting.2492.0.html?&L=1>

Dans le cadre de notre recherche qualitative, en plus d'obtenir leurs opinions et perceptions quant à la pratique du sexting en tant que telle, nous avons également intégré des discussions sur deux campagnes de prévention : l'affiche de ProJuventute *Stop sexting* et le jeu sérieux de la Police Cantonale Vaudoise *Sois net*. Plusieurs participant·e·s avaient alors réagi sur les cibles des messages de ces campagnes de prévention et le fait qu'elles s'adressaient essentiellement aux victimes potentielles et focalisaient uniquement sur l'échange initial.

« Là je pense que ça montre moins que le coupable c'est vraiment celui qui a partagé [...]. Là ceux qui sont blâmés c'est ceux qui ont pris la photo et pas ceux qui ont partagé et je pense qu'il manque pas mal cet aspect-là. » (Garçon, 20 ans)<sup>70</sup>.

Ainsi une des propositions faites par certain·e·s participant·e·s et que nous avons alors reprise dans nos recommandations étaient de réorienter les messages de prévention afin que ceux-ci ciblent avant tout les conséquences négatives possibles comme le fait de faire circuler un message ou de faire du chantage, ainsi que les auteurs potentiels de ces problèmes.

« [...] Je vois souvent ça dans les campagnes de prévention des trucs de culpabilisation des victimes en fait. C'est vraiment à mon sens le gros problème des campagnes de prévention [...]. La bonne question c'est : "Je reçois des photos, j'ai envie de les partager, est-ce que je le fais ?

*Non !" [...]. Je pense que le meilleur moyen de parler au bourreau c'est de parler au bourreau, pas de parler à la victime en s'imaginant que le bourreau va l'entendre [...]. » (Garçon, 20 ans)<sup>70</sup>.*

Cette idée de réorienter la prévention sur les dérives du sexting s'inscrit directement dans la controverse présentée ci-dessus concernant la manière de définir la pratique et de différencier les différentes actions. Cette approche a été utilisée par la dernière campagne française *Non au harcèlement* du Ministère de l'éducation nationale et de la jeunesse sortie fin 2018. En effet, cette campagne se concentre essentiellement sur ce qui a été appelé sexting non consenti, soit « (...) lorsque l'un des deux partenaires trahit la confiance de l'autre en mettant en public la photographie qui avait été donnée ou prise dans un cadre intime. » (Bellon, 2018, guide pédagogique, p.15). Le slogan de cette campagne s'adresse alors directement à l'auteur du partage non consenti : « *Les photos c'est perso, les partager c'est harceler.* »

Dans le cadre de l'élaboration d'un nouveau spot de prévention à l'intention des chargé-e-s de prévention amené-e-s à intervenir en classe dans le canton de Vaud, j'ai été appelée comme experte scientifique quant à la thématique du sexting. Ainsi, en plus de réorienter le message sur les auteurs, auteur principal et complices, le comité de pilotage s'est également accordé sur la nécessité de ne pas présenter des actions genrées et de proposer un scénario permettant à tour de rôle d'avoir des filles et des garçons victimes, auteurs et complices.

#### 1.4. Aspects légaux

Le manque de clarté quant à la définition même du sexting et à la considération positive ou négative de cette pratique s'illustre également dans les discussions et controverses au niveau légal. Dans plusieurs pays, y compris la Suisse, la législation sur la pornographie infantile (article 197 du Code Pénal) est utilisable dans le cadre du sexting lorsque la personne qui est sur une image et/ou celle qui la reçoit est âgée de moins de 16 ans :

*« Quiconque offre, montre, rend accessibles à une personne de moins de 16 ans ou met à sa disposition des écrits, enregistrements sonores ou visuels, images ou autres objets pornographiques ou des représentations pornographiques, ou les diffuse à la radio ou à la*

*télévision, est puni d'une peine privative de liberté de trois ans au plus ou d'une peine pécuniaire.* » (Article 197 alinéa 1, code pénal suisse).

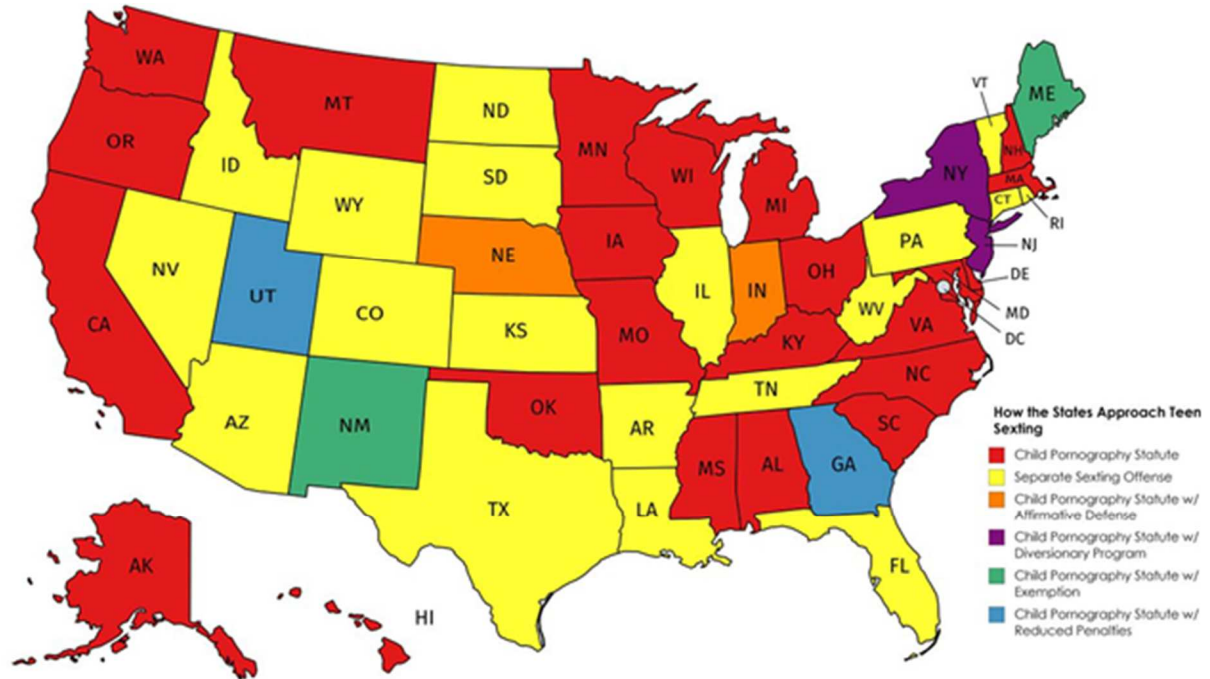
Ainsi, si un tel échange est porté à la connaissance des parents, même sans diffusion massive, il est possible de porter plainte. Cependant, la connaissance d'une telle pratique se fera le plus souvent à la suite d'une diffusion non consentie entraînant une distribution massive.

Plusieurs problèmes se posent par rapport à l'utilisation de cet article de loi sur la pornographie pour gérer un cas problématique de sexting concernant des jeunes âgé·e·s de moins de 16 ans. Premièrement, en cas de diffusion non consentie, l'auteur du partage pourra être condamné pour distribution de contenu pornographique mais la personne sur la photo pourra également être punie pour production et distribution de contenu pornographique même si c'est sa propre image et qu'il y avait consentement dans l'échange initial. Ce point a été fortement critiqué à de maintes reprises. En effet, la loi a pour but la protection des mineurs et dans ce cas, il se pourrait qu'un échange consenti puisse se retourner contre la personne victime d'un partage, allant donc à l'encontre du but premier de la loi<sup>71</sup>. De plus, une telle conception fait totalement abstraction de la possibilité d'un sexting consensuel entre deux adolescent·e·s<sup>55, 66, 72</sup>.

Strasburger et al.<sup>71</sup> dans un article référençant les différentes manières de gérer le sexting sur le plan légal aux USA appellent expressément à différencier le sexting consensuel et le sexting non consensuel pour mettre à jour les lois entourant le sexting, prendre en considération les nouvelles pratiques des jeunes, et utiliser d'autres moyens, notamment éducatifs, pour gérer cette problématique. « [...] *Consensual sexting between teens should not be unlawful. In essence, consensual sexting between adolescents should be decriminalized. Just like sex, sexting should be considered a health and development issue, not a legal issue. We argue that **prosecutions should be limited to the more egregious and nonconsensual acts** [...]. Thus, we argue that consensual teen-to-teen sexting does not warrant law enforcement involvement but **rather is a health and education issue** that is better addressed at home, in schools, and in primary care.* » (p.6)<sup>71</sup>.

Ci-dessous (Figure 7), une figure utilisée par Strasburger et al.<sup>71</sup> pour illustrer des différentes manières de légiférer sur le sexting aux USA allant de la décriminalisation du sexting entre mineurs aux condamnations d'ordre sexuel utilisant les lois sur la pornographie infantile.

Figure 7. Carte des USA sur la manière dont les Etats gèrent le sexting chez les adolescent-e-s sur le plan légal<sup>71</sup>



Created with mapchart.net ©

En 2018, un cas avait fait couler beaucoup d'encre, notamment dans les médias. Une jeune fille de 14 ans avait été accusée de production et distribution de pédopornographie alors qu'elle avait envoyé une photo intime à un garçon de son école, ce dernier ayant fait une capture d'écran et l'ayant distribué à ses amis sans le consentement de la jeune fille.

*"A 14-year-old Minnesota girl is fighting criminal charges that have the potential to destroy her future (...). Her case does not involve harm to others. It does not involve damage to property. And it does not have anything to do with illegal substances. Rather her young life could be ruined all because **she sent an explicit Snapchat of herself to a boy she liked.** (...) Even though Jane didn't victimize anybody, Rice County's prosecutor charged her with felony distribution of child pornography. A conviction, or even a guilty plea to a lesser charge, would require Jane to spend **10 years on the sex offender registry.**"<sup>73</sup>.*

Finalement, les charges ont été abandonnées contre la fille. Le juge ayant pris cette décision a notamment considéré que la loi contre la pédopornographie avait été créée pour protéger les enfants et qu'il aurait été donc absurde de l'utiliser pour punir une jeune fille<sup>74</sup>.

Tout comme la prévention qui risque de stigmatiser les victimes, une telle approche a également été critiquée en faisant référence au concept de *victim blaming* qui consiste à tenir responsable les victimes pour ce qu'elles ont subi<sup>35</sup> ou encore de la culture du viol qui permettrait de le justifier selon les attitudes ou comportements de la victime<sup>39</sup>. Dans une telle conception, le fait d'envoyer une photo intime de soi pourrait alors justifier le partage à d'autres personnes car c'est une conséquence connue, tout comme le fait de porter une mini-jupe en cas de viol.

Un autre problème entourant l'utilisation de l'article du code pénal sur la pornographie est la définition de ce qu'est exactement un contenu pornographique. En effet, dans le cadre de notre recherche qualitative, nous avons pu conclure qu'il existait un large éventail de contenu possible dans le cadre du sexting tel que pratiqué par les jeunes. Cet éventail pouvait aller d'un contenu très explicite à l'illustration d'une personne totalement habillée mais dans une position suggestive. En revanche, il semblerait que le contenu très explicite soit moins fréquent.

« *Oui mais après...**Sans rien** (sans habit) **il y a moins**. Mais il y a sans.* » (Fille, 15 ans -2018)<sup>75</sup>

« *Et ça a duré peut-être 15 minutes et j'étais là : "Mais moi je ne veux pas regarder ça !" C'était carrément pornographique en fait [...]. Et du coup après je ne sais pas si ça rentre dans le domaine du sexting, là **c'est vraiment un autre domaine j'ai l'impression** [...].* » (Fille, 20 ans - 2016)<sup>70</sup>.

Selon la jurisprudence en Suisse (arrêt du tribunal fédéral (ATF) 117 IV 452), les critères à cumuler et à analyser pour qualifier un contenu de pornographique sont :

1. L'être humain est réduit à un objet d'assouvissement sexuel – à une image dégradante ;
2. Le but de la représentation est de provoquer l'excitation sexuelle d'une personne ;
3. La représentation insiste sur les parties génitales.

Dans un autre arrêt (128 IV 260), le tribunal fédéral stipule expressément que « [...] *cette notion reste toutefois une notion juridique indéterminée qui appelle une interprétation.* » Ainsi, les juges sont appelés à examiner au cas par cas afin de juger le caractère pornographique ou non d'une image. Si l'image n'est pas considérée comme un contenu pornographique, le juge peut alors conclure à une ordonnance de classement, sauf s'il existe un autre chef d'accusation tel que le chantage par exemple.

Dans ce contexte, en 2013, une réforme du droit pénal français a modifié la manière de considérer le sexting du point de vue légal. A partir de cette réforme, ce n'est plus seulement le sexting qui tournerait mal (sexting secondaire) qui est puni, mais également l'échange consentant. Cette réforme a été critiquée : « *Le législateur doit, par ailleurs, distinguer sexting primaire et secondaire. Il est certain que la question du consentement est particulièrement délicate. Cela étant, le droit ne saurait ignorer le cas des adolescents qui s'adonnent délibérément au sexting primaire. Or, à ce jour, les peines encourues semblent disproportionnées.* »<sup>76</sup> (p.9). L'Académie française<sup>77</sup> a même traduit le terme *sexting* en *textopornographie* définissant cette pratique comme le fait d'envoyer des textos pornographiques.

En Suisse, une motion a également été déposée au Conseil National en 2016 afin que le sexting soit davantage puni par le code pénal et que cette pratique soit spécifiquement considérée dans le code pénal Suisse<sup>78</sup>. Cette motion a, néanmoins, été rejetée par le Conseil des Etats<sup>79</sup> qui a estimé qu'il était inutile d'instaurer un article supplémentaire spécifique au sexting dans le code pénal car d'autres dispositions étaient déjà disponibles, notamment en cas de chantage.

Ces différents exemples d'implications légales démontrent qu'il est nécessaire de distinguer le sexting primaire et consenti du sexting secondaire qui consiste à partager avec d'autres personnes afin d'avoir des messages de prévention et des lois qui suivent les développements des pratiques pour assurer une cohérence.

## 2. But et objectifs

### 2.1. La thèse

Globalement, cette thèse a pour but une meilleure compréhension de la pratique du sexting et de ses dérives. Pour ce faire, nous l'avons subdivisée en 4 objectifs :

- Définir la pratique du sexting chez les jeunes;
- Comprendre la pratique et les mécanismes par lesquels les problèmes et conséquences négatives peuvent, parfois, apparaître;
- Explorer la prévention existante et ses besoins;
- Obtenir des données quantitatives détaillées de la pratique en Suisse.

Pour ce qui est de la définition et de la compréhension de la pratique, une revue de la littérature et des recherches qualitatives ont été menées dans un premier temps. La prévention a ensuite été explorée grâce à un état des lieux et les besoins en la matière ont été analysés avec une recherche utilisant des méthodes mixtes (qualitatives et quantitatives). Finalement, sur la base de la revue de la littérature et des recherches qualitatives, un questionnaire a été créé et intégré dans une enquête nationale permettant d'obtenir des données quantitatives détaillées. Chacun de ces projets font l'objet d'une publication et sont développés dans les chapitres suivants en termes d'objectifs, de résultats et de discussion. Les articles scientifiques complets publiés et soumis se trouvent dans les annexes 3 à 6 (p.91) et les résumés des rapports dans les annexes 7 à 9 (p.185).

### 2.2. Revue de la littérature : article #1

La première étape de cette thèse a consisté à répondre à la question basique et générale : Qu'est-ce que le sexting ? Pour déterminer comment la pratique du sexting étaient actuellement définie et explorer les contextes principaux, une revue de la littérature a été menée dans le but de déterminer comment la pratique du sexting chez les jeunes avait été mesurée et définie jusque-là. L'objectif de cette revue était d'examiner la littérature existante sur la pratique du sexting parmi les adolescent·e·s âgé·e·s de 18 ans et moins. La recherche a été conduite sur la base de deux questions :



- 1) Quelles sont les similitudes et différences dans les mesures et questions utilisées dans la littérature ?
- 2) Quelles sont les variables associées à cette pratique ?

### 2.3. Recherche exploratoire qualitative : rapports #1 et #2, et article #2

Au terme de la revue de la littérature et de la conclusion principale qu'il n'existait pas de définition claire du sexting, nous avons décidé d'explorer cette pratique du point de vue de différent·e·s acteurs·trices concerné·e·s par cette pratique : des jeunes (16-21 ans) et des adultes ressources (enseignant·e·s et parents). Nous avons alors conduit des groupes focus dans le cadre d'une recherche exploratoire qualitative qui avait pour objectif principal d'identifier les différents mécanismes par lesquels le sexting pouvait mener à des conséquences négatives ainsi que les différentes interprétations quant à la pratique elle-même. Nos résultats avaient deux finalités. La première consistait à appréhender la pratique du sexting elle-même en s'intéressant à sa définition, aux motivations, aux réactions et aux risques. La deuxième visait la prévention avec l'évaluation de certaines campagnes de prévention. Nos questions de recherche étaient les suivantes:

- Quels sont les différents éléments qui définissent le sexting du point de vue des jeunes, des parents et des enseignant·e·s?
- Quelle est la définition du sexting?
- Quelles sont les raisons qui peuvent motiver une personne à pratiquer le sexting (en termes d'envoi et de réception) mais aussi à transférer le contenu à d'autres personnes?
- Quels sont les risques, conséquences et réactions possibles, notamment en termes de jugement?
- Est-ce que la prévention relative au sexting est utile ? Que pourrait-on faire pour prévenir?

Pour la définition de la pratique, nous voulions ainsi ouvrir la voie à l'établissement d'une définition et de mesures plus claires en utilisant les opinions et interprétations des adolescent·e·s et jeunes adultes pour déterminer les éléments constitutifs importants. Nous

avons également pour objectif de comparer la perspective des jeunes à celle des adultes ressources.

Certains résultats obtenus dans le cadre de cette première recherche qualitative nous ont amené à considérer deux suites. La première a été de reconduire cette recherche auprès des plus jeunes. En effet, nous avons débuté par des jeunes âgé·e·s de 16 à 21 ans et s'il s'est avéré que si pour la majorité d'entre eux la pratique semblait bien acceptée et pouvait faire partie intégrante de leur sexualité, les problèmes, notamment le fait de diffuser une image reçue à d'autres personnes sans consentement, étaient beaucoup plus présents chez les plus jeunes. Nous avons donc reconduit cette étude exploratoire qualitative auprès de jeunes âgé·e·s de 12 à 15 ans, ou en tout cas encore en scolarité obligatoire, en reprenant la même grille d'entretien et les mêmes questions de recherche pour pouvoir comparer les résultats. Cette suite a été publiée dans un rapport<sup>75</sup> Raisons de Santé, collection de l'Institut universitaire de Médecine Sociale et Préventive (IUSMP).

La deuxième suite envisagée concernait la prévention. En effet, lors des discussions menées dans le cadre de la première recherche qualitative, très peu de jeunes ont rapporté se rappeler avoir déjà vu ou reçu des messages de prévention relatifs au sexting spécifiquement, que cela soit à l'école ou ailleurs.

*« [...] Franchement je pense que ça existe oui mais, par exemple, au lycée, ce n'est pas du tout abordé, au collège je n'ai jamais eu une seule campagne de prévention qui parlait vraiment de ça [...]. » (Garçon, 18 ans)<sup>70</sup>*

*« Nous on a eu que pour le harcèlement mais pas spécialisé sur le sexting. Enfin il y a la police qui est venue mais je crois un peu comme dans chaque collège. Mais maintenant on n'est plus au collège, on est au gymnase et il n'y a rien eu du tout. » (Fille, 16 ans)<sup>70</sup>*

Nous avons alors décidé d'établir un état des lieux non exhaustif de la prévention nationale et internationale sur la thématique du sexting. L'objectif de cet état des lieux était double. Tout d'abord, nous souhaitions vérifier les dires de certains jeunes sur le manque d'intervention et de discussion sur le sexting et ses possibles dérives. Puis, nous souhaitions récolter diverses informations sur la prévention, notamment en termes de matériel, d'intervenant·e·s et de

message, dans l'optique de notre 3<sup>ème</sup> recherche sur les besoins et les attentes quant à la prévention en lien avec le sexting.

Les deux recherches qualitatives ont été financées par le Service de la Santé Publique du Canton de Vaud.

#### 2.4. Etat des lieux de la prévention : rapport #3

L'objectif de cet état des lieux était de créer un catalogue répertoriant les différents acteurs·trices et ressources à disposition pour la prévention en lien avec la pratique du sexting chez les jeunes. En plus de pouvoir vérifier les dires des jeunes que nous avons interrogés en 2016 et de trouver des sources d'inspiration pour une potentielle future intervention, cette phase avait également comme objectif l'établissement d'une liste d'énoncés ou de postulats sur la prévention en lien avec le sexting. Les énoncés créés ont ainsi été classés selon le degré d'accord des participant·e·s afin d'établir leurs besoins et priorités quant à la prévention.

Cet état des lieux, mené en collaboration avec l'Unité de Médecine des Violences du CHUV, a été publié dans un rapport<sup>80</sup> Raison de Santé, collection de l'IUMSP et a été financé par le Département Universitaire de Médecine Sociale et Communautaire (DUMSC).

#### 2.5. Etude sur la prévention, méthodes mixtes : article #3

L'objectif de cette troisième étude utilisant une méthode mixte de recherche (quantitative + qualitative) était de récolter les opinions des jeunes (13-18 ans) et des professionnel·le·s sur des mesures préventives relatives au sexting afin d'établir leurs besoins et les priorités quant à la prévention.

La liste créée sur la base de l'état des lieux de la prévention et des suggestions des participant·e·s émises lors des groupes focus présentait plusieurs éléments tels que les acteurs·trices-clés, les messages transmis, les cibles et le matériel. Cette recherche a été financée par le Département Universitaire de Médecine Sociale et Communautaire (DUMSC).

## 2.6. Données quantitatives – enquête nationale sur la sexualité: article #4

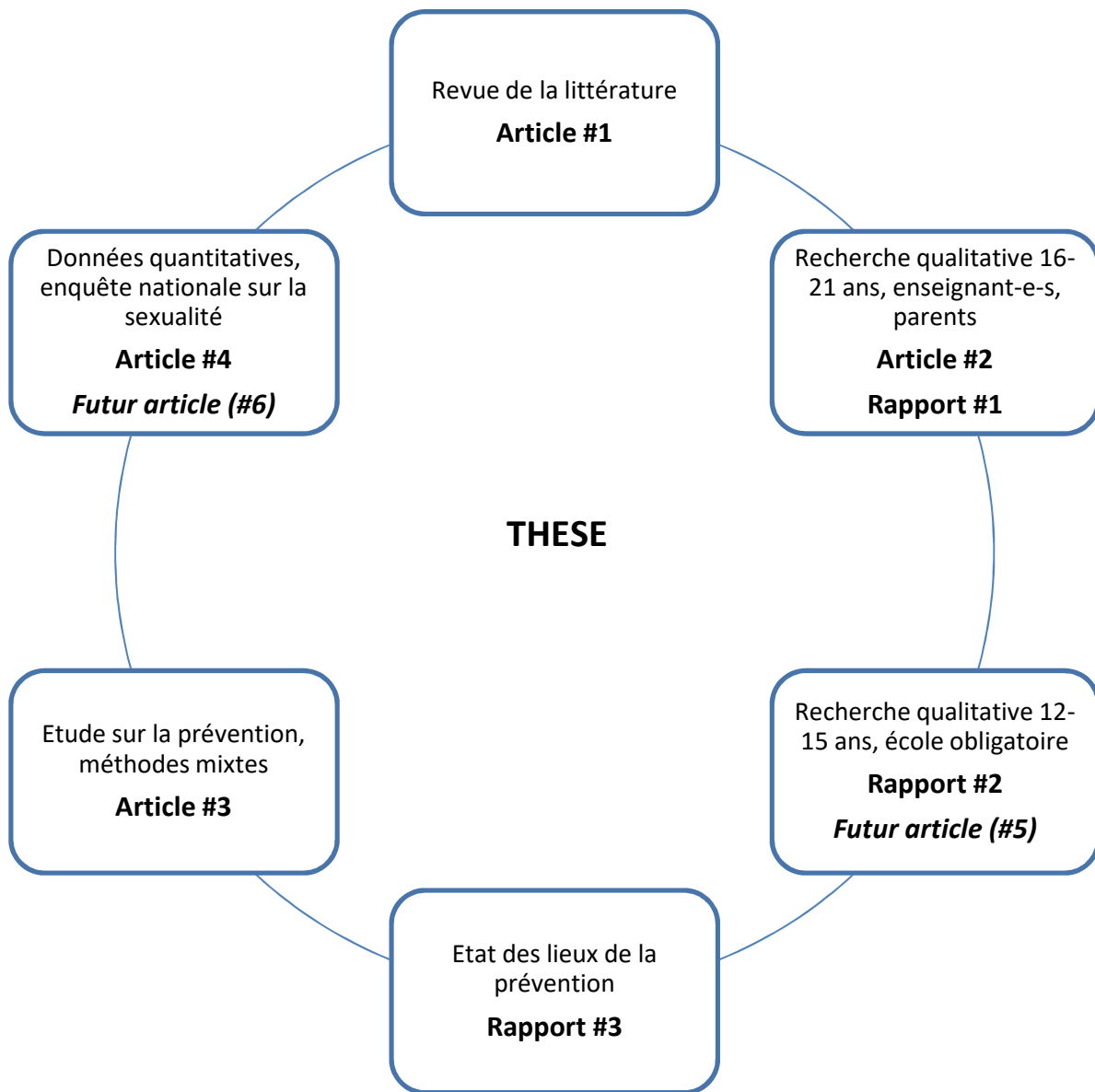
Dans le cadre d'une enquête nationale sur la sexualité des jeunes adultes (24-26 ans) en Suisse, nous avons créé et intégré un questionnaire détaillé sur le sexting et ses dérivés. Ainsi, en nous inspirant de la toute première étude menée en 2008 aux Etats-Unis et en complétant grâce à nos précédentes recherches (revue de la littérature et groupes focus), nous nous sommes intéressés à trois actions en lien avec la pratique : l'envoi de sa propre image, la réception de l'image d'une autre personne et la diffusion ou le partage de l'image d'une autre personne à des tiers. L'objectif de cette étude était d'obtenir des données actuelles et détaillées sur cette pratique. Plusieurs questions de développement ont été posées pour examiner le contexte de ces différentes actions.

Nous présenterons rapidement quelques chiffres concernant l'envoi et la réception, mais pour la thèse, comme il existe une lacune dans la littérature par rapport à l'action de partager avec d'autres personnes<sup>25, 32</sup>, nous avons décidé de nous focaliser sur cette action dans le dernier article. Le but de ce dernier article était alors de déterminer les caractéristiques et les motivations des jeunes qui ont partagé des images intimes qu'ils avaient reçues avec d'autres personnes.

Cette dernière étude faisait partie d'une plus large enquête sur la sexualité des jeunes publiée dans un rapport<sup>23</sup> Raison de Santé, collection de l'IUMSP, et a été financée par le Fonds National Suisse.

L'ensemble des projets et des publications composant cette thèse est résumé dans la Figure 8, ci-dessous.

Figure 8. Différents projets, articles et rapports composant la thèse



### 3. Résultats et discussion

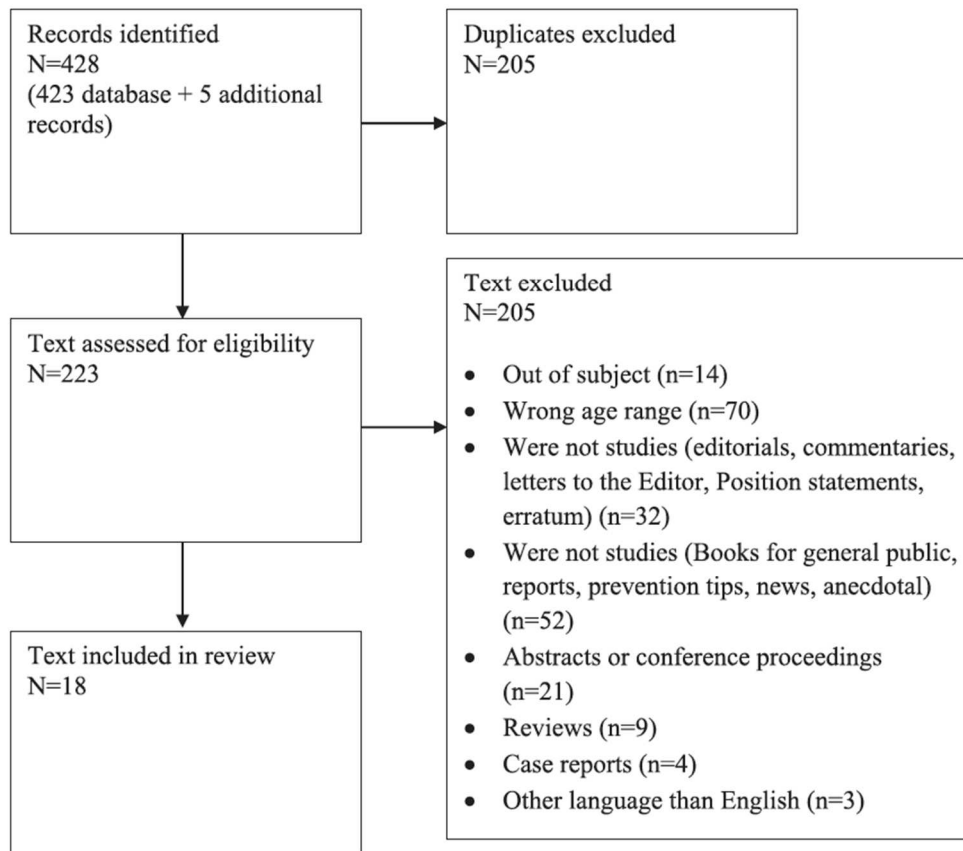
#### 3.1. Revue de la littérature : article #1

**Barrense-Dias Y, Berchtold A, Suris JC, Akre C. Sexting and the definition issue: A literature review. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 2017; 61(5):544-554. Annexe 3 p.91**

Yara Barrense-Dias a conceptualisé la revue, développé la stratégie de recherche, déterminé l'éligibilité des manuscrits, extrait et interprété les données et écrit le manuscrit.

Sur 223 articles à analyser pour leur éligibilité, 18 articles concernant la pratique du sexting auprès des jeunes de 18 ans et moins (date de recherche 4 novembre 2015) ont finalement été intégrés (procédé de sélection Figure 9) et analysés dans le cadre de cette revue de la littérature. Nous avons examiné les différentes définitions et mesures du sexting utilisées dans la littérature, ainsi que ses corrélations. L'ensemble des articles étaient en anglais et ont été publiés entre 2012 et 2015. La majorité des articles venaient des Etats-Unis (n=10). Les participant-e-s étaient âgé-e-s de 10 à 18 ans. La plupart des études sur lesquels se basaient les articles étaient quantitatives (n=15). Sans aucune distinction, les taux de prévalence pour la pratique globale du sexting chez les jeunes étaient compris entre 0.9% et 60%.

Figure 9. Procédé de sélection des études



La revue a permis d’explorer plusieurs dimensions pouvant constituer la définition de la pratique du sexting :

- Les actions (envoyer, recevoir, partager-transférer)

Deux catégories d’action ont pu être relevées. Le sexting actif regroupant les actions de créer, montrer, poster, envoyer et transférer à d’autres personnes, et le sexting passif regroupant le fait de demander, se faire demander et recevoir. Le sexting passif (7.1% à 60%) démontrait des taux supérieurs au sexting actif (2.5% à 27.6%).

Un article<sup>81</sup> n’a pas distingué entre le sexting passif et actif, mettant ces deux types d’action dans une même question (“*On average, how much time per day do you spend sending or receiving sexually-related text messages?*”).

D'autres recherches ont focalisé uniquement sur une action : le fait d'envoyer<sup>9, 44, 47, 49, 82-84</sup> ou de recevoir<sup>29</sup>. Sept recherches se sont intéressées aux deux types d'actions et les ont distingué grâce à plusieurs questions séparées<sup>56, 57, 62, 85-88</sup>.

Certaines études<sup>62, 86</sup> ont directement intégré le fait de partager un contenu reçu avec d'autres personnes dans leur définition du sexting et ont alors étudié trois actions simultanément : l'envoi, la réception et le partage. Pour les autres études, cette intégration était moins évidente. Cependant, neuf études<sup>9, 44, 49, 57, 82-84, 87, 88</sup> ont ajouté un détail dans leur question : *de soi-même*. Cet ajout démontre que le partage d'une image de quelqu'un d'autre n'est pas considéré dans la définition de base du sexting.

- Les types de médias ou supports (texte, images et vidéos)

Toutes les études, sauf une<sup>81</sup>, ont utilisé les images dans leur définition, soit de manière isolée, soit en combinaison avec des messages texte et/ou vidéos. Dans 8 articles<sup>44, 49, 57, 61, 82, 83, 86, 89</sup>, seules les images étaient utilisées. Six études<sup>9, 29, 84, 87, 88</sup> ont intégré les deux types de contenu (texte et image) mais seule une<sup>84</sup> a utilisé deux questions différentes pour distinguer ces deux supports. Quatre études<sup>47, 56, 62, 85</sup> ont également parlé de vidéos, mais toujours combinées aux photos et texte. Une étude<sup>47</sup> avait une définition plus large comprenant les trois supports possibles, texte, photos et vidéos, dans une même question sans aucune distinction. Lorsqu'une distinction était faite, les messages texte étaient les plus rapportés.

- Caractéristiques sexuelles

Les termes employés étaient multiples. Neuf articles<sup>29, 47, 56, 81, 83-85, 87, 88</sup> ont utilisé des termes relatifs à la sexualité : *sext*, *sexting*, *sexy*, *sexuellement explicite*, *à caractère sexuel*, *sexuellement suggestif* ou *contenu sexuel*. Sept articles<sup>9, 49, 61, 82, 86, 89, 90</sup> ont utilisé les termes nu et partiellement nu, et trois articles<sup>44, 57, 62</sup> n'ont utilisé que le terme nu. Deux articles<sup>29, 86</sup> ont décrit plus précisément ce qui était entendu. Ainsi, dans un de ces deux articles par exemple<sup>86</sup>, il était précisé que certaines parties du corps devaient apparaître (les parties génitales, les fesses, la poitrine). Dans cet article, deux questions étaient posées : une sans aucun détail et une autre avec les parties du corps spécifiques. Le taux de prévalence de 2.5% s'est alors réduit à 1% avec les précisions.



Bien que le sexting peut évoluer très rapidement, tout comme les réseaux sociaux et les nouvelles technologies en général, il est nécessaire d'entamer une réflexion sur la manière de mesurer et de considérer cette pratique. Cette revue de la littérature a, en effet, permis de mettre en lumière les disparités et la multiplicité des mesures et des définitions de cette pratique. Ces différences mènent à des taux de prévalence très différents, parfois flous, rendant alors les interprétations et les comparaisons difficiles. Comme la plupart des études ont trouvé que les adolescent·e·s considéraient cette pratique comme une activité positive, il est important d'intégrer leurs interprétations dans les réflexions autour de la définition. Ainsi, différencier les dimensions du sexting (contenu, actions, supports, etc.) et trouver un consensus sur la définition sont deux étapes essentielles pour mieux évaluer et comprendre la pratique, et adapter la prévention à la réalité.

### 3.2. Recherche exploratoire qualitative : rapports #1 et #2, et article #2

**Barrense-Dias Y, Suris JC, Akre C.** "When it deviates it becomes harassment, doesn't it?" A qualitative study on the definition of sexting according to adolescents and young adults, parents and teachers. *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 2019. (online first). Annexe 4 p.103

**Barrense-Dias Y, Suris JC, Akre C.** La sexualité à l'ère numérique : les adolescents et le sexting. Lausanne, Institut universitaire de médecine sociale et préventive, 2017 (Raisons de santé 269). Annexe 7 p.185

**Barrense-Dias Y, Akre C, Suris JC.** La sexualité à l'ère numérique : les adolescents et le sexting 2.0, 2<sup>ème</sup> phase. Lausanne, Institut universitaire de médecine sociale et préventive, 2019 (Raisons de santé 296). Annexe 8 p.193

Yara Barrense-Dias a conceptualisé l'étude, créé la grille d'entretien, recruté les participant·e·s, mené les groupes de discussion, analysé et interprété les données et écrit les rapports et le manuscrit.

Dans le cadre d'une recherche exploratoire qualitative plus large sur le sexting menée en 2016, 32 jeunes (16-21 ans) et 29 personnes ressources (11 parents et 18 enseignant·e·s) ont participé à 11 groupes focus pour partager leurs opinions et perceptions quant à la manière

de définir le sexting. Différents éléments constitutifs de la pratique ont été discutés en termes de connaissances, de supports, de caractéristiques, d'actions et de contexte.

Bien que le terme sexting ait régulièrement été utilisé dans les campagnes de prévention de langue française, sa connaissance est restée approximative dans nos groupes de discussion. En effet, si l'ensemble des participant·e·s ont dit qu'ils savaient sur quoi allait porter la discussion, le terme spécifique sexting n'était pas toujours connu et pratiquement jamais utilisé pour discuter de ce sujet.

*« J'aurais tendance plutôt à utiliser une définition qu'un terme. Avec un exemple. » (Fille, 19 ans).*

En revanche, un autre terme anglais semblait davantage utilisé lorsqu'ils en parlaient entre eux.

*« - Des nudes. (Garçon, 18 ans)*

*- C'est quoi les nudes ? (Intervenante)*

*- C'est en anglais, nudes. [...] C'est des photos sexy quoi. (Garçon, 18 ans) »*

Dans tous les groupes, des caractéristiques sexuelles étaient utilisées pour décrire le contenu des échanges. Comparé·e·s aux adultes ressources interrogés dans le cadre de cette étude, les jeunes avaient néanmoins plus tendance à utiliser des éléments suggestifs dans leur définition : sexy, érotique, intime, coquin, etc.

*« [...] Je dirais intime plutôt que sexuel parce que ça peut... Justement comme il disait pour chauffer ça peut être quelque chose de pas nécessairement sexuel mais quand même du cadre de l'intime, [...] quelque chose d'agréable. [...] Je pense que le sexting rentre dans cette catégorie un peu plus large [...] ». (Garçon, 20 ans).*

En revanche, certains de ces termes ont amené davantage de discussions chez les adultes ressources, comme les termes sexy ou érotique qui ne semblaient pas adaptés à la pratique du sexting chez les jeunes.

*« [...] Pour moi sexy c'est dans l'ordre de la séduction, on ne franchit pas une certaine limite, [...] il y a beaucoup de suggestion dans le message sexy. Malheureusement dans le sexting il peut y avoir de la suggestion mais à mon avis ça va vite beaucoup plus loin. » (Parent)*

Les termes plus explicites comme contenu risqué, rapport sexuel, pornographie, contenu provocateur ont également été utilisés mais surtout par les adultes ressources.

*« [...] Franchement je n'ai pas une définition claire de ce que c'est. Je vois bien que ce soit s'envoyer des images à caractère pornographique mais je n'en sais rien de plus. » (Parent)*

Chez les jeunes, le terme pornographie n'a quasiment jamais été utilisé et lorsqu'il l'a été c'était pour faire part d'un doute quant à l'inclusion de ce type de contenu dans la définition du sexting.

*C'était il y a un an [...], on m'a montré une vidéo, c'était des jeunes qui avaient 14 ans qui se sont filmés en train de coucher ensemble dans la cour de l'école [...]. Et ça a duré peut-être 15 minutes et j'étais là: "Mais moi je ne veux pas regarder ça!". C'était carrément pornographique en fait [...]. Et du coup après je ne sais pas si ça rentre dans le domaine du sexting, là c'est vraiment un autre domaine j'ai l'impression [...]. (Fille, 20 ans)*

Une autre différence dans la conception des jeunes par rapport à celle des parents concernait les actions à intégrer dans la définition du sexting. Deux interprétations ont été relevées. Premièrement, le sexting sous pression, le partage non consentant à des tiers, les menaces et le harcèlement étaient intégrés dans la définition du sexting. Pour ces participant·e·s, la pratique ne pouvait pas être positive, elle était plutôt considérée comme un comportement violent et déviant dont l'issue négative était quasiment inévitable. Cette interprétation est restée minoritaire chez les jeunes alors qu'elle était régulièrement utilisée dans le groupe des adultes ressources.

*« Toute à l'heure on parlait de harcèlement sexuel, c'est un mot violent. Et justement j'ai l'impression que le mot sexting est un mot qui a banalisé le harcèlement. » (Enseignant)*

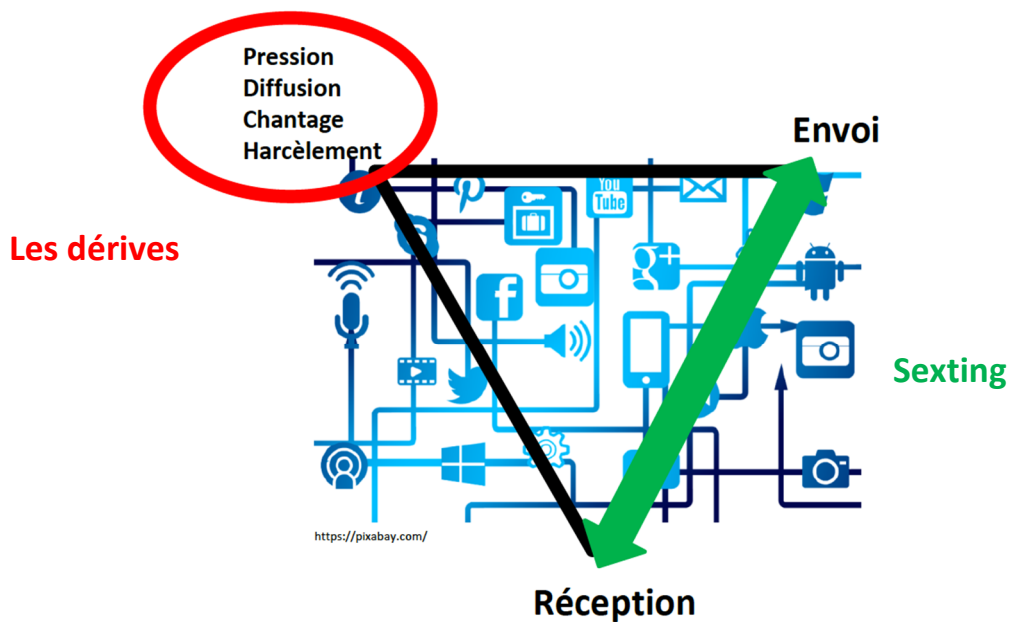
La deuxième interprétation définissait le sexting comme un échange (envoi-réception) entre deux personnes consentantes. Ainsi, le partage non consentant à des tiers, la pression, le

chantage et le harcèlement ne faisaient pas partie de la définition du sexting et ces différents actes devaient être appelés différemment. L'activité n'est pas déviante et violente en soi, c'est un comportement à risque mais qui n'a pas pour but premier de nuire ou de faire du mal à une personne. Si certains parents et enseignant·e·s ont également relevé cette conception du sexting, c'est dans le groupe des jeunes que cette deuxième variante prédominait.

*« Quand ça dévie ça devient un harcèlement non ? Ça dévie pas au début mais ça peut dévier. Le sexting, c'est le fait d'envoyer des messages et après il y a toutes les conséquences qui vont avec. » (Fille, 18 ans)*

Une des conclusions principales de cette étude portait donc sur la différence de perception entre les jeunes et les adultes ressources, démontrant un décalage dans la compréhension et la considération de cette pratique. En d'autres termes, pour la plupart des jeunes interrogés dans le cadre de cette étude, le sexting pouvait se définir comme un échange entre deux personnes consentantes avec 2 actions : envoyer et recevoir. Les problèmes ou les dérives possibles en lien avec cette pratique ne faisaient alors pas partie de la pratique en tant que telle et devaient être appelés différemment (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Schéma différenciant la pratique initiale de ses dérives



### 3.3. État des lieux de la prévention : rapport #3

**Barrense-Dias Y, De Puy J, Romain-Glassey N, Suris JC.** La prévention et le sexting : un état des lieux. Lausanne, Institut universitaire de médecine sociale et préventive, 2018 (Raisons de santé 285). Annexe 9 p.201

Yara Barrense-Dias a conceptualisé la recherche, développé la stratégie de recherche, déterminé l'éligibilité des manuscrits et des projets, extrait et analysé les informations et écrit le rapport.

Deux stratégies de recherche ont été utilisées pour mener cet état des lieux sur la prévention relative au sexting. La première stratégie s'est basée sur une revue de la littérature comprenant les documents inclus dans les bases de données scientifiques (articles, abstracts, etc.) et dans la littérature grise (rapport, site Internet). Dû au fait que nous cherchions des programmes de prévention, nous avons davantage trouvé de résultats dans la littérature grise, surtout sur les sites Internet. La deuxième stratégie visait à obtenir des informations complémentaires plus détaillées et consistait à contacter plusieurs acteurs·trices professionnel·le·s du milieu de la prévention et/ou de la jeunesse qui avaient mené ou étaient

susceptibles d'avoir mené une campagne de prévention relative à la pratique du sexting dans le canton de Vaud.

La recherche de littérature au sens strict a été effectuée le 28 juin 2017 et un total de 467 documents ont été trouvés. Après suppression des doublons, 219 documents ont pu être examinés. Les titres et les abstracts ont tout d'abord été lus puis, en cas de doute, le texte entier était examiné. Sur cette base, 169 articles ont été éliminés car ils étaient hors sujet, soit parce que le concept de prévention était associé à une autre thématique que celle du sexting, soit parce que la prévention n'était qu'une recommandation sans développement. Parmi les 50 articles restants, un ne correspondait pas aux langues que nous avons sélectionnées (français, anglais, allemand, espagnol), 20 ont encore été considérés comme hors sujet après lecture du texte dans son intégralité et le sexting n'était pas le sujet principal ou la campagne n'était pas assez significative pour 11 articles. Nous avons décidé de garder 18 articles<sup>58, 60, 91-106</sup> qui faisaient référence à un ou plusieurs programmes de prévention sur le sexting et qui nous ont permis de découvrir un total de 24 projets. Ces 24 projets ont pu ensuite être approfondis et complétés par d'autres programmes grâce à la littérature grise et aux professionnel-le-s contacté-e-s dans un deuxième temps.

Un total de 51 projets / entités ont été analysés en termes de messages, d'intervenants, de matériel, de canal, etc. Les projets spécifiquement sur le sexting ont ensuite été repertoriés selon qu'ils transmettaient un message d'abstinence (projet anti-sexting, Figure 11) ou une utilisation plus sûre de la pratique (safe/safer sexting, Figure 12) portant alors essentiellement sur les dérives de la pratique. Plusieurs autres projets ont également été analysés même si le sexting était traité dans le cadre d'une thématique plus large comme le harcèlement ou l'usage d'Internet.

Figure 11. Exemple projet spécifique sur le sexting, message anti-sexting-abstinence



[https://www.behance.net/gallery/2360530/PSA-Campaign-for-Sexting-\(Cyberbullying\)](https://www.behance.net/gallery/2360530/PSA-Campaign-for-Sexting-(Cyberbullying))

Figure 12. Exemple projet spécifique sur le sexting, message sexting sûr (safer sexting)



<https://thatsnotcool.com/callout-card/privacy-problems-2/>

### 3.4. Etude sur la prévention, méthodes mixtes : article #3

**Barrense-Dias Y**, Akre C, Suris JC, Berchtold A. Opinions of adolescents on prevention and education related to sexting: A Q-methodology study. *Journal of Adolescence* (under review).

Annexe 5 p.115

Yara Barrense-Dias a conceptualisé l'étude, créé la première version des énoncés, a recruté les participant·e·s, a coordonné les participations, a analysé et interprété les données et a écrit le manuscrit.

Pour récolter les opinions des jeunes sur la prévention relative au sexting, nous avons conduit une étude en utilisant la méthode Q (*Q-Methodology*)<sup>107-110</sup>. Cette méthode de recherche mixte permet de faire émerger des facteurs communs et des profils (données quantitatives) à partir de la subjectivité des participant·e·s et la grande variabilité d'opinions sur un sujet délimité<sup>111</sup> (données qualitatives).

Cette méthode se mène en plusieurs étapes. Tout d'abord, il s'agit de créer une liste de postulats ou d'énoncés sur la thématique qui représentent des opinions et non des faits (*Q-set*). Ces énoncés peuvent s'inspirer de plusieurs sources telles que les résultats d'une recherche qualitative, la littérature ou encore des opinions personnelles<sup>112</sup>. Dans notre cas, nous nous sommes surtout basés sur l'état des lieux de la prévention relative au sexting<sup>80</sup> (voir ci-dessus) ainsi que sur les premiers groupes focus menés en 2016<sup>70</sup>. Nous avons alors créé une liste de 58 postulats reflétant un large éventail de propositions sur les messages, les intervenants, le matériel, le canal, etc. Le nombre minimum de postulats se situent entre 40 et 80<sup>110, 113</sup>. Chaque énoncé a été imprimé sur une carte (Figure 13).



Figure 13. Exemple cartes - énoncés à classer selon le degré d'accord

1	2	7	8
Les cours d'éducation sexuelle doivent aborder le sexting	Il faut ajouter un filtre / contrôle parental sur les téléphones portables pour surveiller les messages / photos / vidéos reçues et envoyées	La prévention autour de la pratique du sexting devrait commencer dès l'âge de 8 ans	Les jeunes doivent être impliqués dans l'élaboration des messages et campagnes de prévention

Dans un deuxième temps, les participant·e·s sont invité·e·s à classer ces énoncés en fonction de leur degré d'accord (Q-sort). Après avoir donné les informations quant à la marche à suivre, les participant·e·s ont d'abord classé les énoncés en trois sous-groupes : pas d'accord, neutre, d'accord. Cette étape leur permet de se familiariser avec les cartes. Ensuite, le classement est affiné et les participant·e·s doivent classer les énoncés sur une grille allant de -5 (le plus en désaccord) et +5 (le plus en accord), le zéro étant défini comme neutre (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Grille utilisée pour classer les énoncés

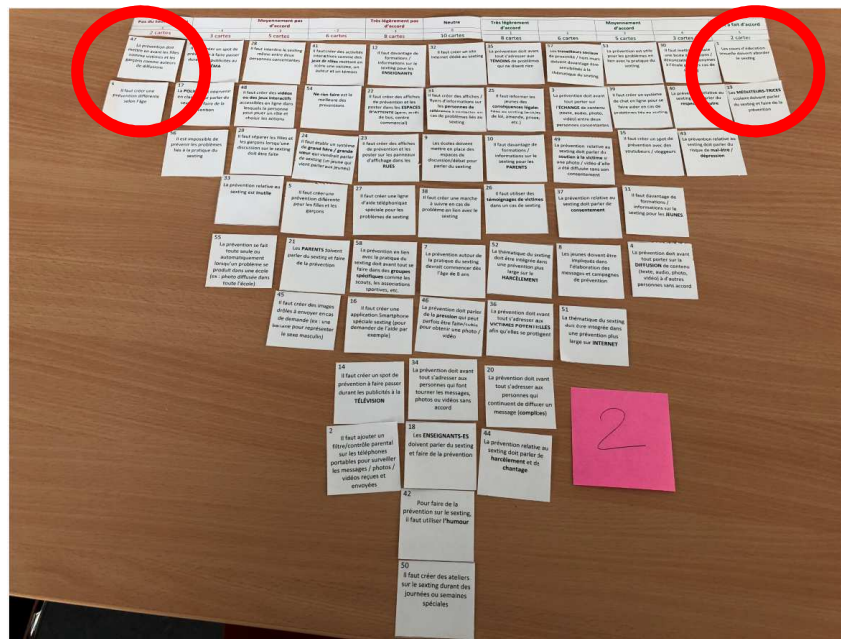
Pas du tout d'accord		Moyennement pas d'accord		Très légèrement pas d'accord	Neutre	Très légèrement d'accord		Moyennement d'accord		Tout à fait d'accord
-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
2 cartes	3 cartes	5 cartes	6 cartes	8 cartes	10 cartes	8 cartes	6 cartes	5 cartes	3 cartes	2 cartes

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5

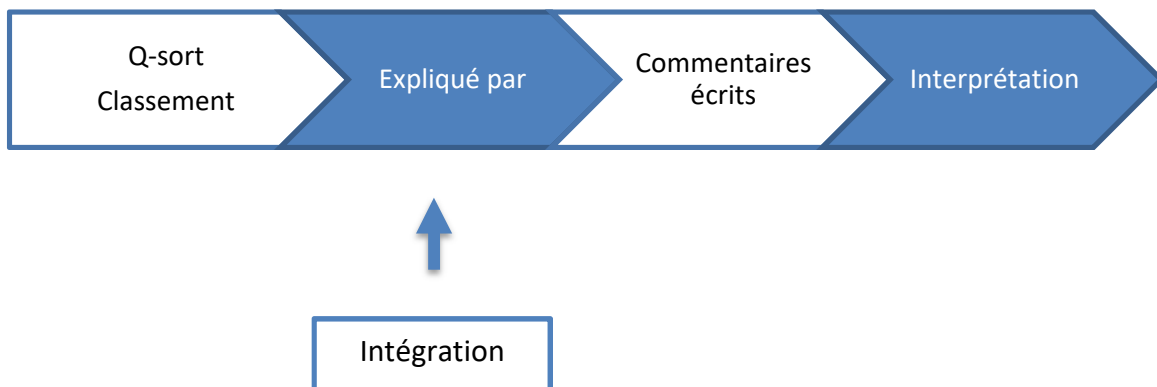
Finalement, une fois que les participant·e·s étaient satisfait·e·s de leur classement, ils étaient invités à expliquer par écrit la place des 4 cartes les plus extrêmes classées à -5 et +5<sup>114</sup> (Figure 15), à suggérer des énoncés supplémentaires et / ou à indiquer si un énoncé avait été peu clair ou problématique<sup>113</sup>.

Figure 15. Exemple de classement des cartes avec les 4 extrêmes (+5 et -5) indiquées en rouge



Cette méthode mixte utilise donc les données qualitatives pour expliquer, approfondir et affiner les résultats quantitatifs obtenus avec l'analyse factorielle (Sequential Explanatory Design)<sup>115, 116</sup>. L'intégration des aspects qualitatifs et quantitatifs se fait donc à travers les commentaires écrits qui expliquent le classement (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Intégration des données qualitatives et quantitatives - Sequential Explanatory Design



Entre février et avril 2018, 48 jeunes (27 filles, 56.2%) avec une moyenne d'âge de 16.2 ans (13-18 ans) ont participé à cette étude. Cette méthode mixte ne requiert pas un échantillon représentatif car elle se concentre sur des profils de réponses et non sur des caractéristiques individuelles<sup>117</sup>. De plus, un échantillon relativement petit est toléré avec un nombre entre 40 et 60 participant·e·s étant considéré comme suffisant<sup>110</sup>.

Cinq profils différents quant à la manière de considérer la prévention relative au sexting ont été trouvés. Les énoncés sur la pression (*La prévention en lien avec le sexting devrait adresser la pression qui peut parfois être expérimentée pour obtenir une photo / vidéo*) et sur le harcèlement (*La prévention en lien avec le sexting devrait adresser le harcèlement et le chantage*) étaient les énoncés les plus consensuels. Le scénario typique utilisé dans plusieurs campagnes de prévention illustrant une fille victime d'une diffusion non consentie par un garçon n'a pas été apprécié. Un sujet plus large tel qu'Internet pour ouvrir une discussion sur le sexting n'a pas été considéré comme approprié démontrant que le sexting était une activité en ligne plus complexe.

Certains énoncés ont constamment été classés négativement pour les 5 profils : *La prévention devrait commencer à l'âge de 8 ans, Le sexting doit être interdit même entre deux personnes consentantes, La prévention relative au sexting est inutile, La prévention relative au sexting devrait présenter les filles comme victimes et les garçons comme auteurs de partage, ne faire / ne pas pratiquer le sexting est la meilleure des préventions, La prévention relative au sexting devrait être faite dans des groupes spécifiques comme les scouts, les associations sportives, etc.* Au contraire, certains énoncés ont reçu un classement positif pour les 5 profils : *La prévention relative au sexting doit parler de consentement, La prévention relative au sexting doit parler du respect de l'autre, La prévention doit parler de la pression qui peut parfois être faite/subie pour obtenir une photo / vidéo, La thématique du sexting doit être intégrée dans une prévention plus large sur le harcèlement.* Les énoncés sur la pression et le harcèlement ont le plus mené à un consensus.

Les cinq profils que nous avons pu faire émerger démontrent la nécessité d'offrir une approche multidisciplinaire, avec des intervenant·e·s et des concepts ou problématiques multiples. Selon les participant·e·s, la prévention ne doit pas cibler des personnes particulières, que cela soit dans des groupes restreints comme des associations sportives ou

en fonction du genre. Le scénario typique d'une fille victime et d'un garçon auteur d'un partage non consenti n'a pas été apprécié par les participant·e·s alors qu'il est encore utilisé dans beaucoup de campagnes de prévention<sup>28, 80</sup>. Une telle approche peut aussi risquer de stigmatiser les filles, alimenter les stéréotypes et mener à des jugements préjudiciables<sup>35, 66, 67, 118</sup>.

La pratique du sexting peut être incluse dans une intervention plus large qui considérerait et présenterait des principes applicables à cette pratique tels que le consentement, la pression et le respect des autres. Même si l'âge de 8 ans n'a pas été jugé positivement pour entamer une discussion sur le sexting, les principes susmentionnés doivent être inculqués dès le plus jeune âge indépendamment de la pratique et indépendamment de l'aspect virtuel ou réel. Le sujet Internet n'a pas été considéré comme approprié pour entamer une discussion sur le sexting démontrant que cette pratique était plus complexe que les autres activités en ligne, avec des enjeux relationnels.

Au vu de la place positive de l'éducation sexuelle pour parler de cette thématique, un parallèle avec la sexualité peut être fait au niveau de la prévention. Les interventions en lien avec la pratique du sexting devraient s'inspirer de l'éducation sexuelle pour reconnaître que cette pratique n'est en soi pas malsaine<sup>119</sup>. Tout comme la sexualité, ce n'est donc pas en interdisant et en criminalisant le sexting que les problèmes liés à cette pratique pourront être évités<sup>25, 58, 120</sup>.

Nous n'avons pas trouvé de consensus quant aux intervenant·e·s. Ainsi, la police, les parents, les intervenant·e·s en éducation sexuelle ont été considérés comme des personnes ressources potentielles. Cette approche multiple peut démontrer que les jeunes ne savent pas exactement à qui s'adresser en cas de problèmes et de questions mais il se pourrait aussi que cela soit propre à chacun et qu'il faille donc sensibiliser le plus grand nombre de personnes ressources à cette problématique<sup>69</sup>.

Malgré le rôle important que les témoins actifs et passifs peuvent avoir dans le cas d'un partage non consenti, seul un profil a placé les deux énoncés sur les témoins (*La prévention doit avant tout s'adresser aux personnes qui font tourner les messages, photos ou vidéos sans accord ; La prévention doit avant tout s'adresser aux témoins de problèmes qui ne disent rien*)

positivement (+2). Ce résultat peut s'illustrer dans un manque de considération ou de connaissance du rôle des témoins dans l'aggravation ou la résolution des problèmes en lien avec une diffusion<sup>10, 58</sup>. Les réactions des pairs dans un tel contexte peuvent s'avérer très violentes et mener à une double victimisation, particulièrement envers les filles victimes<sup>10, 58, 67, 69, 121</sup>. Les réactions négatives des témoins peuvent, notamment, s'expliquer par un manque d'empathie pour la victime<sup>122, 123</sup>. Il est nécessaire que la prévention intègre les témoins dans les discussions afin d'augmenter le soutien et la solidarité envers les victimes et ainsi éliminer les jugements négatifs<sup>58, 69, 123</sup>.

En conclusion, cette étude met en évidence le besoin d'offrir une approche multidisciplinaire, multi-ressources et multi-concepts en termes de prévention en lien avec la pratique du sexting. Des valeurs et principes plus larges tels que le respect, le consentement et l'empathie doivent être intégrés dans les discussions afin de consolider leur place dans le monde digital et assurer une utilisation saine des médias. Il est nécessaire de différencier le sexting consentant du partage non consenti afin de communiquer des messages clairs et de se concentrer sur les problèmes. Si l'angle d'approche peut être différent, l'ensemble des intervenant·e·s doit avoir le même message. Les aspects légaux doivent être rappelés aux jeunes, particulièrement par rapport au partage non consenti et au rôle des témoins. Cette stratégie permettra également d'éviter la stigmatisation des victimes en cas de partage non consenti. Les jeunes ont d'ailleurs expressément appelé à délivrer un message universel et commun à toutes et tous, sans focaliser sur les filles victimes et les garçons auteurs.

### 3.5. Données quantitatives, enquête nationale sur la sexualité : article #4

**Barrense-Dias Y, Akre C, Auderset D, Leeners B, Morselli D, Suris JC. Nonconsensual sexting: characteristics and motives of youths who disseminate received-intimate content.**

*Computers in Human Behavior (under review). Annexe 6 p.155*

Yara Barrense-Dias a coordonné et supervisé la mise en place de l'étude et la récolte de données, a créé le questionnaire sur le sexting, a analysé et interprété les données, et a écrit le manuscrit.

Dans le cadre de cette enquête nationale sur la sexualité des jeunes (24-26 ans) menée en 2017, nous avons intégré plusieurs questions sur la pratique du sexting. Nous nous sommes intéressées à plusieurs actions telles que l'envoi, la réception et le partage.

Sur les 7142 participant·e·s, 5175 (51% hommes) ont répondu à la question suivante : *Avez-vous déjà partagé ou montré une photo / vidéo sexy d'une autre personne (connue ou inconnue) ?* et ont été divisés en trois groupes selon leur réponse : 4396 (85%) ne l'ont jamais fait, 292 (6%) l'ont fait une fois et 487 (9%) plusieurs fois. Les hommes ont davantage rapporté une telle action (21% vs 9% des femmes). De même, les hommes ont davantage rapporté avoir reçu un tel partage (16% vs 6% des femmes).

Même si la catégorie d'âge de notre étude (24-26 ans) n'était pas exactement la même que dans la toute première étude de 2008<sup>17</sup>, nous pouvons voir qu'il n'y a pas eu de grands changements en 10 ans (17% parmi les 20-26 ans en 2008). Les 15% que nous avons pu relever dans notre étude se situent entre les 12% trouvés dans une récente méta-analyse<sup>25</sup> et les 19% d'une étude australienne publiée en 2019<sup>42</sup>. En revanche, 11% des participant·e·s à notre étude ont rapporté avoir déjà reçu un tel partage, un pourcentage bien en-dessous de ce qui avait été trouvé en 2008 avec 40%. Une hypothèse pourrait être que malgré le fait que le pourcentage de l'action de partage n'ait pas significativement changé en 10 ans, le partage pourrait être fait aujourd'hui avec une audience plus restreinte, expliquant alors la baisse de 40% à 11% de participant·e·s indiquant avoir reçu un tel partage.

Même si nous avons trouvé que 9% des femmes indiquaient également avoir été auteures de partage non consenti, ce comportement a davantage été rapporté par les hommes (21%). Tout comme pour l'échange initial, soit l'envoi et la réception primaire, la littérature n'est pas consensuelle sur une différence de genre pour le partage<sup>26, 42</sup>. Une forme de pression des pairs pourrait expliquer le fait que les hommes partagent plus avec d'autres personnes des contenus censés rester privés. En effet, comparés aux femmes, les hommes rapportaient plus avoir partagé pour se vanter auprès des autres. Cette différence a déjà été rapportée dans des études qualitatives parlant de trophées<sup>43, 61, 124</sup>. « *It was believed that sext sharing is more common among males compared with females, with **sexts from girls perceived as 'trophies'** that could be shared in order to demonstrate their sexual success to other males. It was reported that young women did not seek this form of affirmation and, for this reason, they do*

*not share sexts as often as males or condone the action.* »<sup>43</sup>. Cette différence de genre quant au fait de partager avec d'autres personnes pourrait également s'expliquer par des différences en termes de jugements des pairs<sup>42, 125</sup>. En effet, en plus de réactions violentes à l'encontre des filles qui envoient du contenu personnel<sup>68</sup>, les filles seraient également davantage critiquées en tant qu'auteures de partage non consenti. Ainsi, les filles seraient moins susceptibles de partager des contenus reçus avec d'autres personnes car elles auraient peur des représailles. De plus, quand les filles transfèrent un contenu intime qu'elles ont reçu avec d'autres personnes, il semblerait que leurs partages soient "moins" risqués : le visage de la personne apparaît moins, elles montrent davantage le contenu depuis leur appareil au lieu de le transférer et elles ont davantage rapporté ne pas connaître la personne sur l'image partagée. Néanmoins, 9% des participantes à notre étude ont quand même rapporté une telle action, un pourcentage non négligeable au vu des conséquences possibles. Ainsi, il est donc important de ne pas utiliser des campagnes de prévention trop genrées et d'éviter le scénario typique à sens unique avec une fille victime et un garçon auteur.

La principale motivation rapportée par les participant·e·s pour expliquer un partage à d'autres personnes a été pour rire, une motivation qui avait également été rapportée dans la récente étude australienne<sup>42</sup>. Cette motivation était suivie par le fait de vouloir se vanter et ne pas réaliser ce qu'ils étaient en train de faire. Alors que les médias et la littérature ont principalement parlé de *revenge porn* pour expliquer le partage comme une vengeance dans le cadre d'une rupture amoureuse<sup>26</sup>, il semblerait que la motivation de faire du mal à une personne ou chercher un moyen de se venger n'était de loin pas la première motivation pour une telle action dans notre étude. Néanmoins, un biais de désirabilité sociale pourrait expliquer ce résultat. En effet, la motivation pour rire peut avoir été utilisée comme une réponse permettant d'atténuer la gravité du geste ou d'assurer le fait qu'il ne voulait pas faire de mal à quelqu'un. La motivation du rire peut également s'analyser dans le contexte du harcèlement de manière plus générale, dans le sens où il est souvent utilisé pour faire rire ses pairs. Il est ainsi important de ne pas uniquement se référer au terme *revenge porn* pour considérer le partage non consensuel car d'autres motivations existent et doivent être discutées car elles mènent à des conséquences similaires<sup>42</sup>.

## 4. Discussion générale

### 4.1. Définition - conceptualisation

Cette thèse a permis de confirmer le manque d'une définition claire et consensuelle de ce qu'est le sexting tel que pratiqué par les jeunes. Ce constat avait déjà été relevé par d'autres études antérieures<sup>2, 27</sup> et, récemment, la nécessité d'établir une définition et des mesures claires a été mise en avant comme étant l'un des défis entourant actuellement cette problématique<sup>24</sup>.

Selon nos recherches et l'expertise acquise durant cette thèse, nous proposons la définition suivante :

Le sexting est la pratique qui consiste à s'échanger électroniquement de manière consentante du contenu (texte, image ou audio) à caractère sexuel allant du contenu suggestif au contenu très explicite.

Cette définition, si elle permet d'établir un certain cadre et une distinction claire par rapport à la problématique des diffusions et partages non consentis, reste néanmoins relativement succincte et large. Ce sont donc dans les mesures et les questions utilisées pour conceptualiser la pratique que les subtilités doivent être clairement définies et distinguées en termes de contenu, de médias, de partenaires et de contexte pour assurer des taux précis et comprendre la pratique dans sa globalité.

Lorsque le sexting se fait sous la pression d'une autre personne, il n'y a plus de consentement, ce n'est donc plus du sexting à proprement parler mais un acte effectué sous la contrainte ou la menace. La question du consentement initial doit être analysée et prise en compte dans la gestion de cette pratique et des problèmes possibles. La dérive principale qui consiste à diffuser un contenu censé rester de l'ordre du privé ne doit, par conséquent, pas être intégrée dans le terme sexting. Comme mentionné en introduction de cette thèse, il est ainsi absolument nécessaire de différencier la pratique consentante (sexting primaire) de ses possibles dérives (sexting secondaire)<sup>76</sup>, notamment sur le plan légal et préventif. En effet, la gestion des cas problématiques doit être clarifiée du point de vue de la loi qui doit davantage considérer le contexte dans lequel s'inscrit l'échange initial. Une demande explicite dans ce



sens a été relevée dans le cadre d'une étude<sup>126</sup> menée auprès des officiers chargés d'assurer la sécurité dans les écoles (School Resource Officers) dans certains Etats américains. Alors même que ces officiers sont issus du système policier, ils appellent à l'adaptation et à la reconsidération de la loi par rapport à ce genre de nouvelles pratiques : « *The laws need to catch up to this technology so a girl sending a pic of herself to her boyfriend isn't prosecuted and charged as sex offender.* » (p.164)<sup>126</sup>.

Finalement, en termes de conceptualisation de la pratique, il est important de rappeler que le terme sexting est un terme journalistique qui a été repris par la recherche et la prévention, mais d'un point de vue adulte. Le terme sexting n'est pas un terme qui est utilisé par les jeunes<sup>10, 60, 69</sup>, ils n'ont peut-être pas tous conscience de quoi il s'agit et ce qui est exactement inclus dans ce terme. Si ce terme doit être utilisé, il est donc important de le définir avant d'entamer une discussion.

#### 4.2. Les auteurs et les témoins

Les campagnes de prévention ont le plus souvent considéré le sexting du point de vue des victimes potentielles, s'adressant ainsi directement à elles en les sensibilisant aux risques qui pouvaient exister avec cette pratique. Cette approche a déjà été critiquée par le passé, par rapport au fait de stigmatiser les victimes<sup>28, 35, 60, 66</sup>, risquant de mener à une forme de double victimisation avec des réactions violentes des pairs. Ces derniers pourraient, en effet, considérer que la victime a été irresponsable et mérite ce qui lui arrive, adoptant une approche moralisatrice.

Si une part d'autoprotection peut être considérée dans certaines circonstances, il n'est absolument pas envisageable de passer à côté des auteurs des problèmes. Si on ne cesse de rappeler aux jeunes qu'il est dangereux d'envoyer des contenus sur lesquels ils apparaissent eux-mêmes, les messages prévenant ou interdisant la diffusion non consentie de contenu d'autres personnes sont bien plus rares<sup>28, 80</sup> tout comme la recherche qui s'est avant tout focalisée sur l'échange initial<sup>24</sup>.

De même, les témoins, actifs ou passifs, doivent davantage être intégrés dans les messages de prévention, afin que les jeunes prennent conscience du rôle qu'ils peuvent avoir dans

l'aggravation ou la résolution d'une situation problématique. Lors de nos recherches, nous avons pu constater le manque de conscience et de connaissance des jeunes quant à la responsabilité des témoins dans le cas d'une situation problématique en lien avec la pratique du sexting. En effet, les témoins peuvent encourager et aggraver la violence en participant aux rumeurs et à la diffusion, rester passifs et ne rien dire ou défendre et soutenir la victime<sup>69, 127</sup>. Dans ce contexte, le programme anti-harcèlement finlandais *KiVa* a davantage ciblé les pairs et les témoins de harcèlement, considérant qu'influencer les victimes ou auteurs potentiels de violence n'allait avoir que peu d'effet si le contexte social récompensait ce genre d'actions. : « [...] *Trying to change potential targets of bullying by reducing individual-level risk factors such as social anxiety is neither necessary nor sufficient. Attempting to influence individual bullies, on the other hand, is not likely to be efficient if the peers reward their mean behaviors. Influencing the peer context is therefore an essential part of effective antibullying work. Students need to become aware of their own role in maintaining bullying, as well as their potential in putting an end to it. Efforts should be made to influence the group norms and to build capacity in all children to behave in constructive ways, to take responsibility for supporting the victims rather than encouraging bullying behaviors.* » (p.81)<sup>128</sup>.

Dans cette idée de réorienter les messages envers les auteurs et les témoins, Van Ouytsel et al.<sup>69</sup> ont, notamment, recommandé que les écoles mettent en place des politiques internes afin de déterminer comment gérer les incidents en lien avec le sexting et de présenter les sanctions applicables aux auteurs qui partagent des contenus sans autorisation, mais également aux témoins qui continuent à diffuser les contenus reçus. Récemment, en France, une campagne nationale<sup>129</sup> a totalement réorienté le message de prévention afin de sensibiliser les auteurs et les complices ou témoins de partage non consenti d'images reçues: *Une photo c'est perso, la partager c'est harceler.*

#### 4.3. La stigmatisation des victimes

Comme nous l'avons précédemment mentionné, les victimes de diffusion sont susceptibles d'être doublement victimisées par le jugement de leurs pairs. En effet, en plus d'avoir vu leur contenu personnel partagé sans leur consentement et subi une trahison, leurs pairs peuvent se montrer moralisateurs et violents. Lors de nos recherches, nous avons, en effet, pu constater que les jeunes étaient très critiques envers une personne qui s'adonnait au sexting

si cela venait à se savoir, même si cette personne ne souhaitait pas que cela se sache. Ces réactions peuvent alors prendre la forme de rumeurs, de moqueries, d'insultes, de mise à l'écart, etc.

Nous avons surtout constaté ce genre de réactions chez les plus jeunes encore en scolarité obligatoire<sup>75</sup>, un moment durant lequel la reconnaissance des pairs est particulièrement importante pour un·e adolescent·e. Ce genre de réaction semblait également dépendre du développement sexuel. Ainsi, si une personne était relativement avancée dans le processus et avait déjà quelques expériences relationnelles et/ou sexuelles, la pratique du sexting semblait davantage comprise dans ce contexte de développement sexuel et les jugements s'avéraient moins virulents. Pour les autres, une forme de rejet, voire même de dégoût, a pu être relevée. Il est donc nécessaire d'ouvrir la discussion sur ce genre de réactions afin de mieux les comprendre et de sensibiliser les jeunes à cette forme de violence.

Ces réactions sont particulièrement violentes envers les filles victimes<sup>10, 58, 67-69</sup>. Tout comme la sexualité de manière générale, il est donc important de sensibiliser les jeunes aux discours sexistes et violents envers les filles. Néanmoins, en parallèle, il est également essentiel de ne pas essentiellement utiliser l'exemple d'une fille-victime et d'un garçon-auteur, le scénario qui a pourtant été le plus utilisé jusqu'à maintenant<sup>28, 80</sup>. En effet, il existe également des cas de garçons victimes de diffusion. S'il semblerait que ces cas fassent moins réagir et soient peut-être moins portés à la connaissance des adultes, les souffrances et les conséquences psychologiques sur un jeune en plein développement peuvent également être négatives. De même, les filles peuvent également être auteures de diffusion et de réactions très violentes envers les victimes. Ainsi, il s'agit d'adopter un message universel et non genré, et de ne pas se contenter d'une perspective sexospécifique à sens unique qui pourrait risquer de stigmatiser les victimes, surtout les filles, de nourrir les stéréotypes et de conduire à des jugements préjudiciables<sup>35, 60, 66, 67</sup>.

#### 4.4. La place des adultes ressources : prévention et intervention

Dans le cadre de notre recherche exploratoire avec des jeunes et des adultes ressources, nous avons pu constater une grande différence quant à leurs perception et considération de la pratique. Pour certains, le gouffre générationnel actuellement ressenti en termes de

numérique, les mènent à penser qu'ils n'ont pas les outils pour discuter de ce genre de pratique avec les jeunes. Il s'agit de s'intéresser à leur pratique afin de mieux les comprendre sans pour autant avoir besoin de devenir un·e expert·e. Cependant, s'intéresser à leur pratique, c'est également se tenir prêt à entendre ce qu'ils font et pourquoi ils le font, sans émettre de jugement. De plus, malgré le fait que ce genre de pratiques se passe sur Internet, il est nécessaire d'intégrer des valeurs plus larges tout autant applicables au monde virtuel qu'à la vie réelle : le consentement, le respect, l'empathie, la solidarité, etc.

Au sein de l'école, l'éducation sexuelle semble pour beaucoup de jeunes un moment opportun pour discuter de la pratique du sexting. Cette problématique pourrait être discutée plus largement dans le cadre du rôle d'Internet dans la sexualité et leurs relations<sup>69</sup>. Si cette problématique doit être intégrée transversalement dans une thématique plus large, il est nécessaire de clairement indiquer que cela s'applique également à la pratique du sexting en la définissant. En plus des cours d'éducation sexuelle, le plan d'études romand (PER) pourrait ainsi être une porte d'entrée pour discuter de cette thématique, notamment dans l'optique de l'éducation aux médias et des programmes MITIC. Finalement, plus largement, le rôle des témoins pourrait être présenté dans le cadre des cours de citoyenneté en parlant de responsabilité collective.

Les adultes doivent être particulièrement attentifs à leurs réactions en cas de problème ou à leur posture en cas de discussion afin d'éviter que les jeunes ne reprennent un discours moralisateur qui augmenterait les risques de réactions violentes envers la victime. Dans le cadre de la campagne nationale française *Non au harcèlement*, un guide pédagogique a également été créé et donne des pistes aux adultes pour faire face à un problème en lien avec la pratique du sexting, les sensibilisant aux remarques accusatrices : « *Or, lorsqu'on s'intéresse aux réactions des adultes, qu'il s'agisse des parents ou des personnels des établissements scolaires, on s'aperçoit que les toutes premières remarques adressées à la victime sont, la plupart du temps : « Pourquoi as-tu pris une telle photo ? Pourquoi l'as-tu partagée, même en privé ? » en un mot : « Pourquoi as-tu été aussi imprudent ! » Les adultes qui ont pour réflexe ce genre de remarques font, sans s'en rendre compte, exactement la même chose que les harceleurs : ils accusent l'élève victime d'avoir commis une erreur, voire une faute. Et d'être donc responsable, en premier lieu, de ce qui lui arrive [...] » (p.16)<sup>130</sup>.*



## 5. Conclusions - recommandations

**Du point de vue scientifique**, plusieurs recommandations peuvent être faites pour les futures recherches. Comme nous l'avons mentionné en introduction, malgré notre apport avec les données issues de l'enquête nationale portant, notamment, sur la diffusion non consentie, la recherche sur les formes non consensuelles de sexting reste encore relativement rare. En plus des cas de diffusion, la pratique du sexting non-désiré (*unwanted sexting*) devrait également davantage être étudiée. Une meilleure compréhension de ces formes abusives de sexting permettrait une adaptation de la prévention.

La recherche devrait également davantage s'intéresser à la place du sexting dans la sexualité et les relations des minorités sexuelles, que cela soit pour la pratique initiale ou ses dérives. En effet, l'espace numérique peut être un lieu privilégié par ces communautés pour se sentir plus libres et oser s'exprimer. En termes de population ou plutôt de cibles, la recherche devrait également intégrer des questions quant aux témoins ou aux expéditeurs ou récipiendaires secondaires. Notre enquête nationale nous a permis d'obtenir des données sur la diffusion non consentie, mais du point de vue de l'auteur uniquement. La recherche devrait également davantage s'intéresser aux victimes et à leur ressenti.

Selon Van Ouytsel et al.<sup>24</sup>, seules trois études ont récolté des données sur la pratique du sexting chez des jeunes adolescent-e-s (10-15 ans), les données disponibles actuellement portant essentiellement sur des jeunes de 16-18 ans ou des jeunes adultes. Il est, par conséquent, nécessaire d'obtenir davantage de données sur la pratique du sexting chez les moins de 16 ans, et ce d'autant plus que les problèmes ont davantage été rapportés pour cette tranche d'âge dans le cadre de nos recherches qualitatives.

Plus généralement, un consensus doit absolument être établi pour déterminer comment définir et mesurer la pratique du sexting. Sur la base de nos résultats et recommandations, un panel d'experts pourrait ainsi être consulté pour discuter, tester, valider et s'accorder sur des mesures ou des éléments clés constitutifs de cette pratique.

**Du point de vue éducatif et préventif**, les messages doivent davantage cibler les auteurs et témoins potentiels des formes abusives du sexting, afin que les jeunes prennent conscience

du rôle et de la responsabilité qu'ils peuvent avoir dans une telle situation. Les jeunes doivent absolument être sensibilisés aux discours violents qui peuvent être adressés aux victimes d'abus, particulièrement envers les filles qui subissent davantage les représailles de leurs pairs. Néanmoins, même si une attention particulière doit être portée aux jugements des filles par leur pairs, l'approche éducative et préventive ne doit pas être sexospécifique, les garçons, tout comme les filles, pouvant être victimes, auteurs et témoins.

Comme susmentionné, les problèmes en lien avec la pratique semblent plus fréquents chez les moins de 16 ans et pourraient apparaître avec la possession d'un téléphone portable. Il s'agirait donc d'engager une discussion sur cette problématique relativement tôt. Cette discussion ne doit pas forcément débiter en présentant la problématique des images à caractère sexuel, mais il s'agit d'intégrer des thématiques plus larges telles que l'identité numérique, la vie privée, le consentement, le respect et la pression dès le plus jeune âge. Dans cette perspective, Johnson et al.<sup>119</sup> appellent à faire un parallèle avec la sexualité de manière générale considérant que le sexting, tout comme la sexualité, n'est pas une activité néfaste en soi et qu'elle peut se dérouler sans encombre. Ainsi, une approche *Safe Sex / Safe Sexting*, plutôt qu'une approche *Anti Sex / Anti Sexting* prônant une abstinence totale de la pratique sera plus efficace : *"Interventions related to sending sexts should take a sex education approach, recognizing that sending sexts to willing recipients is not by itself a harmful activity"* (p.16)<sup>119</sup>. Ce n'est donc pas en interdisant ou en criminalisant le sexting consensuel que les problèmes en lien avec la pratique pourront être évités<sup>25, 58, 120</sup>.

Finalement, il est nécessaire d'améliorer les connaissances des jeunes quant aux solutions envisageables et aux personnes à contacter en cas de problèmes, en tant que victimes ou témoins. Pour ce faire, il s'agit également de sensibiliser l'ensemble des adultes ressources, parents et professionnel·le·s, à cette problématique afin que le message délivré soit le même et le soutien approprié. Si la loi existe, elle demeure floue et compliquée, et pourrait même s'avérer dommageable. De plus, au vu du temps nécessaire pour finaliser une procédure judiciaire, la loi doit être considérée comme un complément, voire un dernier recours. La maison et l'école doivent en revanche assurer leur présence et accompagner les jeunes concernés. Les professionnel·le·s de la santé devraient également être sensibilisés à la

pratique du sexting et plus largement aux pratiques sexuelles en lien avec les nouvelles technologies afin qu'ils les intègrent dans leur anamnèse.





## 6. Perspectives futures / mise en application sur le terrain

Cette thèse a permis de collaborer avec de nombreux partenaires. Actuellement, deux projets de prévention sont en préparation sur cette thématique et un apport scientifique a été demandé. Ainsi, en partenariat avec la Brigade Jeunesse de la Police de Lausanne, la Police Cantonale Vaudoise et l'Unité Promotion Santé et Prévention en milieu Scolaire, un spot de prévention est actuellement en préparation pour mettre à jour le support utilisé par les policiers et les chargés de prévention amenés à discuter de cette problématique en classe de 8H et 10H. Dans le cadre du programme national Jeunes et médias, une expertise a également été requise pour l'élaboration de fiches de prévention Facile à Lire et à Comprendre (FALC) destinées aux parents et dont une des thématiques abordées concerne le sexting.

Travaillant étroitement avec le chef de projet Harcèlement de l'unité PSPS et maître d'enseignement à la Haute école de travail social et de la santé à Lausanne, une formation courte de 2 jours (7 et 8 octobre 2019) est proposée sur la thématique du sexting.

Des présentations et des ateliers sur la thématique continueront à être offerts aux personnes ressources en milieu scolaire lors des journées pédagogiques des établissements scolaires.

Du point de vue recherche, des questions sur la pratique du sexting vont être incluses dans la nouvelle étude sur l'utilisation d'Internet et des écrans auprès des 10H dont la récolte de données devrait débuter fin octobre 2019. Ainsi, nous pourrons obtenir des données quantitatives sur cette pratique et ses dérives auprès d'un échantillon de jeunes de 14 ans environ. Comme susmentionné, cette tranche d'âge est particulièrement intéressante car nos recherches qualitatives nous ont montré que les problèmes liés à cette pratique avaient lieu surtout à l'école obligatoire et ce sont également ces jeunes qui reçoivent actuellement le plus de prévention. De plus, nous aimerions encore exploiter les données qualitatives des jeunes âgé-e-s de 11 à 17 ans. Finalement, nous projetons également un deuxième article utilisant les données nationales récoltées en 2017. Si le premier article portait sur le partage non consenti, le deuxième article concernera l'échange initial avec l'envoi et la réception primaires, afin d'analyser les contextes (destinataires, motivations, réactions) et les contenus (nudité, visage apparent) échangés de manière détaillée.



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## Annexe 1 : Liste des publications et communications liées à cette thèse

### Articles publiés dans une revue internationale à comité de lecture

**Barrense-Dias Y**, Berchtold A, Suris JC, Akre C. Sexting and the definition issue: A literature review. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 2017; 61(5):544-554.

**Barrense-Dias Y**, Suris JC, Akre C. "When it deviates it becomes harassment, doesn't it?" A qualitative study on the definition of sexting according to adolescents and young adults, parents and teachers. *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 2019. (online first)

### Articles soumis dans une revue internationale à comité de lecture

**Barrense-Dias Y**, Akre C, Suris JC, Berchtold A. Opinions of adolescents on prevention and education related to sexting: A Q-methodology study.

**Barrense-Dias Y**, Akre C, Auderset D, Leeners B, Morselli D, Suris JC. Nonconsensual sexting: characteristics and motives of youths who disseminate received-intimate content.

### Rapports scientifiques

**Barrense-Dias Y**, Suris JC, Akre C. La sexualité à l'ère numérique : le sexting et les adolescents. Lausanne, Institut universitaire de médecine sociale et préventive, 2017 (Raisons de santé 269).

**Barrense-Dias Y**, De Puy J, Romain-Glassey N, Suris JC. *La prévention et le sexting: un état des lieux*. Lausanne, Institut universitaire de médecine sociale et préventive, 2018 (Raisons de santé 285).

**Barrense-Dias Y**, Akre C, Suris JC. La sexualité à l'ère numérique : les adolescents et le sexting 2.0, 2ème phase. Lausanne, Institut universitaire de médecine sociale et préventive, 2019 (Raisons de santé 296).



## Communications scientifiques – acceptation après soumission de résumé

**Barrense-Dias Y**, Akre C, Leeners B, Morselli D, Suris JC. Sexting that goes wrong: characteristics and motives of youths who share received intimate content with others. (Poster) Annual Meeting of the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine (SAHM). Washington, États-Unis, mars 2019.

**Barrense-Dias Y**. Sexting: What is It and How to Deal with It? (Présentation orale – keynote speaker), 10th Edition Excellence in Pediatrics Conference: Improving Child Health Globally – Prague, République Tchèque, décembre 2018.

**Barrense-Dias Y**, Suris JC, Akre C. *"I think it could be good to create a campaign to prevent the misuse of sexting because, in the end, that's the problem."* (Poster-flash) Congrès fPmh 2018, Société Suisse de Pédiatrie (SSP), Lausanne, Suisse, mai 2018.

**Barrense-Dias Y**, Suris JC, Akre C. *Sexting among adolescents: the bad scenario and the reactions.* (Poster) 10th ASPHER Young Researchers' Forum, pre-conference European Public Health Conference. Stockholm, Suède, novembre 2017.

**Barrense-Dias Y**. *Sexting and adolescents: the definition issue.* 3-minutes presentation. (Présentation orale, sélectionnée pour le premier SSPH+ ScienceFlashTalk), SSPH+ Faculty Meeting. Lugano, Suisse, juin 2017.

## Autres communications

**Barrense-Dias Y**. *La sexualité à l'ère numérique: le sexting et les adolescent-e-s.* **Atelier.** Journées pédagogiques harcèlement en milieu scolaire, diverses écoles du canton de Vaud, depuis 2017.

**Barrense-Dias Y**. *Santé et comportements sexuels des jeunes en Suisse / La sexualité à l'ère numérique : le sexting et les adolescent-e-s.* **Cours.** DAS en santé sexuelle 2017-2019, module 6 (3h). Lausanne, Suisse, avril 2019.

**Barrense-Dias Y**. *Le sexting : rôle des médiateur·trice·s scolaires dans ces situations.* **Atelier.** Journée cantonale de formation des médiateur·trice·s scolaires (3x2h). Puidoux-Chexbres, Suisse, avril 2019.

**Barrense-Dias Y.** *La sexualité à l'ère numérique: le sexting et les adolescent·e·s.* **Cours.** Formation (4h) donnée chez Action Innocence, Genève, Suisse, janvier 2019.

**Barrense-Dias Y.** *La sexualité à l'ère numérique: le sexting et les adolescent·e·s & GenerationFree : une étude longitudinale sur les jeux d'argent auprès des jeunes de Fribourg.* **Conférence.** Intercentre, rencontre des centres de loisirs du canton de Vaud, novembre 2018.

**Barrense-Dias Y.** *La sexualité à l'ère numérique: le sexting et les adolescent·e·s.* **Conférence.** Journée cantonale de formation continue (cyber)Harcèlement: prévenir et intervenir. Haute école pédagogique, Lausanne, Suisse, octobre 2018.

**Barrense-Dias Y,** Knobel N. *Le sexe, les écrans, le sexting... Parlons-en!* **Atelier,** Journée adolescence 2018 : À tes amours! Relations amoureuses et sexualité à l'adolescence. Groupe de recherche sur la santé des adolescents (GRSA), Institut Universitaire de Médecine Sociale et Préventive (IUMSP), Université de Lausanne, (UNIL), Lausanne, Suisse, juin 2018.

**Barrense-Dias Y.** *La sexualité à l'ère numérique: le sexting et les adolescents.* **Cours-Séminaire** (1h). Présentation dans le cadre du séminaire Genre, module Altérités et intégration à des futurs enseignant·e·s des degrés secondaires. Haute école pédagogique de Lausanne, Suisse, mai 2018.

**Barrense-Dias Y.** *La sexualité à l'ère numérique: le sexting et les adolescents.* **Conférence.** Les rendez-vous PROFA. Lausanne, Suisse, avril 2018.

**Barrense-Dias Y.** *Soirée de prévention / animation sur le sexting auprès de jeunes âgés de 14 à 20 ans.* **Atelier,** Centre de rencontre et d'animation de Bussigny, Suisse, décembre 2017.

**Barrense-Dias Y.** *Ethique du virtuel: le sexting et les adolescents.* **Cours,** cours dispensé dans le cadre du module *La pensée critique face aux idées, aux savoirs et à l'action,* Haute école de travail social et de la santé, EESP, Lausanne, Suisse, juin 2017.

**Barrense-Dias Y,** Magalhães de Almeida A. *Approche de la sexualité des adolescent·e·s en foyer, notamment par le phénomène du sexting.* **Atelier,** Semaine thématique proposée par EESpace Libre, association étudiants d'Etudes Sociales et Pédagogiques, Lausanne, Suisse, octobre 2016.

**Barrense-Dias Y, Akre C.** *Le sexting...une question de point de vue ?* **Atelier**, Journée adolescence 2016 : Nouvelles addictions à l'adolescence. GRSA/IUMSP, UNIL (SSP), Lausanne, Suisse, juin 2017.

### Retombées médiatiques

Cyberharcèlement: comment expliquer ce fléau des cours d'école? **Article**. Femina, 30 juin 2019 : <https://www.femina.ch/societe/actu-societe/cyberharcèlement-comment-expliquer-ce-fléau-des-cours-decole>

*Le sexting et les jeunes.* **Radio**. Emission TRIBU, RTS, 5 avril 2019: <https://www.rts.ch/play/radio/tribu/audio/le-sexting-et-les-jeunes?id=10309218>. Lausanne, Suisse.

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Participation à l'**émission télévision** RTS *Dans la tête de...*, diffusion prévue le 6 novembre 2019.

## Annexe 2 : Autres recherches menées / coordonnées durant la thèse

### Autres recherches

Recherche longitudinale sur l'utilisation d'Internet auprès des 10<sup>ème</sup> année dans le canton de Vaud (01.06.2019-31.08.2020), questionnaire en ligne.

Recherche qualitative sur l'expérience de jeunes femmes lors de la remise de contraception d'urgence en pharmacie (01.01.2019-31.12.2019), entretiens individuels.

Recherche qualitative sur la consommation de boissons énergisantes auprès des jeunes de 14 à 20 ans et des parents (01.01.2019-31.12.2019), groupes focus.

Recherche sur la santé et les comportements sexuels des jeunes en Suisse (01.01.2016-31.12.2018), questionnaire en ligne.

Recherche longitudinale sur les jeux d'argent et de hasard auprès des étudiants et apprentis du canton de Fribourg (01.09.2015-31.12.2019), questionnaire en ligne.

### Autres articles et rapports publiés durant la thèse

**Barrense-Dias Y**, Akre C, Jacot-Descombes C, Leeners B, Morselli D, Suris JC. Does the primary resource of sex education matter? A Swiss national study. *Journal of Sex Research*, 2019 (online first).

**Barrense-Dias Y**, Berchtold A, Akre C, Suris JC. Consuming energy drinks at the age of 14 predicted legal and illegal substance use at 16. *Acta Paediatrica* 2016; 105(11):1361-8.

**Barrense-Dias Y**, Berchtold A, Akre C, Suris JC. Alcohol misuse and gateway theory: a longitudinal study among Swiss adolescents. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health* 2016; 30(1).

**Barrense-Dias Y**, Berchtold A., Akre C, Suris JC. The relation between Internet use and overweight among adolescents: a longitudinal study in Switzerland. *International Journal of Obesity* 2015; 40(1):45-50.

Akre C, Berchtold A, **Barrense-Dias Y**, Suris JC. Characteristics of youths who perceive themselves as popular or unpopular among same-sex and opposite-sex peers. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health*. (accepted for publication)

Ammann S, Berchtold A, **Barrense-Dias Y**, Akre C, Suris JC. Disordered Eating: The Young Male Side. *Behavioral Medicine*, 2017:1-8.

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### Annexe 3 : Article #1 (publié)

**Barrense-Dias Y**, Berchtold A, Suris JC, Akre C. Sexting and the definition issue: A literature review. [Journal of Adolescent Health 2017](#); 61(5):544-554.





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Review article

## Sexting and the Definition Issue


 Yara Barrense-Dias, M.A.<sup>a,\*</sup>, André Berchtold, Ph.D.<sup>b</sup>, Joan-Carles Surís, M.D., M.P.H., Ph.D.<sup>a</sup>, and Christina Akre, Ph.D.<sup>a</sup>
<sup>a</sup> Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine (IUMSP), Lausanne University Hospital, Lausanne, Switzerland<sup>b</sup> Institute of Social Sciences & NCCR LIVES, University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland

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 A B S T R A C T

Sexting among youths has become a necessary topic of interest in research because of the negative consequences that this activity could create, especially when content is shared with others. Indeed, this loss of control could lead to humiliation, (cyber)bullying, or harassment. The development of new technologies, press coverage, and increase of prevalence rates could also explain the growth of interest in sexting. However, its definition is still a gray area. This review examines the different definitions of sexting used in the literature and its correlates. Several elements of the definition of sexting were assessed: actions (sending, receiving, and forwarding); media types (text, images, and videos); sexual characteristics; and transmission modes. Nine databases were searched for studies on sexting among youths up to 18 years of age. Eighteen studies published between 2012 and 2015 were included. Prevalence rates of sexting ranged between .9% and 60% partly depending on the definition. Most studies assessed sending, but when sending and receiving were measured, prevalence rates were higher for receiving. Some articles found associations with age, gender, race, sexual behavior, romantic relationships, risky behaviors, online activity, psychological difficulties, and social pressure. Finding a consensus regarding the definition is essential to assess accurately the activity and adapt prevention. Adolescents' interpretations of the activity are important as sexting could be used as a sexual behavior between two consenting persons. Prevention strategies should focus on sexting that goes wrong when it is forwarded to a third party and when it occurs in a context of pressure or harassment.

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**IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION**

To understand sexting and adapt prevention, there is a need to find a consensus on its definition in terms of actions (sending, receiving, and forwarding), media types (text, images, and videos), and content. This study provides a detailed review of these different dimensions to pave the way for a clearer definition of sexting.

The Internet and new technologies have become socializing tools, particularly appreciated by adolescents with the development of their communication skills [1–3]. This connected environment has changed the social context in which their relationships with others are created and perpetuated [4]. During adolescence, the construction of a personal identity also implies sexuality exploration [5]. Indeed, little by little, adolescents discover sexuality and today, new technologies with their

unlimited connection and instantaneous communication and impression of security are fully part of this process and influence interactive experiences [2,3,6]. Technology progress and development of communication and sharing means, including growth of the Smartphone market and conception of new applications, frequently lead to the creation, the evolution or the facilitation of certain behaviors [7,8] such as sexting, the contraction of sex and texting.

Regarding young people, considering sexting as a problem per se or as a risky behavior appears to be a controversial issue [4,9]. On the one hand, in a sexualization context, sexting could be considered as a harmless way to express desire and a consensual practice between two persons [10]. On the other hand, some

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\* Address correspondence to: Yara Barrense-Dias, M.A., Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine (IUMSP), Lausanne University Hospital (CHUV), Route de la Corniche 10, 1010 Lausanne, Switzerland.

E-mail address: Yara.Barrense-Dias@chuv.ch (Y. Barrense-Dias).

negative consequences could result from this activity, such as humiliation, (cyber)bullying, or harassment, especially when the content is shared with others without consent and it goes viral [3,10,11]. Legal aspects are also debated, particularly when minors are involved, to determine if it could be considered as child pornography [9]. Finally, a previous literature review on sexting emphasized the demonizing of it as results showed that most of the reviewed studies sought to associate sexting with other risk behaviors [4].

The aim of this review was to examine the existing literature on sexting among adolescents up to 18 years old. The upper age limit was determined according to the rationale that possible consequences of sexting would be different for minors in terms of crisis management and legal issues. Moreover, minors are particularly vulnerable because they might be less conscious regarding the limits of what they share of their private sphere online. We structured our research according to two questions: (1) what are the similarities and differences in the measures of sexting and questions used in the literature to determine how this activity is currently defined and (2) what are the characteristics and correlates of sexting to explore the main contexts of sexting reported up to now. Compared with previous reviews on sexting [4,12,13], this review provides additional information on three aspects. First, even if the definition aspect has been touched upon, we conducted a detailed analysis differentiating and examining each element of the definition of sexting: actions (sending, receiving, and forwarding); media types (text, images, and videos); sexual content; and transmission modes. Second, we were interested in the characteristics of sexting. In addition to an update with articles of 2015, we included a large overview of the different correlates of sexting such as gender issues, Internet outcomes, relational context, and mental health. Third, as additional information and to offer a complete synthesis, we also collected the prevalence rates of the activity.

## Methods

### Search strategy

On November 4, 2015, MEDLINE (PubMed/OVID), Embase, PsycINFO, Web of Science, BDSP (database in Public Health), SAPHIR, Library Network of Western Switzerland, and ScienceDirect databases were scanned. Participants' age was limited to 18 years and younger. For this limit, we used the following terms in the search: adolescent, adolescence, child, teen, teenager, youth, young adult, and young people. Whenever possible, we used database-specific indexing terms: adolescent, young adult (MeSH terms); juvenile, adolescent, child (Embase); child, pre-adolescent, adolescent, young adult, student (including pupil and apprentice; BDSP). Even if we limited the age to 18 years and younger, we decided to include terms like young adult and young people in the search strategy to make sure that age range and definitions were properly used as they could vary. For example, the World Health Organization gave overlapping definitions with adolescents defined as people from 10 to 19 years, youth from 15 to 24 years, and young people from 10 to 24 years [14]. To not miss an article, we therefore preferred to check all the articles that were identified with this search strategy and excluded them after having confirmed the age range used. For the concept of sexting, we used specific terms such as sexting, sex-texting, sexual messaging, and sexto, and only one database (Embase) had the term sexting as an indexing term. We also combined

terms related to social media and the Internet (cyberbullying, bullying, the Internet, social media, cell phones, cellular phone, text messaging, and online social networks) with sexual terms (sex, sexual, and psychosexual behavior). These terms were searched in all possible fields, regardless of their place in the article (title, abstract, keywords, main text, and so on). No limits were given for geographic areas, year of publication, and method used. For language, we restrained the search to English. All types of articles were included in the search strategy (book chapters, peer-reviewed journal articles, abstracts, and so on). Overall, 428 records were identified, and 205 duplicate results were excluded.

### Inclusion criteria

The 223 remaining records were assessed for eligibility on the basis of the abstract, and in case of doubt, the full-text was read. The first inclusion criterion was that sexting had to be the main focus of the article. If it was used as a secondary outcome, we considered the article as out of subject.

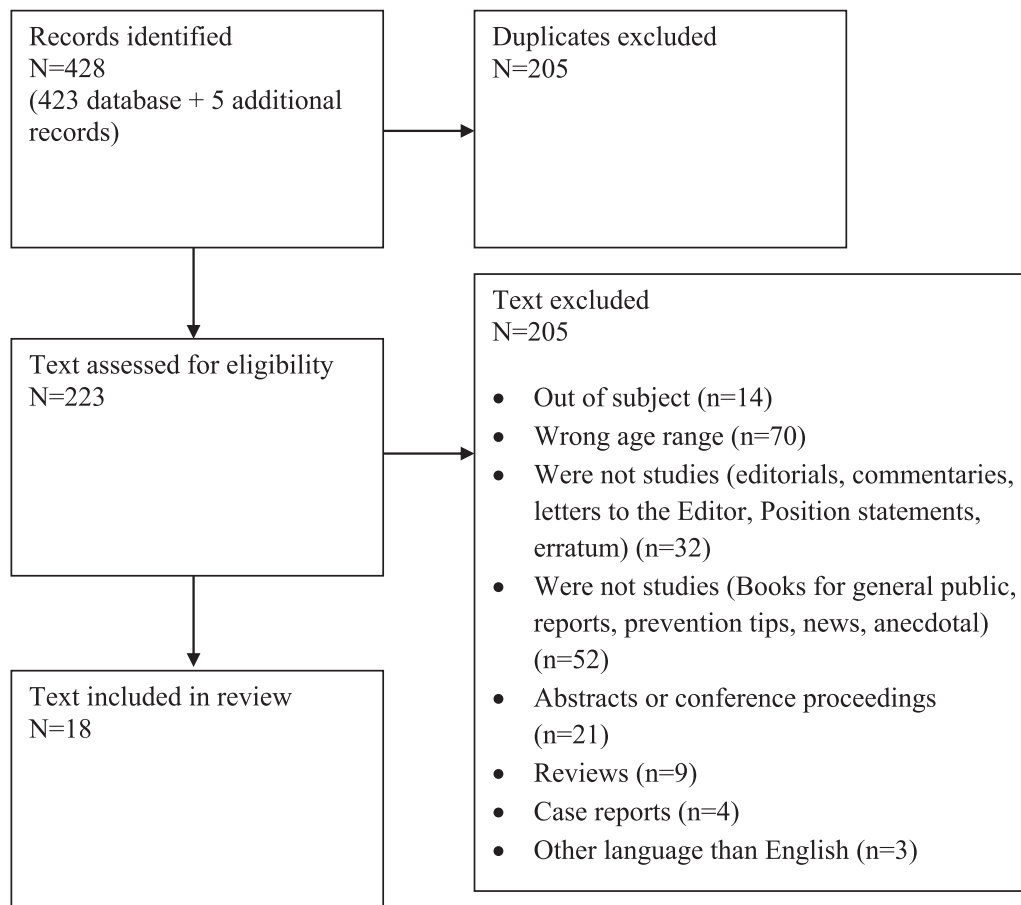
Regarding the age limit of 18 years, some articles were not clear about the age. One of them mentioned 18 years for the upper age limit, but the category 18 years or older was presented in the tables [11]. Another article only used the high school term without any age indication [15], and three others only gave means or medians with standard deviation as the only information on age [9,16,17]. We contacted the authors of these articles and three of them confirmed that the upper age limit was over 18 years [11,15,17], whereas one confirmed that participants were under the age of 18 years [9]. Another author did not confirm but presumed that it might comprise a few older than 18-year-old adolescents because some pupils tend to repeat 1 or 2 years during their school careers because they underperform at school (grade retention) [16]. Thus, we decided to exclude this article. A longitudinal article was based on the second and third waves of a study and indicated an age range of 14–18 years for the second wave [18,19]. Even if the article used data from participants aged more than 18 years in the third wave, we decided to include it because we considered that data were initially based on the first wave with an age range of 13–17 years.

Next, we decided to exclude articles that did not present the results of a study per se (editorials, commentaries, letters to the editor, position statements, erratum, reports, books for general public, or case reports). We did not include abstracts or conference proceedings either because some information was lacking. Reviews were also excluded, but we went through their reference lists to check if we missed any article. Our final sample consisted of 18 articles (Figure 1).

## Results

### Overview

The articles included in this review were in English and were published between 2012 and 2015. The majority presented results from the USA ( $n = 10$ ) followed by two articles on data from the United Kingdom, two others on multiple European countries, one from Belgium, one from the Slovak Republic, one from the Czech Republic, and one from Peru. Respondents' age range from 10 to 18 years. Most used methods were quantitative ( $n = 15$ ), only one article used longitudinal data [18], two used a qualitative approach [20,21], and one used mixed methods [22]. We decided to combine the results of the two qualitative articles because they



**Figure 1.** Flow of studies through the review process.

were based on the same study and on the same sample [23]. For the article with mixed methods, we decided to include the rates in our results even if they were based on a nonrepresentative sample of 51 participants. Prevalence rates of sexting, without any distinction, ranged from .9% to 60% (Table 1).

### Definitions

We analyzed questions and measurements used to assess sexting. We were interested in several dimensions of the definition: content, actions, transmission mode, and sexual characteristics. We considered these different elements as being helpful to catch all the subtleties of the activity.

**Media types.** Only text messages, without any other specification, were included in one article to measure sexting [24], and in eight articles, only images were used [9,18–21,25–27]. Six studies involved both types of content (text and images) [28–32]; however, only one examined these contents with two different questions to assess text and images on one side and text only on the other [32]. Four studies also used video as a possible media type, but it was never isolated. Indeed, three of them combined videos and images [22,33,34] and one had a larger definition with text messages, photos, and videos, but no distinction was made in the way the question was asked in terms of media type [35]. All studies but one used images in the

definition, either in an isolated way or in combination with text messages and/or videos. When a distinction was made, images and images combined with videos had generally lower prevalence rates of sending than text messages and text messages combined with images. Moreover, the article in which text messages were differentiated from the combination of text messages and images demonstrated a large difference between the two groups [32]. Indeed, the prevalence rate for text messages reached 17%, whereas for text messages and images together, it only reached 5%. These differences showed that text messages were more frequent. None of these studies mentioned audio messages.

**Actions.** We found two categories of sexting: active sexting with the actions of creating, showing, posting, sending, or forwarding to a third party and passive sexting with the actions of asking, being asked or receiving [18]. One article made no distinction between active and passive sexting, combining them in one general term [24]. Other studies focused only on one action: either receiving [31] or sending [9,19,25,26,28,32,35]. Seven articles used passive and active actions but distinguished them by asking several separate questions [18,22,27,29,30,33,34]. For these studies, prevalence ranged from 7.1% to 60% for passive sexting and 2.5%–27.6% for active sexting. These rates indicated that passive sexting was more common or more reported. Qualitative studies also explored sending and receiving, but the

**Table 1**

Key elements of the reviewed articles (N = 18)

Authors (year), country of study	Sample size and age range	Research design	Sexting measurements	Main findings
Baumgartner SE, Sumter SR, Peter J, Valkenburg PM, Livingstone S (2014), Europe	14,946 children and adolescents (49.7% boys) aged 11–16 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cross-sectional</li> <li>■ Data from the EU KIDS Online project</li> <li>■ At home interviews</li> <li>■ Face-to-face but private completion (paper-and-pencil or online) for sensitive questions (sexting)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ In the past 12 months, have you sent or posted a sexual message (words, pictures, or videos) of any kind on the Internet?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sexting prevalence ranged from .9% to 11.5%</li> <li>■ Individual level characteristics, age, and sensation seeking are rather universal predictors of sexting</li> <li>■ Country characteristics had no direct effect on adolescent sexting but traditionalism significantly predicted gender differences in sexting</li> <li>■ In more traditional countries, gender differences were stronger with more boys engaging in sexting than girls</li> </ul>
Houck CD, Barker D, Rizzo C, Hancock E, Norton A, Brown LK (2014), USA	420 at-risk (withdrawing, hyperactivity, nervousness, and declining grades) adolescents aged 12–14 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cross-sectional</li> <li>■ Computer-based survey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ In the last 6 months, have you texted/ e-mailed someone a sexual picture of yourself?</li> <li>■ In the last 6 months, have you texted/ e-mailed someone a sexual message to flirt with them?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sexting prevalence of 22%, 17% sexual messages only, and 5% sexual messages and photos</li> <li>■ Pictures were endorsed significantly more often by females and Latinos</li> <li>■ Sexting of any kind was associated with higher rates of engaging in a variety of sexual behaviors, and sending photos was associated with higher rates of sexual activity than sending text messages only</li> <li>■ Youth who reported sexting reported more difficulties with emotional competence</li> </ul>
Kopecky K (2012), Czech Republic	9,353 respondents (52.6% boys) aged 11–17 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cross-sectional</li> <li>■ Online questionnaire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Have you ever placed your own sexy photo or video where you were partially or completely naked on the Internet?</li> <li>■ Have you ever sent your own sexy photo or video where you were partially or completely naked, to anybody?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sexting prevalence of 8.25% for sexting in form of placing the material on Internet and 9.7% when the material was sent to other people</li> <li>■ Reasons for sexting: out of boredom, to make intimate contact, self-representation, social pressure, to arouse the recipients, not planned</li> <li>■ Sexting can be regarded as dangerous: harassment, sexual abuse, publication of photographs, to be charged for production or distribution of child pornography, to be expelled from school, suicide</li> </ul>
Kopecky K (2015), Slovak Republic	1,466 respondents (45% boys) aged 11–17 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cross-sectional</li> <li>■ Online questionnaire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Have you ever placed your own sexy photo or video where you were partially or completely naked on the Internet?</li> <li>■ Have you ever sent your own sexy photo or video where you were partially or completely naked, to anybody?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sexting prevalence of 7.6% for sexting in form of placing the material on Internet and 9.3% when the material was sent to other people</li> <li>■ Reasons of the sexting: a part of a romantic relationship, a tool to kill time, a result from social pressure, a tool of self-presentation or a tool for revenge</li> </ul>
Lippman JR, Campbell SW (2014), USA	51 adolescents (51% boys) aged 12–18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cross-sectional</li> <li>■ Written questionnaires administered during focus group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Have you ever sent a picture or video with your cell phone that involves nudity, also sometimes called sexting?</li> <li>■ Have you ever received a picture or video on your phone that involves nudity, also sometimes called sexting?</li> <li>■ Have you ever forwarded sexts you received depicting other people?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sexting prevalence of 21% for sending, 48% for receiving, and 2.3% for forwarding to a third party</li> <li>■ Often occurred within the context of a desired or established romantic or sexual relationship with peers</li> <li>■ A majority of adolescents believed that sexting was no big deal</li> <li>■ Girls but not boys were judged for their sexting practices</li> <li>■ Adolescents were increasingly likely to place sexting within a romantic and/or sexual context as they get older</li> </ul>

*(continued on next page)*

**Table 1**  
Continued

Authors (year), country of study	Sample size and age range	Research design	Sexting measurements	Main findings
Livingstone S, Görzig A (2014), Europe	18,709 internet-using children and adolescents (50% boys) aged 11–16 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cross-sectional</li> <li>■ Data from the EU KIDS Online Project</li> <li>■ At home interviews</li> <li>■ Face-to-face but private completion (paper-and-pencil or online) for sensitive questions (sexting)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ In the past 12 months, have you seen or received sexual messages of any kind on the Internet?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sexting prevalence of 15%</li> <li>■ 24% of those who had experienced sexting reported that this experience had upset them (uncomfortable, harmed, or felt that they should not have seen it)</li> <li>■ The risk of receiving sexts was associated with older children, boys, higher sensation seeking, psychological difficulties, and offline and online risky behaviors</li> <li>■ The risk of being harmed from receiving sexts was associated with younger children, girls, lower sensation seeking, and psychological difficulties</li> </ul>
Mitchell KJ, Finkelhor D, Jones LM, Wolak J (2012), USA	1,560 youth Internet users aged 11–17 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cross-sectional</li> <li>■ Telephone survey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Have you ever taken nude or nearly nude pictures or videos of yourself?</li> <li>■ Has someone else ever taken nude or nearly nude picture or videos of you?</li> <li>■ Have you ever taken nude or nearly nude pictures or videos of other kids who were under the age of 18?</li> <li>■ Has anyone ever sent you nude or nearly nude pictures or videos of kids who were under the age of 18 that someone else took?</li> <li>■ Have you ever forwarded or posted any nude or nearly nude pictures or videos of other kids who were under the age of 18 that someone else took?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sexting prevalence of 2.5% in form of appearance in or creation of a picture and 7.1% in form of receiving a picture</li> <li>■ 54% of those who appeared in or created a picture and 84% of those who received reported sexually explicit picture (breast, genitals, and bottom)</li> <li>■ 21% of those who appeared in or created a picture and 25% of those who received reported feeling very upset, embarrassed, or afraid</li> <li>■ 28% of those who appeared in or created a picture and 28% of those who received reported incidents to an authority</li> <li>■ 10% of those who appeared in or created a picture and 3% of those who received reported a distribution incident</li> </ul>
Rice E, Gibbs J, Winetrobe H, Rhoades H, Plant A, Montoya J, et al. (2012), USA	1,839 high school students (51.9% boys) aged 12–18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cross-sectional</li> <li>■ Supplemental questionnaire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Have you ever sent a sexually explicit message or photo of yourself by cell phone?</li> <li>■ Do you know anyone who has sent a sexually explicit message or photo of themselves by cell phone?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sexting prevalence of 15%</li> <li>■ 54% reported knowing someone had sent a sext</li> <li>■ Older adolescents were more likely to sext</li> <li>■ Adolescents whose peers sexted were more likely to sext</li> <li>■ Nonheterosexual students were more likely to report sexting</li> <li>■ Participants who had sexted were more likely to be sexually active and exhibited a trend toward unprotected sex</li> </ul>
Rice E, Rhoades H, Winetrobe H, Sanchez M, Montoya J, Plant A, et al. (2014), USA	1,285 middle school students (51.5% boys) aged 10–15 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cross-sectional</li> <li>■ Supplemental questionnaire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Have you ever received a sexually explicit message or photo of someone by cell phone?</li> <li>■ Have you ever sent a sexually explicit message or photo of yourself by cell phone?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sexting prevalence of 20.1% for receiving and 4.6% for sending</li> <li>■ Sending and receiving were significantly associated with one another</li> <li>■ Older students were more likely to report receiving a sext</li> <li>■ Sexting was associated with sexual activity</li> <li>■ Having received was correlated with being African-American and sending <math>\geq 100</math> texts per day</li> <li>■ Having sent was correlated with being a male, sending <math>\geq 100</math> texts per day and being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer</li> </ul>

**Table 1**  
Continued

Authors (year), country of study	Sample size and age range	Research design	Sexting measurements	Main findings
Ricketts ML, Maloney C, Marcum CD, Higgins GE (2015), USA	1,617 high schools students (49% male), under the age of 18 years (mean 15.77)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cross-sectional</li> <li>■ Paper-and-pencil questionnaire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Have you ever texted a nude/partially nude picture of yourself within the past year?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sexting prevalence of 13% for having sexted in the past year</li> <li>■ Internet-related problems increase the likelihood of sexting</li> <li>■ Individuals association with deviant peers (have texted nude picture and/or used another person's debit/credit card without permission) increase the likelihood of sexting</li> </ul>
Ringrose J, Harvey L, Gill R, Livingstone S (2013), UK Ringrose J, Harvey L (2015), UK	35 young people aged 13–15 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Qualitative survey</li> <li>■ Focus groups, individual interviews, and digital observation of Facebook pages</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Gender inequity issues</li> <li>■ Images connoting sexual attention seeking outside the cover of a relationship marked girls as slutty and lacking self-respect</li> <li>■ Boys can gain value and reputational reward from possessing images of esteemed girls' bodies</li> <li>■ Girls are under pressure to send photos to boys</li> </ul>
Temple JR, Choi H (2014), USA	964 adolescents (44% boys) aged 14–18 years at wave 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Longitudinal: data from waves 2 and 3 (spring 2011–spring 2012)</li> <li>■ Questionnaire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Have you ever sent naked pictures of yourself to another through text or e-mail?</li> <li>■ Have you ever asked someone to send naked pictures of themselves to you?</li> <li>■ Have you ever been asked to send naked picture of yourself through text or e-mail?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sexting prevalence of 27.6% for sending, 31.4% for having asked, and 60% for having been asked</li> <li>■ Sending a sext at wave 2 mediated relationship between asking or being asked for a sext and having sex over the next year</li> <li>■ Sending a sext at wave 2 was associated with having sex at wave 3 but not with risky sexual behaviors</li> <li>■ Sexual or risky sexual behavior at wave 2 did not significantly predict sexting at wave 3</li> <li>■ Sending, as opposed to asking or being asked, was the salient component in the link between sexting and sexual behavior demonstrating a higher level of comfort with one's sexuality.</li> </ul>
Temple JR, Le VD, van den Berg P, Ling Y, Paul JA, Temple BW (2014), USA	937 high school adolescents (43% boys) aged 14–18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cross-sectional</li> <li>■ Questionnaire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Have you ever sent naked pictures of yourself to another through text or e-mail?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ No prevalence</li> <li>■ Unadjusted model: sexting was associated with symptoms of depression, impulsivity, and substance use (alcohol, marijuana or illicit substances)</li> <li>■ Adjusted model for prior sexual behavior, age, gender, race, and parent education: sexting was no longer related to depression and associations with impulsivity and substance use were attenuated</li> <li>■ Sexting is a modern day risky behavior and a risk marker for other risky behaviors, but not necessarily as an indicator of poor psychological health</li> </ul>
Van Ouytsel J, Van Gool E, Ponnet K, Walrave M (2014), Belgium	1,028 adolescents (42% boys) aged 15–18 years of 11 secondary schools in Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cross-sectional</li> <li>■ Questionnaire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ In the last month, have you sent a sexually suggestive picture (naked or half naked) of yourself using the Internet or a mobile phone?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sexting prevalence of 11.1%</li> <li>■ Personality factors are significant predictors of teenagers' engagement in sexting: higher score for sensation seeking and experiential thinking</li> <li>■ Significant relationship between depression and sexting</li> <li>■ Economic stress or financial stress is a significant predictor of sexting</li> </ul>

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**Table 1**  
Continued

Authors (year), country of study	Sample size and age range	Research design	Sexting measurements	Main findings
Walrave M, Heirman W, Hallam L (2014), USA	498 adolescents (46% boys) aged 15–18 years from two Belgian secondary schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cross-sectional</li> <li>■ Paper-pencil survey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Have you sent sexts in the last 2 months?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sexting prevalence of 26%</li> <li>■ Attitude toward sexting (funny or not, clever or stupid, and enjoyable or not) tended to be slightly negative</li> <li>■ Similarly, subjective norms (what significant others think) was rather unfavorable to sexting</li> <li>■ Conversely, perceived behavioral control (able to send, the tools needed, sexting is easy) was rather high for sexting</li> <li>■ Subjective norms is the most important predictor followed by attitude toward sexting, adolescents are influenced relatively more by the social pressure that they anticipate receiving</li> </ul>
West JH, Lister CE, Hall PC, Crookston BT, Snow PR, Zvietcovich ME, et al. (2014), Peru	949 high school adolescents (34.35% boys) aged 12–18 years from Cusco	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cross-sectional</li> <li>■ Paper-pencil survey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ On average, how much time per day do you spend sending or receiving sexually related text messages?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sexting prevalence of 20.5%</li> <li>■ Significant correlates for girls' sexting included having been cyberbullied and parental factors, whereas factors for boys were physical fighting, excessive texting, and parental factors</li> <li>■ Boys reported higher rates of sexting than girls</li> <li>■ Sexting prevalence ranged from .9% to 11.5%</li> <li>■ Individual level characteristics, age, and sensation seeking are rather universal predictors of sexting</li> <li>■ Country characteristics had no direct effect on adolescent sexting but traditionalism significantly predicted gender differences in sexting</li> <li>■ In more traditional countries, gender differences were stronger with more boys engaging in sexting than girls</li> </ul>
Ybarra ML, Mitchell KJ (2014), USA	3,715 youth US residents (43.4% boys) aged 13–18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cross-sectional</li> <li>■ Online survey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ How often have you sent or showed someone sexual pictures of yourself where you were nude or nearly nude?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sexting prevalence ranged from .9% to 11.5%</li> <li>■ Individual level characteristics, age, and sensation seeking are rather universal predictors of sexting</li> <li>■ Country characteristics had no direct effect on adolescent sexting but traditionalism significantly predicted gender differences in sexting</li> <li>■ In more traditional countries, gender differences were stronger with more boys engaging in sexting than girls</li> </ul>



distinction between the two actions was not apparent and depended on the questions and respondents [20,21]. However, this difference was not relevant for these studies, because their objective was to explore the practice, including the definition, according to the participants' opinions.

Some studies considered that forwarding someone's message to others than those initially involved by the sharing was directly included in the term sexting [22,27]. From this point of view, sexting was clearly considered as a deviant behavior and a problem in itself with three possible actions: sending, receiving, and forwarding to others. For other studies, it was less obvious. Either sharing with a third party was only a possible risk and was defined separately from the activity of sexting or this action was indirectly comprised in the terms sending and/or receiving. However, for sending, nine studies added a detail in their questions: "a photo or a video of yourself" [9,18,19,25,26,28–30,32]. This specification demonstrated that sharing a photo of someone else with others was not considered as part of the definition of sexting, which implied that sexting could be defined as a risky behavior but not as a problem per se. Indeed, sexting does not necessarily lead to negative consequences, as it is only a risk.

*Transmission mode.* All studies defined sexting as an online, electronic, or virtual activity using the Internet and/or mobile devices (e.g., mobile phone, Smartphone, computer, and so on). However, some studies distinguished between posting the content on the Internet (e.g., profile of the social network) and sending it directly to someone [33–35]. An online posting targets a wider public, and in this perspective, the definition of sexting could not restrain to a simple exchange between two persons only. Finally, one study used another transmission mode defined as showing directly (face to face) a photo of oneself, but the prevalence rate was very low with only 1% of participants [26].

*Sexual characteristics.* The sexual characteristics of sexting were also defined differently among studies and terms were multiple. Most articles ( $n = 9$ ) used a definition with sex terms such as sext, sexting, sexy, sexually explicit, sexually related, sexually suggestive, or sexual contents [24,25,29–35]. Seven studies used the terms nude or naked and nearly or partially nude or naked [9,20,21,23,26–28], and three others only used the term naked or nude [18,19,22]. Two articles described more precisely the sexual characteristics of a message. In one article, specific body parts were added to a question (genitals, buttocks, and breasts), and the age of the person on the pictures or videos was limited to 18 years [27]. In the second article, the authors detailed the content (talk about having sex or images of people naked or having sex) [31]. Interestingly, in the first article, two different questions were asked: one without any detail and one with specific body parts. Prevalence rate reached 2.5% but decreased to only 1% when body parts were specified [27], possibly implying that sexting with suggestive content is more prevalent.

#### *Correlates of sexting*

*Sociodemographic variables.* Three main sociodemographic variables were found in this review: age, gender, and race.

Overall, when significant associations with age were found, older participants (depending on the age range used by the authors) were more likely to report sexting behaviors [26,27,29,30,35]. No statistical tests were done for two other articles, but the authors also indicated that sexting was

performed more often by older adolescents [33,34]. Interestingly, one article demonstrated that, while sexting was more prevalent among older adolescents, the risk of being upset or harmed (embarrassed, uncomfortable, perturbed, felt that you should not have seen this, and so on) by this practice was associated with being younger [31]. Another study reported that age influenced the context in which sexting took part [22]. Indeed, older participants mostly considered sexting in a romantic or a sexual relationship, whereas younger ones talked about fun and platonic context.

For gender differences, no consensus appeared. Some studies reported more girls being involved in sexting [26,31] and others found boys being more likely to sext [24,25,30,35]. But gender differences also depended on the definition of sexting. For example, one study found no difference for having received messages but for having sent them with more males having done so [29]. A gender difference was also reported for the transmission mode. Indeed, boys were more likely to post photos of themselves on the Internet and girls to send them directly to a particular person [33,34]. Regarding message content, in one article, authors defined three sexting groups: no sexting, text only, and photo (including text and photos), and a gender difference was found in the photo group with more girls reporting having sent photos [32]. Finally, another study found that boys were more likely to receive sexual messages, whereas girls were more at risk to be harmed or embarrassed by receiving such messages [31].

Even if no consensus was found for gender differences, the qualitative study emphasized a gendered hierarchy for criticism with girls who sext being treated more negatively than boys [20,21]. As a possible consequence of this difference in terms of judgment, girls also perceived more negative social reactions from peers toward sexting and were more unfavorable to this activity than boys [28]. However, a study demonstrated that negative judgments toward girls could also be found when they refused to sext by considering them as being "goody girls, prude, or stuck-up" [22]. In addition to this disparity in terms of judgment, a gender difference was also identified for some factors associated with sexting. Indeed, in a study, girls who reported having been a victim of cyberbullying were significantly more likely to practice sexting, whereas cyberbullying for boys was not associated with it. For boys only, sexting was associated with excessive texting and having participated in a physical fight during the last 12 months [24].

Finally, some studies associated the practice of sexting with being part of an ethnic minority (e.g., black Africans, Hispanics, or Latinos) [26,29,30,32].

*Sexual behaviors and relationships.* Eleven studies tried to explain possible associations with sexting in a sexual and/or romantic context. Six studies were interested in sexual behaviors in association with sexting [18,26,29–32]. Four of them distinguished two kinds of sexual behaviors: nonrisky (e.g., intercourse) and risky sexual behaviors (e.g., unprotected intercourse) [18,26,29,30]. The authors of the two other studies only reported about sexual risk behaviors without any distinction. In one of these studies, the fact of having had sexual intercourse was considered as a risky offline activity, whether it was protected or not [31]. In the second article, several sexual behaviors were measured ranging from, for example, having a romantic partner to touching genitals over clothes or engaging in vaginal sex, and all of them were considered as risky behaviors [32]. These six



studies reported an association between sexting and the fact of being or having the intention of being sexually active. When assessed, sexting was also associated with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer movement [26,29,30]. When risky sexual behaviors were specified and distinguished from other sexual behaviors, studies assessed unprotected intercourse, concurrent partners, number of sexual partners in the last year, substance use before sex, and sexually transmitted infections [18,26,29,30]. Two of these studies reported an association between sexting and some specific risky sexual behaviors [26,30]. On the contrary, the two others did not find an association between risky sexual behaviors and sexting, and sexting was only associated with the fact of being sexually active [18,29]. For example, the longitudinal study found that sending pictures predicted having sex within the next year but did not find an association with risky sexual behaviors [18].

A study assessed the perception of youths of their parents' feelings and disappointment if they knew that their child was sexually active (How badly would your parents feel if you had sexual relations?). This measure was negatively associated with sexting: the less the feeling was perceived as bad the more the participant reported sexting activity [24].

Finally, four studies considered sexting as part of a romantic relationship [22,28,33,34]. The fact of being in or looking for a steady relationship with the notion of a mutual trust was reported in two of these studies [33,34].

*Risky behaviors.* Some studies analyzed the possible associations between sexting and different risky behaviors, other than sexual. First, associations between sexting and substance use were found for alcohol, marijuana, and illicit drugs [19,26,31]. Regarding violence, a study reported an association between sexting and impulsivity for both genders [19], and another one found an association with the number of physical fights in the past 12 months, but only among boys [24]. Other risky behaviors were also associated with sexting such as truancy, trouble with teachers or with the police [31]. In this field of risky behaviors, personality traits such as high sensation or experience seeking were also assessed and were associated with sexting [31,35].

*The Internet and online activities.* Sexting is part of online practices, and some studies analyzed the possible associations between sexting and the Internet use variables. One study assessed online activities (the Internet games, video clips, instant messaging, social networking, and so on) and risky online activities (to pretend to be a different person, to look for new friends, to add people to my friends list that I have never met in person, and so on) [31]. These two kinds of online activities were associated with sexting, but the association was stronger for risky online activities. Another study found that Internet addiction, measured with an Internet-related problem scale, was associated with sexting [9]. Two studies found an association between sexting and excessive text messaging [24,29]. These associations were explained by the fact that adolescents who hypertexted were more comfortable with digital communication, thus sexting could be easier for them [24]. Individual Internet use and technological infrastructure available in the country were assessed in a study, but only the individual use was associated with sexting [35].

*Social pressure—social support.* The perceived social pressure and/or the fact of knowing someone who sexted was assessed in

four studies. Indeed, adolescents who perceived the acceptance of sexting in their environment were more likely to report doing so [9,28,30,32]. In a direct assessment of social pressure, one study explored the main reasons to practice sexting and one of them was being under the influence of a group [34]. The qualitative study also concluded that sexting could be done under pressure, especially toward girls [20,21]. Finally, a study assessed the perception of social support from family, friends, or significant others, and it was negatively associated with sexting but for younger youths only [26].

*Emotional and mental health issues.* Two studies found an association between sexting and psychological or emotional difficulties [31,32]. For depression, three studies found different results. Indeed, one study reported a strong association between depressive symptoms and sexting [25], but another one found less evident results as sexting was no longer associated with depression when the model was adjusted for age, gender, race, sexual behaviors, and parent education [19]. Furthermore, another study found a relation between sexting and depressive state but only among younger girls [26]. One of these studies also assessed anxiety, but no relation was found with sexting, even in the unadjusted model [19].

## Discussion

Even if prevalence rates were not part of the main focus of this review, we considered it important to offer a complete synthesis, and it enabled us to observe that to date, prevalence rate comparisons between studies are very difficult to make because definitions and conceptualizations of sexting differ widely. The large range of prevalence rates (7.6%–60% for passive sexting and .9%–27.6% for active sexting) could be explained by cultural or methodological differences, but it could also come from the lack of a clear and universal definition. The difference in prevalence rates could also be explained by issues regarding research methods in general. First, the age ranges were different among the samples [12]. Because of the different age ranges used by the authors, we were not able to establish a precise standard on age but a trend stood out as, when associations between age and sexting were found, the activity was always more reported among older participants. Thus, it was quite evident that in a sample including younger participants, sexting would be less prevalent. Second, data were also collected differently with online surveys, pen-and-pencil questionnaires or face-to-face interviews and these differences could influence the answers, especially when the topic is sensitive. In this line and third, as sexuality could be a sensitive topic especially among adolescents, the social desirability issue in responses could also influence the results [23]. One study assessed an indirect measure of sexting by asking participants if they knew someone who sexted, and the indirect rate reached 54% whereas the direct one was 15% [30]. Another study reported that 60% of participants had been asked for a photo, whereas only 31% reported having asked someone to send them a photo [18]. In this review, we also found that passive sexting had higher prevalence rates than active sexting. These different findings could reflect the reality of sexting, but they could also be interpreted in terms of social desirability with participants who may be ashamed to have sent, asked, or forwarded to a third party. Fourth, reference periods to assess sexting were also different. Indeed, articles referred to life prevalence [9,18,19,22,26,27,29,30,33,34], last 12 months [31,35],

last 6 months [32], last 2 months [28], last month [25], or an average per day [24].

Regarding the main related characteristics highlighted in this review, as mentioned previously, older adolescents were more likely to sext. This difference could be partly explained by the pubertal and biological changes faced by older adolescents leading to the development of sexual interest [35,36]. In addition to biological factors, psychological development (e.g., personality traits) and social environment (e.g., peer influence) could also explain the growth of sexual interest during adolescence [37]. Logically, as older adolescents are more likely to be sexually active [30], they are also more likely to sext as an association between sexting and being sexually active was found by certain studies.

For gender differences, no consensus was found but a trend was noticed in terms of judgment and criticism toward girls who are considered more pejoratively if they practiced sexting but also if they did not want to. The association between sexting behaviors and being part of an ethnic minority that was sometimes found could be explained by the pressure context that these marginalized populations could possibly experience [38]. Sexting was often associated with being sexually active but not necessarily with specific risky sexual behaviors when they were assessed separately, such as unprotected intercourse, and it mostly occurred in the context of a relationship. Thus, sexting could be considered as part of sexual behaviors taking place during the sexual and romantic experimentation process. In this context, this activity could be interpreted as a way to approach a person, a prelude to an intercourse, an alternative to a face-to-face contact or an add-on to an active sexuality [22,33,34].

In the same line, as sexting may be understood as a sexual behavior in a larger context of sexualization, it may also be defined as a risky behavior and be included in a larger cluster of risky behaviors [19]. However, we found a trend of not defining sexting as a problem per se as sexting does not necessarily lead to negative consequences. Finally, nonheterosexuality, when it was assessed, was associated with sexting. An explanation could be that the activity of sexting is used in this case as an alternative to a face-to-face contact and a way to create a form of intimacy for this population as reactions from their surroundings could be difficult to deal with [26].

Adolescence is also a period of growing independence and individuation during which peers become strong references [28]. In this context, sexting was also associated with direct and indirect peer pressure. Adolescents' behaviors could depend on the perception of their peers' reaction as conformity to the group is often a condition to be accepted [30]. The direct peer pressure could appear before sexting to push someone to do it or after the fact to mock or harass the involved person. Online communication, especially with social networks, has changed the context in which peer pressure can occur because it could more easily extend into the home environment and be present on a daily basis with the Internet [39].

Regarding the associations with these different conducts, we could suggest that sexting may be analyzed in terms of development and time-limited risk taking [18,19,26,40]. However, longitudinal data are needed to understand the place of sexting in relation to sexual behaviors, risky behaviors, health-related problems, and pressure. Indeed, for example, depression could follow sexting because the person realized the risk that was taken or because a third party was involved [19,26]. On the contrary, these symptoms could also precede the activity because of pressure to do it or because depression may push

someone to choose sexting as a way to feel desired and considered [11,19]. The only longitudinal study found in this review demonstrated that sending pictures predicted having sex within the next year, suggesting that sexting could be used as a prelude to an active and face-to-face sexuality [18].

We are aware that sexting is an evolving concept and changes as fast as social media. The definition could also vary from one person to another according to personal or cultural differences. However, if research aims to assess sexting, a consensus on the way to measure it has to be found. Indeed, one of the issues about sexting and research on the subject is the lack of a clear, validated, and universal definition of the activity [12]. Therefore, we suggest the following recommendations. First, professionals must determine if the term sexting itself could be used when two persons agree to share messages, when the private characteristic is not respected because of a transmission to other parties without consent, and/or when it becomes a way to harass someone. In other words, should this term refer to a sexual behavior between two consenting persons and change to another term such as harassment if it deviates? Should it be used to indicate the activity that goes wrong and defined as a problem per se? Should it include the two situations? Second, more qualitative studies are needed to understand adolescents' definition of sexting and the context in which it occurs [41]. Most studies found that adolescents considered sexting as a possible activity during a relationship and could be defined as a normal way to flirt. Prevention strategies should also consider this idea and focus on sexting that goes wrong when it is forwarded to a third party and when it occurs in a context of pressure or harassment. Third, a clear distinction between the different types of media is needed because they have different potential impacts. Indeed, possessing and forwarding a text message may have a different impact than a photo or a video [32]. Moreover, sexting could be a progressive activity and begin with text messages to continue with photos and videos. Fourth, as sexting seems to occur in different contexts according to age, prevention should also vary according to the later. Differentiating the dimensions of sexting in terms of activity, content, and age and finding a consensus regarding the definition are two essential steps to assess and understand the practice, adapt prevention to the reality of the activity, and reach the intended targets.

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## Annexe 4 : Article #2 (publié)

**Barrense-Dias Y**, Suris JC, Akre C. "When it deviates it becomes harassment, doesn't it?" A qualitative study on the definition of sexting according to adolescents and young adults, parents and teachers. [Archives of Sexual Behavior 2019](#). (online first)



# “When It Deviates It Becomes Harassment, Doesn’t It?” A Qualitative Study on the Definition of Sexting According to Adolescents and Young Adults, Parents, and Teachers

Yara Barrense-Dias<sup>1</sup> · Joan-Carles Surís<sup>1</sup> · Christina Akre<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Sexting was originally made public by dramatic consequences involving youths with contents that were disseminated and then used as a base for harassment. Despite a growing public and research interest, there is no consensus regarding its definition and measurements. As part of a larger qualitative study on sexting, we aimed to gather and compare opinions and perceptions of 32 youths (16–21 years) and 29 adults (11 parents and 18 teachers) on how sexting can be defined. Different constituent elements were discussed in terms of knowledge, mediums (text-only, photographs, videos, etc.), characteristics, actions (receiving, sending, disseminating, etc.) and contexts. The knowledge and the use of the term sexting was approximate for several participants. Youths used more suggestive elements in their definition and the vast majority of them defined sexting as an activity that could be positive and respectful between two consenting persons. It is necessary to develop a precise and consensual definition of sexting by separating different dimensions and by using a specific vocabulary according to youth perceptions as their main definition of sexting seems to be different from the one of most adults. Prevention messages should aim to reduce the risks by targeting the problems linked to sexting rather than prohibiting sexting per se. This exploratory study could pave the way for a clearer definition and measurement of sexting.

**Keywords** Sexting · Adolescents · Parents · Teachers · Qualitative research

## Introduction

The place of the Internet in daily life, the rapid evolution of new technologies, and the popularity of communication and device sharing, especially among youths, have modified social interactions (Davis, 2013; Houck et al., 2014) and created new behaviors such as sexting (Gómez & Ayala, 2014). Sexting was first made public by dramatic consequences involving adolescents with contents that were disseminated and then used as a base for harassment (Celizic, 2009; Crimmins & Seigfried-Spellar, 2014; Kaye, 2010). Such cases have led to a growing scientific interest for this phenomenon. However, since then, this activity has also been considered in a more positive and normative way, as being part of the sexual

and/or romantic development and experimentation of youths (Döring, 2014; Holoyda, Landess, Sorrentino, & Friedman, 2018; Kopecký, 2015; Temple & Choi, 2014; Walrave et al., 2015). In this line, this activity has been studied in terms of strengthening intimacy and trust between romantic partners (Fox & Bridget, 2014), flirtation (Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, & Livingstone, 2013), foreplay to a sexual act (Temple & Choi, 2014), expression of one’s desires and feelings (Walrave et al., 2015), alternative to face-to-face contact (Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Walker, Sanci, & Temple-Smith, 2013), and building a positive image of one’s body (Jørgensen, Weckesser, Turner, & Wade, 2019).

In the 2010 EU Kids survey on European children’s online opportunities, risks, and safety (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2011), 15% of 11–16 years old had received peer-to-peer sexual messages or images, and 3% reported having sent or posted such messages in the past 12 months. In 2014, the European Net Children Go Mobile study (Mascheroni & Cuman, 2014) on children’s online experiences through mobile media found that 11% of children aged 11–16 reported having received such messages in the past 12 months, the

✉ Yara Barrense-Dias  
yara.barrense-dias@chuv.ch

<sup>1</sup> Research Group on Adolescent Health, Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine, Lausanne University Hospital, Route de la Corniche 10, 1010 Lausanne, Switzerland



highest rates being among 15–16-year-old children (19%). In Switzerland, as part of a larger study on media use among youths aged 12–19, lifetime sending a flirtatious or erotic photograph or video of oneself increased from 8% in 2014 (Willemse et al., 2014) to 11% in 2016 (Waller, Willemse, Genner, Suter, & Süß, 2016). Similarly, if 37% of participants reported having already received such a photograph or video in 2014, they were 43% in 2016.

However, comparisons between prevalence rates are difficult to make. In 2017, our research team published a review on sexting and evaluated the definition used by researchers to measure it (Barrense-Dias, Berchtold, Surís, & Akre, 2017). This review highlighted a gap in the literature as current definitions and conceptualizations of sexting are multiple and disparate in terms of media types (text-only, photographs, videos, etc.), actions (sending, receiving, disseminating, etc.) and/or content, even when the research focus is the same.

Thus, despite a growing public and research interest to better understand sexting and its potential negative consequences, there is no consensus regarding its definition, and previous studies have already highlighted the need of a clearer one (Klettke, Hallford, & Mellor, 2014; Livingstone & Görzig, 2014; Lounsbury, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2011; Walker et al., 2013). Recently, this lack of consistency in the literature was presented as one of the current research challenges on adolescent sexting (Van Ouytsel, Walrave, & Ponnet, 2018).

Including youth perspective in the conception of this definition also appears crucial to precisely understand the activity, improve prevention messages and ensure that such messages reach their targets by using their interpretation and language (Walker et al., 2013). In addition, relevant adults such as parents and educators strongly demand to better understand the use of media by youths, including the meaning given to some activities such as sexting. A better knowledge of sexting could also enable more effective measures of this activity and all its dimensions. Indeed, with vague and inconsistent definitions, measurement of behaviors is not precise enough (e.g., when text-only messages, pictures and videos are integrated in one and only question [Baumgartner, Sumter, Peter, Valkenburg, & Livingstone, 2014]).

As part of a larger exploratory qualitative study on sexting, we aimed to pave the way for a clearer definition and measurement of sexting by collecting opinions and interpretations of adolescents and young adults (AYAs) on how sexting can be defined and determine its important constituent elements. We also had the goal to compare their perspective to the one expressed by parents and teachers, two categories of relevant adults who could be involved in preventive action and discussion, and in solving problems linked to sexting.

## Method

We conducted an exploratory qualitative research on sexting in the French-speaking part of Switzerland using focus groups (FGs) to obtain in-depth understanding of the different dimensions of this activity and on the meaning given to it (Collingridge & Gantt, 2008; Rich & Ginsburg, 1999). The group dynamics and the interactions between participants lead to spontaneous discussions and exchanges of outlooks, consensual and opposite, enabling to reveal and deepen different dimensions of the topic from the participants directly (Flick, 2009; Rich & Ginsburg, 1999). FGs methodology is also recommended for research that has an exploratory aim (Flick, 2009; Frith, 2000), especially to capture the different terms and definitions used by participants. Indeed, FGs methodology with group dynamics is particularly powerful in an early discovery process to gather group language (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). Furthermore, this method helps to create a climate of trust and safety during discussion, which is interesting with AYAs who are invited to discuss sensitive issues such as sexuality and intimacy (Frith, 2000; Hyde, Howlett, Brady, & Drennan, 2005). Some scholars (Kitzinger, 1995; Wilkinson, 2004) even argue that FGs could specifically facilitate the discussion of taboo topics thanks to a mutual comfort and solidarity. Thus, it could give youth a sense of belonging and acceptance allowing them to open up and be drawn into the discussion.

Our study included 11 FGs performed between February and June 2016. Discussions lasted an average of 90 min and were audio-recorded. Every recording was anonymously transcribed verbatim and then deleted. To ensure anonymity, all identification elements (first name, surname, school, town, etc.) were removed. Each participant received an information letter and signed a consent form before starting the discussion. At the beginning of each session, we verbally recalled the important points such as aims of the research and confidentiality issues. An interview guide with open-ended questions was developed and used to discuss several dimensions of sexting. Discussions were triggered through the presentation of two vignettes corresponding to testimonies posted on a youth support website ([www.ciao.ch](http://www.ciao.ch)) by a young male and a young female facing a problematic situation with the unwanted dissemination of their previous intimate sending. To avoid preconceived ideas, we started the discussion with the following large question: *Do you know the term sexting?* and we did not give a definition of it. Furthermore, the two vignettes were not presented as problematic cases of sexting to let participants consider if such a situation could be defined as sexting or not. At the end of each FG, to thank the participants, a snack was served and each of them received a gift card worth the equivalent of 30US\$.

## Participants

Inclusion criteria were to be aged between 16 and 20 years for youths, having at least one child aged between 11 and 20 years old for parents, and teaching students in 8th grade (11 years old) or higher for teachers. All participants had to be fluent in French. A total of 61 participants took part in the study including 32 youths and 29 adults (11 parents and 18 teachers). The choice of the 16–20 age range for youths is linked to the fact that these ages do not request a parental consent to interview young people, facilitating recruitment and participation. We also hypothesized that this age group could have more experience and perspective with this relatively new topic for an exploratory research. We decided to include the opinions of reference adults (parents and teachers) to obtain an overview of different actors who can be involved in prevention, discussion and crisis management. For parents and teachers, we used a larger inclusion criterion in terms of age with children and pupils aged between 11 and 20 years old. This age range was chosen to indirectly explore the 11–15 age range as younger teens may also be involved in sexting (Livingstone & Görzig, 2014) and determine if a second qualitative study with younger adolescents could be necessary.

As the topic of sexting could lead to discussions on sexuality and intimacy, females and males participated in same-gender groups of youths. Moreover, gender homogeneity is often recommended for FGs with youths to avoid an adaptation of their speech or a discomfort due to the presence of the opposite sex and to encourage the discussion through this common characteristic (Frith, 2000; Heary & Hennessy, 2002). Therefore, youths (mean age 18.2 years old) were separated by gender and divided into three groups of females ( $n = 15$ ) and three groups of males ( $n = 17$ ) (Table 1). In addition, this separation enabled us to conduct gender analyses (see data analysis below). Even if one inclusion criterion was to be aged between 16 and 20 years, two participants were 21 because one of them came without contacting us (snowball method) and the other had celebrated his birthday between contacting us and the FG.

Eleven parents, including 10 mothers, were gathered in two other groups (mean age 44.3 [41–49], 13.0 for their children [7–18]) (Table 2). Finally, one group included teachers of mandatory school (pupils aged 10–15 years) and two groups comprised teachers of post-mandatory professional schools (students aged 16 or above) (Table 3). For general comprehension in the following text, if not otherwise specified, when we use the term adults we refer to teachers and parents together.

For the recruitment we posted online ads on a job recruitment website for youths (for 15–22 years old), and paper ads on boards in a university hospital and university campus. We also used a snowball method by asking youths who contacted

**Table 1** FGs participants' characteristics (AYAs)

Focus group	Gender	Age	Focus group	Gender	Age
FG1 ( $N=3$ )	F	19	FG4 ( $N=6$ )	F	20
	F	19		F	20
	F	19		F	16
		F		20	
		F		21	
		F		20	
FG2 ( $N=5$ )	M	16	FG5 ( $N=7$ )	M	17
	M	18		M	18
	M	20		M	20
	M	19		M	18
	M	20		M	17
		M		17	
		M		21	
FG3 ( $N=6$ )			FG6 ( $N=5$ )		
	F	16		M	16
	F	16		M	19
	F	18		M	18
	F	16		M	16
	F	18		M	17
		F	16		

**Table 2** FGs participants' characteristics (parents)

Focus group	Gender	Age	Child(ren) age
FG1 ( $N=6$ )	F	41	7; 11
	F	43	10; 13; 16
	F	41	7; 11
	F	44	9; 13; 15
	F	44	13; 16
	F	49	14; 16
FG2 ( $N=5$ )	F	46	12; 12
	F	42	12
	F	47	13; 18
	F	47	12; 18
	M	43	14; 16

us if they knew anyone (friends, siblings, parents, etc.) who might be interested in participating. For teachers, we asked some of our contacts to ask their colleagues if they would be interested in discussing this topic. Participants were recruited regardless of their own experience related to sexting and until reaching data saturation.

Approval for the research protocol was obtained from the Cantonal (Vaud) Ethics Committee. A safety net was intended for problematic cases that might come to the knowledge of the authors. Young people with personal difficulties could be referred to support institutions (ciao.ch, Pro Juventute) or to support and care units (Interdisciplinary Division of

**Table 3** FGs participants' characteristics (teachers)

Focus group	Gender	Age	Grade
FG1 (N=7)	F	44	7–11 (mandatory)
	M	35	7–11 (mandatory)
	M	42	7–11 (mandatory)
	F	44	7–11 (mandatory)
	F	28	7–11 (mandatory)
	F	28	7–11 (mandatory)
	F	42	7–11 (mandatory)
FG2 (N=5)	F	39	Post-mandatory
	F	53	Post-mandatory
	M	57	Post-mandatory
	M	52	Post-mandatory
	M	52	Post-mandatory
FG3 (N=6)	F	55	Post-mandatory
	M	61	Post-mandatory
	F	30	Post-mandatory
	F	36	Post-mandatory
	M	52	Post-mandatory
	F	41	Post-mandatory

Adolescent Health, Violence Medicine Unit). This information was included in the information letter.

### Data Analysis

FG transcripts were transferred to the qualitative analysis software MAXQDA (version 12.2.1). An inductive approach was used to perform a thematic content analysis which enabled to extract the different themes and dimensions brought up by the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2014; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This method aims to focus on subjective interpretations and meanings of a social phenomenon by using a classification and categorization process. First, the first author read the transcripts several times to obtain a general overview of the collected data. Second, she created codes by labeling sections and defined quotes based on predominant and significant patterns. Third, she combined and merged similar codes to form overarching thematic categories relevant to the research questions. The first author generated and defined the codes with definitions when they could be interpreted in different ways, analyzed the data and formed the broader themes. Based on coding definitions, the last author reviewed the first analysis, highlighted discrepancies and identified additional themes. To ensure accuracy and consistency in the application of codes, the two authors discussed divergences until reaching consensus. We also conducted an analysis per group (youths versus adults; females versus males for youths) in the same way to explore possible differences or similarities between them. The first

author translated the quotes used in this text from French to English, and translations were verified by the last author.

### Results

No gender differences were found regarding the definition of sexting. For the comparison between adults and youths, we only specified when differences were found. Therefore, if no difference was found between these groups, results are presented as a whole because interpretations did not differ and only one quotation of a youth or an adult was used to illustrate this common opinion.

Results are structured in five parts helping to define sexting and identify several elements used by participants as components of the activity. First, as the term sexting is also regularly used in French in some prevention campaigns (e.g., Pro Juventute in Switzerland [Pro Juventute, 2013]), participants were asked about their knowledge of this term. Second, participants defined sexting in terms of mediums to perform it. Third, characteristics of the message content were discussed. Fourth, people with whom sexting takes place were also part of the definition of this activity. Fifth, discussions focused on the actions that compose the activity.

### Knowledge of the Term Sexting

When participants answered that they did not know the term sexting, most of them, however, said that they understood what the discussion would be about because they knew the activity, but the specific term of sexting was not always known. "I have to confess. To be sure, I quickly looked on the Internet to have a definition and in fact, I already knew the issue but I did not know the exact term." (Teacher)

If the term was unfamiliar to them before participating, some participants directly deduced the behavior from the term. "I have never heard the word but when I saw it [the ad] on the website, I immediately understood what this discussion will be about [...]." (Male, 18)

Moreover, in a group of youths, some participants reported that they never used the specific term of sexting to talk about the activity. Indeed, they directly discussed the action per se. "I tend to use a definition rather than a term, with an example. [...] I would say: 'It is the fact of sending messages with a nude photo of yourself.'" (Female, 19)

Few participants used a kind of French equivalent with the term *sexto* to define sexting. "It [sexting] is the sending of sexual pictures or something like that, [also] sextos" (Female, 18). Others used another English term *nudes* to define sexting. "Nudes. (Male, 18); What is 'nudes'? (Interviewer); It is in English, nudes [...]. These are sexy pictures." (Male, 18)



## Mediums for Sexting

Three mediums were regularly reported to perform sexting: text-only messages, photographs and videos. “For me, [...] it ranges mainly [...] from photos to videos I think. And there are also text messages” (Female, 16). Compared to the adult groups, one AYA group also thought of another way to do sexting with audio messages. “Audio? WhatsApp? I am suggesting!” (Male, 16) “Yeah, that is right too!” (Male, 19).

While some youths discussed the possible old-fashioned or infrequent nature of text-only messages compared to photos and videos, their inclusion in the definition of sexting was never questioned in their groups. “Actually, they [a couple of friends] only did it with text messages. And she told me that what was cool with him was precisely the fact that he wrote gentle messages. He was like a poet and that turned her on [...]. Maybe it [text-only message] is less frequent but it exists” (Male, 17). However, without contesting the use of texting as a support for sexting and its place in the definition, a different term was once used to talk about text-only messages when they are used without any visual support. “It (sexting) makes me mostly think of people, for example, who send photos of themselves on Snapchat [...]. Because flirting, trying to seduce or just saying: ‘Would you do this or that...?’, makes me not think of sexting. For me this is sexto and not sexting” (Female, 16). On the contrary, among adults, text-only messages were sometimes the subject of deeper discussions on their inclusion in the activity of sexting. Indeed, adults had more difficulties considering that text-only messages could be a way to do sexting. “I did not think of text messages at all [...]. I directly imagined [...] WhatsApp with photos and comments but always with a visual support” (Teacher).

Even when the inclusion of text-only messages in the definition of sexting was not questioned, this support stayed in the background in all FGs. Indeed, when participants gave an example or remembered a real case, only photographs and videos were used to illustrate their words. “But when there was this story all over the canton [state] with two youths in secondary school who filmed themselves during intercourse, my step-son received the video [...]. He was not in the same school but the video went around so much... [...].” (Teacher). This secondary place of text-only messages was even more concretely observed in one group of AYAs in which sexting was reported as a stepwise process: “I think that it begins with flirting by SMS and the extreme limit is precisely these stories of videos or even Webcams [...].” (Female, 20).

Discussions on different ways to perform sexting also focused on Smartphone applications, and Snapchat was the most often cited, especially in the AYAs groups. For some of them, this application contributed to the activity of sexting because, originally, message content was visible to the addressee for a few seconds only and then it disappeared.

Thus, this idea of a safe application was often reported in the AYAs groups. “But strangely, [...] I would trust more Snapchat than Facebook just because the photo is removed after 10 s maximum” (Male 17). In contrast, the security offered by such an application was more questioned by adults. “He [a boy whose content was disseminated] did not think because he sent it on Snapchat. [...]. Snapchat is sold as an application for sending temporary images that are not kept in memory and are not recordable by the other person. [...] But there are 10,000 applications that allow to workaround.” (Parent). Finally, although some adults seemed to be aware of the different applications that could be used for sexting, most of them confessed being completely lost and worried about not following technological evolution. “[...] My daughter began to use a mobile phone last year [...]. Therefore, I began to be interested in WhatsApp and Facebook. Fortunately, I knew these ones. But now, it goes so fast. She comes back and says: ‘Snapchat!’ Well, ok, what is this? Wikipedia, quick!” (Parent).

## Characteristics of Message Content

In every FG, sexual characteristics were used to describe the message content in a sexting context. More specifically, in addition to the term *sexual*, two kinds of terms were used. First, mainly in the groups of AYAs, suggestive terms such as sexy, erotic, flirtatious, intimate, seductive and naughty were part of their definition. With these terms, participants associated the content of sexting with more subtle and larger terms. “[...] I would say intimate rather than sexual, [...] it can be something not necessarily sexual but still part of the intimacy, [...] something pleasant. [...] I think sexting falls into this wider category” (Male, 20). On the contrary, some of these terms led to deeper discussions among adults such as the terms sexy or erotic. Indeed, some of them considered that these terms were not so adapted to the activity of sexting among youths. “For me, sexy is for seduction, we do not cross the limit, [...] there is a lot of suggestion in a sexy message. Unfortunately, with sexting, it could be suggestive but, in my opinion, it goes quickly much further [...].” (Parent).

Second, mainly among adults, more explicit terms such as risqué content, sexual intercourse, pornography and provocation were also used to describe a message and define sexting. “Honestly, I do not have a clear definition of what it [sexting] is. I clearly see that it is sending pornographic pictures but I do not know anything else” (Parent). On the other hand, in the groups of youths, the word pornography was very rarely present when they defined sexting compared to other terms. Some doubts were even reported on the inclusion of pornographic content in the definition of sexting. “It was one year ago, I was shown a video of [...] a young couple aged 14 who recorded themselves during an intercourse in the schoolyard [...]. And it lasted maybe 15 min and I was

like: ‘But I do not want to see that!’. It was totally pornographic. But I do not know if it could be included in the field of sexting, I have the impression that it is really another field” (Female, 20). Furthermore, some adults associated sexting with a larger concept including sexual insults whereas this idea was never reported by AYAs. “I considered it [sexting] very largely, things like language. When children talk to each other: insults, jokes or things with sexual words [...]. And then, it goes through social media, mobile phones” (Parent).

Another characteristic of the messages’ content was that total nudity, or even partial nudity, was not requested to consider a message as being part of sexting. A suggestive position, an attitude, and the context of the message were considered as more decisive to qualify a message as sexting. “There is no need to be half-naked, there is also the way to take the photo or to send messages” (Female, 19). However, for some youths, even if nudity was not a condition, some specific body parts had to appear to consider the message entering in the category of sexting and these body parts depended on the gender of the sender. “A guy who sends a photo of him shirtless, this is not sexting, but a girl who sends a photo of her shirtless, this is sexting” (Male 16).

Finally, the content had to be personalized and individualized. To highlight the importance of these characteristics, a group of AYAs considered that the photograph or the video had to be taken in self-portrait (selfie). “It is not even him who takes the photo! [In reference to a poster of a prevention campaign] (Male 18); So, has it to be taken in a selfie mode to be considered as sexting? (Interviewer); It has to be personal, yes! It has to be from us” (Male 17). Some parents also reported these characteristics to differentiate sexting from other types of sending such as sexual pictures of unknown persons. “Sexting is personalized, it is not just a transmission of sexual images. [...] It means that it is the sender who presents his/her own image and who sends to his/her addressee something that is personalized” (Parent). Thus, in this definition, a photograph or a video taken without the person knowing about it was not included in the definition of sexting. However, some adults considered that this scenario was also part of the definition of sexting. “For me, [...] one day, a student will come to my office and will say: ‘I was photographed or filmed under the shower after the sports course and they send it to the whole class!’” (Teacher).

### Sexting Participants

Based on the main definition from the perspective of the participants, sexting was reported to be performed between peers or, at least, between people who knew each other. “Sexting is better with someone that we already know than with a stranger because with a stranger, it means nothing. Ok, we got a little excited but when we meet, it is not the same thing at all.” (Male, 17). Indeed, sexting between perfect strangers

was rarely considered as an option, and if so, it implied a different goal than seducing or flirting. “Sending to strangers is more for self-talk than seducing the other person I think” (Male, 17). For some participants, sexting with strangers was considered as risky because of the danger of false identity. “I think that there is another inconvenience. When you do sexting with someone that you know, you are sure to have a human being behind the screen who will receive your photo. If it is with a stranger, for example on Facebook, it might not be really the girl, it might be another guy who wants [...] to receive a photo of you and take the piss out of you” (Male 18). When they discussed sexting with strangers, youths also gave examples with celebrities who received messages from fans who are total strangers to them confirming that youths mainly do sexting with peers. “For example, there are some artists. I saw interviews: ‘I received Snaps [messages from Snapchat] of girls I do not know.’. They say that they do not feel comfortable because they are strangers and it is weird” (Male 19).

In the same line, for some youths, posting a photograph on a social media targeting a wider audience, including strangers, is not included in the definition of sexting but rather the definition of exhibitionism. “It is from a person to another but in this case, it is like showing myself to the entire world without knowing who is going to see it. So, I do not know if we can include this in sexting” (Female 20).

### Actions of Sexting

Participants discussed the different actions to be included in the definition of sexting. Indeed, the vignettes that we gave at the beginning of the sessions presented two cases (young male and female) of an intimate photograph that was sent out without consent to a third party. Two interpretations were given to define sexting in terms of actions.

First, sexting under pressure, sharing with others without consent, blackmail and harassment were actions considered as being fully part of the definition of sexting. For these participants, sexting could not be considered as a possible initial positive and harmless activity but as a deviant and violent behavior per se. It was regularly presented in adult groups. “Just before, we were talking about sexual harassment, it is a violent term. And precisely, I have the impression that the word Sexting is a word that made harassment common place” (Teacher). Among youths, this interpretation was marginal.

Second, sexting was defined as two consenting persons sharing with only two possible actions, sending and receiving. “For me, it is the step before. [...] The rest for me is no longer sexting, it’s a problem that is related to sexting, which is the fact that the image escapes” (Parent). Therefore, the actions mentioned above were not part of the definition and these different behaviors had to be named differently. Indeed, for these participants, sexting that goes wrong or

that occurs under pressure was not considered as sexting anymore. “When it deviates, it becomes harassment does it not? It does not deviate at the beginning but it could deviate. Sexting is the fact of sending messages and then there are the consequences.” (Female 18). In this definition, sexting was not deviant or violent per se, it was considered as a risky behavior that could be diverted to harm someone, but harming someone was not the first aim of sexting. This second interpretation was mostly present in the group of youths. “It is a voluntary action. It is for pleasure that we do this, it is really not for anything else. In the definition of sexting it is really for pleasure and to turn someone on, it is something voluntary, positive.” (Male 18).

Some adults, for whom this second interpretation was a minority, even questioned their own definition of sexting after listening to other participants. Indeed, some of them realized that sexting could also be a private activity (for example within a couple) and that the problem would be at another level. “[...] Sexting that goes wrong...So originally, would sexting only be sending photos? [...] It is a simple sending of photos that could go wrong? But originally, it would only be, quote unquote, “an innocent sending”, a sending in trust...?” (Parent).

## Discussion

This exploratory qualitative study presents several key elements to pave the way for a better understanding and definition of sexting.

First, the knowledge and the use of the term sexting was approximate for several participants, even when the French equivalent *sexto* was also considered. This contraction of *sex* and *texting* was first used in an Australian newspaper article published in 2005 (Roberts, 2005 as cited in Walker et al., 2013). This English term is also regularly used in French in some prevention campaigns (for example, in Switzerland [Pro Juventute, 2013], in Belgium [Child Focus, 2015] and in France [e-Enfance, 2017]). However, while some of our participants had already heard or read the term sexting or *sexto*, others confessed not knowing the term at all or not using it even though the issue was well known and even already experienced. This finding on the term sexting is in line with previous studies (Albury & Crawford, 2012; Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone, & Harvey, 2012; Walker et al., 2013) and should be considered by prevention policies. Indeed, the term sexting may be an overly specific term that is only used by adults in a scientific or journalistic context. The activity should rather be presented and discussed in a much more direct way in terms of action and content without going through a shorter term that could group several dimensions at once. This way,

prevention messages would be straightforward and young people would understand where exactly the focus is on.

Second, sexting seems to have several possible mediums such as text, audio and illustrations. However, we found a difference between adults and youths regarding the inclusion of text-only messages in the definition of sexting. Indeed, adults rarely thought or had more difficulty to consider text-only messages as a possible support to perform this activity. However, this diversification of mediums is important in terms of potential consequences. Indeed, in a case of dissemination to other people, photographs and videos could have more negative consequences (Houck et al., 2014). A clear knowledge and separation of the different mediums used to send a message could provide an accurate rate of the activity of sexting and determine precisely the part of text-only messages, photographs and videos sent in such a context.

Third, for the characteristics of message content, youths were more likely to use suggestive terms in their definition including a totally dressed person as a possible content for sexting. Indeed, a suggestive content, including the pose or the attitude of the person, was considered as more important than the nudity. On the other hand, adults were more likely to talk about explicit content or pornography to define sexting. In the same line, a French website that offered a French equivalent to a foreign term defined sexting as text pornography (Ministère de la Culture, 2013). This representation of rude content does not reflect the perspective of youths and their overall use. Another important issue in terms of characteristics of message content was the importance of the personalization and individualization of a message in the case of sexting. Thus, taking a photograph or a video without someone’s knowledge would not be part of sexting, but some adults considered that sexting also included that kind of behavior.

Fourth, for most youths and adults, in terms of participants, sexting was mainly defined as a peer activity or, at least, as an activity between two persons who knew each other. This point is also important for prevention policies to adopt an overall strategy and reach all the young people likely to be involved in a sexting activity. There is a need to lead general prevention and avoid focusing only on the potential victims to dissuade them from consensual sexting. Therefore, as sexting mostly occurred in a peer context, it is necessary and possible to include all young people in educative and preventive strategies whether for their own practice, as potential victims and perpetrators, or as witnesses and peers to encourage them not to transform the activity into a problem.

Fifth, another difference was found between youths and adults in terms of actions that composed sexting. Indeed, the vast majority of young people defined sexting as an activity that could be positive and respectful between two consenting persons. Other behaviors such as coerced sexting or using sexting as a way to blackmail and harass someone were

systematically discussed but not as part of the definition and the basic activity of sexting. Based on the vignettes used as icebreakers that presented a problematic situation (unwanted dissemination to others), this finding is even more interesting and revealing of their interpretation and understanding of sexting. Indeed, from negative vignettes, most young people clearly distinguished the practice of sexting per se and its possible positive sides from the potential problems.

This difference between youths and adults on the definition of sexting in terms of actions highlight the necessity of using the interpretations and terminology of young people in preventive and educative policies. Orientating prevention to avoid the sharing of personal sexually related material between two consenting persons would be ineffective and would prevent from focusing on the real problems (pressure to send, harassment, blackmailing, dissemination). Therefore, to improve prevention, understand the problems and determine accurate prevalence rates, actions have to be differentiated in terms of sending, receiving, requesting and disseminating to others. In the same line, some studies distinguished primary sexting from secondary sexting (Lievens, 2014), experimental sexting from aggravated sexting (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011), consensual sexting from sextbullying (Eraker, 2010), and risk from harm (Livingstone & Görzig, 2014). Indeed, two types of discourse are currently used in the literature and in prevention to define and discuss sexting: the deviance one in which sexting is defined as a deviant behavior associated with other risk behaviors and the normalcy one in which sexting is considered as a normal and intimate way to communicate (Chalfen, 2010; Döring, 2014; Levine, 2013; Lim, 2013).

Some limitations need to be discussed. Firstly, our findings and our recommendations are based on self-reported narratives on an intimate topic. We could face a risk of social desirability or self-censoring, but we reduced it by clearly indicating in our ads that we were not looking for testimonies of their own behaviors and by presenting two vignettes at the beginning of the discussion to reassure them on our aim to gather general opinions only. Secondly, the snowball process, one of our recruitment methods, could have the bias of gathering participants who share the same characteristics and opinions. Thirdly, using negative vignettes as icebreakers could have been a limitation and biased the discussion in only one negative direction; nonetheless, it was not the case in this study.

Despite these limitations, this study highlights the different components (terms, mediums, characteristics, participants and actions) that have to be considered in the establishment of a clear definition of sexting. Indeed, including the youth's perspective in this study highlighted the need for a precise definition of sexting that would take into account a specific vocabulary and interpretation as the conception of most youths seems to be very subtle and quite different from

the one of most reference adults. Such a definition could also enable an accurate measurement of the phenomenon and determine when harm could appear.

We also recommend that prevention and educative policies aim to reduce the risks by combating the problems of lack of consent, pressure, blackmailing, harassment and dissemination rather than prohibiting sexting per se, mostly defined, in this study, as a positive, consensual and normative activity between two persons who know each other. In the same line, sexting should be apprehended as a sexual behavior with possible risks but not as a harmful activity per se. A clear definition of sexting and its possible abuses could also lead to a better understanding for reference adults such as parents and educators.

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## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

**Ethical Approval** All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

**Informed Consent** Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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## Annexe 5 : Article #3 (soumis)

**Barrense-Dias Y, Akre C, Suris JC, Berchtold A.** Opinions of adolescents on prevention and education related to sexting: A Q-methodology study. *Journal of Adolescence*.



**Opinions of adolescents on prevention related to sexting:**

**A Q-methodology study**

**Yara Barrense-Dias<sup>a</sup>, Christina Akre<sup>a</sup>, Joan-Carles Suris<sup>a</sup>, André Berchtold<sup>b</sup>**

**Affiliations:** <sup>a</sup> Research Group on Adolescent Health (GRSA), Center for Primary Care and Public Health (Unisante) – University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland; and <sup>b</sup> Institute of Social Sciences & NCCR LIVES, University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland.

**Address correspondence to:** Yara Barrense-Dias, Research Group on Adolescent Health (GRSA), Center for Primary Care and Public Health (Unisante) – University of Lausanne, Route de la Corniche 10, 1010 Lausanne, Switzerland, Yara.Barrense-Dias@unisante.ch, +41 21 314 69 46

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**Conflict of interest:** none to declare.

## **Abstract**

**Introduction** Sexting has attracted the interest of researchers, media and public opinion but its definition still does not reach consensus. This gap may lead to diverging prevention messages. This study investigated the opinions of youths on a set of sexting-related preventive measures. **Methods** In 2018, 48 youths (27 females) with a mean age of 16.2 participated in the study. To assess opinions of youths on sexting-related prevention, we conducted a Q-methodology study, a mixed methods research, in Lausanne (Switzerland). The final Q-set was constituted of 58 statements reflecting a wide range of key-messages, key-actors and materials. Each participant was asked to rank-order the 58 cards using a grid ranging from -5 (most disagree) to +5 (most agree).

**Results** Five different profiles of considering sexting-related prevention were found: Focus on consequences, Sex education and testimonies, Focus on guidelines, Focus on training/information and Peer prevention. The typical scenario used in many prevention campaigns illustrating a girl who is victim of a nonconsensual sharing perpetrated by a boy was not appreciated. The topic of the Internet was not considered as an appropriate gateway to discuss sexting. Pressure and bullying issues as topics to discuss in a sexting-related prevention were the most consensual statements. **Conclusions** This study highlighted the need to offer a multidisciplinary, multi-resource and multi-concept approach in sexting-related prevention. Broader values such as respect and consent must be integrated. Consensual sexting must be clearly differentiated from nonconsensual dissemination. Policy implications and future directions, including prevention strategies, are discussed.

**Keywords** Sexting; Prevention; Education; Q-Methodology; Adolescents

## Introduction

Recently youths' online sexual behaviors have attracted the interest of researchers, mass media and public opinion. Sexting is one of these behaviors but its definition and measure still does not reach consensus (Barrense-Dias, Berchtold, Surís, & Akre, 2017a; Van Ouytsel, Walrave, & Ponnet, 2018). In Switzerland, the last survey (Suter et al., 2018) on media use among youths (12-19 year-olds) revealed that 12% had already sent erotic or flirtatious images of themselves and 40% had already received this kind of content. A national survey conducted in 2017 (Barrense-Dias et al., 2018a) among young adults found that more than 50% of participants had already sent sexy images of themselves, 62% received such images and 15% shared a received-content with a third party. This practice seems to be quite frequent among youths and increase with age.

In terms of law, Switzerland is currently facing a debate with sexting that goes wrong when, for example, a content is disseminated without consent, especially when youths under the age of 16 are involved. For such a case, child pornography legislation could be used: *Any person who offers, shows, passes on or makes accessible to a person under the age of 16 pornographic documents [...] is liable to a custodial sentence [...]*. (Swiss criminal code). However, controversies surround this use as law ignores consensual sexting and because the victim of nonconsensual distribution could be treated and prosecuted as a child pornography producer. Another difficulty with the use of this legislation is how to define pornography in a sexting context. If genital parts are visible, it is quite simple but if they are not, a case-by-case analysis must be conducted. If the content is not considered as pornographic, the procedure is abandoned unless other charges are possible such as blackmail or threats. Civil law can also be used with legislation on the protection of personality. The legislation on child pornography is also

used in other countries but has been regularly disapproved (Crofts & Lee, 2013; Holoyda, Landess, Sorrentino, & Friedman, 2018; Levick & Moon, 2010; Salter, Crofts, & Lee, 2013).

Despite the fact that the number of scientific publications and prevention campaigns have significantly increased since the first study on sexting among youths (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008), there are still controversies about defining it as a normal sexual activity or as an abusive behavior (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017a; Döring, 2014; Klettke, Hallford, & Mellor, 2014; Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011; Wolfe, Marcum, Higgins, & Ricketts, 2016). This gray area does not help to clarify the legal situation.

This lack of a clear definition may lead to assimilation of consensual and nonconsensual sexting (Krieger, 2017) and diverging awareness messages. In this line, some authors (Albury & Crawford, 2012; Powell & Henry, 2014; Van Ouytsel, Walrave, & Van Gool, 2014) criticized several campaigns that primarily focused on risk management of potential victims, especially girls, rather than addressing perpetrators of problems linked to sexting such as non-consensual distribution to others. Furthermore, abstinence messages were sometimes used to stop consensual sexting while a recent trend called for safe sexting and condemned nonconsensual dissemination (Döring, 2014). In Switzerland, the main prevention campaign focusing on sexting was released in 2013 (Pro Juventute, 2013) and consisted of a poster illustrating a boy and a girl who had their intimate photo disseminated and wore a scarf of *Mister the whole school knows me naked* and *Miss my ex shared my photo*. The slogan was: *Sexting can make you famous, even if you do not want to*. This campaign was therefore aimed directly to communicate a message of abstinence to potential victims and first senders. Since then, the subject of

sexting has been approached in other interventions but in broader themes such as Internet use.

While educational and preventive projects linked to sexting multiplied, we still have relatively little perspective on their efficiency among youths. A study (Jørgensen, Weckesser, Turner, & Wade, 2018) explored recommendations from youths to improve education in school and determine how stakeholders should address sexting. The paper emphasized the importance to use youths' voice for the development of effective interventions.

Therefore, this exploratory study aimed to gather the opinions of youths on prevention linked to sexting. The proposed preventive measures explored elements such as key-actors, key-messages, targets and material to obtain a large overview of what youths expect about sexting issues.

## **Methods**

To assess youths' opinions on prevention related to sexting, we conducted a Q-methodology study (Brown, 1993, 1996; Stephenson, 1935; Watts & Stenner, 2005). This mixed method allows to bring out shared factors, profiles or "patterns of views" (Scott, Baker, Shucksmith, & Kaner, 2014) from the subjectivity of each participant and the great variability of opinions on a topic. In other words, the Q-methodology is "[...] particularly suitable for researching the range and diversity of subjective understandings, beliefs and experiences[...]. At the same time, it facilitates the identification of similarities, the construction of broad categories or dimensions of the phenomenon being investigated and the exploration of patterns and relationships within and between these dimensions."(p.104) (Shinebourne & Adams, 2007). Given the different forms that prevention can take this method seemed particularly appropriate for our purpose. This

method has already been used successfully among adolescents and young adults (Hislop, Mason, Parr, Vale, & Colver, 2016; Jedeloo, van Staa, Latour, & van Exel, 2010; Scott et al., 2014; Tielen, van Staa, Jedeloo, van Exel, & Weimar, 2008). Even if some controversies surround the definition of Q-methodology as a mixed-method, it has been clearly shown that it fulfills the conditions of a mixed-method (Ramlo & Newman, 2011). Indeed, Q-methodology “[...] shares with qualitative methodologies the aim of exploring subjectivity; however, statistical techniques are used to reveal the structure of views”(p.38) (Bashatah, 2016). Ethic clearance was given by the cantonal ethics committee.

### ***Participants***

Between February and April 2018, 48 youths (27 females, mean age 16.2 years) participated in the study (Table 1). The Q-methodology does not require a representative sample as the focus is on response profiles and not individual persons (Brown, 1980). Moreover, a relatively small sample is tolerated with a number between 40 and 60 participants considered as sufficient (Watts & Stenner, 2005), even if it is also possible to use smaller groups (Shinebourne, 2009). However, this method requires a sample that is representative of diverse viewpoints. Therefore, to ensure a larger representation of youths, we used an ad to recruit participants from all over the canton. The ad was posted on a job recruitment website for youths (15-25 year-olds) presenting our research as a scientific study that aimed to collect opinions on prevention linked to sexting. When youths contacted us, we used the snowball method to recruit further participants, especially for those under the age of 15. Forty-one came to our office by their own means. As we had difficulties to recruit boys, 7 additional participants were drawn from a public school through their teacher and the activity was organized in their school after classes.

Participants were recruited independently of their sexting activities. Participation was voluntary, even in the school setting. For children under the age of 14 (based on the Swiss Federal Act on Research involving Human Beings) and those taking part in this study in the school perimeter (with the agreement of the General Directorate of Compulsory Education), parents received an information letter and signed a consent form for their child participation. In Switzerland, if a research project entails minimal risks only, legal minors aged 14 years or more give informed written consent alone. All youths received an information letter and signed a consent form to participate before the session. Important elements such as research objectives and confidentiality issues were also repeated orally. They all received a gift card worth ~30US\$.

### *Q-set*

The first step of this method is to create a set of statements (between 40 and 80 (Shinebourne, 2009; Watts & Stenner, 2005)) on the studied topic that represent opinions and not facts. These statements can be derived from different sources such as qualitative research, literature or personal ideas (Wood, Griffiths, Derevensky, & Gupta, 2002). In our case we first combined results of previous focus groups with youths, teachers and parents (Barrense-Dias, Suris, & Akre, 2017b; Barrense-Dias, Suris, & Akre, 2019), and results of a non-exhaustive inventory of 51 preventive and educational projects linked to sexting (Barrense-Dias, De Puy, Romain-Glassey, & Suris, 2018b). Then, the authors completed the statements by making other proposals. After discussion between the authors until reaching consensus, 58 statements were part of the final Q-set (Table 3), reflecting a wide range of key-messages, key-actors and prevention materials. Each statement was printed on a paper card.

### *Q-sort*

The Q-sort phase is the statements' ranking procedure (Watts & Stenner, 2005). After providing general information, participants were first asked to read the cards and divide them into three categories (Hislop et al., 2016; Jedeloo et al., 2010; Tielen et al., 2008): agree, neutral and disagree. They could ask questions if something was unclear. This first step allowed them to become familiar with the statements. Participants were then asked to rank-order the 58 cards using a grid ranging from -5 (most disagree) to +5 (most agree) with the zero defined as neutral (I do not know) and following a forced quasi-normal distribution (Figure 1). Finally, once participants were satisfied with their ranking, they were asked using paper and pencil to explain the place of the four extreme cards ranked -5 and +5 (Jedeloo et al., 2010), suggest additional statements and/or indicate if a statement was unclear or problematic (Shinebourne, 2009). In addition to their sort, only gender and age were collected. The first author, who was present and available for questions, saved the ranking provided by each participant by taking a picture of the grid. The oral questions some participants asked were exclusively on the final purpose of the study and the ranking procedure. The ranking phase took 45-60 minutes.

### ***Statistical analysis***

The analysis aimed to identify groups of respondents whose grids represented shared viewpoints that were distinct from others. The Q-method used Q-type or by-person factor analysis that focused on individuals rather than statements (Stephenson, 1935; Watts & Stenner, 2005). Using the Ken-Q Analysis web application (<https://shawnbanasick.github.io/ken-q-analysis>), we performed a factor analysis designed to maximize the interpretability of the resulting profiles.

First, meaningful factors were extracted from the initial correlation matrix between Q-sorts using a centroid factor extraction. Second, extracted factors were rotated using



varimax technique to simplify the structure of data and improve the interpretability. Third, an automatic flagging process was performed to identify the most representative Q-sorts associated with each factor (Table 1). Fourth, factors to be interpreted were selected with two criteria (Watts & Stenner, 2005). The first criterion was based on the eigenvalue which must be  $>1.00$ . The second one required that two Q-sorts, at least, were selected in the flagging process to be considered as 'factor exemplars' representing the characteristic configuration of the factor or profile. Finally, Z-scores were calculated to determine the rank of each statement for each factor and a factor comparison was performed to identify consensual and distinguishing statements between pairs of factors. In addition to the factor analysis, we established the trends that all factors or profiles presented. We fixed the significance level at 0.05.

As participants also explained their choice in free-text fields, we performed a qualitative analysis and associated results to the statement in question. This qualitative part used the explanatory sequential design of mixed methods: the integration of qualitative data served to explain and interpret the ranking results (Figure 2). Written comments were translated by the first author from French into English.

## **Results**

The factor analysis resulted in five profiles of opinions. These five profiles accounted for 55% of the total information contained in the Q-sorts: 42% were explained by the first factor, 4% by the second one and 3% for each of the other factors. Main characteristics of the flagged Q-sorts associated to each factor or, in other words, the Q-sorts that mainly defined each factor, appear in Table 2. We also include the main characteristics of all participants to see on which factor their opinions are best represented.

### **Profile A: Focus on consequences**

Youths on the first factor wanted to be informed on the legal consequences related to sexting activities (S25, +5). Regarding this statement, explanations written by participants mostly focused on legal consequences of a nonconsensual dissemination compared to consensual sexting: *“Talking about legal consequences could remind people who use blackmail or other means of pressure on their victims that the dissemination of these images without the consent of the person is completely illegal, and thus discourage them from their acts.”*(Male, 17). In addition to legal consequences, these participants recommended discussion on psychological consequences (S43) and, again, they mostly referred to the nonconsensual dissemination: *“Talking about mental and social consequences is, I think, a quite effective way to make youths understand that sexting is not a funny subject in the case of a person who is seriously affected by the dissemination of photos.”*(Male, 17). This distinction between consensual sexting and potential problems linked to the activity such as nonconsensual distribution to others was also reflected in the statements that differentiated these two dimensions. Indeed, compared to consensual sexting (S3, +1), the prevention of the nonconsensual dissemination got more agreement (S4, +3). Similarly, the prohibition of sexting between two consenting persons had a low rank (S28, -3). This distinction between the practice and its possible negative consequences could also be seen in S44 (+4), which postulated that prevention must include harassment and blackmail issues.

Using testimonies of victims was also considered as appropriate (S26, +4): *“The use of testimonies is very useful. The public will be able to see the consequences of sexting.”*(Male, 15). These participants reported parental control on mobile phones as an inappropriate solution (S2, -5). Moreover, they did not give much space to parents.

Indeed, both statements on parents(training (S10, -2) and discussion (S21, -3)) had low

scores and, compared to other profiles, parents had the lowest rank and privacy was highlighted in their explanations: *“Young people have the right to have their 'private life' without the parents blaming everything. It is the freedom to do what you want. And the more parents want to know what we do, the more we will hide.”*(Female, 15).

Similarly, anonymity issues were also highlighted with the statement on a special phone line to get prevention advices and help (S27, +4): *“[...] People who are victims of photos that are disseminated without their consent will [...] have a hard time talking to someone because the situation could be very embarrassing. This is why a help phone line and website can be very good for a victim feeling alone in sexting. Talking to a neutral person who is not known (and who will not be able to judge us) or finding a solution or help [...] can be easier.”*(Female, 18). In this line of neutrality, teachers were also placed in a lower rank than other profiles (S18, -2), while, in line with the statement on legal consequences, the police was relatively high (S17, +2): *“What always helps me realize is when the police come to school to warn us of something and give us a real example that shocks us and I think it is the best prevention.”*(Male, 14).

However, sexual educators were also positively considered as potential actors for sexting prevention (S1, +3). As they considered that prevention should not be gender-specific (S5, -4) and that boys and girls should not be separated to discuss sexting issues (S29, -4), they also had the opinion that awareness messages should not only use the example of a girl as the victim and a boy as the perpetrator of a nonconsensual dissemination (S47, -5).

### **Profile B: Sex education and testimonies**

Youths on factor B followed the trend of factor A with the legal consequences statement (S25, +5) and testimonies of victims (S26, +5) but demonstrated some differences in

terms of key-actors and gender-specific prevention. If the police (S17) was quite well ranked in profile A, it was ranked -2 in profile B. Indeed, these participants considered sex education classes as a more appropriate moment to address sexting (S1, +4): *“Sex education classes are something that pupils often expect the most. Moreover, sex educators are more qualified to talk about sexting.”*(Male, 16). Even if these participants requested discussions on legal aspects, they also included larger topics such as pressure (S46, +4) and consent issues(S37, +4). They also held the opinion that interventions should mainly focus on nonconsensual dissemination (S4, +3), including the active witnesses who could continue the dissemination (S20, +3), rather than focusing on consensual sexting(S28, -4);(S3, 0): *“I think it is important to note that sexting can be “used” while respecting the individual. Indeed, an individual can be in relation with another and indulge in this kind of practice. You have to trust your partner and eventually discuss with her/him and specify that you want it to stay between you. Sexting can be enjoyed by both [partners] and go very well, without any harassment or defamation.”* (Female, 18). Compared to other profiles, gender differences were positively ranked. Indeed, the statement on gender-specific prevention (S5, +2) and separated discussions by gender (S29, +3) presented the highest ranks among the five profiles: *“If girls have the opportunity to discuss it together without male presence, it will certainly be good for them. As for boys, there is a lot of work to do on the subject of consent and respect for others.”*(Female, 17). Even though this group evaluated the fact of illustrating prevention with girls as victims and boys as perpetrators of dissemination less negatively than other participants, it remained negatively ranked (S47, -1).

These participants called for youth involvement in prevention development (S8, +3): *“People who are most affected are youths, so they know the problem best. Their*

*participation in prevention that is probably more targeted towards them would allow other youths to better understand and take prevention more seriously. Because youths tend not to listen to older people.”(Female, 18). Finally, they did not agree with the statement that postulated that prevention related to sexting should be done in specific groups such as scouts, sports associations, etc.(S58, -4).*

### **Profile C: Focus on guidelines**

Participants on factor C considered that a procedure to follow (step by step) in case of problems linked to sexting could be a good solution (S38, +5). This statement seemed to be considered as an additional mean because prevention alone would not be sufficient to eliminate all the problems: *“You have to create a guideline: “If it happened to you what should you do?” I think we need to do prevention but I do not think that it will stop everything. That is why we must set up a procedure to follow.”(Female 14). In the same line of a guideline, they also called for more information on reference persons (S31, +3): “We do not know who to contact, as we have very little prevention. We cannot talk to anyone in case of problems; it would be nice to have at least one person per school [...].”(Female 16). They were also more neutral towards a parental filter on mobile phones (S2, 0).*

These participants also thought that prevention should address bullying and blackmail issues (S44, +5), as they agreed with the focus on the nonconsensual dissemination (S4, +4) rather than consensual sexting (S3, -2). They were also interested in receiving testimonies of victims as prevention material (S25, +4). Compared to other profiles, they were not so interested in receiving information on legal consequences (S25, 0) and the police was negatively ranked (S17, -2). In terms of key-actors, they considered a more independent strategy: neither sex educators, school staff, parents nor peers received high

ranks. On the contrary, they were more interested in prevention videos with YouTubers (S15, +3). Focusing on girls as victims and boys as perpetrators was not positively assessed (S47, -4). Finally, compared to other profiles, they were more likely to consider that prevention should target potential victims to enable them to protect themselves (S36, +3).

#### **Profile D: Focus on training/information**

Youths in factor D called for more training and information for youths (S11, +5), as well as for teachers and parents, but with lower rankings (S10, +2); (S12, +2). In this context of education, the place of parents was high as these participants considered that they must have a role in prevention linked to sexting (S21, +4): *“I think the first people we listen to are our parents, if the parents talk to their children as soon as they have a mobile phone, it will influence the child [...].”*(Male, 18). Sex education classes (S1, +3) and teachers (S18, +2) were also positively ranked. On the contrary, police (S17, -1) and peer (S24, -1) prevention were not considered as positive. However, the statement on legal consequences received a positive ranking (S25, +3).

For them, prevention related to sexting should include discussions on the possible psychological consequences such as risk of depression (S43, +5). They also considered that consent issues (S37, +4) and respect for others (S40, +4) should be part of such prevention: *“I fully agree with this statement because respect for the other is essential. If we respect the other we will not send photos or videos, without her/his consent. If we respect and consider the person, there will be no reason to harm her/him and therefore the risk of harassment should not exist anymore.”*(Female, 18).

Targeting specific groups was negatively ranked (S58, -4). *“And for specific groups it is not up to the [sport, scouting, etc.] instructor to talk about it to her/his participants. It*

*must be the work of parents or qualified people.*”(Male, 15). Starting sexting prevention from the age of 8(S7, -1) and forbidding consensual sexting (S28, -2) were less negatively ranked than in other profiles.

### **Profile E: Peer prevention**

The last group also called for more training and information on sexting for youths (S11, +5). In terms of resources, they advocated for a system of peer prevention (S24, +4) and sex educators had a rather positive place (S1, +3). They were also quite positive with different types of prevention depending on age (S6, +3) but prevention about sexting should not start at age 8 (S7, -4): *“Prevention at the age of 8 is too early. Between 11-13 years old, it would be ideal.”*(Male, 17). On the other hand, prevention should not be differentiated according to gender (S5, -4), and boys and girls should not be separated to discuss sexting (S29, -4). Likewise, girls should not systematically be portrayed as victims and boys as perpetrators of nonconsensual dissemination (S47, -5).

Police was highly ranked as a key-actor to do prevention in class (S17, +5) and participants also called for more information on legal consequences of sexting (S25, +4). Compared to other profiles, they were less interested in testimonies of victims because of the intimate nature of the topic (S26, -2): *“It is a testimony but it remains personal, private.”*(Male, 16). In terms of content, sexting prevention should include discussion on the pressure that could be put on a person to obtain an intimate content (S46, +4) and respect for others (S40, +3). These participants rather considered discussing sexting as part of a larger prevention on bullying (S52, +3): *“[...] The problem is not sexting per se but the dissemination of content without consent of the person to whom this content belongs which often leads to bullying.”*(Female 17).

### **Consensus statements**

Some statements were negatively ranked on all profiles: Prevention linked to sexting should start at the age of 8 (S7), Sexting must be forbidden even between two consenting persons (S28), Prevention linked to sexting is useless (S33), Prevention related to sexting should highlight girls as victims and boys as authors of dissemination (S47), Doing nothing / not practicing sexting is the best prevention (S54) and Prevention related to sexting should be done in specific groups such as scouts, sports association, etc.(S58). On the contrary, some statements received positive rankings on the five profiles: Prevention related to sexting should address consent issues (S37), Prevention related to sexting should address respect for others (S40), Prevention related to sexting should address pressure that can sometimes be experienced to obtain a photo / video (S46), and Sexting theme should be included in a wider prevention on bullying (S52). Pressure (S46) and bullying issues (S52) were the most consensual statements among the five profiles. Participants were rather indifferent or did not know (scores between -1 and 1 on all factors) for street social workers (Street social workers should be more sensitized to the issue of sexting) (S57) and scholar mediators (School mediators must talk about sexting and do prevention) (S19) as key-actors in sexting issues, an anonymous questions/reports box to be placed at school (S30), prevention posters to create and display in waiting areas (train station, bus stop, shopping center) (S22) and the inclusion of sexting theme in a wider prevention on the Internet (S51).

## **Discussion**

We identified five profiles that revealed different ways of considering prevention and education surrounding sexting among youths. Even if the first one accounted for the major part of variability, the other four were important in demonstrating diverse opinions. This



highlighted the need to offer a multidisciplinary, multi-resource, and multi-concept approach to reach all aspects of this practice.

Sexting prevention should not aim at particular persons or in relation to gender. Indeed, the typical scenario that is used in many campaigns illustrating the case of a girl who is victim of a nonconsensual sharing perpetrated by a boy (Barrense-Dias et al., 2018b; Döring, 2014) was not appreciated by participants. They rather called for a universal, non-gendered and common message. A one-way gendered perspective could also risk stigmatizing girls, feeding stereotypes and leading to detrimental judgements (Albury & Crawford, 2012; Krieger, 2017; Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone, & Harvey, 2012; Salter et al., 2013). While considering the possibility of having boys as victims and girls as perpetrators, youths must be made aware of violent social reactions towards girls (Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Ringrose et al., 2012; Van Ouytsel et al., 2014; Walker, Sanci, & Temple-Smith, 2013; Walrave et al., 2015), especially in a sexual context. When a gender difference was assessed more positively (factor 2), the separation of girls and boys in an educational perspective was essentially seen as a way to avoid discomfort and not as a way to differentiate awareness messages, values and knowledge to be transmitted. This separation was also requested by youths in a recent study on sexting education (Jørgensen et al., 2018) and considered as a first step followed by a joint discussion (Van Ouytsel et al., 2014).

Surprisingly, the topic of the Internet was not considered as an appropriate gateway to discuss sexting, demonstrating that sexting is more complex than other online activities. Sexting being practiced primarily with a Smartphone, it is also possible that youths do not necessarily assimilate its use to the use of the Internet.

Sexting should be included in broader interventions that would highlight and present principles applicable to other activities, such as consent, pressure and respect for others. If an early discussion on sexting from the age of 8 was not considered as appropriate, the above-mentioned principles could however be discussed from a very young age, so that they can be applied later, independently of the practices.

Likewise, youths were also dissatisfied with prevention of consensual sexting, demonstrating that practice-related problems and respect issues need to be discussed directly and independently of the practice per se. These core values are particularly important in light of rapid technological advances. Sexting may be outdated in a few years but other behaviors related to digital tools will certainly appear. Based on the positive ranking of sex education for 4 out of 5 factors, a parallel with sexuality in general should be considered in terms of prevention (Johnson, Mishna, Okumu, & Daciuk, 2018). It is therefore not by prohibiting and criminalizing consensual sexting that problems linked to this activity can be avoided (Madigan, Ly, Rash, Van Ouytsel, & Temple, 2018; Powell & Henry, 2014; Walrave et al., 2015). This result is in line with research (Jørgensen et al., 2018) exploring recommendations from youths themselves to improve education on sexting in school.

Legal issues were considered similarly important on 4 out of 5 factors profiles. However, they were more often considered for nonconsensual sharing to other people or for harassment, pressure, and consent problems, rather than for consensual sexting. Although the police was considered as a good resource in this legal perspective for 2 factors, a multi-resource approach was also highlighted. Indeed, other key-actors, including sex educators and parents, were also considered as potential resources. However, we did not find homogenous results for the key-actors, probably revealing that youths do not know

exactly whom to address in case of problems and questions about sexting or that they are very different in who they prefer to talk to. As previously recommended (Van Ouytsel et al., 2014), youths must be informed about the resource-persons and a broader multi-stakeholder strategy should be designed to ensure a large offer and support.

Despite the role that witnesses could play in the case of sexting that goes viral when an intimate content is disseminated without consent (Salmivalli, Poskiparta, Ahtola, & Haataja, 2013; Van Ouytsel et al., 2014), the ranking of related statements were not very high, except for factor 2. In a sexting context, and more broadly in a bullying context, there are two kinds of witnesses: the active ones who continue to disseminate an intimate content of someone else and/or take part in the mockeries and the passive ones, who see or know something but say nothing. This result may question the possible lack of consideration or knowledge of the role of passive or active witnesses in the context of sexting problems, and the resolution or the aggravation of the situation (Van Ouytsel et al., 2014; Walker et al., 2013; Walrave et al., 2015). Negative behaviors of witnesses could depend on their empathy for the victim and the victim blame, particularly when personal contents are published (Allison & Bussey, 2016; Schacter, Greenberg, & Juvonen, 2016). The statement on victim testimonies that was positively ranked on several factors could illustrate a possible demand and need to improve this empathy and identification. Therefore, prevention approaches must integrate a part on witnesses' behaviors to increase support towards victims and eliminate detrimental judgments leading to double victimization (Schacter et al., 2016; Van Ouytsel et al., 2014; Walrave et al., 2015). For example, the Finish anti-bullying program *KiVa* focuses on peers and witnesses and considers that influencing potential victims or perpetrators of bullying will not have an impact if social context is rewarding the behavior (Salmivalli, 2014).

The first strength of this study is the mixed methodology with quantitative and qualitative data (Jedeloo et al., 2010). Second, to our knowledge, this is the first study that examined the opinions of youths on prevention and education strategies on sexting activities using this methodology. Third, a large set of statements on goals, resources, targets, tools, etc. were offered to the participants to explore the demand of young people regarding sexting prevention. With such a set, we were able to obtain a large overview of the topic and explore different approaches. However, some limitations need to be highlighted. First, the results of this study may not be fully generalizable and mainly brought information on the current viewpoints of the participants (Jedeloo et al., 2010; Wood et al., 2002). However, the combination of shared patterns and quotations contributed to qualitative generalizations (Fairweather & Rinne, 2012). Second, some youths may have selected more repressive statements thinking that a positive attitude towards sexting would be negatively perceived. In this line of social desirability bias, some participants may not have dared to say that prevention was useless. However, to avoid it, when giving instructions, we made it clear that we were not prevention specialists but researchers without any conflict of interest. Furthermore, when we looked at the individual rankings, the two statements for which there might be doubts about this bias present scores between -4 and 5 for S53 (mean: 1.67) and -5 and 5 for S54 (mean: -3.71). Moreover, some authors (Scott et al., 2014) considered that the structure of the Q-Method can counteract such social desirability bias. Third, as we were interested in an overall preventive strategy and in order to avoid influencing their potential responses, we did not collect information on their own sexting activities. But practicing sexting or not could lead to differences in opinions on how to deal with related problems and how to consider it. Fourth, the forced distribution imposed by the grid constrained choices and did not provide the answer *I do*

*not know*. Thus, differences may seem more apparent than in reality. However, such a forced distribution allows direct comparisons between grids because all participants have the same structure and this improves discrimination and stability of data (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Moreover, we offered them the possibility to write comments. Fifth, even if we collected written explanations on their extreme cards and additional comments, we did not discuss and exchange on the overall grid with the participants.

This study highlighted the need to offer a multidisciplinary, multi-resource and multi-concept approach in prevention surrounding sexting. Broader values and principles such as respect, consent and empathy must be integrated in sexting discussion to consolidate their place in the digital world and ensure a healthy use of media. Consensual sexting must be differentiated, whether in research or intervention, from nonconsensual sharing. Such a separation will enable to communicate clear awareness messages and focus on real problems. All key-actors must deliver the same message. The angle of approach may be different, but the underlying message must go in the same direction to avoid contradictions and misunderstandings. Legal aspects must be reminded in relation to the nonconsensual sharing and the role of witnesses. This strategy could also help to avoid stigmatization of victims in the case of nonconsensual sharing. In this line, youths called expressly for a non-gendered message. Finally, to ensure up-to-date discussions, youths must be involved in the conception of prevention and education strategies to determine the right tools and methods to use.

**Ethical approval:** All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the local research committee (Ethics Committee Vaud) and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

**Informed consent:** Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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Table 1 Characteristics of participants and factor on which they are best represented

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Assigned factor<sup>a</sup></b>
1	Female	16	<i>Factor 2</i>
2	Female	17	<b>Factor 5</b>
3	Female	16	<i>Factor 5</i>
4	Female	16	<b>Factor 5</b>
5	Female	18	<i>Factor 1</i>
6	Female	15	<i>Factor 4</i>
7	Female	17	<b>Factor 4</b>
8	Male	17	<i>Factor 1</i>
9	Female	15	<i>Factor 5</i>
10	Female	15	<b>Factor 2</b>
11	Male	17	<i>Factor 5</i>
12	Female	18	<b>Factor 3</b>
13	Male	17	<b>Factor 5</b>
14	Female	15	<b>Factor 1</b>
15	Female	15	<b>Factor 1</b>
16	Female	16	<i>Factor 3</i>
17	Female	15	<i>Factor 1</i>
18	Female	13	<i>Factor 1</i>
19	Female	17	<b>Factor 3</b>
20	Male	14	<i>Factor 2</i>
21	Female	16	<b>Factor 1</b>

22	Female	15	<b>Factor 4</b>
23	Male	18	<b>Factor 4</b>
24	Female	17	<b>Factor 1</b>
25	Female	17	<b>Factor 2</b>
26	Male	17	<i>Factor 4</i>
27	Male	18	<i>Factor 5</i>
28	Female	18	<i>Factor 3</i>
29	Female	17	<i>Factor 3</i>
30	Female	18	<b>Factor 4</b>
31	Female	18	<b>Factor 4</b>
32	Male	18	<i>Factor 1</i>
33	Female	18	<b>Factor 2</b>
34	Female	17	<i>Factor 5</i>
35	Female	14	<i>Factor 5</i>
36	Male	17	<b>Factor 3</b>
37	Male	15	<i>Factor 1</i>
38	Male	16	<i>Factor 1</i>
39	Male	15	<b>Factor 2</b>
40	Male	16	<b>Factor 4</b>
41	Male	15	<b>Factor 1</b>
42	Male	17	<i>Factor 1</i>
43	Male	16	<b>Factor 5</b>
44	Male	15	<i>Factor 2</i>

45	Male	16	<i>Factor 2</i>
46	Male	17	<b>Factor 1</b>
47	Male	15	<i>Factor 2</i>
48	Male	14	<i>Factor 4</i>

<sup>a</sup> **Bold type** represent the most representative Q-sorts for each factor (flagged) or the Q-sorts that defined each factor, *italic type* represent less representative Q-sorts or Q-sorts that did not define a factor (not flagged but the higher loading for the factor)



Table 2 Mean age and gender repartition of participants for each factor, overall and flagged

	Mean age (overall)	Mean age (flagged)	% of females (overall)	% of females (flagged)
Factor 1	15.9	15.8	50.0	66.7
Factor 2	15.7	16.2	44.0	75.0
Factor 3	17.2	17.3	83.3	66.7
Factor 4	16.4	17.0	55.5	66.7
Factor 5	16.3	16.5	60.0	50.0

Table 3 List of statements (Q-set) and factor scores

*The scores of the 10 statements ranking the more extremely (-4, -5, +4, +5) on each factor appear on a grey background, the darkest indicating the most extreme scores*

*Consensus statements are in italic (19, 22, 23, 30, 34, 46, 50, 51, and 52), Z-score is statistically similar for the five factors*

No	Statement	Factor				
		A	B	C	D	E
1	Sex education classes should address sexting	3	4	-1 <sup>a</sup>	3	3
2	A parental filter / control should be added to mobile phones to monitor messages	-5 <sup>a</sup>	-2	0 <sup>b</sup>	-3	-2
3	Prevention should focus on the sharing of content (text, audio, photo, video) between two consenting persons (consensual sexting)	1	0	-2	-1	-2
4	Prevention should focus on the nonconsensual dissemination of content (text, audio, photo, video) to other people	3	3	4	-3 <sup>a</sup>	3
5	Prevention should be different between boys and girls	-4	2 <sup>b</sup>	-4	-2	-4
6	Prevention should be different according to age	-2	-1	0	2	3
7	Prevention linked to sexting should start at the age of 8	-3	-2	-3	-1 <sup>b</sup>	-4
8	Youths should be involved in developing prevention messages / campaigns	-1 <sup>a</sup>	3	3	1	1
9	Schools must offer discussion / debate areas to talk about sexting	1	-2	0	1	-2
10	More training / information on sexting is needed for parents	-2	0	-2	2	1
11	More training / information on sexting is needed for youths	0	2	-1	5	5
12	More training / information on sexting is needed for teachers	-1	1	0	2	2

13	A prevention spot on sexting must be created and shown during cinema commercials	-3	-1	-2	0	1
14	A prevention spot on sexting must be created and shown during television commercials	-2	1	1	1	-1
15	A prevention spot on sexting must be created with Youtubers or Vloggers	-3 <sup>a</sup>	2	3	1	2
16	A Smartphone app on sexting must be created (for example to ask for help)	0	2	-2	-1	0
17	Police must do prevention on sexting in class	2	-2	-2	-1	5 <sup>b</sup>
18	Teachers must talk about sexting and do prevention	-2 <sup>a</sup>	0	1	2	0
19	<i>School mediators must talk about sexting and do prevention</i>	0	1	0	0	0
20	Prevention should target the witnesses who continue to disseminate a content (active witness)	-1	3	2	-1	-1
21	Parents must talk about sexting and do prevention	-3	-3	-1	4 <sup>b</sup>	2
22	<i>Prevention posters must be created and displayed in waiting areas (train station, bus stop, shopping center)</i>	0	-1	0	0	0
23	<i>Prevention posters must be created and displayed in the streets</i>	0	-2	-2	0	0
24	Establishing a system of big brother / sister who would come to talk about sexting (a young person who comes to speak to the youths)	-1	0	-1	-1	4 <sup>b</sup>
25	Youths must be informed of the legal consequences linked to sexting (articles of law, penalties, prison)	5	5	0 <sup>a</sup>	3	4
26	Testimonies of victims in a case related to sexting must be used	4	5	4	3	-2 <sup>a</sup>
27	A special phone line for sexting problems must be created	4 <sup>b</sup>	2	-1	0	0
28	Sexting must be forbidden even between two consenting persons	-3	-4	-3	-2 <sup>b</sup>	-3

29	Boys and girls must be separated when a discussion on sexting is done	-4	3 <sup>b</sup>	-3	-3	-4
30	<i>An anonymous questions / reports box must be placed at school</i>	0	1	0	-1	-1
31	Posters / flyers of information on reference persons to contact in case of problems linked to sexting should be created	3	0	3	1	0
32	A website dedicated to sexting should be created	2	0	1	1	-1
33	Prevention linked to sexting is useless	-4	-5	-4	-5	-3
34	<i>Prevention should target the people who disseminate the content without consent</i>	1	1	2	0	2
35	Prevention should target the witnesses of problems who say nothing (passive witnesses)	-1	1	2	-2	1
36	Prevention should target potential victims to protect themselves	-1	0	3 <sup>b</sup>	-3 <sup>a</sup>	1
37	Prevention related to sexting should address consent issues	1	4	1	4	2
38	A procedure to follow (step by step) in case of problems related to sexting should be created	2	0	5 <sup>b</sup>	-2	-2
39	An online chat system to get help in case of sexting problems should be created	2	1	0	0	-1
40	Prevention should address respect for others	3	1	1	4	3
41	Interactive activities such as role plays involving a victim, an author and a witness should be created	2	-3 <sup>a</sup>	1	0	-1
42	Humor should be used to do prevention on sexting	0	-3	-1	-1	-3
43	Prevention related to sexting should address risk of depression and malaise	5	0	2	5	2
44	Prevention related to sexting should address bullying and blackmail	4	0	5	3	1

45	Funny pictures to send in case of demand should be created (example: a banana to represent the male sex)	0	-3	-3	1	0
46	<i>Prevention related to sexting should address pressure that can sometimes be experienced to obtain a photo / video</i>	3	4	2	2	4
47	Prevention should highlight girls as victims and boys as authors of dissemination	<b>-5</b>	-1 <sup>b</sup>	-4	-3	<b>-5</b>
48	Online interactive videos or games in which a person play a role and choose actions should be created	-1	-2	1 <sup>b</sup>	-2	-1
49	Prevention related to sexting should address victim support if a photo / video is disseminated without consent	2	-1	2	3	1
50	<i>Sexting workshops during special days / weeks should be offered</i>	-1	-1	0	-2	-1
51	<i>Sexting theme should be included in a wider prevention on the Internet</i>	1	-1	1	1	0
52	<i>Sexting theme should be included in a wider prevention on bullying</i>	1	2	3	2	3
53	Prevention is useful for problems linked to sexting	1	3	4	0	1
54	Doing nothing / not practicing sexting is the best prevention	-2 <sup>b</sup>	<b>-5</b>	<b>-5</b>	<b>-5</b>	<b>-5</b>
55	Prevention is done alone or automatically when a problem occurs in a school (example: a photo disseminated throughout the school)	0	-3	-1	-4	-2
56	It is impossible to prevent problems linked to sexting	0 <sup>b</sup>	-4	<b>-5</b>	-4	-3
57	Street social workers should be more sensitized to the issue of sexting	1	-1	-1	0	0
58	Prevention related to sexting should be done in specific group such as scouts, sports association, etc.	-2 <sup>b</sup>	-4	-3	-4	-3

<sup>a</sup> z-Score for the statement is lower (disagree more) than in all of the other factors

<sup>b</sup> z-Score for the statement is higher (agree more) than in all of other factors





## Annexe 6 : Article #4 (soumis)

**Barrense-Dias Y, Akre C, Auderset D, Leeners B, Morselli D, Suris JC.** Nonconsensual sexting: characteristics and motives of youths who disseminate received-intimate content. *Computers in Human Behavior*.



# **Nonconsensual sexting: characteristics and motives of youths who disseminate received-intimate content**

Yara Barrense-Dias <sup>a</sup>, Christina Akre <sup>a</sup>, Diane Auderset <sup>a</sup>, Brigitte Leeners <sup>b</sup>, Davide Morselli <sup>c</sup>, Joan-Carles Surís <sup>a</sup>

**Affiliations:** <sup>a</sup> Research Group on Adolescent Health (GRSA), Center for Primary Care and Public Health (Unisanté), University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland; <sup>b</sup> Department of Reproductive Endocrinology, University Hospital Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland, and <sup>c</sup> Institute of Social Sciences & NCCR LIVES, University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland.

## **First and corresponding author:**

Yara Barrense-Dias (yara.barrense-dias@unisanté.ch)

Research Group on Adolescent Health (GRSA), Center for Primary Care and Public Health (Unisanté), University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland, Route de la Corniche 10, 1010 Lausanne, Switzerland, Phone : +4121 314 69 46

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**Ethical approval:** Ethic clearance in agreement with the Swiss law was given by the Ethics committee in research of the canton of Vaud. All procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

## **Abstract**

To determine the characteristics and motives of youths who disseminated received-intimate images. Data were obtained from a self-administrated Swiss survey on sexual behaviors among young adults aged 24-26 years. Out of the 7142 participants, 5175 responded to the question on nonconsensual sharing: 85% had never shared (NO), 6% had shared once (ONCE) and 9% had shared several times (SEVERAL). Data are presented as relative risk ratios with 95% confidence intervals. More than 15% of participants reported a nonconsensual sharing of a received-intimate image, most of them having done it several times. Compared to the NO group, participants in the SEVERAL group were more likely to be males (2.73 [2.14-3.47]) and foreign-born (1.45 [1.04-2.03]), to report a non-heterosexual orientation (1.46 [1.10-1.93]), to have sent one's own intimate image (1.76 [1.32-2.34]) and received a shared intimate image of someone unknown (4.56 [3.28-6.36]) and known (2.76 [1.52-5.01]). The main reported motivations were for fun (62%), showing off (30%) and failure to realize what they were doing (9%). The perpetration of a nonconsensual sharing was reported by one male out of 5 and one female out of 11. Even though females might also be perpetrators of nonconsensual sharing, this behavior was more prevalent among males.

**Keywords:** Sexting; Youths; Internet; Nonconsensual sharing

## 1. Introduction

The main issue of sexting is its possible association with bullying due to nonconsensual dissemination of received-intimate content (Celizic, 2009; Crimmins & Seigfried-Spellar, 2014; Kaye, 2010). Despite the growing scientific interest in sexting among youths, its definition is still unclear (Barrense-Dias, Berchtold, Surís, & Akre, 2017; Döring, 2014; Klettke, Hallford, & Mellor, 2014). The literature mentions two categories of actions: the practice of sexting with the private exchange between two persons, and sexting that goes wrong when the received-intimate content is disseminated further. The private exchange between two persons is generally called primary sexting (Lievens, 2014), experimental sexting (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011), consensual sexting (Eraker, 2010) or simply sexting (Clancy, Klettke, & Hallford, 2019; Madigan, Ly, Rash, Van Ouytsel, & Temple, 2018). When the received-intimate content is shared with someone who was not supposed to receive it, is called secondary sexting (Lievens, 2014), aggravated sexting (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011), sextbullying (Eraker, 2010), nonconsensual sexting or forwarding (Madigan et al., 2018), revenge pornography or nonconsensual sharing (Walker & Sleath, 2017) and sext dissemination (Clancy et al., 2019).

This distinction can also be seen through the difference between deviance and normalcy discourse (Chalfen, 2010; Döring, 2014; Krieger, 2017; Levine, 2013; Lim, 2013; Walker & Sleath, 2017). In the former, sexting is a deviant behavior including nonconsensual dissemination in the definition. In the normalcy discourse, sexting is a sexual behavior and the potential negative consequences are not part of the definition. Therefore, sexting-related problems, especially nonconsensual dissemination, are defined and named differently than the initial practice.

The first study on sexting (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008) included items on the sending and receiving exchange between two persons as first

sender and recipient, and on nonconsensual dissemination of received-intimate content as secondary sender and receiving such a content as secondary recipient. In that study, respectively 20% and 40% of teens and young adults reported having already shared received-intimate content of someone else with others and having shared it with them as a third party.

While sexting has become especially known because of nonconsensual dissemination, research has been more interested in sending and receiving as first sender and recipient (Madigan et al., 2018; Van Ouytsel, Walrave, & Ponnet, 2018). This trend was also noticed in prevention with abstinence messages to avoid problems (Albury & Crawford, 2012; Döring, 2014). In a recent meta-analysis (Madigan et al., 2018) examining the prevalence of sexting behaviors among youths under 18 year-olds, only 9/39 studies had a part on nonconsensual sharing, either as a perpetrator or a victim. Indeed, most studies focused primarily on sending one's own personal content. Furthermore, a systematic review on revenge pornography and nonconsensual sharing concluded that research on these problems was in its infancy (Walker & Sleath, 2017), as no study assessed the motivations for it. Therefore, research on nonconsensual sharing of received-intimate content among youths remains scarce (Van Ouytsel et al., 2018). Previous studies have found associations between online harassment, including nonconsensual sharing, and anxiety or depression (Priebe & Svedin, 2012), substance use (Patrick, Heywood, Pitts, & Mitchell, 2015) and offline dating violence (Marganski & Melander, 2015). However, nonconsensual sharing was not assessed individually and more generic concepts such as digital dating abuse or cyber-victimization were used.

The present study aimed to determine the characteristics and motives of youths who disseminated a received-intimate content to other people. As dissemination problems relate primarily to images (versus text), we decided to focus on the nonconsensual dissemination of intimate photographs and/or videos. We were also interested in the context of nonconsensual

sharing in terms of the relationship between the sender and the person on the forwarded image, content of such images, recipients and motivations to share.

## 2. Methods

Data were obtained in 2017 from the Swiss national survey on sexual behaviors among young adults aged 24-26 years in 2016. (Barrense-Dias et al., 2018). This age range was selected in order to ensure that the majority of the participants would be sexually active and at the same time sufficiently young to be able to recall accurately the beginning of their sexual life. The Federal Statistical Office provided the initial sample that was representative of this population living in Switzerland in terms of sex, language (French, Italian or German) and canton of residence. The final sample included 7142 participants (response rate 15.1%, mean age 26.3). To correct a slight over-representation of females from the French-speaking part of Switzerland, analyses were weighted by gender and canton of residence. Data were collected using a life history calendar (LHC) approach. The LHC is a method that facilitates recall of past events by using the individual's own past events as cues for remembering and incrementing the precision of reports (Martyn, Saftner, Darling-Fisher, & Schell, 2013; Morselli, Berchtold, Suris, & Berchtold, 2016). A detailed description of the survey method can be found elsewhere (Barrense-Dias et al., 2018).

### 2.1 Variables

#### 2.1.1 Dependent variable

Out of the 7142 participants, 5175 (51% males) responded to the question *Have you ever shared (forwarding or showing) a sexy photograph / video of someone else (known or unknown)?* and were divided according to their answer: 4396 (85%) had never shared (NO group), 292 (6%) had shared once (ONCE group) and 487 (9%) had shared several times (SEVERAL group).

Development questions were then asked to differentiate between forwarding and showing, and between known and unknown.

We defined the term sexy as sexually suggestive, sexually implicit, nude, semi-nude, dressed, flirtatious, etc. This broad definition was then clarified with development questions. Similarly, the ways of transmitting such a content were also broadly defined: SMS, Whatsapp, Instagram, Periscope, Snapchat, e-mail, Webcam, etc., ensuring the inclusion of different practices and avoiding missing out new applications or methods. However, we did not ask which device or application was used for sharing.

### *2.1.2 Independent variables*

Socio-demographic and personal characteristics included gender, birth-place (Switzerland/other), place of residence (urban/rural), attained education level (tertiary/below), perceived family socioeconomic status (SES), perceived puberty onset and sexual orientation.

Family SES was measured with the question *Compared to other families in Switzerland, your family financial situation when you were 15 was...* and we dichotomized the 7 possible answers into below average and average or better (Hibell et al., 2009).

Perceived puberty onset was assessed through the question *“If you think about the age at which you started your puberty, compared to other same-age youths, would you say that you were...”* with three possible answers: advanced, on time or delayed (Berg-Kelly & Erdes, 1997) .

For sexual orientation, we used a multidimensional approach to ensure the effectiveness of such a complex issue for youths (Coker, Austin, & Schuster, 2010; Priebe & Svedin, 2013). We combined three variables: sexual orientation identity, attraction and sex of sexual partner(s). Sexual orientation identity was measured through the question *How would you describe yourself?* with four answers: heterosexual, gay/lesbian, bisexual, I do not know/Not sure.

Attraction was assessed with the question *What best describes how you feel?* with answers ranging from Only attracted to people of the opposite sex to Only attracted to people of the same sex as me. Finally, sex of sexual partner(s) consisted of using sex of their lifetime sexual partner(s) in any sexual contact to consider effective sexual experiences. The combination of these three perspectives allowed dichotomizing respondents between “exclusively heterosexual” (all three dimensions categorized as heterosexual) and “nonexclusively heterosexual” (at least one non-heterosexual).

We also compared groups on sending one’s own intimate image and having received a non-intended shared-intimate content. Indeed, sharing may also be secondary when subsequent recipients decide to continue the dissemination. For the group having already received a sharing, we also looked at whether the person on the image was known or not to determine if a nonconsensual sharing could be explained by it.

Development questions were asked if participants responded positively to the question on nonconsensual sharing. Some of these questions were inspired by the first study on sexting among youths (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008). They were asked to determine the way of sharing (sending the content or showing it directly on a device), how was the person on the image (in a suggestive, sexy or flirtatious position but dressed, partially nude (underwear, low-necked, etc.), completely nude (buttocks, breast, genitals, etc.), or during a sexual act), if the face of the person appeared on the image, recipients (close friends, other friends, family member, online friends or everyone on a social media) and motivations to share (love revenge, showing off, for fun, to be accepted in a group, jealousy or meanness, being under pressure to share, asking for opinion). When possible, other free-text answers were coded into the defined categories and a new category were created. For the remaining free-text answers, we excluded them from our analyses as they were very heterogeneous, sometimes unclear or the free-text field remained empty or it only involved a

very small number of participants (for example, 10 responses for the question on content). As we divided the answer between once and several times, we had to deal with exclusive multiple choices on how the person appeared on the image when several images were disseminated. Therefore, we decided to keep the most extreme answer for this question because it is the one that can have more impact and includes all the less extreme as it is considered a continuum. For example, if a participant shared an image of someone partially nude and another one during a sexual act, we chose the latter.

## ***2.2 Data analyses***

Analyses were performed in two steps. First, the groups were compared on the above-mentioned variables. For the bivariate analyses, we used chi-square tests for categorical and ANOVAs for continuous variables. Statistically significant variables were then entered into a multinomial regression analysis using the NO group as the reference category. These analyses were performed overall and by gender. Results are given as relative risk ratios (RRR). Second, the two groups reporting nonconsensual sharing (ONCE and SEVERAL) were compared on the motives and context of such a sharing. Statistically significant variables were then entered into a logistic regression analysis using the ONCE group as the reference category. We ran additional analyses for motives and context comparing by gender, using females as the reference category. Results are given as odd ratios (OR).

We used STATA 14.0 (StataCorp, College Station, TX, USA) for all the analyses, with a significance level of  $p < 5\%$ .

## **3. Results**

Overall, 15.1% of participants reported nonconsensual sharing of a received-intimate image, most of them having done it several times (9.4%) (Table 1). Males were significantly more likely to report such a behavior (21% vs. 9%), to be a third party and to have such a content been shared with them (16% vs. 6%).



At the bivariate level, compared to the NO group, participants in the other groups were significantly more likely to be males and foreign-born, to report a lower education level and a non-heterosexual orientation, to have already sent one's own intimate image and received a shared-intimate content of someone else (Table 2).

In the multivariate analysis, compared to the NO group, participants in the ONCE group were more likely to be males (RRR 1.66) reporting a lower education level (1.24). Participants in the SEVERAL group were more likely to be males (2.73), foreign-born (1.45), reporting a non-heterosexual orientation (1.46), having sent one's own intimate image (1.76) and received a shared-intimate image of someone unknown (4.56) or known (2.76). (Table 2).

In the gender-differentiated multivariate analysis (Table 3), compared to the NO group, females in the ONCE group were more likely to report a lower education level (1.53) and to have received a shared-intimate image of someone they did not know (2.30). Females in the SEVERAL group were more likely to report a lower education level (1.69), a non-heterosexual orientation (2.00), and having received a shared-intimate image portraying an unknown person (3.66).

Males in the ONCE group were only more likely to have sent one's own intimate image (1.60) (Table 4). Those in the SEVERAL group were more likely to be foreign-born (1.52), having sent one's own intimate image (2.00) and having received a shared-intimate image of someone else they knew (2.70) or not (4.98).

For context, sharing an image of someone else was mostly done by showing it directly on a device (78%). Sixty-nine percent of participants reporting nonconsensual sharing admitted knowing the person on the image and almost 60% shared an image on which the person's face appeared. The first recipients for both groups were close friends (86%), followed by other friends (16%). Very few participants answered that they shared with a larger audience such as

on social media (0.7%). The three main motives for sharing with others were for fun (62%) followed by showing off (30%) and not realizing what they were doing (9%).

The two groups reporting nonconsensual sharing were compared on motivations and context (Table 5). At the bivariate level, participants in the SEVERAL group were more likely to have sent (versus showed) an image to others, an image on which the person's face appeared and had more explicit content (total nudity or sexual intercourse), to have sent images to friends other than close friends and friends that were known online only and to have shared such images for fun. Those in the ONCE group were more likely to have shared suggestive images and to have done it because they did not realize what they were doing. At the multivariate level, controlling for sociodemographic data, participants in the SEVERAL group were more likely to have forwarded the image (instead of showing it) (2.59), to have shared an image on which the person's face appeared (1.83), and for fun (1.49).

We also analyzed these two groups by gender (Table 6). At the bivariate level, males were more likely to have sent an image instead of showing it, an image on which the person's face appeared, with more explicit content, to have shared it with friends other than close friends and with online friends, and to report showing off as a motive. Females were more likely to report having forwarded it to obtain friends' opinions. At the multivariate level, compared to females, males were more likely to share such content with other friends (1.84) and for showing off (4.94).

#### **4. Discussion**

The perpetration of nonconsensual sharing was reported by 15% of the participants. Even though our age range was not exactly the same as for the very first study on sexting, we can see no main changes in 10 years (17% among the 20-26 years) (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008). Our result was comprised between the rate of 12%

found in a meta-analysis (Madigan et al., 2018) and 19% in a recent Australian study (Clancy et al., 2019). We also found that 11% of participants reported having such a content been shared with them, which is much lower than what was found in 2008 (40%). One hypothesis could be that although the rates have not changed much in 10 years, the dissemination may be done with a more restricted audience. Furthermore, given the increase of Internet-related prevention campaigns, youths today might be more aware of the security aspects.

Even though females might also be perpetrators of nonconsensual sharing, this behavior was more prevalent among males. This difference could be explained by gender differences in the initial exchange. As part of the global study (Barrense-Dias et al., 2018), we also collected data on primary sending, and significant differences were found: males were slightly less likely to report having sent their own sexy image (49% versus 52%) and more likely to have received such a content (68% versus 55%). As for the primary sending and receiving, the results of nonconsensual sharing in relation to gender are inconsistent in the literature (Clancy et al., 2019; Walker & Sleath, 2017): males were sometimes more likely to report nonconsensual sharing as perpetrators or no gender differences were found. Compared to previous studies finding significant gender differences for nonconsensual forwarding (Patrick et al., 2015; D. S. Strassberg, McKinnon, Sustaita, & Rullo, 2013; Donald S. Strassberg, Rullo, & Mackaronis, 2014), our rates were higher, with the exception of a Bulgarian study reporting 18% of females and 30% of males (Wood, Barter, Stanley, Aghtaie, & Larkins, 2015). However, in this latter study, the measure for nonconsensual forwarding included images and text.

A form of peer pressure could also explain the fact that males shared more received-intimate content with others. Indeed, they were more likely than females to report showing off as a motive to forward a content of someone else. This difference was already highlighted by previous qualitative studies (Burkett, 2015; Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, & Livingstone, 2013; Yeung, Horyniak, Vella, Hellard, & Lim, 2014), and could be explained by the negative

judgements that females could experiment (Clancy et al., 2019; Reed, Salazar, & Raj, 2018). In addition to more violent reactions towards females who sext compared to males (Lippman & Campbell, 2014), females could also be more negatively judged as perpetrators of nonconsensual sharing. Following this hypothesis, females would not share with others, or less so, because they would be afraid that it would turn against them. In our study, when females forwarded intimate-received content to others, they seemed to perform less risky types of sharing: the face of the person on the image appeared less and they showed more directly on their device. However, 9% of females still reported nonconsensual forwarding, demonstrating the need for non-gendered prevention messages and to avoid the often used one-way scenario showing a girl as a victim of nonconsensual sharing committed by a boy (Albury & Crawford, 2012; Döring, 2014).

Having already sent an image of oneself was not a protective factor for sharing the image of someone else. As sexting and primary sending seem to mainly happen in sexual or romantic contexts (Döring, 2014; Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones, & Wolak, 2012; Van Ouytsel, Walrave, & Van Gool, 2014), a nonconsensual sharing could thus take place in a two-way exchange when one of the two persons decides to share further. Another possible explanation is that practicing sexting and sending one's own image could minimize the risk perception about sharing with people not originally intended (Reed et al., 2018).

Reporting a non-heterosexual orientation was associated with nonconsensual sharing. The perpetration of such a behavior could be a way to ensure inclusion by participating to the current trend of dissemination and/or group integration. However, in an Australian study (Henry, Powell, & Flynn, 2017), non-heterosexual participants were also more likely to experience nonconsensual sharing of a sexual image as a victim than heterosexual ones. Thus, sharing an intimate-received content could also be explained by a victimization experience and therefore be a way of revenge.

Males who forwarded received-intimate content several times were more likely to be foreign-born. Similarly to a non-heterosexual orientation, nonconsensual sharing could be a way to be integrated, especially among males with the motive to show off (Burkett, 2015; Ringrose et al., 2013; Yeung et al., 2014). Additionally, these youths could have received a different education in terms of sexuality and use of new technologies.

Participants were more likely to report sharing-by-showing through their device directly. Social desirability bias could be an explanation to this finding as the sharing of someone else's image without consent is legally prohibited. However, choosing to show rather than send could also be a way to protect oneself and avoid the consequences of a "real" sharing, including legal evidence. Although some might consider this action as less serious, showing an intimate content could also contribute to the rumors, mockeries and isolation of the victim.

Close friends were the main recipients of a nonconsensual sharing and a larger audience was reported by very few participants. Youths could have a sense of security or control over the sharing because it "stays" between close friends only. This belief must be disputed by reminding youths that it only takes one sharing to create problems.

The first motivation to share with others was for fun, similar to another study (Clancy et al., 2019). While the media and literature often talk about revenge porn in a breakup case (Walker & Sleath, 2017), it seems that intending to hurt someone or seeking revenge was not the first motivation in our study. However, a social desirability bias is also possible. Indeed, participants might have given fun as an answer to lessen the gravity of their gesture or to report that they did not intend to harm someone. Despite this risk of bias, the motivation for nonconsensual sharing seemed to refer more to a lack of awareness of the consequences. The motivation for fun can also be considered in the same perspective as for bullying, namely that it is often performed to make peers laugh. The influence of the peer group seems to have an important

place in this issue. The answer *I was not realizing what I was doing* was more reported by those in the ONCE group. Maybe these participants realized the consequences afterwards and did not reiterate. It is therefore important not to refer only to the term revenge porn to consider nonconsensual forwarding because other motivations can lead to similar consequences (Clancy et al., 2019).

The first strength of our study was the sample size. Even if the response rate was lower than expected (15.1%), it is still a very large nationally representative sample of young adults. The second strength is what this study adds to the current literature on the understanding of this understudied theme. Finally, rarely reported in the literature (Walker & Sleath, 2017), we have included data on motives and contexts of this practice to understand the acting out and obtain a detailed overview. Therefore, this study could pave the way to implement efficient sexting prevention and education by focusing on nonconsensual sexting and starting discussions with youths on motivations, context and consequences.

Some limitations need to be considered. First, we asked participants to report a lifetime behavior with no indication on their age when done for the first time. In addition to a possible recall bias, it is quite different if the nonconsensual sharing was performed as a minor. However, asking the question at age 26 gives participants a temporal perspective, and the LHC approach should minimize this risk of bias. Second, participants were aged 24-26 years when recruited. Technology tools and prevention were not the same when they were adolescents. It would therefore be necessary to ask these questions to adolescents today. Third, we asked them if they were perpetrators of nonconsensual sharing but we did not collect data on the potential victimization. Yet, it was found that personal victimization was associated with lower probability of being perpetrator of nonconsensual sharing (Clancy et al., 2019). Fourth, we used questions on having already received a shared-intimate content as a third party and analyzed it to explore the continuation of dissemination. However, we extrapolated this continuation, as

we had no indication whether the nonconsensual sharing was done as a primary or as a following sender. It would be necessary to assess nonconsensual sharing in terms of active witnesses who continue to disseminate as third party. Fifth, regarding sharing an image of an unknown person, we cannot assure that it was not an anonymous image found on the Internet. However, we found that the majority of participants knew the person on the image.

## *5. Conclusions*

Given the three main reported motivations - fun, showing off, and failure to realize what they were doing - it appears crucial to remind youths of the seriousness and possible consequences of a nonconsensual sharing whether as a primary or third party. Prevention and research should focus more on nonconsensual sharing and abusive forms of sexting than on consensual sexting that seems to become a normalised sexual behavior in the digital era. Furthermore, witnesses, including those who continue to share, must also be included in prevention. Even if nonconsensual sharing seems to include more males being perpetrators, a non-gendered message is necessary.

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**Table 1 Descriptive statistics for sexting activities overall and by gender**

	<b>Total (n=5175) %</b>	<b>Females (n=2534) %</b>	<b>Males (n=2641) %</b>
Have never shared a received-intimate image of someone else	84.9	91.2	78.9*
Have shared a received-intimate image of someone else once	5.7	4.1	7.2*
Have shared a received-intimate image of someone else several times	9.4	4.8	13.9*
Have sent one's own intimate image	50.0	50.8	49.2**
Have received a shared-intimate content of someone known	3.2	1.0	4.9*
Have received a shared-intimate content of someone unknown	9.7	5.1	13.2*

*Significant difference between males and females \* (<.01) \*\* (<.05)*

**Table 2** Bivariate and multivariate analyses comparing the 3 groups of participants

	<i>Bivariate analysis</i>				<i>Multivariate analysis</i>	
	NO (N=4397) %	ONCE (N=292) %	SEVERAL (N=488) %	p-value	ONCE RRR [95%CI]	SEVERAL RRR [95%CI]
Gender (male)	<b>47.4</b>	<b>64.7</b>	<b>75.3</b>	<.01	<b>1.66 [1.26-2.21]*</b>	<b>2.73 [2.14-3.47]*</b>
Age (mean±SE)	26.3±.01	26.3±.05	26.4±.04	ns		
Foreign-born (yes)	<b>10.8</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>15.6</b>	<.01	1.24 [0.83-1.84]	<b>1.45 [1.04-2.03]**</b>
Residence (urban)	53.0	50.6	53.0	ns		
SES (below average)	15.1	18.8	17.1	ns		
Education (lower than tertiary)	<b>45.0</b>	<b>58.8</b>	<b>55.5</b>	<.01	<b>1.24 [1.10-1.93]*</b>	<i>1.26 [1.00-1.59] †</i>
Puberty onset				ns		
<i>Advanced</i>	26.1	31.5	30.3			
<i>On time</i>	45.3	41.9	42.5			
<i>Delayed</i>	28.5	26.6	27.2			
Sexual orientation (non-heterosexual)	<b>15.2</b>	<b>23.5</b>	<b>25.9</b>	<.01	1.37 [0.98-1.91]	<b>1.46 [1.10-1.93]*</b>
Have sent one's own intimate image	<b>45.4</b>	<b>73.8</b>	<b>77.8</b>	<.01	1.26 [0.88-1.80]	<b>1.76 [1.32-2.34]*</b>
Have received a shared intimate content of someone known	<b>1.7</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<.01	1.80 [0.81-4.00]	<b>2.76 [1.52-5.01]*</b>
Have received a shared intimate content of someone unknown	<b>6.5</b>	<b>9.8</b>	<b>25.8</b>	<.01	1.51 [0.91-2.49]	<b>4.56 [3.28-6.36]*</b>

The NO group was the reference category for the multivariate analysis.

*Significant relative risk ratios (RRR) are in bold type \* (<.01) \*\* (<.05) † trend (0.054)*

**Table 3** Bivariate and multivariate analyses comparing the 3 groups of female participants

FEMALES	<i>Bivariate analysis</i>				<i>Multivariate analysis</i>	
	NONE (N=2311) %	ONCE (N=103) %	SEVERAL (N=120) %	p-value	ONCE RRR [95%CI]	SEVERAL RRR [95%CI]
Age (mean±SE)	26.3±.02	26.3±.08	26.4±.08	ns		
Foreign-born (yes)	11.5	18.7	12.6	ns		
Residence (urban)	54	51.7	56	ns		
SES (below average)	16.2	18.2	17	ns		
Education (lower than tertiary)	<b>40.3</b>	<b>54.9</b>	<b>54.7</b>	<.01	<b>1.53 [1.02-2.27]**</b>	<b>1.69 [1.15-2.48]*</b>
Puberty onset				ns		
<i>Advanced</i>	30.2	38	35.6			
<i>On time</i>	42.3	35.3	38.6			
<i>Delayed</i>	27.4	26.7	25.8			
Sexual orientation (non-heterosexual)	<b>17.8</b>	<b>30.1</b>	<b>36.2</b>	<.01	1.48 [0.94-2.31]	<b>2.00 [1.35-2.99]*</b>
Have sent one's own intimate image	49.3	75.2	81.7	<.01	0.78 [0.46-1.32]	1.27 [0.76-2.14]
Have received a shared intimate content of someone known	0.8	1.0	2.9	ns		
Have received a shared intimate content of someone unknown	<b>4.0</b>	<b>8.8</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<.01	<b>2.30 [1.06-4.98]**</b>	<b>3.66 [1.94-6.90]*</b>

The NO group was the reference category for the multivariate analysis.

*Significant relative risk ratios (RRR) are in bold type \* (<.01) \*\* (<.05)*

**Table 4** Bivariate and multivariate analyses comparing the 3 groups of male participants

MALES	<i>Bivariate analysis</i>				<i>Multivariate analysis</i>	
	NONE (N=2085) %	ONCE (N=189) %	SEVERAL (N=367) %	p-value	ONCE RRR [95%CI]	SEVERAL RRR [95%CI]
Age (mean±SE)	26.3±.01	26.3±.08	26.4±.08	ns		
Foreign-born (yes)	<b>10.1</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>16.7</b>	<.01	0.90 [0.49-1.66]	<b>1.52 [1.00-2.30]*</b>
Residence (urban)	51.8	50.1	51.8	ns		
SES (below average)	13.9	19.2	17.1	ns		
Education (lower than tertiary)	<b>50.2</b>	<b>60.8</b>	<b>54.7</b>	<.05	1.37 [0.94-2.00]	1.10 [0.82-1.47]
Puberty onset				ns		
<i>Advanced</i>	21.6	28	28.3			
<i>On time</i>	48.7	45.4	43.9			
<i>Delayed</i>	29.8	26.6	27.8			
Sexual orientation (non-heterosexual)	<b>12.3</b>	<b>19.7</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<.01	1.24 [0.77-2.00]	1.17 [0.80-1.71]
Have sent one's own intimate image	<b>41.1</b>	<b>73.1</b>	<b>76.5</b>	<.01	<b>1.60 [1.01-2.53]**</b>	<b>2.00 [1.43-2.81]*</b>
Have received a shared intimate content of someone known	<b>2.5</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>12.4</b>	<.01	1.99 [0.83-4.76]	<b>2.70 [1.41-5.20]*</b>
Have received a shared intimate content of someone unknown	<b>8.9</b>	<b>10.3</b>	<b>29.7</b>	<.01	1.28 [0.68-2.41]	<b>4.98 [3.37-7.35]*</b>

The NO group was the reference category for the multivariate analysis.

*Significant relative risk ratios (RRR) are in bold type \* (<.01) \*\* (<.05)*



**Table 5** Bivariate and multivariate analyses comparing the 2 groups of participants who reported a nonconsensual sharing.

	<i>Bivariate analysis</i>			<i>Multivariate analysis</i>
	ONCE (N=292) %	SEVERAL (N=488) %	p-value	SEVERAL OR [95%CI]
Way of sharing (sending)	<b>11.4</b>	<b>28.8</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>	<b>2.59 [1.53-4.38]*</b>
Person on the image was known (yes)	71.0	68.0	ns	
Face of the person appears on the image (yes)	<b>47.5</b>	<b>66.8</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>	<b>1.83 [1.29-2.60]*</b>
Content			<b>&lt;.01</b>	
<i>Dressed but suggestive position</i>	<b>14.8</b>	<b>11.0</b>		Ref
<i>Partially naked</i>	<b>39.8</b>	<b>24.8</b>		0.87 [0.51-1.50]
<i>Totally naked</i>	<b>31.5</b>	<b>35.9</b>		1.39 [0.82-2.37]
<i>During sexual act / intercourse</i>	<b>13.9</b>	<b>28.3</b>		1.64 [0.86-3.14]
Recipients				
<i>Close friends</i>	85.2	86.9	ns	
<i>Other friends</i>	<b>10.7</b>	<b>19.7</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>	1.21 [0.68-2.13]
<i>Family</i>	8.8	9.9	ns	
<i>Online friends</i>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>	2.85 [0.71-11.47]
<i>Everybody</i>	0.6	0.8	ns	
Reasons				
<i>Love revenge</i>	4.5	3.1	ns	
<i>Showing off</i>	27.5	31.8	ns	
<i>For fun or as a joke</i>	<b>54.5</b>	<b>66.4</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>	<b>1.49 [1.02-2.16]**</b>
<i>Being accepted in a group</i>	2.1	0.7	ns	

<i>Not realizing what they were doing</i>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>&lt;.05</b>	0.68 [0.38-1.21]
<i>Jealousy / meanness</i>	0.8	1.0	ns	
<i>Pressure to share</i>	1.8	1.3	ns	
<i>Asking for friends opinion</i>	4.5	3.7	ns	

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The multivariate analysis was controlled for gender, education, place of birth and sexual orientation.

The ONCE group was the reference category for the multivariate analysis

**Significant odds ratios (OR) are in bold type \* (<.01) \*\* (<.05)**

**Table 6** Bivariate and multivariate analyses comparing males and females participants who reported a nonconsensual sharing,

	<i>Bivariate analysis</i>			<i>Multivariate analysis</i>
	FEMALES (N=223) %	MALES (N=367) %	p-value	MALES OR [95%CI]
Way of sharing (sending)	14.6	25.3	<.01	1.49 [0.90-2.45]
Person on the image was known	73.9	67.1	ns	
Face of the person appears on the image	50.7	63.1	<.01	1.41 [0.97-2.05]
Content			<.01	
<i>Dressed but suggestive position</i>	12.0	12.6		Ref
<i>Partially naked</i>	34.7	28.7		0.77 [0.43-1.38]
<i>Totally naked</i>	39.6	32.2		0.69 [0.39-1.23]
<i>During sexual act / intercourse</i>	13.7	26.5		1.58 [0.78-3.21]
Recipients				
<i>Close friends</i>	88.6	85.3	ns	
<i>Other friends</i>	8.4	19.4	<.01	1.84 [0.99-3.41] †
<i>Family</i>	9.5	9.3	ns	
<i>Online friends</i>	1.6	7.3	<.01	2.32 [0.66-8.14]
<i>Everybody</i>	0.0	0.8	ns	
Reasons				
<i>Love revenge</i>	2.4	3.9	ns	
<i>Showing off</i>	12.2	37.3	<.01	4.94 [3.12-7.85]*
<i>For fun</i>	66.4	60.1	ns	
<i>Being accepted in a group</i>	0.3	1.4	ns	

<i>Not realizing what they were doing</i>	6.7	9.5	ns	
<i>Jealousy / meanness</i>	0.6	0.9	ns	
<i>Pressure to share</i>	0.9	1.6	ns	
<i>Asking for friends opinion</i>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>	0.69 [0.31-1.54]

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The multivariate analysis was controlled for education, place of birth and sexual orientation.

Females were the reference category for the multivariate analysis


**Significant odds ratios (OR) are in bold type \* (<.01) † trend (0.051)**



## Annexe 7 : Rapport #1

**Barrense-Dias Y, Suris JC, Akre C.** La sexualité à l'ère numérique : le sexting et les adolescents. Lausanne, Institut universitaire de médecine sociale et préventive, 2017 ([Raisons de santé 269](#)).





Institut universitaire de médecine sociale et préventive - IUMSP  
Division des Maladies Chroniques - dMC  
Groupe de recherche sur la santé des adolescents - GRSA

# La sexualité à l'ère numérique : les adolescents et le *sexting*

Yara Barrense-Dias, Joan-Carles Suris, Christina Akre

RAISONS DE SANTÉ 269 – LAUSANNE

*Unil*  
UNIL | Université de Lausanne



# 1 Résumé

## 1.1 Introduction

L'utilisation d'Internet et des nouvelles technologies est aujourd'hui omniprésente dans la vie quotidienne de chacun, particulièrement dans celle des plus jeunes. Cette évolution virtuelle a largement modifié le contexte social dans lequel évoluent les adolescents et les jeunes adultes par l'influence qu'elle exerce sur leurs interactions et leurs relations, notamment par rapport au domaine de la sexualité. Les progrès technologiques mènent souvent à l'apparition et au développement de certaines pratiques et parmi les plus récentes, celle du *sexting*, contraction des termes anglais *sex* et *texting*, dont la définition reste encore floue et disparate.

Le visionnage et l'échange de contenu sexuel n'est pas un phénomène nouveau, mais les avancées technologiques ont augmenté la présence de matériel facilitant le partage et affaiblissant les restrictions d'accès. De manière générale, le *sexting* est défini comme l'envoi électronique de matériel à caractère sexuel. Si le *sexting* peut (parfois) être considéré comme une pratique sexuelle expérimentale et inoffensive, cette activité peut également mener à des dérives incontrôlables lorsque les images sont transférées hors de la sphère initiale et peut donc, parfois, servir d'outil au harcèlement.

Bien que la recherche commence à s'intéresser au *sexting* par rapport aux taux de prévalence et que des campagnes de prévention aient été créées pour cette problématique, des recherches plus approfondies sont nécessaires afin de comprendre tous les enjeux entourant la pratique chez les jeunes, particulièrement lorsqu'elle entraîne des conséquences négatives.

Nos questions de recherche sont les suivantes :

- Quelles sont les différents éléments qui définissent le *sexting* du point de vue des jeunes, des parents et des enseignants ? Quelle est la définition du *sexting* ?
- Quelles sont les raisons qui peuvent motiver une personne à pratiquer le *sexting* (en termes d'envoi et de réception) mais aussi à transférer le contenu à d'autres personnes ?
- Quels sont les risques, conséquences et réactions possibles, notamment en termes de jugement ?
- Est-ce que la prévention relative au *sexting* est utile ? Que pourrait-on faire pour prévenir ?



## 1.2 Méthodes

Afin de répondre aux différentes questions de recherche, nous avons décidé d'utiliser une méthode qualitative dans le but d'appréhender les opinions et les interprétations des participants quant à la pratique du sexting. Ce type de méthodes permet, en effet, de saisir davantage le sens qui peut être donné à un phénomène social et d'approfondir l'exploration et la compréhension de celui-ci. Au total, 32 adolescents et jeunes adultes âgés de 16 à 21 ans, 18 enseignants dès la 8<sup>ème</sup> année et 11 parents d'enfants âgés entre 11 et 20 ans ont participé aux groupes focus. Au vu de la thématique touchant à des notions de sexualité et d'intimité, nous avons décidé de séparer les filles et les garçons dans les groupes des jeunes.

Une grille d'entretien, basée sur nos questions de recherche, regroupait les principales thématiques à parcourir (définition, motivations, risques, réactions et prévention), ainsi que quelques exemples de questions ouvertes. Afin de ne pas induire de définition préconçue, la discussion débutait avec une question très générale sur leur connaissance du terme *sexting* puis nous proposons de lire deux vignettes afin d'amorcer la discussion et de rassurer les participants sur le fait qu'ils n'avaient pas nécessairement besoin de parler de leur propre expérience, à moins qu'ils choisissent de le faire.

Le projet a été approuvé par la Commission cantonale (VD) d'éthique de la recherche sur l'être humain.

Afin d'extraire les différents thèmes et dimensions soulevés par les participants, nous avons procédé à une analyse thématique de contenu, une méthode permettant d'extraire les interprétations et les significations subjectives d'un phénomène social en utilisant un procédé de classification et de catégorisation des données. Cette méthode a l'avantage de récolter des informations venant directement des participants eux-mêmes sans théories ou idées préconçues, ce qui est particulièrement intéressant lorsque le but de la recherche est avant tout d'explorer une pratique nouvelle. Nous avons également fait une analyse par groupe (jeunes, parents et enseignants, mais aussi filles et garçons) afin d'explorer les éventuelles différences et similitudes qui pouvaient exister entre les groupes.

## 1.3 Recommandations

Au vu des différents éléments utilisés par les participants pour définir le sexting, il apparaît nécessaire d'élaborer une définition précise et consensuelle du sexting en séparant clairement ses différentes dimensions en termes de support, de contenu et de contexte.

Les messages de prévention et la loi ne devraient pas viser la pratique du sexting en tant que telle et les victimes, mais bien les cas de chantage, de pression et de harcèlement, ainsi que les auteurs de ces actes. Nous recommandons donc que les messages de sensibilisation, ainsi que les éventuelles réponses légales, visent une réduction des risques en s'attaquant aux problèmes de consentement, de chantage, de harcèlement et de transfert plutôt qu'en encourageant une

interdiction et une abstinence pures et dures du sexting, défini comme une pratique positive et un échange consentant entre deux personnes par la majorité des jeunes de cette étude.

Plusieurs participants ont avoué se sentir totalement démunis face à une situation de sexting problématique, notamment par rapport au fait de ne pas savoir à quelles personnes s'adresser. Certains jeunes étaient très réticents à apporter leur soutien à une victime de peur d'en devenir une à leur tour. En plus d'une stratégie de soutien par les pairs envers les victimes, des messages d'empathie et de tolérance doivent être mis en place. En effet, les participants ont très souvent reporté l'existence de réactions et de jugements très négatifs envers les victimes, particulièrement lorsque celles-ci étaient des filles.

En résumé, il s'agirait de :

- Utiliser une définition détaillée du *sexting* et un vocabulaire approprié à la pratique et aux perceptions des jeunes en :
  - Différenciant les supports du *sexting* (texte, audio, photos et vidéos) ;
  - Analysant le contenu du *sexting* (nudité, apparition du visage, personnalisé et privé) ;
  - Distinguant le *sexting* des conséquences négatives qui peuvent en résulter (transfert non consenti, chantage, harcèlement) et ne pas intégrer ces dernières dans la définition du *sexting*.
- Clarifier les différents contextes dans lesquels le *sexting* se pratique ainsi que ceux des cas de transfert et de harcèlement.
- Réorienter la prévention pour cibler les auteurs de transfert.
- Améliorer les connaissances des jeunes quant aux solutions envisageables et aux personnes à contacter en cas de problèmes.
- Mettre en place une stratégie de soutien envers les victimes, notamment en luttant contre les jugements négatifs envers celles-ci, en particulier envers les filles.
- Différencier les messages de prévention selon certaines catégories d'âge et proposer plusieurs interventions durant la scolarité (par exemple, pendant les cours d'éducation sexuelle).

## 2 Summary

### 2.1 Introduction

Nowadays, the use of the Internet and new technologies is ubiquitous in everyday life, especially among youths. This virtual evolution has largely changed the social context in which adolescents and young adults develop their interactions and relationships, including in their sexuality. Technology improvement frequently leads to the creation and the development of new behaviors. Among the most recent ones, there is *sexting*, the contraction of two terms *sex* and *texting*, whose definition is still vague and disparate.

The use and the sharing of numerical sexual content are not new but technological progress has increased the number of tools that facilitate the sharing and weaken access restrictions. In general, *sexting* is defined as the electronic sending of sexual content. If *sexting* could be (sometimes) considered as an experimental and harmless sexual behavior, it could also lead to tragic consequences when the content is shared with other people and used as a base for harassment.

Even if research has begun showing interest in *sexting* in terms of prevalence rates and prevention campaigns have been created regarding its risks, more in-depth studies are needed to understand all the issues surrounding this activity, especially when it leads to negative consequences.

Our research questions are:

- What are the different elements that define *sexting* based on the opinions of youths, parents and teachers? What is the definition of *sexting*?
- What are the possible motivations to practice *sexting* (in terms of sending and receiving) but also to share with other persons?
- What are the possible risks, consequences and reactions (for example in terms of judgments) of this activity?
- Is prevention useful for this topic? What could be done to prevent negative consequences of *sexting*?

## 2.2 Methods

To answer these research questions, we used a qualitative method. This kind of method enables to explore and understand more in-depth a social phenomenon. A total of 32 adolescents and young adults between 16 and 21 years old, 18 8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, and 11 parents of children between 11 and 20 years old participated in focus groups. Given the topic of *sexting* with notions of sexuality and intimacy, we decided to separate females and males for the groups of youths.

Based on our research questions, we built an interview guide including the main topics (definitions, motivations, risks, consequences and prevention) and some examples of opened questions. To avoid inducing preconceived definition, the discussion began with a general question on their knowledge of the term *sexting*. Afterwards, two cases were distributed to initiate the discussion and to reassure participants about the fact that they did not require to talk about their own experience, unless they decided to.

The research project was approved by the Cantonal (VD) ethics committee on research on human subjects.

To extract the different themes and dimensions put forward by the participants, we used a thematic content analysis, a method enabling to extract the interpretations and subjective meanings of a social phenomenon by using a process of classification and categorization of the data. This method has the advantage of collecting information directly from the participants themselves without preconceived theories or ideas, which is particularly interesting when the main aim is the exploration of a recent activity. We also performed a group analysis (youths, parents and teachers but also girls and boys for the youth) to explore the possible disparities or similarities between the groups.

## 2.3 Recommendations

Given the different elements used by the participants to define *sexting*, it is necessary to develop a precise and consensual definition of *sexting* by separating its different dimensions in terms of media types, content and context.

Prevention and law should not target the activity of *sexting* per se and the victims, but they should target the cases of blackmailing, pressure and harassment, as well as the perpetrators of these behaviors. We recommend that awareness messages and legal responses aim to reduce the risks by combating the problems of consent, blackmailing, harassment and transfer rather than encouraging the interdiction of *sexting* which was mostly defined, in this study, as a positive activity between two consenting persons.

Several participants admitted that they were completely lost when problems linked to sexting appear and that they did not know whom to address for help. Some young participants were very reticent to give support to a victim because they were afraid of becoming a victim themselves. Besides strategies of peer support towards victims, there is also the necessity to give empathy

and tolerance messages. Indeed, participants often reported the existence of detrimental reactions and judgments, especially those addressed to girls.


To sum up, it would be necessary to:

- Use a precise definition of *sexting* and specific vocabulary according to the performed activity and to the youth's perceptions by:
  - Differentiating the media (text, audio, photos and videos);
  - Analyzing the content that is included in *sexting* (nudity, visible face, personalized and private);
  - Differentiating the activity of *sexting* per se from its negative consequences (non-consenting sharing, blackmail, harassment) and do not include the latter in the definition of sexting.
- Clarify the different contexts in which *sexting* could occur as well as its negative consequences such as sharing with unintended parties and harassment.
- Redirect prevention to target the authors of non-consenting sharing.
- Improve young people's knowledge about whom to address and what solutions to find if they meet a problem linked to sexting.
- Organize support strategies towards victims, including the elimination of detrimental judgments, especially those addressed to girls.
- Differentiate prevention messages according to age categories and offer several in-school interventions (for example during sex-education).

## Annexe 8 : Rapport #2

**Barrense-Dias Y, Akre C, Suris JC.** La sexualité à l'ère numérique : les adolescents et le sexting 2.0, 2ème phase. Lausanne, Institut universitaire de médecine sociale et préventive, 2019 ([Raisons de santé 296](#)).





Institut universitaire de médecine sociale et préventive - IUMSP  
Groupe de recherche sur la santé des adolescents - GRSA

# La sexualité à l'ère numérique : les adolescents et le sexting 2.0, 2ème phase

Yara Barrense-Dias, Christina Akre, Joan-Carles Suris

RAISONS DE SANTÉ 296 – LAUSANNE

*Unil*  
UNIL | Université de Lausanne



# 1 Résumé

## 1.1 Introduction

Le sexting a d'abord été rendu public par des cas dramatiques relayés par la presse dans lesquels des jeunes filles avaient été harcelées à la suite de la publication et du partage d'une de leurs photos intimes. Pourtant, depuis, cette pratique a également été appréhendée de manière plus positive ou moins alarmiste, pouvant raisonnablement faire partie du développement et des expérimentations des jeunes.

En 2016, nous avons mené une première recherche qualitative qui avait pour but d'explorer la pratique du sexting chez les jeunes en menant des groupes focus avec des jeunes âgés de 16 à 21 ans, des parents et des enseignants d'enfants et d'élèves âgés d'au moins 11 ans. Dans le cadre de cette première étude, certains résultats nous ont amené à élaborer une étape exploratoire supplémentaire.

Ainsi, nous avons souhaité continuer notre approche exploratoire de la pratique du sexting en incluant les opinions et interprétations des jeunes âgés de 12 à 15 ans ou en tout cas encore dans le système d'école obligatoire. Ajouter les opinions et interprétations des 12-15 ans nous offrira une vision complète de la problématique du sexting et permettra assurément d'adapter les messages de prévention au plus près de la pratique en établissant les différents facteurs de risque et de protection quant à la pratique du sexting.

Cette recherche peut être considérée comme la suite de la première recherche menée en 2016 auprès des jeunes âgées de 16 à 21 ans, des enseignants et des parents. Ainsi, les objectifs et les méthodes sont très similaires.

Nos questions de recherche étaient les suivantes :

- Quelles sont les différents éléments qui définissent le sexting du point de vue des jeunes ? Quelle est la définition du sexting ?
- Quelles sont les raisons qui peuvent motiver une personne à pratiquer le sexting (en termes d'envoi et de réception) mais aussi à transférer le contenu à d'autres personnes ?
- Quels sont les risques, conséquences et réactions possibles, notamment en termes de jugement ?
- Est-ce que la prévention relative au sexting est utile ? Que pourrait-on faire pour prévenir ?



## 1.2 Méthodes

La méthode des groupes focus est particulièrement recommandée pour les recherches ayant un but exploratoire sur un sujet encore relativement peu connu, notamment afin de saisir les différents termes, définitions et vocabulaires utilisés par les participants.

Un total de 36 jeunes (56% garçons) ont participé à 6 groupes focus. Pour pouvoir participer, le jeune devait être âgé entre 12 et 15 ans ou être encore dans le système de l'école obligatoire. La moyenne d'âge des participants était de 14.3 ans.

Au vu de la thématique touchant à des notions de sexualité et d'intimité, nous avons décidé de séparer les filles et les garçons. De plus, une homogénéité quant au genre est souvent recommandée lorsque des groupes focus sont conduits avec des jeunes, évitant ainsi le plus possible une adaptation de leur parole ou une gêne par rapport au sexe opposé et encourageant la discussion grâce à ce point commun. Les garçons et les filles sembleraient également apprécier différemment les pratiques liées à la sexualité. Finalement, une telle séparation nous a également permis de mener une analyse par groupe. Ainsi, 3 groupes de filles et 3 groupes de garçons ont participé à cette étude.

Au vu de nos questions de recherche et de l'objectif principal de cette étude, nous ne cherchions pas des témoignages personnels quant à la pratique du sexting. Ainsi, dans nos annonces de recrutement, nous avons clairement mis en évidence que nous ne cherchions pas à parler de leurs propres expériences mais bien de leur opinion générale sur la pratique.

Une grille d'entretien basée sur nos questions de recherche regroupait les principales thématiques à parcourir (définition, motivations, risques, réactions et prévention), ainsi que quelques exemples de questions ouvertes. Pour pouvoir faire des comparaisons, nous avons utilisé la même grille d'entretien qu'en 2016.

Afin de ne pas induire de définition préconçue, la discussion sur la pratique du sexting débutait avec une question très générale sur leur connaissance du terme sexting puis nous propositions de lire deux vignettes afin d'amorcer la discussion et de rassurer les participants sur le fait qu'ils n'avaient pas nécessairement besoin de parler de leur propre expérience, à moins qu'ils choisissent de le faire.

Afin d'extraire les différents thèmes et dimensions soulevés par les participants, nous avons procédé à une analyse thématique de contenu, une méthode permettant d'extraire les interprétations et les significations subjectives d'un phénomène social en utilisant un procédé de classification et de catégorisation des données.

## 1.3 Recommandations

- Rappeler aux jeunes les comportements à adopter en cas de réception d'un nude (contenu intime et/ou à caractère sexuel) :

- Effacer le contenu reçu (destinataire principal ou secondaire) ;
  - Ne pas partager ou montrer le contenu reçu ;
  - Aucun partage ne peut être géré même s'il est fait avec des personnes particulières ;
  - Ne pas participer aux moqueries, aux insultes et à l'isolement de la victime même s'ils ne comprennent ou n'acceptent pas la pratique;
  - Oser parler en tant que victime (en amont ou en aval) et en tant que témoin.
- 
- Mettre en place une stratégie de soutien envers les victimes et supprimer la double victimisation qu'une diffusion non consentie et les réactions des pairs peuvent produire.
  - Tout en considérant que les garçons peuvent également être victimes, il est nécessaire de sensibiliser les jeunes aux discours violents qui sont tenus envers les filles.
  - Les victimes doivent être considérées comme des victimes, il ne faut pas que la situation se retourne contre elles même si les risques pouvaient être connus.
  - Rappeler les aspects légaux entourant la pratique du sexting, tout en prenant en compte l'ensemble des spécificités que la pratique présente, notamment en termes de contenu.
  - Améliorer les connaissances des jeunes quant aux solutions envisageables et aux personnes à contacter en cas de problèmes ou en cas de questionnements.
  - Les personnes ressources doivent éviter d'utiliser des discours moralisateurs, même indirectement, qui pourraient être repris par les jeunes eux-mêmes et accentuer les réactions négatives. Il est nécessaire d'être à l'écoute des interrogations des jeunes et d'avoir connaissance de leurs pratiques.
  - Faire participer les jeunes à la conception des messages de prévention et d'éducation, notamment pour déterminer les intervenants, les canaux, le matériel et leurs interrogations.
  - Ne pas oublier la place des témoins actifs et passifs et le rôle important qu'ils peuvent avoir dans la résolution des problèmes ou, au contraire, dans l'aggravement d'une situation.

## 2 Summary

### 2.1 Introduction

Sexting was firstly made public by dramatic cases that were relayed by the press. These cases involved young females who were bullied because of the dissemination of their intimate photograph. However, since then, this behavior has also been considered and studied in a more positive or less alarmist way, as part of the development and experimentation of youths.

In 2016, we conducted a first qualitative research with the aim of exploring sexting activities among youths. We used focus groups with adolescents and young adults aged between 16 and 21 years old, parents and teachers of children and pupils aged 11 years or older. Some of the results that we obtained with this first study led us to consider an additional exploratory step.

Thus, we aimed to continue the exploration of sexting by including opinions and interpretations of youths aged between 12 and 15 years old or, at least, still in the mandatory school system. Adding opinions and interpretations of these youths will offer a complete view of sexting issues and will help to adapt prevention messages.

This research can be considered as following the first study conducted in 2016 with youths aged between 16 and 21 years old, teachers and parents. Therefore, objectives and methods are very similar.

Our research questions were :

- What are the different elements that define sexting based on the opinions of youths ? What is the definition of sexting?
- What are the possible motivations to practice sexting (in terms of sending and receiving) but also to share with other persons?
- What are the possible risks, consequences and reactions (for example in terms of peer judgments) of this activity?
- Is prevention useful for this topic? What could be done to prevent negative consequences of sexting?

### 2.2 Methods

To answer our research questions, we used a qualitative approach. This kind of method enables to explore and understand more in-depth a social phenomenon. Focus groups are particularly recommended for researches with an exploratory aim on a relatively unknown topic. This method allows to gather terms, definitions and vocabularies used by participants.

Thirty-six youths (56% males) participated in 6 focus groups. To participate, youth had to be aged between 12 and 15 years old or, at least, still in the mandatory school system. The mean age was 14.3 years.

Because the topic could lead to discussions on sexuality and intimacy, we decided to separate females and males. Furthermore, a gender homogeneity is often recommended for focus groups with youths to avoid discomfort with the opposite sex and encourage discussion thanks to this common point. Males and females also seem to consider sexuality differently. Finally, such a separation also allowed us to conduct an analysis by gender. Thus, 3 groups of females and 3 groups of males participated in this study.

Based on our research questions and main objective, we did not look for personal testimonies on sexting activity. Therefore, we specified in our ads to recruit participants that we were interested in general opinions only and not in personal experiences.

Based on our research questions, we built an interview guide including the main topics (definition, motivations, risks, reactions and prevention) and some examples of open-ended questions. To compare the results, we used the same guide in 2016 and 2018.

To avoid inducing a preconceived definition, the discussion began with a general question on their knowledge of the term sexting. Afterwards, two cases were presented to initiate the discussion and to reassure participants about the fact that they did not require to talk about their own experience, unless they decided to.

To extract the different themes and dimensions put forward by participants, we used a thematic content analysis. This method aims to extract the interpretations and subjective meanings of a social phenomena by using a process of classification and categorization of the data.

## 2.3 Recommendations


- Remind youths of what to do if they receive a *nude* (intimate and / or sexual content):
  - Delete the received content (main or secondary recipient);
  - Do not share or show the received content;
  - There is no safe non-consented sharing, even if it is done with particular person such as friends;
  - Do not participate in insulting, bullying or isolation even if they do not understand or accept sexting;
  - Dare to speak as a victim (upstream or downstream) and as a witness.
- Organize support strategies towards victims, including the elimination of detrimental judgments and double victimization that a non-consented sharing and peer reactions could produce.
- While considering that males can also be victims, there is a need to sensitize youths to the violent discourses that females face.

- Victims must be considered as victims. The situation must not be turned against them even if the risks could be known.
- Remind legal aspects about sexting activities. However, all the specificities that sexting presents, particularly in terms of content, must be taken into account.
- Improve young people's knowledge about what solutions to find and whom to address if they face a problem or have questions linked to sexting.
- Avoid using moralizing speeches, even indirectly, which could be used by the youths themselves and accentuate the negative reactions. It is necessary to listen to the questions of youths and to know their practices.
- Involve youths in the conception of prevention and education messages, including identifying actors, channels, materials and their questions.
- Do not forget the place of active and passive witnesses and the important role that they can have in problem resolution or, on the contrary, in the aggravation of a situation.

## Annexe 9 : Rapport #3

**Barrense-Dias Y, De Puy J, Romain-Glassey N, Suris JC.** *La prévention et le sexting: un état des lieux.* Lausanne, Institut universitaire de médecine sociale et préventive, 2018 ([Raisons de santé 285](#)).





Institut universitaire de médecine sociale et préventive - IUMSP  
Division des Maladies Chroniques – dMC  
Groupe de recherche sur la santé des adolescents - GRSA

## La prévention et le sexting : un état des lieux

Yara Barrense-Dias, Jacqueline De Puy, Nathalie Romain-  
Glasse, Joan-Carles Suris

RAISONS DE SANTÉ 285 – LAUSANNE

*Unil*  
UNIL | Université de Lausanne



# 1 Résumé

## 1.1 Introduction

Le développement social et relationnel des adolescent-e-s et des jeunes adultes s'effectue aujourd'hui avec celui d'Internet et des nouvelles technologies. Dans ce contexte, les interactions et la transmission d'informations numériques sont facilitées et peu restreintes, ce qui peut mener à un certain nombre d'enjeux en termes d'usage des technologies et de gestion de l'image numérique. Le sexting fait partie de ces problématiques. Cette pratique pouvant, de manière générale, se définir comme l'échange électronique de matériel personnel à caractère sexuel ou intime, peut parfois mener à des situations dramatiques lorsque, par exemple, le contenu d'un message est transféré sans consentement à d'autres personnes.

Après avoir mené une première recherche exploratoire qualitative sur la pratique du sexting chez les jeunes, la thématique de la prévention relative au sexting s'est avérée particulièrement intéressante à approfondir. En effet, très peu de jeunes ont rapporté se rappeler de messages ou campagnes de prévention autour du sexting spécifiquement. Au vu de ces résultats, nous avons considéré qu'il était essentiel d'établir un état des lieux de l'offre préventive sur la thématique du sexting, plus particulièrement dans le canton de Vaud, afin de vérifier les dires de certains jeunes sur le manque d'intervention et de discussion sur le sexting et ses possibles dérives.

A travers cet état des lieux et ce rapport, nous proposons donc un catalogue permettant de répertorier et d'offrir une vue d'ensemble des différents acteurs-trices et ressources à disposition dans le cadre de la prévention relative à la pratique du sexting auprès des jeunes.

## 1.2 Méthodes

Deux stratégies de recherche ont été utilisées pour effectuer cet état des lieux. La première stratégie s'est basée sur une revue de la littérature nationale et internationale comprenant les documents (articles, rapports, etc.) inclus dans les bases de données scientifiques et dans la littérature grise. La deuxième stratégie a été de contacter plusieurs acteurs-trices et professionnel-le-s actif-ve-s dans le milieu de la prévention et/ou de la jeunesse qui avaient mené ou étaient susceptibles de mener ou connaître un projet relatif à la pratique du sexting dans le canton de Vaud. Aucune limite d'âge n'a été fixée. Nous nous sommes ainsi intéressés à toutes les cibles de prévention (enfants, adolescents, jeunes adultes, parents, enseignants, etc.) tant que celle-ci se référait à la pratique du sexting parmi les jeunes. Nous n'avons aucune exhaustivité de ce catalogue.

La recherche de la littérature scientifique au sens strict a été effectuée le 28 juin 2017 et un total de 467 documents ont été trouvés. Après suppression des doublons, 219 documents ont pu être examinés sur la base de leur abstract. 169 articles ont été éliminés car ils étaient hors sujet. Parmi les 50 papiers restants, un ne correspondait pas aux langues que nous avons sélectionnées, 20 ont



encore été considérés comme hors sujet après lecture du papier dans son intégralité et le sexting n'était pas le sujet principal dans 11 papiers. Dix-huit articles ont ainsi été gardés et faisaient référence à 24 projets. Ces 24 projets ont pu être approfondis et complétés par d'autres programmes grâce à la recherche de littérature grise et sur Internet, ainsi que par les professionnels contactés dans un deuxième temps. Ce rapport présente un total de 51 projets / entités.

## 1.3 Conclusions

Certaines campagnes ou certains programmes de prévention conseillent avant tout de ne pas pratiquer le sexting et de ne pas envoyer de contenu personnel intime (Sexting Abstinence Message) alors que d'autres présentent certains principes pour une pratique du sexting plus sûre (Safer Sexting Message). Un autre type de messages consiste à sensibiliser aux problèmes liés à la pratique (pression, chantage, diffusion, etc.) mais surtout du point de vue d'une victime. En effet, peu de messages s'adressent directement aux potentiels auteurs des problèmes.

Parmi les différents projets recueillis, une grande majorité d'entre eux présente une fille victime d'un cas problématique de sexting. Relativement peu de projets mettent en avant les témoins ou les complices dans le cadre d'un cas de sexting qui tournerait mal.

Inciter à la discussion et au débat est une démarche positive, demandée et appréciée par les jeunes. Mener les jeunes à une réflexion sur la thématique pourrait également les inciter à discuter avec d'autres jeunes, voire même avec leurs parents. Dans ce même ordre d'idée, les messages de sensibilisation seront davantage entendus si ceux-ci utilisent leurs termes et leurs points de vue quant à la pratique du sexting. Les jeunes doivent donc être impliqués dès le début de la conception d'un projet de prévention afin d'éviter que les messages n'atteignent pas leur cible. La prévention par les pairs s'inscrit également dans cette perspective.

Nous avons souvent pu relever que le sexting est souvent abordé de manière transversale et contextuelle à travers des thématiques plus larges telles que l'usage d'Internet ou le harcèlement. Si cette idée nous paraît intéressante, notamment d'un point de vue pratique, il nous apparaît néanmoins essentiel que la pratique soit clairement identifiable par les jeunes afin qu'ils puissent appliquer les concepts et principes (ex. consentement, pression, etc.) présentés dans des thématiques plus larges à la pratique du sexting.

## 3 Summary

### 3.1 Introduction

Nowadays, social and relational development of adolescents and young adults also occurs with Internet and new technologies. In this context, digital interactions and information transmission are facilitated and unrestricted, which can lead to different concerns in terms of technology use and online image management. Sexting is one of them. This activity can be defined in a general way as the electronic sharing of personal content of a sexual or intimate nature. In some cases, sexting can lead to dramatic situations when, for example, the content of such a message is shared with other people without consent.

After conducting a first qualitative exploratory research on sexting among young people, the theme of prevention appeared to be particularly of interest to explore in depth. Indeed, very few young people who participated in our study reported remembering prevention messages or campaigns on sexting specifically. Given these results, we considered that it was essential to establish an inventory of the preventive offer on the theme of sexting, especially in the canton of Vaud. The aim was to verify the statements of some young people who reported the lack of interventions and discussion on sexting and its possible negative consequences.

With this inventory and report, we offer a catalogue of the different actors and available resources for prevention related to sexting among youths, especially in the canton of Vaud for Switzerland, but also worldwide to be inspired by international experiences.

### 3.2 Methods

Two research strategies were used to do this inventory. The first strategy was based on a national and international literature review of documents (articles, reports, etc.) included in scientific databases and in the grey literature. The second strategy was to contact several actors or professionals who were active in the field of prevention or youth and who led or were likely to lead or know about a project related to sexting in the canton of Vaud. No age limit was set. We were interested in any target audience (children, adolescents, young adults, parents, teachers, etc.) as long as the prevention referred to sexting among youths. We advance no comprehensiveness of the catalogue.

The scientific literature research was done the 28th of June 2017 and 467 papers were found. After removing duplicates, 219 documents were examined. Among them, 169 were eliminated based on abstracts because they were out of subject. Of the remaining 50 papers, one did not correspond to the selected languages, 20 were considered off-topic after reading the entire paper and sexting was not the main topic in 11 papers. Finally, we kept 18 articles that referred to 24 prevention projects. We were then able to examine these projects in more detail and complete the list with the grey

literature research, Internet and professionals who were contacted in a second step. A total of 51 projects / entities are presented in this report.

### 3.3 Conclusions

Some prevention campaigns or messages advise not to do sexting and send personal intimate content (Sexting Abstinence Message) at all whereas others prone principles for a safer activity of sexting (Safer Sexting Message). Another kind of message aims to prevent the problems linked to sexting (pressure, blackmail, spreading, etc.) but especially from the perspective of the victim. Indeed, very few messages are addressed to the potential perpetrators of these problems. Among the different projects that we found, a large majority presents a girl victim of a problematic case of sexting. Relatively few actions consider witnesses or accomplices in the context of sexting that goes wrong.

Encouraging discussion and debate is a positive measure, often requested and appreciated by youths. Leading youths to reflect on the theme could also encourage them to discuss with other youths, even with their parents. In the same way, awareness messages will be more heard if they use youths' terms and points of view on the activity of sexting. Thus, young people should be involved and consulted from the beginning of a prevention project to avoid the message missing its targets. Peer prevention is also part of this perspective.

We also found that sexting was often discussed in a transversal and contextual way through larger themes such as Internet use or harassment. If this idea seems interesting, especially from a practical point of view, it nevertheless seems essential that the activity of sexting needs to be clearly identifiable by young people. Thus, by naming the activity of sexting, it could allow them to apply the concepts and principles (e.g. consent, pressure, etc.) of the wider themes to it.