

# **The meaning of sexting for teenagers**

**A social representational, post-Jungian investigation**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Acknowledgements**

I cannot but wholeheartedly thank Dr Myriam Caranzano-Maitre. Her constant support and advice has put me in touch with an international network of practitioners and researchers as passionate about children's rights as I am. Undoubtedly, I would not have been able to carry out this research without her. Equally, I thank the Department of Education of Canton Ticino and the Magistrate for minors of the Canton, Reto Medici for collaborating with me, believing in the research project and encouraging me with advice and insight into the legal and educational aspects that concern sexting. My family has also been an endless source of support, in spite of living abroad and being apart for most of the year, they have been a constant comfort, particularly when I struggled the most. To my partner, Duncan, goes my unlimited admiration and love for the patience, the calm and the support he gave me. I would never have made it without him on my side. I will never thank my research participants enough for their courage in sharing their views, fears and sometimes experiences of a phenomenon that can be funny, but unfortunately is often also humiliating for those involved. I thank the Department of Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies for the academic support; my supervisor, Dr Chris Nicholson, for taking on an undoubtedly demanding task in advising me in the final period of my research, my colleagues and friends, and everyone who believed in my research. Among them, special thanks go to Dr Giulia Zampini. I also thank the Associazione Demetra and the Foundation Gianfre, for the financial contribution.

## Table of Contents

<b>CHAPTER 1</b> .....	<b>1</b>
INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 <i>Teenagers and new technologies</i> .....	12
1.2 <i>The analogies with the trickster</i> .....	14
1.3 <i>A multidisciplinary research</i> .....	17
1.4 <i>The psychosocial approach</i> .....	24
<b>CHAPTER 2</b> .....	<b>32</b>
CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW .....	32
2.1 <i>Sexting and the sexualisation of childhood debates</i> .....	32
2.2 <i>The theoretical perspectives: feminism and moral panic</i> .....	34
2.3 <i>Sexting, the legal aspect and the existing evidence</i> .....	40
2.4 <i>Primary research on sexting</i> .....	44
2.5 <i>Swiss-based research on sexting</i> .....	50
<b>CHAPTER 3</b> .....	<b>54</b>
SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY AND ANALYTICAL PSYCHOLOGY .....	54
3.1 <i>Jung's sociological writings</i> .....	55
3.1.1 <i>Archetype theory and its relevance for social research</i> .....	58
3.2 <i>Jungian and post-Jungian sociological approaches – the classics</i> .....	63
3.3 <i>Jungian and post-Jungian contemporary sociological approaches</i> .....	68
3.3.1 <i>Perspectives applying and discussing the equivalence between collective unconscious and collective representations</i> .....	69
3.3.2 <i>Cultural complex theory and the cultural unconscious</i> .....	79
3.3.3 <i>Applied post-Jungian perspectives to social phenomena</i> .....	83
3.4 <i>A critical appraisal</i> .....	89
<b>CHAPTER 4</b> .....	<b>92</b>
THE PSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACH .....	92
4.1 <i>The historical background of psychosocial studies</i> .....	92
4.1.1 <i>The discursive approach in psychosocial studies</i> .....	95
4.1.2 <i>The object relation perspective in psychosocial studies</i> .....	97
4.2 <i>Social representation theory and the psychosocial</i> .....	98
4.3 <i>Discourse and representation: an epistemological debate</i> .....	104
4.4 <i>Epistemology, Jung and Moscovici</i> .....	107
4.5 <i>Moral regulation and moral panics</i> .....	120
<b>CHAPTER 5</b> .....	<b>133</b>
METHODOLOGY.....	133
5.1 <i>Ontological and epistemological positions</i> .....	133
5.2 <i>The post Jungian tools: transference and countertransference</i> .....	136
5.3 <i>Procedure and participants</i> .....	140
5.4 <i>The interviews approach</i> .....	141
5.5 <i>Thematic discourse analysis and visual methods</i> .....	143
5.6 <i>Ethics of primary research with children</i> .....	149
5.7 <i>Quality standards in qualitative research</i> .....	152
<b>CHAPTER 6</b> .....	<b>158</b>
FINDINGS.....	158
6.1 <i>The official attitude towards sexting, the media discourses and the moral regulatory discourses</i> .....	158
6.2 <i>The major problem with sexting: trust and betrayal</i> .....	172

6.3 <i>Addiction, dependence and abuse</i> .....	191
6.4 <i>The body, sculpture and social status</i> .....	198
6.5 <i>Art versus sexting-as-no-art</i> .....	207
6.6 <i>A reflexive note on Classicism and the Renaissance</i> .....	214
<b>CHAPTER 7</b> .....	<b>217</b>
DISCUSSION .....	217
7.1 <i>Myth in psychosocial research and Jungian and post-Jungian psychology</i> .....	219
7.2 <i>The myths behind the social representations of sexting</i> .....	224
7.3 <i>Privacy, chastity and the Athenian law of hubris</i> .....	231
7.4 <i>Hubris and Swiss politics: the political implications of teenage sexting</i> .....	234
7.5 <i>Images, reflection and reflexivity</i> .....	236
7.6 <i>The female Trickster and girls' resistance</i> .....	238
<b>CHAPTER 8</b> .....	<b>243</b>
CONCLUSION .....	243
LIMITATIONS, REFLECTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	243
8.1 <i>Limitations of the research project</i> .....	247
8.2 <i>Recommendations</i> .....	250
8.3 <i>Reflection</i> .....	252
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>255</b>

## Appendices

Information letter for parents/guardians	Appendix A
Information letter for participants	Appendix B
Information sheet	Appendix C
Consent form	Appendix D
Ethical approval form	Appendix E
Images	Appendix F
Example transcript	Appendix G
Example thematic map	Appendix H

## List of Figures

Pan and Syrinx by Peter Paul Rubens (1620). <i>Royal Collection Trust.</i>	Image 1	p. 214
Campaign “Anti-minaret” <i>SVP UCD, 2006</i>	Image 2	p. 223
Campaign “For the expulsion of foreign criminals”, <i>SVP UDC, 2007</i>	Image 3	p. 223

## Abstract

Recent findings concerning 'sexting' suggest that social status among same-sex teenagers is a major explanatory factor behind such a phenomenon (Ringrose et al, 2013). Alongside elements of immaturity, and (an alleged) disdain for boundaries in gender-based interactions, such research into social status may indicate the constellation of the trickster, a Jungian archetypal figure associated with mischievous characters in world folklore. Tricksters often subvert hierarchies and transgress limits, traits often associated with those rites of passage towards adulthood. To deepen the analysis of the social reactions to 'sexting' and the psychological dynamics involved, depth psychology theories are integrated with a criminological discussion of the moral panics and the moral regulation issues raised by 'sexting'. The main argument justifying such an approach concerns the need to acknowledge the social construction of youth as 'deviant' and to consider the role of social development that is performed around the practice of 'sexting'. The major aim of the research is to investigate teenagers' understanding of such notions as social status and abuse, while analysing the impact of the sociocultural context of the Swiss Canton Ticino, where the data was collected. To achieve this aim, integration of social representation theory with Jungian and post-Jungian psychology has been used to inform the approach to data analysis, based on thematic discourse analysis. Findings from interviews point to issues of trust which lie behind the exposition of peers who are deemed morally reproachable. Such issues stem from a lack of self-confidence and an incapacity to deal with difficult feelings, which educational interventions must acknowledge.



## Chapter 1

### *Introduction*

We often read about how new technologies or consumer culture have changed, if not worsened, our relationships and our ability to interact. It is, therefore, apt to speculate if the younger generation live a more dangerous life, with less authentic relationships than the generations that preceded them? Is this feeling of change, of deterioration, at least to some extent, caused by ‘moral panics’, that is, strong social reactions to events that, due to their unfamiliar and frightening nature, provoke collective anxiety and indignation? To investigate such questions, I have chosen to focus on a specific phenomenon that has sparked controversy over the last decade, at both academic and political levels. The focus of this research is the allegedly increased sexualisation of teenagers. This is said to be observable in their consumer choices (for example, their consumption of increasingly available pornographic materials), and their behaviours, considered by some as abusive, such as the production of sexualised images through digital technology and social media, or what is now known as ‘sexting’.

Now a well-known phenomenon, sexting made its appearance in academic research and grey literature when the realisation dawned in the legal world, in countries such as the US and Australia, that a good number of sexualised images depicting under 18s was being crafted by teenagers themselves. The title of an article by Tracy Clark Flory published on Salon.com in 2009 summarised the impact of such a realisation:

The new pornographers – What’s more disturbing? That teens are texting each other naked pictures of themselves, or that it could get them branded as sex offenders for life?

Legally, such sexualised images and texts often fell under child pornography legislation, with long sentences being given to some young people (Levick and Moon, 2009; Schmitz and Siry, 2011; Crofts and Lee, 2013). Initially, academic research focused on this issue and supported legal reflections concerning ad hoc legislation looking to distinguish sexting from child pornography. More recently though, there has been increasing interest in matters of the sexualisation of childhood (Bailey, 2013; Hasinoff, 2014; Karaian, 2015) and gender dynamics (Ringrose et al., 2012). While primarily focused on teenagers, research has also started investigating adult sexting, particularly within intimacy studies (McDaniel and Drouin, 2015; Amundsen, 2020). Furthermore, both visual, verbal and text forms of sexting have begun to be considered in extant studies (Marengo, Settanni and Longobardi, 2019; Thurlow, 2017). However, research remains particularly focused on the visual format of sexting, because it often causes problems to those involved (Marengo et al., 2019). This study follows this trend.

The nature of teenagers' behaviours appears to have much in common with a Jungian archetype, the trickster, a character that is recurrent in various cultures, such as Hermes in Greek mythology, or Loki in Scandinavia. But what is an archetype?

The notion of an archetype is not as well-known as it could be in contemporary discourse. The reasons range from the limited presence of Jungian psychology in today's universities (Tacey, 1997) to a reduced presence of Jungian commentary in popular media compared to a few years ago, when intellectuals such as James Hillman were publishing widely read books with a Jungian perspective. However, it will be argued here that Jungian concepts might contribute to research.

Jung saw the psyche as a dynamic of opposition, similar to what happens in thermodynamics (Samuels, Shorter and Plaut, 1986: 102). The unconscious is, therefore, a counterpole to consciousness and it can exert a compensatory function. When consciousness and the unconscious are well-balanced, the individual experiences harmony between any of the multiple polarities the Jungian libido<sup>1</sup> provides. At times, however, the opposites enter more intense and conflicting phases, where some attitudes can become rigid (e.g. in neurosis) and the unconscious must tackle a psychological conflict. The latter is resolved when a third position is achieved through transcendence of the polarity.

As a container of opposites, the collective unconscious<sup>2</sup> structures itself according to archetypes. Archetypes summarise polarities and are experienced only as projective images (Samuels, Shorter and Plaut, 1986). Therefore, it is possible to talk about an image of a mother with a baby seen in a famous painting as exemplifying the archetypal mother, or the image of a snake appearing in a dream as an image of rebirth, if it is shedding its skin. The polarity conveyed through archetypes must reach consciousness for the unconscious conflict to be resolved. Thus, Jungian psychologists often amplify the materials that are presented in dreams or fantasies. Amplification concerns the identification of myths, fairy tales, cultural artefacts and social and political information that describe both poles involved in the unconscious conflict (ibid.). If a client is too fixated on one end of the polarity at the conscious level (for example, if somebody is always honest) and this is due to an unconscious conflict, he or she is more likely to encounter the polar opposite as 'Other'. The

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<sup>1</sup> The libido is the psychic energy. Unlike Freud, who coined the term, Jung thought that psychic energy has multiple sources and shapes. For Freud, the libido is primarily a sexual energy, whereas for Jung, it encompasses pretty much all instincts and needs that humans have (Samuels, Shorter and Plaut, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> The Jungian collective unconscious reflect archetypal processes, which have never been conscious. Its collective nature accounts for activities that are not strictly linked to biographical materials (Samuels, Shorter and Plaut, 1986).

polar opposite is projected onto external circumstances, individuals and traits. The encounters are often conflict-driven, thus painful and challenging for the individual. To balance the psychological attitude, materials containing both opposites are brought to the attention of the patient through the above-mentioned amplification. The presence of the opposites within the reach of consciousness begins a process called transcendent function, which facilitates a transition from one psychological attitude to another (ibid.)

Psychic conflict often arises because of the existence of moral rules and social obligations that do not fit our personalities. As such, a psychic conflict can be experienced by multiple individuals around the same oppressive moral rule. Their behaviour and attitudes might, therefore, concentrate around similar energetically charged opposites. This, I perceive, is happening in relation to young people's use of new digital technologies for sexual purposes.

My interest in the figure of the trickster is motivated by its association with rites of passage. First described in 1909 by Arnold van Gennep, a French anthropologist, rites of passage typically entail rituals or ceremonies to attest to the changing status of a member of a community. According to Joseph L. Henderson (2015/1967), initiation is also a psychological need of every human being. While contemporary society has limited rites of passage, our psyche still needs us to go through phases that are challenging and enable growth and self-development. The trickster, as an archetypal image, exemplifies this journey. Trickster tales often see them progress from destructive, yet comedic characters to the role of cultural heroes (Carroll, 1984).

In world literature, tricksters are characterised by threatening tomfoolery, carnival-like buffoonery, playing pranks, malice and shape-shifting attributes indicating duplicity,

disdain for social conventions and a dislike for boundaries and limits. Tricksters are often subversive, do not respect laws, and tend to cross the line, testing the limits of existing rules (Samuels, 1993). This characteristic connects the archetype with crimes such as theft (Gantz, 1993), and its more undefined, shape-shifting, liminal aspects with growth and development (Samuels, 1989).

Another domain that pertains to the trickster is that of the media (Bassil-Morozow, 2015). They can be startlingly ambiguous, presenting the superficial and entertaining indiscriminately next to the grotesque or the tragic. It follows that teenagers, who can also be startlingly ambiguous, and embody the trickster, are often perceived as skilled users of social media and their supporting technologies.

In Jungian psychology, the trickster is also connected with the carnival, the fool and his bursting sexuality (Oliva, cited in Willeford, 1998: 9). Lately, the metaphor of the carnival has made a return in sociological literature in relation to the phenomenon of crime (Presdee, 2000). One of the characteristics of contemporary society is the commodification of crime (ibid: 57), and, in equal measure, of sex. For example, see the debates concerning the ‘pornification’ of culture (Langman, 2008). The commodification of crime and sex are examples of the ‘carnivalization’ of culture (Bakhtin, cited in Presdee, 2000), which sees “the second life of the people” take over and subvert social order, norms and roles (ibid: 8). Presdee defines the process of commodification of the carnival as affecting ‘that part of life that is inaccessible and untouchable to the ‘official’ world of the scientific rationality of modernity and its politics, parties and politicians’ (ibid: 8). At different historical times, the Church and the State have sought to appropriate and control carnivals and public festivities (Presdee, 2000: 37). Capitalism, as an institution, has done the same. Not only are traditional carnivals short periods with a beginning and an end that enable the official order to maintain

its rule by allowing a periodic licence to transgress, which only occasionally results in true revolutions, but capitalism also deprives the carnival of more revolutionary aspects.

Capitalism and 'social processes have contrived to suppress carnival in its 'authentic' sense' (ibid: 44), by making carnivalesque activities 'safe, commodified affirmations of dominant values and celebrations of local community and charity rather than times of excess, laughter, reversal and ecstasy' (ibid. 46).

According to Jung (1972: 135), the 'subversive' quality of the Carnival presents analogies with the accounts on the figure of the trickster in American Indian mythology. In both Carnival and trickster's accounts, there is a reversal of the hierarchic order, coupled with laughter and foolishness. One of the main features of the carnival is the subversive power of laughter that manifests itself in a 'game of inverting official values' (Lachmann, 1988–89:118). All trickster figures present subversive and foolish qualities, alongside malice of some kind (seen in their tendency to play jokes and tricks), and a shape-shifting, undefined and ambivalent nature. Teenagers' gender relationships seem to be characterised by similar features, as recent qualitative research indicates (Ringrose et al., 2012). These traits partially characterise capitalism itself, too (Samuels, 1993: 88; Bassil-Morozow, 2012: 29 and 87): encompassing individualism, ambivalence, a conflict between self-assertion and social requests, competitiveness, hunger for status, association with commerce, fraud, lying and a tendency to play tricks. Of particular interest for this project is the role of status in teenagers' behaviours, as it is associated with the production of sexualised imagery, as discussed below. Status is a prominent feature in trickster narratives, as demonstrated by Bassil-Morozow's analysis of contemporary film (2012). Indeed in trickster films, such as *Dumb and Dumber* (1994), there is a recurring theme of fighting for one's social position:

(...) the trickster film manages, in its unique comical way, to scrutinize the inevitable tension between individuals and their assigned positions in the workplace and the social structure. Trickster protagonists not only fight (or attempt to fight) for their social position, but also make sure that their reward 'is proportionate to their effort'. (ibid: 96).

Of course, sexting is not the first phenomenon in history that concerns the representation of sexualised scenes. Concerns similar to those currently manifested towards sexting have seen much attention paid to pornography over the last century, in connection with women's rights and later with HIV and homosexuality (Watney, 1996). However, representations of transgressive sexual acts were already common in Renaissance Italy (Wolfthal, 1999). During that historical period, the purposes of owning such imagery were multiple, such as to 'elucidate marital doctrine, to serve as erotic stimulation and to assert the political authority of aristocratic patrons' (ibid: 10). It is, therefore, necessary to frame sexting within a long tradition of representational activities that requires investigation in its own turn. Striking similarities become evident when examining teenagers' behaviours in relation to the transgressive sexualised images produced during the Renaissance. The following argument unfolds when the activities surrounding such representation are carefully observed: similar tricks are played by male teenagers claiming sexualised pictures of their girlfriends and through mainstream sexualised images, via producers of pornography, advertising campaigns, and luxury brands. Both elicit the curiosity of the viewer by depicting a transgressive act. By excluding others and occasionally granting them access from viewing the transgressive images, both acquire social status and maintain a certain power. Even during the Renaissance period, Italian aristocrats and wealthy merchants would commission sexualised themed pictures and statues to reaffirm their social status—owning such

pornographic art was indeed reserved for the upper class, just as nowadays pornography is a market worth millions for those investing in it. While focusing the viewer's attention on the sexualised content, a message about the prestigious status of the producer/owner of the images is communicated to the viewers/consumers (Wolfthal, 1999). While access to pornography has been democratised in many ways, it remains a business controlled by the few who own the online platforms hosting such images.

The central aim of this research is to investigate teenagers' reflections and understanding of the connections between sexualised images and abusive behaviours, while acknowledging the role played by their psychosocial development, i.e. the changes in their behaviour that are commonly referred to as developmental. I contend that teenagers can provide insights about their behaviours with a higher degree of nuance than adults. As recipients of moral panics that depict their development as a sort of 'impending doom' leading inevitably towards a self-destructive future, young people have often been considered degenerate by adults, while ultimately proving able to survive through adolescence and into adulthood. This same capacity could also manifest in respect of their consumption and production of sexualised images, whose function might be related to a specific developmental phase. Should they be able to reflect on the dynamic described above, where the access to images is controlled to maintain status among peers, they might be able to engage with sexting in a developmentally sensible way.

However, current debates suggest the presence of a shadowy, creepy side in the commercialisation of sexualised items targeting under-18s (Gunter, 2014). Is this true? Did the commodification of sex towards children change the way teenagers deal with sexualised images? Current explanations are often permeated by strong ideological standpoints, which



often jump to conclusions without offering convincing explanations of how the process of influence takes place. They assume a simplistic relationship of cause and effect, often supported by the experimental methods adopted to study the impact of sexualised items. Consider the case of pornography. Historical debates have opposed those who think it promotes desensitisation towards rape, including proponents of the classic social learning theory paradigm (Bandura, 1971) and radical feminists such as Andrea Dworkin (1981) to more nuanced perspectives that describe the multiplicity of uses of pornography by different people in different contexts (Attwood, 2005). However, these debates have continued to be polarised and moralistic. If observed through a Jungian lens, they exemplify a dynamic of opposites, but neither side is fully convincing in its claims. Pornography does not always promote violence and misogyny, nor does it especially favour fulfilling relationships between individuals, particularly between men and women. Thus, it seems apt to question whether the Jungian psyche might provide a different, more creative insight into matters of sexting, where contemporary debates often replicate the polarities that concern pornography.

Furthermore, research concerning the sexualisation of childhood has mostly been carried out in the UK, the USA and Australia (APA, 2007; Bailey, 2011). Further national and international perspectives need to be developed. Indeed, a change of culture can be beneficial to gather different interpretations and consider the important impact of cultural, political, institutional and socio-contextual differences in the consumption and production of sexualised materials. Switzerland has been chosen as the location for my fieldwork for two reasons. First, there has been an increase in public attention towards children's victimisation in cases of sexual abuse, resulting in major political decisions about sex offenders' punishment from the early 2000s. The context is characterised by a strong anti-abuse

sentiment<sup>3</sup>. How this impacts the perception of children's sexualisation is still unclear. Second, there has been a lack of qualitative research set in Switzerland promoting a local, specific insight into the way teenagers relate with sexualised images, abusive behaviours and the wider political and cultural context just mentioned. Although some qualitative studies have been carried out since this research started (Barrense-Dias, Suris and Akre, 2019), they adopt a grounded theory perspective. To date, hardly any study has adopted a clear theoretical perspective on the meaning of sexting in Switzerland.

To engage with such questions, the following objectives will be addressed. The first objective is to explore the similarities and differences between different types of sexualised images—including pornographic images, advertising, and historical depictions of transgressive sexualised behaviours. The second objective is to explore teenagers' reflections concerning the analogies between self-produced sexualised images and mainstream sexualised images. The third objective is to explore teenagers' understanding of the notions of social status, harm, and abuse in gender-based relationships, in the specific cultural context described above. These objectives will be addressed in Chapter 6.

This is an opportune time to remind the reader about the polarity embodied in the archetype so far labelled trickster. The features listed above might mislead the reader into thinking that tricksters in various tales are simply comedic characters, without fault although destructive. Not so when the energy exemplified in such tales remains unconscious. It can make it difficult for the individual to grow, by deceiving and preventing a commitment to responsibilities (Henderson, 2015/1967). Among these less desirable qualities, lies also the

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<sup>3</sup> See recent votes about the prohibition to assume professional roles in contact with minors for sexual offenders, which has been accepted by the majority of Cantons, and entails serious legislative issues particularly concerning the principle of proportionality of the sentence (<http://www.swissinfo.ch/ita/pedofilia--l-iniziativa-di-marche-blanche-fa-il-pieno/38608150> for further information, last visited on 12th September 2014).

disregard for other people's feelings, which provides a rationale for the emphasis of this research on the abusive elements in sexting, and young people's own understanding of them. While the meaning of abuse within sexting, in their view, might differ from the definition provided by the authorities concerned with their protection, some abusive features may be there simply because some teenagers might fail to acknowledge the feelings of other people involved. Abuse, etymologically, derives from the Latin *abusus*, which implies the distancing (the suffix *ab*), from the common use of something. It is therefore a misuse that can be more or less intentional but based on the excess and waste of something otherwise useful. By making use of technologies in ways that are not those intended by their peers, some young people might indeed act abusively towards them.

So far, I have noted several factors that make sexting an interesting topic in need of further research and also a site for an investigation of complex social processes. I have also introduced an example of amplification, by articulating features of the trickster that might help to reconnect conflicting opposites in sexting. For the remainder of this chapter, several areas need to be clarified to establish a firm foundation for my argument. For example, I will discuss the reasons why a multidisciplinary approach integrating Jungian and post-Jungian theories can support the investigation of the sexualisation of childhood. Briefly, the choice of relying on a multidisciplinary approach is motivated by the conviction that archetypal analysis can contribute to the investigation of social as well as individual phenomena. Later, in Chapter 4, I will illustrate how this can be part of a greater project in social research, aimed at merging depth psychology and sociology, now known as psychosocial research. This supports the choice of carrying out primary research with a qualitative method, as will be argued in Chapter 5.

However, before exploring the benefits of a multidisciplinary approach I will briefly describe the existing evidence about the impact of new technologies on teenagers' behaviours, and further indicate the major analogies with the Jungian archetypal figure of the trickster.

### ***1.1 Teenagers and new technologies***

Sexting<sup>4</sup> and teenagers' interpersonal behaviours have gained notoriety over recent years. Newspapers often report sensational cases involving teens who committed suicide as a result of bullying often perpetrated through the Internet (cyber bullying) and involving some form of sexual violence. One such case is that of Rehtaeh Parsons in Canada<sup>5</sup>, who took her life after pictures of the rape she had been a victim of went viral in the community. While indicating harmful consequences associated with teenage behaviours, and consequently the need for more awareness, such serious cases are, mercifully, rather rare. However, statistics show increasing levels of self-harm among teenagers, often associated with episodes of cyber bullying (Childline saw a 33% increase in communications specifically involving self-harm in 2012–13, according to an article by Alexandra Topping in *The Guardian*<sup>6</sup>). More recently (2018), a meta-analysis carried out by a team of researchers from the Universities of Oxford, Swansea, Birmingham and the Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust, that has shown that victims of cyber bullying are at a greater risk of self-harm. The meta-analysis encompasses studies published from 1996 to 2017 and covered a total population of over 150,000 children

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<sup>4</sup> Sexting is defined as 'sharing inappropriate or explicit images online or through mobile phones' (NSPCC, 2014)

<sup>5</sup> See article in the Huffington Post, of the 4th September 2013, retrieved following this link:

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/09/rehtaeh-parsons-girl-dies-suicide-rape-canada\\_n\\_3045033.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/09/rehtaeh-parsons-girl-dies-suicide-rape-canada_n_3045033.html)

<sup>6</sup> The Guardian, 8th January 2014. Childline has yet to publish the data. It is important to stress how such data reflects both actual increases in cases of self harm and increased disclosure, possibly due to a change in culture. It would be premature to assume an increasing trend of self harm on the grounds of such somewhat inconclusive information.

and young people under 25. Without going into detail, which will be discussed at length in Chapter 2, it is, however, important to point out that current data seem to suggest an increase in children's unpleasant experiences on the Web. They often experience harassment, cyber stalking, and accidentally access sexual content (Sabina, Wolak and Finkelhor, 2008; Lilley, Ball and Vernon, 2014).

Recent research focusing specifically on sexting includes interesting results, supporting the resemblance between teenage behaviour and those traits attributed to the trickster archetype. To justify my hypothesis, I will discuss the main features of these findings. According to Ringrose et al. (2012), young boys involve girls in sexualised pictures using different persuasive tricks, such as pressuring them to participate to avoid exposure of embarrassing information to peers or to prevent gossip and further bullying. Images are then used to gain status among the group of peers, constituting a sort of capital attesting to the boy's value—an important aspect that will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 6 and 7. However, as discussed above, the type of content is confused with the harmful consequences that result when the images are viewed within a specific social context, but no explanation about the actual process of influence is provided (Lerum and Dworkin, 2009; Vanwesenbeeck, 2009: 269). So, while certainly involving some potential harm, especially for girls<sup>7</sup> who can be exposed, rejected and ostracised, it is still unclear how the message, arguably embedded in the images, is made sense of by teenagers. This might seem contradictory with the social constructionist approach underpinning most qualitative research. It is likely that whilst a general message is present, local meanings and uses are negotiated. After all, an apple is an apple no matter how one chooses to use it—to bake a cake, to make

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<sup>7</sup> Girls are not the only targeted group. According to Ringrose et al. (2012), boys display chauvinism also towards homosexuality. The impact of gender is discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

apple juice or to eat it as it is. This is too superficial an analogy to address the fundamental debate concerning the nature of sexualised images; however, the analogy suggests that social construction based on negotiated meaning in specific social settings and a pre-existing ‘message’ are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

### *1.2 The analogies with the trickster*

The connection of teenagers with the trickster might still be unclear. Tricks and malice are not enough to justify such similitude. My reading of teenagers’ behaviours accounts for other aspects. Specifically, I will focus on the importance of laughter and social reaction, which are both main features in accounts of tricksters (Carroll, 1984: 117). I claim that the trickster archetype aligns with teenage behaviours for two main reasons: a) the elements of silliness palpable in relation to the reasons provided by teens who carry sexual images on their mobile devices and b) the nature of adult reactions in relation to such practices. I shall explore each in turn, but first I will briefly illustrate a trickster’s story, from the folklore of the Ashanti from West Africa (Pelton, 1980), which shows well the comedic and ironic nature of the trickster.

In one of his adventures, Ananse, the trickster, visits the sterile Akwasi, and his wife Aso. The couple, due to Akwasi’s jealousy, live a retreated and isolated life. During the dinner, Ananse, who tells them that his name is “Rise-up-and-make-love-to-Aso”, puts some purgative in Akwasi’s food. Overnight, with a trick, Ananse manages to be called many times by Akwasi while the latter is struggling with the effect of the purgative. Needless to say, the story results in Aso’s pregnancy and Akwasi’s derision.

There are similar elements of silliness in the way teenagers carry out their actions, too. Ringrose et al. (2012) do not account for it in their serious report, but some of the direct quotes they included seem, to me, to unconsciously convey rather humorous elements.

Consider the following one, of a 15-year-old boy describing the purpose of storing 30 pictures (30!) of naked girls on his mobile phone (ibid: 44):

I: And what are they [*pictures*]-like what is like the purpose of keeping them all?

R: I don't even know, you know. I don't know, they are just on my phone. But I don't watch them unless I am showing someone.

I: You don't watch them, I don't believe you. [Laughter]

R: Nah, you should believe me.

I: So like you have got them on your phone and so that is just so that you can say, 'I've got 30 pictures on my phone'?

R: Kind of, like say other people they are like 'Oh I got this girl to do this', I will be like, 'Look at my phone'.

It seems to me perfectly plausible that he never watched the images himself!

I do not mean here to undermine the harmful impact of this kind of behaviour but to reiterate the comedic aspects and integrate them with the equally relevant harmful side. The casual image painted by this vignette gives way easily to moral outrage which may fail to consider the dilemma inherent in trickster behaviour, which is often expressed in the way unequal social circumstances are being managed. However, a new image emerges if we conceptualise this boy differently, for example, as sexually inexperienced, physically unattractive and

prone to hormonal changes, which affect him both emotionally and physically. In this way, the gap between the behaviour and the unlikely performer that needs to be acknowledged can be bridged. Often, research reports overlook these considerations which give rise to the comedic component of the trickster, resulting in a portrait of youth that is rather dark and dominated by *shadow*—an element that will be discussed at length in this thesis.

Many adults, whether researchers, teachers or responsible citizens, seem to join in conveying a disdain and lack of acceptance for deviant behaviours. Eliciting similar social reactions is a major trademark of the tricksters around the world in their role of cultural heroes—examples abound in *Coyote*<sup>8</sup>'s cycle, to name but one. It is the cohesive function of the trickster, whose misbehaviours bring communities together, in the attempt to restore harmony among the members of society. However, it is important to remember that such reactions can, in their own way, be more or less constructive. Moral panic, whose consequences can be rather worrying, is among the possible reactions. The emotional investment conveyed by the panic can, paradoxically, produce a worsening of the situation.

Moral panics are well known for generating fear, which in turn, generates disengagement from an increasingly eroded community, while a higher power (such as the government) is expected to intervene. Moral panics tend to elicit requests for change at the political level, exacting punishment and exclusion (Young, 1999). Increasing calls for action result in more intervention, which consequently amplifies the problem, by increasing the visibility of the phenomenon that is considered morally unacceptable. This is the well-known amplification spiral described in Stanley Cohen's historical study on Mods and Rockers in

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<sup>8</sup> Coyote is a trickster character of American Indian mythology. Famously studied by Paul Radin (1956), Coyote is the protagonist of numerous folk tales, where he first destroys then creates, prey of his own impulses and without consciousness.



the 60s (Cohen, 1972). Furthermore, from an archetypal perspective, it is worth highlighting that the concept of panic is associated with the Greek god Pan, the god of fertility who accompanied other gods in battle (Fontelieu, cited in Leeming, 2014). The mechanism induced by moral panics is rather similar to the one involved in the Ananse story mentioned previously: the more Akwasy's jealousy keeps his wife away from social interaction, the more likely he is to be tricked by Ananse; the more he calls Ananse, the more he gets betrayed.

To sum up, like teenagers, the trickster includes both the potential to harm and to elicit laughter. Furthermore, it has a cohesive function, by eliciting a social reaction. Such reaction can be either constructive or dominated by an excessive emotional investment, which prevents the strengthening of the community and the integration of the deviant. Consequently, not only is it important to investigate teenagers' behaviours but also the social reaction that they elicit. To achieve such a level of integration, it is necessary to approach the investigation of teenagers' behaviours with theoretical concepts and perspectives that pertain to different disciplines. These will now be introduced, with a brief justification about their pertinence for this study pre-empting a fuller discussion in Chapter 4. Furthermore, current integrative approaches between depth psychology and social sciences will be discussed in Chapter 4. This provides my justification for applying Jungian and post-Jungian concepts 'outside the clinic', to quote Frosh (2010) and, as will be seen, has repercussions for the choice of methodology, data collection and interpretation.

### ***1.3 A multidisciplinary study***

The disciplines relevant to this thesis are the following: Jungian and post-Jungian analytical psychology, social psychology, criminology, studies on sexuality and pornography,

the study of child abuse and neglect (specifically in relation to the production and consumption of images) and the use of new technologies. While some of these disciplines share common interests and objects of study, others do not. When they do, important philosophical divergences might result in difficulty in reconciling their perspectives. Such issues will be discussed in Chapter 4, where the theoretical perspective of this research study will be elaborated on in depth. A major point in common concerns the fact that social psychology, criminology and various depth psychology perspectives have all contributed to the development of psychosocial studies. The debates that took place in social psychology in the 1990s between social representation theorists and discursive psychologists will be discussed in Chapter 4 and can be seen to shed light on the specific space that the psychology of Carl Gustav Jung has occupied in social psychology over the last century. By this route, Jung's work contributes to a psychosocial approach which has been devised to take the collective into account in the experience of individuals and in contrast to Freudian psychoanalysis, as we shall see.

Criminology is defined as the study of crime (McLaughlin and Muncie, 2013). Thus, it is concerned with the harms that result from criminal behaviours, the social agreement and consensus about whether victims have been harmed, and the official societal response, i.e. the laws, penalties and measures in place to regulate the definition of acts as a crime (ibid.). Considering the trickster's role in creating cohesion in the community and eliciting social responses to their deviant behaviours, criminology could well be considered the study of the collective manifestations of the trickster. Sexualised behaviours of teenagers interest criminologists due to the potential harm involved, the breach of existing laws regulating the use of technological devices and production of sexualised images, and the collective reactions (potentially leading towards legislation) to such behaviour. Criminology is

interested also in moral panics, particularly due to their paradoxical amplification effect and their manipulation for political or personal agendas. Indeed, moral panics are often orchestrated, more or less unconsciously, by moral entrepreneurs who call for action and criticise the authorities (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 2009). Two recent developments in criminological theory are of particular relevance for this study: first, the shift from the study of moral panics to the study of the process of moral regulation (Hunt, cited in Hier, 2011) and second, the application of a psychosocial interpretation of crime, with a focus on individual, subjective anxieties projected onto offending behaviour (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000).

The focus of analytical psychology is similar to that of psychoanalysis, i.e. a therapeutically driven theoretical approach aimed at improving the patient's condition, by analysing unconscious contents and the potential meaning these have for them. Nonetheless, substantial differences also exist. Therapeutically, Jung considered the therapist as participating in the therapy alongside the patient rather than preferring the therapist to act as neutrally as possible, as in psychoanalysis. This led him to develop a more positive attitude towards countertransference<sup>9</sup>, whose therapeutic use he fostered (Samuels, Shorter and Plaut, 1986). Furthermore, Jung's approach to dream interpretation differed from Freud's, with Jung employing amplification, i.e. association of the patient's materials with universal imagery (*ibid.*), as opposed to the Freudian technique of free association, which he explored in his early studies but whose use he reduced in his later practice. The most relevant difference between the two forms of association indicates Jung's more general focus on

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<sup>9</sup> In psychoanalysis, countertransference is the experience of the patient's influence on the unconscious feelings of the therapist. First discussed by Freud (1910), who understood it as an obstacle to the analysis, its use is now common in therapy. Analytical psychology has adopted a more positive attitude towards the countertransference concept from the onset, considering it a useful communication from the client (Samuels, 2001). While Freud regarded countertransference as 'invariably neurotic, an activation of the analyst's infantile conflicts, and an obstacle to his high functioning' (Samuels, Shorter and Plaut, 1986: 20), Jung regarded it as an important source of information for the analyst.

collective contents, as opposed to the personal and subjective associations that were central to the psychoanalytic technique. Furthermore, analytical psychology does not place the same emphasis on sexuality as psychoanalysis does in the aetiology of mental illness, as previously mentioned. The unconscious is said to have a collective rather than individual origin, rooted in instinctive needs and manifesting through archetypes (Samuels, Shorter and Plaut, 1986). This controversial theory opposes supporters of a genetic, innate origin of such structuring elements (Goodwyn, 2010) to promoters of cultural transmission (Roesler, 2012) and de-constructivists (who consider the archetype ‘something in the eye and heart of the beholder’—see Samuels, 1989: 19). Archetypal theory however, holds a metaphorical potential where images are central (Hunt, 2012)—swinging between their collective and subjectively affective nature. Such centrality of the image appeals to the social researcher in the contemporary hyper-visual context (Hayward and Presdee, 2010).

The development of archetypal theory led Jung to pay attention to myths and legends as a repository of archetypal images. In the Jungian tradition, the myth-making function is central and provides a bridge between the individual and the collective unconscious:

(...) public and intrapsychic worlds meet at the point where the human imagination creates myths and symbols that correspond both to social needs for harmony and to individual needs for growth and individuation (Walker, 2002: 211).

It is not difficult to see the analogies with some of the major projects of criminology, particularly concerning the ‘social needs for harmony’. Equally, moral panics are often referred to as perpetuating myths about those social actors or groups that are feared. Therefore, it is justifiable, if not necessary, to integrate criminology and Jungian and post-Jungian theories. This could enable us to investigate the myth-making that takes place in

relation to teenagers' use of sexualised images, which is very likely a manifestation of teenagers' need to grow and individuate. It is important to point out that the controversial nature of archetypal theory requires teenagers themselves to discuss sexualised images. Whilst ethically sensitive, it is undeniably me who is associating teenagers' behaviours and mainstream sexualised images with the trickster. As indicated above, many contributors to current debates about the sexualisation of childhood seem to identify a much more sinister archetype in relation to teenagers' behaviours, namely Pan. The question is, what do teenagers themselves think? After all, sexualised images might well be interpreted differently by teenagers than by adults whether researchers or not. Furthermore, which contribution stems from identifying an archetype such as the trickster in relation to a given social phenomenon? How does an archetypal interpretation contribute to addressing social problems? These are the questions that guide my appraisal of Jungian and post-Jungian psychology in Chapter 4. For the moment, however, it is worth noting that the major point of interest is Jungian psychology's ability to transcend polarities. Would this also work with regard to the polarisation that is caused by the moral regulation of sexting?

Studies on the sexualisation of childhood and on pornography have long focused on the impact of sexualised images on people's behaviour (Attwood, 2005). In Chapter 2, the existing literature is used both as a source of data and as a critical introduction to academic debates in the field. For the moment, it is important to note that quantitative studies usually betray a more conservative approach than qualitative studies. Quantitative results generally suggest a direct link between the consumption of sexualised images and tolerance towards sexual violence and aggressiveness (Malamuth, Addison and Koss, 2000). Qualitative studies are often more nuanced due to their focus on specific, particular realities, and the specific ways to make sense of sexualised materials. Qualitative studies usually acknowledge the

political opinions of the authors in a more explicit way—a consideration that resonates with Jung’s attitude to therapy, inclusive of the therapist’s views and attitudes. Both analytical psychology and qualitative research consider the therapist/researcher as participating in the construction of new meaning.

Equally informative are studies on sexual abuse, which are used as a source of evidence, and on the consumption of pornography. Research in the abuse field is often critical of permissive educational practices or mild penal sentences for perpetrators of sexual abuse. Therefore, such perspectives might have a role in moral panics, political decisions and collective emotional manifestations. Mainly associated with academic psychology and social learning theory, much of the ‘sexualisation of childhood’ debates have been published inside this tradition (APA, 2007; Papadopoulos, 2010; Bailey, 2011).

Thanks to new digital technologies, such as smartphones, tablets and laptops, it is now possible to share communications and information, such as pictures and texts, anywhere and at any time. Such devices are a major characteristic of contemporary relationships, communications and daily life. Younger generations in particular quickly learn how to use them and develop skills that they mostly share with peers while older generations are often excluded from their interactions. Therefore, new technologies are an important factor to consider in relation to the production of sexualised images. At a theoretical level, new technologies were expected to promote ‘a more active and critical subject’ due to their interactive features indicating a ‘collapse of the distinction between consumers and producers’ (Miller, 2011: 12). No longer constrained to watch content and images selected by others, the postmodern subject can select, modify and produce their own content—think about YouTube as an example of such interchangeable quality of the roles indicated above. This is an important aspect of modern media and communication, which also manifests in teenagers’ production of sexualised images. From a psychological point of view, an important aspect of

new technologies, particularly of social media, concerns their impact on the way individuals deal with their identity in respect of others.

According to Balick (2014: 49), social media are an undefined, ambiguous space, whose impact is still largely debated: we do not know what the long-term consequences of their use will be. A major feature of social media, ambiguity manifests itself also in the public as opposed to the private nature of written interactions that were once usually dealt with face to face. Consequently, a great deal of what is written and shared testifies to unreasoned, emotionally charged views (ibid: 47). This is a concerning aspect because it is in collective, emotionally charged situations that moral panics develop. To conclude this section, however, I would like to remind the reader about the connection between the media and the trickster. After all, due to their nature, through the media, the trickster might be playing some of their tricks on us.

The disciplines indicated so far focus on the way society deals with deviance and the ways that individual and collective unconscious factors can participate in the construction of meaning in respect of such deviant events and phenomena. Society though, deals with deviants in many different ways, according to contextual factors that go beyond moral panics and collective emotions. Politics, institutions, economy and culture are all intertwined in the setting up of laws and penalties for those who break boundaries.

The political and institutional Swiss context is likely to deal with consumerism and late modern capitalism according to specific characteristics, in their turn influenced by Swiss culture and history. Hence, the impact of political decisions and institutional structures on teenagers' lives needs to be acknowledged. Among the most relevant factors worth

mentioning here are: the direct democratic voting system, the relationships between local (Cantonal) governments and the Federal government, the rise of the right-wing parties over the last 30 years, the increasing immigration from more distant countries, the relationships with the European Union, multilingualism, and the local Cantonal cultures. While it is not possible to discuss all of these factors in depth, those that have a direct impact on decisions concerning minors, e.g. the legislation process to regulate the use of new technologies or the wider collective sentiments about items related to the phenomenon have been taken into consideration.

The next section discusses the psychosocial approach, which is the most recent attempt to merge depth psychology with sociology (Clarke, 2006). A brief introduction to psychosocial studies with an overview of the most recent debates in psychosocial literature concludes this introduction and leads to the critical review of the literature in Chapter 2.

#### ***1.4 The psychosocial approach***

The psychosocial approach includes the acknowledgement of both the social construction of social phenomena and the impact of emotions in shaping human behaviours and attitudes and the need for appropriate reflexive theoretical tools available to the social researcher (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000). According to Rosalind Gill (2011), it is the psychosocial dimension that needs to be questioned in the study of the sexualisation of childhood. She defines it as “the understanding of the intimate relationship between culture and subjectivity” (ibid: 12). Especially in British psychosocial studies, psychoanalytic perspectives are often adopted to achieve such a purpose (Frosh, 2010).

Major issues arise, however, in relying on theoretical perspectives developed within the therapeutic field to investigate social phenomena. For instance, the following problems have been discussed in recent debates: different methodological and epistemological factors,



the risk of applying pathologising concepts to some social groups or positioning the researcher inside a ‘master discourse’, and concerns with over-determinism. Furthermore, issues with the different mechanisms involved in transference and countertransference inside and outside the clinical setting have also occupied the reflections of psychosocial researchers (Frosh, 2008; Hook, 2008). Often, such issues cover theoretical divides, permeating major historical evolutions of psychoanalytic thought. Researchers who are disposed to a Lacanian perspective tend to consider approaches based on ‘object relations’ reductive and overly individualising when applied too “piously” (Frosh, 2008). Proponents of the Kleinian school, instead, consider interpretations offered by Lacanian perspectives overly sociological, and uninterested in the psychological (or subjective) layer of the psychosocial (Jefferson, 2008). Particularly in relation to criminology, this implies refocusing the attention from a ‘caricatured subject of criminological theorising’ onto “recognizably ‘real’ subjects” (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007: 8).

Generally, however, the British psychosocial approach seems dominated by psychoanalytic principles, i.e. based on Freudian-inspired theoretical perspectives (with all due consideration for further important post-Freudian theoretical developments). Such principles are based on a concept of the unconscious that is individual at its root. Whilst interesting and certainly enriching, interpretations based on such a perspective could perhaps benefit from integrating Jungian and post-Jungian perspectives. This is due to a major feature of the Jungian tradition, namely the already mentioned collective unconscious and its links with myths and archetypes. Attempts to refer to a trans-individual unconscious have been made in relation to the Lacanian notion of the unconscious as the subjective locus of the Other (Hook, 2008), but the connection with myths and legends is not available. Matters of

reflexivity and relationships between depth psychology and qualitative research are discussed in Chapter 5.

Attempts to integrate Jungian and post-Jungian theories with sociological perspectives have highlighted the similarities of Jung's thought with Durkheim's, locating the genesis of individual psychology in culture (Progoff, 1953), extended therapeutic reflection to politics (Samuels, 1993; Alshuler, cited in Young-Eisendrath and Dawson, 2008), or discussed the common philosophical focus on the process of individuation with Irigaray (Gray, 2008). However, the underlying project has not yet been systematised, as it has been in the case of psychoanalysis. This is due to some theoretical issues, not dissimilar to those afflicting the application of psychoanalysis, and to Jung's own attempt to extend his reflection to "national" psychologies, resulting in his infamous anti-Semitic comments, and an ambivalent attitude towards the Nazis during the 30s (Samuels, 1993; Lewin, 2009). These matters are particularly important in any attempt at developing psychosocial perspectives that maintain sociological accuracy through a reflexive practice. They are discussed at length in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, for their epistemological and methodological implications. Suffice to say that from the prejudices identified in Jungian literature and affecting Jung's own psychological model, several problems arose for the author of this thesis.

The problems that affected me can be summarised with several questions, which emerge when a psychosocial research project maintains the general purpose of benefitting society and the social groups involved in the research by contributing data to improve their social experience. If Jung's own psychology is affected by certain prejudices, would adopting his perspective reproduce similar prejudices, hidden behind concepts, which are applied without sufficiently problematising them? Would it be sufficient to isolate the specific

prejudices, extract and separate them from his clinical concepts to ensure the findings of the current research project are exempt from them? These questions started to concern me as soon as I realised that Jungian and post-Jungian literature acknowledging Jung's prejudices overall fails to engage in a thorough discussion on the concept of prejudice itself. It focuses instead on Jung's sexism (Young-Eisendrath, 2004), anti-Semitism (Samuels, 1993) or racism (Dalal, 1988) but omits discussion of the underlying core concept behind the three manifestations listed here. Whilst such literature is excellent at debating historical evidence about prejudices within Jungian psychology, it does not provide a conceptualisation of prejudice that can be employed in primary research. It would indeed be necessary to achieve a proper reflexive stance. The notion goes unchallenged, despite extensive debates and re-definitions generated in social psychology. Even the recent 'Open letter from a group of Jungians on the question of Jung's writings on and theories about 'Africans', first published in the *British Journal of Psychotherapy* (2019), frames its discussion under the label of racism, which is acknowledged to have been enacted individually by therapists uncritical of Jung's views and institutions promoting uncritical adoption of his thought. Whilst historically informative, no acknowledgement of prejudice and, thus, racism as the result of a psychological dynamic is proposed.

Acknowledging that Jung's own psychology cannot be changed, it is a historical fact now, Jung's death prevents any further subjective reflections. Indeed, it might be more productive to maintain his position in its original shape for it to contribute to a research project that wants to challenge prejudices. It sounds paradoxical, but it will become clear later how only by doing so, is it possible for Jungian psychology to become truly reflexive. A new question emerges: would it be possible for Jung's vulnerability, manifesting in his prejudiced views about women, Jewish people and Africans, to contribute precisely because it is acknowledged as such? How could this be achieved methodologically in such a way as

not to confuse my reasoning with his? Since Jung died in 1961, it seems to me to be more a matter of relating critically to his psychology than to change it—as already mentioned, he can no longer change his mind. Furthermore, I most certainly do not share his prejudices, for reasons ranging from biography to gender and ideology, but I, too, must have some prejudices. After all, since we all have some prejudiced views, could Jung’s psychology be re-purposed to help in devising a reflexive practice that challenges any prejudices?

The matters of Jungian prejudices slowly took over the more explicit concern over teenagers’ wellbeing, which had initially motivated my choice to investigate their understanding of sexting. Only after much struggle, I put my finger on a possible solution, which has much to do with engaging psychosocial perspectives adopted in primary research. While most of the psychoanalytic reflections in psychosocial studies are recent and stem from the meeting of criminology and psychoanalysis, primary research has been carried out with psychosocial intent for a much longer time (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Moscovici, 1961/2008), albeit with less emphasis on subjectivity. Particularly within the discipline of social psychology, and particularly within the larger project of European social psychology, attention has always been paid to psychoanalysis, but in a slightly different way from the use made by contemporary British psychosocial scholars. In the UK, primary research carried out in the European social psychology tradition mostly concentrates on health studies and education (Woodward, 2015).

Rather than constructing the social perspective as a consequence of the specific psychoanalytic theoretical position, European social psychology embeds psychoanalytic positions within the process of a vulgarisation of scientific knowledge (Moscovici, 1961/2008). The sociology that surrounds this process is fundamentally Durkheimian, or post-Durkheimian because it maintains some of the premises of Durkheim’s core concept of *collective representation*. As illustrated in Chapter 3, Jung found Durkheim’s sociology

inspiring. He theorised the relation archetypes exert on the conscious perception of an individual, colouring and filtering his experience of the world according to a similarity with that of the individual and the collective representations that govern social life. Some sociologists have even attempted to draw a direct parallel between collective representations and archetypes in what is known as transpersonal sociology (Progoff, 1953; Greenwood, 1990) but the contribution of social psychology goes beyond a shared concept. Indeed, by setting the stage for a psychosocial investigation of commonsense knowledge, Serge Moscovici has also critiqued some of the assumptions that rule Jung's way of relating to social phenomena (Moscovici, 1961b). This critique constitutes an important contribution towards a more reflexive use of Jung's psychology, which composes the core of the methodological approach of this study and more of this discussion follows in Chapter 4.

What are the conceptual reasons supporting my claims about the need to integrate Jungian and post-Jungian concepts within the broad psychosocial project, in respect of teenagers' use of sexualised images? Jung devised a way to reflect on collective contents that brought him to develop the idea that individuals seek a form of self-actualisation due to living in society. He called this self-actualisation 'individuation' (Jung, 1921). This process entails relations between the individual and the collective norms that surround them. Through inner conflict with social norms, the individual emancipates themselves and acquires autonomy and lives a more authentic life (Jung, 1921, para. 757–762; Samuels, Shorter and Plaut, 1986: 76). Such a process, I contend, is in action behind teenagers' transgressions and the theoretical articulation of it can shed light on the psychosocial development of children in such a way as to offer an alternative perspective that draws a path, possibly extricating teenagers, educators and society at large, from the unproductive battle between prohibiting sexting and underestimating its impact too permissively.

Therefore, the major intervention that this thesis seeks to propose concerns the extraction of Jung's method of identifying polar opposites that are in conflict from a uniquely psychological perspective to reposition it within a sociological approach, which understands the causes of such polarisation as derived from the process of moral regulation and moral panics. Furthermore, it illustrates how such re-positioning requires adopting a more reflexive stance, which achieves a third position similar to the one theorised by Jung but without abdicating the self-monitoring and positioning that are necessary to acknowledge the implications of the production of knowledge that results from academic research. This is achieved by examining teenagers' understanding of the contemporary practice of sexting.

The next chapter reviews the existing literature on sexting, discussing its extent and the major theoretical perspectives that have been used to investigate it. It also addresses the existing knowledge of sexting and the sexualisation of childhood in Switzerland by reviewing the findings of the Optimus Study Switzerland (Schmid, 2012) and more recent qualitative findings. It illustrates the existing polarised views on sexting that circulate in the academy and provides a rationale for the intervention proposed by this thesis.

Chapter 3 discusses Jungian and post-Jungian literature concerning sociological theory and details some of its major limitations. Chapter 4 proposes a new psychosocial approach to investigate the social imaginary, encompassing Moscovici's critiques of Jung's approach to social phenomena that informs the methodology of this thesis. Chapter 5 details the epistemological and ontological positions of the research, the research methods and approaches to data analysis and the ethical considerations adopted to ensure respect of ethical standards in primary research with children. Chapter 6 discusses the major findings from the interviews on the meaning of sexting for teenagers, their views on abuse and on the use of

sexualised images in the broader culture that surrounds them. Chapter 7 discusses the findings by enlarging on the myths that summarise the polarities expressed by the participants through the social representations they share concerning sexting. Chapter 8 concludes the research with a discussion of some limitations of the research project and recommendations for future research and educational practices concerning sexting.

## Chapter 2

### *Critical Literature Review*

#### *2.1 Sexting and the sexualisation of childhood debates*

Sexting became an object of study in the late 2000s when mobile phones connected to the internet became widely available. Early research projects were commissioned to investigate the causes of teenagers' involvement in such behaviour, which include the Pew Research Center's *Teens and sexting: How and why minor teens are sending sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude images via text messaging* by Amanda Lenhart (2009). Both public and academic attention were captured by the sexting behaviour of teenagers, which led to adult sexting being researched only later, once the major debates had already taken place concerning the harms of sexting for under 18s. Partially because academic and public interest developed at the same time, sexting is often understood within the frame of the sexualisation of childhood debate. In 2007, the American Psychological Association (APA) published the *Report of the APA Task Force on the sexualisation of girls*, which, through a literature review demonstrated that girls are more often sexualised from an early age than in the past, and claimed that girls suffer negative consequences ranging from cognitive impairment, self-esteem issues and lower educational achievement. Such sexualisation is achieved through



advertising of products targeting children with a sexual message, media and cultural messages supporting the presentation of the self in sexualised terms and peer pressures to conform to sexualised norms. The report was followed by increased concern on the part of educators and governments, which spawned numerous other reports (Papadopoulos, 2010; Bailey, 2011; Phoenix 2011) and surveys, such as the Optimus study that is discussed later in this chapter.

Much of the evidence reviewed in these publications belongs to the ‘media effects’ tradition. Chiefly, this paradigm is based on the often implicit assumption that the media (or advertising) cause an effect by direct influence on the audience—the persuasion is always achieved, the product is always bought and consumed. To such a tradition belong most quantitative studies on pornography. They seem to suggest that there is a direct link between the consumption of sexualised images and higher tolerance towards sexual violence (Malamuth, Addison and Koss, 2000; Bonino, Ciariano, Rabaglietti et al., 2006; Ybarra, Mitchell, Hamburger et al., 2011). However, the results of such studies often lack statistical significance (Attwood, 2005; Jenkins, cited in Buckingham and Willet, 2006; Buckingham et al. 2007). Furthermore, the quantitative approach precludes a deeper analysis of the impact of other cultural factors that might mediate the relationship between the viewing of such material and subsequent aggression. Similarly, the APA’s report (2007) overlooks the complex ways in which teenagers make sense of sexualised products and particularly, the complex ways girls can exert agency all while adopting some sexualised manners.

In Great Britain, two major theoretical perspectives have since developed in the study of the sexualisation of childhood. One is mostly concerned with gender issues and broadly follows the APA report’s concerns about the way sexting, as a manifestation of the sexualisation of childhood, damages girls (Coy, 2009; Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone et al.,

2012; Ringrose et al., 2013). The other is more concerned with the moral panics that obfuscate the agency of adolescents in their use of new technologies (Buckingham and Strandgaard Jensen, 2012; Buckingham and Bragg, 2012; Bragg, Buckingham, Russell et al., 2011). Literature on sexualisation has produced numerous debates in other countries, such as Australia (Lumby and Albury, 2010). However, survey data has been widely produced at both national and international levels enabling a critical appraisal of these perspectives and the identification of some new ones. Furthermore, a growing body of qualitative literature is also available, focusing both on sexting and the sexualisation of childhood more broadly. This chapter first reviews these two theoretical perspectives, then discusses the existing evidence on sexting and the sexualisation of childhood. The review justifies the choice made here of involving adolescents in a reflection on sexualised images by questioning their views on representations and self-representations and by relating their views to the socio-cultural context where they live.

## ***2.2 The theoretical perspectives: feminism and moral panic***

It could be argued that the APA's report itself was following a feminist perspective, which is based on the belief that sexualisation is negative for girls because it objectifies them. This perspective is broadly based on some radical feminist claims that were developed towards pornography by Catherine MacKinnon (1987). In her work, MacKinnon stresses the discrimination enacted towards women in pornographic materials on the grounds of the gender inequality explicitly enacted in the genre. This author, along with Andrea Dworkin, argued that the consumption of pornography objectifies women as a group, making them tools for men's pleasure. Based on Immanuel Kant's notion of 'Object for appetite', this view on the objectifying nature of sexualised images has also been adopted in studying the sexualisation of childhood. Particularly in the report by Linda Papadopoulos commissioned

by the Home Office in 2010, it is evident the assumption is made that in every circumstance sexualisation is objectifying and detrimental for the development of girls. However, just as pro-sex feminists critiqued this assumption as simplistic with regard to men's own ability to interpret pornography and of women to enjoy it, researchers broadened the feminist reasoning concerning objectification regarding the sexualisation of culture. Rosalind Gill (2011) for instance, questioned the notion of objectification itself when women decide to self-represent in a sexualised manner, for instance by wearing t-shirts stating "fcuk me" or "porn star". It led Gill to describe a woman who acquires power not by displaying virtue and innocence, but by presenting herself as sexy, using her bodily capital and sexual skills. She further emphasises how the self-production of images, now possible through new digital technologies, and the "freely chosen" nature of self-sexualisation make it difficult to approach matters of sexualisation (including that of childhood) only by considering subjectivities submitted by objectification. The investigation must therefore abandon the dimension of simplistic forms of objectification and deploy instead psychosocial investigations of subjectivity. Maddy Coy (2013) instead stressed how the debates concerning sexualisation have focused greatly on the matter of age-appropriateness. Sexualisation would consequently not be problematic if it is operated by adults but, Coy points out, such a focus leads to underplaying the importance of gender within the phenomenon of sexualisation. She further states that regaining a focus on gender might contribute to moving the debates away from a conservative engulfing of the radical feminist perspective on objectification discussed above in the reports commissioned by the Home Office (Papadopoulos, 2010) and the Department of Education (Bailey, 2011). She proposes to adopt Gill's (2011) suggestion to switch terms from 'sexualisation' to 'sexism' to describe the cultural representations that compose the sexualisation of culture. While agreeing with Linda Papadopoulos' (2010) conclusion that cultural sexualised representations are a

‘conducive context’ (Kelly, 2007) for misogyny and violence against women and girls, she nonetheless points out that Papadopoulos’ review considers such a type of sexualisation only detrimental to young girls, while being acceptable for adults. This way, concludes Coy, the author fails to problematise the sexualisation itself, by just acknowledging it as an age-inappropriate phenomenon. This is particularly evident in the suggestion Bailey’s review (2011) makes to restrict access to cultural artefacts for children, which borders on censorship. Coy further stresses how an aspect that the existing reviews have failed to consider concerns the construction of masculinity, equally impacted by the current cultural representation of sexualised roles. However, Coy seems to understand such construction of masculinity primarily in terms of entitlement to sex, which undoubtedly is an important aspect of it, but certainly not the only one. Gender is, within feminist perspectives, only theorised as reflecting sex, rather than also encompassing the experiences of LGBT+ children.

The major point though is the acknowledgement by Coy that conservative insistence on protecting children’s innocence is often paired with rather heavily sexualised representations of adult women, which indicate a hypocritical attitude towards sexism. To conclude, Coy reviews suggestions concerning ways forward in reducing the sexist impact of gender norms that are overall misogynist. One suggestion concerns the introduction of media literacy classes for young people, another the direct involvement of young people in participatory projects to tackle the issue of sexualisation in its ‘doing gender’ aspect. The paper concludes with the suggestion to consult young people concerning their own ways to make sense of sexist cultural artefacts. Such a participatory ethos has certainly informed the present research, but with some substantial differences. For instance, one difference is the way the present research conceptualises the ‘conducive context’ which is implied to impact on teenagers. It will be detailed later in this chapter that to interrogate representations

necessitates not assuming a specific message is concretely involved in the sexualised items contemporary teenagers are relating to, but rather, that there is a need to investigate instead how a reflexive relation can be theorised. This pertains to models of child development, which refer to cultural learning other than social learning theory, which seems to dominate the feminist literature on the sexualisation of childhood.

Although the feminist literature concerning the sexualisation of childhood is dominated by reflections concerning its harms, some feminist authors have suggested a paradigm shift in the study of pornography and sexualisation (Attwood, 2011) that has implications also for research on sexting. Such a shift entails abandoning the conviction that masculinity is the root cause of the oppression of women (ibid.). Instead, the new paradigm approaches pornography as a cultural artefact, and studies its consumption by different groups. Notably, the contribution of gay literature on pornography participated in this shift by demonstrating how pornography has slightly different implications for different genders. Gay and queer pornography has contributed to the visibility of these gender groups in society. For women in particular, this shift has meant an increasing interest in their own relation to pornography and sex, no longer assumed to be always harmful and degrading. Such sex-positive literature moved the focus onto the reflective way people engage with sexualised artefacts, thus making it easier to investigate the way they exert their agency. This perspective advocates for pluralism rather than denying potential harms for some groups.

The second major theoretical perspective found in the literature stems from media studies and moral panic theory. It has a similar focus to the sex-positive literature, by questioning matters of agency. It seeks to investigate how the media contribute to the construction of social events and phenomena as ‘issues’ (Buckingham and Strandgaard

Jensen, 2012). Mostly concerned with questioning the ‘media effects’ research tradition, this perspective owes to David Buckingham’s numerous publications, which critique both the conservative feminist views proposed in the official reports and reclaims agency for the recipients of the sexualised messages. Buckingham (2011) stresses how both the conservative and the feminist views on sexualisation assume a pre-existent innocent child who gets corrupted, either by acquiring sexual behaviours that are age-inappropriate or by acquiring sexism of which it was previously deprived. Focusing mostly on the way children deal with products stemming from consumer culture, Buckingham, along with Rebekah Willett, Sarah Bragg and Rachel Russell, is also the author of a report mandated by the Scottish Parliament (2010) entitled *Sexualised Goods Aimed at Children*. This report highlighted how young people reject the idea of being passive victims of marketing, and operate choices according to the norms shared within their peer group, which provide them with confidence and comfort. The interesting aspect of this report consists in its focusing on young people’s reasoning and reflections. In a published article discussing the results of the report (Bragg et al., 2011), Bragg and colleagues stress how the issue with feminist and conservative perspectives (excluding the sex-positive perspectives) concerns the use of methodologies that lead to a conclusion that ‘blame[s] the victim’ for having succumbed to the sexist influence of media and marketing. Thus, the major contribution made by this perspective consists in advocating for methodologies that enable the voice of those concerned to be heard, rather than simply accepting theoretical standpoints *a priori*. The moral panic aspect of this literature concerns the public attention on girls and the risks they are facing when they engage in behaviours that involve technologies (Cassell and Cramer, 2008).

Fundamentally, moral panics concentrate around the notion of risk, particularly when girls are the ones taking risks. Technologies, according to Cassell and Cramer (*ibid.*), have

always given rise to the fears of parents about their daughter's virtue being perverted by accessing tools allowing "strangers" into their lives. These authors give the example of the telegraph, which was welcomed similarly to the Internet. When the telegraph was introduced, it enabled new ways to do business, to get information and, just like the Internet, to commit crimes. Women's access to the telegraph was condemned even when they were employed by companies that made use of the new technology. Often young, these employees were scrutinised due to their possible emotional entanglements with colleagues. Work was nonetheless an opportunity to meet people away from the watchful eye of their families. Cassell and Cramer (*ibid.*) report the story of one young woman, who, while working for her father's company, running a newspaper stand and store in Brooklyn, started a relationship with a married man via the telegraph (in 1886!). The father found out, forbade the relationship, but she kept seeing her beau in secret and the father threatened to 'blow her brain out for her behaviour' (Marvin, 1988: 74, cited in Cassell and Cramer, 2008). Thus, in the moral panic perspective, gender becomes an important factor to investigate when it elicits different emotional reactions in different groups, rather than being the filter through which the wider study is structured.

According to Hasinoff (2015), the kind of logic described by Cassell and Cramer (2008) still applies in the context of the current use of technologies by teenagers, and in the debates concerning sexting. Both technologies and sexuality elicit moral panics, which result in a disregard for girls' consensual sharing, equating it with malicious distribution. For such reasons, this author advocates for alternative educational approaches to abstinence and the criminalisation of teenagers involved.

Notably, the development of new communication technologies, to put it in the words of Joseph W. Slade, author of an extensive reference text on pornography (2001), is tightly linked with the simultaneous invention of their use for sexual purposes. Slade ironically refers to this rule as ‘Slade’s rule’. It is undeniable that it exemplifies the strong connection extant among developments in technology, communication and sexuality. Not to mention the fact that, as Slade aptly points out, if statistics are to be believed, viewers of pornography account for large parts of the general population<sup>10</sup>, whereas known sex offenders remain a marginal group.

To summarise the literature so far, the moral panic perspective considers conservative and radical feminist perspectives rather collusive with the moral panics paradigm when they advocate for a restriction of girls’ access to technologies and omit to consider the agency of individuals who use them. This is exemplified in the notion of consent, which is considered central to moral panic theorists, but not for feminists or conservatives (although for different reasons).

The next section focuses more specifically on sexting, to illustrate how debates concerning the sexualisation of childhood have been reproduced regarding this recent phenomenon.

### ***2.3 Sexting, the legal aspect and the existing evidence***

When teenagers started producing sexualised images and then shared them via new communication technologies, attempts were made to legally regulate such behaviour by

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<sup>10</sup> According to Covenant Eyes, accountability software, (<https://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/>, last visited on 15th April 2020), 28,258 viewers are watching pornography every second.



applying child pornography legislation, particularly in the US and Australia (Crofts and Lee, 2013).

According to Crofts and Lee (2013), often laws that were conceived to target the increase in illegal activities due to the spread of new technologies did not consider the possibility that children might be involved. This often resulted in severe sentences handed out to the under 18s, which prompted debates in legal journals concerning whether such severity was commensurate with the offence and whether such sentences took account of the young age of the offenders. Levick and Moon (2009), for instance, stress how punishing young people for behaviours that might relate to their development might fail to protect them from abuse by simply exposing them to stigma and serious implications such as sex offender registration. These authors further argue that legal systems should take into account existing research that demonstrates how sexting fulfils the developmental needs to experiment with sexual identity and explore sexual relationships. Such developmental needs have much to do with taking risks and sharing the accounts of one's experimentations with others. The use of technology stems, in Levick and Moon's view, from the fact that it facilitates such activities by limiting the embarrassment of face-to-face interactions.

Another important aspect that should be considered with regard to punishing under-18s for child pornography when they engage in sexting concerns the recognition by the majority of legal systems of the primacy of rehabilitative interventions towards youth, aimed at acknowledging the developmental needs of young people, their vulnerability and their need to be educated, which is often manifested in the existence of a youth justice system operating separately from the criminal justice system operating with adults. By punishing young people as child pornographers, the diversion of young people from the adult criminal justice system would entail a return to punitive measures where it has been acknowledged

that offering a space to reform is more important due to young people's needs. Moreover, child pornography legislation is aimed at protecting the victims. According to Levick and Moon, this does not apply in the case of sexting, where sexualised images are more often self-produced, although it is worth considering the possibility of coercion into making such images, about which more is said later in this chapter. Indeed, primary research has shown that coercion is possible even among teenagers and, therefore, it requires careful consideration (Ringrose et al., 2012).

Overall, the legal implications of prosecuting sexting as child pornography have led to specific legal approaches in different countries. Whereas in some parts of the US, child pornography legislation still applies, in the UK it is considered a crime to possess, take, make, distribute or show to others an indecent or abuse image of a child or young person under 18. This also applies if the image is self-produced. However, discretion is required of police forces investigating cases of sexting, to establish whether a criminal justice response is needed or if safer school officers and neighbourhood teams might instead be able to provide a more appropriate response. In Australia, the emphasis is on nudity: possession of naked or partially naked photos of under-18s is a crime, as is sending and sharing such images. The Council of Europe has instead opted for a more discretionary approach, stating that sexting can fall under the scope of the *Budapest Cybercrime Convention*<sup>11</sup>. The court must establish if specific sexting images constitute pornography. Particularly, another convention, the *Lanzarote Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual*

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<sup>11</sup> The Budapest cybercrime convention is the first international treaty concerning crimes committed on the Internet. It deals with infringements of copyright, computer-related fraud, child pornography and violations of network security. It can be accessed via the link: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cybercrime/the-budapest-convention>

*Abuse*<sup>12</sup> defines the terms for pornography to apply to sexting as centring on the consent of those involved in the production and distribution of the images. Swiss legislation instead considers illegal the possession and sharing of sexual videos or images of under-16s, as well as showing such materials to under-16s. The Swiss legal system nevertheless adopts diversion automatically when the offender is under 18, thus guaranteeing an educational and rehabilitative intervention rather than a punitive one. This overview of the legal implications of sexting highlights how serious the implications can be for young people engaging in it. Furthermore, it shows how complex it is to determine whether an image results from abuse or not. Coercion seems to be the factor at stake when teenagers produce such materials themselves.

Since the early debates on the most appropriate legal response to sexting, research has generated a considerable body of knowledge, although poorly systematised. A review of existing literature by Cooper, Quayle, Jonson and Svedin (2016) included 88 articles in their analysis and concluded that most studies have focused on matters of prevalence and participants' characteristics, leaving considerable gaps in knowledge on the nature of sexting activity. The review by Cooper et al. (2016) identified four major reasons why adolescents engage in sexting: 1) a form of flirting and/or gaining romantic attention, 2) within a consensual relationship, 3) an experimental adolescent phase and 4) pressure from partner/friend(s). These reasons are likely to reflect the theoretical position of the researchers, who have focused on specific aspects, locations, methodologies, subcultures and intersectional identities to gather their data. Nevertheless, they offer a useful frame to approach existing research on sexting. To further justify the argument of the current research,

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<sup>12</sup> The Lanzarote Convention concerns the criminalization of all kinds of sexual offences against children. It defines the legislation required of member states. It can be accessed via the link: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/lanzarote-convention>

a review of some important primary research studies is now discussed. These studies show how elements surrounding self-representation, the understanding of abusive practices and the psychosocial development of teenagers have been taken into consideration so far in the field of sexting studies. Furthermore, they focus on coercion and the search for status, which are central to the current research. The critical appraisal further justifies the rationale for this research, namely that it is the reflective way teenagers use to engage sexualised representations that needs to be investigated.

#### ***2.4 Primary research on sexting***

In 2012, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) mandated Jessica Ringrose, Rosalind Gill, Sonia Livingstone and Laura Harvey to carry out a qualitative study to investigate teenagers' views on sexting. The major findings illustrate well the group dynamic that surrounds sexting for the participants of the NSPCC's research set in inner-city London. Because of peer pressure, boys often threaten girls and coerce them into sending sexualised images. The 35 participants indeed seemed more concerned with this inter-group dynamic than with the 'stranger danger' risks faced online. The coercive dynamic plays out this way: boys solicit girls to send them sexting images and threaten them to expose them to the group of peers if they do not comply. Sometimes the girls are asked to write their boyfriend's name on their bare breast and take a picture of it, which the boyfriend then shares with his mates, without saying who the girl is. Should she fail to comply with his further requests, he would expose her by sharing her name and compromising pictures and information. The whole dynamic rotates around the 'honour' of the boys, who claim ownership of girls' bodies to attest to their status among their peers. The research by Ringrose and colleagues is important because it stresses how sexting in the specific location of the study is sexist and rather abusive, with the strong pressure put on girls, the

ambivalence of boys towards their behaviours and their tendency to betray girls' confidences. However, the chosen location might entail also elements of gang culture behind the behaviour of the participants, which might be absent from sexting in other locations. Would this mean that sexism is absent elsewhere? Or would it be present to a similar extent? Is sexism the core issue in sexting? Furthermore, the social construction of sexting operated by the participants is not linked to the broader cultural context, making it difficult to appreciate what purpose sexting fulfils and what complex positions and identities are being dealt with by the participants through the behaviours they report.

The study by Ringrose and colleagues has the merit of illustrating one of the possible ways sexting can be abusive. Currently, the literature has expanded the way abuse is understood within sexting. According to Barroso, Ramião, Figueiredo and Araújo (2021), sexting is also associated with risky sexual behaviours and the increased likelihood of online victimization. It consists of sexual abuse when photos or videos of a person are disseminated without their consent as well as through coercion. For Barroso and colleagues (2021: 2) 'what technically defines the presence or absence of sexual violence (...) is consent, equality and coercion'.

A study by Vandeen Abeele, Campbell, Eggermont and Roe (2014) explored the role of the peer group and the search for social status in a Flemish sample which gathered data via a survey (N = 1'943) across 12 high schools in Belgium. The results clarified the impact of social status among the peer group on young people's sexting behaviours. Flemish girls are likely to engage in sexting when their perceived same-sex popularity is poor, but this is not the case for boys. The authors discuss the possibility that girls' reputation among their female peers is the key factor to explain this double standard. Low same-sex peer popularity means

an increased likelihood of being labelled as ‘sluts’ and develop a ‘sex object identity’.

However, both research studies are inconclusive in explaining girls’ involvement in sexting for reasons of status. Whereas the search for status and the defence of ‘honour’ are evident for boys, it is equally possible that girls engage in sexting out of same-sex peers’ ostracism or to gain notoriety just like boys do. Interestingly, the study by Vandeen Abeele and colleagues shows that mobile phone mainstream porn is mostly used by boys, particularly when they experience strong peer pressure and seek greater popularity among girls. Mobile porn use among girls instead does not seem to be associated with peer pressure, but with having high popularity only. However, due to the method of data collection (i.e. survey by questionnaire), it is not possible to draw conclusions concerning the causal direction of teenagers’ behaviours. For instance, it is not clear if teenagers who are highly popular among their same-sex peers engage in sexting and mobile porn to increase their popularity with the other sex or if their popularity enables them to use such images with no concern for moral judgment due to their already strong reputation.

Whilst the search for status seems common across locations with different cultures, as demonstrated by the Belgian survey, it appears essential to clarify whether the extent of coercion described by Ringrose et al. (2012) is also widespread.

A big international survey, the *Safeguarding Teenage Intimate Relationships* (STIR) investigates the experiences of interpersonal violence and abuse (IPVA) among young people across five European countries: England, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Italy and Norway. It focuses specifically on coercion and abuse within adolescent intimate relationships online and offline, intending to understand the role played by new technologies (Stanley, Barter, Wood et al., 2018). Of the 4,564 young people aged 14 to 17 who completed the survey, 72% overall have

had a boyfriend or girlfriend. Intimate relationships are therefore common across European countries and the high number of participants enables significant comparisons across countries.

The findings show that girls in England, Italy and Norway present higher rates of experience of sexual coercion and abuse than in the other countries involved. In England, 41% of girls state having been coerced and pressured into intimate touching or sexual intercourse rather than being physically forced. The boys who declared having experienced sexual coercion and abuse in Italy, Bulgaria and Cyprus are also more likely to use sexual violence against a partner (54% in Bulgaria, 51% in Cyprus and 70% in Italy). This takes the form of pressure rather than physical violence in most cases. Sending a self-produced sexualised image instead was disclosed by 6% to 44% of young women across the countries and 15% to 32% of boys. Similar proportions of young women (9% to 49%) and a slightly higher proportion of young men (20% to 47%) disclosed having received sexualised images from a partner. Often a reciprocal activity, sexting is associated with IPVA because those young people who had experienced IPVA are twice as likely to have sent or received a sexual image/message as those who had not experienced IPVA. Most participants reported an affirmative impact of sexting (responding by selecting from a range of options inclusive of 'frightened', 'bad about myself', 'loved/wanted/fancied', etc.), ranging from 41% to 87% for girls and 75% to 91% for boys. However, girls in England and Norway were more likely to report a negative impact if the image had been shared with third parties. Mostly seen as flirting or 'a game', sexting for the adolescents involved went awry only when the images had been shared with others, either to punish the person depicted or get even. At this stage, the gendered nature of the harm inflicted becomes relevant: the reputation of girls is jeopardised by such sharing due to the broad culture that surrounds teenagers, whereas boys

do not seem to suffer much in the way of consequences should they be exposed. This, say the authors, is particularly true in countries with strong religious and traditional values, which is one more point supporting the choice of investigating the meaning of sexting in Switzerland.

The authors conclude that overall, the majority of young people in the European countries concerned do not experience coercion by their partners to watch pornography, but regular viewing of pornography and perpetration of sexual coercion and abuse by boys are related. While it is not possible to infer the direction of the relationship between these two behaviours, it is nevertheless an important finding that supports sexist and abusive undertones in pornography consumption by men. The findings concerning sexting instead shed an interesting light on the frequency and prevalence of such behaviour, which is widespread for both sexes, but harmful, especially for girls, in the case of exposure. Coercion and abuse are related to sexting though for the young people who use sexual violence in face-to-face relationships, whereas sexting is not associated with adverse effects for many young people in the general population.

Another big study, comparing data of the *EU Kids Online* survey from 2010 and those of the *Net Children Go Mobile* survey from 2014 (Livingstone, Haddon, Vincent et al., 2014) remarked on a decrease of about 13% in sexting in the UK among 15–16-year-olds over the four years covered. This age group had higher rates in the two surveys data (N = 3'500). The diversity in rates from different surveys suggests that sexting is not a self-explanatory phenomenon for the participants of these studies. It is, perhaps, apt to wonder if behaviours commonly associated with sexting are understood as such by teenagers or if, depending on the phrasing of the questions in surveys, they might simply not understand some of their experiences as falling under the label of 'sexting'. The connection might be clear to adults,



who are establishing the conceptualisation of the phenomenon through studies and research, but it might be experienced differently by young people. Whilst this might indicate a normalisation of sexualised imagery in the daily behaviour of young people, it might also suggest that the equation of sexting and pornography derived from the sexualisation of childhood debates is inadequate to explain young people's social representations of sexting and sexualised imagery.

Moreover, the extent of sexting varies from study to study. For instance, in the US the *National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancies* (Kean et al., 2013) found that 20% of the 1,280 teenagers aged 13 to 19 who were sampled had sent a self-produced sexualised image and 40% had received one. In another survey, 1,289 students from 36 US middle schools participated (Dake, Price, Maziarz and Ward, 2012) of which 17% stated having engaged in sexting. However, Lenhart (2009) had found much lower rates of proactive behaviour (namely, sending a self-produced image), at approximately 4% for a sample of 800 young people aged 12 to 17. Among whom 15% instead had received one such image before taking part in the survey. It is, therefore, unclear whether all samples are equivalent and which contextual factors might explain the different prevalence rates that have been obtained by different studies in different countries and locations.

It appears that sexting is widespread yet poorly conceptualised in existing research that has framed the phenomenon under various perspectives, including studies on intimacy, use of technologies or risky behaviours. Survey data is more informative about the prevalence of sexting than small-scale qualitative research due to the bigger samples that enable estimation of the extent of the phenomenon, particularly with regard to aspects of violence and abuse. Whilst Ringrose et al. (2012) found very widespread coercive behaviours, this is not the case for the STIR findings, which illustrate a much broader dynamic, where

sexting is normalised within intimate relationships of which only some are coercive. Furthermore, the great variation of prevalence found among surveys elicits questions concerning methods and conceptualisation (Barrense-Dias, Berchtold, Suris and Akre, 2017). It is apt to ask what understanding teenagers have of sexting itself, what social representations guide their use of new technologies in the context of sexting and what meaning they give to abusive behaviours. Particularly, given the extent to which the existing literature on sexting has been associated with the sexualisation of childhood debates, it is fitting to ask what understanding of the connection between sexting and pornography young people have. An overview of existing evidence about sexting in Switzerland further illustrates how key questions have yet to explore the social representations of sexting among adolescents.

### ***2.5 Swiss-based research on sexting***

Switzerland is often absent from big European surveys due to not being a member state of the European Union. However, the Optimus study (Schmid, 2012) collected information about sexual abuse of children in Switzerland and touched upon some of the aspects that have also been researched with regard to sexting. The survey attracted responses from 6749 year 9 students (aged 15 to 17 years old) from 161 schools in the country. Due to legislation, sexting falls within the scope of sexual abuse when it depicts a child under 16, although, as seen in the previous section, findings from the STIR study indicate that not all of the episodes were coercive. The Optimus study has captured the prevalence of such behaviours, with one in three girls having received sexualised images (1 in 10 boys). However, it is unclear who the sender of such images is, whether the exchange is consensual and whether the images are self-produced or not.

According to Averdijk, Billaud, Greber et al. (2014) who prepared the recommendations for interventions based on the results of the survey, focusing on media literacy of children and parents would help prevent sexual abuse through electronic media. While such a recommendation might be useful, especially in regard to parents, who are often less IT literate than their children, it seems that a focus on prevention only might be inadequate regarding sexting when it is not abusive behaviour. The Optimus study assumes that any sexualised image sent to an under-16 is abusive, whereas it might be consensual and welcomed. Such an assumption is problematic for the reasons detailed in the first sections of this chapter, where the theoretical perspectives debated concerning the sexualisation of childhood have been revisited. To equate sexting with abuse might overlook the agency of those involved and limit their possibility of engaging in intimate relationships that are not coercive. Nevertheless, even if sexting is confused with other sexualised behaviours by the survey (for example, an invitation to perform sexual acts in front of a webcam, or receiving suggestive comments), the findings of the study indicate that sexting is as common in Switzerland as surveys suggest it is in other countries.

Barrense-Dias, Suris and Akre (2019) have instead carried out exploratory qualitative research concerning the meaning of sexting by interviewing 32 young people (16–21 years old) and 29 adults (11 parents and 18 teachers) in the French area of the country. These authors found that the term ‘sexting’ was only known by some of the participants, but all had intuitively understood what the research was about. A French equivalent (‘sexto’) was instead often preferred. This confirms the possibility mentioned above, that young people might not relate to the term ‘sexting’ and thus not understand some behaviours as episodes of sexting. Moreover, Barrense-Dias and colleagues point out how such confusion might translate in incommunicability between prevention programmes (traditionally employing the

term quite extensively) and the target population. The research also highlights how adults more often make the connection between sexting and pornography than young people. This further supports the choice of the current study to focus on the meaning for young people, rather than assuming a pre-existing connection between these two forms of imagery. However, the methodological approach used by Barrense-Dias and colleagues fails to articulate a specific psychosocial insight. It is unclear what model of social construction they are following and therefore, it remains difficult to understand the psychological implications behind the understanding of sexting for their participants.

Overall, the existing evidence concerning sexting and the search for social status fails to fully engage a psychosocial perspective. The subjectivities of participants are seldom touched upon, even in qualitative studies. Such a lack of psychosocial insight is likely to deprive intervention programmes based on research evidence from a sufficient articulation of the dynamic of exposure and humiliation that often results in harm to girls. A further element that is seldom taken into account is the meaning of the collective dynamic around sexting at the symbolic level. The meaning provided by participants is taken concretely to signify an understanding that remains pragmatic, rather than constellating symbolic meaning. Instead, it can be argued that a collective dynamic such as sexting acquires a more archetypal dimension by acting as a metaphor for internal and interpersonal conflict.

Overall, the existing literature falls within two major theoretical traditions (and three ideological ones). Feminist scholars problematise sexism and gender, but often presume the centrality of objectification. Such a perspective can easily override girls' agency and autonomous participation in sexting. Similar blindness to girls' non-coerced involvement is typical of more conservative assumptions, often unchallenged by quantitative research. The

moral panic tradition offers more critical insights, but as it will be shown in Chapter 4, the concept of moral panic has been debated in its turn.

A central question that requires attention concerns the meaning of sexting for teenagers themselves. While qualitative research such as that of Barrense-Dias et al. (2019) is certainly a step in the right direction, its exploratory nature leaves open the possibility for some ideological assumptions to be conveyed unnoticed. Furthermore, it does not propose an alternative explanation of the impact of coercion to the simplistic cause and effect conveyed by quantitative studies. Like the STIR findings, it acknowledges that coercion is only experienced by a few, but no further insight is provided of when sexting becomes abusive according to young people. In psychosocial studies, the engagement with subjectivity provides the opportunity to explore such questions through the lens of reflexivity, a concept that will be defined in Chapter 4.

The next chapter discusses how the Jungian and post-Jungian insight can be introduced within a psychosocial approach that is based on a critical perspective, to frame teenagers' behaviours in a psychosocial developmental perspective. Chapter 3 first reviews Jungian and post-Jungian literature concerning social phenomena, its theoretical implications and the specific perspective adopted by this research. It then engages with the literature concerning the use of Jungian and post-Jungian perspectives in interventions with children. Finally, Chapter 4 details the specific psychosocial approach developed by this thesis.

### Chapter 3

## *Sociological theory and analytical psychology*

In the previous chapter, the extant literature concerning the sexualisation of childhood has been presented and discussed to illustrate the major theoretical perspectives adopted by authors participating in the debates concerning the consumption of sexualised images and sexting. This chapter reviews Jungian and post-Jungian literature concerning social phenomena, to illustrate the gaps that need to be addressed by the psychosocial approach developed by this thesis to apply Jungian and post-Jungian thought<sup>13</sup> to issues such as sexting.

The intensity of the reactions to sexualised images that were detailed in the previous chapter, and the recurrent pattern of the debates are, in Jungian terms, precisely the point of interest. To understand this specific perspective, it is important to shift the focus from the two opposing views and to concern ourselves precisely with the intense emotional reaction elicited by sexualised materials. Such an emotional reaction could be said to be numinous<sup>14</sup>, and therefore indicative of underlying archetypal motifs<sup>15</sup>. It is now necessary to discuss

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<sup>13</sup> It is appropriate here to clarify the difference between Jungian and post-Jungian psychology. Jungian psychology refers to the original analytical psychology devised by CG Jung. Post-Jungian psychology encompasses all schools of thought that have developed around Jung's own approach (Sameuls, 1985).

<sup>14</sup> Jung defined the *numinosum* as 'either a quality belonging to a visible object or the influence of an invisible presence that causes a peculiar alteration of consciousness' (CW 11, para. 6). Numinous experiences are impressive, characterised by a compelling force and full of meaning. For Jung, such experiences were religious and signified an irruption of unconscious materials in the ego of the individual. The term is used here in relation to sexualised images because the debates that concern them are recurrent, signifying an irruption of fear and to dissipate the intense emotional reaction, interpretation of the meaning of sexualised images in a specific period is needed.

<sup>15</sup> The relation between archetypes and the numinous is that of the experiential quality of archetypal content irrupting into consciousness.

Jung's sociological writings and those of Jungian and post-Jungian authors who followed him similarly engaging with topics of a sociological nature. For such a perspective to be psychosocially relevant, it is essential to position Jung's thought within a clear sociological approach. The psychosocial approach aims to marry different disciplines to achieve a deeper level of reflexivity concerning social, cultural and psychological experiences according to the mission statement of the *Association for Psychosocial Studies*. This is often pursued in primary research, gathering data to inform interventions or to critically appraise socio-political decisions. Therefore, the critical appraisal of Jungian and post-Jungian literature that follows is to be understood as an appraisal made with psychosocial studies in mind. Much Jungian and post-Jungian literature is essentially clinical or theoretical, rather than based on primary research. As such, it inevitably fails to comply with the requirements of a primary research project such as this one.

### ***3.1 Jung's sociological writings***

CG Jung took an interest in social phenomena early in his career. For instance, his thesis, which was later published under the title of *On the Psychology and Pathology of So-called Occult Phenomena* (CW 1, 1953/1957) focuses on psychic mediumistic experiences, which were very common at the beginning of the 1900s. However, much of his work on social phenomena concentrates on the advent of modernity, which, for Jung, entails a rupture of time (Main, 2004). Such a rupture is associated with the advent of industrialisation and the secularisation of society, which are reflected in the abandonment of religion in favour of science. Science and scientific rationalism, in Jung's view, fail to contain the unconscious due to their inherent materialism. Modernity in its one-sided emphasis on materialistic science is ill-equipped to respond to human needs for faith and the lack of a vital religion entailed a loss of myth, which has provoked a profound uncertainty. Such conditions often

also result in a loss of the ability to introspect, to think autonomously and independently, to the point that the state becomes a source of salvation, a devotion that can turn sour when totalitarian regimes take control of states and institutions. Commenting on events such as World War II or the Nazi regime, Jung considers that scientific developments have come too fast for the unconscious to keep up, with the result of it not being properly contained by a suitable symbol. Such a symbol functions as a cohesive image, enabling members of a given society to reconnect their unconscious emotions and images with their conscious attitudes. The symbolic process for Jung is a process of connection, which endows meaning to human experiences and contains the raw archetypal impulses that erupt from the unconscious into consciousness<sup>16</sup>.

Through the filter of such convictions, Jung commented on various social phenomena, including women's status in European society, World War II, UFOs, technology, the psychologies of some ethnic groups and contemporary art and literature. However, he never adopted a specific sociological position to gather together and unify the vast array of phenomena that he commented upon. His approach was based on the identification of an archetypal motive that would then prompt an amplification<sup>17</sup>.

Such an approach can be seen, for example, in *Flying Saucers: A modern myth of things seen in the skies* (CW 10, 1959). Jung begins the book by clarifying his interest in UFOs as a psychiatrist and connects such apparitions with the "end of an era", typical of "changes in the constellation of psychic dominants, of the archetypes", which accompany

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<sup>16</sup> Most of Jung's sociological reflections can be found in *Civilization in Transition* (Jung, 1964, CW XX).

<sup>17</sup> Amplification is Jung's specific method of interpretation. It is based on identifying analogues to the initial archetypal image with the aim of highlighting the totality of the archetypal motif (Samuels, Shorter and Plaut, 1986).



“long-lasting transformations of the collective psyche” (ibid: para. 589). UFOs are then discussed as the product of rumours, framing the first appearances in the context of Orson Welles’ radio show based on HG Wells’ *The War of the Worlds*, which set New York into a panic in 1938. While it is a psychosocial concept, rumour is not investigated as such by Jung; it is instead understood as psychologically motivated. Chiefly, Jung sees it as the result of a psychological projection caused by an emotional tension common to all mankind (the Russian policies of the time are deemed responsible for such widespread anxiety), resulting from the split between conscious attitude and unconscious emotional tone. The unconscious is said to be full of metaphysical hope, which has become dissociated from consciousness due to the advent of modernity characterised, argues Jung, by rationalistic enlightenment (ibid: para. 623). Such a background provides fertile soil for the development of a living myth, which Jung equates to a *mandala* (or ‘symbol of totality’, in Jung’s own words) (ibid: para. 618), to spirit Mercurius (which is the alchemical *quinta essentia* or *solution*), and to the eye of Horus, in an amplification of the UFO through dreams and paintings.

However one feels about Jung’s interpretation, namely that UFOs (whether imaginary or actual objects seen in the skies) receive projections of salvation and fear of war, the major sources of sociological insight consist in the application of his developing ideas and some *soi-disant* expert opinions, rather than on carefully collected and tested data. It is worth noting though that the sociology of UFOs does not necessarily relate to the actual existence of such objects. On the contrary, this paradigm should properly interest itself in the social interactions, reactions and panic that surrounds episodes of the apparition of UFOs. While Jung engages in the notion of rumour, which was later to be studied in the context of the spreading of prejudices and moral panics, it remains unclear how a mechanism said to take place intra-psychically in individuals can be generalised to entire groups without allocating a

role to social interaction. Jung's justification is that similar conditions produce similar psychological reactions in different people, but this is not convincing to contemporary readers who are accustomed to think about communication as a core vehicle of common public reactions. Rather than discounting either communication or Jung's perspective on archetypal pressures, it may be possible to theorise the issue in such a way that both elements are acknowledged.

Despite these initial limitations, Jung's approach has been followed by other authors who, in different ways, attempted to develop a stronger sociological perspective to explain collective projections in contemporary events. Their work is discussed in this chapter after a summary of scholarly work on the notion of the archetype. The latter is a central feature of Jung's contribution, with its central role in each phenomenon that Jung interpreted, including social ones.

### ***3.1.1 Archetype theory and its relevance for social research***

According to Jung's original conceptualisation, archetypes manifest through images that result from a collective layer of the unconscious (Samuels, 1985). He identified patterns of meaning that appeared in his patients' dreams and fantasies, and he connected them to world mythology, which he consequently considered a repository of collective archetypal images, rather than being culturally learnt (Walker, 2002). He first named such patterns 'primordial images' and strived to understand their origin. He dismissed cultural transmission on the ground that environmental influences could not give rise to such sophisticated symbolic forms. However, he also recognised that, to be collective, such images must connect to the constantly repeated experiences of humanity (CW 7, 1966). Such repetitive patterns lead to a predisposition to experience life according to predefined structures in a sort

of ‘feedback system’, where the pre-existing structures (archetypes) get confirmed and shape further experiencing according to the existing pattern (Samuels, 1985: 26). This mechanism is close to the confirmatory biases typical of prejudices (Samuels, cited in Young-Eisendrath and Dawson, 2008).

Inheritance seemed to offer a good explanation for the physical manifestation of archetypes, although such aetiology has been widely critiqued for denying cultural specificity, particularly among anthropologists (Tacey, 2012: 139). Jung’s solution was to acknowledge the ever-changing nature of the images produced by different individuals in different cultural contexts but he remained firm that the ‘archetype as such’ was collective, impersonal and universal, and provided the potential to form images (Jung, 1936/1968, para. 90). This layer of the unconscious he termed psychoid, and postulated that its manifestations could not be perceived because it was incapable of reaching consciousness. On a much deeper unconscious level than that of cultural manifestations, the psychoid unconscious ‘has proprieties in common with the organic world generally’ (Samuels, 1988: 10).

The existence of this invisible layer can be better understood from the perspective of the *unus mundus*, which considers psyche and matter to be connected and mutually influenced (Samuels, 1985), like ‘two sides of the same coin’ (Samuels, 1988: 10). According to this postulate, individual elements, or subsystems, are connected to the universal structure, and both are mutually influenced. Therefore, Jung’s notion of ‘archetype-as-such’ can be understood as part of a holistic view of the unconscious, responsible for connecting the individual to the collective.

At an early stage in the development of this theory, the archetypes are said to function in a similar way to that of instincts, but later Jung came to view them as psychosomatic manifestations (ibid: 27). For the instinctual matrix to be assimilated, an image must first be produced and integrated. Samuels points out the interdependence between image and instinct; the first relating to ideas and spirit, the second to biology and drives (ibid: 28). Debates on the effective necessity to stress the biological origin of archetypes have seen post-Jungian authors develop two rather distinct perspectives that also follow the polarity just described.

While proponents of the biological objectivist perspective, such as Anthony Stevens (2002), insist on the importance for analytical psychology to rely on scientific validation based on the connection between the archetype-as-such and the body's biological functioning, other authors have been more concerned with stressing the sociological and metaphorical value of archetypal images such as those expressed in myths.

Samuels (1985), for example, refuses to attach any objective value to the 'archetype as such', when he states that 'the archetypal is a perspective defined in terms of its impact, depth, consequence and grip' (ibid: 53). Thus, this author recognises the archetypal value in the 'emotional experience of perception' rather than in pre-defined categories. In this sense, the ongoing nature–nurture argument is avoided, while still recognising an underlying layer of 'nature' (ibid.). This leads to the abandonment of discrete archetypes in favour of a general archetypal component and thus a phenomenological approach to experiences and images is the logical consequence, rather than a preconceived categorisation (ibid.).

Furthermore, rather than providers of structures or organisations, archetypes can be considered to be linking agencies: they contain the possibility of sense. This understanding of

archetypal functioning aligns with a cybernetic rather than structuralist framework.

Consequently, perspectives can be changed if connections are made so that their links become conscious. Samuels (1985) lists three sense-making links: polarity (encompassing all dualism), complementarity (the balancing function), and finally, interaction, where images overlap. A more detailed discussion of sense-making is provided in Chapter 5, which deals with the methodology of the research and later in this chapter when theoretical methodological approaches are discussed.

While a biological foundation might as well exist, a more explicitly psychological perspective (such as the one indicated by Samuels) might be more useful when approaching social phenomena. It has the merit of allowing different images to exist simultaneously, depending on the specific point of view adopted.

Furthermore, it would be dangerous to assume that the origin of social behaviour lies solely in biological factors, for instance, because of the nature of social phenomena, which presupposes the existence of social interaction. Social interaction is certainly not a biological fact. While genes might provide individuals with the underlying structure to manifest some potentialities, in a social context, social interaction would appear to be a better predictor of behaviour. Also, interpreting the goal of genetics as being only aimed at maintaining adapted structures and patterns sounds partial, to say the least. Genetics is also aimed at preventing non-adapted characteristics to reproduce themselves in future generations. Reproduction, at least among mammals such as human beings, happens through the selection of suitable partners. While it is clear that other species might rely on factors such as symmetrical traits in the body, or smell, it is undeniable that socio-cultural factors play an important role when such choices are made by humans. Profession, social class or financial status are undeniably

variables included in the decision one makes to commit to a partner, and to have children with them.

A logical conclusion on the debate between biological objectivism and more postmodern perspectives with regard to the nature of archetypes is that social phenomena are better understood within a more constructionist approach, focusing on the impact of social interaction on the manifestation of archetypal images and symbols, rather than on their biological aetiology. Stated simply, it is a perspective whose approach is better suited for the present study. This, of course, does not exclude a potential manifestation of archetypes in the biological realm.

A precursor of the move towards a more postmodern archetypal theory was James Hillman (1975). He recognised the cultural potential of Jung's theory and he strongly emphasised the importance of imagination, and consequently of images as 'part of the realm of psychic reality' (Samuels, 1985). Consistent with such an emphasis is the focus on mythology, which, according to Hillman, is of metaphorical value (*ibid.*). Great importance is given to recuperating images of gods and goddesses that enrich the human experience and avoid the reductionism of monotheism, which Hillman considered to be the source of over-rationalism. The metaphorical value of an archetypal perspective is certainly to be retained in relation to this thesis, particularly in its practical implications when selecting the images to analyse with the participants.

Further debated by Petteri Pietikäinen (1998), who proposes to consider archetypes as 'symbolic forms' (a notion developed by the philosopher Cassirer to whom Jung's theory is compared) determined by culture rather than manifestations of biological instincts, the metaphorical value of archetypal images is scarcely accepted among Jungians who claim that

Jung's distinctive contribution to psychology lies precisely in the theoretical articulation from the biological to the narrative realm (McFarland Solomon, 1998). Symbolic forms, according to Pietikäinen, are not transmitted genetically but, rather, culturally, which questions the very nature of Jung's original concept of the collective unconscious. According to Stevens (2002), who understands the human mind's ability to use symbols, create myths and think as resulting from evolution (understood as a form of positivist progress), such a view on the archetypal is in 'sharp contrast' (ibid: 345) to Jung's idea of innate symbol-forming propensity. Far from concluded, debates about the origins of archetypes have the merit of highlighting major epistemological issues in Jung's original perspective.

To summarise the approaches discussed thus far, it is clear that Jung's original conception of archetypes has given birth to two fundamental perspectives: a metaphorical or social constructionist viewpoint, and a biological one, focused on the 'archetype as such' rather than on the social function of archetypal images. Bearing these debates in mind, an in-depth review of the various ways sociological theory has been used in Jungian and post-Jungian literature is necessary to justify and underpin the specific psychosocial approach adopted by this thesis.

### ***3.2 Jungian and post-Jungian sociological approaches—the classics***

The first explicit reading of Jung's psychology in terms of its sociological value was undertaken by Progoff (1953). This author recognised that Jung is overall not concerned with matters of 'structuring societies, the organisation of economic and political systems, problems of population and group mixture' (ibid: 306), but instead with 'the various kinds of beliefs, the different ways of thinking, the driving power of some symbols as compared to others, the formation and disintegration of life attitudes' (ibid: 307). Jung, according to

Progoff, is interested in the 'inner content of history' (ibid: 307), which entails focusing on the character formation of individuals and the problems of personality. Such a perspective nevertheless reaches, according to this author, the inner dynamics of social change.

Progoff focuses on archetypes as vehicles of psychic energy required to form a new symbol. The images through which archetypes manifest are always collective, stemming from the collective unconscious. In this way, any symptom or behaviour of the individual is always paralleled by broader social manifestations of the same symbol. Jung, in Progoff's view, reverses the logic of the liberal tradition, which sees the individual willingly engaging in society for their own profit. Individuals are, in Jungian terms, first collective then, once individuation has taken place, fully in control of their agency. Progoff's perspective is based on the notion of Jung's psychoid unconscious, which is a layer of the unconscious regulating the teleological aspect of the psyche, which governs human motor and instinctual responses. Jung theorised the psychoid unconscious as an intrapsychic fact that is neither body nor mind but that relates to both, enabling adaptation to stimuli based on a physiological instinctual base (Addison, 2017). The friction between the instinctual drives and the social function of the symbol produces energy that manifests itself in symbol formation, bridging the gap between the individual and the group (Progoff, 1953). The resulting cohesiveness produces conscious attitudes, the forms of which shift according to historical changes and, ultimately, articulate the primordial form that is in its nature to manifest. Illness results from unassimilated, unelaborated unconscious content reaching consciousness without the appropriate symbolic support. Individual and mass psychoses are thus indistinguishable. Because such content is poorly supported in its transition from the unconscious to consciousness, it tends to remain unconscious to the carrier. This content is consequently subject to projection onto others.



This perspective consequently centralises the source of unconscious possession within the psyche, rather than in the outer world. The infection, as it were, comes from within, and manifests through independent complexes, as has been illustrated before. This process is relevant to study any social phenomena that entail the presence of different groups. Such perspective, says Progoff (ibid: 96) is ‘a necessary complement’ to sociologies that acknowledge the importance of analysing psychological points of view. He cites Weber and Simmel among others, but more specifically, the sociology of Emil Durkheim takes centre stage. The collective unconscious contains, in Progoff’s view, ‘the great communal experiences of mankind’ (ibid: 310). The collective unconscious is therefore a social unconscious by definition. The following quotation by Progoff exemplifies how this author connects Jung’s psychology to Durkheim’s sociology (ibid: 320-321):

For the specific concepts with which he analyses the emergence of the individual in the social process, however, Jung is most indebted to the sociological concepts of Emile Durkheim and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. Like Durkheim, Jung postulates society as a primary human datum, and he agrees that the individual must be understood in terms of the social situation in which he lives. He also takes over Durkheim’s basic conception of the ‘collective representations’. By this is meant the basic beliefs and assumptions about the nature of things, the world, and the conduct of life held in common by the members of the group, imposed on them by the pressures of the group, and transmitted from generation to generation. Individuals share in the collective representations not as individuals but as members of the group and, in this sense, their individuality is submerged within their culture. The individual partakes of the collective representations by a fusion of himself with the group; it involves the loss – or absence – of individuality for him. Jung realized that something of this is present in every social relationship, and he therefore followed the question further to ask what is the psychic process involved in the participation of the individual in the collective representations.

A very strong equivalence is drawn between collective representations and collective unconscious if such logic is to be followed through. The social interactive element acknowledged by sociology as background for the representations to develop is left untouched in Progoff's perspective. It will be seen later in this chapter how such an omission is still haunting Jungian psychology, and how some attempts have been made to overcome it. Progoff's understanding of Jung's attitude towards sociology is correct: no actual theorisation of how social interaction can impact the mechanism of projection of collective unconscious contents described in the previous section of this chapter is evident in Jung.

While Progoff's focus was on the relationship between collective representations and collective unconscious, particularly in its psychoid layer, other authors, contemporary with Jung, have adopted different Jungian perspectives to articulate the relation between archetypes and society or culture.

Joseph L. Henderson, for instance, investigated what he called the cultural unconscious (cited in Guggenbühl-Craig, 1962, 1984, 1990 for the elaboration of the concept). This layer of the unconscious includes all archetypal images that have historical, social, and cultural value rather than a personal essence. Often, according to Henderson, patients in analysis would struggle to come to terms with some cultural values and social norms. The analyst would identify the cultural nature of the problem through their countertransference and often end up with analysands who somehow share similar cultural backgrounds (cited in Jung et al., 1964). He further stressed Jung's emphasis on modern societal organisation as deprived of symbolic images containing cultural values once included in traditional organisations (1984), and accorded primary importance to the social aspect of such unconscious materials (cited in Jung et al., 1964).

In Henderson's perspective, the cultural unconscious is the home of the archetype of initiation, already mentioned in Chapter 1. This archetype supports the process of separation from the natural state regulated by the psychoid unconscious and civilization, which is instead regulated via social interaction (*ibid.*). As such, the cultural unconscious is concerned whenever political matters are involved. Furthermore, says Henderson, Jung stressed the role of religious symbols in providing a connection between the collective unconscious and consciousness. For Henderson, a social attitude is equally essential for such a connection to take place (*ibid.*). Here we see the first attempt at taking into consideration social interaction as an essential process in society and conversely within a sociological perspective that wants itself coherent with sociology's disciplinary focus.

According to Henderson's original perspective, culture involves four attitudes, which are distinguished from the traditional Jungian types and the simple impact of education (1964).

The first concerns the philosophical attitude, where energy is invested in researching meaning and truth about essential questions (*ibid.*). The second is the social attitude, dedicated to 'maintaining the ethical code of the culture' (*ibid.*: 17) and often manifested through social identity and political awareness. A religious attitude often takes the form of a movement of the energy from the Ego towards the Self, and concern with faith and spiritual matters. The last component of Henderson's definition of culture regards aesthetic appreciation. This attitude manifests through artistic productions and emotional reactions focused on beauty and form rather than as a judgment of value (*ibid.*), whether spiritual, philosophical or social.

While this is certainly a huge contribution in defining a more cultural set of patients' characteristics and attitudes, the notion of the cultural unconscious is not unproblematic. For instance, it is not clear how the cultural unconscious is transmitted. Furthermore, this notion can potentially lead to stigmatisation of those cultural attitudes that the analyst (or the researcher) does not happen to support. Nonetheless, more recently Singer and Kimbles (2004) have relied on the same model of the unconscious used by Henderson to propose the notion of a cultural complex, which is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Overall, early attempts to introduce a more sociological element to Jung's perspective on social phenomena have relied on an equivalence between the inner world of individuals and the socio-cultural beliefs that pertain in society. While the emotional element of Jung's original approach is certainly still of use in understanding specific collective situations, it is nevertheless true that much has changed within sociology, social psychology and cultural studies in terms of theories developed to explain social structures, social interaction and culture. Hence, it is worth briefly reviewing more recent literature that is based on Progoff's and Henderson's original work to further identify limitations that a psychosocial approach can instead address.

### ***3.3 Jungian and post-Jungian contemporary sociological approaches***

Most authors who have followed in Jung's footsteps have maintained his method to investigate the archetypal meaning of symbols rather than explicitly discuss a sociological perspective, despite Progoff and Henderson's initial anchoring of Jungian reflections in either sociology or cultural studies. Examples of such literature can be found for instance in Te Paske (1982) and Pinkola Estes (1992). This has not been the case, however, for three groups of authors, the strands of whose work more directly follows the path set out in those earlier

socio-cultural readings. Their work is reviewed here according to the focus of their sociological engagement.

### ***3.3.1 Perspectives applying and discussing the equivalence between the collective unconscious and collective representations***

A recent collection approaching the matter of Jung and sociological theory (Walker, 2017) points out how analytical psychology, unlike psychoanalysis, has seldom been explicitly associated with the existing sociologies. Walker's perception is that sociology has largely ignored Jung, which this thesis disputes. Nevertheless, he is right in remarking on the little explicit reference to his work there is in connection with the various sociological paradigms on the part of sociologists. However, few authors have taken on the task of merging sociological theory and Jungian psychology. The most remarkable attempt is the work of Susan Greenwood (cited in Walker, 1990, 2017), who has indeed furthered the work of Proffoff by emphasising the relationship between the collective unconscious and the collective consciousness of Durkheim. Further notable attempts concern the sociology of Weber (Walker, 2012; Main, 2013) and Marx (Glass, cited in Walker, 2017), but in the context of this thesis, it is worth focusing on the work of Greenwood in particular.

According to this author, structures such as the collective representations that are produced in society and the symbols generated by the unconscious have a similar purpose and origin in both thinkers. Greenwood considers collective representations and the collective unconscious two sides of the same coin in her transpersonal sociology (Rominger and Friedman, 2013). Both are manifestations of a religious experience, one internal and the other external. Ultimately, Greenwood attempts to unite subjective and objective epistemologies in a 'divine dialectic' (Greenwood, 1990: 492) maintaining the assumption of equivalence between inner and outer worlds. Differently from Proffoff, she relies on religion

to explain such equivalence: the re-ligious (meaning the “re-connection” or the “re-connecting”) needs of human beings manifest simultaneously by re-connecting with inner instinctual structures (the archetypes) and through the social interaction necessary to maintain collective representations in society. Although more focused on a mechanism (the human need for religion), her perspective remains nevertheless based on a sociological theory whose central concept, namely the collective representations, has been redefined and changed quite considerably over time.

Concluding the edited collection of reflections, Walker (2017) does nonetheless point out how it is perfectly possible to find points in common between Jung’s thought and that of the major twentieth-century social theorists, but a meta-theoretical perspective, enabling a clearer positioning of such similarities is still missing, except for the work of Gray (1996), which is discussed below. Walker further stresses elements that, in his opinion, might be core points of interest for further reflection concerning the sociological relevance of Jung’s thought<sup>18</sup>. Among them, one is of particular interest in the context of psychosocial research such as this: a critique of the “personal equation” of those intending to investigate social phenomena through a Jungian lens. Fundamentally, this point amounts to critiquing the subjective bias of those adopting Jung’s approach. Such an endeavour, says Walker, is still to come.

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<sup>18</sup> Walker (2017) lists five more points of interest for those studying the relationship between Jung’s thought and sociological theory. They encompass the possibility of formulating a) typologies, based on the psychological types: introvert/extravert and the psychic functions; b) a non-deterministic and interactive relationship between culture (or society) and personality; c) the use of psychodynamic theory to explore psychopathology, with a conceptual separation of psychopathology and deviance; d) an approach to acculturation—or anomie, alienation, rationalization and disenchantment; and e) the analysis of myth and ritual in terms of the archetypes and the collective unconscious, leading to the identification of human universals.

Interestingly, Hauke (2000) who has located Jung within postmodern thought, rather than within the broader corpus of sociological theory, demonstrates similar plasticity of Jungian thought against the thought of postmodern authors. According to this author, Jung can be better understood as a precursor of those who offer a response to modernity, giving his critique of scientific rationalism and the Enlightenment. Hauke's work revolves around detailing Jung's epistemologically, which is discussed in more depth in Chapter 4.

So far, the comparative work done on sociological theory and the attempts at marrying it with Jung's psychology generate some problematic aspects alongside some interesting reflections. The first problem concerns the tendency to eliminate social interaction from the picture and maintain an equivalence between inner and outer worlds that fails to explain the role of communication. The second, instead, has to do with the lack of contemporary sociologies taken into consideration. Debates within Jungian and post-Jungian studies have addressed the first issue, and these are briefly summarised here. The second issue instead is addressed in the next chapter, when the specific psychosocial approach adopted by this thesis is discussed.

To fully grasp the way the above-mentioned equivalence can be problematic, it is necessary to acknowledge the way Jung made sense of Lévy-Bruhl's notion of *participation mystique*. Lévy-Bruhl introduced the notion to explain the different mentality of so-called "primitive" people (intending to describe people living in pre-industrial, tribal societies). According to the anthropologist, people living in pre-industrial societies would explain empirical events in a mystical and pre-logical manner. By mystical, he meant that the world is experienced as identical to the self and by pre-logical, he meant that similar things are deemed identical, yet somehow distinct without acknowledging contradiction. In this way,

the people living in pre-industrial societies experience the world as one with themselves. They relate to the world, including other human beings, in a mystical participation. Thus, collective representations, a term which Lévy-Bruhl borrowed from Durkheim, are dealt with in a similar participatory way, where the collective representation shapes perception and experience. According to Robert Segal (2007: 639), this mechanism is explained in the following quote:

For Lévy-Bruhl, ‘primitive’ representations alone come between ‘primitives and the world’. The representations shape perceptions as well as conceptions, so that ‘primitive’ peoples experience, not merely think, the world as one as well as distinct. By contrast, modern representations shape only conceptions, not also perceptions, which convey the world to moderns rather than come between moderns and the world.

Jung’s perspective on collective representations developed along with his specific views on the concept of libido. He saw the libido as a sort of stream of energy, regressing and progressing depending on the adherence of personal attitudes to external circumstances and, thus, promoting adaptation to novel circumstances (CW8, 1928/1942: 34). He thought that libidinal activity could be elicited by analogy by transferring the libido onto ‘an analogue of the object of the instinct’ (ibid: 47). He thought, in line with Lévy-Bruhl, that such transfers had a magical character rather than a rational one. He provided the following example, based on a spring ceremony of the Watschandies, an Australian tribe, to illustrate the movement of the libido away from instinctual objects onto a collective representation:

After digging a hole in the earth they surround it with bushes so that it suggests the female genitals. Around this hole they dance, holding their spears before them in such a way as to simulate the erected penis. While dancing about the hole they thrust their spears into the ground and cry: “Pulli nira, pulli nira, wataka!”. During the ceremony



none of the participants is allowed to look at a woman. By means of the cleft in the ground the Watschandies make an analogue of the female genitals, the object of the natural instinct. By the reiterated shouting and the ecstasy of the dance they suggest to themselves that the hole is really the vulva, and, in order not to have this illusion disturbed by the real object of the instinct, none may look upon a woman. We are dealing here with an indubitable case of canalization of energy, and the transference of it to an analogue of the original object by the imitation of the sexual act.

(Ibid: 47– 48)

The recognition of the energetic displacement in this ritual offered Jung a suitable social parallel for a psychological equivalent, namely the transference (Shamdasani, 2003). He postulated that the collective unconscious functions similarly to the social ritual of the Watschandies, where a default identification with some collective themes (i.e. archetypes) is present. The mystical participation, the substitution of one object for another, its cohesive impact on the social group, were all relocated inside the psyche to serve the purpose of a sort of projective identification. Therefore, in Jung the social becomes psychological. It remains to be understood which elements differentiate the collective representations of the groups described by Lévy-Bruhl and the mentality of modern man.

Jung strived to highlight the presence of assumptions, presuppositions and beliefs in both modern and pre-modern mentality. In *Archaic man* though, he firmly indicates rationalism and materialism as responsible for the departure from the world of pre-modern man (CW 10, 1933/1970). “Primitives”, he says, explain natural events through superstitions rather than through a cause and effect relationship. The latter is the preferred explanation of modern, rational individuals, who usually prefer to deny any event rationality fails to explain. Whenever they cannot explain events rationally, they revert to collective representations, which he equates with the conviction that an arbitrary power was at work behind the

inexplicable occurrence (ibid.). However, he also contended that such superstitious convictions localise psychic happenings outside one's head, forming relationships between objects by analogy, similar to that which results from a dissociation (ibid.). The positive side, says Jung, is that this outpouring of energy decentres man from the dominion over nature. Natural events remain "in charge" and man remains one among many animals and natural factors. Religions, he thinks, still provide modern man with the opportunity to decentre in such a way. But Jung's reading of Lévy-Bruhl has been criticised and revised, partially due to his psychologisation of what was initially studied as a social activity. Collective representations were, indeed, understood as the product of social interaction by both Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl.

Post-Jungian reviews of Jung's use of mystical participation have addressed these issues in numerous publications (Bishop, 2011; Winborn, 2014). On the one hand, critiques have highlighted Jung's misunderstanding of some of the concepts theorised by Lévy-Bruhl (Segal, 2007). Namely, according to Segal, Jung mistook pre-logical thinking, whereby an object becomes another without losing its own proprieties, for the overwhelming of one object by the other, which becomes somehow possessed by its willpower. If for Lévy-Bruhl such a mechanism entails recognition of qualities that are shared between objects, for Jung it also entails outsourcing of negative qualities that cannot be tolerated by the individual (ibid: 131), due to the analogy with dissociation. Jung, suggests Segal, mistook Lévy-Bruhl's pre-logical thought for a case of possession. Such overlapping of two distinct phenomena, pre-logical thought and possession, suggests that Jung was drawing a parallel between primitive people and modern people in relation to trance states. The parallel is interesting because of Jung's interest in occult phenomena and of his attempts at explaining them through the lens of psychology. Furthermore, they might betray a need to rehabilitate some social phenomena

(i.e. the collective representations of the spiritists he had studied in his dissertation), which were considered primitive, or illogical in his days and cultural context.

According to Segal, Jung adapted Lévy-Bruhl's notion to the inner world, psychologising "primitive" thinking, and failing to take into account Lévy-Bruhl's acknowledgement that the pre-logical thinking of so-called 'primitive' people was not a recapitulation of the species but the result of social construction. Jung's mistrust of modernity makes him romanticise participation mystique and dismiss scientific thinking. Thus, Jung's views are more similar to those of Vilfredo Pareto, who deemed modern behaviour non-logical, than to those of Lévy-Bruhl and Durkheim.

A further issue identified by Bishop (2011) is the presence of two contradictory positions in Jung's attitude towards mystical participation concerning his views on the "primitive". For Jung, clarifies Bishop, the primitive is like modern man but uses different presuppositions in his thinking (intention-based rather than causal-based) while at the same time Jung states that the subject—object relationship is indeed different for primitives and modern individuals. Therefore, says Jung, the key to understanding the difference between the two peoples lies in 'the distinction made between (a) the 'subjective-psychic' and (b) the 'objective-natural' aspects of this relation' (Bishop, 2011: 230). The "primitive" does not distinguish a separation between inner and outer worlds; they are equivalent. The separation is the product of modernity and only 'civilised' man can see clearly where the distinction is. Consequently, it is easy for 'archaic man' to be at one with the natural world, in a holistic relationship of equivalence. Bishop further points out how Jung's solution to such dilemmas (primitives and modern individuals are "the same", using two different thought processes and are intrinsically different because of their relations to objects) is to develop a dialectic. For

Bishop, Jung attempts to discern ‘the object in the subject, to find what is objective in the subjective’ (ibid: 232). Furthermore, Bishop stresses how such analytic activity intends to liberate modern man from the oppressive disconnection with the world of mystical participation, where the ‘fantasy-images of the unconscious’ lie (CW8: 739). Here, we suggest, Jung fails once more to acknowledge the socially constructed character of collective representations. By identifying the objective in the subjective, by breaking down the wall artificially separating the thought of the primitive from the thought of the modern man, he thinks he can resolve the ‘conflict with nature’ that is generated by the rupture of time of modernity. The risk, failure to do so, is that the collective unconscious can break through and cause a psychosis. Such ambition might not be fulfilled though in a society where mystical participation is still somehow active and not dissociated. Consequently, it remains paramount to contextualise Jung’s use of mystical participation within contemporary sociology.

Susan Rowland (2007) suggests instead the need to approach the matter from a different angle, namely by understanding Jung’s writing on “primitive” people and the unconscious as an enactment aimed at working out the otherness implicit in the notion of “primitive”. Rowland suggests that this reading leads to an understanding of Jung’s relationship with the “primitive” as dialogical, similarly to Bishop’s suggestion. Furthermore, she contends, Jung is ‘aligning the modern occult and irrational past with the other cultural present, not to wholly identify them, but to develop a realistic perspective on the past, to make visible what modernity has obscured’ (ibid: 223). In a reply to Rowland’s article, however, Segal (2007) stresses how Jung’s intent might have been overemphasised in her reading. According to Segal, Jung fails to engage successfully in a dialogue with Lévy-Bruhl (ibid: 207). The debate between Rowland and Segal is important aside from Jung’s possible

mistakes concerning Lévy-Bruhl, because it highlights the gap between the complexity of facts and the productive possibilities of interpretation.

To summarise, we can stress the following two points: on the one hand, Jung attributed a specific meaning to mystical participation by drawing a parallel between the superstitions of some of his contemporaries and the collective representations of so-called primitives which hint at a process of dissociation, implying a split. Secondly, he engaged in a dialogue with the inner world of superstitious man to realign the individual with his surrounding context after the split took place further to the advent of modernity, which is akin to the split between the collective unconscious and consciousness.

In this vein, Winborn defines the Jungian mystical participation as ‘a blurring of psychological boundaries between individuals, between individuals and their environment, and in some instances between individuals and objects’ (2014: 30). Through a review of different definitions provided by Jung over the years, Winborn points out how Jung equated mystical participation with a sort of conformity based on identification in such instances as the transference, infantile states and the relationship between parent and child, later to be substituted with the identification with collective representations concerning social entities such as ‘the tribe, society, church, or nation’ (ibid: 36). A further point acknowledged by Winborn is that analytic literature has long been ambivalent concerning regressions to the participative state that require communication with the analyst to then integrate back into consciousness. With this element, we can now conclude that classic Jungian sociology entails

- a) an assumption of dissociation as the starting point in the psychological experience of mystical participation, leading to projective identification as a way to relate to social reality;
- b) an implied parallel between a so-called primitive mentality and the mentality of

superstitious modern people, and c) the need for some type of dialogue to make conscious the identification, either between the analyst and his client or internally, as exemplified by Rowland's reading of *Archaic man*.

For these reasons, much post-Jungian discussion of social phenomena seeks to apply Jung's own method (detailed at the beginning of this chapter) to identify the emotional and archetypal underpinnings of cultural artefacts, social movements and events. While it is indeed a fascinating approach, enabling dissipation of identifications and mystical participation (in the Jungian sense) with phenomena that can benefit from their release, the sociological issues so far discussed remain to be tackled.

A major attempt to devise an archetypal sociology was made by Gray (1996), who suggests starting from existing paradigms defining sociology, rather than from Jung's own use of sociology. This solution is enticing and Gray suggests the formulation of some key questions rather than a definitive "solution" to the core issues so far addressed by reviewing the relevant literature. He considers Jung's contribution as stemming from archetypes, which he considers the conveyors of subjectivity drawing individuals to group experience (ibid.). He clarifies that, within a structural–functional sociology, Jung 'provides the basis for understanding how it is that the products of human consciousness become reified as external facticities, and explains the nature of their coercive power' (ibid: 124). For Gray, archetypes are innate response mechanisms and 'meld with their releasers in an undifferentiated union of subject and object, stimulus and response' (ibid: 125), which, through projection and identification, provide the individual with the basic tools for group formation. These two psychological activities related to archetypes contribute to the formation of family, nations and thought (through myth) and large groups more in general. However, putting projection

and identification at the forefront of group formation fails to theorise the role played by communication, too. In such a way, Gray's attempt does not fully depart from Jung's original method and only repositions the core of archetypal activity in these two processes, rather than examining the way social interaction might contribute to them. As such, this interesting attempt fails to acquire a psychosocial character, failing to account for a reflexive relationship between subject and social construction.

While the issues surrounding collective representations and *participation mystique* have received considerable attention in Jungian studies, another major approach to socio-cultural phenomena has concerned itself with the notion of the complex<sup>19</sup>. It is now reviewed in its current theorisation as a cultural complex theory, which stems from the initial work of Joseph Henderson, discussed above.

### **3.3.2 Cultural complex theory and the cultural unconscious**

Aimed at providing an explanatory tool for 'the interface between psyche and society' (Singer, 2014: 10), cultural complex theory, in the intentions of the authors, offers 'a real bridge between the archetypal and the specific' (ibid: 10). A major issue of archetypal theory when applied to socio-political events like Jung did, says Singer, is the risk of reductive overgeneralisation that obscures those historical, economic and political factors that lead to a 'cultural possession'. His view is that cultural complex theory prevents such de-contextualisation while maintaining the centrality of the notion of complex, in its own right as a connection between the archetypal unconscious and the individual consciousness. Jung, say these authors, exposed himself to misunderstanding when in the 1930s he published his

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<sup>19</sup> According to Jung, the psyche often splits the personality off from unwanted, emotionally charged traits. These nevertheless manifest autonomously by taking over the behaviour or responses of the individual in an atypical manner. These dissociated elements of personality are the complexes, which require integration in order to subdue to the control of the ego (CW 8, para. 202).

essay on Wotan and Nazi Germany precisely because he did not refer to a notion connecting the two levels (Singer and Kimbles, 2004). However, Singer and Kimbles' theory proposes to differentiate between individual complexes and cultural complexes when, in fact, all complexes might depend on cultural factors, often intertwining with more individual emotional tones. Henderson (1990: 104) himself acknowledged this aspect when he wrote that

... from a purely empirical standpoint, the cultural unconscious is not derived from the collective unconscious any more than from the personal unconscious. A great deal of what Jung called personal was actually always culturally conditioned. In being nursed, weaned, and trained, the child derives from its mother her personal attention, love, and education.

A participation mystique, or projective identification with the identity provided by the group, is needed for the complex to manifest in different individuals belonging to the same cultural group but this does not differ much from what happens at the purely individual level. A complex could easily be considered the product of a maladaptation of the individual to some cultural values and practices to which they attach specific emotional tones. Moreover, also as conveyors of collective archetypes, complexes have a collective rather than individual nature. This thesis consequently contends that a better approach to the cultural unconscious consists in relying on the notion of moral panic, which more clearly acknowledges the power dynamics at play whenever cultural complexes take over, as discussed later in Chapter 4.

A further problematic aspect of Jung's original cultural critique consists in what Singer and Kimbles indicate as the difference between cultural complexes and cultural identity. Had Jung realised this, he would have been spared accusations of antisemitism, say these authors. It is indeed surprising that he, who first theorised the persona and the shadow



as a product of conformity to family and social norms, thus opening the way to Goffman's studies on social interactionism, did not apply a similar reflection to group psychology. Something very important is at stake here: Jung, as pointed out by Andrew Samuels (cited in Young-Eisendrath and Dawson, 2008) has the merit of having understood how prejudices get formed, but this did not prevent him from expressing his own prejudices. Somehow, this is an important lesson to learn from Jung, namely that the therapist, the researcher and the observer react with their own complexes to that which they analyse, observe or research. A question remains about how to translate this consideration into a suitable reflexive practice for social research, as pointed out by Walker (2017). This is a relevant factor when researching social phenomena and even more so when the subject of study in question specifically concerns highly numinously charged phenomena like the use of sexualised images, or that of new communication technologies. Jung's writing is somehow confused on the matter of prejudices. He ambivalently romanticised a simpler evolutionary level (i.e. "primitive") all the while attributing superiority to modern man (namely, Western man). Consider for example the following statement:

We laugh at primitive superstitions, thinking ourselves superior, but we completely forget that we are influenced in just as uncanny a fashion as the primitive by this background, which we want to scoff at as museum of stupidities. Primitive man simply has a different theory—the theory of witchcraft and spirits. I find this theory very interesting and very sensible—actually more sensible than the academic views of modern science. Whereas the highly educated modern man tries to figure out what diet best suits his nervous intestinal catarrh and to what dietetic mistakes the new attack may be due, the primitive, quite correctly, looks for psychological reasons and seeks a psychically effective method of cure. The processes in the unconscious influence us just as much as they do primitives: we are possessed by the demons of sickness no less than them [...]. Only, we call all these things by different names, and that is the only advantage we have over primitive man. It is, as we know, a little thing,

yet it makes all the difference. For mankind it was always like a deliverance from a nightmare when the new name was found.

(Jung, 1930/1970: 14).

While Jung pays tribute to the ‘primitive’s’ skills at dealing with anything psychological, he nonetheless suggests modern man’s advantage based on the symbolic function of a more sophisticated language. The major issue is, of course, the attribution of primitive qualities to some contemporary groups. Jung’s double standard (primitive = psychologically healthy, modern man = superior yet psychologically unhealthy due to pseudo-rationality) is evident throughout his *Collected Works*. It would indeed be naïf to rely on similar oversimplifications, which in many instances abide by ‘signification spirals’<sup>20</sup> worthy of the most classic moral panic. A more sophisticated discussion of these points follows in the next chapter when moral regulation and the methodologies used to study its impacts are approached. It is a major claim of this thesis that the cross-fertilization between discursive psychology, social representations theory and the psychosocial field can address these issues, which are intrinsic in Jungian psychology at a methodological level.

Similarly, the notion of the cultural complex has been criticized for its lack of acknowledgement of the epistemologies and methodologies of disciplines that more specifically study collective functioning, such as history, sociology or anthropology. A point which is illustrated later in this chapter, and which Lu (2013) stresses in relation to the claim of Singer and Kimbles that cultural complex theory adequately explains the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Lack of acknowledgement of historical contexts and alternative theories of such type of transmission, says Lu, reduce the theoretical power of the theory,

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<sup>20</sup> A signification spiral is defined by Hall et al. (1978: 223) as ‘a self-amplifying sequence within the area of signification’ regarding those individuals, phenomena or events that are the target of a moral panic.

which might result in a prejudiced self-fulfilling prophecy. In the case of this thesis, for example, it is claimed that complex formation requires the support of moral panic theory to become applicable to social reactions to sexting. A critiqued concept in itself (Jenkins, 2009), moral panic theory has the merit of better acknowledging the social dynamics that surround the emotional reactions to societal threats. Particularly, the emphasis on moral entrepreneurship and power relations enable a much more specific contextualisation of the cases of collective emotional contagion under study. While complexes seem to depend on a trauma affecting a certain community, moral panics depend on another constant of humanity: the struggle for power and social control that come into play when moral regulation seems to fail. That said, this thesis further claims that the specific contribution of the notion of collective emotional contagion or possession does not reside in its factual accuracy, but rather in its connection to prejudice. Moral panics benefit moral entrepreneurs who foment them, different individuals manifests the conflict thus generated through similar symptoms, beliefs and behaviours, but each individual relates to such conflicts and their manifestations differently. This focus on the connection between individuals' beliefs and the socio-political context is the strongest contribution of a Jungian and post-Jungian perspective to psychosocial research particularly with regard to Jung's approach to the underlying emotions that can be apprehended through analysis of symbols and archetypal patterns through his method.

### ***3.3.3 Post-Jungian perspectives applied to social phenomena***

A further approach to social phenomena has developed within Jungian and post-Jungian studies and it centres on the use of concepts other than archetypal theory or complexes. It is closely linked to the involvement of analytical psychologists engaged in various humanitarian and political activities, causes and fieldwork. Publications in this

tradition are more markedly post-Jungian, often adopting other theoretical frameworks in conjunction with Jungian concepts to better investigate the topics under examination. Overall, it is composed of two trends: one that could be called extraverted, which, similarly to how sociology investigates social, cultural and political matters external to the Jungian and post-Jungian movement. The other is, rather, more concerned with re-defining Jungian concepts to acknowledge contemporary debates on such matters as gender and culture. It is a more introverted literature, aiming at changing the way analytical psychology is also practised clinically. Often these two traditions cross each other. For this thesis, only the aspects pertaining to the way this literature engages psychosocial approaches are discussed. The purpose is not to discredit any perspective that is unsuitable for the current research but to identify limitations in those approaches that already exist and that can be taken into account by developing a psychosocial approach that is firmly anchored in a contemporary sociological approach.

The background of this literature is to be found in the work of authors such as James Hillman and Michael Fordham. Both Hillman and Fordham brought forth changes in the way they theorised their work compared to the classic Jungian approach (Samuels, 1985). Their perspectives differ in the importance attached to the development of personality, the concept of self and the definition of archetypes, as well as the emphasis given to the analysis of transference and countertransference, symbolic experiences and the use of imagery in clinical practice (*ibid.*).

Hillman developed his approach to react against ‘unnecessary metaphysical assumptions in Jung’, rejecting the distinction between archetype as such and archetypal image (Vannoy Adams, cited in Young-Eisendrath and Dawson, 2006). In his approach, only

archetypal images are to be retained as phenomena, thus the archetypal school of analytical psychology can be considered a phenomenological school. Any image can be considered archetypal in Hillman's view, simply because it is perceived so by the individual. When an image is so considered, it is perceived as typical, valuable and thus it acquires an archetypal feature for the individual. For Hillman then, the purpose of analysis is not to make the unconscious conscious, but to make the literal metaphorical (*ibid.*), so to become able to appreciate that imagination is reality. This approach enables understanding the plurality of images circulating in society, with potential profound metaphorical implications. To Hillman we also owe the notion of 'mundus imaginalis', or the transpersonal source of imagination that produces the images, which run across individuals, but which are not possessed by them. Such an approach is substantially different from Jung's connection between the archetype and instinct, and from any biologisation of imagination that has followed his initial locating of archetypes in genetics and physiology.

Michael Fordham focused on child development, an area where Jungian theory had initially failed to invest (McFarland Solomon, cited in Young-Eisendrath and Dawson, 2006). His model of child development arose from the interest of London-based Jungians in object relations and the work of Melanie Klein in particular. The interest stemmed from the acknowledgement of a lack of substantial theoretical background to engage in early developmental issues with patients. To invite pre-verbal forms of communication into the analytic setting, for the early issues with relationships with the caregiver to be elaborated in analysis, Jungian psychology relied on further conceptualising transference and countertransference as vehicles of such early communication, mostly conveyed through projective identification. On the ground of infant observation, Fordham demonstrated that the concept of the self, initially conceived by Jung as the site of the total personality, which, if

fully accomplished, would provide unity to the individual, was instead present already in infants, albeit in a psychosomatic unity (ibid.). The ego develops through the relationship with the caregiver and the reintegration of elements that are fed back to the infant. The centrality of the transference and countertransference in the analytic work carried out with a developmental approach has also translated into the use of these concepts outside the consulting room. Chiefly, as it is seen below, by Samuels (2001) who proposes to relate citizens' reactions and political decision-making through such unconscious communication.

Numerous post-Jungian authors have followed Hillman's approach to the archetypal, as seen in section 3.1.1 of this chapter with regard to the perspective of Samuels (1989) concerning the socially constructed and metaphorical nature of archetypes. This author further emphasises the importance of countertransference to access the 'mundus imaginalis' shared with the patient (ibid.), somehow bridging the developmental and archetypal traditions. Samuels has also devoted effort to theorising the use of countertransference and archetypal imagination with regard to politics (Samuels, 2001). He conceives of citizens as therapists when they react to political themes with imaginal responses, which are not rational, nor politically correct (ibid.). The engagement of citizens' subjectivity, says Samuels, could provide creative solutions to political problems and offer insights into the unconscious meaning of such problems. It could also offer invaluable information about what is going on under the surface, what communication is happening between politics and citizenship, which could inform ways to campaign within movements that oppose certain political decisions.

Samuels' work is also tightly linked with the activities of those Jungian analysts who are active within the *Analysis & Activism* group of the *International Association of Analytical Psychology*. The group has dedicated numerous conferences to matters of inequality, politics,

ecology, humanitarianism and clinical work related to these themes. Kiehl, Saban and Samuels' (2016) collection contains reflections and accounts of the direct involvement of Jungians in socio-political issues. Ranging from work with genocide survivors through sand play therapy (Pattis-Zoja), struggles against oppression (Alschuler), and non-violent conflict resolution (Rasche) among others, the contributions of the analytical psychologists involved testify not only to the commitment to causes of social justice, whether in the form of intervention or from a theoretical angle, but also of the changing approach to socio-political issues compared to Jung's initial approach. If an interpretive commentary was initially preferred, possibly to be published as a monograph, the contemporary socio-politically aware Jungian and post-Jungian psychologist is often involved in front-line fieldwork, organising therapeutic interventions or collaborating with organisations operating in the field. Such involvement is, of course, a distinct contribution that in many cases attempts to not only acknowledge Jung's own mistakes, such as those he made around his anti-Semitism and his gender prejudices but also to relate with the collective in a much more participatory and relational way. However, it remains surprising that no methodological reflection is made concerning the way knowledge is generated through such endeavours. To inform a psychosocial approach, the latter would be necessary, not only in its sociological features but also to inform reflexivity.

A problem, this lack of methodological reflection, which affects also the adoption of standpoints is exemplified in other initiatives, such as the recent 'Open letter from a group of Jungians on the question of Jung's writings on and theories about "Africans"', published by the British Journal of Psychotherapy in 2018 and reproduced in numerous other academic journals. The core issue addressed by the open letter concerns Jung's racist views concerning people of African and South Asian Indian heritage, initially detailed in an article by Farhad

Dalal (1988). The signatories, moved by the thirty-year lack of acknowledgement and apologies for what Jung wrote on the part of Jungian psychologists, intend to remedy by making amends. The intention is, of course, laudable, but it opens the question of how to implement necessary changes in practice. The authors state that some implicit biases have remained unexamined and unchallenged despite the distancing of most analytical psychologists from Jung's views. Whilst at the interpersonal level an apology, such as the one produced by this initiative is certainly likely to reduce tensions between the interested parties, at the academic level, the changes require implementing different methodologies and finding ways of doing things differently. Particularly with regard to psychosocial research, as indicated in Chapter 1, the methodology adopted must prompt a reflexive positioning of the researcher against the social phenomena under investigation. It seems, therefore, essential not to settle for a perspective that overall does not provide one but instead to dig deeper into the gaps to devise the best approach. It is perhaps worth remembering here that reflexivity concerns the examination of one's own beliefs, practices and prejudices to understand how they might have influenced our research. This sociological post-Jungian literature does not do so although it reflects on Jung's prejudices.

To summarise, contemporary post-Jungian literature that seeks to address Jung's prejudices and explore social phenomena through different lenses does not fully serve a psychosocial primary research project with sufficient methodological insight to ensure addressing biases potentially hidden in concepts developed by Jung. This is the case even when the approach used to investigate socio-political matters is substantially different from Jung's original one for the reason of the absence of a clear reflexive methodology.



The preoccupation with making amends and remedying Jung's own mistakes has been a central feature of much of the literature instead directly devoted to addressing prejudice expressed by Jung also at the theoretical level. Starting with research into Jung's antisemitism (Samuels, 1993), this second applied post-Jungian literature revolves around two fundamental approaches. The first concerns historical research revising Jung's work to verify whether or not he held prejudiced views, acted in a discriminatory way or endorsed those who did (Samuels, 1993; Bair, 2003, Lewin, 2009, Schoenl and Schoenl, 2016).

The second approach discusses theoretical notions that are no longer acceptable in light of developments in gender studies, anthropology and cultural studies, in the attempt of redefining them. This literature started with feminist critiques of some of Jung's views on the contra-sexual archetypes (Samuels, 1989; Young-Eisendrath, 2004; Gray, 2008), and extended to matters of ethnicity (Brewster, 2017; 2019) and homosexuality (Hopke, 1991). Some of the solutions devised are indeed interesting, such as the repositioning of animus and anima<sup>21</sup> in terms of constructivism (Young-Eisendrath, 2004; 2006; Gray, 2008), and are discussed later in connection with sexting. Overall, though, this literature is theoretical and is difficult to reasonably apply to a primary research project. While it can very much inform a methodology, it is nonetheless not one in its own right. Consequently, while it might provide useful concepts, it remains necessary to adopt a clear methodology alongside it.

### ***3.4 A critical appraisal***

The existing literature focusing on socio-political and cultural phenomena in analytical psychology seems to fail at adequately supporting primary research carried out with a psychosocial ethos. Mostly, it has never fully concerned itself with matters of

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<sup>21</sup> Initially defined as the inner figure of a woman in a man's psyche and of a man in a woman's psyche (Samuels, Shorter and Plaut, 1986), the contra-sexual archetypes have been redefined as present in the psyche of both sexes at the same time (Hopke, 1991; Young-Eisendrath, 2004).

methodology, for example, how to gather information and then interpret it? How to ensure all possible information is gathered? How do the choices I, the researcher, make concerning the way I gather information affect the findings? Such questions are more than pertinent in a primary research project and must be asked. A simple suggestion to focus on the archetypal elements within the information collected does not seem to stand the test of the debates concerning archetypal theory: there is no consensus around the nature of archetypes, thus shortcuts of such nature are unlikely to produce a research project methodologically valid. It is, therefore, a matter of furthering the game started by those authors who have looked more closely into the sociological premises Jung followed. It must be kept in mind that contemporary researchers cannot rely on sociological theories that are outdated within their own fields. Classical sociological theories have been considerably revised, debated, reconceptualised and fundamentally changed. Their contemporary versions often inform the majority of contemporary primary research that reaches evidence-based impact in a shape that is substantially different from the one Durkheim or Weber had thought. Thus, it is important to position the research methodology within evolving concepts, theories and sociological approaches.

A further issue that strongly affects Jungian and post-Jungian literature with regard to sociological theory concerns the relative lack of reflexivity. Partially because of its theoretical rather than applied focus, partially due to a scarce involvement with research methods themselves, this literature hugely underestimates matters of reflexivity and thus fails to provide the primary researcher with sufficient tools to select a suitable method for data analysis. Of course, some perspectives exist that can be furthered to adopt some type of Jungian or post-Jungian insight, such as phenomenology (Brooke, 1991). Nonetheless, to introduce Jungian elements into an existing epistemology requires careful consideration of

the existing relationships between Jungian thought and the philosophical perspective that underpins them. In short, no such attempt is likely to be easy, practicable or straightforward. For this reason, the current thesis tries to identify a suitable sociological perspective to describe the process of social construction that takes place during interviews (thus theorising the role played by communication in Jungian interpretations), develop a suitable reflexive approach and allocate a methodologically adequate space to Jungian and post-Jungian interpretations. A rather challenging task indeed, but a worthwhile one if the efforts so far deployed to address the impact of Jung's prejudices are to be implemented in a new way of doing primary research within analytical psychology. A further question might be asked, though. Why maintain a reference to Jung's psychology if it has proved so biased? The answer is simple and complex at the same time. On the one hand, it can be argued that a reflexive methodology needs blind spots. Or else, the use of knowledge of the researcher would be faultless, to begin with. On the other, while Jung unquestionably made mistakes, he also devised a therapeutic approach that has been found effective (Roesler, 2013). Thus, elements of Jung's theories might equally contribute to the understanding and the creative resolution of some of the problems sexting presents and which were addressed in Chapter 2.

## Chapter 4

### *The psychosocial approach*

The previous chapter shed light on some limitations in existing Jungian and post-Jungian literature concerning its possible use in psychosocial primary research. When a social phenomenon such as sexting is investigated qualitatively, it is essential to approach it according to a clear theoretical perspective, encompassing an epistemology and a methodology. The latter is discussed in the next chapter, but the theoretical and epistemological elements are detailed in this chapter. They build on the limitations discussed in Chapter 3 and illustrate how a psychosocial perspective can overcome them. First, a summary of the historical background of psychosocial studies illustrates the way analytical psychology can contribute from a very specific perspective. Then, an overview of moral panic theory and moral regulation illustrates the discursive approach taken by this thesis. These areas of focus are essential to the study of ‘sexting’, which is often subject to strong moral reactions and matters of fear for children’s wellbeing, as was illustrated in Chapter 2.

#### *4.1 The historical background of psychosocial studies*

Since the early 2000s, psychosocial perspectives have resurfaced in the British Academy leading to the establishment of the Association for Psychosocial Studies in 2013, which began to formalise the approach into a clear discipline. While the interest in formalising psychosocial studies derived from the interest of sociologists in psychoanalysis, and particularly in some specific British traditions, such as the object relation perspective

(Holloway and Jefferson, 2000), other traditions exist which are also historically rooted in psychoanalytic approaches. Chiefly, a discursive perspective, which has been at the centre of Ian Parker's work critiquing mainstream social psychology for its 'expert' views on human psychology based on laboratory experiments (Parker, 1989). Lacanian psychology also figures prominently in the work of Stephen Frosh (2010), who contributes a great deal in setting out the specificities of psychosocial studies with regard to social research and critical perspectives (ibid: 190). The implications stressed by these two authors are reviewed in the next section. Whatever the psychoanalytic tradition adopted, though, a major departure from traditional psychoanalytic studies concerns the reliance on social research to inform psychosocial interpretations. For this reason, psychosocial literature has also been taken on board within criminology, which is a discipline that, in its critical perspectives, fosters the use of qualitative methods to gather information about crime, its impact and its actors (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007). Criminology as a field that can draw upon a huge historical data set from across vast geographical and socioeconomic areas, is a natural meeting place for psychology and sociology. At root, psychosocial studies are the outcome of an attempt to balance the extreme tendencies of psychology and sociology and arrive at an approach to human phenomena which is more holistic and complete.

A further approach, less explicitly informed by psychoanalysis (although very much connected to it), yet strongly psychosocial in its merging of the way individuals perceive and relate to social phenomena with a strong sociological focus, derives from social representation theory (Moscovici, 1961/2008). This perspective has been centre stage in psychosocial research concerning health studies in Britain, deriving from the pioneering work of Claudine Herzlich concerning social representations of health and illness (1969). All existing approaches, however, seek to understand the subject according to their experience, feelings and emotions rather than pre-established social categories (men/women,

wealthy/dispossessed, etc.). Such a focus strongly characterises psychosocial studies (Woodward, 2015). This author further defines the psychosocial focus as ‘an exploration of the processes and the relationship that provides a means of understanding and making sense of what is happening and of why and how people do what they do and feel what they feel’ (ibid: 2). Woodward explains that many of the practical issues involved in psychosocial studies originate in the provision of medical and social care and education as part of a move towards recognising that

...dealing with the whole person, in the promotion of healing and well-being, includes not just the individuals’ social circumstances but a whole range of interactions within a person’s biography and the situated self as well as the more obvious socioeconomic factors associated with ill health or dependency and underperformance in education (ibid: 3).

Needless to say, according to scholars working within the psychosocial paradigm, psychoanalytic theories provide insight into subjectivities, which can relate to the socio-economic context through a self-reflexive process. The psychodynamics of identity, emotions and positioning become available to the social researcher, whose task is to challenge pre-established categories, with these often leading to prejudices and roles restrictive to individual autonomy. The next sections detail the major defining approaches to psychosocial studies, starting from the discursive turn and the object-relations approach. Then, the challenge provided by the existing epistemologies in use in primary research is illustrated through a discussion of the extant literature on moral regulation and moral panic, which call upon the use of critical social psychological methodologies.

#### ***4.1.1 The discursive approach in psychosocial studies***

A major player in the psychosocial understanding of subjectivity, the discursive approach, relates to the work of Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault. These post-structuralist authors centred their research on the articulation of subjectivity, manifested in discursive practices. To say it with Parker (2015), the impact of psychoanalysis on critical debates within psychosocial studies has gone through a “turn to language”, then a “turn to discourse” followed by a “turn to subjectivity” (Parker, 2015). All play out in qualitative research carried out with a psychosocial focus, thus it is essential to understand how this perspective engages the subject, reflexivity and the psychosocial itself.

For Parker, the three turns surround the critique of scientific psychology, considered “shaky” when no agreed model of its object of study is displayed along with a tendency to aggregate results obtained through experiments and surveys based on large numbers of subjects. Such an approach, says Parker, lacks a reflexive “self-monitoring” theorisation of the subject, which is instead conceptualised as an object pushed around like a billiard ball by the research methods adopted. The “linguistic turn” facilitated instead a focus on human agency, yet still failed to conceptualise the subject in its irrational, unconscious features. The “turn to discourse” enabled a conceptualisation of the subject as influenced by symbolic phenomena, thus bringing back psychoanalysis into scholarly reflection and mostly framing social construction within the analysis of ideology. Psychosocial studies, and the turn they further entailed, summarise the merging of discursive psychology with psychoanalysis. For Parker (2015) and Frosh (2010), the use of discursive psychology aims at locating psychoanalytic subjectivities within the discursive process of social construction, rather than adopting the subjective perspective that psychoanalytic pioneers fostered. This element is important because psychoanalysis has devised its own understanding of how the psyche constructs the social (Frosh, 2010). Mostly, this is done by internalising experiences, and the

outer world is then related accordingly. This is the case in object relation theory. However, as Frosh remarks, some constructionist approaches reject this option because they reject the idea that an inner world might exist at all, and particularly, according to such rules devised by psychoanalysis. Discursive psychologists treat inner processes as resulting from discursive activity, surrounding the identity positions that are constructed for the person producing the discourse and those they communicate it to. Psychoanalysis instead goes ‘behind the text’ (ibid: 202). It explores the anxieties, defences and ways of relating that are learned through development. Many psychosocial researchers, continues Frosh, recognise differences between discursive social psychology (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) and psychoanalysis, all the while recognising the shared interest in the subjective meaning and the constructive role of language. Discursive psychologists, however, often consider psychoanalysis problematic because it conveys a “psychological versus social dualism” (Wetherell, 2003). The deep inner structures that interest psychoanalysis, particularly within object relation approaches, are separated from social relations, and thus they are understood as static, somewhat confined to early development. No transformation through social relations and practices is contemplated and determinism is always round the corner, ready to magically explain everything with developmental processes.

For this thesis, the word discourse is taken to suggest ‘any practice by which individuals imbue reality with meaning’ (Ruiz Ruiz, 2009: 1). Discourse informs us about the meaning attached to social actions, and critical psychology, from which Parker develops his interest in psychosocial approaches, mostly aims at identifying the ideological underpinnings of discourse, to shed light on the dominant discourses circulating in society that are projected by sources of power (Van Dijk, 1999). Ruiz Ruiz (2009: 2) stresses that ‘discourse is therefore understood to mirror mechanisms of ideological domination’. Particularly



important in this optic is the work of Potter and Wetherell (1987), who participated fully in the discursive turn that preceded the more recent psychosocial focus. Equally, the notion of habitus developed by Bourdieu (1991) is often considered a reflection of discourse, deriving from belonging to a given social group, with the related social experience conditioned by such belonging. Consequently, discourse reflects social inequality and mechanisms of social domination. The merging of discursive psychology and psychoanalysis can be sustained if the notion of psychic reality is adopted (Frosh, 2010). The latter is not internal, nor a structure, but rather, a process that somehow replaces external reality for the psychic version each of us adopts. According to Frosh, ‘the subject is always immersed in a flux that is neither inside nor out, but something else—a folding of space that is perhaps closer to the Moebius ideal’ (ibid: 203). The psychosocial perspective that derives from discursive psychology is, therefore, libidinal, stressing such elements in social discourses and highlighting the flows and blockages of desire, which become the focus of the psychosocial investigation carried out within this approach.

#### ***4.1.2 The object relation perspective in psychosocial studies***

Another important perspective instead reverses the logic, suggesting focusing on anxiety and desire (Holloway, 2006b) as fundamental factors in psychosocial investigations. Holloway states that discursive psychology omits any engagement with the psychological processes involved in subjectivity. For this author, theories of subjectivity must take into account its development, as ‘we are psychosocial because we are products of a unique life history of anxiety—and desire-provoking life events and how they have been transformed in internal reality’ (Holloway, 2006: 468). Holloway considers, therefore, the psychosocial as the result of defensive activities, which affect and are affected by external conditions and discourses. This author further stresses that the social is always found along with the psychic

processes that make it and vice versa. Anxiety and defensive subjectivity are the central focus of the methodological approach Holloway and Jefferson developed (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000). Through the lens of a defended subject, their work engages with the fear of crime to illustrate how defences play out in the interaction with the researchers in such a way that categorising research participants as men and women might not be useful to understand the underlying mechanism that makes some people declare more fear of crime than others. Here, it is appropriate to stress how a focus on object relations resonates more with a social interactive sociological focus than with a macro perspective. The interest in people's defences and anxieties enables a sophisticated perspective on how they relate to discourses, which can develop into a reflexive approach. However, the assumption is that society results from discursive practice, which is a position that is still debated within the broad field of social psychology.

#### ***4.2 Social representation theory and the psychosocial***

Another core theoretical perspective within social psychology explores instead social interactive practices through the notion of social representations. First detailed in 1961 by Serge Moscovici in a work discussing the vulgarisation of psychoanalysis in 1950s France through different ideological discourses, social representation theory (SRT) is a development of Durkheim's concept of those 'collective representations' compatible with contemporary society. While certainly collective, social representations are also inextricably linked to specific communities and their objects of knowledge. The social element, however, goes beyond the simple fact of sharing assumptions and notions, and for this reason, social psychologists have abandoned Durkheim's concept in favour of Moscovici's. The social in social representations 'refers to a symbolic relationship that gives a value of transformation from the imaginary of a community and synthesizes the complex intertwining of cultural

relations by which subjects are linked with others, in the midst of a determined historical and structural context' (Rubira-Garcia, Puebla-Martinez and Gelado-Marcos, 2018).

Social representations are a system of values, ideas and practices (Moscovici, 1961/2008) that are shared through social interaction and media discourses and serve to guide everyday life actions and communication by acting as a shared code. Moscovici conceived of social representations as meaning-making that takes place in relation with other individuals and collectives to apprehend the unknown based on pre-existing knowledge. Furthermore, social representations 'serve to orientate individuals themselves in the social and material context, to dominate it' (Moscovici, 1979: 18). Intending to construct a social psychology of knowledge, Moscovici aimed at shedding light on 'how and why people share knowledge and thereby constitute their common reality' (Moscovici, 1990a: 164).

Over the years, various approaches have developed to study social representations (see Rubira-Garcia, Puebla-Martinez and Gelado-Marcos, 2018 for a summary of the major strands), but most agree that the fundamental characteristics of social representations are the following. A representation must always be a representation of an object; that is, it must be objectified in a body of knowledge; it has the character of an image, and the property of being able to exchange the sensitive and the idea, the perception and the concept. It has a symbolic, significant and constructive character, and it has an autonomous and creative character. The process of representation, as eloquently stated by Rubira-Garcia, Puebla-Martinez and Gelado-Marcos (2018: 3),

... always starts from a re-production, not a reproduction, of objects of knowledge. This new production of meaning implies a subjectivation that is born from the interactions between the subjects (at all levels, including individual, group, institution or at a massive scale) and the object itself. When re-presenting a reality, in order to

apprehend it and not let it escape, its disarticulation is facilitated, transforming it into something different, a new quality that distances the representation from its object.

Given their constructive nature, social representations are often equated with commonsense knowledge, or lay beliefs, which circulate in society and form a sort of social thought. They differ from discourse because they also express elements of social subjectivity that are not made explicit in discursive forms. These other forms range across traditions, beliefs, and images that circulate in the imaginary of a given group. Thus, social representations have also been studied in connection to myth (Jodelet and Coelho Parades, 2010). For Moscovici, (ibid.) the relationship between myth and social representation is that of a connective element. Myth precedes social representations in human history and, as such, it unifies them; myth operates as a sort of cement for the represented world. Therefore, social representations are a useful methodological device to explore what Jungian psychology has mostly described, namely archetypal figures. The relationship between social representations and the notion of archetype, which is proposed below in this chapter, remains to be investigated. However, it is worth noting here that the implicit, symbolic nature of social representations, as described here, moves toward the psychological and unconscious anchor and thus, towards the psychosocial.

Four major traditions have developed in the study of social representations: the classical school, the structural school, the socio-dynamic approach and Wolfgang Wagner's perspective (Rubira-Garcia, Puebla-Martinez and Gelado-Marcos, 2018). The classical school, started by Moscovici and then perfected by Jodelet, mostly uses qualitative approaches to research and open questionnaires. This school focuses heavily on media and institutions as sites of production for social representations. The structural school, also started in France by Jean-Claude Abric, focuses on building social representations with an emphasis

on cognitive procedures. It aims at establishing the assessment of social representations as an organised set of cognemes (Lahlou and Abric, 2011). These authors' central core theory tries to explain the way a representation is organised. Central core theory sees representations as socio-cognitive phenomena, which have a central core and a peripheral system, engaged both in maintaining the representation as stable and flexible at the same time. Mostly employing experimental approaches, this perspective has been criticised for using a positivist methodological approach. The socio-dynamic school started in Geneva by Wilhelm Doise, is interested mostly in studying representations as sites for symbolic exchange. This approach studies the relationship between the social metasystem and the mental universe of the subjects, who are affected by their position within the metasystem itself. This approach mostly relies on correlational statistic methods to study the relationships between subjects and metasystems. Wolfgang Wagner, instead, focused on the social interactive process that constructs the representations. This thesis adopts the classical approach, which is more explicitly connected with qualitative methodologies.

Overall, the purpose of studying social representations is twofold. On the one hand, they guide behaviour by organising reality for individuals according to common sense and lay beliefs. To study them enables one, therefore, to better understand those behaviours displayed in society that do not necessarily follow rational or institutional requirements but which have a logic of their own. On the other hand, they frame identity and the related social positioning. This is often understood by pairing social representations theory with social identity theory yet, lately, reflections on subjectivity have interested those researchers investigating social representations.

According to Denise Jodelet (2008), after World War Two, positivism, structuralism, Marxism and postmodernism rejected subjectivity due to its background in individualism and humanism and due to its emphasis on consciousness. In social psychology, such rejection has had a positive outcome, which concerns the reintroduction of the sociological dimension in the study of various phenomena. However, sharing Holloway's realisation concerning discursive psychology, Jodelet recognises that too much emphasis has been put on social interaction and not enough on the underlying mental processes and dynamics taking place in the psyche of people living in society. She mentions the work of Kaës (1976) and Zavalloni (2007) as notable exceptions, attempting to articulate the relation between social representations and subjectivity. The subject described by these authors interiorises social representations and at the same time intervenes in their construction. Furthermore, Jodelet stresses the fact that the major critiques of social representation theory concern its presumed conceptualisation of the subject in Cartesian terms, despite Foucault's use of the notion of representation as an "ensemble des idées" in the *Herméneutique du sujet* (2001b). Foucault sees representations intervening in the process of subjectivation<sup>22</sup> in the form of reflexive appraisal and choice. Furthermore, Foucault suggests that this reflexive work is controlled by conscience, a role which Jodelet compares to that of social interaction in the elaboration of the representation of the self. This author further suggests the value of engaging the notion of subjectivity in its psychoanalytic features, according to the different conceptualisations of social relations and according to the involvement of the notion of habitus in the internalisation necessary to reflexive processes. She further insists that a rejection of a Cartesian subject does not necessarily entail 'a pure structuration based on the linguistic

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<sup>22</sup> Subjectivation describes a process of constitution of the subject within knowledge-power. Subjectivity is therefore attached to the individual at a particular time and in a particular place, carrying social and political meanings (Butler, cited in Tadajewski, Maclaran, Parsons and Parker, 2011). Nikolas Rose (1998: 37) defines the process of subjectivation as a "kind of infolding of exteriority" whereby external forces determine the way we intimately relate to ourselves, thus constituting us as subjects.

exchange' (ibid: 29). Thus, the inter-subjective element involved in social representations surrounds the Merleau Pontian 'field of the institution', which regulates any further experience, which relies on it. The ultimate question, suggests Jodelet, is to investigate the way social representations participate in subjectivation and vice versa, how modifying social representations generate changes in subjectivity.

Three spheres are considered to understand such a process: the subjective, the inter-subjective and the trans-subjective. These spheres concern the inscription of the subject in a network of social interactions that are performed through social communication, and in belonging to a social category (through social structure, position, identity), of social and public space. The subjective sphere of social representation has an expressive function. It sheds light on the meaning of objects localised in the social sphere and on the emotional and cognitive subjective functioning and desires associated with it. The intersubjective sphere instead concerns the interaction between various subjects. Through direct verbal communication, social representations are shared and negotiated. Dialogical exchanges play a major role in establishing knowledge, meaning and shared interests. Social representations intervene here as a means to understanding, as interpretive tools, and to construct shared knowledge around a shared interest. The transpersonal sphere instead concerns those representations that are shared across inter-subjective communication and subjective emotions and desires. It encompasses the cultural elements that enable a meaning that is not built in interaction or through subjective stance, but which is cultural and shared *a priori* by everyone belonging to a given culture. The trans-personal sphere offers the criteria for the codification of reality and allows inter-understanding. The trans-subjective element of social representations is often seen in mass communication, in institutional functioning, in ideological hegemony. These three spheres interact, of course, generating conflict between representations, which call upon identity, position and reflexive engagement.

To summarise this overview of major theoretical perspectives adopted by psychosocial researchers, it appears that two major focuses have developed: one is discursive, thus, concerned about the way people convey their identity in their texts, speech or statements and how power is exerted when the discourses are those of institutions, politics and governments. The other is representational and this is more concerned with the way people theorise reality on the grounds of social interaction. What remains to be established is the way these two paradigms can collaborate and contribute to the study of sexting, an aspect that would require further research. For now, however, we turn to the question of whether SRT can be used as a valid form of knowledge production.

#### ***4.3 Discourse and representation, an epistemological debate***

The major difference between discursive psychology, as defined by Potter and Wetherell in 1987, and social representations theory consists in the importance accorded to language. Whereas for discursive psychology (DP), language is the core site of construction, for SRT the core site is, instead, communication. Many authors have stressed the incompatibility of DP and SRT (Flick, 1998; Potter and Wetherell, 1998; Parker, 1997), with Potter and Wetherell (1998) denying social representations an epistemological place. Debates have been ongoing, with Jovchelovitch (1996) and Voelklein and Howarth (2005) defending the indispensability of representations for epistemological purposes.

For Jovchelovitch (1996), a major issue affecting the debates sits with the different understanding of the word ‘cognition’ in Anglo-Saxon countries and French-speaking areas. For the Anglo-Saxon researcher, cognition is automatically equated with information processing, whereas for the French researcher cognition refers to ‘savoir’, thus knowledge, intended as a site of both power and the imaginary. This author further stresses that the role of social representations is to mediate between the subject and the object, between the



individual and the others. Social representations are equated by Jovchelovitch with the Winnicottian potential space (Winnicott, 1958), where symbolic activity takes place, which connects and separates the subject and the object-world in a shared reality. Social representations are, therefore, intersubjective. Moreover, representations reflect relationships of power and domination within society by being in contrast with each other, a point further stressed by Caroline Howarth (2006). By eliminating representations in favour of DP, claims Jovchelovitch, along with Holloway and Jodelet (see above), the entire notion of mind is put into question. If people construct the world uniquely by interacting linguistically, then no space is left to represent it. Furthermore, she continues, by equating language with action, then what is left is, *de facto*, a renewed form of behaviouralism. Thus, it appears that a psychosocial approach, whether inspired by DP, such as the one used by Holloway and Jefferson, or Parker or Frosh, needs to articulate an intersubjective, reflexive space, in a sort of rupture with the epistemological stance proposed by DP. Further critiques of SRT include the fact that, just like DP, it failed for a long time to theorise a reflexive subject (Parker, 1997), and its relationship with ideology is certainly less clear-cut than that of DP.

Nevertheless, currently, attempts are being made to merge the two traditions (Batel and Castro, 2018). According to Batel and Castro (2018), SRT would benefit from incorporating discourse analysis in its qualitative investigations to capture simultaneously the content, format and process in the construction of social representations, particularly with regard to the role played by ideology. Moscovici (1961/2008) theorised forms of communication<sup>23</sup> that are enacted depending on the particular way an ideology relates to the object to represent, but these forms indicate a style of communication, not the discursive

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<sup>23</sup> Moscovici's approach to ideology is theorised in the context of the communication styles adopted to circulate social representations and by active minorities. He conceptualised three forms of communication: diffusion, propagation and propaganda, dialogically shared between the subject, the alter and the object (Markova, 2000). See Orfali (2002) for an extensive summary.

value associated with the represented object *per se*. Discursive psychology, on the other hand, having mostly applied critical analysis to societal narratives to highlight the role played by the *Orders of discourse* (Foucault, 1971), has often neglected the interactive context. Therefore, SRT would offer the possibility to also apply critical discourse analysis to the product of social interaction. Jovchelovitch (2018) praised the suggestion of Batel and Castro (2018), welcoming the possibility of being able to ‘recover the centrality of communicative interaction as the driving force of social representations’ (Jovchelovitch, 2018: 2), by ‘going beyond the propositional and semantic dimensions of representation to encompass its relational and discursive dimensions’ (ibid: 2). She does, however, identify some possible pitfalls in such an attempt: the introduction of critical discourse analysis in SRT research should not be attempted separately from methodological reflections. Jovchelovitch mentions the risk of abandoning interviews in favour of more naturalistic methods, often recommended by DP researchers (Potter, 2010; 2018), which might be unsuitable when researching hard-to-reach communities, who would welcome the dialogue with the researcher. Social representation theory has always advocated for methodological pluralism, unlike DP.

Further discussion of the methodological implications of such merging is addressed in the next chapter, but suffice to say here, Batel and Castro’s suggestion is a welcome and refreshing perspective, which is particularly useful in the context of research on sexting. As shown in Chapter 2, debates on sexting often involve the perspectives of adults on the meaning of the behaviour, omitting instead to explore the perspective of the children. Adults’ views could be considered the equivalent of the position of the ‘expert’, so criticised by DP researchers (Parker, 2015). They constitute the equivalent of the broader ideological panorama surrounding young people, who must negotiate contrasting social representations of sexting, engaging subjectively in reflexive practice. Adults’ views are expressed also using

legislation, media messages, educational practices etc. As such, this research considers them discursively important to fully grasp the alterity involved in sexting.

Having clarified the psychosocial epistemology of this research, it now remains to illustrate how Jungian and post-Jungian psychology locate themselves within it to make their contribution.

#### ***4.4 Epistemology, Jung and Moscovici***

According to Papadopoulos (2006), one reason behind the lack of explicit discussion of epistemology and methodology within Jung's work accounts for Jung's reluctance to consider theories in any way separate from the theorist's subjective psychology. Jung particularly emphasised this perspective when discussing the different focus of his, Adler's and Freud's approaches:

This difference (in interpretation, ndr.) can hardly be anything else but a difference in temperament, a contrast between two types of human mentality, one of which finds the determining agency pre-eminently in the subject, the other in the object...

(Jung, 1943/1972).

Such consideration for the specific perspective of the theoretician led him to develop his well-known theory of psychological types. However, from an epistemological perspective, his strong conviction that only an empirical focus would be able to truthfully render clinical findings often prevented a systematic consideration for epistemological matters. Nevertheless, his definition of 'empirical' is problematic and numerous authors have investigated the philosophies of knowledge that pervade his psychology (Nagy, 1991; Brooke, 1991; Papadopoulos, 2006; McCoy Brooks, 2011). Some relevant debates that arose from these works are reviewed to define the specific epistemological problems that arise for

psychosocial research. Successively, the specific perspective that develops from the meeting of Jungian and post-Jungian psychology and SRT is addressed.

Papadopoulos identifies in vitalism a first, important source of Jung's epistemology (2006:15). Within this perspective, Jung's emphasis on the primacy of psychology over 'abstract metaphysics' and scientific mechanical materialism finds its origin—an emphasis which became a strong consideration for subjective perspectives, linked to the insistence on empiricism. Visible here are the roots of an approach to research that encompasses the subjective perspective of the researcher and an empirical focus. Apparently irreconcilable, empiricism and a psychological focus were later to find in Jung's approach a strong phenomenological character (Brooke, 1991), despite the absence of acknowledgement of Heidegger's fundamental ontology as a construct similar to his own of 'psyche' (McCoy Brooks, 2011). The major limitations arising from this lack of acknowledgement, which results from the constraining reference to Kant's 'thing-in-itself', influenced by German Idealism, and to Cartesian 'mind/body' dualism, imply a set of *a priori* inner cognitions related to the self that guide the subject's understanding of the phenomenal world. This results in an isolated mind, with an essential subjectivity. Such essentialism has been criticised and reviewed within the Jungian movement, starting with Zinkin (2008), who endeavours to theorise a subject emerging within social contexts, leading on to Brooke (2009b), who, instead, criticises the dualism implicit in considering the Jungian Self as a matter of mind alone. Brooke also suggests that Jung's empiricism is better rendered when the term 'facts' is understood in relation to human sciences, rather than as an extension of a notion pertaining to the natural sciences into the realm of psychology. For Brooke (2000: 1), the legitimacy of Jung's phenomenological perspective rests on the idea of 'meanings as the fundamental evidence of human experience'.

More recently, Colman (2008) proposes an embodied understanding of the Jungian subject, by defining the Self as an ongoing relationship between a cultural context and a biological body. These post-Jungian authors have tried to introduce a constructionist view of Jung's *a priori*, transcendental and absolute 'psychoid unconscious'. It is important to note here that there is an increasing consensus in considering Jung's psychology as phenomenological psychology, where 'a systematic attempt to describe the phenomena of psychological life without violating the integrity of the experience' is deployed (Brooke, 2000: 1), despite the little recognition given to Jung by his contemporary phenomenologists, which was partially reciprocated, as previously seen in the case of Heidegger.

The last important epistemological approach that informed Jung's work on the Word Association Test is associationism (Papadopoulos, 2006). Through his work on associations, Jung developed his theory of complexes, which is essential to the Jungian understanding of the notion of moral panic. Papadopoulos considers Jung's focus on the dissociability of the psyche, which is intrinsic to the theory of complexes, essential in respect to another fundamental epistemological concept, namely that of 'Other'. According to this author, Jung's fundamental work aims precisely at reformulating the problem of the 'Other', throughout his career, a concept which, wrote Papadopoulos (2002: 170), 'represents the pinnacle of Jung's theoretical endeavours as it offers a structuring principle which is also connected with broader cultural and societal perspectives' through a dialectic between the societal and the symbolic. Papadopoulos further adds that:

the best possible way of understanding the nature of his (Jung's) 'problematic of the other' is in terms of it forming a basis for comprehending the dynamics of the knowing subject, i.e., in terms of epistemology  
(ibid: 25).

This is particularly relevant for qualitative primary research, where two (or more) individuals interact in a co-construction of meaning concerning a given phenomenon, a co-construction that Jung first identified in family constellations and was explored with his Words Association Test (WAT) (Jung, 1909). Not only was the lexicon of members of the same family similar, but also the underlying meaning attributed to phenomena (Papadopoulos, 2006.). Jung acknowledged the importance of family interactions, unconscious inter-projections and the wider socio-cultural environment as contributing to the particular complexes of the participants. The WAT experiments also enabled him to identify some shared unconscious structures, which are not projected onto individuals but affect the families. He considered them of a collective nature and contributing to the development in knowledge and purveyors of sense. In line with such structures, later to become known as archetypes, he adopted a teleological perspective on the unconscious, whose activation was purposive to regain an enhanced balance.

He first witnessed this teleological aspect of the unconscious by observing his cousin Helène's trance personalities, one of which sounded like a more mature and whole version of the young woman (Jung, 1903/1970, CW 1). For these reasons, he was sceptical of any psychological explanation concerned with the specific, reductive and deterministic aetiologies, proper of positivism and evident in many of Freud's interpretations. Jung's emphasis on teleology has implications at the epistemological level because, if accepted, it implies a constant construction of knowledge, in a process of endless generation, directed by the unfolding individuation process (ibid.). Further to the acknowledgement of the reciprocal influence of human interactions (for example, between parents and children), unconscious projections, and the socio-cultural environment, Jung also introduced the teleologically structuring role of archetypal constellations (a network of archetypal images) in shaping an

individual's psyche. This has relevance at the methodological level, as discussed in a later section of this chapter.

Epistemologically, it is worth noting that archetypal constellations 'colour' all interactions of the individual: with other individuals, with their unconscious materials (including their past experiences), and with their socio-cultural environment. This happens in a non-deterministic way, meaning that the perspective one has on one's past can change. The present, so to speak, can 'shape the past' as much as the past defines the development of the individual (Papadopoulos, 2006: 33). The resulting model of influence is circular, rather than linear, and the approach to the symptom should reflect the pattern of reciprocal relationships, rather than seek a causal explanation. A meaningful connection between the conscious mind and the archetype is the target of any therapeutic interpretation. This should produce an increased awareness, a new sense of purpose and ultimately a 'shift in position by a person who becomes aware of his location within the network on interacting relationships' (Papadopoulos, 2006: 37). The influence of the archetype as a structuring entity can be understood as a form of 'epistemological contextualism' (ibid: 38). The psyche of a person is contingent on the context. A different context implies the need for different epistemic (and methodological) standards. Papadopoulos concludes his discussion of Jung's epistemology highlighting two further important notions: the Socratic ignorance often claimed by Jung with regard to his insistence on avoiding 'stereotyped interpretations of dream motifs' (Jung, 1948, cited in Papadopoulos, 2006), and his Gnostic perspective. The latter is evident in the lack of critical engagement with the concept of the archetype itself and in striking contrast to the former claim of an unbiased attitude towards any new patient, symptom, or phenomenon.

Jung's postmodern flair is stressed instead by Hauke (2000), whose reading of Jung's epistemology points out the critique of modernity, the attempt to bridge the subject-object divide and the reliance on intuition, which are all precursors of the postmodern turn. However enticing it might sound to enlist Jung as a postmodern thinker, a major problem nevertheless persists; the relative lack of theorisation of communication as a source of socially constructed meaning. Would this problem be solvable by integrating Jungian and post-Jungian psychology with SRT in the way authors have attempted to do with Durkheim's collective representations? Such an endeavour is enticing, yet one fundamental aspect of Moscovici's epistemology clashes with that of Jung. It consists of their rather different ways of relating to phenomenology.

Highly focused on thought and knowledge, SRT aims at rigorously investigating common sense and its relationship with scientific knowledge. It, therefore, does not concern itself with unconscious phenomena. Of course, Wendy Holloway is right in pointing out that a lack of engagement with such phenomena reduces the power of a psychosocial theory in explaining subjectivity. Nonetheless, we cannot assume Moscovici's lack of engagement with the unconscious derives from an antipathy towards psychoanalysis, to which he dedicated his first intellectual work (Moscovici, 1961/2008) and repeatedly referenced during his life, including to the analysis he underwent in Paris around 1953 (Moscovici, 2019). However, a fully phenomenological stance, which would be necessary to theorise a psychoanalytic subjectivity (a subjectivity where the unconscious plays an essential role in establishing a subjective perspective) was not palatable to him. The reason is evident yet complex: phenomenology can easily override the impact of social interaction in creating perception (Markova, 2017). In fact, in Merleau-Ponty, whose work Moscovici frequently referred to (*ibid.*), social interaction is elided and only perception is accounted for. Similarly



in Jung, social interaction is elided and archetypes only are recruited to work out subjectivity, through the process of individuation. Thus, to use SRT (which, it must be stressed, is an operationalisable and evidence-based approach to interview materials) to investigate the meaning of sexting for teenagers within a psychosocial perspective, requires (accepting that Jung's psychology details a process of subjectivation, too) a dialogue between SRT and Jung's thought that addresses this issue. To achieve this, it is necessary to dig deeper into Moscovici's views on phenomenology and on Jung himself. A brief biographical note on Serge Moscovici clarifies the genesis of some of his intellectual work. The reference here is to his autobiography, published in 1977 under the title *Chronique des années égaree* and to a second volume, edited by Alexandra Leignel-Lavastine, collecting documentation found after his death in 2014 (*Mon après guerre à Paris: Chronique des années retrouvées*, 2019).

Moscovici was born into a Jewish family of grain merchants in 1925 in Braila, a small town with an important port on the Danube (Moscovici, 1977). His family relocated often, bringing him to Bucharest, where he witnessed and survived the last Pogrom in 1941. Expelled from high school in 1938 due to racial laws, he became self-taught while working in forced labour. He lived through the rise of the Iron Guard to power and its alliance with Nazi Germany and resented the endorsements of public intellectuals such as Mircae Eliade and Emil Cioran, who supported the fascist ideology of the movement. This led him, along with his subsequent experiences as a stateless refugee in Paris (Moscovici, 2019), to insist on the duty of public intellectuals to act as dissidents and to commit to the study of victimised groups (it is worth mentioning here his late research into the social representations on the Gypsy community in Spain).

Whereas DP criticises experts' use of science and reification to exert power, Moscovici focused on the role of public intellectuals in contributing to the spread of rumours and lies about scapegoated groups. Indeed, Romanian fascists gathered support for their anti-Semitic policies by spreading lies about the Jewish community. Chiefly, they accused the Jews of being allied with the Soviet Union, intending to take power in Romania. Needless to say, Moscovici thought that public intellectuals should see through such lies. He joined the Communist Party only to grow disillusioned with the Soviet intentions after witnessing the lack of humanitarianism and the growing pretensions towards the control of the European territory at the end of WW2. It is, therefore, unsurprising that, once he reached Paris in 1948 after escaping Romania, having travelled across a devastated Europe where he met numerous survivors of the camps who felt guilty for having escaped the genocide and were trying to reach an Israel with what he considered a utopic Zionist promise, he did not embrace existentialism, nor the French attitude towards the holocaust. In *Mon après guerre à Paris* (2019: 192), he wrote:

We were just coming out of the most appalling catastrophe ever known to humanity, but everything was carrying on as if the millions of murdered Jews, among whom our families, had literally been sucked, or swallowed by the earth! People were still confusing concentration camps, labour camps and death camps. And covered them up with their silence, which used to infuriate us. Our relatives, slaughtered like beasts, had certainly not died naturally...

He continued (ibid: 193):

It tortured me that French intellectuals demonstrated no sorrow for the immensity of such horror. Why could they not understand that Hitler had not been satisfied with destroying Germany? By destroying the Jews with the complicity of other nations, they had destroyed the last true Europeans of the century, and European civilization with them. And such suicide has not yet completed the contamination of the future of the old continent. French people felt the need to erase their desertion and their collaboration. *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* by Sartre was published in 1946, everybody was raving, but not a word on Auschwitz, nor on the genocide of the Jews... On the other hand, Sartre was able to affirm, “we’ve never been so free as under the Occupation”... In a sense, it is true that we are never as free as when we are in prison! But that “us” was clearly not referring to us—of course. The Saint-Germain-des-Prés of the *après guerre*, or the amnesic generation.<sup>24</sup>

By “us”, Moscovici refers here to the many stateless refugees who, like him, had reached Paris in the aftermath of WW2. Among them, he became intimate friends with the anthropologist Isac Chiva, who survived the Pogrom of Iasi in 1941 and was later to become Lévi-Strauss’ right-hand man, and with the poet Paul Celan, whose parents were deported to concentration camps and whose infamous encounter with Heidegger in 1967 further confirmed Moscovici’s distrust of phenomenology, a distrust that led him to formulate an epistemological critique employing his theory of social representations (Markova, 2017) and a more direct one towards Jung (Moscovici, 1961b).

The purpose of a psychosocial approach to primary research should, if Moscovici’s perspective is accepted, take into account a reflexive process highlighting prejudices and biases caused by the personal equating of the researcher. To use the reflection Leonardo Ambasciano dedicates to his deconstruction of the work of Mircea Eliade (2014) in an interview with Enrico Manera on *Doppiozero* (2020), the assumption that the scientific

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<sup>24</sup> Translated by the author of this thesis.

production of a scholar should not be judged on the grounds of their political views as far as it reveals itself scientifically autonomous and epistemologically valid, revealed itself as misleading. Therefore, it is compelling to work out a specific methodology based on Moscovici's critique of Jung's sociological approach.

In 1961, Moscovici published in the *Revue Française de Sociologie* the following brief review of Jung's *Flying Saucers*<sup>25</sup>:

C.G. Jung has acquired a reputation for originality in the scientific world and especially among the general public, due to the attention he has given to the psychological genesis of myths. Without doubt, the questions that he touches upon are important. In *A modern myth of things seen in the skies* he examines the phenomenon of "flying saucers". He attributes the apparition of such collective illusion—is it an illusion? —to the anxiety-provoking circumstances that characterise the existence of modern man. The scope of this explicative hypothesis should not, in our opinion, be overestimated. Quite a variety of materials are used to support it: dreams, paintings and news articles. Unfortunately, C.G. Jung gives us, with regards to these materials, comments rather than analyses. Analogic reasoning plays in it a huge role. Decidedly, the universe of C.G. Jung is particular: either we get it, or we do not. The sociologist —after all, this phenomenon of flying saucers is a social phenomenon—will not find in *Flying saucers* suggestions scientifically fecund. The author seems, after all, to fuse in a harmonic totality this *être de raison* that is the collective unconscious and this indisputable reality that is society. The *être de raison* and reality are treated with the same freedom. An example, among others, illustrates Jung's point of view: 'With much perspicacity, the Indian government has foreseen 500.000 liveries for the restriction of births and Russia is using the system of work camps to sterilize and reduce dreadful birth excess' (p. 49). For what concerns the unconscious, it is a true comedy character intervening when needed, at the right moment. *A modern myth* is not one of Jung's best books. It remains nevertheless a very personal work, where

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<sup>25</sup> The review is reproduced here in its entirety. Translated by the author of this thesis.

subjectivity, the intelligence and the self-assurance of the writer constantly proclaim their presence. Jung has a voice that affirms and imposes itself. It does not induce to reflection. It fixes the object of science and keeps it in front of us by showing the limits of a given knowledge, the questions that should be answered. This is why the reading of this short volume is useful: the psyche, says C.G. Jung, represents the only known opposite to gravitation (Jung, 1953: 115).

Several considerations must be extracted from this brief review, particularly because it is the only occasion that sees Moscovici address Jung's work directly. The first consideration concerns the methodological imprecision resulting from Jung's method of selecting and using materials gathered to learn about flying saucers. Moscovici stresses its analogic as opposed to analytic character. Secondly, Jung, in Moscovici's view, fuses inner and outer worlds to the point of confusing the imaginary world of the collective unconscious (the Spinozian *être de raison*) with the socially constructed reality of the sightings of flying saucers and related commentaries. The fusion is responsible for the misconceptions regarding mass sterilization and the use of work camps, which Jung makes sound like rational solutions, whereas they stem from discriminatory and oppressive practices. Moscovici seems to suggest that the freedom exerted in this confusing socially constructed reality and collective unconscious results in prejudice. He recognised the subjective value of such an exercise, but he questions its output, which he associates with the self-assurance of Jung and his will to impose his views.

Indeed, to equate social representations to archetypal images, as enticing as it might have initially seemed<sup>26</sup>, would deny Moscovici's views, specifically his efforts at devising a theory and an epistemology that would account for the influence of prejudices on the

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<sup>26</sup> Attempts that fail to acknowledge Moscovici's critique have already been made. See Saiz Galdós, Fernández Ruiz and Estramiana (2007) for an example.

oppression of some social groups. How, then, to use Jung's otherwise interesting technique to identify the affect projected onto socially constructed entities such as flying saucers? This thesis proposes the following reflexive strategies:

1. to construct the social representations of sexting shared by teenagers according to social representation theory. This entails adopting an analytic methodology to account for their anchoring and objectification. Social representations are generated through these two processes, which are connected with past objects, experiences and knowledge (anchoring) and transform the object they represent into something almost physical and concrete (Wagner et al. 1999). The process of anchoring accounts for the cognitive process of analogic associations, but it does not evoke the underlying affect, which requires instead amplification in the Jungian sense (as briefly defined in Chapter 3).
2. To contextualise the influence of the moral regulation of sexting on teenagers using discourse analysis. Prejudices are contextual and the parameters that rule them are historically and culturally defined (Moscovici and Perez, 1997).
3. To identify those elements resulting from the social interaction with the research participants that are analogic in the participants' answers.
4. These analogic, fused, imaginary elements are considered epistemological vulnerabilities, offering the possibility to identify affect-charged projections that require amplification (see point 1 for the link between amplification and the evocation of affect).

5. Such amplification and the related archetypal motif must be reconnected to the moral regulation of sexting and the subjectivation thus enacted. It is clarified in the next section that these analogic elements are those affected by the moral panics about sexting, which set in place shadow projections on the part of the participants and the researcher, along with mechanisms of identification.

The archetypal activation, the phenomenological charging of images with affect can no longer be considered sufficient in itself as an analysis after Moscovici's critique. Indeed, the journey inward must be met with a reflexive journey outward! The critique of *Flying saucers* provided above enables the researcher to approach the interpretive task acknowledging both the underlying affect, which colours the imaginary and takes shape in archetypally charged images, and their relocation in relations of power, communication and oppression. Of course, this implies carrying out psychosocial research with a representational perspective, interested in the common sense of participants and mindful of instances where such epistemology fails, leaving space for the type of imaginary that Jung engaged with, failing to reflexively output it for the reader.

To achieve such an analysis of the meaning of sexting for teenagers, the concepts of moral regulation and moral panic require some refining. They provide the discursive frame impacting the social representations of sexting and the related psychological conflicts experienced by teenagers.

#### ***4.5 Moral regulation and moral panics***

The study of moral regulation provides a framework to understand moral panics as specific instances, happening occasionally and under given circumstances (Hier, 2002a, 2002b, 2008, 2011, 2016; Hier et al., 2011; Hunt, 2011 in Hier; Critcher, 2009). The term moral panic has uncertain origins. Stan Cohen's evocative 1972 classic *Folk devils and moral panics* makes explicit reference to the devil, and implicitly to Christian morality.

Moral panics are often invoked when alarming media stories and reactive laws and public policy follow an episode of deviance that generates exaggerated or misdirected public concern, anxiety, fear, or anger due to a perceived threat to the social order (McLaughlin, 2014).

According to Alan Hunt (cited in Hier, 2011), the traditions of research in moral panic and moral regulation have historically developed in opposite directions. Moral panic research has mostly compared the exaggerated anxieties of the moral panic with the actual conditions surrounding the social phenomenon that starts the panic, to reduce the inflated perception of the latter on the part of the public and lawmakers. The sociology of moral regulation has, instead, focused on the ways discourses and practices are used to describe the conduct of the self and the other, without engaging in an evaluation of such moralising discourses. For Hunt (ibid: 538), moral regulation is 'the deployment of distinctively moral discourses that construct a moralized subject and an object or target that is acted on using moralizing practices'. However different, these two sociological traditions have, nevertheless, the aim of analysing the implications of the harm caused by the panic in common. Such a purpose cannot but be welcomed in a study on sexting, which seeks to contextualise its meaning, its relations to violence and abuse by taking into account broader societal discourses.



Two major limits affect moral panic theory: first of all, the presumption of a shared normative stance which entails a shared perception of moral reactions as disproportionate and second, the difficulty of defining anxiety (ibid.). The perception of exaggeration in reactions to societal threats has indeed been discussed in the existing literature as very much in the eyes of the beholder. Furthermore, moral regulation happens also when such an exaggerated emotional reaction is not present. Thus, it is essential to contextualise moral panics to articulate their symbolic value, which better explains the origin of the affect involved in the process.

Moral regulation is a form of definition of respectability, where some groups and some characteristics are deemed respectable and others are deemed immoral and disreputable. According to Young (2009), it is through comparison with immoral groups that individuals develop the resentment necessary for a moral panic to blow up. For instance, adults might compare themselves with young people in the context of sexting, develop resentment towards them and thus create the fertile ground for a moral panic to be set in motion. With the introduction of risk as a predictive factor of harm, the circle closes itself: not only are virtues and sins associated with some groups but also the groups themselves are made responsible to avoid harm by not taking risks. Anxiety can be considered a companion to this mechanism. The more we anticipate risks, the more anxious we feel. To maintain respectability one needs to not take risks, but the anxiety needs to be purged somehow, too. Once this dynamic is accepted as basic mechanism generating moral panics, it is important to notice how the discourses on risk have multiplied and thus, the moralisation of everyday life now has much more scope than it used to before the introduction of the logic of risk prevention. Risk is conflated with harm, the 50% chance that by taking a risk the result might be positive is

automatically excluded from the equation by associating diminished respectability to those who take such risks (Hunt, cited in Hier, 2011).

Initially investigated as a regulation of morality by the state in a classic Foucauldian manner, moral regulation can now be understood as any process of moralisation that aims at regulating moral behaviour more generally. Moral panics, instead, are exceptional circumstances in the moral regulatory process. For Hier (2002a, 2002b, 2008, 2011a, 2011b, 2016), moral panics happen when the liberal attempts at making individuals responsible to avoid harm by setting in place correct procedures to reduce risks is failing. A collective process of scapegoating then takes place, targeting those deemed irresponsible, who threaten the moral order. In a sense, Hier understands moral panics as a defensive response, which seems to be supported by their regular appearance when a new technology sheds light on immoral behaviours.

The new deviancy theorists promoters of moral panics theory, namely Jock Young and Stan Cohen, acknowledged the influence of Marshall McLuhan's (1964) *Understanding Media: The extensions of man* behind the genesis of the concept. Both McLuhan and the new deviancy theorists recognised that an increase in mediatisation and mass communication is often accompanied by increasing anxiety and fear (McLaughlin, 2014). A further influence is to be found in the concept of *moral indignation*, first developed by Albert K. Cohen (1965). Young defined moral indignation as 'a process both of threat to identity and of confirmation. Further, that such a moral disturbance had an intensity of emotion, that it was a function both of attraction and repulsion' (Young, 2009). This idea was the result of the elaborations of two fundamental thinkers.

The first was Ranulf (1938), a Danish sociologist who first recognised the presence of personal investment in the need to punish those behaviours that indicate a lack of moral

boundaries, and a lack of discipline in the self-restraint and repression of hedonism, self-imposed by the lower class or petit bourgeoisie. The second was Joseph R. Gusfield (1963), who analysed the prohibition period in the United States. According to Gusfield, the temperance advocates did not secretly crave alcohol, and the targets of their indignation were quite substantially different from them to pose identity issues (non-middle-class, not Anglo-Saxon, not rural, non-churchgoers, etc.). On the contrary, in Gusfield's view, the indignation against alcohol sprang out of a 'status panic' due to the collapse of abstinence as a sign of respectability. Both indignation towards a member of the group that deviates by disrespecting a fundamental social rule, and indignation towards an outsider who is recognised as alien to the core values of the group are essential to the panics.

According to Hasinoff (2015), many features of a moral panic can be traced to the increasingly severe legislation concerning the production, ownership and distribution of sexualised materials depicting minors in the US. A major issue lies in the concept of privacy violation and the non-recognition of girls' consensus, as discussed in Chapter 2. Girls are, therefore, blamed for the disrespect of the norms of the group, while boys are perceived as outsiders who cannot be allowed membership because of their challenge to the existing status quo.

Another notion theorised in connection with the concept of moral panic is pertinent to understand the underlying mechanisms of such social reaction. The notion is that of 'signification spiral', which in Hall et al's (1978) original elaboration is visible when multiple notions and phenomena are associated with the initial threat that triggers the indignation. For example, in the UK, debates about sexting have followed those about the sexualisation of girls, which tend to combine various, yet different, phenomena, such as body

image and sexual activity at a younger age, around the alleged 'adultification' of girls. Linda Papadopoulos's report for the Home Office (2010) provides a good example of signification spiral: body image, anorexia and bulimia, increased risk of sexual exploitation and abuse, consumption of pornographic materials and rape, are all associated with the increasing availability of 'sexualised' clothing and goods aimed at girls although no clear evidence proving that a causal link exists between the availability of sexualised clothing and goods and the phenomena associated.

Hasinoff details some of the major features of the signification spiral associated with the recent panic about sexting: a) the fear that children and teenagers might get in touch with a 'predator' via sharing sexualised materials online, b) the association between sexting, child pornography, and rape, c) the consensus about the protective nature of more and more severe legislation, which regulates privacy by considering any form of sexting a violation, and d) the impressive media coverage of any story relating to sexting in association with concepts such as abuse and sex offending. Hasinoff comments that 'indeed, privacy violations can cause devastating harm, but the rhetoric about the risks often exaggerates the actual danger and blames the consensual sexters for their failures to abstain from sexting' (2015: 9). This often results in extra blame for girls, who are held responsible for failing to opt out (Hasinoff, 2015). This is the same logic that is very much evident in the attribution of rape's responsibility to victims.

Current moral panics tend to split boys' and girls' roles, utilising a socio-political context that, which will be discussed later in this chapter, feeds into fears of invasion and contagion. This construction of young people according to the requirements of moral panics polarises gender into sex roles in a very old-fashioned way. Chapter 6 illustrates how this happens also to Swiss teenagers through the moral regulation of sexting.

According to Weeks (cited in Krinsky, 2013), anxiety over sexuality functions as a central element in moral panics. Sexual ‘deviants’ have been ‘omnipresent scapegoats’ (1981:14) throughout history. Therefore, the current panic over sexting, rather than an atypical, episodic fear, belongs to an ongoing cultural concern.

A psychosocial investigation of the moral panics concerning sexting is concerned with the reactions to the socio-political context that generates different trajectories in individuals’ development, different subjectivation, conflicting social representations and the related strong affect generated by unconscious analogies, which require conscious resolution. These kinds of context can be accessed and explored using Jungian approaches to myth and archetypes.

The concept of moral panic that makes explicit reference to the split nature of Christian morality is associated with the notion of media, and implicitly refers to Pan, the Satanically horned goat-like Greek deity that is often depicted chasing Nymphs, cannot but resonate with a Jungian and post-Jungian perspective sensitive to mythological and archetypal imagery. In Jung’s terms, a moral panic is not only a manifestation of a shadow projection onto a suitable recipient, but also of its collective, archetypal nature, which is shared by a group of people. Such claims have been addressed by clarifying the epistemology of this research, which reframes projection as contributing to the process of social construction and communication and stemming from the related presence of a strong affect, which generates analogic thinking. Jung’s original notions of possession and complex formation are now discussed to illustrate the origins of his perspective on ‘othering’ and scapegoating, both related to moral panics. Needless to say, this perspective accounts for a subjective reading of social phenomena, which requires a careful reflexive process when

applied to the participants' views on sexting. It describes the Jungian subject, whose reliance on common sense fails and allows the imaginary world of the collective unconscious to take over.

According to Craig Stephenson, who discusses the historical case of Loudun, (2009: 31), Jung considered 'possession' the result of the formation of an autonomous complex in the psyche following trauma or a moral conflict that prevented the associated affect to be integrated into the ego. Complexes result from a mix of personal experiences that become associated with a certain archetypal pattern and manifest in the emotional responses of the individual to external events (Samuels, 1985). In Jung's own words, complexes result from '...certain constellations of psychic elements grouped round feeling-toned contents' (Jung, 1969, CW 8, para. 18).

Three major consequences can occur when external reality and complex-driven feelings do not match. An internal conflict between the two opposed sources of information can develop (the individual is 'torn in two' so to speak), the ego represses the complex, or the complex can overwhelm the ego (Samuels, 1985). This can be coupled with a sort of 'momentary and unconscious alteration of personality known as identification with the complex' (Jung, 1934a, CW9 para. 204), when the individual themselves behaves according to the complex's prescriptions, whereas they would project<sup>27</sup> such attitudes onto others when no identification is involved (Samuels, 1985).

Acknowledging the notions of possession and complex formation enables one to approach matters of new technologies and the consumption of sexualised images with a double focus. First, important consideration must be given to the socio-political context

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<sup>27</sup> Projection is a defence mechanism that manifests when unwelcomed feelings and emotions are attributed to other individuals or objects because the ego rejects them (Samuels, Shorter and Plaut, 1986).

where such phenomena manifest, morally regulated in specific ways. Second, the researcher can disengage from the investigation of the causes of the phenomenon, which are potentially misleading, because they are decontextualising and reductive compared to the intricate relationship between a subject and the broad socio-political context that surrounds them. Rather, as Jung's teleological approach might suggest, it is important to consider the finality of the phenomena under study, which may contain unexpressed potentialities for further development (Samuels, Shorter, and Plaut, 1986). Jung discusses finality in relation to psychic energy, i.e. what he calls libido, insisting on the principle of equivalence that governs the relations between conscious and unconscious (CW 8, para. 43). Such equivalence is evident when libidinal energy is moved from one level to the other, or invested in a new object. In Jung's terms, a mechanistic perspective would reduce energy to a manifestation of substance, and therefore abide with the principle of causality. An energetic standpoint, instead, would consider substance as an expression of the underlying existence of an energetic system, and as such be finalistic (CW 8, para. 41). The reduction of psychic activity to a causal model, says Jung, prevents any further development because it only confronts the individual with a fact. Adoption of a finalistic approach enables instead the production of symbolic expressions through a 'makeshift', or new and more developed energetic investment (CW 8, para. 46). In short, complexes are unilateral manifestations of a greater energy system, which can develop if they reconnect with their original roots. Possession is consequently a manifestation of such a unilateral entity taking over the whole psyche.

Furthermore, as emphasised by Stephenson, historical episodes of possession usually betray political conflicts involving personal and political interests. Similar conflicts are often associated with moral panics, which can be considered the collective equivalent of the psychological concepts discussed here. Moral panics are often promoted by moral

entrepreneurs<sup>28</sup>, with clear interests (and occasionally authentic concerns) in mobilising collective fears (see Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 2009 for a review of types of moral entrepreneurship). Somehow we must presume Jung was not exempt from similar reactions himself when he expressed prejudiced views.

In the case of the Loudun possessions examined by Stephenson, for example, Richelieu can easily be understood to have played such a role, through his powerful influence on the ‘demonisation’ of Urbain Grandier, the catholic priest who publicly critiqued him and supported views that were dangerously close to those of Protestant Huguenots. At the time, this Protestant group was a threat to Richelieu’s religious and political hegemony. A ‘demonic possession’ of some Ursuline nuns instrumentally triggered accusations of witchcraft towards Grandier, who was burned after enduring torture.

To better relate to Jung’s complex formation and the moral panics about sexting, the notion of ‘othering’ is now discussed in connection to the scapegoat complex and shadow projection.

Jung described the mechanism of ‘othering’ in 1928 (CW 13), in a book translated by Richard Wilhelm:

In this way, the fragmentary system is projected and a dangerous situation created, because the disturbing effects are now attributed to an evil will outside ourselves, which is naturally to be found nowhere else than with our neighbours *de l’autre côté de la rivière*. This leads to collective delusions, incitements to war and revolution, in a

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Moral entrepreneur’ is a term coined by Howard S. Becker (1963) to qualify those individuals or groups who seek to influence a group to adopt or maintain a norm in respect to a perceived threatening social evil.



word, to destructive mass psychoses  
(*ibid.*: para. 52).

This quote is relevant for two reasons: 1) Jung identified the need for a ‘fragmentary system’ for a collective projection to happen, which can easily be related to the failure of the moral regulation process as described above, and 2) the recipient of the projection is a ‘neighbour’, somebody who is only ‘other’ by a minor difference to use Freud’s term (1929). It is needless to remind ourselves of the double-sided nature of moral indignation, where recognition of similarity and perception of aggression towards one’s status coexist in response to a perceived moral threat.

However, ‘othering’ has seldom been explicitly expressed as such in Jungian and post-Jungian literature, where the notion of scapegoating has dominated the domain, summarising the major features of the underlying archetypal propensity to ‘other’ suitable groups or members of society to exclude them. Papadopoulos (2002: 178) summarises the major use of ‘othering’ within Jungian literature:

The usual way Jungian psychology understands our relation to others is either in terms of projections of our own material (positive or negative) onto them, or in terms of the way these others activate in us certain images which may then exert their power into our psyche and evoke our response. With regard to the first possibility, the focus is on the contents and processes within our own psyche which are then projected onto the others, whereas in the second possibility what is emphasized is the archetypal nature of the others themselves, which then get a grip on us in specific ways that make us react accordingly. More specifically, analytical psychology often approaches these issues (without, of course, naming them as ‘the other’) in terms of projecting the shadow and scapegoating or in terms of idealization and projection of images of lost paradise.

As mentioned before, this author relates Jung's N1 and N2 personalities to two distinct types of 'Other'. 'Others' of type 1 present characteristics that are absent in the conscious attitude of the subject, they are 'exotic others'. 'Others' of type 2 instead share similar characteristics with the subject, and are, so to speak, their neighbours. This distinction is illustrated in evidence concerning the contemporary Swiss attitude towards Islamophobia, which is strongly mediated by the degree of personal contact with Islamic populations (Swiss citizens who never had any contact with Muslims are more likely to display Islamophobic attitudes and stereotypes). It is also strongly correlated to general, underlying xenophobia, where people of the Muslim religion are perceived differently depending on how close (neighbouring) is their culture of origin. Needless to say, foreigners who come from a faraway land are considered less 'likeable' (Stolz, 2005). This distinction between the 'exotic other' and the 'neighbouring other' also applies to boys' and girls' different roles in sexting. Boys seem to play the role of exotic others, aliens threatening the group's status quo, while girls are only ostracised when they do not respect the fundamental rule of refusing to participate in sexting, i.e. when they take risks.

To summarise, both moral panic theorists and the post-Jungian perspective of Papadopoulos point to the double nature of the 'other', depending on its proximity and the chances for the subject (which manifests in the social representations) to identify with its characteristics. The differences between subject and other can be more or less emphasised, depending on the socio-political context.

Another point in common between moral panic and possession pertains to the underlying notion of contagion. In the case of moral panics, the role of the media seems akin to that of transmitters of an infection, which spreads among the population as a sort of spell,

ultimately leading to a 'possession'. Finally, during panics and historical cases of possession, a scapegoat is often created out of the stereotypical association of various traits and behaviours into one devilish image, such as with the demonisation of Grandier, mentioned above.

According to Sylvia Brinton Perera, 'scapegoat' is a term usually applied to individuals and groups accused of 'causing misfortune' (1986: 8). By making an outcast of the scapegoat, a twofold function is thus performed: 1) relieving those who would scapegoat others of their responsibility, and 2) strengthening their sense of power and righteousness. Scapegoating purges society of any characteristic "unfit to conform with the (social) ego ideal", which is instead projected onto the scapegoat. Its function however is no longer celebrated in contemporary society through a ritual like it was in the past (ibid: 9), but, as contended by Moscovici, enacted through social interaction. A shadow projection, namely the attribution of unwanted, suppressed attributes to others (Samuels, Shorter and Plaut, 1986) takes place when the moral regulation framing the social interaction generating the representations fails to guarantee a positive identity for individuals. Unlike most complex projections, shadow projections involve a depreciative character due to the estrangement from socially unacceptable characteristics. While personal shadow contents depend in large measure on early experiences with parents and family, collective and archetypal shadows are socio-cultural and specific (Casement, cited in Papadopolous, 2006).

The close relationship between moral panic, possession, scapegoat complex and shadow projection raises concerns regarding the consequences of panics about sexting not only due to the prejudices constructed around teenagers' behaviours, and particularly because it fosters a victim-blaming attitude towards girls among the general population, oblivious of

their consensual participation (Hasinoff, 2015) but because it foments a subjectivation process that reproduces a similar epistemological vulnerability among teenagers. It appears therefore necessary to offer an alternative interpretation of those elements that are affected by the failure to morally regulate teenagers' access to new technologies in such a way that resolves the collective shadow projections.

To conclude this chapter, it is necessary to stress that the critical appraisal of Jungian sociology carried out in Chapter 3 and the even more critical evaluation of Jung's approach to social phenomena discussed in this chapter highlight a conflict between transcendent function and reflexivity. For Jung, resolving psychological conflicts caused by moral regulation is obtained by identifying the affect that is polarised through amplification. This generates a transcendent function, a new attitude and a solution to the conflict. But the positioning of the therapist is not questioned. Jung takes for granted his neutrality, which might be the case in the consulting room, but it is not the case in the wider society. Thus, all while attempting to resolve the split generated by moral panics might require amplificatory materials, acknowledgement of opposites and of the affect their clash generates, it is equally important to explicitly state the researchers' positionings, and question their implications in the generation of knowledge.

The next chapter discusses the methodology and research methods adopted to interview the participants and analyse the media and official documents. It also discusses ethical considerations and anti-oppressive practice measures implemented to guarantee the researcher's adherence to ethical standards.

## Chapter 5

### *Methodology*

The previous chapter illustrated the theoretical–epistemological background of this research, based on a psychosocial approach. This chapter details the process of interviewing participants, their recruitment and the technical approaches to the interview process and data analysis. The research question, aim and objectives of the research have already been mentioned in Chapter 1. The central aim of this research is to investigate teenagers’ reflections and understanding of the connections between sexualised images and abusive behaviours, while acknowledging the role played by their psychosocial development, i.e. the changes in their behaviour that are commonly referred to as developmental. This will help in addressing the central question, concerning how teenagers understand the current commodification of violence and sexuality represented in mainstream sexualised images and sexting.

Having explained in Chapter 4 the epistemological nature of the debates between discursive psychology and social representation theory, which compose the core of the psychosocial methodologies, it is, nevertheless, important to further specify the ontological and epistemological positions of this research.

#### *5.1 Ontological and epistemological positions*

It almost goes without saying that to engage meaning-making with a social representational perspective entails adopting a social constructionist ontology. Indeed, social representations are the product of social construction (Wagner et al., 1999). However, social representation theory is often considered a weak form of social constructionism (Cricher and

Pearce, 2013). The supposed distinction between ‘brute facts’ and ‘social facts’ was maintained for a long time, compared to ‘strong’ forms of social constructionism. In such perspectives, any fact is subject to social construction, whereas in ‘weak’ perspectives, ‘brute facts’ exist ‘independently of language’ (Searle, 1995: 62), such as natural events that would subsist despite human activity. In Moscovici’s theory, new social ‘facts’ emerge through a process of anchoring and objectification<sup>29</sup>, which enable both to reproduce society and slowly modify it (Lahlou, cited in Sammut, Andreouli, Gaskell and Valsiner, 2015). Through such processes, representations based on previously existing ones (the anchors) are debated, spread and consensually adopted until they become reified social representations, i.e. they become anchors in their turn. Such a process was initially conceptualised as the diffusion of scientific knowledge into common sense (Moscovici, 1961/2008), but it has since been reframed to acknowledge the socially constructed nature of scientific knowledge in its turn (Howarth, 2006). Representations form and transform both in the consensual realm (proper commonsense knowledge) and in the reified realm (proper scientific knowledge). Scientific knowledge is, therefore, influenced by commonsense knowledge, and vice versa. Thus, the ontological position of this research reflects such a shift, maintaining a focus on the process of reification, rather than on polarising the social construction as uniquely pertinent for commonsense knowledge.

Epistemologically, social representation theory is inspired both by phenomenology, in its focus on perceptions, and dialogism for its focus on relating and interaction (Markova, 2008). According to Markova (*ibid.*), Moscovici advocated for the adoption of relativism in human and social sciences further to the epistemological revolution Einstein had started in the natural sciences. Such relativism enabled him to situate the construction of

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<sup>29</sup> See Chapter 4 for the definition of anchoring and objectification.

representations in the interaction of members of a given social group, rather than within the individual. This is the fundamental point of discord with Jung's initial archetype theory, as seen in previous chapters. Furthermore, continues Markova, the deployment of interactionism enabled Moscovici to conceptualise social representations as the product of intersubjectivity (i.e. the *Ego-Alter-Object* triangle theorised by Moscovici in 1970). With this epistemological background, Moscovici's approach can be considered a method of invention, rather than a method of falsification. As such, SRT is open to all research methods. Markova further stresses how Moscovici's work presents similarities with the dialogism of the Bakhtian Circle, emphasising the study of language within processes of communication and discourse. She further states (ibid: 21):

Both the theory of social representations and the dialogical approach draw attention not only to the social nature of humankind, but they place a considerable weight on the plurality of thinking and communication in creating social reality and on the expression of human life experiences and emotions.

In a sense, SRT's dialogical epistemology acquires an affective dimension by introducing the post-Jungian approach discussed in Chapter 3. Social representations carry the imaginary<sup>30</sup> (Arruda, cited in Sammut, Andreouli, Gaskell and Valsiner, 2015), which can frame the intense archetypal affect so well described by Jung. Thus, by introducing Jung's techniques of working on the countertransference, identifying and amplifying the analogic elements present in the representations, this research aims not only to describe the way contemporary social representations of sexting and the related discourses are contributing to

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<sup>30</sup> Often translated in English as 'imagination', the 'imaginary' is a notion well established in the humanities in France. Arruda defines it as 'the mental activity of producing iconic or linguistic images. The social imaginary, on the other hand, refers to a network of significations, collectively shared, that each society makes use of to think about itself' (Arruda, 2015, in Sammut, Andreouli, Gaskell and Valsiner: 128).

the subjectivation of the participants, shedding light on their creative transformation of pre-existing representations, but also looks to address the possible underlying affective conflicts that lead to harmful behaviours. Representations of violence and abuse that are shared by the participants will contribute to shedding light on this last aspect.

### ***5.2 The post-Jungian tools: transference and countertransference***

Among Jung's important contributions to methodology are the attention to the teleological aspect of the human mind, and his use of a sort of participant observation, which indicates some understanding of the co-construction of knowledge that results from human interaction (Papadopoulos, 2006). His approach to therapy was based on the acknowledgement of the contribution of the analyst on the evolving clinical interaction with the patient (Sedgwick, 1994). This led to emphasising the important task of self-analysis on the part of the therapist, which he rendered through the image of the 'wounded healer'. Based on the myth of Chiron, the 'wounded healer' is a figure of the imaginary that can be used to describe the transference/countertransference's dialogue during the clinical encounter. As such, it is an important tool for the researcher, too.

Initially conceptualised as a mutually transformative process (ibid: 10) where equal partners participate in an alchemical reaction, the mutual influence in the clinical encounter led Jung to rely on the image of the 'conjunctio' (ibid: 12; Perry, 1997; Samuels, 2006) where a fusion of substances produces the alchemical 'gold', to describe the transformative therapeutic process. This manifests in a new wholeness. However, this process is not without dangers because the analyst is at risk of getting infected by the patient. The pair often perceive equal confusion, or irritation and collaborate in shedding light on the patient's problem. The latter process is elusive and deceptive, and Jung compared it to the alchemical



Mercurious (Jung, 1967, CW12). Later formulations of the countertransference defined it as the optimal behaviour of the good-enough mother (Fordham and the developmental school), close connections between the analyst's chain of associations and the patient's (Dieckmann, cited in Adler, 1974), or as ruled by the archetype of the 'wounded healer' (Guggenbühl-Craig, 1968). The latter concerns the risk for therapeutic omnipotence, manifested through negative projections, inflations and overall, neurotic countertransference. A further discussion of this subject brought Guggenbühl-Craig to highlight the issue of power in the helping professions (*ibid.*). There is no doubt that a similar risk exists in this research, and the related issues are discussed later in this chapter, regarding the ethics of primary research with under-18s.

A further important development in the evolution of countertransference theories concerns Goodheart's (1984) identification of the unconscious control of the analyst on the part of the patient (Sedgwick, 1994), moving the interaction from the conscious level to the unconscious level. Not only through talking, but also through unconscious associations, transference and countertransference unfold. This seems to happen particularly when modification of some ground rules of the setting (i.e. modification of the frame) takes place as an attempt to relieve anxiety, which would be rather better confronted in dialogue. The patient might request gratification as a defence from internal conflicts, and the analyst might give in to the analytic strain (his own anxiety). This often results in neurotic countertransference. Successive associations in the words of the patient provide information about the real inner conflict. This model offers therefore a way to keep the countertransference under surveillance. Furthermore, according to Samuels (1989), this interaction is likely to produce those images that are of a more important healing potential. If understood metaphorically, the countertransference indicates access to the patient's inner

world. This is achievable by reflection (where feelings are reflecting those of the patient) and by embodiment. Three types of countertransference have been identified by this author: bodily/behavioural, feelings and fantasies. To adopt a transference/countertransference approach to research interviews entails having clear in mind the differences that exist between a therapeutic setting and a research setting. Countertransferential reactions such as those illustrated by Samuels usually entail a rather strong therapeutic alliance and clear boundaries to the clinical encounter. In a research context, such elements might not develop, particularly when participants are only met with once, as in the case of this research.

Furthermore, Holmes (2014) warns against those qualitative researchers who adopt a countertransferential logic that betrays a positivistic background, rather than engage more recent constructivist conceptions, which see feelings in the analytic setting as mutually created by the therapeutic dyad. Advocating for such co-construction is clearly in line with Jung's markedly avant-garde intuitions on the transference/countertransference dynamics, and the specific psychosocial approach adopted by this research addresses his relational failures also at the level of the conscious co-construction through the reflexive process developed on the ground of Moscovici's critique to *Flying saucers*.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge some of the limitations of existing psychosocial literature adopting countertransference as a primary research tool. Holmes (2014) indicates a first problem in the use of countertransference based on the projective identification model because it often reinforces unequal power relations (which Holmes calls the myth of the infallible therapist). Whilst Jung's model of countertransference is less explicitly directive than the Kleinian one, and enables taking into account also projective elements that start from the analyst, the point made by Holmes is important. The risk for the researcher to assume the 'expert' role and adopt a top-down attitude towards the participant

is nevertheless present. A second potential problem sees an implicit Cartesian certainty about countertransference, where the 'expert' therapist/researcher describes the views of the patient/participant as 'distorted'. The Jungian model, which sees the transference/countertransference as a mode of mutual communication should be, at least in its intentions, less exposed to such a tendency to maintain a superior perspective on perceived distortions, which are more often understood as meaningful in the context of the relationship but in the context of moral panics, the risk of taking sides and perceiving the point of view of the other as 'irrational', or 'exaggerated' is always high. A third problem is in failing to carefully consider similarities and differences between the clinical and research situations. In a research setting, the responsibility to get the ball rolling is with the researcher, whereas in a clinical situation, it is a prerogative of the patient, who is free to lead the session onto topics of his choice. However, as it is shown in Chapter 3, Jung used his approach to transference/countertransference in a variety of circumstances, including regarding social phenomena. Hence, by accepting it as a co-construction, the result of using this technique has to do with the positioning of the researcher vis-à-vis a given research topic, rather than with attributions towards the participants' inner worlds.

Most often conceptualised by a square of double-headed arrows, the Jungian model of transference/countertransference entails a set of interactions encompassing a conscious-to-conscious communication, an unconscious-to-unconscious communication, and reciprocal conscious-to-unconscious/unconscious-to-conscious exchanges (the latter in the form of transference), as illustrated in Figure 1. The connection of the therapist personal wounds is essential to set in motion the rest of the communications, and we assume a similar statement to be true in the research setting. The interaction that is less solicited in a research setting concerns the unconscious-to-conscious communication of the participant, who, unlike a

patient, is not expected to ‘heal’. Rather, caution must be taken in not eliciting any harm (Alderson and Morrow, 2011) according to the ethical principle of non-maleficence.

External world including  
analyst’s training body

External world

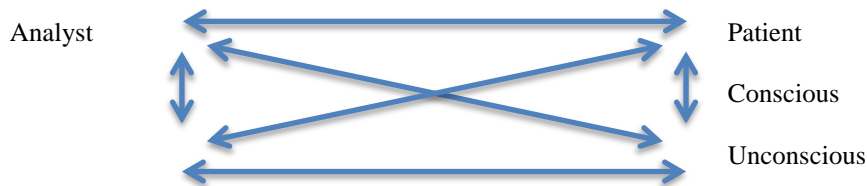


Figure 1.

### ***5.3 Procedure and participants***

Participants were recruited through the Department of Education, Culture and Sport of Canton Ticino (DECS), Switzerland. The five high schools in the Canton were contacted to obtain the home address and phone number of four boys and four girls attending the second year of courses in each location, ensuring that all were 16 at the time of the interview. Home addresses and phone numbers were provided separately, to ensure compliance with data protection. For this reason, the phone numbers were only identifiable by the personal name of the student, rather than by family name. The researcher stored the information separately in a password-protected folder on her laptop. The high schools selected the eight students at random out of the yearbook.

The home addresses were used to send an invitation letter to all 40 students and their parents. The letter included information on the research’s aim and objectives, the extent of involvement of the participants, specifying that no reference to direct experience would be made, but only opinions and personal views on sexting. Furthermore, their right to withdraw

was also clearly stated, as well as their right to access the records (see Appendix A for full details). A week after the letters had been delivered, the researcher called each household to ask the students if they wanted to participate. The opt-in strategy had been chosen to ensure all students could express their intentions freely during the initial phone call. Parents were informed with a letter addressed specifically to them, although this is not a legal requirement. This was done to enable them to ask the researcher any questions concerning the topic, the research process and the involvement of their children and be able to discuss the research with their children, too.

Five girls and 11 boys from the five locations expressed interest in participating. They were met individually in May 2016 on high school premises, in an allocated room that was arranged with each high school administration. At the beginning of each interview, the informed consent document was reviewed with the participants and any doubt concerning the procedure, the aim and focus of the research and the rights of the participants were clarified, and then a consent form was signed by both the participant and the researcher, who both kept a copy. The interviews lasted between an hour and an hour and a half, were audio-recorded and ended with a debriefing session, where the participant was reminded of services available in the Canton to assist with any support related to negative feelings and their rights to withdraw and access the data. Participants were shown the contact details of the researcher on their copy of the consent form, should they have any queries or wish to withdraw subsequently.

#### ***5.4 The interviews approach***

This thesis is based on two major methods of research. Semi-structured interviews and focused individual interviews were used to question participants' views on sexting and to

investigate the meaning of sexualised images for them. The qualitative approach has been favoured due to its naturalistic and interactive nature. A major criticism of the use of quantitative methods concerning social phenomena such as sexting relates to the absence of engagement with the contextual specificity of their emergence. This means that the use of questionnaires and generalisations should follow rather than precede the investigation of phenomena through qualitative methods. This thesis seeks to investigate the meanings of sexting to criticise assumptions that are generally held by the public. As such, it requires substantial contextualisation. The use of social representation theory as a sociological framework for the investigation of identifications and projections around sexting requires face-to-face interaction where the relational aspect of social representations can unfold. This is consistent with the holistic character of qualitative methods (Harding, 2013).

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are supportive of a participatory role of the interviewees, whose perspective is developed with the interviewer, rather than preconceived by the researcher (ibid.). Face-to-face semi-structured interviews are considered effective at encompassing a whole range of communication that is not otherwise available for interpretation (body language, facial expressions, etc.) (ibid.). Broad questions were developed by the researcher on the grounds of the research's main objectives and were used as a guideline during the interviews (see Appendix C for the full questionnaire).

Considering the in-depth focus needed for this research, this method of data collection is to be preferred to any other entailing a medium (telephone calls, online interviews, etc.). Furthermore, to examine power issues involved in the relationship with the participants, they were considered to be members of a minority group within the broader society (Eder and Fingerson, cited in Gubrium and Holstein, 2002). To reduce the socially constructed dependence, the interviewer explained the focus of the research to each participant, emphasising the absence of right or wrong answers. The option of group interviews has been

discarded since the requirement to focus on meanings that might prove difficult to share with known peers. Furthermore, the interest in the deep archetypal affect that is generated around the discourses and social representations of sexting requires careful consideration for the comfort of the participants, who might present a much less involved attitude during a focus group.

Whilst a group can certainly provide a similar set of affective elicitations, the study is also aimed at questioning the construction of teenagers according to socially preconceived representations. Rather, it is evidenced how each participant makes sense of current socio-cultural contexts and relates to the potentially harmful impacts of sexualised materials (and of new technologies) in different ways. It was considered that if something is shared at the group level, it should manifest through interviews with different individuals nonetheless.

### ***5.5 Thematic discourse analysis and visual methods***

According to Batel and Castro (2018), it is difficult to identify any systematic commonalities in the analytical procedures used by qualitative researchers who have adopted SRT as epistemology. A wide range of data analysis techniques has been used: examples here encompass thematic analysis (e.g. Howarth, 2002); rhetorical and argumentative discourse analysis on its own (Uzelgun, Mohammed, Lewinski and Castro, 2015) or combined with thematic analysis (Batel and Castro, 2015; Batel et al., 2015); content analysis (Gervais and Jovchelovitch, 1998); dialogical analysis (Caillaud, 2016; Mouro and Castro, 2012), among others. Such variety reaffirms SRT's methodological pluralism and allows considerable freedom to the researcher, who can adopt the most suitable data analysis approach to the transcripts generated after the interviews. Batel and Castro also stress how the dialogical, critical, rhetorical/argumentative form of SRT and the critical approach to discursive psychology share some assumptions, which can be explored through a thematic discourse

analysis (or thematic DA). For this research, the use of thematic analysis in conjunction with discourse analysis matches the need to identify patterns of meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2006) across participants. It provides a way to organise the text that sheds light on the conceptualization of the phenomenon under study on the part of participants, who are members of a specific group (they are all 16-year-olds, they all attend high school and they belong to an age group that is often associated to sexting in the press). Furthermore, it allows the identification of discursive elements that pertain to the broader moral regulation of sexting. To perform the thematic analysis, the steps devised by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed. They encompass first familiarising oneself with the data through reading and re-reading the transcripts, noting initial ideas. Then initial codes were generated by highlighting interesting aspects in the transcripts and collating them into codes. Once this was done, the codes were collated into potential themes, which were checked against the codes and the entire data set. Clear definitions and names of each theme were then produced before selecting the quotes and examples to discuss the findings in Chapter 6.

Batel and Castro suggest three more steps to introduce the discursive element to the data analysis. First, they suggest paying particular attention to inductive themes, which can manifest explicitly or implicitly. Furthermore, they also suggest paying attention to those themes that are not present in text. The presence and absence of certain themes are strong indicators of power dynamics (Billig, 2006). By following these three steps, Batel and Castro open the door to a more specifically discursive level of analysis because through presence and absence, implicit and explicit statements and inductive connections, the themes become alive, in contrast, opposition and conflict and illustrate the subjectivation involved in developing social representations. To further the discursive analysis, Batel and Castro suggest following Billig's pragmatic approach to discourse analysis (Billig, 2009). This data



analysis approach enables paying attention to power and asymmetries in the relations that produce social representations. Based on Wittgenstein's pragmatic use of language, it identifies pragmatic uses of expressions and linguistic elements that indicate the presence of an underlying discursive element. Billig's approach looks at what functions discourses serve and what strategic interests are being pursued. Consequently, political, ideological and institutional dimensions and moral regulation of self–other relations are taken into account. To perform the pragmatic discourse analysis, discursive strategies and rhetorical devices, tropes and emphatic elements were identified in the themes found with the thematic analysis.

The focused individual interviews, instead, concerned the work done with the participants on the mainstream sexualised images (see Appendix D). This visual task required displaying some selected mainstream sexualised images in front of each participant, once the semi-structured interview had explored questions about the meaning of sexting. The visual task was then followed by further questions on abuse, harm, media and moral panics concerning sexting.

The availability of technologies able to produce visual materials coincides with a shift of attention from textual language onto images, pictures and photography to frame experiences and meanings (Rose, 2016). Increasingly, social research employs visual research methods, ranging from images produced by the media to those created by the researcher or directly by the participants to interrogate identity, power, meaning and values (ibid.). The present research employs some mainstream sexualised images from various cultures and historical periods to elicit reflections from the participants and to investigate the relationship between the depiction of sexuality, the production of the images and their consumption. Based on Wolfthal's (1999) discussion of representations of rape in

Renaissance paintings, this thesis argues that the current production of sexting images on the part of teenagers fulfils similar aims, particularly concerning the intense search for status that is often associated with the sharing of such images and the assertion of power on the part of those storing the images. While the prestige associated with ownership is certainly less convincing than it was for aristocratic patrons in Renaissance Italy, by controlling the process of production and sharing of the images, teenagers nevertheless achieve a certain prestige among their peers. The use of mainstream sexualised images during the interview was aimed at enabling reflections on the content of the images and on the process of production and consumption itself. Thus, the visual task was aimed at eliciting reflexivity concerning teenagers' production of sexualised images in sexting. Based on Gillian Rose's work (2016), the use of images enabled the researcher to explore the way the participants themselves made sense of Rose's four sites framework (*ibid*). Rose's frameworks entail an investigation of the site of production of the images, of the site of the image itself (its content), of the site of its circulation (where it travels) and of the site of audiencing, which is the site where the image is seen by its intended audience.

Rose (2016) suggests investigating the social conditions and effects of the images and their modes of distribution, which is the original intention of the present research. A final reflexive point is made by Rose: to consider the researcher's way of looking at images. The Jungian and post-Jungian approach taken to investigate the images used with the participants is based on the work of Robert Romanyshyn (2013), who proposes a way to take into account unconscious factors in research. Romanyshyn suggests some techniques to approach research and to allow some space for unconscious factors. The first concerns the cultivation of a sense of reverie, by maintaining a connection between conscious and unconscious fantasies and images (such as daydreaming). The second involves the creation of a ritual to contain the

dialogues with the participants (a stage setting, which was performed through the setting of the interview space, the starting of the recorder and the positioning of the images in front of the participants at the right time). The third technique prescribes the invitation of the personification of the complexes of the researcher into the setting. This facilitates the connections to the various levels of the unconscious of the researcher. The fourth technique involves producing a gesture (visual, bodily or dialogue) to engage with the characters that get shaped. Finally, amplification can take place, to reconnect the images with similar materials from other cultures or historical periods. Besides the specificities of the Jungian unconscious, these techniques enable irrational elements to become an active part of the researcher. Stages were not fully followed with the participants due to lack of time, but they informed the reflections of the researcher concerning the reflexive process asked of the participants.

Having detailed the way images are used in this research, illustrating the reflexive nature of the participants' contribution, it remains to discuss in which way this is framed within the specific approach to social construction and psychosocial research that was detailed in Chapter 4.

Within social representation research, visual materials have just recently been introduced as a focus for analysis. Traditionally, social psychology, and thus, psychosocial research, has relied on interviews, focus groups or surveys rather than visual materials (Howarth, 2011). The increasing access to technologies that enable the production of images has nevertheless prompted an interest in visual materials also among social representation theorists (*ibid.*; Sen and Wagner, 2005). Furthermore, the theory itself relies heavily on the ideas of imaginary, metaphors and discourse, signalling a metaphorically visual nature

embedded in such perspective (Sen and Wagner, 2005: 2.2; Arruda, 2015). For Arruda (2015), it is a matter of connecting images to the social imaginary through the social representations shared between participant and researcher.

At the methodological level, working visually within the social representation tradition entails a focus on the anchoring and objectifying processes that produce the social representation and on the contradictions that stem from such processes. For instance, Howarth (2011) used pictures and photos from art projects to investigate people's self-representations. Focusing on identity, she demonstrated that the use of the photos and pictures produced by the participants gave much richer data than the verbal accounts that could have been gathered through interviews only. Overall, existing research employing visual methods within the tradition of social representation remains heavily concerned with matters of social identity, which, as seen in Chapter 4, participate in subjectivation, but might fail to account for the moral regulation and moral panics that surround sexting. Consequently, the analysis of the visual method broadened the focus to a more psychosocial investigation, encompassing matters of social identity but also matters of projection and identification that happen in the context of moral panics, as seen in Chapter 4.

Practically, this phase of the interview required the participant to focus on nine mainstream sexualised images (see Appendix D). The images were plasticized, of rectangular shape of approximately 10 cm x10 cm each. Participants were allowed to take them, explore them, make comments and ask questions about the various characters, the setting or the actions depicted. They were then invited by the researcher to "tell the story" of just one image, chosen by the researcher, ensuring that the images that were commented upon were

used with two participants (where possible a boy and a girl). The transcripts have been coded using Braun and Clarke's steps, as were the rest of the interview materials.

The images were chosen by the researcher to abide by three rules: 1) their nature must be mainstream, common and often seen in everyday life contexts. This is to avoid potential issues if the content is considered too overwhelming by participants. Images that are less mainstream among those included, have been selected for their non-explicit nature; 2) they need to depict both Western and non-Western sexualised scenes. Similarly, the sexualised element must not be hetero-normative. This broadens the definition of 'sexual' image and reduces the chances for simplistic associations to male-centred pornography. 3) the number of images used should not exceed the number of participants. Ideally, each image should be commented on by more than one participant. This is to ensure no image is excluded from the interview and both boys and girls have a chance to comment on images.

Of course, plenty of different images could have been used and those that were included have some limitations compared to more explicit materials but the purpose of the task is not to measure their impact. Rather, it is to elicit reflexive positioning by presenting a pluralistic selection that requires abandoning a stereotyped understanding of the nature of sexual images. Their connection to sexting is not to be found in the scenes depicted, not in the subjects represented, but in their nature as sexualised images produced within relations of status between producers and consumers.

### ***5.6 Ethics of primary research with children***

Ethical standards were implemented according to the *Guidelines for ethical approval of research involving human participants* of the University of Essex. Ethical approval was obtained on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015. Two grants were awarded to the research project by two

Swiss-based foundations. The *Fondazione Gianfe* offers grants to cultural, scientific and social activities carried out using academic research, conferences and organisation of events that promote Canton Ticino (see Appendix E). The other grant was awarded by the *Associazione Demetra*, which operates in the field of the prevention of child abuse and neglect in the Canton. The money was used to cover tuition fees for four years.

As mentioned above in this chapter, parents of the students approached to participate in the interviews received an information letter detailing the research project, the recruitment process and the level of involvement required of participants. This was done to ensure transparency towards parents and legal guardians. The parents also received a copy of the information sheet (Appendix C) later to be read by participants during the interviews. The sampled students received a separate letter, tailored to explain the project and the recruitment procedure. It was clearly stated that non-participation or withdrawal would in no way prejudice their education or any other aspect of their lives. The letter clarified the opt-out strategy adopted to select the participants. Although opt-out strategies are more time-consuming and require more effort on the part of the researcher, it was decided that this recruitment method would ensure the maximum likelihood of attracting participation, without eliciting group dynamics around the topic of the research, which might have happened if it had been broadly advertised in schools.

Further information concerning ethical measures was provided in the information sheet and can be read in Appendix C. Finally, each participant signed two copies of the consent form, along with the researcher, just before starting the interviews (see Appendix D). One was kept by the participant, the other was kept by the researcher.

Involving children and under-18s in primary research, particularly on a sensitive subject such as sexting, requires careful consideration of their needs and the way ethical measures can ensure respecting their vulnerability when facing adults' decision-making. Alderson and Morrow (2011) provide a list of points to use to guarantee such ethical considerations are abided by. To further clarify in which way the research has met such ethical standards, they are here addressed regarding the research process, the choices made by the researcher and the overall experience that resulted from the encounter with teenagers.

For Alderson and Morrow, it is worth initially asking whether the research seems worth doing, due to the potentially serious implications of sexting in terms of gender violence. The answer I gave myself is that 16-year-olds are legally granted the right to consent whether to engage in sexual practices or not. Thus, to reflect on their social representations concerning a sexualised practice like sexting does not depart from the level of maturity that they are socially recognized as having. Furthermore, the research aims at benefitting young people, whose views on sexting are not taken into account by legislators. Another point that required consideration is whether potential harms could concern participants' understanding of the way they deal with sexualised images and what dynamics they are involved in. Would they re-interpret something that happened to them as 'abuse'? New awareness might cause distress, and measures were taken to ensure participants had sufficient information to contact supporting services should they want to. The research has been carried out in close collaboration with the Fondazione ASPI (Swiss Association for the Protection of Childhood), which offers support to victims of child abuse and with the Magistrate for minors, which guaranteed legal support. Furthermore, Alderson and Morrow suggest considering whether payment for participation would be suitable, which I excluded in order not to generate attractiveness for the research on the grounds of monetary reward, thus obtaining more

participation from the students among those contacted who have a lower income. A further point to consider was the level of expertise of the researcher in working with young people. I could draw on my experience working with vulnerable people in various sectors (probation, homeless shelters), my professional qualification as a clinical psychologist and on my lecturing experience to guarantee an age-appropriate relationship would establish itself during the interviews.

This appraisal of the ethical considerations based on Alderson and Morrow's criteria suggests that the research has successfully taken into account those elements that pertain to conducting primary research with children, ensuring their needs would be met by adopting measures that are respectful of children's vulnerability in research contexts.

### ***5.7 Quality standards in qualitative research***

Sarah Tracy (2010) has developed a conceptualisation of quality standards for qualitative research that summarises the major criteria found in the literature. While she acknowledges the importance of methodological paradigms in defining quality, this author contends that a set of general criteria can help guide the appraisal of qualitative research. Her approach seems in line with the pluralism demonstrated by social representations researchers, who use a variety of paradigms to generate their data, as discussed above. It involves criteria that are overarching individual paradigms and criteria that instead allow for paradigm specificity. For Tracy, the eight criteria good quality research must encompass are: a) a worthy topic, b) rich rigour, c) sincerity, d) credibility, e) resonance, f) significant contribution, g) ethics and h) meaningful coherence.

A worthy topic is defined in terms of relevance, timeliness, significance, and level of interest. The study reaches rich rigour when it sufficiently elaborates theoretical constructs,



dedicates sufficient data and time to the field, has a sufficiently meaningful sample, describes the context of the research in sufficient detail and provides abundant data collection and analysis process. Sincerity is achieved when sufficient self-reflexivity is demonstrated, in such a way that subjective values, biases and inclinations of the researcher are addressed. Furthermore, this criterion is reached when the study demonstrates sufficient transparency about the methods and challenges faced by the researcher. Credibility is achieved by the presence of thick description, with concrete detail, explication of tacit (non-textual) knowledge and the practice of illustrating rather than telling. Then, through triangulation or crystallisation, it is achieved by using multiple methods or data sources. Crystallisation, in particular, entails approaching representations by bringing together different genres, which is an approach to credibility that suits social constructionist and critical paradigms:

Crystallization combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers' vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them  
(Ellingson, 2009: 4).

A further route to guarantee credibility consists in ensuring a plurality of voices are conveyed through the research, along with some reflections of members of the interested group (in the current case, this concerns reflections of 16-year-olds).

For Tracy, the criterion of resonance can be achieved through aesthetic, evocative representation of the materials collected and by discussing transferable findings. Furthermore, it must contribute by adding to conceptual and theoretical debates, at the practical level, by

addressing a problem affecting numerous people, morally, by raising ethical questions, methodologically, by engaging debates and heuristically, by illustrating intuitive solutions and reflections. Ethically, the research must consider procedural elements, situational and culturally specific ethical aspects, relational aspects and strategies to leave the scene and share the research in line with what was promised to participants. Coherence is achieved when there is a balance between methods used and stated goals, the general aim is addressed and literature, research focus, findings and interpretations are interconnected meaningfully.

These criteria guided the research in establishing a reflexive practice based on integrating Jungian and post-Jungian psychology with the SRT approach, informing a psychosocial perspective on sexting that has never been adopted before. The review of the literature in Chapter 2 illustrates how much research focuses on moral panic or radical feminism when approaching sexting, or enacts moral panics when adopting more quantitative methods. These perspectives often fail to articulate a subjective participant or to acknowledge the shared meaning of sexting among teenagers. Thus, by introducing a psychosocial perspective, this research has attempted to meet the criteria for qualitative research at the theoretical, methodological, interpretive and practical levels.

Another important quality criterion to consider when deploying thematic analysis is saturation, which can be broadly defined as ‘the point at which no additional themes are found from the reviewing of successive data regarding a category being investigated’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 61). Failure to reach saturation impacts the quality of the research because more themes could be generated to address the research question. Ando, Cousing and Young (2014) point out that reaching saturation is particularly important when the research concerns common views held by a certain group of people. Strongly related to grounded theory, which develops codes along with the theoretical perspective on the data, saturation determines the

sample size. For what concerns the present study, saturation was achieved for the semi-structured interviews based on the questionnaire developed by the researcher, but not for the focused individual interviews carried out with the mainstream sexualised images. The semi-structured interviews generated codes that repeated themselves during the last three interviews. It became instead evident that saturation would not be reached working with the visual materials for two reasons: first, each participant engaged with a different image, thus making it impossible to generate sufficient codes for each image, and second, not all images were picked to comment upon specifically. Thus, those that were not taken into consideration could not be made part of the coding. This aspect is most definitively an important limitation of the present study. In future, I intend to refine the method and recruit new participants to broaden the research. Furthermore, the visual method used during the focused individual interviews proved limited from the point of view of the engagement of the participants in the task. On more than one occasion it had not been possible to obtain a complex narrative based on the images from the participant, which I linked to the lack of familiarity with me and with more phenomenological ways of engaging materials. Thus, it is definitively worth pursuing a more refined way of engaging participants in this task.

A final comment before moving into the findings must go to reflexivity. Having established that Jung's method to retreat projections through the use of countertransference does not guarantee a level of reflexivity that fully addresses the researcher's biases, prejudices and inclinations. Having adopted SRT to frame the co-construction of the representations as intersubjective, how reflexivity was achieved throughout the research remains to be explained. Reflexivity is the process of continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of the researcher's positionality and its implications for others (Berger, 2015). It is a process of self-appraisal, which turns the research lens onto the researcher to 'take responsibility for one's own situatedness within the research and the effect that it might have

on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected and its interpretation' (ibid: 2). The notion of positionality, which is central to reflexivity, must be understood in relation to the participant, in relation to the context surrounding the meeting with the participant (thus, the high schools, the Department of Education of Canton Ticino and the Department of Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies,) and in relation to the wider context, which encompasses all actors participating in the moral regulation of sexting, where my gender, race, affiliation, age, sexual orientation, immigration status, personal experiences, linguistic tradition, beliefs, biases, preferences, theoretical, political and ideological stances become charged with specific meaning. Berger summarises the impact of these positions on the access to the field, on the relationship between participants and researcher and on the way the background of the researcher affects the way she uses language, poses questions, and chooses the lens for filtering the information gathered. These activities guide the interpretation of the data, and thus, they shape the findings and the conclusions drawn from the research.

To fully address positionality, reflexivity has been incorporated in the various chapters of the thesis. An example has been presented in Chapter 1, where I described the struggle that stems from realising that Jungian and post-Jungian psychology has not yet fully addressed Jung's prejudices at the theoretical and practical levels, which made me opt for a psychosocial approach. Chapter 6 is where most of my reflexive practice is illustrated. The narrative that developed in Chapter 6 is therefore both dedicated to the social representations of sexting shared with me by the participants and to my reflexive account.

Chapter 6 opens with a brief contextualisation of the research, which then leads on to the discussion of the various discourses that surround teenagers and the production of sexualised images in sexting in Canton Ticino and Switzerland. The social representations

teenagers shared with the interviewer are then discussed, with the contribution of the post-Jungian psychosocial approach discussed in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 6

### *Findings*

The socio-cultural context where the interviews took place is characterised by a Catholic background, where Italian, the third language spoken in Switzerland, is the official language. The Canton has seen numerous newspaper articles and television broadcasts dedicated to teenagers' use of new technologies for sexting, cyber bullying or more generally youth offending. In the period from 2014 to 2020, events such as roundtables have been organised to discuss sexting with experts and a movie was made in collaboration with the Department of Education, Culture and Sport (*Take Control* by Marco Bitonti) to show in schools and elicit discussion with adolescents. It, therefore, appears that there has been and continues to be considerable attention paid to sexting and its implications for young people. The chapter first reviews existing national regulations, and then discusses some of the strategies put in place by the government to tackle sexting. Moving on, some articles from the major newspapers in the Canton are addressed, to complete the contextualisation and the identification of discourses that are morally regulatory.

#### ***6.1 The official attitude towards sexting, the media discourses and moral regulatory discourses***

At the Federal level, an interpellation was presented to the Federal parliament in 2013<sup>31</sup>. The text of the interpellation asked the government to clarify how sexting can be fought against, whether the government considers it appropriate to take action at the legislative level, in which way can young people be made capable of managing the possibilities offered by the new media and whether it would be possible to teach new media

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<sup>31</sup> Interpellation number 13.4266, retrieved on 1st June 2020 from the Swiss parliament's website. <https://www.parlament.ch/it/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20134266>

literacy classes in school. The interpellation resulted from a campaign by *Pro Juventute*, a non-statutory organisation that promotes the rights of young people nationally. The campaign aimed at raising awareness among the public about the risks of sexting and the implications of online activities for those under 18. The Federal Parliament replied to the interpellation stressing the importance of raising awareness about the potential negative outcomes of sexting among young people. It explained that existing penal and civil legislation is relevant in the case of sexting, thus, there is no need for further laws. Among the existing legislation, the Parliament cited law and regulations on pornography and the ratification of the Lanzarote Convention in 2013 on the part of the Swiss Federal chambers. Furthermore, a national programme called *Youth and Media* had been commissioned in 2013 to investigate whether or not it is necessary to regulate the media landscape to ensure child protection laws are respected. The programme was also tasked with introducing some media literacy strategies, such as the promotion of peer education among youth. *Youth and Media* has since devised numerous strategies that are available on its website ([www.giovanimedia.ch](http://www.giovanimedia.ch)), along with federal reports, scientific studies, and a database of materials used in education settings to inform parents, young people, teachers and key workers in the ambit of education and child protection. These materials are variously developed by non-statutory organisations operating in the field of child protection or sexual education, and the police. The approach taken by the Federal Parliament is, therefore, perfectly in line with the Swiss reliance on the education system to promote safeguarding, child protection and correct information about the legal framework for the population.

In Canton Ticino, the location of interest for this research, much work in educating youth is done by the police, charged with running workshops in schools to explain the functioning of new media and the legal implications. For instance, all interviewees were

well-informed on the matter of online security. Further promoters of information include the association *ASPI*, which works with children of various age groups and provides counselling and advocacy in cases of child abuse and neglect, and the already mentioned *Pro Juventute*, which runs workshops, provides materials on their website and shares information for parents and teachers as well. To illustrate the official discourses on sexting, some of the materials offered by *Pro Juventute* and the *Youth and Media* programme will be reviewed.

From *Youth and Media*'s database, only materials concerning sexting were selected. Among these, the first one reviewed here was produced by *Sexual Health Switzerland* ([www.salute-sessuale.ch](http://www.salute-sessuale.ch)) in 2019. It aimed at providing information to parents about the appropriate educational approach to sexualised images found online or on television with children of different ages. For this research, only the information provided to parents of 16- to 18-year-olds is addressed. Devised to describe instances that might embarrass parents, the information focuses on the best way to start a conversation with the child after discovering that they have shared a sexualised picture of themselves with their partner. The educational text is reproduced here, and the original document can be seen in Appendix H: Points covered are as follows:

Why does your daughter or your son send an intimate picture?

Your daughter or your son is discovering her/his sexuality.

She/he is in love

She/he sends an intimate picture to please her boyfriend/his girlfriend.

So, you can tell them: "You have sent an intimate picture to your boyfriend or your girlfriend. You feel love for somebody. I am happy for you. You must know two important things:

1) You should send intimate pictures only if you really want to do it.



- 2) In any case, you and your partner should keep intimate pictures for yourselves, only for you.

It is very important to protect your privacy. Privacy is the part of your life you do not want others to know.

Aimed at illustrating concepts in a simple and accessible way, this message associates sexting with consent and privacy. It effectively moves the attention from the intimacy presumably sought by the teenager onto matters of autonomy and mutual respect, which are properly indicative of adult relationships. Although simplistic, this message fulfils an important task: to encourage parents to assume the responsibility to relate their children's emotional state with the broader relational context that they must learn to navigate. Moreover, there is no moralising tone involved, just a responsible attitude for parents to assume.

Another document focused on sexting that was retrieved from the *Youth and Media* database was produced by the *Swiss Prevention of Criminality inter Cantonal service* (PSC), which specialises in crime prevention. It organises a yearly conference for the police divisions that are in charge of crime prevention and community safety. As such, it provides materials for such divisions to use also concerning the illegal aspects of sexting. One such document is the *My little Safebook*<sup>32</sup> booklet, aimed at teenagers themselves and available to download from the PSC website, as well as printed copies being available at police stations. It dedicates page 13 to sexting. The text states:

The fact that you are curious about sex and wish to gain experience is perfectly normal and it is also natural that you look into what other people are doing. If for everyone else it is normal to send sexy pictures of themselves (“sexting”), why

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<sup>32</sup> The booklet can be accessed through this link: <https://www.skppsc.ch/de/download/my-little-safebook/>

shouldn't you do it? It is simple: because it can be dangerous. For example, one day you have an argument with your boyfriend/girlfriend and he/she starts to send one of your pictures to the whole net! In the end, everyone at school will have seen your picture and will laugh when you walk by. That's horrible! If you really wish to send a sexy picture to somebody, first ask yourself if somebody could abuse the picture. The biggest proof of love is not making each other presents in the virtual world, but in the real world.

It is interesting to note how the tone of this message differs from the message of the previous leaflet by *Sexual Health Switzerland*. The PSC message warns teenagers very directly, calling upon situations that are likely to happen if they take risks. Both messages attempt to implement gender equality by mentioning "boyfriend/girlfriend", "he/she", etc. While it is appropriate to acknowledge that anyone can be involved in non-consensual sexting, the definition of gender adopted by these messages does not acknowledge some linguistic solutions that also allow for the inclusion of non-binary gender identities, where 'they' is often preferred to 'he/she'. Furthermore, the message of the PSC seems to equate the experiences of boys and girls when their images are shared with third parties without explicit consent on the part of the person portrayed in the picture. The major consequence seems to concern the derision on the part of peers once they have accessed the picture. It suggests a first important point that requires further investigation: how is gender dealt with in official discourses? Are authorities overlooking specific needs of girls by "being fair" and treating boys and girls equivalently? Are teenagers themselves respecting, so to speak, some type of equality or are their practices gendered? Above, in Chapter 2, the suggestion was made that in other locations, sexting is a gendered dynamic.

A final example of documentation taken on board by the government through the *Youth and Media* programme consists in the explanations provided by *Pro Juventute*<sup>33</sup> to the young people and parents who seek advice in the case of episodes of sexting. The page also includes information about support that is available through the organisation. An interesting aspect concerns the fact that, as the message of *Sexual Health Switzerland*, this message also acknowledges the role played by intimacy and building trust in relationships as an important element behind sexting. Here is the message concerning trust:

#### A fatal test on trust

Young people who practice sexting mostly do it in the context of an intimate relationship. Sexting is sent when the partners are distant or to demonstrate trust. But sexting is also used to start new relationships or flirts. Unfortunately, unknown adults hiding behind a pseudonym can sometimes get in contact with young people and put pressure on them, or even blackmail them with the sexy pictures they sent them. It is important that young people manage intimate pictures very cautiously and carefully when dealing with strangers.

While it is certainly good to see stakeholders demonstrate some insight into the rather complex dynamic that develops around sexting in teens' intimate relationships, the message remains rather obscure over what concerns the demonstration of trust. What does it mean when young people send each other intimate pictures as a demonstration of trust? It will be clarified in the discussion of the interview findings that trust does indeed play a huge role in sexting, but in a slightly different way compared to what is conveyed by *Pro Juventute*. Furthermore, the way adults can get intimate pictures of young people is not fully elucidated. The assumption is that the recipient is untrustworthy, never mind if an adult or under-18, and therefore, young people should refrain from sending such images. While an understandable

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<sup>33</sup> Page consulted on 2nd June 2020: <https://www.projuventute.ch/it/genitori/internet/sexting>

precaution, it puts the responsibility on the sender not to take risks, rather than on the one who abuses the trust. Considering what discussed in Chapters 2 and 4 concerning the implications of such logic, it is worth stressing that the strategies so far devised to deal with sexting, which have been endorsed by the Federal government, do not acknowledge the gender dynamic involved, nor the way sexting is played out in the case of non-heteronormative identities. On the contrary, the message overall warns young people of strangers lurking in the shadows. Whilst abuse by strangers is certainly a harmful and concerning phenomenon, the issues facing teenagers among known peers need to be taken seriously, too.

A final sample of preventive strategy provided by *Pro Juventute* consists in their campaign called *Pro dei Media* (it could be translated as ‘expert of the media’), which was circulated in 2016. The leaflet produced for the campaign reads:

What is sexting?

The word sexting includes the English words ‘sex’ and ‘texting’ and it indicates the exchange, via Internet or mobile phone, of self-produced intimate pictures or pictures of other people, equally self-produced. These pictures are accessible to a chosen person or a group through messages, instant messaging or social media. Often, young people are influenced by group dynamics, sometimes in unconscious ways, or they get pressured. Sexting should not be confused with anonymous pornography, which is not self-produced.

When is sexting practised?

Not wanting to engage in sexting is legitimate and it is not a problem. Most young people are careful not to do it with strangers. It is much more common to practise sexting within an intimate relationship. Sometimes, sexting is used to start new relationships, or to flirt, or with friends. In other cases, unknown adults under

pseudonym contact young people in chat rooms and then blackmail them after obtaining their pictures.

What are the risks linked to sexting?

If your intimate pictures are uploaded on the web or downloaded on mobile phones of your classmates, it is no longer possible to remedy. Think carefully about how you depict yourself in pictures, never mind who is the recipient. The risk that your pictures become public and everyone else sees them is always present.

The *Pro dei Media* campaign by *Pro Juventute* illustrates an underlying discourse, which, albeit correctly informing the reader about the nature of technology, attempts to dissuade young people from sharing their pictures online. There is no questioning of the legitimacy of the behaviour of those who presumably will misuse such images, nor is there a clear differentiation between the attempts at developing intimate relationships and the activities of intentionally malicious predators targeting teenagers online. Fundamentally, the discourse here is the classic ‘stranger-danger’ refrain that fails to develop any suitable skill to effectively constructively cope with the implications of sharing sexualised materials online. It clearly participates in the general climate of suspicion towards the Internet and new technologies that is one of the major discourses reaching teenagers.

This brief discussion of some of the information on sexting circulating in Switzerland illustrates the line adopted by the authorities. A fundamental aspect that is questioned in this thesis concerns the need to consider the gender dynamics to devise intervention strategies that address the major problems that are caused by sexting. These problems, as pointed out in Chapter 2, concern dynamics of power, status-seeking and sexism among teenagers. Of course, authorities are not the only sources of information. The media play an important role in morally regulating sexting, too.

In an article entitled “That slogan incites young people to do sexting”, published on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2014 by *Tio 20 Minuti*<sup>34</sup>, sexting is discussed in relation to a slogan by *Pro Juventute*. The article states that there is “increasing alarm about sexting, an emergency that must be faced”. By reporting the expert opinion of a sexologist, Kathya Bonatti, who criticises the slogan used at that time by *Pro Juventute*<sup>35</sup> (“Sexting can make you famous. Even when you do not want to”), the article associates sexting to contemporary social values that emphasise the importance of sex (“sex is a way to express ourselves and to be valued”). Young people are said to “slip” into sexting when they have pre-existing problems, “something that is unresolved”. They are influenced by international stars, who “set a bad example”. Bonatti further states that it is necessary to make young people understand that “we are dealing with something horrible. If you send a picture with your mobile phone, it becomes uncontrollable, you can no longer manage it”. The director of the Ticinese section of *Pro Juventute*, Ilario Lodi, replied to Bonatti’s criticism by stating that the slogan had been created by a team of experts and acknowledged that sexting is “a very serious problem among adolescents”. He stressed the role of parents in educating them, rather than relying on prevention campaigns only. The article further mentions that young people in the Canton “are brought to their knees by sexting”, a phrase that suggests humiliation.

The language used in this article betrays a moral stance that defines sexting as pathological by default, something one “slips” into because influenced by “those who set a bad example”, rather than a complex (and nuanced) relational practice that can go awry in specific circumstances. The loss of control after the sending of a picture is deemed “horrible”,

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<sup>34</sup> Last retrieved on 3rd June 2020: <https://www.tio.ch/ticino/attualita/781804/quello-slogan-incita-i-giovani-a-fare-sexting>

<sup>35</sup> Pro Juventute has since given the slogan up.

but kids continue to get “tricked”. It is striking how the expert opinions in the article do not concern themselves with what sexting might mean to young people themselves. The insistence of Bonatti on ‘prevention’, rather than providing information further suggests the intention to impede sexting, rather than educate young people on ways to do it that do not hurt others. This perspective was also reproduced in another article, still on *Tio 10 Minuti*, published on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2014<sup>36</sup>, where sexting is defined as “a phenomenon dangerously growing also at our latitude”. Rather than punishing those who share the pictures when no explicit consent is given, the authorities deem it necessary to engage in raising awareness and preventing young people from engaging in sexting.

In 2016, the *Corriere del Ticino*, one of the major local newspapers, organised a debate on sexuality and new technologies to which various practitioners and experts were invited<sup>37</sup>. Among them, Graziano Martignoni, a psychiatrist often interviewed on matters of youth behaviour, stated that it is the sense of modesty that has changed in our society. In his opinion, modesty used to guide the relations to our bodies and to other people. Nowadays, it no longer fulfils such a function and he gave the example of “the girl who, naked in front of the mirror, takes a picture of herself to send to friends”. Thus, he suggested that schools should become role models attempting to “put a brake” on new technologies, but “without demonising them”. Statements such as these are relatively unhelpful to those young people who might experience problems due to sexting, particularly because they reduce the issue to diminished decency on their part without engaging in understanding the meaning that such behaviours have for them.

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<sup>36</sup> Last accessed on 3rd June 2020: <https://www.tio.ch/dal-mondo/attualita/789525/record-di-sexting-nel-2013-l-ingenuita-alla-base-di-tutto>

<sup>37</sup> Last accessed on 10th June 2020: <https://www.cdt.ch/il-corriere-in-tv/giovani-e-sesso-tutta-una-questione-di-rete-CXCDT165025?refresh=true>

The discourse expressed in these articles falls within the scope of the appraisal of similar messages about sexting done by Hasinoff (2015). In a rather conservative attempt to eliminate the phenomenon, those young people who engage with it are portrayed as either naive and easily influenced, or problematic to begin with. Those who share pictures of another without consent are not held responsible because the only strategy to tackle what is considered a very serious problem is to prevent it altogether by making those who lack the necessary modesty responsible. Thus, the young people who shared their pictures intentionally and were betrayed are left to take the blame for the spreading of pictures by others.

While there is certainly a valuable aspect in these messages, the element of naivety requires a more in-depth exploration. Are those who send the images naive? After all, articles such as these should have also reached teenagers, so why do they continue to send sexting images to others?

Not all articles published by newspapers adopt this discourse. Often, only serious cases are reported, such as the one published by *La Regione Ticino*<sup>38</sup> on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2019. A 30-year-old man from Zürich had been sentenced to 28 months of probation for coercing a 14-year-old with pre-existing mental health problems to send him intimate pictures, which he then uploaded on a pornographic site. He further threatened her to send the images to her family if she did not comply with his requests for more pictures. The girl took her life in 2017, but the role the abuse played in such a tragic decision remains unclear.

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<sup>38</sup> Last retrieved on 3rd June 2020: <https://www.laregione.ch/svizzera/svizzera/1391971/pena-ridotta-per-un-30enne-accusato-di-sexting-con-una-14enne>



The article condemns the behaviour of the perpetrator and ascribes the status of the victim to the 14-year-old. Whilst the word ‘sexting’ figures prominently in the title of the article, it is clear that the offences are much more serious, including child sexual abuse and sexual coercion. Thus, in this case, the moral regulation of sexting is much less focused on preventing risky behaviours and much more on condemning the offender.

The same case was reported also by *Corriere del Ticino*, which is a more conservative newspaper. On 16<sup>th</sup> September 2019<sup>39</sup>, the article entitled “Sexting with a 14-year-old, halved sentence”, emphasised that the reduced sentence will be spent mainly on probation rather than in prison, as initially thought. The tone is more critical of the decision of the Cantonal Court of Zürich, but also this article maintains a clear focus on the culprit, rather than on the behaviour of the victim.

The last element worth considering concerns the case of a Dropbox folder that contained hundreds of pictures of Ticinesi’s girls, accessible to all via a WhatsApp message. The RSI<sup>40</sup> showed the first episode of a documentary concerning this case on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2017<sup>41</sup>. Sexting is defined as “private pornographic material”, and assumed to circulate widely when no consent is given. The specific instance saw the creation of a Dropbox folder, which circulated through 2016 and has since been blocked by the police. However, the folder is still accessible after having been added to an existing broader folder currently circulating in Italy. The documentary stresses the abusive nature of such behaviours and reminds the viewer of the suicide of Tiziana Cantone, an Italian woman who had shared some sexualised

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<sup>39</sup> Last retrieved on 3rd June 2020: <https://www.cdt.ch/svizzera/cronaca/sexting-con-14-enne-condanna-dimezzata-CF1711260>

<sup>40</sup> The Radiotelevision Svizzera di lingua italiana (RSI) is the major Swiss radio and television broadcasting company.

<sup>41</sup> Last retrieved on 3rd June 2020: <https://www.rsi.ch/news/oltre-la-news/La-Bibbia-erotica-senza-fine-9561949.html>

videos of herself with friends and an ex-boyfriend in an attempt to make him jealous. The ex-boyfriend had uploaded the video on public Internet sites. One of the videos, in particular, went viral and some of the phrases she used in it appeared on t-shirts and smartphone cases. Tiziana brought the case to court, demanding the right to be forgotten and obtaining the removal of the videos from many EU websites. She changed her name and moved to a new city, trying to avoid getting recognised, but took her own life in 2016.

The documentary by RSI describes the case through the words of some of the victims. Among them, Giada, 19 years old in 2017, reported the Dropbox folder to the authorities after a friend had sent her the link where she found some of her pictures. She states that many girls seek popularity on social media by uploading sexualised images. They often generate numerous “likes” and friendships. She acknowledges that one must be aware of the downsides of such behaviours, such as the permanence of the pictures on the Web, which might have repercussions on future professional opportunities. Carol, who was 17 years old when her images ended up in the Dropbox folder, experienced physical violence from her then boyfriend. During the interview, she lamented the absence of parental figures able to support a girl through such a tough experience. When her pictures landed on Dropbox, the boyfriend heard from a friend about them and became violent. With a difficult family background, she had engaged in taking such pictures because her best friend incited her and some boys she knew asked her for them. She admitted feelings of persecution that still make it difficult for her to walk around the city centre and at one time led her to run away from home, seeking refuge in the attic of her aunt, where she spent eight months with major depression, coming out just to eat and use the bathroom. The last interviewee, Serena, 30 years old, is an Italian woman whose boyfriend uploaded pictures taken during intimate moments onto the broad folder circulating in Italy after they broke up. She reported the

actions of her boyfriend to the authorities, which in 2017 were still struggling to get a grip on the situation. She received numerous insults from strangers on her Facebook account, bordering on hate crime. She considers herself a victim of psychological violence and says that she had to give up a job she enjoyed because she could no longer bear being in contact with the public. Some days, she says, she does not leave her house. Having sought help from a private company, which successfully managed to remove her name from the index of the folder, Serena stresses that help is available if one has the strength to ask for it. She considers Tiziana Cantone a fellow victim of an unpunished crime. When Tiziana died, she says, a part of her died with her.

The media in the Canton are contributing to raising awareness about the possible serious consequences of sharing one's sexualised images. Just like the official discourses, media discourses are also preoccupied with preventing harmful consequences, and they engage with rather serious episodes. However, the message received by teenagers might be slightly different from that intended by the authorities. What seems absent overall is the perspective of teenagers themselves. By stressing risks associated with possible coercion by adults, or the broad rape culture that surrounds slut-shaming and hatred of women who produce sexualised images and videos, the media frame the activities of teenagers in a broad context that is indeed worrying. But what are teenagers doing among themselves? Which way do they subjectively position within such context? Which positions are protecting them and which are, instead, jeopardising their integrity?

The discourse remains, instead, tightly linked to the notions of risk and risk prevention. The discussion of the social representations shared with the 16 participants illustrates how such discourse is, in fact, counterproductive. Their perception of abusive

elements in sexting refers to social representations that are not necessarily conveyed through the discursive moral regulation of the authorities and the media but relate to it in such a way that gender identities are constructed according to the sex of young people.

### ***6.2 The major problem with sexting: trust and betrayal***

Trust issues are well known to be involved in cases of abuse, and its betrayal is a basic feature of traumatic events (Nicholson, Irwin and Nath Dwivedi, 2010; Brothers, 1995; Finkelhor and Browne, 1985). Particularly in the case of sexual abuse, the combination of stigmatisation, powerlessness and traumatic sexualisation (i.e. sexual exploitation) is known to merge with the betrayal into a particularly vicious attack on one's sense of self (Finkelhor and Browne, 1985). The betrayal of trust can, therefore, be considered a corollary of the coercive practices displayed by some young people, which are more often studied and recognised as indicators of abuse by the existing literature (Ringrose et al. 2012). Trust and distrust were strongly activated during the interviews, and stigmatisation is often the threat involved in the exposure of sexualised pictures. Whether or not the sexualisation is exploitative is instead still a matter of debate within the literature (Egan and Hawkes, 2008) and the participants did not share particular insights about this aspect. Issues around trust and distrust, though, manifested in various forms. For instance, through the reticence to disclose thoughts, experiences or reflections even when not directly asked (for example, no question about any direct involvement with sexting was asked).

Bill, for example, carried on with the entire interview before deciding to admit already knowing about sexting. He studied me for the entire hour, maintaining his position and refusing to elaborate on his statements. I thought he was giving me a treatment similar to those of authorities when they give a press release about a controversial case: "Do not say

anything compromising!”. Only before leaving, probably satisfied by our interaction, he decided to tell me that:

P: ‘In the end, I already knew about it, a bit from everyone, my friends, my girlfriend, the media...’

Of course, his reticence might have been caused by the research setting, or be a trait of his personality. However, distrust also manifested with other interviewees, such as John, who quite openly asked me “how did you get to me?” with the attitude of somebody who had previously been in trouble because of behaviours related to sexting. I explained to him the procedure to select participants, which was already detailed in the letter that was sent to them and their families but I felt he did not tell me everything, and that his reticence was due to a fundamental lack of trust. Understandably, I did not expect anyone to disclose anything they did not want to, and for this reason, I had clearly stated that the interview did not entail any unwanted disclosure on their part. Why, then, did some of the participants feel the need to engage me with their distrust, all while (paradoxically) disclosing more than they seemed to intend? They could have very simply omitted such suggestions about their actual involvement in sexting, rather than opening up about their doubts concerning my trustworthiness. I reflect that they enacted a behaviour similar to that of boys who ask girls to sext. They elicited my curiosity (which, incidentally, I believe mirrors their curiosity about sexuality) all while denying me the full information. They were playing hard to get, and I felt let down on a couple of occasions, when they used their mobile phone while I was talking, or when they refused to engage with a question.

A consideration about the sample is consequent to this point: girls were much less keen to participate in the research than boys. Almost every boy who was contacted accepted the invitation to participate unless an external impediment prevented it. Girls were much

more reluctant to participate, and some made it clear they had no interest in the subject. The proactive involvement of boys made it clear to me that they were keen on participating due to the subject matter of the interview, rather than to their support for scientific research. I preferred not to confront them with questions about this aspect, respecting their lack of confidence in me, as a means not to force them too much. However, I perceived performance anxiety in some of them, who wanted to ‘get it right’ and looked for the ‘correct’ answer right away. I had to repeat “there is no correct answer, you can say anything you think” more than once with them. I never had to say this to the five girls.

Trust and betrayal of trust are fundamental in the sexting dynamic itself. According to the participants, when a girl sends her picture to a boy and he shares it with his friends or posts it on a social network, her trust is betrayed. The dynamic around sexting is, consequently, particularly interesting concerning trust. Boys seem to believe that controlling the picture taken (of trust) means automatically increasing their security and reducing the chances of being betrayed: girls cannot betray their feelings if they can expose them. The logic of exposure of morally reprehensible behaviours parallels broader societal behaviours, as it is visible daily on social media and TV. For instance, it is quite common to expose famous people whose behaviour is considered immoral or to read about the misdeeds of politicians in shaming posts and articles. The participants declared a similar understanding of sexting, where moral indignation characterises the response of the broad community of peers once the sharing of pictures is exposed. The risk boys try to avoid concerns the risk of being betrayed. Such translation of broader societal concerns about the consequences of sexting in their everyday life’s concerns results indeed in a sexist dynamic, where gender is constructed according to the moral panics detailed by Hasinoff (2015). The following dialogue with John suggests that young people are aware of many more cases than the authorities and the adult world know of and that the general reaction is of embarrassment and shame:

I: So, in your opinion sexting is quite widespread, it's common?

P: In my opinion, yes, but people hide it cause they are ashamed, or ehm, I think just because of this, and so we don't really talk about it much, and when it happens there is a lot of judgments and accusations going on.

I: So, if an episode becomes public, are there a lot of reactions?

P: Yes, not much on the media, but among young people for sure, I always hear at school when something like this happens.

I: So, you are informed among your friends and classmates. What happens usually? What is the reaction?

P: I think it's different among boys and girls. Boys tend to have a laugh at the beginning but then... It often ends poorly for girls because they are judged differently than the way they might expect.

I: It ends poorly? What do you mean?

P: Well, that she can get the label of troia (i.e. slut in the local parlance). I might be exaggerating, but girls also tend to react like this because they say that these are not things to do because a girl should show some respect for herself.

As discussed in Chapter 4, moral indignation is one of the fundamental features of moral panics. To elicit such a reaction by the public (in this case, the schoolmates and peers) is an efficient way to exert a form of power that guarantees silent compliance. It mostly manifests in the lack of repercussions for the boys who betray the girls who sext. While authorities might give them a punishment, such as days of suspension from school, the peers

do not take any action to ostracise them. Rather, the girl risks being blamed for taking a risk, as previously discussed. This manifests also in the form of the blaming that girls themselves direct towards their congeners who send the pictures. This brief dialogue with Joy indicates a lack of solidarity towards the girls who should ‘regret’ the mistake of sharing their sexualised images with boys:

I: So, from what you just told me, sooner or later a girl regrets having sent a picture...

P: Yes, in my opinion yes. I would regret it, so I think other people should regret it, too. Whether they actually do it, I can’t really say.

The major social representations connected to the subject of trust and betrayal that were shared by the participants turn around the central dynamic described so far. Some participants contend that the non-consensual sending results from break-ups and the availability of pictures on boys’ mobile phones after the break-up has happened. According to Josephine, for instance:

P: Most often, they break up, he still has all her pictures on his mobile phone and since they are no longer together, he sends them around to his mates...I’ve already heard of videos sent around like that...

I: But why do they send them?

P: Bah... because they are boys, they are there, with their mates and they go “hey, look she’s hot, isn’t she?”... and pictures start to circulate... or sometimes they steal each other’s phones and start sending around the pictures...

I: I see...



P: Many also because they are jerks, they don't care about the girl...

I: I see...

P: And many because "this one is a troia, send her pictures around!"

I: Ok... I see

P: Always probably to be accepted by the group, to share and to brag.

In a sense, the representation shared by Josephine concerns gaining a more secure membership in the boys' group by bragging and despising girls, depending on the quality of the relationship one has with them. Thus, it could be argued that non-consensual sharing is not always aimed at slut-shaming the girl. Acceptance on the part of the group seems the central element in Josephine's social representation of the dynamic.

According to Jack, the central element is trust in the recipient. He considers it the direct result of awareness. In this quote he clarified to me that being aware entails thinking about the consequences:

I: Ok, so is there a real risk?

P: Real but not contemplated by many people...

I: Does it happen often to be mocked for online activities?

P: Bah... the brother of a friend of mine was video recorded after a tennis training, while he was taking a shower. He took the mobile phone and smashed it against the wall... The tennis club addressed the situation, the

trainers took the friends aside and dealt with the problem. It was a joke but, c'mon, think a moment, no?

I: I see...

P: And in my school (middle school), I remember a sexy picture had circulated a guy was drunk and sent it around... he had posted it on Facebook... and the girl didn't come to school for a bit... He didn't have much of a reputation after that episode...

I: So, were there repercussions for him, too?

P: Not as much as for the person depicted in the images, but in my opinion, also the one who sends the images around suffers some consequences...

I: So, do you think that both girls and boys do these kind of things?

P: The way they do it is different... with girls, it's more a matter of verbal bullying, with boys it's more likely to be a fight... But it depends also how the picture is taken...

I: Can you elaborate a bit more on the way it depends on how the picture is taken?

P: With boys, if you betray them like that, it's "OK, you are no longer my friend", and the story ends there. With girls it goes on longer, they pull rank maybe it's a longer process, more wearing... maybe it's because girls are more emotional, they think too much about it... whereas a boy solves it straight away, even with a fight...

Besides the obviously stereotypical views on boys and girls, Jack stresses vindictiveness among girls, idealising boys' ability to solve problems with violence as a more efficient solution. The causes of the spreading of the pictures for him mostly have to do with

pranks, jokes or attempts to mock somebody, which can result in bullying, and which are the consequence of lack of awareness.

For Jade instead, it's mostly "peculiar" characters, 16 years old or younger, who enjoy playing such pranks. Such "peculiar" characters also do it as part of the activities of a couple, and she mentioned the Dropbox folder case. She could not explain why, but gossip suggests that girls are more likely to send their own sexualised pictures, to get attention and visibility. She stated:

P: Boys often send the images around to their football mates on a WhatsApp group, often that's how they spread around...

I: I understand... so, a girl sends a sexy picture to a boy and he goes to football training and shows it around...

P: Yes, because boys brag that girls send them these pictures, they must show off... I think there must be some couples that keep stuff to themselves, but some boys feel the need to show that they are almost superior to others because they receive these pictures.

Jade had initially clarified that she does not do such things herself and she sounded quite superior towards the "peculiar" ones who engage in such actions.

These three different ways to make sense of the betrayal of trust involved in spreading sexting without the consent of the people depicted indicate different ways to apprehend something unfamiliar and anchor it to existing conceptions. For instance, Jack made sense of it as a form of bullying, which can be resolved with a saloon-type fistfight. Not only is the betrayal acknowledged, but also the mockery and the humiliation, to which a swift and

decisive action such as that of his friend's brother is the most effective response. Jack being a boy, identified with those acting in such an effective manner. His insistence on awareness sounds more akin to a sort of alert state where you must watch your back at all times.

Josephine, instead, insisted on boys' need to be accepted by the group of peers and engaging in spreading pictures to brag. Thus, for her, the idea of bragging is the anchor that familiarises the unfamiliar phenomenon of sexting. Bragging is a way to attract the attention of peers, which she deemed a symptom of insecurity later in the interview. By highlighting young people's need to be accepted by the group, she positioned herself at the opposite end with those who do not need to brag to be accepted.

Anchoring concepts such as bragging and bullying reconnect sexting to phenomena that were already well known before the advent of the technologies required to send sexualised images and videos. Such activity enables the participants to position themselves against sexting and maintain a positive identity.

A further social representation that was shared about the nature of sexting has been aptly summarised by John. It is more concerning because it summarises the experience of betrayal in the way described at the beginning of this section. It entails a notion of masculine honour and the deprecation of girls who sext:

I: So it's girls who send the pictures, who do they send them to? To everyone?

P: No, to a boy they like or their boyfriend, and then if they break up or she does something she shouldn't have, he then sends the picture around. In the end, most of the time this is how it goes.

I: So, it's a sort of revenge.

P: Well, a revenge, yes. It's a very childish thing to do, in my opinion.

I: It's often the result of a perceived offence though?

P: Yes, because he is a child, yes. It's a very stupid thing. It is useless to humiliate girls so much.

I: What do these girls do to deserve such humiliating treatment?

P: It can be that she cheats on him, according to what I heard.

I: Ok, I understand, so she sends her pictures to her boyfriend, then she cheats on him, or they break up, he takes it badly and he shares the pictures with his friends to humiliate her. And the general reaction of the group is to say that she is to blame because she behaved this way.

P: Exactly...

This social representation connects to the notion of punishment for having disregarded the honour of a boy. John introduces an element that was not brought forth by the other participants, which concerns the inability of boys to cope with emotional hurt and with the perception of being betrayed. John dissociated from such behaviour, indicating that he finds it childish, but he considered it very common.

The image that results from the various social representations participants shared about sexting is of an activity that is well-known for causing problems, negative outcomes and betrayal from which they prefer to keep at a distance, even when they knew about it or participated in it. It is, therefore, apt to question why girls especially, who are said to be more often betrayed in the end, continue to send their pictures to boys. A solution to this

paradoxical behaviour on the part of girls was shared by Joy, the only one among the girls who participated in the research who accorded a tricksterish quality to the behaviour of girls. She was describing ways used by girls to test boys' intentions:

I: Do you have in mind some examples of strategies that girls use to find out if a boy is truly interested?

P: To send a picture might be a bit much, but to behave in a slightly transgressive way to see if the boy falls at their feet, or if he is interested in her behind the fact that he is attracted to her body, that yes, I think it happens.

I: Ok, what do you mean by 'transgressive'?

P: Well, it can be a t-shirt that shows the cleavage

Somehow mirroring boys' bragging, girls attempt to establish the trustworthiness and reliability of boys by displaying sexually provocative behaviour. As such, sexting can also be considered a means to find out whether boys are reliable or not. Somehow, two dynamics stem from the representations shared by the participants. One is about bragging and acquiring popularity in the search for status so well documented by existing research on sexting. The other is about hurt feelings, a sense of honour, dignity and the will to avoid betrayal at all costs. Both dynamics revolve around the reputation of girls, which is disqualified through exposition in both cases. This appears to be the central gender dynamic within sexting and polarises young people into two distinct groups: those seeking status or defending against betrayal, which is more often a role played by boys, and those seeking intimacy and reciprocal trust, which is more often done by girls. The slut-shaming that results from the exposure sees both boys and girls shaming the girl who has sent her sexy pictures around.

According to Josephine, this dynamic is comparable to gossip and backbiting. She describes it in the context of an explanation of the way groups work:

P: I am in a group, which is composed of people who do not care where you come from, what you have done before... but there are other groups where everything you do is very important... it's common among young people... and in the end, gossip is the favourite thing among young people...

I: Is gossip common?

P: Yes, yes, there's gossip everywhere...

I: What is the most common topic for gossip?

P: Girls, they are the favourite topic... among girls it's all a "look at what she did, she gave head to that guy in the bathroom last night". It's the favourite topic, so, in the end those who are less experienced are less likely to end up on everyone's mouth...

The slut-shaming dynamic described by the participants revolves around the notion of being a 'troia', the local slang to describe a girl as a slut. The image that arises is that of the war of Troy<sup>42</sup>, which in the myth was conquered by Sparta after Helen had been abducted by Paris. The pragmatic discursive action performed around this myth is of major relevance: the unreliable and cheating girl is compared not to Helen, but to Troy itself, the hometown of Paris, who had abducted Helen with a deceptive diplomatic move. Fearing having to face competition and betrayal, boys slander girls who bring that upon them. These girls become the battleground itself and it is not a welcomed event, to the point that other girls condemn

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<sup>42</sup> Troia is the Italian translation of Troy.

their behaviour, too. This discursive expedient has been recurrent in the Canton, thus by far preceding the arrival of new digital technologies. The latter simply makes it possible for young people to take a side that is clear and popularised through the new media. The underlying fear is nevertheless more available to us. By demanding pictures as a sort of insurance policy against betrayal, boys attempt to pre-empt a conflict that is much more worrying—the conflict with other boys that could arise from the girl’s untrustworthy behaviour. By emphasising the need to avoid risk-taking behaviours, the authorities align themselves with those who condemn betrayal. Thus, structurally, they fail to dissuade from exposing girls. Furthermore, there does not appear to be any strategy targeting the fear of conflict that sees boys pre-empting it with such dedication. It also appears that the authorities act as bystanders who try to alert girls about the consequences of certain actions but do not offer a shoulder to cry on when they are victimised. A major repercussion of the ‘stranger-danger’ and ‘risk’ discourses adopted by the authorities concerns the emphasis put on maintaining control on the whereabouts of pictures uploaded on the Internet. As for advice in line with common sense, the refrain to keep control colludes with some preoccupations expressed by boys concerning the possibility of being betrayed and the consequent conflict that might erupt. It seems likely that their requests for pictures that are then kept stored on their phones, as described by John, consists in gaining insurance that can be used against the betraying girl.

The position of the victim of such controlling behaviour is described in rather sad terms by Josephine, who told me about events that happened to another girl:

P: I’ve heard the story of this girl, who was said to have been to bed with three guys in one day... She was targeted by slander, her pictures were sent around everywhere, some of the things I heard were crazy... In the



end, I doubted whether to believe those stories or not... I wondered “how is it possible that a girl can do something like that?”... She became marginalised...

I: And what’s the reaction of someone who is marginalised?

P: She got by on her own... I remember a comment on Facebook, kind of “you can say whatever you want about me, I know the truth”... you know, the usual stuff... and she had few friends and she got on like that...

I: I see...

P: Often then anorexia... she became anorexic... she ended up in hospital for months...

An important reflexive aspect concerns the fact that the majority of the participants referred to events they heard of or knew by word of mouth. It often felt as if we were sharing a similar process during the interview. I wondered if this “gossiping” with me had a similar function to the function it has among the group of peers. Namely, I wondered if, by asking them about something intimate such as their knowledge of sexting, I might have somehow reproduced a similar dynamic, where some slandering of others took place to defend against an unwelcome conflict, such as the risk of being seen as a cheat for taking part in the research. While most participants seemed happy to be there, I was nonetheless demanding a certain level of trust on their part. Although I did not brag about the research, participation might have been seen as an enviable opportunity, which was rather exclusive. As such, it might have elicited similar jealousy and envy as sexting does, putting the participants in a rather difficult position, which can be maintained if one has sufficient self-confidence, an element repeatedly touched on by many of the participants. The absence of self-confidence among

young people manifests also with regards to the reasons why social media are more often used to approach others. Peter described this aspect in detail:

I: What impact do new technologies have on the relationships of young people?

P: Well, I think that they bring them closer... 'cause it's easier to approach somebody of the opposite sex via social networks than it is in real life.

I: Does this depend on the context?

P: Yes, but it's always a bit embarrassing to speak to a girl when you like her. On a social media platform, you can tailor your account to feel good about yourself, so it's much easier to accept yourself and you feel less embarrassment.

I: So, a plus side of social media is that they take away some of the initial embarrassment?

P: Yes, but it goes down to the fact that it's not you, it's more your ideal self that you put forward...

Jade shared a very similar perspective when she stated that the way people present themselves on social media is "always a mask". She signalled how disappointing it can be when a real meeting takes place to find out that the person one has had extensive contact with might be different from how they imagined them. Feeling more confident behind a mobile phone, young people might mislead the interlocutor.

Both Peter and Jade stressed how an excessive tidying of one's account profile might generate more misunderstandings than one could expect. Mostly, they said, due to the potential lack of authenticity in the interaction, which might suddenly become disappointing

once people really meet. In the end, they concluded, virtual interactions might actually never result in a real meeting.

Stephanie approached the issue of potential inauthenticity pushing the considerations even further. Many times in her interview, she referred to the notion of “prendersi gioco” of somebody, which can be translated to English as “making a fool of somebody”. Lack of authenticity, for Stephanie, can equate with intentional deception, an element that falls within the scope of action of the trickster archetype, but which might be better considered as anxiety about the intentions of the other. Affectively, the difference between trick and deception is small. It is maybe worth spending some words on it at this point, to further clarify how the use of archetypal amplification works. Whereas Peter might be hinting at a ‘fake it till you make it’ approach in the use of social media profiles to compensate for embarrassment and shyness, Jade and Stephanie are implying less clumsy motives behind people’s tendency to present themselves differently from how they are. Academic literature on the trickster stresses the same distinction between characters often categorised as tricksters (Carroll, 1984). On the one hand, there are clever heroes, such as Robin Hood and Ulysses, who outwit stronger opponents making use of deception; on the other hand, there are buffoons, whose deceptions often backfire. It appears, therefore, that a first polarity can be found in the way teenagers relate to sexting, trust and the use of social media to establish relationships. As indicated in previous chapters, polarities are not only the result of moral regulation but they can be affectively charged in the case of moral panics. There must be caution in referring to the trickster as an archetype: while this thesis has identified a use for it in providing a deeper understanding of the affect that underlies moral panics, the reference to it as a figure relies on cultural artefacts. Tricksters’ tales are part of world folklore and like all tales, they have a pedagogical purpose, a moralising quality of their own. Trust and deception are accounted for

in such literature (*ibid.*) but so is the advice on how to respond to them. This is an element that young people cannot devise on their own.

It appears that young people are ambivalent towards establishing intimate relationships. They fear the possible betrayals while seeking attention (through bragging or attempting to look sexy). The role played by trust and betrayal is deep, to the point of eliciting a peer moral regulation that leads to indignation when a girl somehow betrays a boy or other girls find her behaviour unacceptable. There is an underlying fear of conflict that is elicited by those behaviours deemed morally unacceptable: a fear of entering into conflict with a rival who appropriates the source of status. In this sense, girls who sext are objectified. It appears that the objectification in sexting has to do with dialogue: who is dialoguing with whom? Boys seem to focus on other boys both when they brag and when they betray girls for fear of conflict. It is the fear of conflict with other boys they are experiencing and it is their admiration they want. The girl is collapsed into her image, treated as a status symbol. Girls who condemn the one who engaged in sexting act as bystanders, and just like authorities, they often fail to offer support. Mostly, this seems due to attempts to preserve a positive identity, which requires differentiating, distancing and de-identifying from the girl who is blamed by boys.

It is noticeable that the dynamic so far described is heavily hetero-normative. None of the participants disclosed a gender identity other than cisgender, which was not explicitly addressed, but implicitly assumed to be the norm. Such an element did not prevent transgender elements to come forth, through the use of pictures (they are addressed later in this chapter). It remains to say that the approach taken by the authorities educates young people to concentrate their social representations on the dynamic described in this section. It

is rather disconcerting to observe how narrow is the horizon presented by the participants regarding their gender identity. Their daily interactions mediated by new technologies support such a lack of pluralism. At least in part, this seems connected with the collective rather than individual nature of the dynamics that surround sexting. This is another feature of moral panics: they polarise and reduce individuals to their collective role. The search for status and the fear of betrayal and the related conflict seem to propel a group rather than individual identity, which must be even more polished to approach those who are deemed attractive.

A further, important aspect related to trust and betrayal concerns the structural aftermaths of inappropriate sharing. Stephanie stressed how the community surrounding young people is often unsupportive towards the victims of non-consensual exposure. She insisted that bystanders should be clear about who is making the biggest mistake. While using social media or the Internet to share intimate pictures is certainly risky, it would be important for people to realise that exposure is much worse and unacceptable. I asked:

I: Is there anything that could be done by schools to make young people understand this?

P: I don't know... Because the information that we receive warns us about the issues related to the use of Internet and suggests not sending pictures, but it does not stress that it is wrong to expose those who send them. We should receive more information, besides the risks that there are on the web, but also about the correct behaviour when you receive a picture, so not to circulate it around.

I: So, this is something that could be explained to young people. Do you think this is something that could be said also to younger children?

P: Well... those who expose senders of pictures do it anyway, they know they shouldn't do it...

I: Ok, I see, they are transgressive...

P: Even if they were told not to do it, they would do it anyway. It's bystanders who should act differently because they understand that the exposer is misbehaving.

I: Do you think the media do enough to inform bystanders?

P: No, we only receive information in secondary school. And it is only for young people, not for their parents. Parents should be told, too, so that they can educate their children.

The importance of trust and betrayal in explaining young people's attitude to sexting is central and requires care from the authorities. It would be beneficial for authorities to devise intervention programmes that target the underlying fear expressed by the participants and found to be in the culture of the Canton. Information should tackle the structural unfairness discussed by Stephanie. The superficial engagement with sexting and the merging with the use of web-based technology should not obscure the specific gender dynamic that

results from a moral panic that reinforces the belief that exposing others is an acceptable strategy to be accepted by peers, enhance one's status or simply make fun of others.

Another important theme that somehow connects to elements of lack of self-confidence and fear of betrayal was brought up by some participants to explain why some young people persist in engaging with sexting even if it entails marginalisation, ostracism and exclusion.

### ***6.3 Addiction, dependence and abuse***

The search for appreciation that prompts girls to share their self-produced sexualised images with boys has implications on the repeated engagement with sexting. According to Stephanie, naivety only explains the initial sending of a picture. This suggests that authorities and prevention strategies underestimate the motivation towards sending sexting that can be found in receiving attention, appreciation and validation, although some official messages have already targeted this aspect, such as the controversial one of *Pro Juventute*. The social representations shared by the participants surround the notion of addiction and dependence to make sense of such behaviour.

According to Josephine for instance, girls feel more and more the need to display their bodies. She stated:

P: I don't know... society has changed a lot over the last few years... I'm not the kind to upload pictures of myself in a swimsuit on Facebook, I'm really not like that... If I see a picture like that on somebody else's account I go "but what is she doing?" "why does she need to upload a picture like that?". There's people who upload pictures of themselves wearing underwear... many girls have more and more the need to show

their bodies... generally, also if you go to the city centre, some girls walk around with mini-shorts that show everything, they wear t-shirts that are very low cut. Some are transparent. If you go to the lido, nobody wear normal swimsuits anymore. Everyone is wearing Brazilian ones...

I: Do you think they feel comfortable?

P: The more they show their bodies, better they feel... they feel more accepted because of their physical beauty.

I: Accepted by whom?

P: Everyone...

I: Do you think there are dynamics of jealousy or envy?

P: Probably, those dynamics are always there... If a girl wears a Brazilian swimsuit, there is another one who is jealous and calls her a troia. The most common word is troia...

In a sense, she is suggesting that girls are keen on wearing provocative clothing as a general societal change, and attention-seeking is pervasive in her opinion. Once more, she positions herself at the other end of the spectrum, finding such attention-seeking perplexing but her perception is shared by other participants, too. Joe, for instance, considers the excessive use of social media abusive, an element that Josephine associates with dependence on new technologies and the appreciation that is received through them. She stated:

P: Some people can no longer do without Facebook to check who has put a “like” to their pictures.

I: Is it common? Are there many people like that?



P: Yes, people who never log out of their Instagram or Twitter accounts... now there is also Snapchat. People post, post, post and keep on posting content to check how many followers they have, how many “likes” they receive... They are a bit obsessed, that’s it...

I: Yes, they must interrupt a movie to go check if they received messages on WhatsApp, or something like that...

P: Exactly, like smoking...

She further clarified that smoking, too, is still very common. Thus, she addressed the connection between the search for status and validation and the addiction to social media as a form of abuse.

I: When do these behaviours become abusive?

P: When you can’t live without the technologies... you start for fun then you can no longer give them up... a bit like smoking, really...

I: And what about the dynamic of sexting? Is that abusive?

P: Well, if a person can’t stop sending their pictures...

In Josephine’s account, there seems to be a clear connection between the need for validation, the use of sexualised pictures of oneself and a feeling of obsessive addiction to others’ appreciation. It suggests a ritualised nature of sexting, in the attempt of initiating into more mature relations, but which is jeopardised by the need to boost one’s self-confidence through other people’s approval. Joe shared similar social representations around abusive uses of new technologies. For him, exposure often results from a sort of response to

excessive sharing of one's pictures. Those that are "exaggerating" in presenting themselves on social media in a sexualised manner are exposed and shamed. Thus, the moral regulation operated by young people towards other young people relies on a perception of excess in their behaviour: excessive self-exposure, excessive need for validation, excessive self-obsession.

Concerning sexting specifically, Brian made a direct link between these behaviours and bullying. He stressed the importance of the reactions of other young people in reducing the attractiveness of abusive behaviours that are enforced to gain popularity in a transgressive way.

I: What reaction on the part of peers would help to change the dynamic?

P: To take a stand, to take side with the person who is getting bullied, rather than laughing and encouraging the bully... That would reduce the attractiveness of taking pictures of classmates in the showers to mock them. Of course, if everyone laughs, one feels spurred to continue... if everyone sides with the victim, it's less likely that they feel validated...

Brian's understanding of abuse enables a clear connection between exposure of others and a form of maltreatment. Similarly to what was discussed about trust, he considers those who expose are guilty of bullying and those whose intimate pictures are widely circulated as victims. This aspect falls within the scope of what literature has already acknowledged concerning the abusive features of sexting (Rignrose et al. 2012). However, the abuse does not seem to require explicit coercion. The way the exposure of girls' intimate pictures might constitute a form of abuse has been described in the previous section when addressing the underlying issues with trust and betrayal, therefore, it is not repeated here. Suffice to say that

the participants acknowledge it as such and in some cases explicitly demand a change of culture to redress the unfair treatment of some girls by some boys.

Also from the angle of addiction, dependence and co-dependence, the dynamic of sexting, when non-consensual, often results in abuse. Either because it carries a feeling of excess, or because it does not respect the will of a young person, the way new technologies are used to send sexting brings about numerous abusive behaviours, ranging from self-abuse to taking pictures of others without their agreement, to sending sexy pictures to a third party, consent seems a key concept in connection to these behaviours. Jade explained why girls are shamed despite engaging consensually in sexting, when their activities are deemed excessive:

I: How does abuse happen in sexting?

P: It can be an abuse of one's own privacy... and then an abuse of power on the part of those who share the pictures with others...

For some, consent is a straightforward, clear-cut concept, which requires no more than implicit yet obvious evidence to know how to behave. For Joe, for instance, 15- and 16-year-olds know perfectly well that it is not acceptable to send a girl's picture to a third party.

I: How would you understand consent in such a case?

P: It's implicit... if she sent a picture to one guy, he knows she doesn't want other people to see it, otherwise she would have sent it to other people herself...

For Bill, consent is a more mysterious concept, which he approached almost like a mathematical problem. Somehow, he equated displays of nudity with consent to share one's image.

I: How would you define consent? We have said that once they are online, there is no longer control of the images. How does it work with consent?

P: I don't know, if, if... I don't know.

I: It's a bit difficult, isn't it? It's a problem...

P: Yes, it is difficult. (*long pause*). But I think that if somebody goes around looking like that (*indicates 50 Cent, with the upper body naked, in one of the images used for the interviews*), there is no problem, the person should be ok about being seen like that.

I: Do you think that there is any difference for men and women?

P: In my opinion there isn't.

I: So, a man goes around with his upper body naked, a woman goes around with her upper body naked, and both are implicitly consenting for their image to be shared online?

P: If she goes around like that she should know that pictures could circulate, and if she doesn't want it, she should go around more dressed.

His reasoning is slightly confusing because he assumes a similar cultural norm for nudity, when in fact men have always shown their torso in public places, which has never been the case for women. To assume that because somebody is naked, that means they are okay with being seen by third parties betrays a lack of clear boundaries about such gender

norms. Like Bill, many young people struggle to understand the implicit nature of consent described by Joe. The ease with which images can be shared on social media does certainly not help in clarifying their confusion. In a sense, Bill's position is "if you show it, it means you want it to be seen by everyone". Quite concrete, this perspective collapses consent into a masculine perspective, where it is allowed to display nudity explicitly and ignores its meaning for women. While authorities somehow make clear that spreading images of other people without consent is unacceptable, having made it illegal, the prevention messages reaching young people do not seem to tackle the core issue that pertains to different perspectives of different sexes and genders regarding the outcomes of displaying one's own naked body. They ignore the moral regulation that has developed over centuries and respond to the panic with unfair norms, to use Stephanie's expression. Brian, for instance, acknowledged that sending pictures around is illegal, but it took him a good while during the interview to conceive of the possibility that also young people can play a role in dissuading from abusing sexting (as described in a previous quote). Thus, it is proper to ask whether legislating against abusive behaviours is sufficient or if official strategies could also educate about the culture that maintains abuse in place. Some participants, such as Stephanie, explicitly endorse such educational measures at the media level.

In conclusion to this section, the word 'abuse' seems to elicit two major subthemes for participants. On the one hand, they reflect the ideas of excess, of self-abuse through behaviours such as the sharing of intimate pictures and selfies, which should be avoided. On the other, they recognise the pain of being exposed and publicly shamed for doing so. A key notion for young people in the age group of the participants of this study is the notion of consent. It appears confusing when it is not fully grasped and accommodated in one's mind. The interviews carried out in Canton Ticino have the merit of shedding light on the plurality

of ways sexting is understood as abusive by 16-year-olds. Unlike the authorities that provide information on the correct use of the web, teenagers do not seem to think that technologies are the only culprit, but that users must conduct themselves respectfully by not exposing, bullying or spreading intimate pictures of others.

A further major theme that runs through those that have already been discussed concerns the body. A central feature of both sexting and the broader culture that surrounds celebrities, the body features prominently in teenagers' everyday life.

#### ***6.4 The body, sculpture and social status***

Reference to the body was made both in relation to the phenomenon of sexting itself and when discussing the images. It has central importance because it is a means to obtain attention, thus rewarding the (apparent) self-esteem of the individual, but it is also used to discredit, as we have seen in previous sections. Social representations concerning this aspect regard its use in advertising, its sexualisation to gain approval, its elimination further to public humiliation and its fragmentation to avoid being recognised. All these aspects concentrate on ideas of the body as an element that must be regulated, controlled, and compared to social standards to provide a positive identity to the person. None of the participants identified with such a perspective, yet they were all keen to describe the common representations that they encountered among peers. Possibly, the fact that the participants were all attending high school might play a role in the rather moralistic tone of some responses. Participants might have felt the need to present themselves as responsible, wise and mature to differentiate themselves from peers of age attending instead professional schools, which, in the class system of the Canton, are considered "easier" options from an intellectual point of view.

The element of status did not surface often in an explicit case, but it somehow relates to the notion of the body when approached from the perspective of a sort of *body politic*<sup>43</sup>.

As high school students, participants might regard themselves as a “body politic” compared to younger children in secondary school, those in professional training and those among their acquaintances who dare to transgress the boundaries of their moral compass. As such, some of them took a position opposed to those who exhibit their bodies through sexting.

For Jenni, the age of those engaging in sexualised activities online has dropped. She reported her memories of being in secondary school and realising that her classmates were all connected on social media from the second year onwards.

P: I remember that when I was in secondary school I realised that my classmates were all on Facebook, they all had mobile phones. Whereas now, I see the classmates of my little brothers in primary school, they all have mobile phones and many already watched pornography.

I: So, in a sense you perceived a lowering of the age of access to new technologies?

P: Yes, and of access to pornographic materials... sometimes images pop up inadvertently, because a child is looking for something on the net and an image of a naked woman pops up... Then, I've also noticed that they know plenty of vulgar words already in primary school. I'm always

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<sup>43</sup> By body politic, the idea intended here is that ‘a state, society, or church and its institutions are conceived of as a (usually human) body. As it is usually applied, the metaphor implies hierarchical leadership and a division of labour and it carries a strong autocratic or monarchical connotation’ (Rollo-Koster, Encyclopedia Britannica online: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/body-politic>). The use of this metaphor to illustrate teenagers’ attitude towards their peers illustrates the corporative nature of their identification with a specific group and the aristocratic pretension to a certain level of sovereignty. They consider themselves a separate **entity** compared to others, who, unlike them, take pictures of their bodies.

astonished when my little brother speaks like that, I didn't know words like those until I attended the third year of secondary school.

Jenni's perception was shared by most participants, such as Jack, who also stressed how children already have access to new technological devices connected to the Internet in primary school. Often, he said, parents give such devices to their children to maintain direct communication with them, in what feels like an attempt to control their whereabouts. Thus, the participants positioned themselves as different from those who are now growing up with such technologies. Jenni further stated also that she expected sexting to be much more common in other environments than high school:

P: I have never heard of girls I know being involved. Sometimes the boys make some comments, but I've never known of actual episodes taking place here. Maybe in other schools, in other environments such images can circulate more...

I: Other schools?

P: Depending on who you hang out with, but here in high school we are all interested in learning, in sports... whereas I remember when I was in secondary school, those who had no interests were those that used to get involved with this kind of stuff...

It appears that high school students as a body prefer locating sexting and consumption of sexualised images outside the walls of their schools.

The body however was also at the forefront of the representations of sexting for what concerns its aesthetics. Bill, for instance, expressed admiration for the body of 50 Cent, after looking at his picture among the other images. He stated "what a body!" when he saw the



picture, which indicated some level of longing for the muscles of the celebrity. He added that 50 Cent can perform shirtless because “he is well-hung”, suggesting that a muscly torso gives some entitlements to men.

The appreciation for the aesthetics does not, therefore, seem to be related only to female bodies, an element confirmed also by Josephine, who stated:

P: At the moment there is this thing of Herbalife, they are all obsessed with muscles, tight t-shirts... in the end, they are not that different from girls...

A further way the body is central to the dynamic of sexting is in the way victims of slut-shaming react by nullifying their own bodies. Either by self-harming, as described in a previous quote where anorexia was mentioned or by hiding from social interaction, victims seem to attack their own bodies somehow. More than once, participants mentioned cases where the girl who had been slut-shamed failed to return to school for a period after the exposure. Joe clarified that he would expect the return to school to be hard for a girl after such an experience.

P: Well, I think she would be uncomfortable coming back to school after having been humiliated.

I: Do you think the boy who exposed her feels the same?

P: No, he would behave as nothing had happened.

This perspective was shared by Stephanie, who emphasised how boys behave normally even when a disciplinary action is taken to punish them for having sent around

pictures without the consent of the person depicted. She clarified it when I asked her about the possible outcomes of sexting.

I: What happens to boys when they are suspended from school once they come back?

P: Nothing. I remember it happened here in high school. A guy got a suspension for three days because he had sent around a picture of a girl. He stayed home for three days but then he was back and behaved as nothing had happened, laughing and kidding with his friends.

It appears, therefore, that the two sexes are constructed very differently around the body, both for what concerns the value of nudity and shame and humiliation. Girls' bodies are approached with much more ambivalence and their aesthetic value is standardised against the amount of attention and validation a boy receives by bragging about it. Boys' bodies, instead are constructed as something that must be displayed, pumped up, exhibited. In a sense, the construction is diametrically opposed.

Interestingly, one of the girls spontaneously reported an experience with sexting. Josephine told me at the very beginning of the interview that she had experienced unwanted exposure after her ex-boyfriend had shared one of her pictures with his friends while out drinking. They were both 15 at that time. Her case is relevant because her experience generated some difficulties for her in relation to her body. I decided to report some reflections on her interview specifically because I believe it is paradigmatic of some of the struggles girls must face when engaging with sexting. It illustrates the impact of the moral regulation operated by young people themselves and by the official discourses.

The emotional tone of the interview was excited. I often felt I was sharing intimate information with a very close friend. In my countertransference, I might have tried to control the stream of information just as she was trying to work out whether she could share her experiences with me. Having experienced betrayal in the past, such a task must have been difficult for her. She must have felt ambivalent, wishing, on the one hand, to be heard while discussing something that must have made her feel vulnerable and, on the other hand, working out whether or not I was trustworthy enough to do so. This dynamic is particularly evident at the beginning of our interaction when we were working out whether we could sustain our encounter. Paradoxically, I, who had never engaged in sexting, ended up explaining to Josephine the definition of sexting, when in fact she had reported her ex-boyfriend to the authorities for sharing one of her pictures with his mates. The following quote illustrates such a paradoxical situation:

I: What do you think is ‘sexting’?

P: The approach with... with sex, yes, yes... ehm, how sex is related to young people, I don’t know...

I: OK, ... to young people?

P: Not only young people, more in general, all people.

I: Ok, practically it’s the sharing of sexualised images or texts through new technological devices.

P: Ah, Ok, perfect...

I: So... (*interruption*)

P: I understand, yes...

Josephine's reaction to my pseudo-authoritative definition is interesting. She said "Ah, Ok, perfect..." as if she had been checking that we were talking about the same thing. I interpreted this as a need on her part to share the same experience, to make sure that we both meant the same when we were sharing it. Both of us had to be on the same page for Josephine to feel comfortable. Retrospectively I realised that my need to 'control' the interaction relaxed her—I, too, had 'shared' too much!

When asked to narrate the story in one of the images (the *Rape of the Sabine Women*), Josephine identified a series of elements coherent with the meaning of the image: physical distress, suffering, grieving. However, she 'misread' some of them as signs of a loving relationship: "Her man holds her, and there's another man who does not want to look... maybe both men are in love with her, but one has prevailed...". Such a gap between her ability to read the emotional tone of the image and the failure to correctly contextualise the very same emotions alerted me about a possible personal association, which was clarified through our further conversation. Josephine felt the image was about a tragic passion, differing quite substantially from sexting. She stated that sexting is "much more vulgar" and she further associated passion with drama and art. These were all elements that she opposed to the vulgarity of sexting. She said:

P: An artistic image, a nude sculpture in my opinion is not vulgar, it's art. A nude of a woman which is not a sculpture, nor a painting, just a picture is vulgar in my opinion...

I interpreted Josephine's attitude towards the image of the *Rape of the Sabine Women* as ambivalent and led by difficulty in relating to her sexting behaviour. A similar gap between her correct understanding and the misleading contextual reading was replicated when we discussed the process of production of sexualised images. I had asked her who she thought might have produced similar statues to the one depicting the *Rape of the Sabine Women*. She correctly described the process of production: a renowned artist would be commissioned to produce the work of art by wealthy patrons, who would then exhibit the piece to reaffirm their status within society: "Well... it's a bit like... to decorate a wall or hang a painting to show their wealth... to show off...". I then asked her if she thought something similar happens in sexting. She concurred that also in sexting there is a similar attempt at reaffirming one's status, yet she did not think that wealth is the factor exhibited in sexting. The body, rather than wealth, is the pivotal element. Josephine insisted on this element: the body is the currency, the current status symbol. What remains unclear in her perspective concerns the role of the producer. Just as she had omitted the violence in the *Rape of the Sabine Women*, she omitted to consider the objectification of female bodies in sexting operated by producers of pictures.

These incoherencies led me to think about the temporal aspect that I had inserted in the conversation using the selected images. Some of them were contemporary, but some, such as the one used with Josephine, depict historical artwork. I wondered if what Josephine was trying to point at had to do with her discomfort towards her own sexualised images. She had made them in the past, she had shared them with a boy that she expected to be loyal and faithful, who instead betrayed her by objectifying her naked image which got shown to his friends. Furthermore, she interpreted contemporary images depicting bodies as vulgar. If her

images were to be judged according to her own standards, she would have to admit that her sexted images are vulgar.

Yet, having made them in the past, they were associated with artistic endeavours resulting in an objectification that she struggled to accept. I wondered if Josephine was facing an impasse, whereby she was torn between accepting having done something vulgar, despite her authentic search for intimacy and the true feelings of passion that had motivated sexting to her boyfriend, and the distancing from a past when she could still believe that patriarchy was supportive of women's agency. Both the *Rape of the Sabine Women's* negative aspects and her dismissal of the heteronormative role of the producer in sexting were unspeakable for her. If my reflection is correct, for Josephine the major issue at stake was to find a way to attribute positive connotations to the naked female body while recognising agency in such a display of nudity.

Only a long time after the interview I realised that she had somehow managed to achieve this during the interview itself. I had asked all participants to choose a name to use in published materials and conference talks. I had explained that I could not use their actual names to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, but I also wanted them to enjoy a bit of creativity by picking their favourite fictitious name. All of them, except Josephine, had picked an English name, in line with the TV culture of the Canton, where most kids watch American TV series crowded with names like Nick, Joe, Kelly and Ann. I had found it curious that she had gone for Josephine, a rather frivolous French name. She did not mention why, it had sounded like a spontaneous touch of colour, a bit of humour after a rather serious chat.

Months later, it occurred to me that one of the pictures I had shown her, before asking her to comment on the *Rape of the Sabine Women*, was of Josephine Baker. We had not discussed it, she had just asked what that was about and I had simply said that Baker had been a very famous actress and performer in France during the 20s and 30s. Somehow that image must have been retained sufficiently by Josephine to provide her with a role model. Baker's picture depicts her with a naked breast and displayed her elegant and ironic persona. It displays a naked female body that is not vulgar, nor objectified by men. Ironic enough to make fun of her African origins with her banana belt, mocking colonialist representations of African women, elegant enough to be artistic, Baker had definitively helped Josephine out of her impasse.

In a sense, the disembodiment resulting from the exposure can be counteracted through reinforcing cultural role models that subvert the rather worrying culture that developed around the use of new technologies in sexting.

The impact of the moralisation of sexting on Josephine's sense of bodily self is quite intense and she must have felt bad about herself as a consequence of it. It seems, therefore, important not to overlook the impact it might have on other young people. Appreciation for aesthetics was expressed in relation to the notion of the body, but it was also expressed when commenting on the images. Meant as a reflexive task, the artistic nature of the images I showed participants was initially of no interest to me. However, somehow, it appealed to many of the participants, who tried to categorise sexting as different from artistic depiction.

### ***6.5 Art versus sexting-as-not-art***

For many participants, just like Josephine, the distinction made between art and sexting-as-not-art was made when commenting on the images. While for her, similarly to

Wolfthal (1999), it was clear that it is the process of generating an image that makes sexting and art similar, other participants refused to acknowledge any similarity between sexting and the sexualised images that were used during the interviews.

Some, like Bill and Jack, saw similarities only between sexting and the pictures of Miley Cyrus and 50 Cent because of the type of nudity depicted, the style of the image and their contemporary nature. For Jack, art is distinct from sexting. He explained himself by grouping the pictures according to the relationship he saw with sexting. He grouped the images of *Narcissus*, *Pan and the Nymph* and the *Rape of the Sabine Women's* sculpture and stated convincingly:

P: I've decided to put these three together because in my opinion these three are just art and nothing else. Knowing the Greeks a little, nudity was almost a "must", practically all statues were nudes. This one (*Narcissus*), I don't know the context. The context makes a lot of difference. Say for instance a puritan person, if they go to a museum and they see Greek statues without knowing the context, probably they'd get scandalised.

Thus, for Jack, nudity is acceptable (i.e. not scandalous) depending on the context of production of the artwork and the gaze of the viewer. Somehow, he misses the point that similar reasoning might apply to sexting. Namely, the vulgarity of an image might depend on knowledge of the context in which it was made and on the degree of puritanism of the viewer.

Bill was, instead, more categorical. Only images made with new technologies can be compared to sexting, those made in the past are different. I asked him to think about connecting the images in front of him to sexting.



I: If you were to choose among these images, which ones would you connect to sexting? What do they have in common? You can move them, take them to look at them closely...

P: In the end, just these two (*Miley Cyrus* and *50 Cent*). These ones (*all other images*) seem more like art pieces to me. In the Renaissance they used to depict a lot of naked characters, from what I remember from art history class... and even thinking about new technologies, just these two (*Miley Cyrus* and *50 Cent*).

I: So, these two are made with new technologies, which are a very new thing, so the images that are made with them are a bit new, a bit different from art?

P: Yes, yes, exactly.

I: Why?

P: I don't know, but there's always been nudes in art

I: And taking a picture of oneself isn't the same...

P: In my opinion, no.

I: Why? How would you differentiate a selfie from an artwork?

P: It takes time to make artworks, a picture can be taken in 2 seconds... you can take 50 or 100 in a very short time... Instead with art, you must stay there, a painter must be making it, it costs much more money and it has a purpose, like for decoration, instead if you send a selfie to somebody, they won't hang it in their rooms...

I: OK, I see... in a sense the relation between who watches the selfie or the artwork and who produces it is a bit different?

P: Yes

It is, therefore, clear that not all participants situate sexting in the relationships that frame its production. Marius, for instance, also excluded similarities with the contemporary images that might have been used for advertising campaigns. He considered sexting a personal exchange, thus with less mediatisation and visibility than pictures used in advertising. Jonas stressed differences based on the contemporary nature of the images sent via new technologies.

I: Do you think these images have something in common with sexting? Or are there differences?

P: I'd say these (*contemporary pictures*), rather than these (*older images*), to show what one likes... to make examples...

I: Why not these ones (*older images*)?

P: Because most people would understand the message with these pictures (*contemporary pictures*), but not with these ones (*older images*)... Like in this one (*Josephine Baker*) her breast is uncovered, but you must look closely to notice...

I: OK, I see... basically they are too discreet...

P: Indeed, yes.

However, even when initially rejected, a connection to sexting was often found when commenting on the one picture I indicated to them for the focused interview. Jonas himself,

commenting on the image of Narcissus, previously dismissed as unrelated to sexting for its lack of explicit sexualised content, found a rather strong connection.

I: Can you think of any element in common between this image and sexting?

P: Maybe the fact of checking out one's image to see how others see you maybe a girl takes pictures of herself because she doesn't like herself much, and she wants to keep track of changes and then some friends steal her phone and they send her pictures around...

Joe instead realised that the picture of Josephine Baker could easily have been used to advertise her show, which he considered somehow similar to teenagers' search for validation through sexy selfies, albeit with some differences, such as the professional nature of Baker's picture, as opposed to the more amateur production of young people.

Overall, most participants remained concentrated on the content of the images, rather than contextualise their production to the point that I had to ask them directly "who do you think produced such an image?" and "who would have commissioned an image like that?" Of all interviewees, once more it was Josephine who found the best formulation to contextualise sexting within the long tradition of sexualised images produced all around the world. She had just explained that in the past, sexualised images might have been displayed on the walls of a wealthy or aristocratic person's house to reaffirm the wealthy social status.

I: Do you think that it is possible to say that the meaning of sexualised images is still similar nowadays?

P: Yes, it's similar... back then they'd display wealth, nowadays we no longer display money, but something else...

I: What would that be?

P: The body.

I: I see...

P: We are surrounded by bodies, human perfection, stuff like that... also, think about models that do the catwalk... we are always trying to show our bodies more and more, we are always trying to reach that perfection but there is a very high rate of obesity, but there are no pictures of them on Facebook... It's beautiful girls that show their bodies...

In her opinion, the body, as seen in the previous section, is not only a major theme in sexting but the central currency in contemporary society that can reaffirm and illustrate one's social status and power.

A further difference between some of the images used in the task and sexting was acknowledged by Stephanie when she discussed the number of people depicted in either type of image. She stated:

P: This one and this one (*indicating images with just one subject*) are pictures that it's easy to make by yourself and send around.

I: I see, because sexting is self-produced it does not depict a group, but just one person...

P: Yes, I don't think people send around pictures of groups...

The element of individuality suggests a relatively narrow definition of sexting, which legally concerns any sexualised picture that is sent to another, including pornographic images. For Stephanie, sexting has a crafty character, an independent quality. I wondered if she was uncomfortable discussing the topic of sexualised imagery and if she was making a distinction between artistic imagery depicting groups of people and individual self-produced sexting to accommodate such embarrassment. Having stressed the importance of individual choices previously in her interview, it is appropriate to wonder if she was ‘isolating’ sexting as a responsibility: if you end up seen as sexy, it is because of your own choice!

Thus, overall, the way participants engaged with the images had quite a bit to do with the major preoccupations that they felt concerning sexting. Either explicated in terms of admiration towards some much-coveted bodily shapes (e.g. the muscles for boys), or by projecting some elements on specific pictures while idealising others as more paradigmatic of sexting (e.g. Miley Cyrus), all participants struggled to engage with the images at a more phenomenological level. Josephine was the only one who properly contextualised them, and this opens up a question regarding the possible implications of having had direct experience of sexting on the ability to engage one’s reflexive considerations.

Through the discussion of the images with the participants, I came to reflect on my choice of showing them those images instead of others. I felt I had relied heavily on classical depictions, which were often deemed artistic by the participants. I wondered if, by presenting them with such images, I might have done something akin to what was done in the Renaissance by aristocrats and wealthy merchants: reaffirm my status in front of the participants by showing them some sexualised scenes. The next section discusses this reflexive element.

### ***6.6 A reflexive note on Classicism and the Renaissance***

The Western nature of the images I had chosen to present to the participants is very obvious. The preoccupation with avoiding unethical materials on the one hand, and the need to use images participants could easily relate to on the other, reduced the options to rather mainstream images, possibly already encountered by the participants. The other criterion that was used concerns the need to guarantee a certain plurality of meanings behind the general category of ‘sexualised image’ to allow for a broad definition. The general idea was to break with stereotypes that tend to reduce the definition of ‘sexualised image’ to pornography and obscenity in the hope that the participants could somehow relate their knowledge of ‘sexting’ to a similarly pluralistic multiplicity of meanings. Somehow this was achieved, as discussed in the previous section.

While there was no intention for the images to offer any subliminal or influential element, a balance was found between the suggestion of sexualised themes and the evidence of some sexualised elements (naked breasts, allusive clothing, a joint in the mouth of a sailor to remind of homosexuality, etc). To ensure each image would be carefully studied by the participants, only nine were finally included, with some motifs from different cultures and depicting individuals of various ethnicities. Thus, my reflexive task had started as an effort to guarantee a degree of inclusion and variety in the materials that I planned to show to the participants.

Upon further scrutiny of the images, however, I came to realise that they could easily be separated into two groups. One includes the more ‘classic’ images, whether of Greek or Roman mythological motifs or the Indian Kama Sutra. The other mainly depicts members of the show business industry. Images taken from movies and pictures of singers were selected

to appeal to the young participants. Unconsciously though, I must have drawn a parallel between the two mythologies. The first one is pluralistic because of the variety of scenes depicted—a rape, an attempted one, a celebration, an ironic depiction of female genitals, etc. The second is more monothematic. It mostly shows one individual either on stage or staging a pose. The variety is not circumstantial, but rather, featured by the characteristics of the bodies and the clothing of the individuals themselves. Their ethnicity, style and identities provide the plurality required to challenge the monotone obscenity of the imagined sexted images produced and shared by young people.

Classicism is often regarded as an artistic period that emphasises harmony and a sense of proportion as a canon of artistic production. It intrigues me to consider the possible impact that my choice of images might have had on the participants: was I somehow putting under their noses the obvious attempt at sculpting statuesque bodies that both boys and girls are so often engaged with nowadays? Was I somehow suggesting that their search for muscled role models among rappers, such as 50 Cent, or sexually explicit female performers, such as Miley Cyrus, resonates with a search for a ‘classical’ body? Retrospectively, this was confirmed by some of the considerations made by the participants. Bill, a rather smart boy, who did not want to admit having taken part in exchanges of sexualised images, admired the picture of 50 Cent for a long time during the interview before admitting that “with a body like that, you can proudly go around half-naked”.

A further and more concerning reflection relates to rape and rape culture. According to Wolfthal (1999), during the Italian Renaissance, classical and mythological images of rape were centre stage in the bedrooms of wealthy merchants and aristocrats. They were also often displayed in the privacy of their homes, for guests to witness their status. By focusing the

attention of the participants on contemporary statuesque bodies, I might have reaffirmed that classical standards of beauty must be abided by. To say it with Moscovici, I might have failed to break the analogy and failed to bring all participants on to analytical thinking.

These reflexive considerations end the summary of the findings and lead to the discussion, which reconnects the social representations of sexting shared by the participants to the psychosocial approach that informed the research project.



## Chapter 7

### *Discussion*

This chapter discusses the findings within the theoretical framework adopted by this thesis. First, it briefly describes the Jungian approach to myth, then illustrates how the specific psychosocial method adopted here modifies this approach. Myth carries archetypal materials or those images that are affectively charged in a given culture. To fully grasp the affective charge that young people project onto sexting, it is necessary to describe the images that arise from the findings. Two images<sup>44</sup>, in the Jungian sense, are discussed to identify elements that should be taken into account by the official discourses, the prevention strategies and the educational interventions carried out with young people around sexting, which were appraised in Chapter 6. Then, existing intervention strategies based on the resolution of archetypal affect stemming from conflict are illustrated to show the difference between the approach in current use by authorities and a new way that interventions could be set up in light of this research.

This chapter makes use of the Jungian technique of amplification, already briefly introduced in Chapters 1 and 3. This technique has received considerable attention within Jungian literature (McCoy Brooks, 2013; Cambray, 2001; Spencer, 1984; Russack, 1984; Hubback, 1984; Hobson, 1971) and constitute the major intervention of this thesis. It entails referring to myths, legends, fairy tales or historical events and symbols to clarify and broaden an archetypal theme (Samuels, Shorter and Plaut, 1986: 16). It often uses connections of personal imagery (for instance, those found in dreams) with collective, metaphorical contents

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<sup>44</sup> Often confused with the notion of symbol, an image, for Jung meant 'a condensed expression of the psychic situation as a whole'. (Samuels, Shorter and Plaut, 1986: 72) Thus, it gives shape to archetypes, including their opposite poles and the possibility to develop a symbolic understanding as opposed to a concrete one.

in the therapeutic context. But it has been used also to comment on social phenomena (see for example Zoja, 2010).

The use of amplification can contribute to the interpretation of social representations in the context of moral panics because it fosters the withdrawal of projections based on the strong affect that results from the moralisation of certain behaviours. Thus, it is said to foster the transcendent function that enables a new attitude to crystallise towards a given issue. Chapter 6 has illustrated how participants deal with the moral panic that surrounds sexting and their use of new technologies by splitting their Self into polarised categories defined around gender (girls initiate sexting, boys seek to ensure loyalty by controlling the access to the self-produced pictures). Which psychological images are elicited by their polarisation? The following amplification discusses those that I experience as most appropriate to summarise the conflicting psychological opposites that are elicited by sexting.

In a sense, the reader will realise, we are now resuming what was just introduced in Chapter 1. There, I amplified the figure of the trickster based on existing literature on sexting. In Chapter 2, I then highlighted issues that are intrinsic to the academic literature, which justifies the specific methodology adopted to interview teenagers. The amplification had to be left to one side to deal with such intrinsic issues. The limits of a classic Jungian approach were then addressed and the specification of a methodology that allows for a reflexive approach to be deployed was discussed. Once more, amplification had to wait. What follows here is not an amplification based on summarising a piece of literature, but on first-hand data collected through interviews. It differs quite substantially from what was anticipated in Chapter 1 as it is based on the revised methodological approach.

### ***7.1 Myth in psychosocial research and Jungian and post-Jungian psychology***

According to Segal (cited in Walker, 2002), for Jung, myth's main function is compensatory. In Jung's perspective, says Segal, "myths serve to raise to consciousness heretofore untended aspects of the societal and individual personality and thereby to promote balance of wholeness" (ibid: 20). Myths are, in Jungian terms, cultural elaborations of those archetypal motifs that are conveyed from the collective, psychoid unconscious. Unlike Freud, who understood myths as forms of fantasy connecting the pleasure and reality principles, thus deriving from consciousness (Csapo, 2005), Jung considered them expressions of archetypal motifs of the collective unconscious. As such, myths of different cultures contain elements that transcend the boundaries of specific cultural identities and appeal to every human being (Walker, 2002). However, warns Walker, the connection between the spontaneous representation of instinct to a culturally elaborated narrative is not explicitly theorised in Jung's writing (ibid: 106). This process seems to account for a conscious creative effort, aimed at transforming into culturally relevant narratives images that carry a collective archetypal meaning. Furthermore, according to Walker, it is in the correspondences between the individual's dream and fantasy motifs and the world of mythology that the specific Jungian analysis of myth finds its *raison d'être*. Therefore, 'public and intrapsychic worlds meet at the point where human imagination creates myths and symbols that correspond both to social needs for harmony and to individual needs for growth and imagination' (ibid: 410). Resorting to myths can, therefore, enable objectification of an intra-psychic constellation of archetypal affects that is somehow problematic for the individual or a social group. Complex formation and moral panic have already been discussed in Chapter 4, however, it is worth remembering here how conflicts between the archetypal (intended here as the vector of strong affect) and the social often depend on historical and political factors. Furthermore, the moral panic on sexting might indicate a social conflict about the control of technologies, as it

is illustrated in the findings by the behaviour of boys who feel caught up in warfare when girls “misbehave”.

Furthermore, Jung’s specific approach to myth diverges from that of other non-psychoanalytic theoreticians. Such approaches to myth have different focuses. Some approaches, such as that of James Frazer, are interested in the underlying subjects of myths. For the author of *The Golden Bough*, myths mostly account for the natural cycle of death and rebirth of vegetation. Other theories instead focus on myths’ origins or functions. According to Segal (1998), Jung’s approach covers the three aspects. While he recognises the parallels between physical and natural processes and the death and rebirth of the ego, he does not consider one the cause of the other. Jung excludes the possibility that the human mind could have logically developed the idea of the existence of a god to account for natural phenomena after observing them. For him, this is too great a gap for human imagination. Humans, says Jung, cannot but imagine what they already know in another form (*ibid.*). He rejects the allegorical origin of myth, or its ‘explanatory’ value. A symbolic reading is necessary, for Jung sees the myth as being about the human mind, rather than about gods or nature.

For the psychosocial approach of social representations theory instead, myth is understood as ‘concrete systems of representations’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1964 cited in Jodelet and Coelho Parades, 2010). By pulling together the imaginary and social representations, myths can be located in the social and historical context of their production (Jodelet, cited in Jodelet and Coelho Parades, 2010). Similarly to social representations, Moscovici (1961/2008) thought that myth also had a function of orientation within pre-industrial societies, enabling individuals to situate themselves and to make understandable the unknown. He saw myth as a progenitor of social representations, upon which social representations develop. Nonetheless, he also stressed some differences. Chiefly, within contemporary society, which is fragmented and where social classes benefit from a certain mobility, social representations have become heterogenic. Furthermore, scientific experiences contribute to defining reality providing more

certainty than myth does. Later on, in the second edition of *Psychoanalysis, its image and its public*, published in 1976, Moscovici operated a more drastic distinction between myth and social representations. He took notice of the prejudices associated with the word ‘myth’. For instance, in expressions such as ‘the myth of progress’, ‘the myth of equality’ or ‘the myth of womanhood’. Such prejudices are not associated with the notion of social representation. They are often used to disqualify opinions and attitudes of a given group, by claiming that they are irrational. Indeed, Jodelet (ibid.) says that the notion of myth is associated with an archaic and primitive<sup>45</sup> way of thinking and being in the world. Social representations instead are normal, common ways of thinking, different from the sophisticated way of thinking of logicians and “primitives” alike. Furthermore, in our contemporary culture, each social representation has a relative, local and circumscribed value, with a plurality of other sources providing counter-information and meaning. Science, for instance, often clashes with commonsense views. Consequently, Moscovici (1976: 42) stated:

to identify myth and social representation, to transfer psychical and sociological proprieties of the first onto the second in a simplistic manner, signifies satisfying ourselves with metaphors, with spurious rapprochements where it is instead necessary to clearly grasp an essential aspect of reality. Such easy rapprochements often have the purpose of disqualify our common sense by showing its inferior quality, its irrationality and limitations; this way myth is not really raised to its genuine dignity.

Thus, for Jodelet (cited in Jodelet and Coehlo Parades, 2010: 49), it is important to focus on the cognitive (and thus, epistemological) construction of myths to recuperate a clearer connection with social representations. This way, myth is seen as ‘a variable system, linked to natural, mental and social contexts, susceptible to changes and adjustments to social modifications or even to disappear in the case of social crisis’. In a sense, myth (or social representations), when approached from this perspective, becomes a translation of the

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<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 3 for a discussion of some of these issues in relation to Jung’s views.

contradictions experienced in the world, yet, as clarified in Chapter 4, too much attention paid to changing images might lose sight of the affect that underlies their creation in a given society and context. Nonetheless, Jodelet (*ibid.*) suggests that only some social representations make reference to myths, building upon some themes that are more clearly relatable to pre-industrialised societies.

Examining different publications that discuss “wild” femininity in relation to the myth of the wolf, Jodelet reviews Pinkola Estés’ 1992 *Women who run with the wolves: myths and stories of the wild woman archetype*, Misha Defonseca’s 1997 *Misha: a mémoire of the holocaust years*, Hélène Grimaud’s 2003 *Wild harmonies* and Hélène Cixous’ 2002 *L’amour du loup et autres remords*.

All books build a wild feminine starting from the myth of the wolf. Given the positive and negative symbolic values associated with the wolf, it is an apt vehicle for the construction of a new mythology. Jodelet points out how Estés’ Jungian premise leads her to claim a similarity between a specific aspect of femininity and the wolf because both have an instinctive nature that has been suffocated through the moral social construction that, for centuries, has denied both beings the space that it is necessary now to reallocate to them. She further points out how social representations become vehicles for the mythicalisation of “wild” femininity in connection with feminism, through the publications of books such as those reviewed, which appropriate “wild” femininity and turn it into a collective matter. This is achieved by employing some of the relations of transformation described by Lévi Strauss with the relation between women and wolves. Inversion is particularly employed by the four authors where the ‘*homo homini lupis*’ sees the wolf becoming an ally of women. Jodelet (*ibid.*: 86) concludes:

A symbolic figure, the wolf, is chosen in a specific historical context, to construct a vision of the mythified woman in wild nature, producing social representations of the temperament and behaviours specific to women.

Jodelet further claims that the relation of such myth-making on the part of the four authors signals a cultural shift in feminism, which first employed the witch as a core myth and is now focusing on the wolf. From a myth of resistance to a social order and institutions such as the Church, states Jodelet, to a myth with a more individualistic nature, namely the wolf. The way women are represented shifts according to the socio-political context in which they live.

It is instructive to analyse the findings gathered about sexting using Jodelet's analysis of the social representations that develop around a myth. Not only can the mythological elements that were brought forth by the participants be easily connected with warfare, but they are likely to signal some cultural change further to the introduction of new technologies among under-18s. Rather than a disappearance of childhood caused by its sexualisation, the myths that are conveyed through the social representations discussed in Chapter 6 signal a shift from one type of childhood onto another. It will become clear later which shape this shift has taken, but it seems to revolve around the presence of two myths: the myth of Pan, manifesting in the risk discourse, the fears of predatory relations carried out via new technologies, and the myth of Ulysses, the trickster who defeated Troy with a deceptive move. These two figures are archetypes for Jung, archetypal images for Hillman, and myths carried by a complex set of social representations for Jodelet. They are charged with an affect that is archetypal for us, based on the psychosocial approach adopted in Chapter 4. A brief description of each is made with connections to the socio-cultural context where the interviews took place.

## *7.2 The myths behind the social representations of sexting*

It is well-known that Jung, in the alchemical metaphor, referred to Mercurius as a metaphor for the analytical process due to the metal's connective value (Jung, 1943/1967). Mercurius, it is worth remembering, is the Roman name for Hermès, god of commerce, and communication. Messenger of the gods, Hermès is often on the road, connecting the various members of Olympus with their business. Both trickster figures, these mythological characters are representations of archetypal motifs that concern liminality. Well known is Paul Radin's study of the Trickster's cycle of the Winnebago Indians, which introduced anthropological discussion to Jung's initial identification of common characteristics shared by the trickster and the carnival (Jung, 1956/2003: 195). The reason why trickster figures are discussed in relation to teenagers' sexting accounts for the invitation to change perspective on boys and girls' interactions stated in Chapter 1. The theme of liminality and other features of the trickster figure manifests in the myth adopted by Ticinese's youth to construct their representations of sexting. It concerns the warfare that is set in place when a girl 'misbehaves' and boys retaliate. It takes the shape of Ulysses' tricks to defeat Troy and attests to the difficult nature of trust and betrayal in young people's relationships mediated by new technologies (a Trojan horse by *antonomasia*).

The other mythical figure that is evoked throughout the interview materials and the official and media texts is that of the Greek god Pan. Also, the participants refer to Pan, when they express a lack of knowledge, moral panics and othering of some individuals to differentiate themselves. Papadopoulos's discussion of panic and terrorism after 9/11 (2006) provides a starting point to relate moral panic to the myth of Pan. Indeed, the Jungian and post-Jungian contribution to psychosocial research requires one to focus attention on those "stories of archetypal encounters" (Samuels, Shorter and Plaut, 1986), which illustrate archetypal motifs.



According to Papadopoulos, intrinsic to the notion of terrorism is the notion of panic, and with it ‘a clear division between ‘us’ and ‘them’, friends and enemies, black and white, right and left’ (ibid: 92). Such a division pertains to a polarisation that does not allow differentiation: like the random target, equally undifferentiated are the terrorists, who act as ‘one man’ with complete dedication to the cause. Papadopoulos connects this polarisation with the original meaning of panic, pertaining to the god Pan. The Arcadian god was associated with war, when he would take the side of one contender and instigate terror, panic and confusion in the enemy. This splitting quality of Pan is then counterbalanced by a unifying quality, which he dedicated to his territory, Arcadia (Pan as the god of flocks and nature). Within his territory, there was a totalising harmony.

It is easy to identify major features of the moral panic concept developed by new deviancy theorists. Cohesion and division co-exist within a single image. Pan was also known for attempting to rape nymphs; indeed, he was also a god of fertility. The image of *Pan and Syrinx* by Peter Paul Rubens (1620) (*Image 1*), where the god chases the nymph to rape her summarises the major fears surrounding young people’s use of new technologies. There is something predatory yet lonely in this image that adapts well to the idea of the lone ‘predator’ lurking in the shadow of the web, cut off from human relationships; the perfect ‘other’. Why is ‘Pan chasing a nymph’ a better image to describe the panic over



*Image 1*

teenagers’ behaviours, rather than any other of the numerous rapes carried out by Greek gods? I contend that the reason lies in the major association, present in the myth of Pan, between rape and invasion. For example, Pan, or rather, his Latin alter ego Fauno, was very much present during the arrival of Aeneas on the shores of the river Tiber where he was

welcomed by Evandro. The latter was Pan himself, and took Aeneas' side in the war that gave birth to the foundation of Lavinium, the first settlement of Rome (Grimal, 1990).

Pan's raping is consequently not characterised by the 'cheap sexuality' of Hermès and his 'love by chance', where nymphs and goddesses are seduced into superficial, short-lived sexual encounters (López-Pedraza, 1989), but by the fight for supremacy over a territory that is yet to be colonised (the pure nature of the virgin nymph). In this sense, the Roman foundational episode of *The Rape of the Sabine Women* is a prototype of Pan's rape: a foreign male invader who kidnaps a woman belonging to another man (the father or the husband), threatening the identity of the community. Rape is, in this case, indeed the matter of objectification. The interaction, so to speak, is between the two males: the invader and the original 'owner'. The woman has no say; her role is confined to that of a classic Jungian anima, bridging the divide by intermission (the Sabine women are said to have pleaded for the Romans' life, once the conflict between the two factions openly exploded). Moral panics, with their exclusivist and drastic boundaries, indicate clear role divisions also concerning gender, as it was discussed in Chapter 4 and illustrated in Chapter 6 regarding the way participants account for sexting as a clear, gendered dynamic. The polarisation of boys into control and status seekers versus girls as temptresses and victims of humiliating exposures is rather clearly a result of the failure to acknowledge the underlying issues with lack of trust and self-confidence on the part of adults.

Furthermore, according to Sukey Fontelieu, author of a thesis on American exceptionalism and terrorism (2018), Pan's myth does not limit itself to the panic and fear generated in those he pursues. It also involves loyalty to friends and redemptive acts when something goes wrong. His compulsive, single-minded pursuit of sex, which is destructive of innocence, quietens into the music of his solitary pipes, and rests under the bushes of Arcadia, when he sleeps in the early hours of the afternoon (Grimal, 1990). For Fontelieu (2018), this

paradoxical nature of Pan, where compulsion and withdrawn quiet coexist, indicates a paralysis and an incapacity to take initiative towards contemporary problems (ibid: 25). Furthermore, Pan's attachment to his idyllic Arcadian territory, which burns under the light of the sun, enables a clear connection between innocence and a well-defined, bordered national identity.

Suspending easy comparisons with teenagers' innocence and with the World Wide Web as the latest frontier, it is important to connect the mythological image of Pan in his contagious, invasive aspect and its sexual undertones with the current socio-political Swiss context dominated by the Swiss People's Party. As it is shown later in this chapter, fear of crime, immigration and fear of child abuse are all intertwined in the party's political message.

Carrying on within a moral panic logic in society's pedagogical messages is likely to further increase the risk for teenagers to get caught in negative projections. Such projections are likely to identify teenagers with offenders, discriminated into two 'others' depending on their biological sex and equally scapegoated, as shown in Chapter 4. It is worth remembering the similar half-goat nature of Pan and Azazel, the divinity presiding over the celebration of the scapegoat ritual. To him was sent one of the two scapegoats, left to wander in the desert until he met his death.

The paralysis towards the contemporary problems associated with Pan, which is highlighted by Fontelieu in her thesis, is instead absent from the many stories on trickster figures. Indeed Ulysses finds the solution to the impasse that sees Sparta and Troy face each other with equal force. Not only are trickster figures an ever-active principle, but for them, boundaries have relative value. Indeed, these figures are boundary-crossers that carry the

potential for connection. This function is well expressed by Hermès who carries messages around ancient Greece.

Jung, in *The spirit Mercurius*, notes how alchemists wished to keep the metal sealed and safely stored, to get back to it and transform it; ‘a real trickster who drove the alchemist to despair’, due to its elusive nature, the metal easily evaporated (Jung, 1943/1967, para. 251). Moreover, Jung stresses the connection of the alchemic metal with spirit, thus presiding over wind and with a volatile nature (ibid, para. 255), all the while emphasising its ‘many-sided, changeable, and deceitful’ qualities (ibid: 267). Duplicity, says Jung, is its most evident characteristic, often defining him as hermaphroditic (ibid: 268), and thus making this archetypal motif coincide with ‘the psychological concept of the self’ (ibid: 268). Complex characters, trickster figures, are, in fact, good and bad, mischievous and friendly, prone to pranks and a ‘Stupid Hans’. The archetypal motif is identifiable not only in personifications such as divinities but also in those feast and theatrical plays that involve some form of subversion of the established status quo, as discussed in Chapter 1. Says Jung (cited in Radin, 1956: 200), in his commentary to Paul Radin’s study on the Winnebago Trickster’s cycle:

In picaresque tales, in carnivals and revels, in sacred and magical rites, in man’s religious fears and exaltations, this phantom of the trickster haunts the mythology of all ages, sometimes in quite unmistakable form, sometimes in strangely modulated guise

Many reasons lead me to think that this motif is at work in sexting. For instance, teenagers’ behaviours mostly take place in social contexts (school, after-class courses, youth clubs, etc.) where the atmosphere is often one of play. Though they are expected to comply with good manners, it often appears not to be the case. Their interactions are, to some extent, immersed in a carnival atmosphere (Presdee, 2000) much more than hoped for by serious

teachers. Much can be said of teenagers, but certainly not that they miss out on occasions for humorous pranks and laughs.

Due to duplicity, trickster figures are also criminal. Consider Hermès, who stole his brother Apollo's cattle soon after being born: a well-conceived plan, which set Apollo to rage. Or the Winnebago's trickster who, in the first tale of the cycle, prepares to go on to warpath although it is strictly forbidden to him in his role as chief. Tricksters transgress and subvert established moral and legal canons. They do not do it with ill intentions; it is just in their nature to do so. Under this aspect too, the Trickster is an apt metaphor of teenagers' boundary-less, transgressive behaviours. The list could continue, each feature of the trickster's archetypal figure could easily be applied to the attempts of teenagers to gain status in their group of peers, or to play pranks on their friends and classmates.

Ulysses is a specific trickster figure, distinct from others for his strategic deceptive qualities and human (as opposed to divine) nature. His patron deity is Athena, goddess of metis, the cunning quality displayed by Ulysses, rather than Hermes, god of commerce. However, stresses Russo (2006, in Young, Eisendrath and Dawson), Ulysses is said to descend from Hermes in the 19<sup>th</sup> book of the *Odyssey*. This author suggests that the archaic folk tradition that preceded Homer's *Odyssey* would have understood Hermes to be the divine patron of Ulysses. But, says Russo (ibid: 251),

... in the creation of heroic epic poetry to be sung at a royal court, new paradigms were needed that embodied the more dignified ethos that went with the Trojan War legends and their claims to ground the present in a glorious past, and so to ground present-day heroes in prestigious divine lineages and connect them with divine protectors. Thus, Odysseus lost his special connection to his great-grandfather Hermes, the god of tricky inventiveness, and gained in his place, as a kind of foster parent, Athena the "good" goddess of civilizing intelligence.

Thus, it is appropriate to wonder if something similar happens in young people's subjectivation and social representations, i.e. a move into a more heroic, yet deceptive, but less liminal attitude.

A major shift that can be observed in young people's tricksterish attitude concerns the shift from the silliness and boundary-crossing attitude displayed when they play pranks on each other, for instance when stealing a classmate's mobile phone or when taking pictures in the gym changing room, onto the more strategic deception operated towards girls who send their sexy selfies to a boy, hoping for some reciprocity. It appears that couple relationships bring such shift along, in the representations shared by the participants. The context of the myth shifts, too. From a carnival to the Trojan shores, young people's social representations point towards the fear of being separated from family (in the *Odyssey*, Ulysses wonders before reaching Ithaca), of being catapulted into a conflict they distance themselves from (the 'troia' is the other, not them), reluctant to compete with their peers for the same girl. New technologies bring these fears to the forefront of their experience, because of the constant anxiety they perceive, the refrain heard from school, police and prevention messages that they must protect themselves. In this bleak panorama of mistrust and strategic deceptions, girls seem to have a little part to play. They try to break through the limitations with attempts at finding out if they can trust boys, giving them pictures but often suffering ostracism as a consequence. Their myth is secondary, in their accounts, to that of boys, who are proactively grafting their experiences of sexting onto a millenary tradition of narratives aimed at promoting their individuation when conflict dominates, the future is uncertain and their friendships are changing. Girls seem to have two strategies available: either to take a risk by

sending a picture, which often backfires or to keep a low profile, to avoid “taking privacy away from themselves”, as Jade aptly described during her interview.

The latter element describes the ambivalence of new technologies for girls: they enable and repress them at the same time. Jade’s brief quote also reminds us of the Christian notion of chastity, as defined by St. Augustine, who employed it to define a Christian version of rape (Thompson, 2004).

### ***7.3 Privacy, chastity and the Athenian law of hubris***

Whereas in ancient Rome, rape was regulated through the notion of *stuprum*, which consisted in illicit sexual acts, soiling the honour of the family, but with no acknowledgement of the will of the victim (victims were routinely punished along with the perpetrators), for St. Augustine, in Christianity, rape did not soil the victim if she has maintained her chastity (ibid.). Further to the 410 C.E. mass rape of nuns during the Gothic sack of Rome, St. Augustine aimed at clarifying the notion of chastity to ensure their virtue would be preserved. He achieved such a shift in defining rape through the commentary of the rape of Lucretia, a Roman noblewoman whose rape can be understood as political, in the period that preceded the establishment of the Roman republic.

St. Augustine shifts the honour-based definition of *stuprum*, which concerned external reality, into an internal, guilt-based notion. The victim’s Christian chastity is violated, rather than her physical purity. Besides the surviving issues involved in contemporary rape legislation, where the will of the victim is often put in question, making physical evidence insufficient to deliberate, it appears that in the context of sexting, privacy assumes a similar role to chastity in the value judgment concerning a girl’s internal guilt. It appears, therefore, that by associating privacy with chastity, young people themselves are abiding by rather

hubristic views of abuse. Further reinforced by the authorities' support for a similar logic, victims of exposure have, like Tiziana Cantone, in some cases opted for Lucretia's sort: taking their own lives.

Thus, it appears that sexting entails numerous elements of rape and rape culture, which authorities should take seriously and address with prevention strategies more adequate in holding the perpetrators responsible, rather than enabling the surfacing of old cultural standards that criminal justice has partially outmoded. Victims of sexual abuse already suffer the shame, dishonour and attack on their integrity that goes with the political significance of rape, so it would appear essential not to foster misconceptions concerning their will alongside them.

By the political significance of rape I mean the implications it carries, either in its physical reality or in its cultural manifestation, of the shaming and dishonouring that are still experienced by those who suffer it. It is easier to grasp this element through the notion of the Athenian Law of Hubris, where humiliation was used to shame the victim of sexual violence when the law was violated through sexual assault, theft of sacred or public property, violence and battery. Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric*, clarified that such treatment was aimed at gratifying the perpetrator, not to seek revenge, a misconception that is often applied to the non-consensual sharing of sexting. Gratification is instead obtained through feeling superior by ill-treating others.

According to Button (2011: 306), hubris 'not only offends against the equal legal and moral standing of others, but threatens the political domain more broadly by eliding plurality and undermining the conditions necessary for deliberation, good counsel, and shared political judgment'. This author not only stresses the political relevance of hubris as a mechanism



regulating access to decision-making, but also its connection to tyranny stemming from ‘political-psychological conditions that produce a will to mastery and domination’ (ibid: 306) in a form of anti-politics. Button further argues that hubris constitutes a danger for societies that value moral equality and freedom because it fosters the rejection of equality under the law, enforces monologism (or domination of one voice, one will, one modality of reason) and elevates loyalty over the civic and ethical conditions necessary for democracy. It positions the tyrant (or hubristic leader) in a power relation where he seeks to consolidate its sovereignty all while he fears losing it. Fear, says Button, ‘lies at the heart of the hubristic in power—in particular the fear of a relative loss of social and political standing, or power’ (ibid: 306).

To understand how hubris applies to sexual abuse, Cohen (1991) discusses the fact that most Athenian examples of sexual conduct violating the law of hubris ‘involve conduct that enhances one’s own position at the expense of another’s honour and reputation’ (ibid: 8). Thus, sexual abuse is a means to obtain a certain type of status, which resides in the humiliation and the shaming of another person. As such, the variant of sexting that is perpetrated as a reaction to a perceived attack on a boy’s honour, is a manifestation of hubris, an attempt at maintaining the social status acquired within the group of peers. An interesting element of hubris is the political relevance of this type of status-seeking behaviour. As suggested by Button (2011), anti-politics is based on claims of superiority that require the degradation of others, humiliation and shaming. Such features figure prominently in the political discourses of populist parties, for example, when culminating with the election in the US of Donald Trump, whose lack of condemnation of white supremacy might be understood as a manifestation of hubristic principles behind his political choices. In

Switzerland, the Swiss People's Party has often promoted hubristic discourses over the last 30 years.

#### 7.4 Hubris and Swiss politics: the political implications of teenage sexting



(Image 2)

Notorious for promoting its positions with visual materials that include controversial images such as the 2006 campaign against the authorisation to build minarets in Helvetic territory (*Image 2*), the SPP became a leading political contender under the lead of Christoph Blocher, an industrialist. From 1990 onwards, Blocher introduced a neoliberal ideology thus far extraneous to a conservative party that was originally the party of farmers and blue-collar workers. Among the SPP's strategies, the repeated use of the popular initiative<sup>46</sup> has been the most efficient in raising the electorate's support for its candidates. Critics have pointed out the populist and demagogic nature of most Popular's Initiatives promoted



A further,

(Image 3)

by the SPP, whose greater concerns include mass immigration, abuse of asylum rights, imported criminality and loss of traditional Swiss values, coupled with a strong anti-European attitude. A further, important aspect of the SPP's agenda regards the focus on sexual offending. The 2007 'Initiative for the extradition of criminal foreigners' was supported by posters showing messages such as 'Ivan S.<sup>47</sup> rapist and soon-to-be Swiss citizen?' (*Image 3*).

<sup>46</sup> The Popular's Initiative is a direct democracy tool. Swiss citizens can promote a change to the Constitution by raising 100,000 signatures. The Initiative is then examined by the Federal Assembly, which issues a counter-proposal. Citizens are then called on to vote. For further details: <https://www.admin.ch/ch/e/pore/index3.html>

Support for anti-child abuse initiatives conceived by other groups such as *Marche Blanche*, is also often generously provided by the SPP. For example, in 2004, members of the party joined the committee that promoted the initiative against the prescription of offences involving child pornography<sup>48</sup>. The initiative was strongly criticised by the Government and other anti-abuse organisations for technical legal considerations concerning the impact of such modifications to the Constitution. It is worth stressing a similar attitude pertains towards immigrants, criminals and sex offenders. The types of policies and intervention promoted are usually punitive and repressive. Increasing restrictions to freedoms such as free circulation (the Schengen agreements have been strongly criticised by the SPP on numerous occasions<sup>49</sup>), and greater support for the penal system to deal with social problems are paradoxically coupled with neoliberal positions that oppose increasing welfare measures, or the support of rights such as maternity leave, or to a basic income.

The specific nature of the Swiss political process (based on a direct democratic system) supports previous considerations concerning the impact of moral panics and fears of contagion that dominate the discourse about childhood and sexuality. The Swiss system is, by definition, likely to mirror panics, fears and prejudices in the results of the vote, given that decisions are taken directly by citizens, not by the parliament. Furthermore, the SPP often employs strategies that denigrate those whose morally reprehensible behaviour it targets. Rising fears among citizens and deprecating immigrants and asylum seekers, by associating them with sex offenders seem to go hand in hand in defining a specific hubris that pivots on

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<sup>47</sup> The name Ivan is widespread among men of Balkan origins. A large immigration from that area in the 90s brought to Switzerland the second wave of migrants (the first wave in the 60s and 70s saw Italians move north of the Alps to work).

<sup>48</sup> See [http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/cold-case\\_child-abusers-face-life-long-prosecution/34557754](http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/cold-case_child-abusers-face-life-long-prosecution/34557754) for further details. Last visited on 1st August 2015.

<sup>49</sup> See <http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/people-s-party-to-target-schengen-membership/28953914> for further details. Last visited on 1st August 2015.

nationalistic sentiment. It is, perhaps, unsurprising to spot a similar strategy in use among those teenagers who want to acquire a more prominent position within their peer group. However, according to the interviewees, such activity is often the result of insecurity, rather than self-confidence.

In a sense, it could be argued that the abusive element in sexting is on a continuum with more harmless and transgressive behaviours that do not entail the same level of humiliation and shaming, but which fall into hubristic logic when the fear of conflict with peers is elicited by a perceived betrayal on the part of girls. As this discussion illustrates, the behaviours of boys are far from new in Western history and revert to a moral regulation of sexuality that sees citizenship as something based on social status. The social representations that derive from this representational activity based on the myths of Pan and Ulysses turn hubris into a matter of self-protection from the possible betrayal they might suffer at the hands of girls. Whereas mostly understood by existing literature as a disregard of the principle of consent and autonomy, it is apparent that confidentiality is also disregarded. Privacy, and its resonance with chastity, stands out instead as the fundamental value to protect. It is, of course, one's own privacy that is defended, not the privacy of others, whose right to confidentiality is not achieved reflexively due to a lack of reciprocity. It appears that promoting greater empathy and reciprocity is an essential task for educational strategies that aim at tackling the harmful consequences of sexting.

### ***7.5 Images, reflection and reflexivity***

The way participants related to the visual materials used in the interviews is also paradigmatic of the level of reflection and reflexivity they are encouraged to adopt in their dealings with the imaginary. Many among them were unable to contextualise the self-

production of sexualised images in a long history of production, consumption and ownership of such images but some were, instead, able to relate to the images enough to establish a connection between them and sexting. The lack of similar reflexive tasks in their education and daily life is likely to account for the struggles some of them experienced in positioning young people's use of new technologies for sexualised exchanges. However, increasing activities such as the one adopted for this research might support the development of a more relational approach to the use of new technologies. The use of images enables the elicitation of certain emotions. Jack, for instance, identified an emotion of disgust when commenting on the statue of the *Rape of the Sabine Women*. Josephine thought about a tragic romance, finding the image "sad", "passionate" and "tragic". These emotions enabled a more personal, experiential investment in the images, which reduced, particularly in the case of Jack, the anxiety about "getting it right" and the reliance on preconceived information, fostering a more creative use of knowledge, which was used in a more imprecise manner<sup>50</sup> but supported a more reflexive engagement with sexting. While more intuitive and less systematic than fully structured reflexivity, they were able to reflect on young people's relations to sexualised images and new technologies in a way that made them realise some of the implications of exposure.

However, an element that transpired just in little glimpses concerns the development of social representations that might be able to foster a different role for girls, both in terms of sexual victimisation and gender plurality. From Joy's timid suggestion that girls might be testing boys' trustworthiness when sending them sexy selfies to Josephine's reporting of her ex-boyfriend to the authorities, a glimpse of trickster elements can be inferred. These might be the sketches of a feminine way to navigate the complex relations with new technologies,

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<sup>50</sup> Both participants made reference to their knowledge of art history. Jack mentioned the statuary of ancient Greece, Josephine the sculptors of the Renaissance.

where girls must develop the nose to spot boys that are more reliable, less frightened by conflict and capable of some level of intimacy.

### ***7.6 The female Trickster and girls' resistance***

According to Tannen (2007), the postmodern period has seen the birth of new trickster figures. For a long time segregated in world literature to a supporting role, female trickster figures have become more and more visible in films, fiction and generally in Western culture. This author discusses various such characters: the protagonists of *Sex and the City*, some famous private detectives, such as V.I. Warshawski, played by Kathleen Turner in a Hollywood movie, etc. Tannen (ibid: 170-71) concludes that,

... the female trickster, whether embodied fictionally as sleuth, cyborg or time-travelling feminist, are messengers charged with informing the collective consciousness about how identity and subjectivity can be constructed in postmodernity.

The major change that seems to follow the increasing visibility of the female Trickster concerns the refusal to be a victim, an increasing presence in the public arena, and fundamentally, a humorous attitude that competes with that of more traditional male trickster figures.

A more equal identity is possible whenever both sexes are acknowledged as proceeding on the path to individuation, which this archetypal motif also presides (Jung, 1967, para. 284), individuation that is rather full of mistakes, which can nonetheless be constructive. After all, Trickster figures comprise a motif that, it is said, "makes this world" (Hyde, 1998) by coordinating their fragmented aspects in an increasingly consistent self.

Tannen's work is important because it attests to the impact of historical, social and political changes on the increasing possibility to play new roles by different groups of people, whose identity has, for a long time, been associated with their biological characteristics. The current moral panic about teenagers' online security seems similarly caused by socio-political changes. Teenagers, and girls in particular, participate in this trickster's game, which somehow challenges the status quo by subverting the logic of the panic, producing sexualised images that honour the most political meaning ever associated with the word 'pornography'. Indeed, girls resist surveillance by exposing the un-exposable, and they solicit action from their often distracted parents, who are incapable of addressing the problem. The ability Josephine demonstrated to relate to a role model (i.e. Josephine Baker) through a reflexive activity with the images indicates a possible line of action. The latter should seek to promote role models, whose images sit on the impasses young girls experience. Such impasses concern the way sexting shames their bodies, splits their souls into acceptable and unacceptable traits. A promotion of suitable role models such as Josephine Baker might enable them to develop the self-confidence they so clearly require to navigate the rather masculine world of new technologies.

Role models, unfortunately, are often understood as a good opportunity to promote values best exemplified by the temperance movement, and for this reason, the purpose of role models should be reconsidered by authorities. Rather than emphasising only the morally irreprehensible aspects of personalities called upon to play such roles, authorities and education strategies would obtain better results if they identified those characters capable of capturing and turning into a strength those features that young people experience as conflicting. The often despised tendency of young people to adopt the rather unpleasant characteristics of favourite musicians and idols can be understood as an attempt to engage

with the function of the role model, which is not valorised in contemporary society, where risk prevention discourses have taken centre stage in education practices. Re-establishing a practice of engaging with notions such as affective conflict and individuation could help young people to experience new technologies in a less threatening way.

It would be fitting to support girls in this direction, by promoting effective role models. However, more research is needed to establish if the use of visual materials can be extended into an intervention strategy. It appears that the opportunity for reflexive thinking that is offered by such use of images requires more preparation of young people. This research demonstrates that, despite their superficial first reaction which often entails reflections that are disconnected from the deeper relational possibilities, young people are available to develop through this kind of work.

Post-Jungian education approaches are said to foster the creative use of imagination as a reflective element (Jones, Clarkson, Congram and Stratton, 2008). For instance, in *mythodrama*, an approach devised to help schools tackle various types of conflict and issues, which often see young people involved in some type of violence (Guggenbühl, 2008, in Jones et al.), participants are asked to imagine the end of a story or a myth. The purpose is to enable the young person to access a creative resolution of those conflicts that are summarised by the myths and stories employed in the intervention. The approach is similar to that adopted in this research presenting a visual task to the participants where they were asked to explain what they think is happening in and around the images. However, unlike *mythodrama*, the visual task was performed in an hour, without preparation and alongside questions on other aspects of sexting. Thus, it is relevant to question, had a more structured approach been devised, whether this greater preparation would have enabled participants to invest more imagination in relating to the images. Josephine, whose involvement with the task was rather



reflexive, shared her experiences as well as her opinions on sexting, making it much easier to engage my countertransference. Furthermore, possibly because of her experiences, she also made the most of the task by identifying a suitable role model. With other participants, it was impossible to access such an experiential level, which was to be expected given that the sample was selected from a population of second-year high school students, rather than from a population who had already engaged in sexting. Thus, an important distinction to make in reflecting on the use of such visual and imaginative tasks concerns the need to acknowledge the degree of exposure to the target phenomena and the level of experience of the participants.

Guggenbühl's *mythodrama* follows a very thoughtful set of stages when engaging participants (Guggenbühl, 1992), which enables them to enter a more imaginative state. Whereas *mythodrama* has a therapeutic aim, the adaptation of a similar approach to primary research needs to balance the psychological aspects involved with the setting, the time available and the age group with which the research is carried out. However, a similar gradual engagement of participants might be advisable in a future iteration, considering the relative heterogeneity of the results obtained in this research.

Overall, the findings indicate that sexting generates conflicting affective states for teenagers, who experience a high degree of anxiety, fear and fascination at the same time. The strategies adopted by the authorities tend to support fears and anxieties about external threats, rather than tackle the fears about separating from peers to venture into the world of adult relationships. Furthermore, they often reinforce attitudes and behaviours that are defensive and maintain the problem rather than address it. The overriding need is to develop self-confidence that is shared by the participants which suggests that trust and self-confidence should be programmatically fostered by authorities. Furthermore, the social

representations developed by young people about sexting suggest a connection with the political climate of Switzerland. This has manifested some hubristic tendencies in the form of a moral regulation that supports the onset of moral panics against immigrants, sex offenders and others who are deemed 'non-Swiss' by associating them with harmful behaviours and abusive intentions.

The general outcome of the research is, however, twofold. On the one hand, it demonstrates that the moral panic on sexting is affecting young people, particularly regarding their gender dynamics, which become polarised and often abusive. On the other, it shows that a methodology that accepts how knowledge circulates according to SRT and introduces a Jungian focus on the underlying affective tone conveyed through social representations can lead to uncovering solutions to the anxieties and fears of teenagers. Self-confidence, which is different from gullibility, enables self-reliance and separateness. It should be pursued by educators instead of moral panics. Self-confidence, when acquired as in the case of Josephine, is the best defence against further abuse. It gives young people the resilience not to give in to bullying and the ability to confide in others who are reliable.

The concluding chapter summarises the major elements that are addressed in this thesis and points out some limitations to inform recommendations for future research and for educational strategies and interventions that are more attuned to young people's conflicts, affective states and needs.

## Chapter 8

### *Conclusion*

#### *Limitations, Reflection and Recommendations*

This research approached a contemporary social phenomenon in a psychosocial way, by questioning the reflexive meaning of sexting for teenagers, their understanding of possible instances of abuse and the broader context that surrounds it. It adopted a new theoretical and methodological approach, based on a critical appraisal of Jungian and post-Jungian sociological literature and the introduction of social representation theory to analyse the findings. Such a marriage is far from straightforward given the important critiques Serge Moscovici makes of Jung's (1959) *Flying saucers: A modern myth of things seen in the skies*. The novel approach abandons Jung's critique of scientific rationalism, manifesting through a "rupture of time", entailing a psychological superiority of so-called "primitive" people due to their religious capacity for analogic thinking. On the contrary, with Moscovici's development of the concept of social representations as an extension and improvement of Durkheim's collective representations, it is possible to maintain a connection with analogic thinking through everyday life's intersubjective social representations that are co-constructed in society to orientate and make sense of unknown phenomena by connecting them to already known ones. Jungian and post-Jungian psychology contribute knowledge and insight on the projection of affective states into such representations, by paying particular attention to myths. Therefore, the use of transference and countertransference during the interviews to

isolate and explore affective states informed an important element of the reflexive positioning I took. This supported the major reflexive activity of this project in which the research participants were asked to reflexively engage with some images articulating connections to sexting.

It turned out that a central problem in sexting consists in the very widespread practice of betraying the confidentiality of female peers, either to play a prank or to humiliate them after a perceived attack on a boy's honour, which is deemed abusive by participants. This phenomenon has been identified in previous research (Ringrose et al., 2012), but has never been systematically shown and understood as an issue stemming from problems with trust and self-confidence. Coercion was instead the major issue at stake for Ringrose and colleagues. Often manifesting as a humiliating appraisal of girls' bodies, even in cases when they do not suffer more serious consequences, such as anorexia or self-seclusion, they might struggle to maintain a positive psychological attitude towards their bodies because of the moral regulation that deems sexting 'vulgar', as shown by the reflections on Josephine's perspective and thoughts about sexting, the body and artistic versus non-artistic images.

The body plays a major role in sexting, having become the conveyor of status, being sculpted and exhibited to gain notoriety and approval. It must follow clear aesthetic prescriptions, be displayed while maintaining privacy, or it is shamed and humiliated with a local version of slut-shaming ('troia') that, with a metonymy, connects to the myth of the War of Troy. Pointing to the underlying affective conflict experienced by young people, this myth is discussed with regards to another myth, that of the Greek god Pan, which is instead more visible in the official discourses on sexting.

The first objective of the research consisted in exploring the similarities and differences between various types of sexualised images—including pornographic images,

advertising, and historical depictions of transgressive sexualised behaviours. It was achieved by discussing a selection of images with the participants. This task illustrated the various degrees of understanding of sexting as a practice that is either disconnected from the history of sexual imagery or positioned within it, as Josephine and Jack did. The sexual element present in all images was not always acknowledged, particularly by those among the participants who failed to locate sexting within a long history of sexual imagery. The engagement with images is difficult for teenagers, who often feel the need to distance themselves from aspects of sexualised imagery that they consider challenging (e.g. vulgarity, lack of muscles, lack of privacy, etc.). All these challenges reflect the moral regulation of what can be shared and what cannot, what is obscene and what is presentable.

The second objective of the research concerned exploring teenagers' reflections concerning the analogies between their self-produced sexualised images and mainstream sexualised images. The identification of analogies proved difficult for most participants, signalling the need for a more refined method of investigation. Some focused on the poses, some on the degree of nudity present in the images. Many failed to contextualise the practice of sexting in a similar process of production and consumption of sexualised images. Reflexive engagement with the idea of making images, producing and watching are often collapsed in a fixation on the content of the images, in a polarisation that opposes art to sexting. For many, this split is the only way to keep the anxiety provoked by acknowledging a personal sexualisation under check.

The third objective focused on teenagers' understanding of the notions of social status, harm, and abuse in gender-based relationships, in the specific cultural context of southern Switzerland. It was addressed by identifying the hubristic dynamic that can stem from

sexting. This finding, discussed at length above, helps frame teenagers' needs in terms of education. The connections between sexualised images and abusive behaviours made by the participants range from considerations about the deceitful character of boys' tendency not to respect confidentiality, overlooking the absence of consent to share images of girls to the idea of addictive behaviour as a form of self-abuse. These elements all indicate problems with trust and self-confidence, as discussed previously.

To conclude this summary of the major outcomes of the research, it must be stressed that the major intervention promoted by this study consists in approaching a topic that is often a site of moral panic at the collective level with a focus on identifying the underlying affective tone that must be relied on to move out of the panic and promote a healthier culture towards sexting among teenagers, for teenagers and for those who are interested in their development. Despite Jung's over-reliance on essentialist notions such as that of instinct to ground his notion of archetype, he identified a method to overcome the splits that are generated in people's souls when moral regulation becomes aggressive, repressive and threatening to one sense of self and position within a group. The departure from a scientific foundation for the theory of archetypes and the move onto an epistemology that supports a more reflexive (thus positional and engaged) sociological basis has enabled a focus on the affective tone that is elicited by moral panics as a collective, social event. This is a promising move, which anchors the collective unconscious, which is perceived through affect, in social interaction. The use of amplification in Chapter 7 was meant to join the dots by putting images (intended as Jung did) on the affect. The result is an invitation for educators to pay more attention to support self-confidence to reduce the abuse of girls' trust.

The following section addresses some limitations of the research project, and it is followed by some recommendations for future research. A reflexive appraisal of the process of researching and writing this thesis then follows, concluding the report.

### ***8.1 Limitations of the research project***

While some of the existing studies on sexting have recruited children younger than 15, they mostly employ surveys to question them about their views on sexting (Vandeen Abele, Campbell et al., 2014; Wood, Barter, Stanley et al., 2015). The age of the participants in my research project was chosen to target those at the age of consent (16 in Switzerland), but it would undeniably be interesting to carry out similar research with those under 16. It would be particularly interesting to investigate the reflections and reflexive attitude of those in secondary school, so often mentioned by the participants as more often involved in the pranks and carnivalesque activities that also constitute sexting. Equally, similar use of the visual task could easily be adopted in research with older interviewees, whose imaginative reflective reasoning around sexting might open the door to more creative ways to relate to new technologies in a sexualised context. Furthermore, the participants were all recruited among students attending Cantonal high schools. Involving also students of other schools, such as professional and commercial schools, which prepare young people for less academic paths towards a more varied set of professions would enhance the knowledge of the meaning of sexting for those under 18.

A major limitation concerns the method adopted to carry out the visual task, which was already briefly mentioned in Chapter 7. It consists of the relative difficulty in engaging the participants in reflecting more experientially and less superficially with the visual materials employed. Following the review of the approach adopted by Guggenbühl (1992) to

engage participants in sessions of *mythodrama*, which is based on carefully designed stages to enable them to enter a more imaginative mindset, it appears that the visual task would benefit from a similar approach. Meeting participants at their school primaries might have reduced the success of the activity. Schools are the setting where they are usually asked to think rationally and avoid fantasising. Thus, involving them in an imaginative exercise must have decisively been a rather unusual request for them. A request that, on top of everything, was made by a stranger who contacted them through the school, thus further reinforcing their anxiety about ‘getting it right’ and giving a good performance. While some of them were able to access emotional elements, relate them to sexting and contextualise their reflection into proper reflexivity, it remains very much necessary to refine such a task by introducing a period of preparation including activities to make participants feel at ease with the researcher, the setting and the use of their imagination. Specifically, it seems advisable to carry out research focusing only on this task, rather than complement it with a more traditional semi-structured interview, where the participants are asked to perform a more common type of social interaction which must have felt quite intimidating. Most of them had never taken part in a primary research project before. Of course, most of them relaxed through the interview and generously shared their perspectives, but it would be interesting to deepen the use of the visual task to gather more in-depth information about the more unconscious elements that populate the imaginary around sexualised images and sexting. Such a process could then be supported by follow-up interviews to further explore and contextualise the initial findings.

A further limitation consists in the lower participation of girls, who were more reluctant overall to engage with a rather controversial topic such as sexting. The stigma attached to it must have been such that many preferred to distance themselves by not taking part in the interview. It is, therefore, important to acknowledge that a different recruitment



process might be more suitable for girls. Possibly, it might be advisable to rely on local sexual health services and charities that are consulted by girls confidentially, where they might feel less exposed to the stigma and humiliation associated with sexting than they are in a mixed school.

The qualitative nature of the research makes it difficult to generalise the results, and of course, they would benefit from such generalisation to generate more evidence to support the development of education strategies. Whilst rich in depth, particularly concerning the clarification of the way trust and betrayal are played out in sexting, the social representations of sexting would also benefit from being investigated qualitatively in other contexts than Canton Ticino. For instance, the way Ticinese's participants suggest slut-shaming is made sense of by connecting it to the myth of the War of Troy, might vary in other cultural contexts. Proof of this is the English expression used rather than 'troia' when shaming a girl: slut. Indeed, pragmatically, something specific is done there, too but the underlying myth might be slightly different, given the different associations with the word 'slut' compared to those available to the word 'troia'. Different fears might be highlighted in different cultural contexts, too, so it appears important to acknowledge the local rather than global nature of the social representations that surround the practice of sexting.

Finally, the short time spent with the participants was also a limitation in this study. While partially due to limited resources, both economical and of time, it is undeniable that having more time to spend with each participant would have improved the relationship with the researcher to the point of fostering more disclosure.

Thus, in the light of these considerations, future research should expand and refine the visual method used in this research to enhance the chances for reflexivity to take place and

consider the impact of local culture in the production of social representations to explore different ways education strategies could be designed and delivered.

## ***8.2 Recommendations***

Both research into psychosocial studies and sexual health education strategies would benefit from more research on sexting. While some big surveys have now been carried out, such as by the STIR project, numerous questions remain unaddressed concerning the way sexting shapes teenagers' experiences of new technologies. While the present research project mostly concerned itself with matters of abuse, it is clear that teenagers have welcomed the possibility of approaching peers through new technologies and social media because of their shyness and embarrassment at approaching each other face to face. The way shyness seems to have been amplified, thus possibly constituting a more chronic problem, might need to be investigated from the perspective of intimacy studies. It appears that self-confidence, often jeopardised by shyness and by stigma, would need more in-depth investigation, with a focus placed on how this impacts abusive behaviours and methods of harm reduction for victims from the consequences of ostracism.

The relationship between the hubris of anti-politics and the hubris among young people also deserves a much more in-depth investigation. Different models should be applied to further explain such a relationship, which might be unconscious, countertransference or more direct, entailing mimicry. Such investigation requires a sophisticated methodological approach, which psychosocial studies are refining, but which can hardly be considered conclusive when it accounts for one depth psychology perspective only. The current trend to introduce psychoanalytic perspectives in psychosocial research is aimed both at developing reflexive methodologies based on transference and countertransference as intended in

different schools and at theorising subjects who are vulnerable, as defined by the various psychoanalytic perspectives. Thus, to limit the study of the meaning of sexting to a post-Jungian and representational perspective might mean missing out on deep psychological dynamics other than those pertaining to a more or less available imaginary which manages identity vis-à-vis the moral regulation of sexting. Future research might want to explore elements of attachment, envy or libidinal investments involved in explaining young people's behaviours, attitudes and beliefs concerning sexting.

From a social psychological point of view, the psychosocial reliance on depth psychologies to theorise subjectivity might contribute towards the study of the impact of vulnerability. For instance, the focus on the study of vulnerability has been adopted by *The Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research LIVES*<sup>51</sup>, which has been running numerous research projects aimed at investigating the way people overcome vulnerability in life course perspectives. The Centre promotes research investigating the mechanisms allowing “some individuals to adapt better than others to the development of society”, which is said to be unpredictable further to the “major shifts of economic activity in a globalised world”. Whilst eminently focused on the way health, family, work and institutions play a central role in defining people's vulnerability, it is not difficult to imagine a contribution on the part of psychosocial studies bringing a depth psychology definition of vulnerability into the mix and the consequent reflexive approach. Overall, it is undeniable that maintaining a connection with sociology and social psychology benefits psychosocial research, which risks otherwise falling back onto a psychoanalytic construction of the social world. As seen in the

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<sup>51</sup> Information on the NSCCR LIVES research centre can be found here: <https://www.lives-nccr.ch/en/page/innovative-interdisciplinary-and-comprehensive-approach-n9> (last consulted on 14th June 2020).

case of Jung, such a perspective presents numerous limitations due to a limiting subjectivity and biases that remain unchallenged by the lack of sociological data.

Further research, addressing the limitations discussed in the previous section, could greatly contribute to educational and official strategies to tackle the most problematic outcomes of sexting. Often relying on rather short messages promoted by charities or governmental agencies, which are insufficient to withstand both immediate peer pressure and the pressure exerted by social media and online discussions, educational strategies should invest in long-term programmes involving young people in their design. For such programmes to be effective, it is necessary to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding. Research employing psychosocial methods, as discussed in the early part of this thesis, is uniquely able to achieve this.

### ***8.3 Subjective and epistemological reflexivity***

A conclusive set of reflexive considerations ends this thesis by attesting to my experience of carrying out this research project. The ethical crisis I underwent when I realised that classic Jungian psychology overall fails to reflexively address biases and prejudices has proved a tough experience. For somebody whose academic values have been greatly influenced by a strong emphasis on human rights, children's rights and wellbeing, it was difficult to navigate a psychology that often fails to challenge itself, as shown in Chapter 3. Having trained as a psychologist in Geneva entails not only a deep commitment to the values listed above but also to carrying out research with an impact on the lives of children through collaborations with education services and charities that promote children's rights as defined by the UN Convention. Such a perspective is so embedded in my approach that shifting onto a post-Jungian one has not been straightforward. Often, I felt something was

missing in the phenomenological perspective that more naturally derives from adopting Jungian psychology as a theoretical perspective. Since it opens the possibility for a more imaginative, creative and relational engagement with the research process and with the participants, a purely phenomenological epistemology is captivating. Yet, I felt a certain discomfort in rejecting knowledge and social construction under the label of products of modernity, exemplifying the scientific rationalism Jung criticised and warned against.

By introducing social representation theory, I demonstrated that it is possible to maintain a focus on the analogic and religious working of the psyche, all while paying attention also to shared knowledge as a conveyor of the representations that enable teenagers to evolve, individuate and form their subjectivity in a context that often creates obstacles to the development of their self-confidence. For my part, the introduction of social representation theory meant finding a way to use Jungian psychology in a manner that maintains a link with knowledge, social construction and the sharing of representations rather than consider them an eminently phenomenological phenomenon in the exploration of sexting. It requires a more explicit positioning within the conflicting debates, which needs bearing in mind who my research is trying to help. Of course, the answer is young people, and I took a clear critical stance with regard to risk discourses that gain widespread consensus among adults and authorities. It equally means acknowledging the power exerted by some boys on girls who sext by giving voice to those participants who were critical about such behaviours.

Personally, this shift of methodological focus has fostered a more personal relationship with Jung, his psychology, the post-Jungian literature that has followed him and the Jungian movement more in general. In a sense, through the knowledge of social

representation theory and the work of Serge Moscovici, I individuated and emancipated myself from a point of view that does not fully represent me. My connection with Jungian psychology is now a much more relational experience than it used to be. I wish I sufficiently illustrated how a similar experience can happen to teenagers when they reflect on sexting, whether or not they had direct experiences of it. Knowledge can, if Jung's scepticism is left on the side, contribute to a more individual and autonomous experience of the world, which sounds promising to my ears in a period that is undermining education through the anti-politics of many world leaders too interested in their prestige to guarantee a plurality of perspectives and acknowledgement of different experiences. There is a need for a horizon for young people different from the narrow one conveyed by fear and anxiety about new technologies, and demonisation of youth's sexuality. This is a horizon that fosters their creativity in using technologies to better support rather than undermine their relational needs. It entails a more relational engagement with their fear of betrayal, more relating to their fears and less criminalisation of sexting.

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Bellinzona, 1 maggio 2016

**Lettera di informazione sullo studio 'Adolescenti, nuove tecnologie e sexting'**

Gentili Signore, Egregi Signori,

Ricevete questa lettera poiché vostro figlio/a sarà invitato a partecipare ad un progetto di ricerca condotto in Canton Ticino, che coinvolge ragazze e ragazzi maggiori di 16 e che frequentano i Licei Cantionali. La ricerca è svolta con il supporto della Fondazione ASPI, della Magistratura dei Minorenni e dell'Ufficio dell'insegnamento medio superiore.

Magari avete già sentito parlare di 'sexting'. È un fenomeno che riguarda l'uso di nuove tecnologie da parte di adolescenti al fine di produrre immagini sessualizzate dei loro amici e compagni di classe. Questo fenomeno è legato al consumo di immagini sessualizzate. Riteniamo necessario lo studio di tale fenomeno poiché esso è diffuso e potenzialmente dannoso per i ragazzi coinvolti. Sino ad oggi, la ricerca non ha prodotto risultati conclusivi, e raramente ha chiesto alle ragazze e ai ragazzi del gruppo di età indicato quale sia il loro grado di comprensione di tali comportamenti.

La collaborazione degli studenti liceali Ticinesi è preziosa poiché possono aiutare la ricerca scientifica nell'approfondire la comprensione del significato soggettivo di comportamenti legati al sexting. Le ragazze ed i ragazzi che accetteranno di partecipare a questo studio ci aiuteranno a capire come intervenire in maniera sensata per aiutare le future generazioni a sviluppare delle relazioni rispettose e soddisfacenti con i propri amici e compagni di scuola.

Lo studio consiste in un'intervista individuale durante la quale i partecipanti verranno invitati ad esprimersi sui significati di 'consenso', 'danno', ed 'abuso' in riferimento alle relazioni tra maschi e femmine. Delle immagini pubblicitarie o di artisti famosi verranno sottoposte al loro vaglio, per discutere il legame tra il sexting e la cultura occidentale. Non vi è nulla di cui preoccuparsi: le immagini sono approvate dal comitato etico dell'Università dell'Essex presso cui la ricercatrice sta svolgendo un progetto di dottorato. Sono immagini ad alta diffusione, visibili in molti contesti quotidiani, alla televisione o su cartelloni pubblicitari.

Ai partecipanti non verrà chiesta nessuna informazione personale.

Il documento allegato include informazioni sull'approccio etico dello studio e le informazioni di contatto della ricercatrice e dei servizi che collaborano al progetto di ricerca. Siete pregati di leggere tali documenti con attenzione e di contattarci qualora abbiate domande, dubbi o reclami.

Vi ringraziamo della vostra attenzione e collaborazione.

Cordiali saluti,  
Camilla Giambonini

## APPENDIX B Letter for participants

Colchester, Essex, October 2014

### Invitation to participate to the study: Teenagers, New Technologies and Sexualisation of Childhood

Dear *Name*,

We are contacting you to invite you to participate to the study called ‘Teenagers, new technologies and sexualisation of childhood’. We are very pleased to involve you in this project.

This letter provides you with explanations about the project, and your own involvement. The study focuses on investigating teenagers’ use of new technologies in ‘sexting’.

You might have heard of it, it concerns teenagers’ use of new technologies such as smartphones to produce sexualised images of their friends. We know little about the consequences of ‘sexting’ and we would like you to help us by providing your opinions. Your involvement in the research consists in attending an hour-long interview with me, where you’ll be asked to analyse mainstream sexualised images, and discuss their content in relation with ‘sexting’. Then, we’ll discuss some definitions of terms such as ‘harm’, ‘abuse’ and ‘consent’ in gender-based relationships. No need to worry, all images will have received the ethical approval from the University of Essex’ ethical board.

Your contribution is invaluable, because previous research seldom questioned teenagers. Participants of your age have the insight to provide a different explanation of the way teenagers understand sexualised images, possibly challenging many stereotypes promoted by politicians and moral entrepreneurs. We want to say, there is no right or wrong answer to any question we ask. We are interested in your attitudes and opinions only. So, we won’t ask you about any personal experience.

I will contact you with a phone call in a week time, to ask you if you agree to participate and schedule the interview at a time that fits your school commitments. Over the phone call, I will answer any question and clarify any doubt you might have. You are free to opt out from the study. You just have to tell me when we speak over the phone. This will not affect your academic nor personal life.

Please refer to the enclosed Appendix to find out about the measures taken to implement an ethically informed procedure, protecting your right to anonymity, confidentiality and voluntary participation.

We are looking forward to meeting you soon and we thank you for your collaboration,

Best wishes,

Camilla Giambonini, MSc and MA

Bellinzona, 1 maggio 2016

**Invito a partecipare allo studio: Adolescenti, nuove tecnologie e sexting**

Cari studenti,

Siete invitati partecipare allo studio 'Adolescenti, nuove tecnologie e sexting'. Lo studio è svolto con il supporto della Fondazione ASPI, della Magistratura dei Minorenni e dell'Ufficio dell'insegnamento medio superiore. Siamo felici di coinvolgervi nel nostro progetto. Questa lettera vi fornisce spiegazioni sullo studio e sul vostro coinvolgimento.

Magari avete già sentito parlare del sexting. È un comportamento recentemente emerso, legato all'uso di nuove tecnologie (telefoni smartphones) per produrre immagini sessualizzate di amici e compagni di classe. Sappiamo ancora poco sul significato del sexting per gli adolescenti, e sulle sue conseguenze. Vi invitiamo ad aiutarci fornendoci le vostre opinioni.

Se decidete di partecipare, il vostro coinvolgimento consisterà in un'ora di intervista con la ricercatrice (Camilla Giambonini), durante la quale vi sarà chiesto di discutere il contenuto di comuni immagini che veicolano messaggi sessualizzati (quali pubblicità, o dipinti artistici). In seguito, volgeremo uno sguardo ad alcuni concetti importanti quali 'consenso', 'abuso', o 'danno' nel quadro di relazioni fra maschi e femmine. Non preoccupatevi, le immagini che vi verranno sottoposte sono state approvate dal comitato etico dell'Università dell'Essex, presso la quale la ricercatrice sta svolgendo una ricerca di dottorato.

Il vostro contributo è determinante, poiché le ricerche precedentemente svolte in questo ambito non hanno direttamente coinvolto gli adolescenti in maniera sistematica. I ragazzi e le ragazze della vostra età possono fornire una prospettiva diversa sui comportamenti dei loro pari. Si tratta quindi di dire la vostra su un tema che riguarda la vostra generazione, senza censura. Non c'è risposta giusta o sbagliata alle domande che vi porremo. Siamo interessati alle vostre attitudini ed opinioni e non vi verranno poste domande personali.

La ricercatrice vi contatterà personalmente via telefono tra qualche giorno, per chiedervi se volete partecipare e fissare un appuntamento per l'intervista che non pregiudichi i vostri impegni scolastici. Durante la telefonata, vi sarà data risposta a qualsiasi domanda e chiarimenti circa ogni dubbio possiate avere. Siete liberi di non partecipare, basterà dirmelo al telefono.

I documenti allegati vi forniscono le informazioni di contatto della ricercatrice, e quelle dei servizi Cantionali coinvolti nel progetto ed importanti informazioni riguardanti le misure etiche messe in atto per garantire la protezione dell'anonimato, la confidenzialità e la partecipazione volontaria. Vi preghiamo di leggere questi documenti con attenzione.

In attesa della nostra collaborazione, vi ringraziamo della vostra attenzione.

Cordiali saluti, Camilla Giambonini



**Informazioni riguardo le misure etiche per lo studio 'Adolescenti, nuove tecnologie e sexting'**

Lo studio è parte della tesi di dottorato di Camilla Giambonini (MSc in psicologia clinica e sociale, Università di Ginevra e MA in criminologia, Università del Kent) svolta presso il Centro di studi psicoanalitici dell'Università dell'Essex. La tesi è svolta sotto la supervisione del Professor Andrew Samuels e del Dottor Kevin Lu. Lo studio è svolto con l'appoggio della Magistratura dei Minorenni del Canton Ticino, la Fondazione ASPI per la protezione dell'infanzia, e con il supporto del Dipartimento dell'Educazione, Cultural e Sport (DECS).

Questo documento contiene informazioni riguardanti le procedure messe in atto per garantire il rispetto dei criteri etici durante e dopo la partecipazione allo studio 'Adolescenti, nuove tecnologie e sexting'. Vi preghiamo di leggerlo attentamente e di contattare i servizi e le persone indicate qualora abbiate domande.

**Selezione dei partecipanti:**

Tutti i partecipanti sono stati selezionati con metodo random attraverso il Dipartimento dell'Educazione, Cultura e Sport (DECS) per garantire il rispetto della protezione dei dati che proibisce la condivisione di informazioni personali con terzi estranei all'Istituto scolastico. Sono stati contattati unicamente studenti liceali che hanno raggiunto l'età del consenso (16 anni). La ricercatrice è a conoscenza unicamente del nome di battesimo dei ragazzi e delle ragazze selezionate, e del loro numero di telefono fisso.

**Ritiro dalla partecipazione ed interruzione della partecipazione:**

I 40 studenti selezionati verranno contattati telefonicamente previo invio della lettera allegata a questo documento. Essi avranno qualche giorno di tempo per decidere se vogliono partecipare oppure no. Durante questo periodo gli studenti contattati potranno discutere della proposta con i loro genitori o tutori legali e formulare le eventuali domande da porre alla ricercatrice. Siamo coscienti del fatto che il tema è delicato e di conseguenza abbiamo semplificato la procedura per ritirare la propria partecipazione. Gli studenti selezionati possono semplicemente comunicare la propria intenzione alla ricercatrice durante il contatto telefonico iniziale. Ciò non avrà nessuna conseguenza sulla loro vita scolastica e personale poiché tale informazione resta anonima. I nomi e l'iniziale del cognome non verranno condivisi con terzi (incluso il DECS ed i servizi che collaborano al progetto). A chiunque decida di partecipare o di ritirarsi è garantito l'anonimato (vedi sotto). La partecipazione è volontaria anche durante lo svolgimento dello studio. Qualora un partecipante che avesse dato il proprio consenso dovesse cambiare idea può ritirarsi in qualsiasi momento e chiedere lo scarto delle informazioni già raccolte. La richiesta di ritiro deve essere formulata direttamente alla ricercatrice, via telefono, email o di persona.

### **Anonimato e confidenzialità:**

Solo i ragazzi e le ragazze selezionate, e le loro famiglie sono a conoscenza del fatto di essere stati contattati per la ricerca. I ragazzi e le ragazze selezionati ricevono una lettera (allegata) e questo documento al loro indirizzo privato. I genitori ricevono una lettera informativa. L'anonimato dei candidati selezionati è quindi garantito. La confidenzialità è pure garantita dalla procedura che prevede che nessuna informazione personale sarà registrata durante l'intervista, a parte l'età ed il genere del partecipante. Un nome fittizio verrà loro assegnato nelle trascrizioni e nelle pubblicazioni dei risultati. L'unico modo che i partecipanti hanno di identificare le registrazioni delle loro interviste consiste in un codice attribuito all'inizio dell'intervista.

### **Protezione dei dati:**

Il codice attribuito ai partecipanti serve nel caso essi vogliano consultare la registrazione e le trascrizioni dell'intervista. Ciò è possibile nell'arco dei due anni seguenti alla conclusione dello studio. Le registrazioni e le trascrizioni saranno tenute sotto chiave in un armadietto nell'ufficio della ricercatrice presso l'Università dell'Essex, assieme ai formulari di consenso.

### **Consenso informato:**

All'inizio dell'intervista la ricercatrice leggerà questo documento con il/la partecipante. Lo scopo è quello di chiarire qualsiasi dubbio residuo, che non sia stato precedentemente espresso durante la telefonata iniziale. Una volta letto e compreso il documento, il partecipante firmerà un formulario di consenso informato. Una copia di tale formulario verrà data al partecipante.

### **Reclami, contatti e supporto:**

Intendiamo fornirvi tutte le informazioni di cui potreste necessitare. Quindi, di seguito sono indicati tutti i dati di contatto della ricercatrice, dei supervisori accademici, del Centro per studi psicoanalitici, e dei servizi coinvolti nel Cantone. Qualora vogliate inoltrare reclamo sulla base di principi etici, ciò deve essere indirizzato al comitato etico dell'Università dell'Essex. Le informazioni di contatto sono anch'esse indicate.

Non verrà chiesto nulla riguardante la vita privata dei partecipanti, o le loro esperienze personali. Lo studio verte sulla loro comprensione del sexting e delle immagini sessualizzate. Nonostante ciò, qualora dei partecipanti dovessero esprimere ricordi, o emozioni negative durante l'intervista, ci riserviamo il diritto di indirizzarli verso il servizio Cantonale adeguato. I dettagli di contatto del servizio di aiuto alle vittime, della Fondazione ASPI, e del reparto competente presso la Polizia Cantonale sono forniti di seguito. Questi servizi possono fornire ulteriore supporto e invitiamo chiunque ne senta la necessità, a contattarli senza indugio.

### **Dovere di segnalazione:**

La legislazione non prevede il dovere di segnalazione per i ricercatori accademici. Conseguentemente, solo i casi di crimine verranno segnalati. La Sezione dei reati contro la persona della Polizia Cantonale è stata contattata ed è a conoscenza dello svolgimento dello studio. Qualora dovessero sorgere dubbi circa una situazione, la ricercatrice si riserva di

contattare la Sezione per chiarire la modalità di presa a carico più corretta. La ricercatrice userà discrezione al fine di garantire la massima confidenzialità ai partecipanti.

**Disseminazione dei risultati:**

I risultati dello studio saranno inclusi nella tesi di dottorato della ricercatrice e in altre pubblicazioni accademiche (articoli scientifici, capitoli di libri di testo, presentazioni e atti di congressi). Conseguentemente, i dati raccolti resteranno accessibili alla ricercatrice.

Contatti:

***Ricercatrice:***

Camilla Giambonini  
+41/76 372 55 62  
[clgiam@essex.ac.uk](mailto:clgiam@essex.ac.uk)

***Magistratura dei minorenni:***

Reto Medici  
+41/91 815 53 61  
Via Bossi 2a  
6900 Lugano

***Fondazione ASPI:***

Dot.rssa Miryam  
Caranzano-Maitre  
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***Ufficio dell'insegnamento  
medio superiore:***

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***Sezione reati contro l'integrità  
della persona:***

Michela Gulfi  
+41/91 815 51 67  
[michela.gulfi@polca.ti.ch](mailto:michela.gulfi@polca.ti.ch)

***Servizio per l'aiuto  
alle vittime di reati:***

Cristina Finzi  
+41 91 814 75 02/08  
[dss-lav@ti.ch](mailto:dss-lav@ti.ch)

***Supervisori Accademici***

Prof. Andrew Samuels  
[http://www.essex.ac.uk/cps/staff/  
profile.aspx?ID=441](http://www.essex.ac.uk/cps/staff/profile.aspx?ID=441)  
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Dr. Kevin Lu  
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profile.aspx?ID=453](https://www.essex.ac.uk/cps/staff/profile.aspx?ID=453)  
[klu@essex.ac.uk](mailto:klu@essex.ac.uk)

APPENDIX D Consent form



Bellinzona, 1 maggio 2016

**Consenso informato per la partecipazione alla ricerca**

***‘Adolescenti, nuove tecnologie e sexting’***

Svolta nel quadro della tesi di dottorato di: Camilla Giambonini, MSc e MA

Cara/o \_\_\_\_\_ ,

Questo formulario attesta il tuo consenso informato e la tua partecipazione volontaria alla ricerca sopracitata.

Dichiari di aver letto la lettera informativa e di aver capito la procedura per ritirarsi, le misure messe in atto per garantire l’anonimato e la confidenzialità, la procedura per accedere alle trascrizioni dell’intervista, e di aver preso nota dei servizi di supporto indicati (qualora ce ne fosse il bisogno).

Dichiari di partecipare volontariamente ed autonomamente alla ricerca.

Nome del partecipante		Nome del ricercatore	Camilla Giambonini
Indirizzo		Indirizzo	Viale Officina 13, 6500 Bellinzona
		Email	camillag@bluewin.ch
Firma		Firma	

**Codice per accedere alle trascrizioni:**

Iniziale nome della madre	Iniziale nome del padre	Prima cifra data di nascita	Ultima cifra data di nascita



Desidero ricevere un feedback con i risultati della ricerca: Si  No

Se si, fornisci l'indirizzo email:

Hai già sentito parlare di 'sexting'? Si  No

In che contesto:      Dai compagni a scuola  Dagli amici  Dalla tua ragazza/o  Dai  
media  Altro

Saresti interessata/o a partecipare ad una seconda intervista sullo stesso tema? Si  No

**Grazie per la partecipazione!**

APPENDIX E Ethic approval form

**Application for Ethical Approval of Research Involving Human Participants**

This application form should be completed for any research involving human participants conducted in or by the University. 'Human participants' are defined as including living human beings, human beings who have recently died (cadavers, human remains and body parts), embryos and fetuses, human tissue and bodily fluids, and human data and records (such as, but not restricted to medical, genetic, financial, personnel, criminal or administrative records and test results including scholastic achievements). Research should not commence until written approval has been received (from Departmental Research Director, Faculty Ethics Committee (FEC) or the University's Ethics Committee). This should be borne in mind when setting a start date for the project.

Applications should be made on this form, and submitted electronically, to your Departmental Research Director. A signed copy of the form should also be submitted. Applications will be assessed by the Research Director in the first instance, and may then be passed to the FEC, and then to the University's Ethics Committee. A copy of your research proposal and any necessary supporting documentation (e.g. consent form, recruiting materials, etc) should also be attached to this form.

A full copy of the signed application will be retained by the department/school for 6 years following completion of the project. The signed application form cover sheet (two pages) will be sent to the Research Governance and Planning Manager in the REO as Secretary of the University's Ethics Committee.

1. 

<b>Title of project: Sex, Violence and Teenagers in Contemporary Capitalism</b> <b>Post-Jungian and Archetypal Perspectives on the Commodification of Sexuality</b>
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2. The title of your project will be published in the minutes of the University Ethics Committee. If you object, then a reference number will be used in place of the title.  
 Do you object to the title of your project being published? Yes  / No

3. This Project is:  Staff Research Project  Student Project

4. Principal Investigator(s) (students should also include the name of their supervisor):

Name:	Department:
Camilla Giambonini	Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies
Prof Andrew Samuels	Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies
Dr Kevin Lu	Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies

5. 

<b>Proposed start date:</b> January 2014
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6. 

<b>Probable duration:</b> 6 years
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7. Will this project be externally funded? Yes  / No   
 If Yes,

8. 

What is the source of the funding?
------------------------------------

## APPENDIX F Images for interviews



Baubò, illustration included in Devereux, G (1983) *La Vulve Mythique*. JC Godefroy.



Narcissus, Jan Cossiers (1600-1671), Prado Museum



Pan and Syrinx, Peter Paul Rubens, 1620, Royal Collection Trust



Abduction of a Sabine Woman, Giambologna, 1581-83, Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence



Kamasutra, 400 BCE – 300 BCE.



Josephine Baker, portrait by Walery 1927.



Fireworks, by Kenneth Anger 1947



50 Cent, Getty Images 2013



Miley Cyrus, Instagram 2013

APPENDIX G Example of transcript analysis

I:	... The recording device then	1		
	maybe you must go at a certain point?	2		
P:	Bah... if we finish by 5pm and I go	3		
	home at 5:15 or 5:20 it's fine...	4		
I:	OK, let's speed up a little then, so	5		
	we were saying about 'sexting'.	6		
	You were telling me that	7		
	you heard about it, yes?	8		
P:	So, exactly...	9		
I:	What is it? Do you know?	10		
P:	I can't give a proper definition	11	Definition	Working out trust with me
	but I've got in mind the fact that	12		
	the word 'sex' brings me	13		
	back to 'sex', but I don't really	14		
	know a definition...	15		
I:	What do you think is 'sexting'?	16		
P:	The approach with... with sex,	17	Definition	
	yes, yes... ehm, how sex is	18		
	related to young people, I don't know...	19		
I:	OK, with young people?	20		

P: Not only young people, 21  
more in general, all people. 22



I:	Ok, practically it's the sharing of sexualised images or texts through new technological devices.	23 24 25		
P:	Ah, Ok, perfect...	26		
I:	So...	27		
P:	I understand, yes...	28		
I:	To send each others a message with a sexy picture, something like that...	29 30		
P:	A bit of a provocation...	31	Provocation	Sexting is transgressive
I:	Yes, it can be, it might depend... have you ever heard about it on the media? Sometimes there are cases, we hear about it...	32 33 34 35		
P:	Yes, I've already heard, and I've already had experiences, heard of friends...	36 37 38	Knowledge Experiences Heard of it	Experienced
I:	Ah, I see, can you maybe tell me a little bit about it, without entering into details, no need to make names, nor...	39 40 41 42		
P:	Of course, no problem.	43		

When I had this boyfriend,	44	Boyfriend	Intimate relationships
we sent each others many sexy pictures	45		
and apparently one evening	46		
he was out drinking with his mates	47	Peers dynamic	
and he sent around one	48	Non consensual sharing	Breach of intimacy
the pictures. He was drunk and	49	Alcohol consumption	Peers can impact on intimate
relationships			
it must have been 3 years ago.	50		
He was drunk and he shared	51		
one of my pictures...	52		
I found out about it only after a long time,	53	Not knowing	
when some friends came and	54	Peers dynamic	
“Josephine, but this is you!”...	55		
“ah, oh yes” I said. For months	56	Length of time	
I had no idea about it,	57		
I did not know what had happened,	58		
how it happened...	59		
I thought my classmates had stolen	60	Stealing mobile	
the mobile phone and shared the picture.	61		
Then I reported the whole thing	62	Reporting to Youth Justice	Telling the right people vs telling peers
to youth justice,	63		
without telling my parents,	64	Not telling parents	
you know, stuff for minors...	65		
and the day before I reported it,	66		
my boyfriend comes	67		
and tells me “it was me”.	68	Admission of responsibility	
After months and months	69	Length of time	
he had lied to my face... Then...	70	Lies to her face	Lack of trust and lies
I: Wow...	71		

P: Oh yes... and I also know of images 72 Knowledge

	circulating on mobile phones of friends, they even created a folder that was freely accessible by everyone online. There is also a What'sApp group...	73 74 75 76	Peer dynamics Folder Access to images New technology	Peers cannot be trusted
I:	Wow...	77		
P:	2,000 and more pictures and videos...	78	Amount and extent	
I:	Oh gosh, and how did you react, I mean...?	79 80		
P:	Bah, my picture... you couldn't see the face, I did it because... for reasons, if you want... he was my boyfriend... so, in the end, I said to myself "ok, it will pass". They did not carry on too long... But I saw pictures, well, I heard stories of pictures sent to everyone and anyone, if you want... just like that without any specific reason...	81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93	Visibility/identification  Intimate relation  Time Length of time Spread of sharing  No reasons	Face is saved if not shown    Time matters
I:	Yes, yes...	94		
P:	Then also pictures of girls on Facebook, on Ask, Twitter, Instagram...	95 96	Social media	

	very sexy, half naked...	97	Sexy pictures	
	They left me a little perplex...	98	Perpelex	
I:	So, what was your reaction,	99		
	when you found out about your	100		
	boyfriend? Were you... how did you...?	101		
P:	Eh, I got very, very angry, very angry...	102	Anger	
	mostly with myself,	103	Self blame	Anger and lack of self trust
	because I believed him when	104	Believing	
	he'd said he wasn't him...	105		
	I shouldn't have believed him...	106		
	I blamed myself...	107		
I:	Because he told you bullshit...	108		
P:	Yes, I'd asked him and he said no...	109	Lying	
	I blamed myself, then him, oh well...	110	Self blame	
	he apologized and I said to myself	111	Apology	
	"it can have happened"...	112		
	I was very angry mostly because	113		
	he'd lied to me...	114	Lies hurt	
I:	Cause he did not do it on purpose...?	115		
P:	Exactly, it wasn't that	116	Motive	
	"hey, look, here's my girlfriend,	117		
	she's naked, let me send you	118		
	the picture", so in the end, I let it go...	119	Letting it go	Taking distance
I:	I understand, well... so, yes,	120		

	you know something about it... well...	121		
P:	Yes, exactly... when they asked me	122		
	“do you want to do the interview?”	123		
	I said “I have something to say,	124	Knowledge/experience	
	why not...”.	125		
I:	I imagine, well... second question,	126		
	do you have the feeling...	127		
	well, you clearly have an experience,	128		
	you saw pictures of others, etc...	129		
	Do you think it’s more girls who end up in	130		
	these pictures or are there also boys?	131		
	How’s the dynamic?	132		
P:	Mostly it’s girls,	133	Girls take selfies	
	much more often girls than boys,	134		
	because guys are interested	135	Boys’ interest in female nude	Girls’ naked bodies are valuable, like secrets
	in female nude, girls much less,	136		
	so, it’s something like that...	137		
	Do you get it... no... the...	138		
	I’ve seen also pictures of boys...	139	Also pictures of boys	Boys show off
I:	Oh, I see... there’s also	140		
	those of boys around...	141		
P:	Yes, on the net there are also those...	142		
	but girls have less, well,	143	Girls not interested in boys’ nude	Boys bodies are no secret
	they don’t think “let’s send this picture	144		
	to my (girl) friends” whereas boys	145		
	have a different approach...	146		

I:	I see, so boys send the pictures to their mates, but why?	147 148		
P:	To brag, to show their mates “hey look how hot she is”, to take the piss at girls...	149 150 151	Sharing to brag	Sharing secrets increases acceptance in boys
I:	Whereas girls do not send around pictures of other girls?	152 153		
P:	In my opinion no, much much less often. Girls are more reserved, and anyway there’s more pictures of girls than boys around... there is just a few boys who send their own images... I had one of my boyfriend, but... maybe I though “I should send it around” as a sort of revenge... but I didn’t feel the need to do it, so...	154 155 156 157 158 159 160 161 162 163	Girls are reserved	Some girls keep secrets
I:	But a girl of a girl? I mean, when a picture is circulating, maybe also girls...	164 165 166		
P:	I’ve seen mostly boys... It is rare that girls participate to these What’sApp groups...	167 168 169	Girls don’t share non consensually	Girls keep secrets
I:	I see...	170		
			Not needing to seek revenge	Revenge needed vs not needed

P:	Girls stay a bit out of it...	171	Girls stay out of it	Girls keep secrets
I:	When did all of this happen?	172		
P:	I was 15...	173		
I:	15, Ok, so...	174		
P:	It started at about 13-14 but it's still going on...	175 176	Age of start	
I:	Ok so even here in high school are there people who...	178 179		
P:	Now less, here in high school... but I've heard... it might have been 3 months ago or 4, they created a folder on Dropbox, I think... one of those websites where you can share widely... They'd put more than 2,000 pictures in it. That's recent stuff, I'm telling you, it must have been few months...	180 181 182 183 184 185 186 187 188 189	Not common in high school  Dropbox folder  Time	High school is for mature people  New technologies enable sharing secrets
I:	So... but authorities are often alerted? I mean...	190 191		
P:	Yes, yes... I've heard of many people reporting an ex-boyfriend, or a friend...	192 193	Common to report reporting boyfriends and friends	Sharing information with trusted people Sharing intimate information



I:	Are they often couples-related?	194		
P:	Bah... not only...	195		
I:	I mean, why is a couple relationship ending up like that?	196		
	You say your boyfriend did it because he was drunk and he didn't realize...	197		
	Are they always drunk and don't realize, or...	198		
		199		
		200		
		201		
		202		
P:	No, also for other reasons... mostly maybe they split up, he still has all her pictures and he feels he can send them around...	203		
		204	Couple split up	End of intimacy, end of trust?
		205		
		206		
I:	But is it a revenge or...?	207		
P:	Bah... boys are like that, they are there with their mates, they go "hey, look at my girlfriend, she's hot, here, look" and so pictures start to circulate...	208	Boys are like that	Biological determinism?
	Maybe it happens that a friend takes your mobile phone off your hands and he's the one who shares them...	209	Peers dynamic	Peers are unreliable
		210		
		211		
		212		Peers are unreliable
		213	Peers dynamic	
		214	Stealing mobile phone	
		215		
I:	Ok...	216		

P:	Many are jerks...	217	Boys are jerks	Boys are naturally unreliable
	many don't give a crap about the girl...	218	Not caring	Boys naturally don't care
I:	OK...	219		
P:	Many because "she's a troia, let's send it around..."	220 221	Girl is a <b>troia</b>	<b>Pragmatic discursive element</b>
I:	OK...	222		
P:	Always probably to be accepted by the group...	223 224	Seeking acceptance	To be accepted one must share girl's secrets
	If you're already in, you want to share and brag...	225 226	Sharing and bragging to be accepted	
I:	So, it's a bit a way to be accepted by a group of boys...	227 228		
P:	Yes, in my opinion it is...	229		
I:	I see... well, you are the first one who admits such things still happen in high school...	230 231 232		
P:	They happen everywhere...	233		
I:	Everywhere LAUGHS...	234		
	I agree... and wish to ask you what age do you think people have when they do 'sexting'?	235 236 237		

P:	When I was 15... well, when I was 14	238	Peak at 14	
	there was a peak of pictures...	239		
	3 years ago... and now	240		
	they're still talking about it...	241		
	then, well, kids at 12-13 already have	242		
	an I-phone...	243	Kids have I-phones	Younger ones shouldn't have access
	they already have everything...	244		
I:	Ok, so the age is dropping...	245		
P:	Every year it's lower and lower...	246	Age drop	
I:	And even if this is basically	247		
	happening all the time,	248		
	girls send their images to boys...	249		
P:	They've never given up...	250		Things go bad if everyone can do it
	in fact it's getting worst...	251	Worsening	
I:	Why is that so, in your view?	252		
P:	Bah... I don't know, society	253	Societal changes	
	has changed a lot lately...	254		
	I'm not the kind that takes pictures	255	I'm not like that	Identity
	of herself wearing a swim suit	256		
	during the summer and	257		
	then posts it on Facebook, definitely not.	258		
	If I see a picture of a girl in a swim suit	259	Girls take pictures in swim suits	Female nude not only in sexting
	I think "what is she doing?",	260		
	"why does she need to post	261		

	a picture like that?"...	262		
	There's people who posts	263		
	pictures of themselves	264	Many people take pictures of themselves	
	wearing underwear, many girls need	265	Girls need to show their bodies	Other girls need to show their bodies, not me
	to show their bodies... In general,	266	Showing bodies	
	even if you go to the main square	267		
	in town, there's plenty of girls wearing	268	Exposing garments	
	very tight shorts or t-shirts with	269		
	loose neckling...	270		
	transparent t-shirts,	271		
	less and less covering swim suits...	272		
	If you go to the Lido,	273		
	everyone is wearing	274		
	a Brazilian swim suit these days...	275	Exposing garments	
	nobody wears normal ones...	276		
I:	Are they comfortable like that,	277		
	in your view? They enjoy it?	278		
P:	More they share their bodies,	279	Sharing body increases acceptance	Bodies are currency for
	more comfortable they feel...	280		acceptance
	because physical beauty...	281		
	they feel much more accepted...	282		
I:	By who? Accepted by...	283		
P:	Girls, boys...	284		
I:	Everyone? Ok...	285		
P:	Yes...	286		

I:	Are there jealousy and envy behind these behaviours?	287 288		
P:	Probably, they are everywhere... A girl wears a brazilian swimsuit and the other one is jealous, so it's a "look at that troia". The most used term is "troia"!	289 290 291 292 293	Troia label if others are envious	
I:	Still?	294		
P:	Oh yes, always	295		
I:	We used it already back when I was in high school... the dynamic of envy is still there... but there seems to be a certain confidence in showing themselves, on the part of girls.	296 297 298 299 300		
P:	Maybe they are more insecure than other girls because they feel this need to show their body and boys look at it and say "she's so hot!"... they feel more looked at and so... Being half naked does not equate with feeling confident of your body...	301 302 303 304 305 306 307 308	Showing body means insecurity      Insecure girls show their body but have no self confidence	Using body to gain approval indicates insecurity      Self confidence vs showing body
I:	So, they don't really like the clothes they wear but...	309 310		

P:	Maybe getting compliments is important if she is insecure...	311 312	Getting compliments	
	they try to get some confidence...	313	Wrong way to increase self confidence	Acceptance does not acceptance
	there might be plenty of reasons...	314		
I:	OK, I see... it depends a bit...	315		
P:	From girl to girl, yes...	316		
I:	But has there been a change in terms of how we expose our bodies?	317 318		
P:	Yes, yes... we show them much more than even just few years ago...	319 320	Bodies more exposed that few years ago	More pressure
I:	I see... what's the impact of growing up? Is there a difference?	321 322		
P:	It can change, not necessarily for the better...	323 324		
	Since I was little, things have changed a lot...	325 326	Time	
	this thing of technologies, half naked women,	327 328	Technologies equate with more nudity	Technologies enable this dynamic
	half dressed... it was around before, but things have gone worst...	329 330	Things worsening	
	Now even boys go around wearing t-shirts with a cleavage...	331 332		
I:	We'll all go around naked at some point...	333		

P:	Or it takes the opposite direction and we go back to the 1500, when one could not show her ankles!	334 335 336	Irony	
I:	So, also boys are into showing their bodies... they don't only brag about girls'...	337 338 339		
P:	Yes, also boys are like that...	340	Also boys show their bodies	
I:	Spontaneously?	341		
P:	Oh yes... now there is this thing of Herbalife for the muscles... tight t-shirts and in the end also boys, a bit like girls... in the end they are like that...	342 343 344 345 346	Muscles to show Herbalife Exposing garments for boys	Muscles of boys are like sexualised poses for girls
I:	But girls feel less the need to exhibit boys' body to their friends...	347 348		
P:	Than boys of girls'	349		
I:	Boys brag more than girls...	350		
P:	Exactly...	351		
I:	Do you think that things change growing up?	352 353		

P:	I think it's going to reduce itself... the older you get, the more mature you become, at least in theory... not always this happens, but the more one progresses into life, the more things change... I believe that sexting and this sort of things are typical of the period when one begins... to discover things that you don't know about... I'm talking about sex... it's a whole new world at this age so there is the excitement... that's it...	354 355 356 357 358 359 360 361 362 363 364 365 366 367	Growing up equates with less self exposure  sexting linked to puberty  Sex as novelty, excitement	Being adults means not needing to be accepted  Sexting is typical of beginning of sexual activities with others  Sexting is done when sex is a novelty
I:	How's the bragging you were talking about? How would you define it?	368 369 370		
P:	For boys it's fun... so...	371	Boys bragging is for fun	Fun vs cruel bragging
I:	It's to laugh together?	372		
P:	Yes, they laugh, to mock each other, to be silly... it's a bit of a game, they don't take it seriously.	373 374 375	Reciprocal mockery Game	
I:	How do girls take it?	376		
P:	I think girls get very angry when they see their pictures circulating...	377 378	Girls take it seriously	Girls don't like their bodies being used for fun



	girls take it much more seriously...	379		
	I'm generalizing, there's certainly	380		
	some who don't...	381		
	some girls send their	382	Some girls don't care	
	pictures to their friend,	383		
	their fuck-buddy and they don't care...	384		
I:	OK...	385		
P:	Some instead take it very seriously...	386		
	I took it very seriously...	387	I took it seriously	Josephine did not like her body being used for fun
	then I told myself that my face	388		
	was not visible,	389		
	nobody can identify me,	390		
	so I'm not going to care too much...	391		
	But there are pictures with the face on it,	392		
	or with a necklace, some underwear...	393		
	they go look for this kind of pictures...	394		
	some have the name typed into them...	395	Identifiable elements on pictures	Absence of face makes sexting safe
I:	So, it's difficult not to be identifiable...	396		
P:	It is difficult...	397		
I:	It takes thinking about it...	398		
P:	Exactly...	399		
I:	I see...	400		
P:	It's enough a picture with a necklace...	401	Identity is mocked by boys bragging	Boys mock girls who are identifiable

	often I hear such stories...	402		
	boys do it for fun, to play,	403		
	more pictures they have,	404		
	the cooler they are considered...	405		
I:	It's a matter of amount more than...	406		
P:	Exactly...	407		
I:	Are there girls who don't engage with this dynamic?	408 409		
	How are those who do not share their pictures perceived?	410 411		
P:	Well... some of my friends are still virgins,	412 413	Virginity equal not participating	Abstaining is OK
	some never had a boyfriend...	414		
	I respect them, I feel esteem for them...	415	Respect	
	I don't think being a virgin is shameful, they are not losers...	416 417		
I:	What about the collective dynamic?	418		
P:	There are the two extremes, girls who go from bed to bed and those that are very reserved and are shy with boys...	419 420 421 422	Two extremes	
I:	How does the group treat them?	423		
P:	It depends on the group.	424		

	My group of friends does not care where you come from, what you do, what you have done... but then there are groups where your past matters a lot... especially among young people... then of course, gossip... it's the favourite thing among young people.	425 426 427 428 429 430 431 432 433	Peer dynamics Caring about friends reputation    Gossip is widespread	Trustworthy friends     Gossip
I:	Is gossip frequent?	434		
P:	Oh yes, all the time...	435	Gossip always present	
I:	Who's the favourite subject?	436		
P:	Girls... among other girls it's all a "look at what she's done, the other night she gave a blow job to him in the toilets..." it's the favourite argument... so in the end, those who are reserved risk less to be on everybody's mouth...	437 438 439 440 441 442 443 444	Girls are target of gossip Girls sexual activities  Being reserved is safe Being reserved and not being on everybody's mouth	Girls' sexuality is currency also for gossip     Being reserved avoids gossip
I:	So behaviour is controlled by others... and in your view, it's mostly girls, or do boys participate, too?	445 446 447		
P:	They are also judgmental,	448	Boys are also judgmental	

	but not as much as girls are...	449		
	boys are less taken by gossip...	450	Boys gossip less	Boys brag, don't gossip
I:	Why?	451		
P:	They gossip less than girls...	452		
	for girls it's enough to wear	453	Triggers for girls gossip	
	the wrong pair of shoes to trash	454		
	down another girl...	455		
I:	Are boys less interested in girls' status?	456		
P:	Exactly, for them to find out that a girl	457		
	is promiscuous means that	458	Boys interested in promiscuous girls	Promiscuous girls are good currency for
	they will try to get to bed with her, too...	459		boys
	the rest is less compelling to them...	460		
I:	How do boys deal with	461		
	a girl who has a reputation?	462		
P:	Girls often mock other girls,	463	Girls mock girls with a reputation	Promiscuous girls are punished with gossip
	they make pranks...	464		
	to give an example, on Ask, they often	465		
	type anonymous questions	466		
	to make the other one feel uncomfortable.	467		
	Why? Because they think she's a troia.	468	label of <b>troia</b> is easily assigned	<b>Pragmatic discursive element</b>
	Boys might talk about a girl	469		
	among themselves, but it ends there.	500	Boys make comment but move on	
	Girls are much more likely to go on	501	Girls go on longer	Girls are less forgiving
	and on about it, boys don't waste	502		

	so much time on it.	503		
I:	So, girls are more controlling...	504		
P:	Exactly, boys don't exclude girls so much, who to trust	505	Boys less excluding	No need to gossip if you know
	because they have few selected	506	Friends are trusted	
	female friends	507		
	and they choose them wisely...	508	Wisely choosing friends	Peers can be friends or foe
I:	So, what must a girl do	509		
	to be accepted by the group of boys?	510		
P:	It's quite easy, though the group of boys	511		
	remains the group of boys and	512	Not many mixed groups	Biological sex matters in selecting
	friends			
	the group of girls is the group of girls...	513		
	not many cross overs...	514		
I:	Ok, so fundamentally...	515		
P:	I think girls' groups are more likely	516		
	to be vengeful and gossipy,	517	Girls are vengeful and gossipy	Girls are worst friends of other girls
	you must always pay attention	518		
	to what you say	519		
	because they will share it with third parties.	520		
	I find groups of boys calmer	521	Boys are calmer	Boys are better friends
	and less pretentious.	522		
	It's easier for a girl to be	523		
	marginalised by girls than by boys.	524	Girls marginalise	

I:	Are the sexting images involved in this dynamic?	525 526		
P:	It's so common that it doesn't really have that much of an impact... it's an old story so to speak...	527 528 529	Sexting is so widespread that it makes no difference	Sexting is not the point.
I:	"Been there, done that"...	530		
P:	Exactly...	531		
I:	What gets young people truly upset? What creates exclusion?	532 533		
P:	The behaviour of a girl towards a boy... refers to	534	Exclusion of promiscuous girls	The point is what sexting
	if she is promiscuous...	535		
	I've heard stories of a girl	536		
	who was told to have been	537		
	with three boys in one day...	538		
	She was targeted by heavy gossip,	539		
	they sent her pictures everywhere...	540		
	the stuff that was told was crazy...	541		
	In the end, I didn't know whether	542	Gossip is unreliable	Maybe gossip is not trustworthy
	to believe what I was told...	543		
	I told myself, how is it possible	544		
	that a girl does things like that?	545		
	She ended up marginalized.	546		
I:	How did she react?	547		

P:	She carried on on her own...	548		
	I remember a comment of facebook,	549		
	kind of "you can tell whatever you want,	550	Loneliness	Loneliness
	I know the truth"...	551		
	you know, the usual stuff...	552		
	She had couple of friends	553	True friends vs peers	Peers can be friends or foe
	and she carried on like that...	554		
I:	OK...	555		
P:	Often then it's anorexia...	556	Eating disorders	Bad consequences of gossip
	she became anorexic...	557		
	she ended up in hospital for months...	558	Hospitalization	
I:	So, she suffered proper harm	559		
	for the fact of	560		
	having been targeted like that? I see...	561		
P:	Exactly...	562		
I:	It sounds like a complex dynamic,	563		
	I wonder if you think young people are free	564		
	to do what they want?	565		
P:	Anything you do will be used	566	Retaliation law	Sharing unwisely leads to retaliation
	against you... that's it...	567		
I:	OK, I see, sounds like retaliation...	568		
P:	It's a bit like with parents,	569	Peers and parents, the same thing	Parents are not supportive
	any word you say will be used	570		

	against you...	571		
I:	I see... second thing I ask you,	572		
	these images, look at them,	573		
	you can take them, move them, etc.	574		
	They are all sexualised images,	575		
	I mean I've chosen images	576		
	that are not explicit but they	577		
	are mainstream and from different	578		
	historical periods and cultures.	579		
	I'm asking you to tell me if you see	580		
	any connection between	581		
	these images and sexting?	582		
P:	There is the element that	583		
	they are circulating widely,	584	Widespread images	Sexting is like other sexualised images because all are
	you can see them in churches, at concerts,	585		widespread
	on YouTube, on the Internet...	586		
	a bit everywhere...	587		
I:	Is this something similar to sexting?	588		
P:	Yes, they can be found everywhere,	589	Sexting can be found everywhere	Sexualised images are easily accessible
	some are serious, some are more vulgar,	590		Different images have a different nature
	like Miley Cyrus... others are artistic...	591		
I:	OK...	592		
P:	Well, I wouldn't know...	593		
I:	Is there any that you would exclude,	594		



	you'd think it has nothing to do with sexting?	595 596		
P:	This one (Fireworks)...	597	Not like sexting	
I:	Ok...	598		
P:	Because these don't really concern technology... whereas this one with Miley Cyrus and this one, who is he?	599 600 601 602	Sexting equal technology	Technology makes some sexualised images more akin to sexting
I:	50 Cent	603		
P:	Maybe they are more related to technology because they are accessible on the Internet, whereas these ones are more sophisticated, so they are less related to technology...	604 605 606 607	Easy access on the Internet Sophisticated images are not easily accessible Sophisticated no link with technology	Art is not for everyone. Art is "reliable"
I:	What do you mean by more sophisticated?	608		
P:	I wouldn't expect them to pop up on the Internet spontaneously..	609 610	Sophisticated must be searched for	
I:	I see... if I ask you to tell me the story of what you see in this image (Rape of Sabine women), like, you can invent any story....	611 612 613 614		

P:	A girl who is not feeling well, she is about to faint, she is upset, or something like that, and her man supports her, and then there is a man who doesn't want to see. It could be that both men where in love with her and one has prevailed over the other...	615 616 617 618 619 620 621 622 623	Suffering  Man is supportive Man cannot stand other man's support  Rivalry  One gets the girl	Josephine confuses a rape for a supportive act She thinks it's a supportive act because this is art
I:	OK, what do you feel about it?	624		
P:	Maybe passion?	625	Passion	
I:	Is it a happy passion?	626		
P:	It's a bit sad, a bit dramatic, that's it...	627	Dramatic, sad	
I:	What are the elements in common with sexting?	628 629		
P:	I think sexting is more vulgar, I don't think it's a dramatic passion or artistic... I think it's much more vulgar...	630 631 632 633	Sexting is vulgar Sexting is not dramatic Sexting has no passion, nor art	Sexting is vulgar, so it's not art
I:	OK, so you think there is a difference between an artistic image and sexting, which is vulgar?	634 635 636		
P:	An artistic image, a nude sculpture	637	Art nude is not vulgar	

	in my opinion is not vulgar, it's art...	638	
	A nude of a woman that is not a sculpture, a painting, just a picture is vulgar in my opinion...	639 640 641	Sexting is vulgar
I:	OK, who do you think produced this kind of sculpture?	642 643	
	This is from the renaissance, who was making this kind of art?	644 645	
P:	I don't know, Michelangelo maybe?	646	
I:	OK, I didn't mean the specific author, I mean...	647 648	
P:	OK, well a famous sculptor, not the first one who comes along...	649 650	Art is made by famous people Art is about displaying wealth, sexting is about displaying the body But still not everyone can.
I:	Who do you think might have been interested in buying this kind of art?	651 652 653	
P:	Wealthy people, to display them in their houses or in churches...	654 655	Wealthy people buy art To display it
I:	OK	656	
P:	Convents and that kind of place...	657	
I:	Why did they want to display or own such statues?	658 659	

P:	To display their wealth...	600	Wealth is in display
I:	A bit to brag about their wealth...	601	
P:	Exactly...	602	
I:	Ok	603	
P:	To show off...	604	Art is to show off wealth
I:	Has the meaning of sexualised images changed under this perspective?	605 606	
P:	It hasn't, it's still similar. Back then, wealthy people displayed their wealth, nowadays it's no longer money that is displayed, but something else...	607 608 609 610 611 612	Sexualised images are used to display Used to display wealth Something else is displayed now
I:	What else?	613	
P:	The body	614	The body is displayed now
I:	OK	615	
P:	We are surrounded by figures, human perfection, stuff like that, like models. The body is more and more displayed,	616 617 618 619	The body depicts human perfection

	perfection is searched...	620	
	there is a very high level of obesity,	621	
	but I don't see that around,	622	
	I don't see that many obese	623	
	people around...	624	
	nor I see pictures of obese people online...	625	Only perfect bodies are displayed
	On Facebook, it's just beautiful girls	626	
	who display their bodies...	627	
	there is a search for...	628	
	I don't even know what...	629	
I:	So in your opinion the body	630	
	is something to show off	631	
P:	Those who have a beautiful body	632	
	can show off,	633	
	those who don't cannot	634	
	display anything...	635	Ugly bodies are not displayed
I:	I see... What are the consequences	636	
	of new technologies in your opinion?	637	
P:	On who?	638	
I:	Generally, in society...	639	
P:	In general... with technology,	640	
	not just images?	641	
I:	Images, too.	642	

P:	What changed is that privacy no longer exists...	643	Privacy does no longer exist	Privacy is gone
	anything you write online is published, and you must be aware that anyone can get to it...	644 645 646 647	Online posting equal public posting	
	you won't take it off the Internet...	648	The Internet stores forever	
I:	OK...	649		
P:	Like pictures of people smoking joints, for instance...	650 651		
I:	OK...	652		
P:	It's very difficult to turn back... once that you've pressed the button it's published, dot. There is little that can be done. Privacy is gone and another consequence is populism... and comments, a bit vulgar... what else? Mmhmm...	653 654 655 656 657 658 659 660	No turning back  Privacy is gone when posting Populism is consequence Populism and vulgarity are similarly consequences Vulgarity is consequence of new technologies	
I:	With new technologies, is there...	661		
P:	Addiction also with technologies...	662	Addiction is consequence	New technologies are addictive
I:	OK	663		
P:	There's people who can't live	664	Addictive behaviour to technologies	

	without Facebook,	665	Social media	
	checking who's put a like	666	Getting likes	
	to their pictures...	667		
I:	Is this something you've seen often?	668		
P:	Yes, people who cannot take their eyes off	669		
	Instagram or Twitter, or Snapchat.	670		
	People who continue to post, post, post,	671		
	they check how many	672		
	followers they've got,	673	Getting followers	Seeking popularity
	how many likes...	674		
	they're a bit obsessed, you know...	675		
I:	So, new technologies are quite catchy?	676		
	They get people's attention?	677		
P:	I couldn't imagine a life without them...	678		
I:	OK	679		
P:	Maybe I could, but some other	680	I can live without them	I am more sophisticated
	people wouldn't cope...	681	Other people cannot	
	some people I really couldn't imagine	682		
	without new technologies,	683		
	without websites and social networks...	684		
I:	What makes them so interesting?	685		
P:	It's fundamental to have news to post,	686		
	life has moved from real interaction	687	Virtual life is better than real life for some	

	to social networks.	688		
	A while ago it was normal to go	689		
	knock on the door of a friend,	690		
	go to the park together,	691		
	now you have two lives...	692	Normal to have two lives	Two lives, two faces?
I:	OK...	693		
P:	Sometimes they match,	694		
	because real life is the life	695		
	on social networks...	696		
I:	Does this happen often?	670		
P:	Most people manage to keep a real life	671	Most people keep two separate lives	
	separate from the life on social networks...	672		
I:	OK...	673		
P:	Family life, school,	674	Real life is still real	
	going out on Friday night...	675		
	stuff like that is still very real...	676		
I:	But the two spheres interact...	677		
P:	It depends on individuals...	678	The difference is down to individuals	
	some people fuse the two spheres,	679		
	their life is based on what happens	680		
	on social networks,	681		
	around new technologies,	682		
	the most up to date phone, the playstation...	683		



I:	OK	684		
P:	Very centred around technology	685		
	If I go to the mountain for the weekend,	686		
	I turn the phone off for 4 days...	687		
	other people might not go, if their	688		
	phone cannot be used...	689		
I:	What happens to them?	690		
P:	I live better without,	691	I live a better life than those who are addicted	Addiction is a bad
live				
	in the sense that I don't feel	692		
	the need to check	693		
	how many likes I've got,	694		
	or to get to 300 likes	695		
	for a picture just for the sake of it...	696		
	I don't feel the need,	697		
	but there's people who really want that,	698	Others want to be popular, I don't	Popularity is vulgar
	they want to be popular...	699		
I:	So, it's a matter of popularity...	670		
P:	I find it pointless to be popular if	671	Popular vs real friends	
	in real life you've got no friends	672		
	because you're "technological friends"	673	Technological friends are not real friends	Peers are friends or foe
	in real life don't...	674		
I:	There's no...	675		

P:	Exactly...	676		
I:	How is the contact with reality for people like that?	677 678		
P:	It takes balance, otherwise it becomes abusive.	679 680	Easy to abuse new technologies	
I:	Have you ever observed this happening?	681		
P:	Yes, I know 12 year olds who are already living more online than in reality. At 11, they already had 200 “likes” and they continued, picture after picture, then they create a blog, they want followers, sort of fans...	682 683 684 685 686 687	Creation of a blog Followers are like fans	
I:	How do they cope with reality?	688		
P:	Well, I’ve seen nephews visiting their aunt and they spend 3 days on their phones...	689 690	Witness children not interacting	
I:	I see	691		
P:	You talk to them, you ask them something, they reply, then they ask you “what have you said?”	692 693 694	Not listening Miscommunication	New technologies lead to miscommunication
I:	OK...	695		

P:	Completely absorbed... you can't touch their phones...	696 697	Being absorbed Being defensive of phone
I:	Is this happening also among 16 year olds?	698 699	
P:	Yes, I don't see this very often because my friends are not like that, but there are people that are really obsessed. If a picture is not perfect, they throw it away and do it again, people who is on What'sApp 24/7, if they don't have access to the Internet they get crazy. We went on a school trip and some of my classmates were all "oh no, Internet isn't working here in the hotel, how will we manage without wi-fi for three days!" you know, the usual...	700 701 702 703 704 705 706 707 708 709 710 711 712 713 714	My friends are not like that Other people are obsessed Obsessive behaviour Disconnection equal getting crazy Example of school trip
I:	But you tell me, there are also young people who are not so obsessed...	715 716 717	
P:	Yes, there are...	718	
I:	Is there any basic difference? Have you got an idea why some people do and some don't?	719 720 721	

P:	I know many people	722	
	who do not have access	723	
	to Internet on their phones,	724	
	some of my friends	725	
	don't have WhatsApp...	726	
	I don't think there's any basic difference,	727	No basic difference
	but maybe those who	728	
	don't have access live better	729	
	because they don't keep thinking	730	
	"I must be popular, I must be accepted"...	731	
I:	Sounds anxiety provoking...	732	
P:	"I must get more likes because	733	Anxiety to be popular
	if there aren't enough it's a mess".	734	
I:	Where does this obsession for technologies	735	
	come from, in your opinion?	736	
P:	I don't know... my friends don't care,	737	
	they have their friends, they don't care	738	
	about other people...	739	
	the people they don't know,	740	
	they are not interested in what they think.	741	
	But those who do, they must live badly,	742	Obsession with popularity makes one live badly
	really badly...		
I:	Do you think family can	743	
	make a difference?	744	

P:	Probably, if you feel neglected at home,	745	Feeling neglected at home means seeking popularity
	you might look for some	746	
	attention elsewhere...	747	
	but it could be anything, any life story...	748	But many life stories
	there are so many different people	749	
	with so many different life stories...	750	
I:	It sounds like some people	751	
	might be unwell...	752	
P:	Yes, it's true, being constantly	753	Virtual life is unhealthy
	online isn't a very good life...	754	
I:	How often does it happen, do you think?	755	
P:	Very often... there's plenty of people who	756	
	cannot spend two hours without	757	
	checking Whats'App.	758	
	It's not easy, many people must live badly,	759	Addictive behaviour
	a bit like smokers...	780	
I:	I see	781	
P:	Yes, it's like being a smoker...	782	Smoking equal technology addiction
I:	OK, so new technologies can take off a	783	
	chunk of real life,	784	
	there's massive sharing...	785	
	more naked bodies to brag	786	
	about one's status...	787	

P:	You get more likes if you're naked, then you become popular, that's the dynamic in my opinion...	788 789 790	More likes if you are naked Naked pictures ensure popularity
I:	Who's more likely to become so addicted in terms of gender?	791 792	
P:	Everyone, it doesn't really make a difference anymore...	793 794	Everyone can become addicted
I:	OK...	795	
P:	Social media are mostly about presenting a positive image, to give an image of oneself and everyone can feel the need to present such an image of oneself...	796 797 798 799 800	Popular image is tailored image
I:	OK, gender doesn't make a huge difference in this sense...	801 80	

APPENDIX H Thematic map

