UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Cyberbullying: Teenage girls' online experiences of, and challenges to sexual harassment.

This research study is submitted as a full dissertation in fulfilment of the Master's in Education Degree, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

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December 2021

SUPERVISOR DECLARATION

As the candidate's supervisor, I agree to the submission of this dissertation.

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Name of Supervisor: <u>Professor Deevia Bhana</u>

Date: _<u>08/12/2021</u>_

DECLARATION:

I, Omeshree Lakhan, pledge that:

i) The research represented in this research study is my own effort.

ii) This paper has not been previously submitted for any other degree or examination at any other university.

iii) This dissertation does not contain any other sources unless specifically acknowledged.

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Signed: ███████

Date: 8/12/2021

DEDICATION

To my precious little girls…I love you all so very much!
Aradhiya Lakhan
Theraya Lakhan
Diviyanka Kadis
Nicole Harris
Cayla Harris

"i stand
on the sacrifices
of a million women before me
thinking
what can i do
to make this mountain taller
so the women after me
can see farther"

legacy- rupi kaur

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

The emergence of the internet has allowed for new modes of self-expression, whilst also providing new platforms for abusive social dynamics. There is a dearth of support in the response of schools, parents, and advisors to the experience of sexual harassment of young girls online. Cyber security practices, specifically the monitoring and support of online behaviour in academic policy can address the problem of sexual harassment and cyberbullying. Due to the rapidly changing nature of online landscapes, research connecting sexual harassment and cyber spaces remains minimal. Given the everchanging development of online spaces and dynamics, both governments and academic researchers have lagged in providing either sufficient study or governmental policy in the interest of protecting young people from online abuse. This study examines teenage girls' online experiences of cyberbullying and sexual harassment and aims to understand how girls confront and challenge these issues. The dissertation adopts a multi-theoretical approach focusing on gender relational theory, femininities, theory of performativity, and feminist new materialism. Data was collected and collated through qualitative research methods in the purposive sampling of South African girls aged 13-18 in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. This research was executed in Victoria High School through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, vignettes, and photo-elicitations. While the results highlighted the pervasive experience of sexual harassment online, unexpectedly, the participants revealed their complicity in this harassment by actively engaging in harmful online practices. In response, this dissertation recommends that key stakeholders listen to the voices of young girls and work in synergy to offer support from abusive online behaviours. As attitudes about sex remain taboo in homes and schools, it is the role of these advisors to make comfortable spaces for discourse about sexual harassment. Furthermore, policy makers need to sanction greater penalties to prevent the recurrence of cybercrimes and protect young girls in these spaces.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Affects: Emotions or feelings created through interaction with materials in online spaces.

Assemblage: A collection of spaces, bodies, materials, objects, affects that work together in capacitating young people through enactments.

Becoming: Transitioning form adolescence to adulthood

Blesser / Sugar Daddy: A "blesser" in South Africa is kind of like a sugar daddy. He's an older man who often has multiple girlfriends he lavishes with gifts, in exchange for sex and companionship.

Bumble: A dating app that matches suitable heterosexual matches where the women must be the first one to start a conversation.

Catfish: to lure young people into a relationship by means of a false online persona.

Crowdsourcing: getting approval from many people**.**

Cyber flashing: Sending unsolicited nudes of private parts to people via text message direct messaging apps.

Deterritorialize: the process by which social relations are altered to form new relations

Duck pouting: making duck lips with lips pressed together and sucked in cheeks to take pictures for social media.

Emoji: a small digital image or icon used to express an idea or emotion.

Emotional Atrophy: gradual decline in behaviour leading to behavioral and emotional symptoms.

Fantrepreneur: An entrepreneur whose business focuses on products, services, or media of interest to fans.

Ghosting: the practice of ending a personal relationship with someone by suddenly and without explaining withdrawing from all communication.

Heterosexual: Being sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex.

Hypersexualized: exhibiting very sexy presentations or indulgence in sexual activity

Materials: Everything around us that is made from matter.

Matter: Basic substances that make up the entire universe.

Objects: Objects are material things that can be seen and touched that make up the world (technological devices: laptops, smartphones, tablets)

Only Fans: a website where Creators use videos, photos and enactments performed to earn money.

Reterritorialize: the restructuring of a place or territory that has experienced deterritorialization.

Selfies: Photographs of self-expression taken with smartphone or webcam and shared via social media.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Cyberbullying is an *"emerging public health problem"* (Peterson & Densley, 2017, p.194), occurring through internet-based technologies resulting in violence, aggression and threats encountered by young girls between the ages of 13-18. While this technology has considerable value in developing empowering femininities, there are various manifestations of cyberbullying that diminish teenage girls' agency and is a violation to their digital rights. This chapter details the background context to this study, it provides the problem around which there is a paucity in understanding girls experiences, it explores through the rationale as to why this research study was executed. It will present the aims, objectives and critical questions that underpin the study, followed by the theoretical framework and the study's location. It will then provide the criteria chosen to secure participants and finally provides an overview of data analysis by the categorization of data into thematic analysis.

1.2 Background

Numerous studies have reported that bullying amongst teenagers is an aggressive form of behaviour that is pervasive in schools across the globe and is regarded as a form of harassment (Smith, 2016; Festl & Quandt, 2016; Dasgupta, 2019; Mitchell & Stulhofer, 2020). Bullying has extended into digital realms as "cyberbullying", with Peter and Petermann (2018) conceptualizing it as an intentional act of inflicting harm on an individual using electronic devices, such as computers, laptops, and smartphones through the mediums of videos, text messages and images. It is contended that cyberbullying is a "systemic abuse of power" (Smith, 2016, p. 519) that leads to inequalities between people of different sexes due to cultural and societal norms imposed upon them. According to Naezer (2018), girls face being labelled "slut" when they upload sexy selfies of themselves, and while they seek to challenge their heterosexuality ingrained in the gender binary, girls are attempting to challenge these previously condemned practices.

Technology presents a double-edged sword, and while it is a source of global cohesion, and an invaluable knowledge base, it can also serve as a breeding ground for danger amongst the youth. The youth is more susceptible to online dangers because of their curiosity and need to fit in. Therefore, it can be elucidated that the use of the internet is determined by people's actions, personality traits and attitudes (Monteith et al., 2021). A study conducted by Armitage

(2021) noted that the COVID-19 lockdowns, coupled with closure of schools during the peak of the pandemic, increased cyberbullying through digital modalities, and specifically impacted on females. Technological devices are used to access social media applications such as: Tik-Tok, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Myspace, and WhatsApp amongst many others, with Dennen and Rutledge (2018) reporting that 85% of youth have access to these platforms. The implication is that the use of social media firmly entrenches its claws into its young people to the extent that they are reluctant to report or seek help to break the hold it has over them. It was asserted that young people share personal information easily on social networks, and that disclosure of private information and non-consensual matters put young girls at great risk (De Ridder, 2017). Certain social media sites do not take responsibility for the distribution of abusive texts or images, and user verification is not needed, resulting in anyone being able to view confidential information on a public platform, distorting the meaning of privacy. In a study in Tanzania on how girls see the world, it was found that "*due to their age, girls are seen to make choices out of ignorance or a failure to fully comprehend their consequences*" (Pincock, 2019, p. 1). Likewise, underage girls are particularly exposed to "*risky hypersexual performances based on misogyny, the subordination of women and girls, and male sexual entitlement*" (Bhana & Chen, 2020. p.1).

Despite both boys and girls experiencing cyberbullying and sexual harassment, a study in Munster, Germany, by Festl and Quant (2016) shows evidence that girls are avid social media users and more at risk of online harassment than their male counterparts. Moreover, key stakeholders have a lack of understanding in addressing these risks concerning connectivity and engagement of young girls (UNICEF, 2017). Burton et al., (2016) revealed that more males bullied, harassed, and denigrated female victims as opposed to females involved in these phenomena. Digital landscapes are fast becoming a virtual haven for adolescents, who spend a considerable amount of time online. Real movement and socialisation have reduced, and social interaction has become condensed to just having screen time (Bowles, 2020). Digital Technology focuses on communication tools that are emphasizing the acquisition of cognitive skills through a visual consciousness thus neglecting the other senses. Furthermore, uninformed parents do not fully comprehend the techno-savvy nature of their children and have no idea how to use social media platforms. Therefore, it can be argued that parents' conservative and uninformed approach towards technology does not enable them to regulate and supervise their children's internet usage. This free reign over technological gadgets can lead to irresponsible and unfortunate outcomes for the youth. Spišák (2020) elucidated that

these outcomes can lead to risky sexual behaviour, poor academic performance, substance addiction, poor mental health, family breakdowns, reduced self-esteem, self-objectification, self-harming, and suicide.

According to a study in Switzerland, "97.7 *% of girls between the ages of 12 to 18 make use of their mobile phones, the internet, and social networks regularly and excessively, which position them as the population at the greatest risk of suffering cyberbullying*" (Ortiz-Marcos et al., 2021, p2). A study by Mitchell and Stulhofer (2020) noted that cyber harassment is a discriminatory process of unwelcome sexual attention aimed at young girls. They contend that increased use of the internet is shaping sexual norms and how teenagers explore sexualization, sometimes dangerously.

It is difficult to track sexual harassment and bullying in the digital realm, particularly when perpetrators hide under a veil of anonymity, their identification being further complicated due to the internet being a vast and specialized field of study. An inadequate number of law enforcement experts are trained to monitor and regulate incidences of cyberbullying and harassment (Kshetri, 2020). This field is also male dominated, with Kshetri (2020) declaring that female cyber professionals are under-represented in having cybersecurity skills, which may further impact on female perceptions of cyber harassment and bullying, and the impact they may have in reporting incidents. Addressing the gender disparity in law enforcement may make female victims more inclined to follow through if processed by someone of the same gender.

According to Morales (2021), it was reported in The New York Times that three American cheerleaders were victims of harassment and impersonation, with incriminating and altered videos of the girls displaying them nude, consuming alcohol and vaping. The learners were targeted using deepfake technology, which is software that is used to alter images and thereby spread false information having the power to ruin their reputation and result in harassment. Consequently, one of the three girl's committed suicide because she could not tolerate the harassment, while the other two experienced severe emotional trauma. A recent report by BBC News (2021) highlighted an incident in France where a 14-year-old girl was bullied at school. These manifestations of bullying and harassment were transferred onto social media platforms, where the victim received death threats, along with her nude pictures hacked and circulated on social media without her consent. It was reported that she was brutally beaten up and flung into

the river Seine where she drowned, with the 15-year-old perpetrators being under investigation for premeditated murder.

Such insidious acts are increasingly common with the advent of technology, and according to Cuthbert (2021), it was reported in The Guardian that the COVID-19 pandemic has enabled sexual harassment to move from offline spaces onto social media sites. A casual conversation with an older man led to great danger for an Arabian girl who was sent a series of sexual images by her perpetrator, which she kept a secret from her family because they would have thought she encouraged such risky behaviour. She was a victim of online assault and suffered guilt and self-blame. This incident involved sexting where inappropriate sexual messages and materials were displayed in the form of pornography by the perpetrator and sent to embarrass the victim (Setty, 2019; Ringrose & Barajas, 2011).

The Constitution of South Africa (1996) has enshrined that all children have a right to freedom of expression and privacy, and the right to be free from violence in any form. However, young girls are marginalized and face digital rights violations because perpetrators operate with impunity in a legal landscape that is ill-equipped to deal with cybercrimes. South Africa is only at the initial stages of policy development (Burton et al., 2016), and that laws in isolation will not uphold the rights entrenched in the constitution. A concerted effort that sees a paradigm shift in the male-dominated power dynamics that are entrenched in society is desperately required for equitable digital transformation. This is the necessary challenge that education and broader society must accept to address the adverse effects that social media can have on young people. There seems to be a lag in policy that underpins the framework of technological opportunity, authority, and responsibility (UNICEF, 2017). Policy making loopholes regarding children's' rights and welfare do not take into consideration the need for ongoing and committed investigations to address the evolving nature of cyberbullying (Bryne & Burton, 2017). There is a dire need to identify, regulate, prosecute, and impose restrictions on perpetrators. However, very little rehabilitation is offered to young perpetrators and minimal psychological support is available to victims in South Africa. A multidimensional approach is required in which the key stakeholders of government, the Department of Education, school management and parents need to work collaboratively to keep abreast of this phenomenon in closing the gaps that currently exist between policy and practice.

Macupe (2021) presented a case in The Mail and Guardian in South Africa, Limpopo province, shedding light on the deadly nature of bullying, which was graphically represented in a video where Lufuno Mavhunga was the victim. The abuse began online with nasty remarks and escalated into a physical attack at school, where the 15-year-old was manhandled and slapped several times. This incident of her brutal assault was recorded while her peers stood by laughing, and on arriving home, she locked herself in her room where she took an overdose and later died in hospital. This was fuelled by a continuum of cyberbullying when the physical attack captured on video was circulated and distributed so that everyone was able to see her embarrassment.

Cyberbullying is a new means of victimization transferred from traditional, offline bullying into online spaces (Hase et al., 2015), with Nielsen et al., (2015) concurring with this intermeshing of online and offline spaces, which is now regarded as inseparable. Further research by Ringrose and Barajas (2011) contends that cyberviolence manifested on social media sites through devices and can lead to an increased risk of being physically attacked in schools. In Lufuno's tragedy this was the case, and she left behind a powerful message in a suicide letter:

> *"Forgive me for what I did wrong to you and what I did to you wasn't so big for you to embarrass me in the eyes of the whole country. Where will I find the strength to sit in class and learn? When they pointed at me, laughed at me and it caused a pond of pain…Your doings made me lose hope. May God help you to continue with the journey where I left off. May you get educated and materialize the dreams I had for my mother for them to come true. My soul is not resting, it is not resting in peace. It was sent to death by those better than me. The mighty God must not sympathize with you, my tears that shed shall cause a cloud of curse upon them. I hope you are happy considering I have passed on…"*

Macupe (2021) contends in The Mail and Guardian that she could tolerate the real-world bullying, but the spill over to a wider audience on social networks was too great a humiliation for her to bear. This voice from the grave serves as a reminder of the devastating path of destruction that cyberbullying leaves in its wake. It is a sad indictment on society when a death is necessary to draw attention to a phenomenon that has become so prevalent. In a recent report by Phungula (2021) it was illuminated in the Daily News that a 16-year-old girl in a high school in Durban was ridiculed because of the size of her breasts. This defamatory incident took place

on a class WhatsApp chat group and leaves the victim feeling isolated, body shamed and psychologically scarred. The school management team chose not to get involved because they were of the premise that the incident occurred outside the parameter of the school. Consequently, when the incident was reported to the police, it was stressed that "*the National Prosecuting Authority declined to prosecute because there was no prospect of conviction as the message was not specifically directed at her*" (Phungula, 2021, p.1).

In a recent article by Naidoo (2021), a perpetrator extorted and sent threatening messages, operated under a false profile, and harassed his victim by threatening to rape her, and when caught, was given the option of a two-year sentence or a R60 000 rand fine. This was regarded as inadequate by women's rights groups, given the serious nature of his threats, and is evidence that in South Africa, punitive measures against cyberbullying and sexual harassment are not always powerful enough to prevent these crimes from reoccurring.

In an article by BBC World Services on the dark side of online dating, Ford (2021) contended that a disproportionately large number of females are experiencing harassment. It was found that females were asked for sexual favours even before even being greeted and were made to feel as if they were sex workers. These incidences can be equated to sexual violations and impact negatively on the victims emotional and physical aspects. Misogynistic encounters by men online perpetuate a cycle of abuse in which the effects are underestimated and irreversible (Ford, 2021).

In a report by UNICEF (2017) on the state of children in the digital world, it was emphasized that young people lack the digital skills and ability to be critical in maturely judging the security and trustworthiness of cyberspace. Evidence by Mckeown et al., (2017) suggests that there is a lack of understanding of how girls access technology and consume sexually explicit materials, and why they engage in the quality of information they do, so recklessly. Therefore, their actions may lead to gender-based violence which is an indefensible force of power that is widespread. The common forms of this type of violence entails physical, sexual, economic, emotional, and psychological aspects. If repetitive acts of violence are underreported or ignored, then the cycle perpetuates itself, this being the case in South Africa, where there is an excessively high rate of online violence impacting females compared to any other part of the world (D'Avanzato et al., 2021).

In South Africa, cyberbullying is under-researched as it is a relatively new phenomenon. According to Bhana (2017), childhood sexuality in the South African context is silenced, making it possible for social networking sites to allow young people to explore their sexuality dangerously. According to Chen (2016), young girls are adopting new persona to challenge the norms of heterosexuality and masculinity. A local study by Popovac and Hadlington (2020) that focused on teenagers aged 12-18 years established that there is a dearth of information related to evaluating and preventing online risks of cyberviolence. A study undertaken on sexual violence in South Africa against children indicated that girls reported more sexual abuse than boys, the latter being exposed to pornography while the former experienced attempts of coercion into sexual intercourse and emotional abuse (Ward et al., 2016). An absence of current and relevant research on cyberbullying and harassment in South Africa led to the focus on teenage girls' (aged 13-18 years old) and their engagement with technology and their confrontation and resistance to their virtual experiences of these phenomena.

1.3 The problem statement

The problem faced in South Africa is that society is unaware of what girls are doing in cyberspace and do not know the ways in which gender and sexuality are resisted and negotiated in these arenas because they are left to their own resources to deal with situations that can abuse their rights.

1.4 Rationale

My first motive for undertaking this study stems from my experience of that of being teacher at the forefront of learning in a high school for the last 14 years. Many of the learners I teach are raised in patriarchal families and live in difficult socio-economic circumstances, where the silencing of women has been generationally ingrained and influences young people's behaviour. Patriarchy is a cultural discourse that indoctrinates girls into believing they are subordinate, whilst boys are groomed for positions of power. In my experience, there have been arguments and physical fights among boys and girls where boys asserted themselves with strength, while girls remained passive recipients of violence. The male child, when provoked or emasculated, feels the need to react with violence by physically and emotionally lashing out at girls. While I have always supported the need for female affirmation and aspiration, there are unsettling cultural and social beliefs that undermine girls. Young people need to unlearn the double standards that exist for femininity and masculinity in offline and online spaces.

My second motive stems from my observation of girls' lack of knowledge in how to be critical when using internet-based technologies. Teachers are left helpless because cybercrimes are not occurring within the parameters of the school, yet the aftermath of damage leaves teachers having to deal with the negative impact to their learners' physical and emotional wellbeing. They often must spend a considerable number of counselling sessions mending damaged psyches. Unfortunately, emotional scars can have permanent repercussions which manifests as inequality, power imbalances and violence (Naicker, 2020). This study therefore aims at keeping me abreast of the power dynamics and the rapid technological advancements arising from social media. I want to be a teacher who is not just a presenter of curriculum but someone who assumes the pastoral role in confronting anxieties and challenges brought into the classroom.

Thirdly, the rise of technology has imposed a new dynamic in the way respect among young people is practiced, consent is given, and autonomy is granted. Particularly in the last decade, the ubiquitous nature of technology demands that it is essential to keep abreast of teenagers' social experiences. Girls' exposure to technological advancements are increasing knowledge but, exposure also creates negative impacts on their identity, agency, and self-image. In my personal capacity as a mother and in my professional capacity as a teacher, I hope to be better equipped to understand cyberspace. I want to add to the available literature in the hope that other key role-players can propagate greater protective measures in response to the ever-changing virtual landscape.

1.5   Aims and Objectives

The study aims to examine how teenage girls in South Africa understand and manage their experiences of cyberbullying and harassment.

The study had the following Objectives:

1. To examine teenage girls' online experiences of sexual harassment and cyberbullying.
2. To understand how girls confront and challenge online experience of sexual harassment and bullying.

1.6   Critical Questions

The critical research questions are:

1.   What are teenage girls' online experiences of sexual harassment and bullying?

2. How do girls confront and challenge online experiences of sexual harassment and bullying?

1.7 Theoretical framework

This study was informed by a multi-theoretical approach, I applied four theories to my phenomena to make meaning of my research study. Connell's (1987, 1985) gender relational theory, the theory of femininities (Connell, 1987; Pyke and Johnson, 2003; Schippers, 2007; Paechter, 2018), Butler's (1988,1990) gender performativity theory and Deleuze and Guattari's feminist new materialism highlighted by Braidotti (2013) and Van der Tuin (2011).

Connell's gender relational theory (1996) highlights that history, culture and social stereotypes influence gender binaries. The theory entails understanding the dynamics of power between men and women and has highlighted that there are "*patterns of dominance, harassment, and control over resources amongst pupils*" (p. 213). Connell (1987) noted that gender relations occur because of practices that teenagers engage in and the circumstances around which interaction occurs. This theory will assist to uncover how gender power relations manifests in teenage girls' experiences of cyberbullying.

The theory of femininities and hegemonic femininities will also be examined, as Judith Butler (1988) highlights that gender, sex and heterosexuality are entwined, and acts performed on women cultivate a system of oppression that manifests differently in varying global contexts and cultures. Heterosexuality is a normative framework where men are the regulators of power and women are pressured to be under the control of men where there is "*refusal to grant freedom and autonomy*" (Butler, 1990, p. 19) to women.

Butler's theory of performativity enables an understanding of the relationship between the self and taking 'selfies', which can either bring affiliation or rejection once posted online. The reason for using Butler (1990) is that she specifically deals with sexualization and selfhood, which are heteronormative and may result in gender binaries (male and female). Butler (1990) asserts that's girls are searching for ways to challenge their sexuality on digitized landscapes.

The Feminists' new materialism theory focuses on the merging relationship that exists between subjects, materials and affects (Fox & Bale, 2018). One of the fundamental ideas promoted by the theory is that everything in the universe constitutes of matter (Trueman, 2019). There is a

relational process that exists between all bodies of matter, which gives rise to social interaction. Feminist new materialism (Corple and Linabary ,2020; Mohandas, 2021) suggests that material and online worlds are interconnected and entangled. The girls are the subjects in which the virtual non-human world becomes the real world, wherein they live through gadgets. Young girls use materials and devices that embody their emotions, experiences, and expectations (Blaikie, 2020). This theoretical framework highlights how girls engage with social media through their non-human materials, such as smartphones, laptops, and tablets. Media spaces compromise individuals' judgement and morality, resulting in the commodification of the material body (Fox & Bale, 2018). Spišák (2020) stressed that sexually explicit material contaminates sexual attitudes and expectations of young people. The relationality between the subject and material affects young girls, who consume pornography. Renold and Ringrose (2017) explored the interaction of girls' bodies entangling with digital devices is normalizing sexual objectification and desire. The harmful sexual cultures created in cyberspace leads to risky behaviour, permissiveness, and negative attitudes (Fox & Bale, 2018). This theory enables a richer understanding of what happens when the material and non-material worlds interact. According to Corple and Linabary (2020), social media sites and blogs may erase the physical presence of women, replacing them with images and words, which further marginalize them on social media platforms. This theory allows me as a teacher to plan and strategize educational practices that can dismantle misconceptions and power imbalances and teach girls to be more critical users of digital technology.

1.8   Methodology

1.8.1   Study design

This study used a descriptive, exploratory research design to collect qualitative data. Cohen et al., (2018) assert that qualitative data provides a detailed understanding of a phenomenon, action, attitude, and overall participation to make sense of the world. In this case, the qualitative methods enabled the researcher to understand teenage girls' experiences of cyberbullying through their perspectives, which will not be possible through a quantitative design. This study aimed to understand the interpretations of teenage girls' experiences of cyberbullying. Interpretivism is where the world is not experienced in the same way by everyone, therefore "*circumstances, culture, experiences*" are unique (Cilliers et al., 2018, p. 29). This paradigm was most appropriate for this study as it sought to explore the reasons and possible circumstances that created an environment where teenage girls are subject to sexual harassment and cyberbullying.

Case study research was used, which, according to Creswell (2007), contends that the researcher compiles an in-depth setting of a case, in this instance the case examined was cyberbullying within a school setting. A case study is "*the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances*" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 375). The choice of a case study was because it would provide vivid representation of relevant data on cyberbullying. The advantage is that it allowed the researcher to understand and recognize the complexity of social situations and provided insight into the participants own experiences. The case study was executed with the intention of obtaining rich, thick data about a "*contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context*" (Yin, 2014, p. 16).

1.8.2   Study Location

The study was conducted in a co-ed high school in the northern suburb of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal Province, and the participants in this study were young females. The school accommodates learners of different races who live in the area, thereby providing a breadth of responses from different socio-economic and cultural perspectives.

1.8.3   Selection of participants

Thirty girls aged 13 to 18 were invited to participate if they had smartphones and were active on social media daily. Purposive sampling entailed specific learners being approached by the researcher who were regarded as possibly meeting the inclusion criteria. Participation was voluntary, with parental and participant consent required.

1.8.4   Data collection

The data collection methods consisted of semi-structured individual interviews, using vignettes and photo-elicitation to invoke their thinking about their own experiences. The interviews were digitally recorded for later transcription and analysis. This step involved collecting and collating the data, with the participant providing personal accounts of their lived experiences to arrive at "*rich, individualized descriptions*" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 301).

1.8.5   Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis for this research study was audio recorded interviews and transcribed. The data derived from interviews, photo-elicitations and vignettes were thematically analysed to arrive at themes which address the two study objectives.

1.9   Overview of Chapters

The document is presented in the following five chapters:

Chapter 2. Literature review: This chapter reviews international and local perspectives of cyberbullying and harassment. Literature on teenage girls' online experiences of sexual harassment and cyberbullying are presented.

Chapter 3. Theoretical framework: This chapter outlines the theoretical frameworks used for this study. this consist of Connell's gender relational theory (1996) and, Judith Butler's (1988) theory on heterosexuality and heteronormativity, and the theory of femininities and hegemonic femininities and the use the feminist new materialism. These theories give meaning to understanding how young girls experience bullying and harassment on digital landscapes.

Chapter 4. Methodology: This chapter examines the methodological approach of the study, and outlines the research design, study location, sampling methods used, as well as data collection, processes, and analysis methods. It details the ethical issues considered, given that this study was conducted among people under the age of 18 and on a potentially sensitive topic.

Chapter 5. Data Analysis: This chapter focuses on interpreting data acquired from interviews, vignettes and photo-elicitations that were analysed and divided into themes.

Chapter 6. Recommendations and conclusion: This chapter highlights the findings that have surfaced and suggest recommendations and interventions to combat cyberbullying and harassment This chapter details the extent to which the Aim was achieved by addressing the findings from each objective. It outlines the limitations that may have affected the findings and their generalizability to other settings and makes recommendations for further research and application.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This research study explores how girls between the ages of 13-18 years old experience cyberbullying and harassment at a site in the Durban suburb of Chatsworth, KwaZulu-Natal Province. The literature review focuses on how girls negotiate and resist dominant gendered ideologies that underline their experiences of cyberbullying and harassment. These ideologies are based on the gender binary, which rigidly confine gender and sexual socialisation into male and female categories, based on heterosexual presumptions. The gender binary is based on power relations and inequalities, where masculinity is hegemonically produced in relation to femininity, which is subordinated. The gender binary is not only pervasive in offline spaces, but is widespread in the virtual world, reinforcing constructs of gender inequalities and heteronormativity. Girls challenge their experiences by their expert use of technology as a conduit through which they explore their sexuality. Gender inequality and power discrepancies are ingrained in the gender binary, this dichotomy existing where a heterosexual male embraces active and dominant masculinity while femininity remains passive. This is more so in South Africa where age-old cultural and social norms contribute extensively to the marginalisation of females.

This chapter provides an overview of the various types of cyberbullying, with key controversies and inconsistencies within the body of knowledge being analysed. The review addresses issues from international and local perspectives on cyberbullying and harassment, as there is a gap in understanding girl's experiences of these phenomena and how their actions and reactions may empower or disenfranchise them.

2.2 Access to digital technology and sexual relationships

The rapid development of hardware and software, including the internet, has led to the transformation of social interaction amongst people. Electronic devices, such as smartphones, laptops, and tablets, are user-friendly and affordable, making young peoples' use of it globally pervasive. In a study by Phelps (2019) on the construction of American girlhoods, 26 girls aged 10 - 14 years participated in examining the complexity with which they used social media and the number of ways they accessed these sites. The findings revealed that the girls were frequently using social media sites, with the study recommending that their parents needed to adopt a more proactive stance in their daughters' lives, as they fell prey to sexual predators,

pedophiles and cyberbullies. Internet-ready gadgets are not only easily accessible, but it is a norm for young people to spend considerable amounts of time surfing the internet or browsing through social media network sites, thus neglecting academic performance and face to face communication.

Sasson and Mesch (2016) undertook research in Israel and reported that technology in young peoples' lives allows them to stay connected, keep abreast of trends, to have online engagement with greater intimacy, and amplify their understanding of their sexuality. Digital technology may offer young people a way to quell their curiosity, alleviate loneliness and provide a space for self-expression. Although self-expression is an integral part of growth, "*children's rights in global internet governance institutions are rarely recognized, even though children constitute an estimated one in three internet users*" (Livingstone & Stoilova, 2021, p. 215). In some instances, young people are not responsible enough to curb their usage of technology and develop serious addiction to their devices. According to Du Plooy et al., (2018); Phelps (2019) and Nielsen et al., (2015), young girls are specifically targeted on social media and experience enhanced sexualization. Burton et al., (2016) conducted a study with 49 children between the ages of 9–17 and found that they were engaging with digital technology at a very rapid rate. The statistics showed that 86.3% of children were connected to social media network sites, 94.2% were on WhatsApp, 68.5% had access to Facebook and 18% used Instagram. Young people appear to be highly skilled in connecting with their peers and the outside world through their use of digital technology.

2.3 Digital Technology Advancing Sexual Relationships

While adolescence is a quest to find identity and advance friendships, many young people also want to be involved in personal and intimate relationships. According to Rodriquez-Castro et al., (2021), searching for new sexual interests, looking to experience romance and an insatiable curiosity drive sexualized technological experimentation amongst young people. It can be argued that "*adolescence is a period in which teens are separating from their parents and becoming closer to their peers*" (Sasson & Mesch, 2016, p. 973). Young people would much rather confide in peers, with whom they are building new attachments, than communicate with and possibly be judged by their parents and families. Livingstone and Mason (2015) suggested that the confusing stage of adolescence, with its rapid hormonal changes and normative pressure, are a few reasons why young girls find it difficult to fit in and therefore explore their sexuality recklessly. Young girls may find the anonymity of cyberspace appealing, as it is non-

judgmental, being a disguised nature, which may be different to their orthodox and male dominated realities.

Traditional means of communication and face-to-face contact diminishes across the virtual space, as the elements of non-verbal communication are lost, which leads to the assumption that the youth are more disconnected and disengaged from their families than they have ever been. Chen (2016) provides evidence that the young people's non-verbal cues are masked in cyberspace when he suggested that the tone of voice and facial expression are a missing discourse in effectively understanding young girls on social media. Emoticons have replaced emotions, and authentic personal interactions have given way to on screen communication. Thus, young people credit similar levels of intimacy to virtual engagements as they would in their real, interactive relationships (Van Zalk,2020). Being privy to non-verbal communication, such as body language and facial expression, is an integral part of understanding language, but as most communication appears to take place via text, deception is easier to achieve in online platforms.

2.4 Teenage girls' online experiences of sexual harassment and cyberbullying

Reviewing their online experiences of sexual harassment and cyberbullying will be presented in two sections, the first being international literature with the second being the South African context, with a focus on KwaZulu-Natal Province, the site for this study.

2.4.1 International

An international perspective that focuses on young girls' experiences of cyberbullying and sexual harassment will be provided. Despite the internet being used by young people for educational advancement and social engagement, dangers have arisen through technology in the form of cyber violence. A France study of 1127 participants between the ages of 12-16 years were interviewed by Richard and Couchot-Shiex (2021) found that perpetrators of cyber violence may stalk, embarrass, spread rumours, exclude, and coerce defenseless individuals. In a study in Sweden by Johansson and Englund (2021), it was noted that bullying and cyberbullying are highly relational, being hurtful acts of various forms that are directed using technology. The study draws on the experiences of 10-12-year-old children of which 98% had smartphones.

In Portugal, Matos et al., (2019) explored cyberbullying as a form of violence, where the perpetrators persistently harassed their victims, escalating the severity of physical and psychological threats through aggression and coercion. Roderiguez-Castro et al., (2021) conducted a study in Spain using 993 participants and contended that harassment and sexual solicitations by strangers are practices embedded in cyberbullying and enable perpetrators to regulate and manage power over their victims. A cyberbully is "*someone who deliberately uses social media to perpetuate false, humiliating or malevolent information*" (Cookingham & Ryan, 2015, p. 3) about a person. Cyberbullying takes place on ever-evolving devices that diminishes the ability of young people to manage their lives independently and gives others the opportunity to manage and control them (Herring & Kapidzic, 2015). Although the use of technology is highly advantageous, manifestations of cyberbullying and harassment may contaminate the experiences of young girls.

There are several types of cyberbullying that teenage girls are subjected to, such as harassment, which is a common form of online bullying that draws unwanted sexual attention and emotional blackmail (Mitchell & Stulhofer, 2020). Ringrose (2018) noted that harassment unfairly targets victims, presenting gender inequalities whereby degrading language and sexual remarks are hurled. According to Roderigo-Castro et al., (2021), cyberstalking is a form of cyberbullying that is entrenched in harassment, where a perpetrator intrudes on the privacy of their victim and asserts dominance using threats and ingraining fear without consent to follow through with certain actions. According to Dobson and Ringrose (2016), females involved in questionable online behaviour experienced harassment after the unsanctioned circulation of their nude images and were regarded as having initiated the problem.

Renold (2018) clarified that sexual harassment experiences on the virtual landscape pervades young people's lives with repudiation, silence, and normalization. Chen (2016) exposed another type of cyberbullying, contending that participants undergo fabrication and manipulation of identities in the virtual world. Impersonations or masquerading are used, where perpetrators change their identity (catfishing) and pretend to be someone else. This type of cyberbullying is commonly used by those who want to explore their sexual preference, lure girls into dating, seek revenge, or harass those individuals who are insecure about themselves. Video shaming is also a common form of cyberbullying, and entails videos displaying incidences of fighting, provocative sexual displays, memes, and risqué messages on social media that denigrates the victim.

Dobson and Ringrose (2016) identified sexting as a portmanteau word by the combination of 'sex' and 'texting'. A report by Ringrose et al. (2012) noted that sexting is a confusing phenomenon and was described as the process of circulating illicit sexual images and texts by minors to each other or adults pretending to be someone else. A minor is a child under the age of 18 who is still in the care of their parents or guardians and lacks the legal capacity to make sound decisions, being impressionable and vulnerable to danger and risk. Roderigo-Castro et al., (2021) and Baiden et al., (2020) contended that sexting is a type of cyberbullying that involves the intimate exchange of erotic messages, photographs, and videos with forms of nudity to embarrass the victim. Ringrose et al., (2019) contend that sexting is prevalent in the United Kingdom, being regarded as a form of expression where negotiation occurred, and graphic sexual images were presented. In England, Setty (2020) conducted a study with participants aged 14 -18 years and established that girls are at greater risk of sexting than boys, which was also reported by Baiden et al., (2020). Berndtsson and Odenbring (2021) established that sexting is gendered and primarily affects girls, with 25% of young people aged 12-16 years having received messages or images of a sexual nature. These findings highlight that those young girls are very susceptible to the negative effects that arise from sexting.

Setty (2020) attributed hegemonic masculinity as a behaviour that is projected onto girls, where boys marginalize those whom, they consider to be on lower social ranks e.g., gay boys and girls. Cultural constructs perpetuate power imbalances, where girls are demeaned, and boys are considered supreme. In Sweden, Berndtsson and Odenbring (2021) noted that a hegemonic setting encouraged the sharing of sexually explicit materials of girls without their consent, which left them vulnerable to sexual harassment. Albury (2015) warned that exposure to nonconsensual sexts and photographs could lead to criminalization, as it is deemed by law to be an inappropriate practice amongst young people. The legal age to warrant consent for sexual texts and pictures is 18 years old in some countries, yet children who are much younger are engaging with sexually explicit materials. Moreover, victims are ignorant of their rights, while perpetrators are ignorant of the repercussions of their actions.

There is a disjuncture between the legal systems and the use of technology in many countries. In Australia, the use of pornography laws that are also designed to manage sexting fail to consider the various ways young people are practicing these phenomena (Albury & Crawford, 2012). While young girls are pressurized into sending sexual materials to their partners,

"*consent is under a microscope because they are not deemed legally to give consent*" (Livingston & Mason, 2015, p. 24-25). In the Netherlands, a study conducted by Naezer and Oosterhout (2021) introduced 'down blousing', which is similar to 'up skirting' and are types of image-based abuse constituting objectification of girls through pictures without consent. In several instances, the illegal dispersal and sharing of these images went against the sexual autonomy and agency of women. Dobson and Ringrose (2016) stated that girls who have experienced harassment after the circulation of their non-consensual images seemed to be regarded as having invited the problem. Issues with 'up skirting' reveal that male counterparts strategically angle a smartphone camera under the skirt of a female, and 'down blousing' is where the device captures the female cleavage unknowingly. These acts are deemed illegal, yet when it goes viral the female is blamed for wearing clothes that were too revealing, slut shamed, or they are portrayed as being enticing by the way she positioned herself.

2.4.2 South Africa

This section focuses on the South African perspective of experiences of cyberbullying and harassment. South Africa is a multi-cultural country, with many races who are represented through 11 official languages. Within race groups cultures vary, with many in the country subscribing to patriarchal norms regarding gender roles. This is compounded by widespread religious beliefs that have a Christian or ancestral foundation, where men are regarded as having higher spiritual authority, being household leaders and community elders, while the women are home makers and child raisers. While the country has many females who are employed in high-ranking positions, the dominant culture remains one of male supremacy, with women having to find their own spaces to express the way they want to engage with the world, including in community and religious arenas. In South Africa there is a relationship between race, culture, class, and heterosexuality that singles out girls and women as being vulnerable, because the African male is considered dominant and in positions of authority due to patriarchy, gender binaries particularly impact on the African girl (Carboni & Bhana, 2019). Shefer (2021, p. 4) concurred and stated that young African females are "young and voible" while African boys are "predatory and violating". Power and gender binaries originate from the premise that girls are "*innocent and passive*", and male sexuality is juxtaposed as "*active and aggressive*" (Bhana et al., 2019. p. 364). From the research provided it can be deduced that females are more likely to be vulnerable because of their characteristics of docility, submissiveness, and passivity, this being expected due to the very patriarchal nature of their male perpetrators.

According to Jewkes and Morrell (2010), differences in gender result in power differentials, where females are more at risk of intimate partner violence, compliance, and tolerance.

While young people visit online sites to feel accepted and keep in touch with their friends, online risks are a growing problem in South Africa. There is an ever-widening gap in understanding how and why young people are exploring social media in the way that they do. In a study among teenage girls aged 13-18 years regarding how they negotiated femininity, Carboni and Bhana (2019) proposed that their experimentation with sexually explicit materials is because their parents do not allow them the liberty to explore their experiences effectively and prefer to view sex as a subject of secrecy. Cyberbullying and harassment are occurring at an alarming rate in South Africa, with Mayeza et al., (2021) associating sexual harassment with name calling, humiliation, sexual bullying, and violent threats. In South Africa, there is also a fear of reporting such cases because girls feel ashamed of their behaviour. Parents are under the impression that their children encourage this type of behaviour online and may be unapproachable to discuss these kinds of matters with their children. Key role-players may also not consider cyberbullying as being dangerous because it takes place from a distance and may be handled as a trivial matter by those who do not understand the implications of the technology on the psychological, physical, and emotional elements of the body.

In South Africa, teenage girls face marginalization that is perpetuated by traditional, cultural, and societal norms, where males dominate the home environment resulting in girls being silenced. African boys brought up in these homes practice hegemonic masculinity. While culture is the tapestry that weaves the fabric of society together, divisiveness exists in gendered roles under the guise of traditional practices. Morell et al., (2012) described white and black masculinities in South Africa and identified hegemonic masculinity as rooted in negative attitudes that propagate risky sexual performances, violence, and the rampant exploitation of females. A study by Mayeza and Bhana (2021) focused on hegemonic boys who noted that power was under the influence of patriarchy, keeping subordinated girls compliant. The authors further contend that hegemonic masculinity manifests as violence, which may be very harmful to girls, with boys taking ownership of girls' bodies and deciding how they should be represented, regulated, and controlled. In South Africa, according to Kangaude et al. (2020), childhood sexuality in some African home environments is missing, and masculinity is hypersexualized while femininity is passive. Girls are exposed to dangers such as unsafe sexual behaviour, transactional sex, rape, coercion, grooming, abuse, prostitution, and early marriage.

2.5 How girls confront and challenge their online experiences of sexual harassment and cyberbullying.

2.5.1 International

Internationally, girls are challenging and confronting cyberbullying and sexual harassment in multiple ways. Nielsen et al., (2015) shed light on females aged 11-18 years in Finland who were 100% connected to gadgets and engaging with sexual online messages that lead to harmful sexual development and ill mental health. When sexually charged images and messages are circulated without consent by the perpetrator, the embarrassment on the victim far outweighs the ramifications meted out to those who are accused of sexual crimes. According to Roderiguez-Castro (2021), 83.5% of young people admitted to exhibiting, managing, and controlling behaviours online, especially when in intimate relationships. Participants in Roderiguez-Castro's (2021) study stated that it was common practices to access their partners' passwords and delete contacts they did not approve of, and that accessing pictures and sexts of intimacy was something they thrived on to feel a sense of power and security. Additionally, participants claimed that when online relationships failed or partners had separated, intimate pictures and texts were publicized as a form of revenge and trolling.

Scarcelli (2015) researched girls' experiences in Italy and found that there is an increased availability of sexually explicit material that is allowing girls to reinvent their gender experiences. Research by Atwood et al., (2018) in the United Kingdom highlighted an increased consumption of multiple forms of pornography and referred to the virtual space as a space of life altering sexuality, where the reach of sexual fantasies was openly explored by curious young females. Pornography can be defined as the construction of sexual representations and fantasy induced depictions that are enacted in a desensitized manner (Paasonen, 2014). According to Spišák (2020) she undertook a study in Finland among 12-17 years old teenagers and contended that there was major concern about the youth's manifestations of the innumerable pornographic images these young people explored, the findings showing that these hypersexualized images were freely available through technological devices. Underage girls whose worlds are small thrived in the vast and veiled space to liberally explore their sexuality through pornographic platforms. According to Mckeown et al., (2017), findings in Canada amongst 11 female participants reported that 90% accessed sexually explicit content. Fox and Bale (2018) noted that an overconsumption of

sexually explicit materials may impair judgement, impact on sexual attitudes, and create a lack of empathy in the youth. Jackson and Vares (2015) provided evidence that the boundaries between private and public space have become blurred, which is allowing sexual content to filter into the normal world, increasing its exposure to impressionable young people.

While technology has a powerful influence on sexuality and the shaping of identities of young girls', their experiential nature compels them to function though heteronormative and patriarchal means (Korkmaze, et al., 2020). Evidence by Chen (2016) suggests that girls are challenging the norms of masculinity and heterosexuality and developing more liberated online profiles and practices. A feminist study in the United Kingdom by Attwood et al., (2017) found that technology was associated with "*the sphere in which we become who we are, and the space in which the self emerges*". However, in the Netherlands, a study by Naezer (2018) found that moral panics are arising because young girls are exploring their sexuality, not merely as passive receivers but by gravitating to cyberspace as an empowering platform. Tsaliki(2015) found that young girls are engaging in dangerous behaviour that takes away their childhood innocence. According to Van Oosten et al., (2017), who worked with Dutch adolescents, girls engaged in hyper femininity which entailed being scantily dressed and indicated that they were becoming desensitized to the social norms and stereotypes imposed on them.

According to Scarcelli (2015), the internet invited girls into a boy's world, where they could engage with sexually explicit materials without repudiation and stigmatization from society, and gain greater insight into desire, their bodies and sexuality. It is argued that regardless of the "*moral discourse used to repress and silence manifestations of sexuality*" (Korkmaze et al., 2020, p. 3), young girls are trying to establish their own identities and are unreservedly investigating sexuality while negotiating normative behaviour, placing themselves at great sexual risk. These risks are listed by Angel et al., (2018) as objectification and commodification. Penney (2016) concurs, when she explains that exposing themselves to these provocative representations against gendered norms are a transgression against traditional cultural and social norms of girlhood.

Mendes et al., (2018) stressed that although sexual violence was once seen as an invisible, suppressed action directed at young girls, the digitized landscape now helps them to challenge sexual violence. Women had to constantly be taught how to avoid rape by regulating their behaviour, dress code and online discourse, while men's behaviour remained unchallenged

(Mendes et al., 2018). In a study in Australia by Hayes and Dragiewicz (2018), it was argued that males felt a sense of entitlement and intentionally circulated pictures of their private parts (cyber-flashing) to women to make them feel uncomfortable, yet these men are omitted from controversial debates around morality.

In an Australian study by Hart (2017), who engaged with the experiences of 25 young people who posted naked selfies, it was noted that they were merely embracing their sexuality, which gave them a sense of belonging and acceptance. A contrasting claim suggests that some view this exposure of sexy self-representation as slut-shaming, which is "*disparaging girls for acting in a manner that violates gendered norms*" (Berndtsson & Odenbring, 2021, p. 92). These findings reveal that there are preconceived ideas of sexuality and how girls should act and behave to prevent them being stigmatized. Ringrose et al. (2013) asserted that girls are thriving in the veiled space to liberally explore their sexuality. Mckeown et al., (2017) findings in Canada revealed that 90% of females reported accessing sexually explicit content and challenged sexual double standards. An Italian study by Scarcelli (2015) highlighted that there are sexual double standards, where boys' sexual practices are condoned, and girls are condemned. Society often frowns upon girls who are popular with boys, regarding them as 'sluts' or 'whores.' However, if a boy is popular amongst girls, this is deemed as being a part of normal 'boys will be boys' behaviour.

Ringrose (2018) noted that social media is a benchmark for self-worth, and that when girls get attention on the virtual platform, they feel a sense of importance. Many young girls are searching for acceptance and feel the need to gain affiliation, the internet being the perfect status enhancing space. Pincock (2019) elaborated that sexual agency as a standard is evaluated, based on desire and sexual aggression. Paasonen (2018) contended that some girls have monopolized the virtual space to get 'likes', 'shares', and comments to command attention, seek sexual agency and gain popularity. Girls are using social media as a form of catharsis through which they can tell their stories using memes, selfies, and hashtag videos to feel a sense of upliftment through the reach of a wider online audience.

Sexualization is fueled by pop culture, trends, and mass media, which are major contributors of young people's perception and how skillful girls can be in performing their femininity in a provocative way (Ringrose et al., 2019. Various authors (Jackson & Vares, 2015; Naezer, 2018) noted that hyperfeminized and sexualized representations are determined by wearing

high heels, excessive makeup, duck pouting, wearing tight or skimpy clothing, and accentuating certain parts of the body to encapsulate 'hetero-sexiness'. These kinds of 'sexy' representations that are displayed by pop stars or in advertisements are emulated by young girls, with social media having proceeded to intersect with hegemonic constructions of femininity. Dobson (2016) affirmed this by referring to the dichotomy, where some girls are seen as victims and others as villains who challenge femininity via sexy content created on social media. The veiled nature of the virtual space makes this a virtual playground for girls who seek to embrace the full capacity of their gender. Girls may feel that this space provides them with an outlet to liberally express themselves. They can gain validation from their virtual audience and command attention to feel a sense of self-worth when this part of the developing self and sense of importance is missing in the home environment.

A Taiwanese study by Chen (2016) noted that it was becoming increasingly common for girls to challenge the heterosexual norms of masculinity, where they engage in role reversal by being sexual agents of dominancy. The restrictions placed on girls by their culture and traditional impose limitations on them, with conservative issues, such as dating, boyfriends and sex not being openly discussed, resulting in them gravitating to the virtual realm to explore their sexuality. This space becomes a fantasy world, where they can adopt different personas and experience their gender freely. Setty (2020) and Ringrose et al., (2013), stated that women are seen as 'trophies' through the sexy images they produce, and men are uplifted in their masculine code of honour to feel a sense of hierarchical power when in possession of these compromising pictures.

Girls' attractiveness and conduct is dictated to by social and cultural means, with Dobson (2016) stating that sexualization is due to entrenched cultural practices that are used as a tool to shape sexuality. According to Spišák (2016), a cleavage exists between sexualization and female agency, and that those teenage girls who experience sexuality as a taboo subject in the real world may not know how to effectively handle online sexual harassment. A report commissioned by The European NGO Alliance for Child Safety Online (Enasco) noted that culture plays a significant role in how adults handle and accept how "*young people gain sexual knowledge and experience*" (Livingstone & Mason, 2015, p. 14). In addition, sex education in schools do not always effectively promote children's awareness of healthy sexuality development. Spišák (2016) stressed that the experiences of sexting and pornography need to

be openly discussed in sex education, given that it is now a part of young peoples' daily experiences.

Dobson and Ringrose (2016) identified a serious gap in schools' inabilities to address the cause and effect of cyberbullying and sexting, as well as keeping abreast of their learners' technological advancements. Spišák (2020) highlighted that a more up-to-date and nuanced approach is required to evaluate how young people's identities intersect with sexually explicit media and the effects thereof. Young people are ashamed to openly express their views on pornography, and teachers may not understand or want to take responsibility in addressing the social issues that occur online as they are ill equipped to identify and comprehend the far-reaching outcomes.

Patriarchy is steeped in history and tradition, entailing practices where men subjugate and dominate women. Feminist research has found that cultural constructs have infiltrated online spaces and are "*contaminating the sexual subjectivity and values of young people, encouraging self-exploitation and the re-embedding of patriarchal forms of gendered power*" (Karaian, 2015, p. 342). These preconceived notions about femininity derive from perceptions of stereotypical gendered roles, and fuel girls to challenge sexual exploration online while simultaneously exposing them to cyberbullying and harassment. There is a disjuncture in the way young girls view their desires, emotions, and identity on social media platforms. Handyside and Ringrose (2017) qualify this claim by emphasizing that girl's identities are at a great risk of falling into disrepute. However, they are developing a resilience to sexual issues and prematurely learning about the ambit of sex, sexuality, and the connection with self.

2.5.2 South Africa

In South Africa there is a paucity of research around how girls are confronting and challenging their experiences of cyberbullying and sexual harassment. A study by Du Plooy et al., (2018) posited that healthy sexuality is most powerfully expressed when it is done in a way that respects others. Oosterhoff et al. (2017) stressed that young people are not given much guidance on sexuality in the real world by their parents and are therefore experimenting with innovative technology to understand it. Technological devices have become the central hub for young girls' sexualities, providing them a space of expression and agency that lacks in their real life (Gibbs et al., 2021). Young girls in virtual spaces are pressured into performing highly provocative sexualized displays, which impacts on them becoming increasingly dissatisfied

with their appearance. Young girls are constantly editing and updating their online profiles to gain more likes and positive comments about themselves. According to Gibbs et al., (2021) the preoccupation with self-representations is because social network sites are fixated with marketing their ideas of sexuality and playing on the inadequacies of girls' beauty, body shape and overall appearance while allowing men to unravel new ways to control and dominate girls. Naicker (2020) contends that boys regulate and monitor girls' aesthetic appearance. Impressionable girls aspire to be like models and are slaves to media and celebrity culture, which inadvertently pressurizes them to undergo extreme body make-overs, induce eating disorders and trigger mental health issues. Girls develop a preoccupation with sexual and self-objectification, which is in keeping with the adage that 'sex sells. They are challenging the norms of society by the desire to go on diets to become thin. Formative experiences of sexualities of boys and girls between the ages of 6-8 years old were examined and it was established that sexualization and how children acquire sexual agency in South Africa is through inculcating heterosexuality as part of normalcy (Bhana, 2013).

Bhana et al., (2019) view girls as 'sexual architects, who are trying to explore sexuality, desire and pleasure while still negotiating their innocence (p. 364). Although it is evident that technology is allowing girls a great many opportunities to uplift themselves, dangers present in the virtual landscape. Young people are ill equipped to deal with the skills needed to address cyber-sexuality due to there being a gap in how schools handle sexuality and how young people face their realities (Carboni and Bhana, 2017). According to Kanguade et al., (2020), teachers are the vehicle that can either empower the child with sexual rights-based education or deny them due to their own perceptions of patriarchal constructs and the gender binary. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement for Life Orientation had a glaring lack of information on sexuality, particularly in the formative years of adolescence. This presents as a problem, as children inhabit an era governed by the internet and experience cyberbullying and harassment due to their excessive use of it. This is despite being ill equipped to deal with cybercrimes or sexuality issues due to their ignorance about these phenomena. Teachers are also inexperienced in dealing with these cyberviolence issues in the classroom because of its multifaceted and contemporary nature, and the fact that it occurs outside of the school setting, which falls outside the ambit of school authority.

Sex education is seldom provided at home, and children are under-equipped to deal with the sexually enquiring nature resonating within them. Bhana et al., (2019) contend that sexuality

education needs key stakeholders to encourage, guide and equip children to acquire skills to embrace safe sexuality and enjoy healthy associations with others. A study by Shefer (2021) highlighted that while sex education is being taught, gender normative practices are surfacing within the curriculum because the negative actions and attitudes of teachers perpetuate this vicious cycle. Educators either shy away from teaching sexual education or find other challenges taking precedence, such as a fixation with completing the syllabus.

According to Strode (2015), the Children's Act of 2005 highlights that while parents, teachers and society at large are duty bound to protect children from harm, discrimination and abuse, most parents lack the expertise to monitor their children's use of technology. Moreover, many children stem from fractured family units and do not have the guidance of both parents in their lives. Within the South African social climate, it is also possible that many children see their devices as the only outlet they have providing security, comfort, and uncensored expression. Policies in South Africa do not readily allow parents or even the justice system the right to easily intervene on social media sites. In a study of 13–18-year-old girls in two high schools in Durban, Carboni and Bhana (2017) noted that although the Bill for Internet and Cellphone Pornography Act (2012) is in place, the circulation of pornographic material is still pervasive, the policy not being effective in eradicating sexual pictures and messages on social media.

More recently, the Cybercrimes Bill (1 June 2021) was endorsed by parliament, as cybercrimes are difficult to deal with using the existing laws, and obsolete policies which cannot be used to address evolving technologically advanced cybercrimes. The act criminalizes the unlawful distribution and circulation of any image or text without the consent of the originating party. The Cyber Crime Act 19 of 2020 was drawn by the National Council of Provinces due to the rapid increase in cybercrimes, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, calling for a more stringent Cyber Crime Act with penalties. The Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), 4 of 2013 was affected on 1 July 2021 highlighting the right to privacy of personal information and protection of data. This act is undoubtedly a safety net for young people who constantly face hacking and disclosure of personal information, especially the distribution and circulation of sexually suggestive pictures. However, judiciary and law enforcement need to be more supportive and empathetic towards the invasive nature of these crimes on victims' lives. Oosterhoff et al., (2017) stressed that young people are not given much guidance on sexuality in the real world and are therefore experimenting with innovative technologies to gain agency. Teenagers need to be made aware of laws like the Cybercrime Act and The Protection

of Personal Information Act, so that they are aware of their digital rights. The constant need to upgrade the laws around cybercrimes is the only effective means of keeping the pace with current advances in technology and the associated crimes that arise.

2.6 Conclusion

The scourge of sexual cyberviolence continues as a perplexing problem, where issues of cyberbullying and sexual harassment are widespread in online spaces, and young girls' sexualities are still viewed through masculine norms. Girls are using internet-based technologies to experience a myriad of experiences that involve sexualization, pornography, sexting, objectification, and commodification. Girls choose online spaces as the preferred means of exploration to challenge their childhood innocence. They are maximizing the virtual space for sexual growth, but their behaviours are having devastating outcomes. The online platform itself is an empowering space that equips and capacitates girls to experience sex, and answer their intimate questions about love, dating and relationships. While girls challenge normative femininity, patriarchy and power binaries expose girls to risks of danger, disease and damage to the mind and body. In my review of literature, it was evident that girls are desensitized and reckless in their approach to explore their sexuality which consequently still occurs in a gendered way. Dangerous conditions are arising from social media sites that dictate how girl bodies and appearances should be projected. Technological devices are central to catalyzing sexual relationships, yet the virtual world affords girls a false sense of power and control over their lives. Manifestations of multiple partner relationships, mistrust, infidelity, and deception have created normalized and distorted ideas of love amongst young girls. In the next chapter I will provide a theoretical framework that underpins my research study.

CHAPTER 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the multi-theoretical approach adopted to frame the study and to make meaning of how power integrates within gender relations that perpetuate cases of cyberbullying and sexual harassment. Through Connell's gender relational theory (1985, 1987) and the theory of femininities (Connell, 1987; Pyke and Johnson, 2003; Schippers, 2007; Paechter, 2018), I aim to conceptualize femininities and explore their multiple forms in society. Femininities are fluid, patriarchally driven and considered an under-theorized phenomena in contrast to masculinities. Butler's theory of performativity (1988) will be explored within the gender binary and reveal the disparity that exists between masculinities and femininities. A Butlerian lens will also be used to propose perspectives on sex, gender, gender performativity as well as the heterosexual and cultural matrix. I will also make use of the contemporary feminist new materials theory as a branch of post-humanism to provide insight into how materials, bodies and discourses intertwine in the process of "becoming" as subjects, where reconfiguration from passivity to active agency is promoted (Lyttleton-Smith, 2019). The chapter starts by understanding gender relations, then reviews constructions of femininity, sex and gender construction, Butler's theory of performativity and feminist new materialism, all of which will be used to understand the results that emerge from the study findings, specifically regarding how young girls confront and challenge their experiences of cyberbullying and sexual harassment.

3.2 Understanding Gender Relations

According to Connell (2000), gender is historically and culturally constructed, and can impose numerous restrictions on females. Connell (1985) posits that gender is not a logical entity but one that has a system of connections that create a family that depends on the production of femininity, with women being regarded as the home makers and caretakers of the family unit. Subjugation of femininities first stem from the home and is maintained through patriarchal practice (Connell, 1985). Gender is socially constructed and depicts what specific role women and men should play (Connell, 2000), with gender relations shedding light on gender roles, stereotypes, and the process of socialization. A stereotypical view of the female is to assume the role of nurturer or caregiver, while males adopt roles of authority and assume the right to patriarchal power. Women's social standing is a based on "*production, reproduction, sexuality, and the socialization of children*" (Connell, 1985, p. 267), with each of these having their own

entrenched forms of subjugation. Men take charge of females' lives through a set of theorized, masculine beliefs, attitudes, and practices (Mayeza & Bhana, 2021). Young girls subscribe to subjugation and inequity while boys are given entitlement and privilege. It has been explained that males have "*hetero-patriarchal privilege and unequal power relations*" (Moosa & Bhana, 2017, p. 2). The gendered dichotomy that is exacerbated by binary pressure deems males as authoritative and dominant beings, while females are considered passive and subordinate (Bhana, 2018). These deeply entrenched constructs of gender are further reproduced with insistent practices of heterosexuality and heteronormativity (Tolman, 2012). Gender relational theory identifies that there are multiple femininities and masculinities that exists (Connell, 1995). Females are at the forefront of inequality, marginalization, restrictive autonomy, and a lack of agency in cyberspace. Femininities via technological gadgets are experienced through privileged patterns of masculine power (Bhana, 2018).

3.3   Constructions of Femininities

Femininities are conceptualized as "*multiple*" and "*hierarchical*" (Schipper, 2007, p. 85), with societies often devaluing femininity through socio-cultural inscriptions, this being the reason for their oppression, with femininity theory being underpinned by opposing constructions of subordinate and dominant relations (Pyke & Johnson, 2003). Schipper (2007) views cultural practices as a purveyor of gender hegemony, with the femininities constructed through subordination or domination being based on the intersectionality of gender, race, and class. For example, in South Africa, while White women experience femininity via hegemonic means due to their independence and assertiveness, Indian women are hyper-feminized to a point where they are considered weak and subservient, thereby experiencing subordinate femininities (Schipper, 2007), and Black women are seen as being aggressive and masculine (Pyke & Johnsson, 2003).

The ways in which women perform gender relations within their various cultural roles allows them to experience their femininity differently. Multiple manifestations of femininities are highlighted, such as hegemonic, emphasized, and normative femininities. Hegemonic ideologies of femininity intend to be challenge masculinities that uphold, preserve, and legitimize dominant positions in online spaces. Hegemonic femininity can be conceptualized as an "*expression of feminine characteristics which establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship*" (Budgeon, 2014, p. 324), being regarded as controversial by some academic scholars. Paechter (2018) highlights Connell's (1985, 1987) claim about

femininity not being hegemonic, while others, such has Schipper (2007), contend that hegemonic femininity does exist. In contrast to hegemonic femininity, hegemonic masculinity underpins the unequal gender struggles that expose women to various forms of violence (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012). Young girls may use hegemonic femininity on the virtual space as an invented world, where they conceptualize their own ideals of masculinity and find momentarily pleasure in their illusive virtual fantasies.

Emphasized femininity is a type of femininity described as "*compliance with subordination and accommodation of male desires, which they consider central to men's dominance over women*" (Hoskin, 2019, p. 2). This type of femininity is performed to hypersexualize the bodies of females with the intention of catching the male gaze. According to Carboni and Bhana (2019), emphasized femininities are naturized femininities that engage in heterosexual behaviour driven by the power to be in control, with females finding new ways to transgress their gender, sex, and sexuality (Hoskin, 2019). The use of digital technology has allowed girls the opportunity to explore sexualized media performances, which empowers them by giving them "porn-chic" status and allows them the sexual liberation they seek through technologies to gratify men (Ringrose & Barajas, 2011). Carboni and Bhana (2019) asserts that girls are experiencing their sexuality through masculine norms, where they are reconfigured as commodified entities. They are exploring sexually explicit material through technology in ways that allow them to rebel against the confines of male territory, while simultaneously searching for different ways of expressing their multiple femininities.

Normative femininity uses attractiveness as a yardstick to emphasize that the ideal female should be "*young, white, thin, heterosexual, middleclass*" (Winterich, 2007, p. 52). These kinds of ideals are generated though culture, with young girls being particularly under pressure to conform to these expectations. Powerful masculinities and femininities instigate a categorization process that play on insecurities, making some young girls feel especially more inferior to others (Pyke & Johnsson,2003). Setty (2020) contends that boys commodify the bodies of girls through circulating, tagging, and evaluating sexts and images. However, girls see this as an opportunity to harness their sexual potential and validate themselves through the attention their posts receive. With regards to technology and how young girls are experiencing their sexuality, they are projecting their desires in a way that places them at crossroads of sexual risks and innocence (Carboni & Bhana, 2019). More girls are being cyberbullied because they challenge male domination and are marginalized because of it. According to Connell "*bodies*

are seen as weapons" (2000, p. 837) and on social media, girls are emphasizing their bodies to lure boys who treat them as objects of desire. Furthermore, Sparks (2021) accentuated that the offender uses young females' bodies as leverage to become more socially accepted and popular. Society and media dictates to young girls what is acceptable embodiment, and prescribes a set of specific aesthetic appeal standards, which females are conditioned to follow. In attempting to become more desirable, females inadvertently side-line self-love and acceptance for sexualization and objectification, which drives the gender binary gap wider by exposing the stark inequality between males and females (Coffey, 2019).

3.4 Sex and Gender construction

There is a distinct difference between sex and gender, with the former being associated with the biological composition of a human being. A female is automatically deemed to be physically weaker, mentally more fragile, and emotionally sensitive. This generalization stems from her biological make-up and forms the foundation of the gender binary. Sex is conceptualized as "*natural, anatomical, chromosomal or hormonal*" process (Butler, 1990, p. 7), while gender is associated with the cultural constructs associated with binary inscriptions (Butler, 1990).

According to Braidotti (2013), it is the already sexualized constructs that impact on the gender/sex dichotomy, with gendered laws intersecting with historical, social, and cultural practices. The gender binary places individuals into male and female categories, which could constitute various reproductions of identities, and is where young girls frame their experiences of technology through adopting multiple digital gender identities. According to Butler (1993), gender constructs are predetermined and heterosexualized, with sexual codes of harassment being where men are the harasser and women are the harassed. Butler's (1993) proposition on harassment and heterosexuality plays out in a similar way in the virtual space. However, the seamless nature of the internet is empowering females to act authoritatively, and "*feminist theory celebrates or emancipates an essence*" (Butler, 1988, p. 529). Digital feminism is enabling young girls to strive for freedom using technology to invert the power dynamic, change identities and advance understandings of gender switching to experience true sexuality.

3.5 Butler's Theory of Performativity

Butler (1988) regarded the construction of gender identities as being fluid and expanded on how behaviours performed in society become normalized, with performative acts of the body

being constituted by appearances, gestures, mannerisms, and acts. Gender identity encompasses all these enactments that reshape sexual identity. In this study, Butler's theory of performativity is executed by young girls who are motivated by their own sexual drive to enact various performances, such as taking selfies, and engaging with sexting and sexually explicit materials that lead to the risk of cyberviolence of many other kinds. Penney (2016) refers to Butler's theory when she elaborates on the fact that explicit pornographic materials are suggestive of performative acts of a deeply sexual nature which are inspired by eroticization. Braidotti (2013) explicitly states that pornography exacerbates sexual harassment and that both these phenomena are dogmatic practices that create stigmatization around young girls' sexualities. Corple and Linabary (2020) asserted that females sometimes assume anonymous identities online to protect themselves against potential harassment. Performances are enacted under the notion that young people are redefining and reinventing their sexual experiences to challenge the gender binary. The gender binary promotes the condemnation of women in the physical world. However, acts of sexuality displayed in contemporary times through digital technology afford women the opportunity to challenge and push the boundaries of being female. Masculinity refutes women agency and autonomy because gender boundaries are shaped by historical and patriarchal means (Butler, 1988). In other words, men in positions of power cultivate a system of oppression over their females.

Butler (1988) highlights the use of role-play and identity, where acts of dramatic performances unravel and manifest as multiple dramatic online enactments. Chen (2016) highlights a digital dating game in which women inverted the binary by becoming the masters, where they make the rules, with the men being regarded as the pets who must take instructions. The virtual space was considered a stage for their performances, with the virtual audience providing the encouragement needed to command respect and attain validation. In this study, technology transforms women's sexual identities to improve their sex life and challenge heterosexuality. These performances disrupt the gender binary, and provide women with the opportunity of momentary fantasy, where they can embrace sexual empowerment and satisfy their restrained sexual desires. While feminine identities have always been shackled to heteronormative experiences, Lyttleton-Smith (2019) as being enactments of "doing" and "becoming" which is considered "*matter with intent*" (p. 659). The internet and social media become an experimental virtual playground for girls, who can explore their sexuality due to the anonymity of the internet and social media sites, with their reputations remaining protected and society not being able to pass judgment on their cultural, historical, societal constructs and stereotypical norms.

In society, when the gender binary is not effectively enforced, young girls who trespass the rules inscribed by the heterosexual matrix can undergo discrimination. The heterosexual matrix is where there is subliminal indoctrination of constructs that frame identities (Butler, 1990), which are categorized by a heterosexual framework. Hoskin (2019) emphasized Butler's (1990) work on the heterosexual matrix that casts a light on the dichotomy of gendered representation. Butler (1990) highlighted the ways in which performances were characterized, enacted, and expressed through desire and sexual digital cultures. Men objectify women as "*heterosexual exchange and distribution*" (Butler, 1990, p. 41), Being regarded as goods for the purpose of transaction and negotiation by men and boys who consider women to be mere sex symbols. These kinds of performances are prevalent in digital spaces, where provocative hypersexualized images of young girls are used as currency, and when distributed, are used to authenticate, and upgrade male status. García-Gómez (2019) highlights Butler's (1990) theory of performativity as "… *gendered identities and expressions, normative gender roles and performances, and sexuality in both online and offline contexts*" (p. 3). *A dichotomy exists* in performative acts displayed by males who use violence, discrimination, and inequality-based discourse while females want to perform acts of self-expression and empower themselves.

Young girls are already dramatically reduced by being female, in a masculine bound space, the interconnectedness with the digital space lending itself to further reducing them when they are slut-shamed, labelled, cyberbullied, or sexually harassed. When negative comments go viral, they catalyse the toxicity of the virtual space, dehumanize the subject, which could lead to fatal consequences. Butler (1990) contends that gender is also constructed through cultural practices, the cultural matrix being conceptualized when gender identity is prescribed by certain acceptable norms that have a political context and are regulated to keep society in line by cultural means (Butler, 1990). This is to conform to specifically shaped norms of sexuality that oppress women through patriarchal structures of hegemonic ideology.

Butler (1990, 1988) specifically deals with how heterosexuality and heteronormativity result in gender binaries that disempower females. There are rules for men that grant them entitlement, and different rules for women, which tarnish their reputations and impose condemnation on them. These sexual double standards, and the moral discourse debates that have been generated through age-old cultural, historical, and social norms, need to be dismantled to level out the playing field between men and women. Intersecting technologies

with gender generates a twist on feminine performances and how they engage in negotiating risks, exploring sexual desire and agency, and redefine their identities.

3.6   Feminist New Materialism

Feminist new materials is based on a combination of feminism and technologies melding together, being advanced by scholars such as Gill Deleuze and Felix Guattari (Braidotti, 2013). Feminist new materials is a social theory that ascribes to the belief that relational materiality merges with the social and natural worlds (Fox & Alldred, 2018). Fox and Bale (2018) advocate that materialism is fuelled by the interaction of ephemeral bodies, materials, discourses, and experiences within cyberspace. In the last decade, there has been a radical transformation in the way people behave as social agents in an affective world which is loaded with emotions, and changes in communication that is coupled with the rapid growth of cybertechnology.

Matich et al., (2019) identify the entanglement of gender and technology to be fluid, situational and dynamic, with changes in technology undoubtedly impacting on gender power relations. Through a feminist material lens, I will observe how this connection between bodies and materials, and their interactions of "becoming", fuel the purpose of social production (Fox & Bale, 2018). According to Keller and Rubenstein (2017), human beings are displaced from positions of privilege and power where there is a greater focus on the agency of matter. The fundamental essence of feminist new materials is that all entities are made up of matter or materials. In a study by Van der Tuin (2011), the body was identified as having the potential to be more than just a passive receiver and has a role in agential realism. Feminist New materialism is a theoretical orientation in which Matich et al. (2019) argue that technology is constantly evolving and impacts on bodies and gender power relations. Digital technologies acts as agents of socialization, allowing the exploration of affects (Fox & Aldred, 2021), these social productions being initiated when bodies merge with materials to produce affective responses and reactions through digital applications (Handyside & Ringrose, 2017).

Renold and Ringrose (2017) explore feminist new materialism and discovered that the intersecting of girls' bodies with technology in digital spaces (non-human world) gives rise to objectification. This theory involves the idea of distinctly "*rejecting differences between 'natural' and 'cultural' realms, human and non-human culture, structure/agency, reason /emotions, animate/inanimate and perhaps most significantly-between mind and matter*" (Fox & Alldred, 2021, p. 2). Feminist new materials provides an opportunity to observe how gender

and youth sexualities unravel in digital spaces and presents a new digitally infused nexus and sexual culture that advocates for violence and sexual harassment aimed at young girls. According to Taylor and Ivinson (2013), new feminist materialism concerns feminists with adopting innovative strategies to circumvent violence, discrimination, and inequalities. Braidotti (2013) emphasizes that this theory enables females to break the conventions of disempowered femininities to deconstruct the gender dichotomy that is pervasive in society and show the rise of a feminist mandate. The focus shifts from individual acts of cognition to promote the flux and flow of material processes, assemblages, and entanglements. (Taylor & Ivinson, 2013).

Under the sway of the feminist new materials, Braidotti (2013) highlights virtual feminism as a concept wherein subjects reinvent themselves through the process of 'becoming' in handling issues of identity, power hierarchies and oppression. Braidotti (2013) further elucidates that the females preoccupy themselves with developing into an embodiment of perfection due to the influence of media. They may take drastic steps, such as plastic surgery, and/or develop eating disorders to have a certain body shape because of the influence of media and celebrity culture. This theory makes technology the key social agent within which there is social production occurring through assemblages. An assemblage is a "*functional collection of connections*" (Coffey, 2019, p. 77) including discourses, experiences, feelings, bodies, affects and practices. Assemblages, according to Fox and Bale (2018), are material components that can be detached and plugged into multiple assemblages. To conceptualize gender as an assemblage through encounters with technology, it is importance to understand the active connections and the constant flux in which it evolves, as there is a gradual subversion of the gender binary model (Coffey, 2019). Gendered assemblages pose risks through technologies, where human and non-human entanglement occur and swift circulation of information is cascaded (Lupton, 2016). The repercussions of entangling bodies and technologies impact on young people's social habits, where they can easily develop a lost identity, lack of privacy, addiction, and self-objectification, and succumb to being victims of cyberbullying. Paasonen (2018) emphasizes that market leaders, such as Facebook, Instagram and Tik-Tok, use a degree of manipulation to control young girls by creating distorted perceptions of themselves through advertising, which amplifies the unequal power that exists in gender relations. If technology is not used effectively, the virtual space compromises judgement and morality, resulting in the commodification of the subject's material body. Braidotti (2013) highlights that through the process of 'becoming', subjects face new types of oppressions. According to Keller and

Rubenstein (2017), humanity converges with matter through patriarchal means, forming entangled worlds that bring about being, knowing and doing. Braidotti (2013) casts a light on the fact that patriarchy disparages a women's ability to have sexual agency, with female digital bodies being viewed through patriarchy as rupturing borders of feminine identities (Matich et al., 2019).

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the theories that best relate to my research study on the kinds of experiences of bullying and harassment girls face and how they confront and challenge these experiences. Connell's social theory of gender highlighted femininities and the impact of being female in the power dynamic. Men have shifted the boundary of power onto the digital realm where they still exert dominance over women. Butler's construction of sex and gender dichotomy contends that gender is associated with cultural inscriptions while sex is associated with the genetic make-up of a human being. Butler's (1990) theory of performativity is instructive in showing how girls can manifest a myriad of identities on virtual landscapes to feel empowered. Feminist new materials shows how technology is an agent that merges with feminism to drive social production through assemblages and events. The next chapter outlines the methodologies used to conduct this study.

CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The chapter outlines the study design using a case study approach, being driven by the interpretivist paradigm to enable qualitative data to be effectively comprehended. The study location is described to outline the school environment and clarify the socio-economic context. This is followed by a description of the school pupils to contextualize the selection of study participants, with specific inclusion and exclusion criteria being applied while using purposive sampling. The 30 participants were prompted to address the areas of interest through vignettes, photo-elicitation, and semi-structured questions to ensure that the Objectives were addressed. Ethical issues were taken into consideration during the study and data was analysed and arranged using thematic analysis, and the different sources triangulated to arrive at consistent themes, with issues related to validity, reliability, rigour, and positionality being important components for conducting qualitative research. Table 4.1 presents the two study Objectives and their associated data collection methods, while Table 4.2 provides an overview of the research methods.

Table 4.1: Study objectives and methods

Objectives		Methods
1	To examine teenage girls' online experiences of cyberbullying and sexual harassment.	• Semi-structured individual interviews
2	To understand how girls confront and challenge online experience of cyberbullying and sexual harassment.	• Vignettes • Photo-elicitation

Table 4.2: Overview of research design

Research site	Chatsworth, KwaZulu-Natal Province
Participants	30 girls Age group: 13 – 18-year-olds Race: African, Coloured, Indian
Methodology/Sample size/instruments	Instruments: Face-to-face semi structured, individual interviews Tool: Vignette/photo elicitation Sample size: 30 Duration: 30-45 minutes. Purposive sampling Thematic analysis

4.2 Study design

Case study research was adopted for this research, with Creswell (2007) contending that this involves examining a problem within a particular context, this study focusing on girls within a school environment who were victims of cyberbullying and sexual harassment. This type of research is about trying to understand the shaping of power in individual subjects to reach a hypothesis (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The design is adopted by qualitative researchers who wish to select and understand phenomena through complex ways as an integrated system that concentrates on a phenomenon and seeks to obtain a full description (Merriam, 2002).

Case study research acted as the vehicle that drove the study forward (Merriam, 2002), being defined as "*a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and a context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context*" (Yazan, 2015, p. 138). Case study research allowed us to make sense of abstract ideas and principles that complement each other (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 376), and was designed to establish a causal relationship between phenomena. Baxter and Jack (2008) asserted that case study research focuses on how and why a phenomenon occurs. Cohen et al., (2018) emphasized that the strengths of this type of research compliments the interpretivist paradigm well as it is concerned with making meaning of heuristic, rich, qualitative data that presents relevant and detailed understandings of cases.

According to Silverman (2014), qualitative research is involved in exploring and gaining rich descriptions of phenomena. It enables the investigator to interpret processes in the pursuit of making meaning and acquiring a detailed account of the phenomena in relation to the world. Merriam (2002) contends that the world is not fixed but is constantly in flux, and that there are various interpretations of its realities. Qualitative research aims to find understanding in unusual situations and observe interactions within unique contexts (Merriam, 2002), and should therefore aim to collect rich, thick data (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This research was executed in a way that the primary investigator could authentically capture the experiences of the young girls to explore their exposure to sexual harassment and cyberbullying. It is appropriate to emphasize that "*qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning, individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem*" (Thanh & Thanh, 2015, p. 26). Frels and Onwuegubuzie (2012) contend that qualitative research is a process of encapsulating the deeper meanings that create an advancing reflexivity in the researcher. It is where complex understandings of knowledge can be produced and processed through being

critical. Qualitative research identifies the complex nature of the world and highlights the associations of patterns that create meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

There are three frameworks of qualitative data analysis that Braun and Clarke (2013) discuss, these being that they are based on the formulation of patterns, are involved in interaction, and find meaning in stories. Qualitative research is a pedagogic framework embedded in an evidence-based approach to make ethical and moral judgements (Denzin, 2009). In this research study, the discourses, and narratives of the girls' experiences of cyberbullying and sexual harassment were used to make deductions from the evidence provided through an interview setting. Qualitative research for this study was most appropriate as it enabled close interaction with participants using a framework to understand their behaviour within their environments. It also presented an opportunity to contextualize the phenomena, with a particular emphasis on the subjects, the context, and their interaction.

4.3   An interpretivist paradigm

Guba and Lincoln (1994) indicated that the interpretivist paradigm is about the principles that govern the world and how individuals interact within it, being referred to as "*the beliefs, assumptions, values and practices shared by a research community*" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 3). This research study employed an interpretivist paradigm, which highlighted the importance of understanding the world and paying attention to the phenomenon that is of central focus (Cohen et al. 2018). An article by Thanh and Thanh (2015) purported that interpretivism is where participants will give insight into their background and the perspectives of their lived experiences to find answers. This research study focused on how girls reconfigure their experiences, challenges, and practices to establish their agency, which is performance based (Fredengren, 2021).

The purpose of using the interpretivist paradigm was not only to understand the phenomenon but also examine common issues that prevailed amongst the young girls, such as inequality, oppression, and sexual violence. This study explored the treatment of girls and the effects of the technological manifestations of cyberbullying that negatively impacted them. According to Creswell (2007), interpretivist, qualitative research focuses on reflection, how the research was read and the purpose of qualitative enquiry. This paradigm not only captured the varied experiences of participants but lent itself to creating understanding. The investigation of a specific phenomenon "*portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex and*

everchanging" (Thanh & Thanh, 2015, p. 25). A study by Braun and Clarke (2013) noted that meaning must be interpreted to provide rich descriptions of the data provided. Through the perspectives of the participants, the researcher used a deductive reasoning strategy to collect data by means of interviews and the analysis of the data (Merriam, 2002). This paradigm contends that to "*study human behaviour, experience, and interaction, there needs to be interpretation, self-awareness, cultural and linguistic mediations and recognition of agency*" (Dillow, 2009, p.1341).

4.4   Study Location and context

The study was conducted at Victoria High (Pseudonym), which is a public, multi-cultural school located in the outskirts of the suburb of Chatsworth in KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. I chose this school because it is easily accessible and situated within proximity to me. The school is situated in a predominantly socio-economic depressed, semi-urban area that is surrounded by informal settlements and low-income houses. Social impediments, such as unemployment, child headed and single parent households, are widespread in this area. Learners often resided with their grandmothers or aunts, as their parents work in urban areas, or the families are separated for a myriad of reasons, such as incarceration, death, illness, addiction, or parents have secondary family responsibilities. Victoria High has been in operation for 22 years and is rated a level 5 quintile school, that is regarded as being fully resourced and affluent, and therefore receives less funding from the government than poorer schools. Many parents constantly appealed to the principal for exemptions from school fees because they cannot afford to pay school fees due to financial constraints.

Most learners commuted by bus or taxi to school from the surrounding areas of Demat, Klaarwater, St Wendolins, Sunshine, Marianhill, Welbedacht and Shallcross. The school accommodates 1760 learners; this number having increased over the years due to pupil enrolment increasing with houses being built as part of the Reconstruction Development Projects in the neighbouring areas. This initiative was implemented after the transition to democracy in 1994 to uplift Black communities by removing them from squatter camps and placing them in better dwelling spaces. However, this had resulted in large class sizes of up to 56 learners, where teaching from the curriculum rigidly prevailed, and instruction about sexuality or sex was considered unimportant in comparison to getting good grades. Apart from the subject of Life Orientation, which touched on sex and risky behaviours, very little effort was made to discuss these concepts in all learning areas. The school is very academically driven

and placed little emphasis on sport, with only two sporting venues, a large soccer field and a large netball court that made up part of the assembly area. Many parents are unemployed and recipients of social grants, with the school setting up a lunch club for the children who do not bring lunch to school, this not being a part of the government feeding scheme initiative. The school followed a strict code of conduct, which was enforced daily by teachers.

The learnt behaviour of girls through media and celebrity cultures condones highly sexualized representations. Peer influence and fashion trends have moved from online to offline spaces, creating a continuum of these sexy representations at schools where girls wear short skirts and take in their uniform to be figure hugging. Self-expression was not encouraged in Victoria High school because it deviated from the rules of the school. Policies on discipline, homework, and behaviour were highlighted within the code of conduct and regularly monitored. However, from general observation, learners experienced low morale during the COVID-19 pandemic, and developed an increased addiction to technological devices, such as smartphones and smartwatches, carrying them to school, despite this being a transgression of the rules.

The school's policy on safety and security emphasized that the learners were prohibited to carry cell phones, which was stipulated in the school's code of conduct. Greater access to and engagement with technological devices during the pandemic forged intimate relationships through digital technology. On numerous occasions, as learners' left the school premises, they were seen to be submerged in the virtual world, taking selfies with their peers, and chatting openly in the street corners, putting themselves at risk of being mugged. In addition, various fights and events occurred during school hours and went viral due to the ubiquitous nature of social media. This site was therefore regarded as being suitable for my study as many learners were in possession of digital devices and were active social media users.

Table 4.3: Staff and Learners at Victoria High School

Variables		Number
Learners		1770
Teachers		47
Administration staff		8
Race	African	1500
	Coloured	20
	Indian	250
Gender	Girls	**1056**
	Boys	**714**

4.5   Study participants and sampling strategy

A sample is the number of cases or subjects within a research study (Etikan et al., 2015). Robinson (2014) contended that a sample is a selection of participants from which data is acquired. The participants in this study were young girls aged of 13 to 18 years old and were chosen as they had access to technology and social media sites and were at a risk of cyberviolence in its various manifestations.

As this was a qualitative research study, the sample size comprised of 30 female participants, to ensure a fair, purposively selected sample to obtain a rich understanding of identities, emotions and experiences of girls who were victims of cyberbullying and harassment. I adopted a purposive sampling technique, also known as convenience sampling, as it was easy to access these participants within the study site. Purposive sampling is where the investigator specifically selects individuals/sites and who are regarded as being able to provide information about the phenomenon to create a comprehensive understanding (Creswell, 2007). According to Cohen et al. (2018), purposive sampling deals with a broad scope of issues, such as frequency of use, length of time and engagement with participants, which would deepen my understanding of the phenomenon of cyberbullying and sexual harassment. Etikan et al., (2015) explained that data gathering is an important part of research, the selection of data being made with the best judgment of the primary investigator.

Girls were identified for participation if they adhered to the following inclusion criteria:
- within the required age group,
- owned a smartphone,
- knowledgeable of the phenomenon as they accessed social media regularly,
- willing to be a part of this research study and provided the necessary parental consent and personal ascent,
- had time to participate in the interviews.

4.6   Data Collection methods

The data collection methods utilized were face-to-face semi-structured interviews using vignettes (Appendix 1A) and photo-elicitations (Appendix 1B) to prompt discussion, as well as semi-structured questions (Appendix 1C). The three interview instruments were structured to enable learners to reflect and conceptualize cyberbullying and sexual harassment to enable

rich discussion. Data collection is an important constituent of research and needs to be linked to the research questions or Objectives (Creswell, 2007). A researcher needs to have access to their participants to provide authentic and rich data. The activities related to data collection methods were "*locating a site or an individual, gaining access, making rapport, sampling purposefully, collecting data, recording information, exploring field issues and storing data*" (Creswell, 2007, p. 117).

Before the interviews began, the girls were requested to complete a brief questionnaire about relating to the age they received their smartphone, how long they spend on social media and what social media sites they access (Appendix D). All the components of the interviews were audio-recorded with their permission to enable me to focus on the interview and transcribe the data verbatim for later analysis.

4.6.1   Vignettes

Vignettes were employed to familiarise learners with the phenomenon enabling a creative way of invoking understanding and unpacking concepts (Palaiologou, 2017). I used two case scenarios that were related to cyberbullying and sexual harassment (Appendix 1A and 1B). In the first vignette, I read out each thought-provoking scenario, highlighted how a young girl's picture was posted by her 'so-called' friend without her permission on Facebook and she incidentally saw the post on another friend's news feed. The associated comment read "*Would you get a guy if you looked as ugly as her*?" Using the probing technique, I enquired whether incidents of this nature occurred amongst their peers. This vignette was used to invoke thinking about their own experiences of these phenomena and stir interest to enable them to identify with the concept of cyberbullying and its various manifestations. The second vignette related to sexual harassment as a form of cyberbullying that many girls faced, with a young girl looking for an emotional crutch on social media and engaging with a boy who made her believe he loved her. This was until he started passing sexual remarks to her and asking her for nude pictures, which she felt forced to share, and eventually committed suicide because he blackmailed and emotionally abused her. This vignette enabled deliberation on this kind of behaviour.

A study by Skillings and Styliandes (2020) highlighted that the use of vignettes helped to probe for rich understandings about a specific phenomenon. After the brief account of the scenario, they were able to identify the meaning of sexual harassment and cyberbullying. The

participants were able to conceptualize and unpack these words by relating the scenarios on the vignettes and applying it to understanding the phenomena. This tool aided in linking the phenomena to their own lives. Vignettes contributed substantially to providing a more comfortable space where participants presented rich interaction during the interviews.

4.6.2 Photo-Elicitation

Photographs were regarded as being effective because many children are very receptive to visual stimuli. Using photographs before the in-depth, semi-structured interviews allowed me to gauge their understanding of the key phenomena. Dockett et al., (2017) stated that photo-elicitation (appendix B) is a method of exploring the untapped world of the participant that may otherwise be invisible to the researcher. It has been found that "*photo prompts can enhance interaction between researchers and participants and produce richer data*" (Leonard & McKnight, 2015, p. 636). The participants were able to interpret their own idea of the pictures provided on cyberbullying and sexual harassment. Some found making a link between the picture and the question difficult, which resulted in my rephrasing the questions to realign their thoughts with the phenomena.

These four photographs were a powerful tool as it ignited visual consciousness. The first picture represents a rift in communication and the widening gap that exists in teenagers lives regarding the effect of social media on communication with real people in their lives as opposed to strangers online. The second picture highlights gender oppression that is pervasive in online spaces. The third picture portrayed girls wearing skimpy clothes as being more approved of because they received many 'likes and comments' compared to those who wear baggy clothes. The last picture portrayed the idea of selfies and unravelled the subliminal message of how societies want girls to appear. These pictures were an interesting way to get learners relaxed and to be more confident when answering the interview questions that followed.

4.6.3 Semi-structured interviews

Individual semi-structured interviews were used as the phenomena being discussed was of a sensitive nature and participants felt at greater ease speaking privately to the interviewer rather than in a group. An interviewer must ask questions aimed at the participant with the intention of not deviating too much from the research or objectives. This method of data collection allows interaction with participants on an individual basis. A conducive environment was essential for the subjects to develop a sense of comfort in the presence of the researcher. An interview is "*a*

tool for data collection, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, seen, spoken, heard" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 506). An interview schedule was drawn using guidelines to keep the research study in focus (Appendix C) to probe for a greater understanding the phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2018).

The interviews explored girls' in-depth experiences of sexual harassment and cyberbullying, as indicated in the two study Objectives. A semi-structured, individual, face-to- face interviews was utilized to probe, build rapport, and gain rich data. According to Gubrium and Holstein (2001), interviews provide the full experience of participants lives through observation, interpretation of perspectives, and their encounters of relationships with family and friends. It was essential that questions were phrased appropriately and sensitively to avoid emotional and behavioural outbursts. Exploratory interviews were chosen to enable them to freely relate their experiences, with open ended questions being asked, leading to spontaneity of responses (Cohen et al., 2018). Open-ended questions gave participants the opportunity to understand their experiences of the phenomena.

4.7   Data collection process

Once ethical clearance had been obtained and permission granted from the institutional authorities, I went into the school where I asked permission from the principal and then asked for participants who fit the inclusion criteria. Everyone who indicated an interest was individually spoken to about the interview process and informed about the ethical procedures that needed to be followed. The forms were discussed, and they were asked to take them home as it required their parents' consent before they could be interviewed. I addressed any concerns, assured them that this was a purely voluntary and confidential process, and that if they felt uncomfortable at any part of the research process, they could be excused from participating. Of the 40 consent forms that were taken home by the leaners, 32 had brought them back and gave their own assent for them to participate in my research.

Once participants brought back their parent's consent forms, I informed them of my free periods during the day and asked them to provide me with a feasible time when they could be slotted in within the week that did not hamper teaching and learning. I used the time before school and periods when teachers were absent to do my interviews. A quiet and non-threatening environment was created in a designated classroom to facilitate the interview process. The interview process began by switching on my recording app on my cell phone, with the

questions moving from general topics about their likes and their favourite hobby, and as they mentioned social media, I drew in more detailed responses to try to ease them in and remove the power differential between the interviewer and the participant. I tried to develop a rapport with them, with a non-threatening environment being conducive in dismantling power discrepancies between the participants and the researcher (Cohen et al., 2018). Before starting the actual interview, they completed the short demographic questionnaire to enable me to have some context to their responses. Each semi-structured interview was planned to last 30 - 45 minutes, and were conducted in English, the language of instruction at Victoria High School.

Although the interviews were a part of a fluid process, the discussion was prompted by the participants and their responses. Taking into consideration the type of response elicited I was able to ensure those unanticipated responses were also catered for. Although I was the facilitator, I ensured that the participants determined the process and course of the discussion. According to Cohen et al., (2018), an interviewer should be an expert in the content of their research study to sustain a conversation. It was important to pick up cues from their responses to effectively expand on them. They were given as much time as they needed to understand the questions asked. As researchers should follow the principal of non-maleficence and approach the phenomenon with empathy and compassion, I was sensitive to their needs and gave them my undivided attention.

4.8   Data Analysis

According to Cohen et al., (2018), qualitative data analysis is orientated towards interpretation, explanation and understanding the data. Qualitative data analysis involves a "*robust, systemic framework for coding*" (Braun & Clark, 2014, p. 1), being organized into categories, this being called thematic analysis. I analysed all three of my research tools thematically and looked at my findings from vignettes, photo elicitation and semi-structured interviews cohesively formulating the themes. Once data was collected and transcribed, it was categorized, analysed, and coded. Creswell (2007) posited that there are three categories, these being having a basic idea of themes before the study, discovering surprising information while conducting information, and include interesting and unusual information. Cohen et al., (2018) asserted that qualitative data analysis is not straight forward and requires a rigorous process of interpreting the relevant data. The data was transcribed from the interviews that were recorded on a cell phone, with Otter.ai program being used to transcribe them. Once transcription was complete, I went back and checked to see if the transcriptions were accurate, during which I highlighted

the key themes that I felt were starting to emerge related to my research. According to Braun and Clark (2013), data should be thoroughly examined, deliberated and reflective. The process of data analysis an "*exercise in seeking patterns of evidence, presenting evidence in a way that will engender trust*" (Denzin, 2009, p. 151). Braun and Clark (2014) outlined a six-step process for thematic data analysis:

- Reading: a description and familiarization with data was necessary.
- Checking: Generate the codes for emerging themes.
- Finding: Making sense of emerging themes.
- Reviewing: Go through each theme carefully.
- Defining: Find meaning in each theme.
- Writing: Find literature, apply to theme, and analyse the data given by participants.

I identified different themes and highlighted which participants had common responses, each theme being analysed applying the theories to the participants responses and findings emerged. To assist in unpacking the data I applied a multi-theoretical approach by using the gender relational theory and femininities by Connell (2000, 1995, 1985), Butler's theory of performativity (1988, 1990) and feminist new materialism (Braidotti, 2013; Van der Tuin, 2011).

Once data was analysed collectively, I used triangulation to find commonality between them, this being where more than one data collection instruments is used to gain greater insight into this research study. Triangulation is an important part of establishing validity and is the "*systematic process of sorting through data to establish common themes*" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). I looked at all data wholistically and cohesively and drew common themes together from the different sources of data.

4.9   Trustworthiness, Validity and Reliability

Validity is an integral part of research that defines "*the extent to which interpretations of data are warranted by theories and evidence used*" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 427). I ensured that my data collection methods for this qualitative research study were sound and produced rich data. According to Cohen et al. (2018) validity may also be addressed as trustworthiness, dependability, credibility, and honesty. I maintained validity by using triangulation, which

demonstrated the full capacity of human beings' actions and practices. Moser and Korstjens (2018) indicated that for research to be transparent and dependable, every part of the research process must be documented through materials kept from meetings and my own notes. I remained unbiased during interviews and focused on the participants to build a relationship with them.

Vignette and photo-elicitation were employed to provoke discussion and unpack concepts. A voice recorder was used to record interviews to capture the participants experience truthfully and ensured that the way the data was interpreted was according to the individuals' stipulated experiences. Reliability is an important part of qualitative research and I ensured that my research study was reliable by maintaining equal power relations with my participants, so they were comfortable enough to confide in me and not feel threatened by power differentials. I ensured that I used a variety of data collection methods to acquire rich data.

4.10 Positionality

I am a 38-year-old Hindu female who originated from Shallcross, a suburb on the outskirts of Chatsworth. My parents married in 1982 and I was the older of their two girls. My father worked as a machinist in a clothing factory whilst my mum was a laboratory technologist. Dad was in and out of a job while mum was our source of economic stability throughout our lives. Having no extended family to depend on, at the tender age of 9 (grade 3), I assumed the responsibility of taking care of my sister when we got back from school, making us the proverbial latch key kids. My mother had a better standard of education, a higher paying job, was an impeccable home maker and an above-reproach mother. She invested in my sister and I emotionally, educationally, and financially. Despite her considerable role in the family, my father was always the final decision maker and the head of the household. As an adult I marvel at the contrast of this strong woman that I know as my mother, yet society dictated that she be the submissive wife. I was fortunate to have parents who prided themselves in conscious parenting and was only given a cell phone in my first year at university (2003) to enable communication with them in times of an emergency. Cell phones were a relatively new device and accessibility was difficult because they were expensive. In addition, my parents' style of parenting did not deem being in possession of cell phone a necessity before entering university.

During this research study I reflected on the dichotomy that existed between girls in contemporary times to the time when I was a young girl. While I conducted the interviews

many girls highlighted the negative experiences that formed a continuum of abuse that taunted them. I often found myself overwhelmed with emotion. Not only did I empathize with the participants, but I recollected my years of experience in school, being a young girl of 12 myself in Grade 7, I remembered my incident of bullying and harassment. I was one of those girls who physically developed ahead of my peers and was constantly body shamed, which led to me becoming very conscious about my appearance. The scars that the bullying and harassment left behind resulted in someone who tries to constantly cover up, and although wearing heels resembles femininity, I stick to flat sandals or pumps because of my height. Inadvertently, exposure to these negative experiences made me ultra-conservative in my dress sense.

Cohen et al., (2018) emphasized that my role as a young researcher enabled the young girls to bring their own life experiences to the forefront, providing them with an opportunity to share their feelings and emotions in a non-judgmental context. Participants were liaised with in a very cautious way. They were not hesitant about divulging their experiences of harassment and bullying because at the outset I made sure that the environment was relaxed, and an ice breaker session eased them in. I remained unbiased in my approach despite knowing what being harassed and bullied felt like and engaged with them in a non-threatening manner displaying concern and empathy for their well-being. This made them look at me as someone who was not just a teacher but as their equal.

To challenge the power dynamics even further, I tried to be casual in the way I dressed and spoke to them. I used words like "kewl", "awesome", "eish" and "dope" to ease them in and to appear more at their level. I also broke the ice by having a general conversation with them about my life so that they did not feel that I was intimidating and unapproachable. Berger (2015) emphasized that the researcher has the responsibility to be sensitive, free of biases and allow participants the freedom and comfort to openly express themselves. Initially I was also pensive about being a teacher in the same school that I carried out interviews, but learners seemed to find me approachable. It was an advantage for participants to see a familiar face during the interviews, which broke down the power dynamic because I taught them, and they were comfortable in my presence. I ensured credibility and awareness by interpreting and analysing data while simultaneously documenting and reflecting in my research journey.

4.11 Ethical considerations

The following ethical issues were considered when conducting this study:

- Ethical approval was received from the Humanities Research Council of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Appendix 2A). An ethical clearance committee ensured that the research design was ethically and methodologically appropriate, given that the participants were aged 13 – 18, and that the topic was of a sensitive nature.

- The Department of Education gave permission to conduct my research study (Appendix 2B) at the school site.

- Permission was obtained from the school principal for the research to be allowed to take place in the school premises (Appendix 2 C).

- The parents were informed about the research and what the process entailed (Appendix 2 D) through the provision of consent forms to secure participation of their children.

- The participants who returned completed forms were required to complete assent forms before data collection began. (Appendix 2E).

- Confidentiality and anonymity were a central part of the data collection process, with pseudonyms being used instead of the girl's names. Joy and Numer (2017) highlighted that the underpinning of ethical research refutes any forms of manipulation, but fosters the ideas of anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent. I made sure that all participants were knowledgeable of their ethical rights, and that such interactions with them were strictly confidential. Interested participants were made aware from the outset of the research study that if they did not feel comfortable answering certain questions they did not have to do so. They also needed to be aware that if the research made them feel uncomfortable at any time they were not forced to continue. Ethics is an integral part of research especially when based on human subjects as part of the study. Ethics, according to educational research must be sensitive and principled so that the rights of subjects are not infringed upon (Cohen et al., 2018). During the interviews some girls revealed very personal information, and as a researcher I had to discern how to react to it. Cohen et al. (2018) advised that participants should remain under a cloak of anonymity. Consent protected the participants' rights, and confidentiality was maintained. The researcher always complied with the ethics code in which the overall wellbeing and rights of the participants were top priority.

- The key principles that made up ethics are non-maleficence, beneficence, autonomy, and justice. Within ethics principles of non-maleficence, it was stated that the research should not harm anyone emotionally, physically, and psychologically. Non-maleficence is a precept employed by the researcher to ensure proper ethical standards where participants

should be handled with careful consideration to minimize risk to them in any way. Beneficence informs the world of researchers of what "*personal, educational or social benefits"* can be reaped by doing the study (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 128).

4.12 Conclusion

A case study design was used for this research, engaging with 30 girls by using vignettes, photo-elicitation with scenarios and pictures to prompt their responses about the phenomenon under investigation. This was followed by semi-structured interviews, the results from the three data collection being thematically analysed then triangulated to identify areas of commonality regarding the two study objectives. I attempted to ensure trustworthiness, validity, and reliability which was an integral part of collecting data. I ensured that ethical standards were strictly adhered to and was confident that I obtained sufficient data of good depth to enable the analysis to be highlighted in the next chapter. The next chapter presents the data which will be collected, analysed, and thematically analysed.

CHAPTER 5. DATA ANALYSIS

5. 1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data obtained through the processes of collation, analysis, and interpretation, with thematic analysis being used as a guide to unpack the common themes that emerged from the 30 participants (Table 5.1). While this study foregrounds the experiences of cyberbullying and sexual harassment as common experiences faced by girls, they may resist and negotiate how well they extend and shape their gender and sexuality in cyberspace. Young girls on social media engage in hypersexualized representations of their bodies and adapt different personas to challenge constructions of femininity. This chapter showcases girls' agency as they relate their experiences in an uncensored manner through semi-structured interviews, vignettes, and photo elicitation methods.

Table 5.1: Themes and sub-themes

Theme	Sub-themes
1. **Girls' relationships with technology as a sexuality playground**.	• *Views about the importance of connectivity to their devices* • *Material posted on social media sites* • *Gender binaries and heteronormative experiences of pleasure.*
2. **What kinds of experiences are girls navigating online?**	• *Body and slut-shaming, naming, and blaming.* • *Easy access to pornography and sexting* • *Sexual harassment: normalized occurrences*
3. **Socio-cultural inscriptions that perpetuate the vicious gendered cycle**	*10 Patriarchy and sexual double standards*
• **Role of media and celebrity culture**	• *Diseases of the mind and body* • *Morality vs Materiality: Preconceived notions of beauty* • *Identities intersecting technologies*
• **Love, sex, and virtual dating**	*1. Sex as a taboo subject* *2. Sugar daddies and virtual dating.*

5.2 Theme 1. Girls' relationships with technology as a sexuality playground

Three sub-themes emerged for this theme, these being their views about the importance of connectivity to their devices, the material posted on social media sites, and gender binaries and heteronormative experiences of pleasure.

5.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Views about the importance of connectivity and their devices

According to Gibbs et al. (2021), smartphones and other connecting devices are seen as sources of attachment that foster intimate online relationships amongst teenagers, giving the girls a sense of belonging. Sanders and Lyon (2020) pronounced sexual encounters to be an integral part of why girls have devices and are a means of exploring intimacy. Sanders and Lyons (2020) view devices as entanglements of bodies to machines, which in turn connect to other machines, resulting in addiction, dependence, and non-functionality without them. Young girls are not just utilizing social media applications, they are living their lives through these devices by investing time, emotion, and energy through their virtual quests. Austin (2017) highlights that a free-floating energy exists within each one of us, which he identifies as sexual energy, and that as this energy must be expended, so girls have found their devices and the virtual space to be their ideal sexuality playground. It is identified that sexuality is a "*complex, multi-layered force that produces encounters, resonances and relations of all sorts*" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 148). These are some of the responses from their semi-structured interviews on how they viewed their devices.

> *Interviewer: How do you view your device?*
>
> **Tina:** *[Black, 17] Oh my God, we are like two peas in a pod. It is the love of my life, and I can't do anything without my phone. My phone is the most important thing to me.*
>
> **Nita**: *[Indian, 15] My phone keeps me happy, because I attempt to dance like celebrities do. And it like boosts my confidence up high. I feel like so good.*
>
> **Shay**: *[Coloured, 18] I like to get away from reality on the smartphone, like I go on social media sites just to escape whatever I'm going through.*
>
> **Tiny:** *[Black, 16] Because for instance, people my age, they sleep with their phones so they can chat till twelve midnight, till the next morning. The parents don't take away the phones. Because a phone is like something else in your life. It's like, another part of your life. Like, if you don't have it, you don't have a life. And I remember when I didn't have a phone, I was in the dark.*
>
> **Pat**: *[Black, 15] I feel like my phone is my prized possession. Like I'm in a different world, a different reality.*
>
> **Katie**: *[Coloured, 16] Like, I guess, like, you don't get as many confinements as in your own reality.*

The various responses indicate how the participants viewed their relationship with their devices, shedding light on the cohesive bond forged to help manoeuvre the virtual terrain. They used their devices for various reasons, with Tina noting that her smartphone keeps her happy, being an indispensable socialising tool. Shay saw her smartphone as her escape from her harsh circumstances, her device being a major catalyst in filling the communication void in her life. Many parents are working or absent in their children's lives, and therefore do not have the time to foster open relationships or are unapproachable about sexual issues. Inadvertently, the virtual space becomes the arena to quell young peoples' curiosity. Pat contended that her smartphone was her most valuable material object, saying that it transported her into another realm where she could live her life differently, from where she derived great pleasure. Tina describes her smartphone and herself as being intertwined "like two peas in a pod", implying the inseparability that exists between human and non-human entities.

The girls contended that they asserted control through resisting and challenging power relations online by ignoring, blocking, and ghosting boys through their devices (Ringrose et al.,2021). While these acts of resistance give girls power, they may simultaneously enhance coercion, inequalities, and harassment to permeate the virtual space (Gill, 2016). Tiny reveals that her device allowed her the opportunity to escape her mundane, real life, where she would gain confidence and excitement by living through other people's lives on social media. She went as far as to imply that her life would be meaningless if it was not for her smartphone and equated her smartphone to being a part of her identity. Digital devices are portals through which young girls escape to keep abreast of the latest trends that empower them by providing agency. Katie makes a poignant statement when she discusses that her smartphone does not give her as many confinements as her reality does. Her response illustrates that she felt restricted because socio-cultural norms dictate rules in gendered ways to protect their presumed childhood innocence, yet they neglected to understand that girls are sexually knowledgeable (Marston, 2020).

Girls use social media as a technology of power through which their agency becomes possible, through which they can become other, and they discover new ways of being and becoming as they grow up in a world defined by social and virtual spaces. Despite the virtual space being used for girls to express themselves, they still face a great degree of sexism and discrimination, where derision and deception can be pervasive. Devices have become the centre of young femininities, promoting socialisation to greater heights, and allowing the extension of girls' sexualities. It is evident that girls use the online platform as a place of belonging regardless of

it being such a public domain to experience affects, desires, and multiple enactments (Kanai, 2017).

5.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Material posted on social media sites

Girls are using digital technology to confront and challenge socio-cultural norms by using their bodies as weapons (Connell, 2000) and projecting them through various ways to seek self-benefit and embrace femininity. Dolphijn and Van der Tuin (2012) found that girls' bodies are no longer restricted, and that they are undergoing a metamorphosis by performing certain enactments. They portray themselves through heterosexuality, which makes them feel a sense of power that is temporarily status enhancing. Alldred and Fox (2017) espoused that girls' bodies are dichotomized as celebrated or demonized, they are caught between loving their bodies and pathologizing them, depending on how they are received by virtual audiences.

Girls are motivated by their sexual desire to strive for digital emancipation to invert power dynamics and display their themselves using selfies, engaging with sexually explicit materials, and having virtual relationships. A myriad of responses was shared by the participants in which they contended that contemporary young femininities are "fashion fixated, wrinkle averse, weight-conscious" (Gill, 2016, p. 617). Young girls are image conscious and go to extreme lengths to project picture-perfect images to become popular. The semi-structured interviews below highlighted how sexy performances fuel online activities in which young girls are shaping sexual digital cultures:

> **Interviewer:** *What do you do on social media?*
> **Nicole***: [Indian, 18] I pout, position my body forward in an angle for selfies.*
> **Andy***: [Black, 16] Yes. You move you firstly move around your hands and your arms. You do like sexy poses. And you like shake your body especially like the lower part of it for a sexier video.*
> **Bella***: [Indian, 18] I like dancing. And I like watching other people dance and learn new moves in videos*
> **Katie***: [Coloured, 16] My personality, I like to express myself, I like communicating with people who share my interests, my hobbies, my opinions.*
> **Felan***: [Coloured, 17] On Tik-Tok, I love doing the dances that they do. I love Tik-Tok because it helps me express the way I feel through dancing cos I am not a person that tells people how I feel. And then on Instagram I keep up with the*

latest fashion trends as well as celebrity's lives and getting to know them more. On Facebook, I just enjoy meeting new people. And I also like chicks, which is a music website.

Pat*: [Black, 15] To do dance moves. I don't know how to describe it. But there's mostly swaying. Yeah. And there's a lot of twerks. Because twerking is all about moving your butt up and down. They're mostly about dancing make up tutorials, and hair tutorials and how to dress cool.*

Ana: *[Black, 16] Yes ma'am, I enjoy taking pictures and posting them and getting likes and getting many likes because it makes me feel popular. It makes me feel appreciated. Yes, ma'am and I love to keep up with the latest trends, like the clothing trends, cos like, when you dress a certain way, like celebrities do, people would get many followers on social media, like you are considered as a drip queen. Like you're the shit ma'am.*

Kelly: *[Black, 18] I'm on social media, I post on Instagram, I post because there are latest trends. It teaches me what experiences guys like with girls and it teaches me how to dress and look in a certain way.*

Girls are filter application specialists who enhance their appearance, angle their bodies, duck pout, and try to epitomize their ideals of perfect femininities in multiple ways. According to feminist new materialism, it is elucidated that "*Flesh is no longer filth: it is joy and beauty*" (Dolphijn & Van der Tuin, 2012, p. 148). The online platform is a medium through which digital femininities are being celebrated through expressions of dance, provocative dress, pouting and positioning as powerful forms of expressions (Austin, 2016). Agency is not individualized but made possible through interaction with other elements online through popular social media sites, such as Instagram, Tik-Tok, Twitter and Facebook, which provide affective capacities for young girls displaying sexual enactments. Girls' bodies possess the capacity to feel sexy, and highlight pleasures that goes beyond being sexual, locating itself in other forms of creative expression (Austin, 2016). They use their performances to sexualize themselves and feel sensation and consider these displays pleasurably self-satisfying ones. Nicole details social media as a space for self-expression, because in the real-world and in broader society, teenagers are not accepted the way they are in virtual spaces. She mentions enacting various performances on the virtual stage (Butler, 1990) to feel empowered.

Girls are active agents on social media, where they adopt multiple identities, and like Nicole, perform many roles to feeling the full capacity of their gender. Andy uses the online platform to gain maximum sensation from comments, likes and followers. She can therefore be seen as drawn to heterosexual compulsion, where she tries to claim agency through feeling power in the world of social media. (Paechter, 2017). Felan's reasons for posting are twofold, being fashion fixated and driven by media perceptions of what is beautiful. Many young girls who aspire to live through celebrity culture are exposed to hypersexualised embodiments that are regarded as normal behaviour. She also loves the way she feels when she dances provocatively to feel powerful sensations via heterosexual practices (Paechter, 2017). Pat gains emancipation through self-expression by twerking, which is both empowering and erotically charged but indirectly gains male attention. Ana is status driven and refers to perfection has having drip queen status, which for her means having positive affirmations from a wider audience about her appearance. The more comments and more likes she gets, the more validated she becomes. Kelly says that Instagram appeals to her because of the high-end fashion, and it teaches her how to be trendy. Cathy explains that the more seductively one poses, the more followers they will receive. It is evident that girls are reorientating their bodies to transition from risk to resistance to gain heterosexual power (Govender & Bhana, 2021). The environment online gives rise to a cycle of heterosexuality, where young men misinterpret and objectify girls, thus perpetuating oppression. These comments prove that while girls aim to be sexy for self-expression and empowerment, engrained masculine norms demand that boys respond by objectifying and treating them like sex symbols.

Young people are not just posting on social media for self-expression, with the participants not indicating that young people are also using social media applications, such as 'OnlyFans', as an opportunistic means of income (Rouse & Salter, 2021). Girls market their bodies on these platforms where there is a subscription fee that's charged, and for every 'like' or enactment that young girls display, their capital increases. This social application site became increasingly common in 2021 when the COVID-19 pandemic restricted physical movement. Social media applications allow young people the space to become 'fantrepreneurs', where they project sexy representations of themselves to earn likes for money, roleplay characters and adopt new identities to develop a fan base for entertainment (Rouse & Salter, 2021).

According to discussions based on photo elicitations in Figure 5.1 below, smartphone communication has replaced face-to-face human connection.

Figure 5.1. Rift in communication
Source: https://www.facebook.com/Beauty-Around-The-World-110235807315926/photos/pcb.185305943142245/185305856475587/

> **Telo***: [Black, 18] Cell phones have created bond barriers in relationships. People would rather chat to strangers on virtual platforms than be judged by the real people in their lives.*
>
> **Nita***: [Indian, 15] I don't have a woman figure in my life to talk to, so I pour my heart out to those online, I can't speak to my brothers or father. This picture reminds me of how I can't speak to the males in my family cos they don't understand me and there's a rift between us!*

Articulation and linguistic communication are important aspects of online communication where content is spread through comments. Words are an important part of communication that cements an individual's online trajectory, the focus not only being on robust bodily productions (Dolphijn & Van de Tuin, 2012). Agency is catalyzed by the power of language, which used to be regarded as a "*fixed, determining, an inhuman grid imposed upon life*" (Dolphijn & Van de Tuin, 2012, p. 109). However, communication through social media is evolving through content displayed and messages decoded to be agentic. Emojis' have replaced body language in cyberspace, with simulated emotions and young people being more concerned with digital communication rather than having real connections with friends and family. As in the case of the participant Nita, young people develop a condition called emotional atrophy, which is a result of a lack of real-life communication that causes social anxiety and a lack of intimacy

amongst family and friends (Mackey, 2016). Telo outlined that the power of words has a greater meaning online, where young people find more comfort confiding in strangers than to their own family. This could be due to the restrictions imposed on girls to follow the feminist mandate in the real world, while the virtual world gives them a sense of autonomy. Nita details that she is dominated by a masculine run household, and her behaviour is policed and regulated, her only source of freedom being her smartphone, which she uses to connect with other females and to broaden her world.

5.2.3 Sub-theme 3: Gender binaries, heteronormativity, and girls' heterosexual experiences of pleasure/ desire.

Gender is considered a form of expression, with Butler (1990) highlighting that it is heteronormatively constructed. "*Gender is characterized as doing not being*" (Lyttleton-Smith, 2019, p. 658), with unequal power relations being deeply entrenched in the gender binary grip manifesting in cyberspace. Gender can be idealized through performances, which males and females align themselves towards, where heterosexuality is essential to the *performance* of gender. The gender binary dictates what girls should do, and how they should appear through a heterosexual framework. Girls experience their bodies and harbor innate sexual feelings that connect their minds, bodies, and emotions (Dolphijn & Van der Tuin, 2012). They are pleasure seekers, whose desires unfold in virtual spaces using content, language, and expression, where they enact performances of erotic dance, snapshots, videos, memes, and selfies online. A girl can also be treated like "*a piece of meat activated by electric waves of desire*" (Dolphijn & Van der Tuin, 2012, p. 19) on social media, where she becomes active and can switch into any identity to claim agency. In the following photo elicitation discussion (Figure 5.2), gender oppression was highlighted by various responses given by participants.

Figure 5.2 Gender oppression persists through technological devices
Source:https://www.facebook.com/drumargill/photos/a.114598223214404/501955561145333/?type=3

> **Lizzy**: [African, 13] Ma'am, the woman is under the cell phone indicating she is considered weaker.
>
> **Ria**: [Indian, 17] Men use their cell phones to control women and to stay on top of them.

Lizzy details that the gender binary places men and women into gendered categories, and through stereotypical norms embedded by patriarchal practices, the women are deemed subordinate (Connell, 1985). As depicted in Figure 5.2, Lizzy highlights that the women are deemed to be weaker than men. Girls are challenging these gendered presumptions by seeking empowerment from virtual platforms, while simultaneously dealing with harassment and dehumanization. Ria's response highlights the power dynamics that are at play due to socio-cultural beliefs that place masculinity and femininity into hierarchical ranks, where women are inferior to men. Girls are not allowed to act, feel, or embrace their sexual lives in a healthy manner due to societal constraints. The materiality of girls' bodies become entrenched in power relations favouring masculinity, with girls finding that through overt sexualization, they are radicalizing the idea of power by toppling binary opposition (Dolphjin &Van der Tuin, 2012). The virtual space has created a world in which girls are secretly exploring their sexuality, where they can escape the harsh judgments of socio-cultural impositions.

When girls share images and content online, they undergo entanglements with bodies, objects, ideas, and expressions that function through an assemblage (Austin, 2017). Sexuality assemblages are loaded with capacities that bodies can represent through their desire, sexual conduct, and erotic practices (Austin, 2017). As elements connect with assemblages they evolve, impacting on physical, cultural, and emotional factors. Bodies, content, and images produced through digital technology experience affects, deterritorialization, reterritorialization, assemblages and in their experiences of becoming (Braidotti, 2013; Austin, 2017). The excerpts below from the semi-structured interviews provide an idea of what girls do how they use the virtual space to learn about sexuality.

> *Interviewer: What do girls do to impress boys?*
>
> *Ana: [16, Black] Uh, videos that talk about how to like impress boys, and if you see ma'am these days, there's this thing called oral sex. So yes, ma'am it's like when boys muff girls and then girls give BJs. So, ma'am my friends influenced me, they were like have you tried oral sex. I know you can't have sex cos you want to remain a virgin; you must try uh doing oral sex and watch videos online where they'll teach you to do a blow job. I was like, okay, maybe I'll try watching a couple of videos and we watched a couple of videos together.*
>
> *Cathy: [17, Black] Girls love to learn how boys want girls to be because some boys want those sexy looking girls with those figures and nice body shape.*
>
> *Shay: [18, Coloured] It's a trending thing to show more flesh, and woman want to show more bodies these days. It's because of what men want. And sometimes girls want to fulfil that part to keep their relationships. Men want women to expose their bodies. Because sometimes they just feel too sexual.*
>
> *Felan: [Coloured, 17] uhm… they treat women in an objectified way, they want them to please them just by them looking at them, they don't go for what's inside, they go for the physical appearance when it comes to women.*
>
> *Nicole: [Indian, 18] Boobs, ass, figure. You must see how some boys really like it when you are thick. Like where you have huge behind... And you have like, something for them to grip on.*

Butler (1990) highlights that gender is constructed through a heterosexual matrix, where acts are essential in the claim to define the heterosexual male and female. Girls may modify their femininity, such as by showing more flesh to presenting themselves as being heterosexually desirable in acquiring heterosexual female status. However, simultaneously in doing so, they

become objectified by males, and can reconfigure their identities from passivity to active agency (Lyttleton-Smith, 2019). The heterosexual matrix is still very prevalent in how girls subscribe to prescribed standards by maintaining body weight, complexion, and overall physical appearance through normative femininity. It would seem from Ana's statement that apart from being aesthetically perfect, girls also want to have sexual prowess. Tina uses the virtual platform to learn how to please sexually by researching oral sex, as this is another way of seeking pleasure without losing her virginity.

The topic of sex is not discussed at home or at school, so she finds an avenue to awaken her sexuality and derive her own answers. Girls constantly upgrade their looks, because in the virtual space there are competitive femininities that pressurize girls to have greater status-enhancing potential. Having a sexy figure, as Cathy notes, is a priority, and she alludes to her culture's perception of how girls' bodies are supposed to be i.e., with fuller figured girls being revered as signs of good health and fertility. Shay believes that showing flesh is what boys like, so she wears revealing clothing, and notes that girls must dress this way to keep their relationship with boys. This is an indication that boys have a preconceived set of standards that they expect girls to follow for boys to date them. Power imbalances arise where girls face marginalization while representing themselves. Felan views girls as being objectified and highlights that when they expose more of their bodies, they become the property of boys, who are preoccupied with outer image. Nicole submits to what boys like by subscribing to societal perceptions of being a perfect girl oozing sex appeal. Societies' expectations of girls are that they must be beautiful for boys but protect themselves from boys, and "*girls must speak in a world when they are expected to be sexually available but not sexually in charge of themselves*" (Tolman & Tolman, 2002, p. 8). This has created a dichotomy, where girlhood is caught between power and risk (Renold & Ringrose, 2013).

Sexuality is a quintessential part of girlhood and the formulation of their identities and interactions. Girls who are not sexually knowledgeable find it difficult to identify sexual advances and harassment (Jewkes et al., 2005). Society desexualizes the idea of girls' experiencing sexuality effectively, identifying them as looking for emotional connections and matters of the heart, while boys appear to be emotionally detached and preoccupied with sexual matters. The expectations of girls are that "*sexual adventurousness and confidences have become a compulsory part of normative, heterosexy, young female subjectivity*" (Waling et al., 2020, p. 4). As young girls who are submerged in the material world, they constitute matter

and want to constantly reproduce this idea of sexy embodiment (Coole & Frost, 2010). The following responses were unravelled by semi-structured interviews by participants.

>*Interviewer: What comments do you get when you post pictures?*
>
>*Nicole: [Indian, 18] So my top was quite open, but not that open. So, it showed a little off my breasts, the top part, and my jeans are tight. So, when you pick the phone a little higher, it showed the whole entire figure. So when I did post it, I had comments that were like, really bad. It seemed that the likes were getting higher, because boys were interested in the picture I posted.*
>
>*Tiny: [Black, 16] You are seen as a sex toy, as an object that uhm needs to be sexualized constantly. She is seen as someone who cannot do things on her own, she cannot provide for herself, for her to get the things she wants she needs to sleep with the rich and powerful man. So, women are seen as sex objects, and they are used as sexual tools for men.*
>
>*Tina: [Black,17] It's important because like, people admire that in a person, when you a good-looking body, and you have got on a short skirt. People admire that, you know, they are like bees drawn to honey.*

The participants dressed by revealing a kind of "striptease culture", which girls find pleasurable (Gill, 2007). They are becoming more explicit in their dressing, and are adopting a bold stance, where they are not reticent in challenging cultural and societal norms in a confrontational manner. Nicole details her sexiness by wearing a revealing top and a tight pair of jeans to enhance her figure, with most of the participants wearing tight, revealing clothing to feel maximum sexiness. Tiny shared that many girls want to look beautiful, being considered passive and depending on men for material wealth, with pretty girls having better privileges.

For photo elicitation in Figure 5.3, the girls were asked to interpret the picture, and highlighted that the number of likes, comments and followers are determined by how well they embody sexiness.
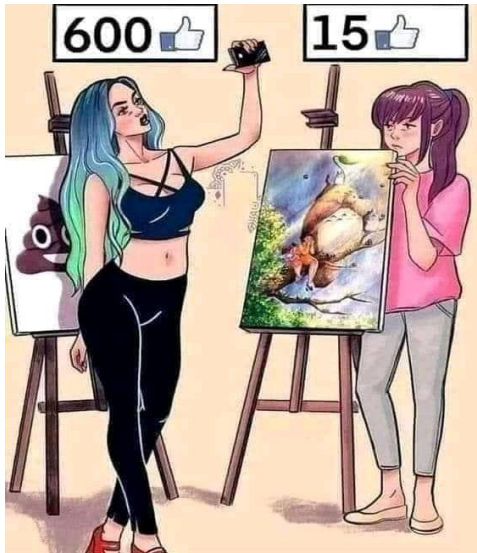
Figure 5.3 Sexy representation for more validation.
Source:https://me.me/i/15-600-following-its-real-especially-on-instagram-i-log-777aa2f521b3404182115698c10e85d6

> *Interviewer: Explain what you see in the picture?*
>
> ***Bela****: [Indian,18] the girl with more likes is dressed more revealing and the other girl only got 15 likes because she is dressed very conservatively, like a prude.*
>
> ***Penny:*** *[Black, 18] Sexy over smart anyway!*

While girls challenge hegemonic ideologies of masculinity through self-expression, they are simultaneously presented within an emphasized femininity, where there is "*compliance with women subordination and an orientation towards accommodating the interest and desire of men*" (Jewkes & Morell, 2010, p. 3), at the same time appearing sexualized to boost their own confidence. If they are fully clothed and interested in academic work on social media, according to Bela, they are labelled a "prude". While if they appear hypersexualized with inappropriate attire, make-up, tinted and styled long hair and high heels, they meet the expectations of what femininity ought to be. Penny implies that physical appearance is rated more highly than academic excellence when she says, "sexy over smart". The comments suggest that the young girls do not prioritize their education when in possession of smartphones.

5.3 Theme 2: What kinds of experiences are girls navigating online?

Three sub themes emerged from this theme, these highlighting girls' experiences of body and slut-shaming, young girls' easy accessibility to pornography, sexting and sexual harassment becoming normalised experiences in cyberspace.

5.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Body and slut-shaming, naming, and blaming

When girls post sexualized materials online, they are faced with harassment and bullying. While men try to negotiate girls' bodies to get ownership of it, girls can experience serious psychosocial problems (Renold & Ringrose, 2013). Men sometimes propose sexual transactional deals to lure girls, often using blackmail, slut shaming, and body shaming. Girls' bodies were seen as gazing objects (Zarabadi, 2021) in which the virtual space limits their agency, this being considered an enactment of matter that reconfigures entanglements and de-territorializes bodies to displace power and change interactions in online spaces (Zarabadi, 2021). Harassment and shaming are pervasive elements of cyberbullying within the context of the participants' lives and their engagement with technologies. The girls' experiences of slut and body shaming ruined their reputation in some instances. Shaming, blaming, and naming were common occurrences while girls attempted to establish agency through various enactments of sexualization, taking sexy selfies and sending explicit content. These misconstrued performances gave boys and other jealous girls the opportunity to ostracize, harass and hurl disparaging comments at them (Doring, 2014) due to entrenching stereotypical socio-cultural norms that filter through the virtual spaces. According to the participants who were interviewed, many agreed with the negative social media experiences they had to endure due to misinterpretation of their enactments.

> ***Interviewer:*** *What bad experiences have you had on social media?*
> ***Kelly:*** *[Black, 18] They were saying bad things like oh yeah, it's true I've seen her being forward with this person. And that girl and they were calling me forward and they will call me bad names*
> ***Interviewer:*** *like?*
> ***Kelly****: [Black, 18] [laughs] they were calling me a hoe they were calling me uhm a bitch.*
> ***Bella****: [Indian, 18] they call me a slut. Although I didn't send pictures, and another one told me that no boy will like me …*

Felan: [Colored, 17] My anxiety started way back in 2019, I used to suffer from very bad acne. So that led to me being self-absorbed. And so, to boost my confidence I decided to join a group of friends that were pretty and cute in school. They somehow boosted my confidence cos I didn't feel less attractive coz I had people that were cute around me. My anxiety started when us girls had a fight. So, I ended up realising that they were using me, and I decided not to be friends with them anymore. They went on my Facebook wall where I had just recently uploaded a picture of me, and they started commenting nasty comments. And they used to call me ugly troll. They told me that I will never be good enough and that I will never have fine skin and be beautiful. I'll always be worthless. This all led to me having social anxiety and very low self-esteem and depression.

Jade: [Indian, 18] Uh he used to call me a bitch and stuff. He should tell everyone that I'm his bitch and stuff like that there. But when I found out why he called me that was because I shouldn't send him those photos what he wanted I shouldn't give him what he wanted. So, he started telling all his friends. And they should also tell me about it that this guy is not good for you, he's cheating on you, but I shouldn't listen to them I still trusted him a lot but uh in the end, he hurt me by swearing me and calling me a bitch and stuff.

Mello: [Black, 16] Girls would call you a bitch on social media when you like post your pictures like wearing a bikini, or they will say that you want attention from boys, and you want more boys to like your pictures.

These responses indicate how girls get labelled and stigmatised, with gender inequalities and hetero-patriarchal attitudes being widespread online, where femininities are policed, managed, and regulated. Some participants were called "bitch", "slut", "whore" by boys, which caused great humiliation due to the emotional abuse and repudiation in maintaining hegemonic forms of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In Jade's case, she was called a "bitch" because she did not want to share her nude pictures with her boyfriend. Profanity is a common way in which boys undermine girls and reinforce the gender binary in marginalising ways that disparage and condemn and is perpetuated by cultural inscriptions (Ringrose & Harvey, 2015). Nude pictures are currency for boys, because once they are in possession of them, they use them to gain affiliation with other boys through competitive masculinity (Meehan, 2021).

Kelly and Bella were called derogatory names during their interaction with the virtual world, proving that boys use profanity and shaming techniques to denigrate young girls. Profanity is used on women who challenge men, they develop bruised egos and may lash out at girls to regulate their behaviour and keep themselves feeling in positions of power. Felan detailed her experience of body shaming, the attack on her physical appearance being done to break her spirit and make her feel inferior about herself by preying on her insecurities. Naming and shaming have detrimental effects that impact on confidence, agency, and self-worth. Girls' experiences of slut-shaming may also stem from other girl groups due to competitive femininities and jealousy. Mello outlines an episode where a group of girls called her a "bitch" because she was dressed in a bikini, and according to certain cultural beliefs, a woman's body is supposed to be covered. Ringrose and Renold (2012) explain it is not safe to wear a bikini in some cultures, because heteronormative constructions of femininity encourage girls to dress in a certain way. Girls attack other girls who they consider inappropriately dressed because they believe that these girls are seeking male attention (Ringrose & Renold, 2012). In other words, attempts to regulate girls' conduct occurs according to dominant gender norms of putting girls in their place within gender relations. Alternatively, girls showed agency by wearing bikinis (materials), which disrupts normative ideals and is assumed to be inappropriate dress, which can be regarded as violating gender norms as they transgress acceptable femininity. At the same time, they are also reinforcing heterosexual norms through the male gaze but are also derided by other girls for inappropriate dress and conduct, thereby recasting girls as subordinate within gender relations.

Through the vignette (Box 2), Kate's case scenario on Instagram highlighted many girls responding to having had similar experiences.

Box 2. Vignette 1: Kates's experience of body shaming and naming.

> *Kate is a high school learner. She is on Instagram and many other social media sites. However, a so-called friend posted a pic of her without her permission on Instagram saying, "Would you get a guy if you looked as ugly as her? "She happens to see this nasty message on her classmate's news feed, and it really upsets her".*

    Nita: [Indian, 15] This is normal on the socials where friends diss friends.
    Cathy: [Black, 17] These things happen often mem [Mam].
    Lilly: [Black, 18] This happened to me, I was so embarrassed.

The responses elicited by the vignette findings reveal that girls are developing a resilience to what is normal on social media, this kind of labelling being considered a normal occurrence in Nita's world. Cathy has also accepted this kind of behaviour has part of the online experience, while Lilly was very affected by her incident, indicating that some learners maybe more sensitive to other in their reaction to a wider audience and how they deal with shame.

5.3.2.   Sub-theme 2: Easy access to pornographic platforms and sexting experts

Pornography is a display of sex viewed through heteronormative, masculine driven narratives that does not only extend the sexuality for girls but lures them into a narrow perception of normative sexuality (Fox & Bale, 2018). Many girls responded to viewing pornography as an experiential learning tool, where they could enquire about sexual matters aside from the conservative family unit. Fox and Bale (2018) highlight a moral panic that arises due to sexualization. Girls were curious and eager to learn about their bodies by using sexual materials, and that pornography can no longer be seen as being that of male interest only (Marques, 2019). According to Carboni and Bhana (2019), girls become sexually knowledgeable and gain pleasure from understanding their sexuality. The virtual terrain is a sexuality playground for girls who find it an adventure to engage in pornographic material and sexting. Restricting girls' sexuality does not capacitate them to discover their full identities, and all pornographic images (matter) can affect and be affected by the body.

Relationships with ephemeral body, ideas and objects form an accessible assemblage that detaches and attaches to devices, make access to pornography and cybersex easily available (Fox & Bale, 2018). Young femininities are delving in pornographic platforms and deviating from the sexual double standards existing for males and females. Sexuality is practiced in complicated ways that are embedded in risks of sexual violence, abuse, and oppression. Through pornographic platforms and social media, young girls are broadening their spaces to capacitate their sexual knowledge, feeling and emotions. A contradiction exists because pornography is easily accessible and is a huge part of young girls experiential learning, yet there is a refusal for society to accept these young people as curious and sexually knowledgeable. The following excerpts from the semi-structured interviews detail how girls experience pornography.

Interviewer: How do you learn about your sexuality?

Kelly: *[Black, 18] Well, I do go on this website uhm porn [giggles] I do watch to see what the girl's private parts and the guys do and how it works Yes. It teaches, what can I say uhm it teaches me like how to become a woman.*

Tina*: [17, Black] Yes, it does. Things like going on to inappropriate sites like Pornhub.*

Jen: *[15, Black] ma'am to show the penis go into the vagina and all those things. It's disgusting. We want to experience and want to learn more about it. So yes, some of them hook up with people oh now they are saying uhm no strings attached.*

Felan: *[17, Coloured] I think when you watch porn as a girl you are then referred to a slut. But then when boys do it it's normal. That's how boys are. But when you were a girl, and you are doing it, you get negative comments from people.*

Zingi: *[16, Black] Yes, I had a sneak peek. I have, it was a different kind of porn. It was new and taught me how the body worked. I was at a stage when I was confused about whether I liked girls or boys. I seemed to have gotten more excitement from porn. Eventually, I think I left; it was so toxic. I just couldn't, I was emotionally drained. I had issues. I started getting depression.*

Girls watch pornography because they are curious about how their bodies work, and discussions around sex are taboo within cultural and religious environments. Kelly details the process of becoming a woman by outlining how the reproductive organs work and function in the way that they do, and because of curiosity and conservative families they have unanswered questions about sexuality and sex. Tina views pornography as inappropriate because society sees men's consumption of pornography has a natural phenomenon, while girls watching it is considered inappropriate. Zingi noted that for her the use pornography is an open arena where confusion of her sexual identity can be dispelled through watching explicit sexual practices between male and female, and female with female. She indicated that lesbian pornography made her excited and sparked her desire, reflecting her personal preference of gender. It gave her the opportunity to explore her sexuality without judgement from society and gave her a space to feel accepted with her lesbian status. She further noted that she became depressed because of how hostile cyberspace can be to homosexual people. Tiny indicated that in conversations with her friends she found out that many young people stay up at night and watch pornography and exchange nude images, being the perfect time for this kind of activity as

everyone is asleep and the secrecy around sexual exploration can be maintained. Kelly and Jen use pornography to understand how they become women.

Social media sites have normalized pornography and harassment to become impulses that young people enact (Nayak et al., 2006). These performances are considered a transgression that allows girls a platform for sexuality learning, but they also imitate the enactments of pornographic action that is heteronormatively constructed. This is disempowering young women, as it normalizes the denigration of women and disrupts true intimacy. Increased consumption of pornography may contaminate attitudes of sex and sexuality and the way relationships are forged (Fox & Bale, 2018). Pornography misleads young girls because it objectifies them and leaves then believing that risky behaviour is acceptable.

Sexting is the where sexually explicit photographs and texts are distributed via smartphones messaging, social media applications and YouTube (Lee & Croft, 2015). This may involve an exclusive relationship, where a boy and girl are dating and send each other pictures to show their appreciation for one another, or it could be done randomly. Sexting is a criminal offense for under 18-year-old teenagers, yet it is very much a part of young peoples' social activities. The following excerpts unravel girls sexting experiences in cyberspace through the semi-structured interviews.

> **Interviewer:** *Have you experienced sexting?*
>
> *Ana: [Black,16] Definitely, cos there you're free to just talk. Talk whatever you want, post whatever you want, tweet wherever you want and so uhm you start having those conversations you have with people mostly boys where you'll talk like how I wish I was there; we will be in the bed… then the next step will be kissing… the next step I will be taking your clothes off… then the next step I'll be down there…*
>
> *Interviewer: what kind of pictures?*
>
> *Kelly: [16, coloured] Like my body parts*
>
> *Interviewer: Yeah*
>
> *Kelly: like me naked*
>
> *Interviewer: yeah*
>
> *Kelly: and because I was so*
>
> *Interviewer: what?*

> *Kelly:* In love with this guy and I took pictures of myself, and I sent it to him
>
> *Kelly:* And then I [laughs] I get like, messages from I think his friends, but they don't they just say, a friend gave a number and then asked which friend and then he said, Is this you? And [laughs]
>
> *Interviewer:* And they sent the picture back to you?
>
> *Kelly:* They sent the picture back to me or asked who's this? And they say that my boyfriend sent them the pictures and then I immediately blocked them.

Ana provides a detailed account of how virtual sex occurs, initiating an awakening of the imagination to rekindle simulated fantasy. This erotic display of sexting is a common practice amongst many young people, yet they are unaware of the legal implications while they are still minors. In an interview with Kelly, she made it clear that a requirement in some relationships is that nude pictures must be exchanged, with the girls never being the ones to initiate this practice. In many relationships, men coerce girls to send these pictures and instruct them about what they want. In this case, Kelly proved to be gullible by believing she was in love and sent her naked pictures, not realising that a few hours later these pictures were distributed to her boyfriend's friends, and they messaged her back asking if this was really her. She blocked them with immediate effect, but the embarrassment and the emotional trauma is something that haunts her, and she has developed a deep sense of distrust regarding dating boys. The modus operandi for this boy was to gain popularity amongst his friends while he did not attach any emotional attachment to the relationship with Kelly. Sexting in teenage girls' relationships manifested as dangerous when used as a source of coercion or as a form of revenge pornography, such as when a couple breaks up, one wanted to get back at the other and abuses the images (Van Ouytsel et al., 2017). Although sexting is a precursor to enhance sexuality, unauthorized circulation of sexually explicit pictures has legal implications. The motive for boys wanting these explicit images is that they are "*valuable to boys as currency because they denoted ownership over girls*" thus identifying girls' bodies as interchangeable (Ringrose et al., 2021, p .1). Young people express deviant behaviour as part of normalcy, despite sexting being a criminal activity, where teenagers can be persecuted in the court of law (Doring, 2014).

5.3.3 Subtheme 3: Sexual harassment: normalized occurrences amongst young girls

Young girl's harassment is underpinned by broader socio-cultural norms that suffuse the online space. Digital platforms are emancipatory tools for young girls who desire complex

embodiments, bodily projection, and approval for the purpose of crowd sourcing. Social media sites have developed into spaces that adopt divisiveness through cycles of competition and exclusivity. Bodily entanglements with materiality created effects on girls' emotions and physical appearance, and increased exposure to risks of their bodies. The responses below are from the semi-structured interviews and present the kinds of experiences girls are navigating online.

> *Interviewer: What kinds of experiences are you facing online?*
>
> *Tiny: [Black, 16] Well, the most recent one I posted a picture on Sunday on the 12th of September 2021. I posted that picture and then there were three sexual uh comments that came one after the other. The first one was I was wearing a skirt and a black top. The first one was about the length of my skirts. He said uhm that skirt should have been shorter so that we can see your thighs he wrote it in isiZulu I ignored the comment. The second comment was about my chest area. He said something about me having big boobs and how uhm well his exact words were uh you should also give us a taste of whatever it is that you have meaning that men sexualize women on social media.*
>
> *Kelly: [Coloured, 16]. Do you wanna fuck?*
>
> *Nicole: [Indian, 18] they comment on your body they say you are sexy, and you are hot, you are delicious, I would like to taste you ...they would like to pick up that skirt a bit or open the top a bit, show me your body they say, they make you feel like a prostitute.*
>
> *Andy: [Black, 16] I like cooking shows.*
>
> *Kita: [Black, 14] I don't post nudes, I post bible scriptures on Sundays, I post jokes on Facebook. Common jokes like, when there is a common joke on Facebook and everyone is posting it, I also post it, I share posts, photos and post my photos.*

Digital platforms can be more hostile to some, and in the case of these participants, all of them have had some experience of cyberbullying and sexual harassment. The impact of technology on female bodies imbues forces of harassment and bullying that work "*within and through bodies*" (Fredengren, 2021, p. 525). Technology provokes ambivalence and a moral panic around girlhood, as they are becoming more desensitized to experiences of sexual harassment and cyberbullying. In some culturally conservative homes, girls are not spoken to about what a normal body should be like, and in many instances do not recognize the sexual advances made at them (Jackson & Scot, 2015). In many instances, girls are spoken to very sexually and

do not identify harassment as being serious. This type of behaviour is normalized, yet it reproduces gendered power imbalances. Connell (1987) affirms that boys use their manhood to attain higher ranking masculinities through imposing their power on girls and reducing their agency. Tiny describes her feelings after posting a picture about how she felt sexualized and uncomfortable. Kelly was immediately taken aback when she posted a picture and a guy slipped into her direct messages asking her if she would like to have sexual intercourse with him, the way he asked indicating that he wanted casual non-committal and impersonal sex.

Boys experiment with girls in relationships that lack intimacy and only satisfy their sexual needs. This proves that while girls want to use digital platforms as a place of expression, boys find it an opportunity to negotiate sex. Another participant Nicole describes the kind of comments she received where she felt violated, when all she wanted to do was to use the virtual space for catharsis and self-expression. She explained that she felt like she was a prostitute, to be sexually exploited and made to feel disgusted about being a woman. Representations of sexualized images of girls lead to sexual harassment, where an ever-evolving media space intensifies the misogynistic behaviour of males, and the lack of legal structures perpetuate the vicious cycle of sexual violence (Phipps et al., 2012). While Tiny, Kelly and Nicole experienced very negative experiences of social media, Andy used cyberspace to enhance her culinary skills by using YouTube to try recipes and learnt how to empower herself. Kita got a sense of empowerment from the virtual space by posting religious sermons to provide spiritual guidance to her peers and jokes to empower others.

5.4 Theme 3: Sociocultural inscriptions that perpetuate the vicious gendered cycle

The subtheme that emerged from this theme was about the impact of patriarchy in the lives of girls and boys and the double standards that exists for these genders.

5.4.1 Sub-theme 1: Patriarchy and sexual double standards

Patriarchy divides men and women into prescribed roles, and according to Jewkes and Morrell (2010), is classified into power differentials of active masculinity and passive femininity. Patriarchy is embedded in cultural inscriptions that create boundaries to restrict agency for females, while elevating male power due to gendered norms. Patriarchal households embody the idea that girls are subordinate and categorized as overseeing domestic chores and are caregivers to their siblings, while the boys are viewed as 'effeminate' if they help with household chores. While girls are embedded within heteronormative and gendered socio-

cultural norms, boys are pressured to conduct masculinity in line with hierarchical relations of power. These stereotypical norms create a double bind of gender and power that characterise women as subordinate and men as powerful (Connell, 1987). Exposure to technological devices is affording girls the opportunities of enactment, where the intersection of sexuality and technology tend to overthrow patriarchy. This occurs through the restructuring of their performances and language (Dolphijn & Van der Tuin, 2012). Girls challenge patriarchal norms by destabilizing material spaces and using social media sites as a vehicle to drive social productions through the formation of multiple assemblages. These assemblages are caught up in feminine and masculine constructs of power that filter from offline to online spaces. According to societal norms, girls lacked the desire to be regulated and controlled by boys (Lyttleton-Smith, 2019). The responses below from semi-structured interviews provided insight into the treatment of gender online.

> **Interviewer:** *Do you feel that boys are treated differently from girls in online spaces?*
>
> **Tina:** *[Black, 17] Because okay, because of patriarchy. This act goes on in our homes affecting women. All because of culture. Yeah, definitely because of culture and traditions that make girls feel like we're supposed to listen to instruction supposed to be a bit obedient to demands of men, we're supposed to do everything they say, the men release power, in power, they are the alphas compared to us.*
>
> **Katie:** *[Coloured, 16] There are different behaviours for boys and different behaviours for girls that is acceptable. It's like, boys have more freedom.*
>
> **Ria***: [Indian, 17] It's all about power uhm I don't know when this arose but uh males tend to tend to think that they are dominant over females. Like… it's all about a power the way power is divided uh men think that they often they often think that they are more uh dominant over females.*

In the excerpts above, the girls highlight how culture plays a role in creating double standards that exists for boys and girls. Tina detailed that patriarchy is the reason for men assuming the 'alpha' status in homes, and that women must take instruction from them. Girls are taught to be submissive and that boys have a right to control them. Katie detailed that there are different standards for boys and girls, and that boys have more freedom than girls. She further elaborates that if boys take half naked pictures they are regarded as cool, but if girls do the same then

society frowns upon them and ostracizes them. This results in degradation of self-worth and reputation, where girls are kept shackled to prescribed socio-cultural norms. Ria believes that power differentials exist between men and women that keeps women subdued and docile.

A common occurrence amongst girls online is cyber-flashing, which is where men and boys send girls unsolicited pictures of their genitals on social media. These acts are aggressive attempts of non-consensual representations of men sent to woman who have no control over receiving them. According to Amundsen (2021), men do this to taunt and harass girls through these sexist acts. Men are not afraid to express their sexuality on digital platforms, and that "*male masturbation tends to be conceived as simply normal*" (Austin, 2017, p. 41). Zingi reported this when she mentions how a boy just went onto her live feed and started masturbating, indicating that for boys these kinds of behaviours are normalized. In a discussion with Zingi on vignette (Figure 6), she related her experience of being a victim to cyber-flashing.

Box 5.2: Vignette 2 Tosca Peter's experience of sexual harassment.

> *Tosca Peters was a 14-year-old victim of cyberbullying, sexual harassment, and trolling. Tosca had her own insecurities that stemmed from anxiety, depression, and weight gain. When 16-year-old Keaton asked her to be friends on a social networking site, he became the reason she smiled. They communicated regularly online. Tosca's parents worked long hours and she was left with substantial amounts of time on her hands. She arrived home from school where Keaton became her 'virtual escape' from her daily challenges. She started to feel a sense of self-worth and belonging until one day when Keaton decided to pass rude and sexual remarks and his nude pictures which made her feel uncomfortable. He wanted to be more than friends with her, he asked for a picture of her exposing her chest. When she said no his messages became nasty, and he told her that she was too fat and ugly on the eye anyway! He started name calling and bullying her and posting unpleasant comments on her wall. This droves Tosca to hang herself in her closet.*

> ***Zingi****: [Black, 16] I remember how bad I felt when a guy came on and started masturbating, he didn't even show his face. And for me, I didn't understand what happened. Masturbating was what he did for fun.*

Cyber-flashing is "*non-consensual exposure of male genitals and operates to cause offence and/or to express a sense of male sexual or aggrieved entitlement*" (Amundsen, 2021, p. 1470). These images appear in some girls' inboxes via direct messages, or through their social media pages. Boys feel entitled to the pleasure he derives by subjecting girls to this kind of performance, the opportunistic and unsolicited display of male dominance being typical of the

macho complex. The participants below elaborated on the young girls' experiences of cyber-flashing and the way in which they negotiate and challenge receiving these pictures.

> **Interviewer:** *What is the most uncomfortable thing that has happened to you on social media?*
>
> **Andy:** *[Black, 16] … I was sexually harassed. So, this Pakistan man, I didn't know him. He texted me and then I texted him back I thought like he needed something, because sometimes I'm a dancer uh so I thought he needed something, like asking for tips and everything. So, I answered his dm. And then he started like sending nudes to me and I didn't even ask for anything.*
>
> **Interviewer:** *Nudes of what? of his entire body?*
>
> **Andy:** *No, he wasn't showing his face he was just showing his lower part of the body. So, I told him don't do that, but he still did it. And then I went, and I blocked him and reported on Instagram. And then there was this other one. I think it's the same guy who created another social media page on Instagram. Uhh the video called me like without my permission and he was naked wanted me to show him and then I switched off the video call. And then he texted me asking me to show him my boobs and I refused so I deleted that account and then I made a new one.*
>
> **Kita:** *[Black, 14] There was this one time I posted; I changed my profile picture, then there was this guy. I think he is from America, this white guy, he told me he is from America, and he told me he owns a modelling agency, then I said no I am fine I want to focus on school first than I will think about modelling. Then he created another account because I knew it was him and he started commenting on all my pictures. Started saying how pretty I am and said some things on inbox, he sends me a picture of his manhood.*

In the above excerpt, Andy resisted these nude pics by blocking the sender immediately as they were disturbing to her. Kita noted that some men try to lure girls by using modelling to compliment them on their beauty and felt offended and violated by the unsolicited nude images. Although these participants resisted these unsolicited pictures, some females challenge men in the way that they respond. Some use humour to take back their agency by ridiculing the sender, retorting on the size of their manhood or retaliate by using a "sausage slicer" (Amundsen, 2021). This indicates that their witty retorts are really acts of resistance used to counteract the unequal power balances that unravel on digital platforms (Amundsen, 2021).

5.5 Theme 4: Role of media and celebrity culture

This theme gave rise to three sub themes, these being the effects on the disease of the mind and the body, preconceived ideas of beauty that have been created by media and celebrity culture and the intersection of technology with girls' identities.

5.5.1 Sub-theme 1: The disease of the mind and the body

Alldred and Fox (2017) note that bodies can be demonized or celebrated through representations that are projected by media and celebrity industries. As a resistance to power, the influence of media and celebrity culture results in girls stringently controlling their food consumption. Some girls are on a "thinspiration" quest (Alldred & Fox, 2017), and even in broader socio-cultural contexts, the female body is subjected to fat shaming. According to Banet-Weiser et al. (2020), there is a misogynistic growth of boy culture perpetuated online, in which gendered inequalities continue to be perpetuated. There is a considerable focus on women's bodies due to the media, with popular feminism being the privileged form of beauty. The online platform is a space where girls are celebrating and women are defending women, for example, through hashtags and blogs they can feel a sense of empowerment when they challenge the disenfranchised women movements, such as "Smash the Patriarchy" or "Women Power" (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020). According to the girls' responses based on Figure 6, many highlighted that society confines women to a particular socio-cultural context.

Figure 5.4 Selfies and preconceived notions of beauty.
Source:
https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https://lookaside.fbsbx.com/lookaside/crawler/media/?media_id%3D10224865

> **Interviewer**: *Tell me about this picture?*
>
> **Kita**: *[Black, 14] Girls think that stick thin is in ma'am, they starve themselves just to look good in selfies.*
>
> **Jade**: *[Indian, 18] Ay ma'am thick girls are in fashion if you too thin they call you an ironing board.*

Media, fitness, and beauty industries set current trends by advocating what is desirable, having ranged from at one time to desiring the heroin chic look, as represented in the picture above, where girls appear emaciated and hollow-eyed. This is a stark contrast to the current fascination with more voluptuous bodies and well-rounded derriere. The media and beauty industries have a strong hold on young girls by dictating how they receive the bombardment of scintillating imagery according to what is deemed attractive at the time, based on socio-cultural contexts. It is clear from Kita's response that for some girls, starving means that they will be beautiful, while Jade believes that girls who appear curvier have more sex appeal.

The following responses from the participants semi-structured interviews emphasised the influence of media and celebrity culture on the girls' lives.

> *Interviewer: Do you think media and pop culture influence girls?*
>
> *Tiny: [Black, 17] I think that celebrity culture causes anorexia. Because most young women want to lose weight and they want a small waist, so they don't eat and they go to the toilet and throw up all their food. It causes a lot of problems for them in terms of their health. Some of them suffer from many illnesses such as malnutrition you find someone eating a packet of chips for the whole day just because you want to maintain that good figure.*
>
> *Sindy: [Black,16] It sometimes leads to suicide. Because when you've been blackmailed and used, you just feel less of a woman sometimes.*
>
> *Lizzie: [Black, 13] They, they have a lot of anxieties, depression, insecurities about their bodies*

Tiny contends that the media has a strong hold over their lives, one area of social media being a preoccupation with heteronormative forms of beauty and body shape. According to Tina, girls develop eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa, where a person feels that as they lose weight by resisting food, they feel powerful and happy, and their bodily concerns disappear. Society confines girls' bodies in particular context, where marketing agencies and fitness industries are obsessive about weight and shape. Being fat is regarded as a parasite that suffocates the body, the dominant perceptions of social discourses being to deterritorialise the fat body (Braziel & LebeSco, 2001). According to Tolman and Tolman (2002), girls demonize their bodies by fuelling insecurities and inadequacies. Tiny also makes mention of bulimia, which is fuelled by media and celebrity culture and their ideals of how girls should look. They become so obsessed with their bodies that they must tailor themselves to meet the standards of commodified beauty and confidence. However, this perception is one that affects the psyche, where media and celebrity culture prey on girls' bodily insecurities, and prescripts of the perfect body is dictated heteropatriarchal and heteronormativity standards. The technological blogs and social media sites face normalising insecurities associated with the body and the mind.

5.5.2 Sub-theme 2: Morality vs Materiality: preconceived notions of beauty

Current technologies have become extensions of young girls whose main aim is connectivity, trending and being popular (Tolman, 2012). Preoccupation with appearance was a mantra expounded by the media that stated that superficiality and outer looks were everything. Girls who had a positive self-image and were popular had agency. Austin (2017) identified that masculinity aligns their views through a gendered context in which women and girls are heterosexualised. Girls gain popularity through the enhanced affects created through social media filters, with Austin (2017) noting that those affects are hetero-sexualized, heteronormative, eroticized, and superficial. According to post humanistic discourse, Fredengren (2021) places some individuals at a higher ranking than others, and power inscriptions intersect with digital girlhood identities.

> ***Interviewer:*** *What do girls wish their appearance to be?*
>
> ***Ria****: [Indian, 17] Uh Speaking about appearances, surgery, plastic surgery makes people look a whole lot different, and celebrities, many celebrities, indulge in these so teenagers think that it's okay for you to look a certain way.*
>
> ***Tina****: [Black, 17] The person that I am on social media changes, how I see things is like, I've just turned into a materialistic person. Back here, it's all about getting money... Because you're concerned with like, how you look and how you dress and how you feel people see you. I feel it takes away the importance*
>
> *from your life, of education, and of having like, a good moral grounding. Because at some point, you must like set aside your morals and values. To be this influencer or to be this trendsetter on social media.*

Girls are influenced by social media to have the perfect bodily displays, and Ria explains that women will go to great lengths to have the ideal bodies aided by plastic surgery. Ria informs us that youth culture is using technology as a place to acquire beauty tips, enhanced filter applications, take selfies and find fitness groups to appear perfect. Fredengren (2021) reported that excessive use of technology meant excessive influence of media and celebrity culture, which materially shaped the bodies of young girls and enslaved them to dieting and adjusting their complexions and resulted in constantly upgraded identities. There were expectations ingrained in how girls should look, ensuring thinness by curbing hunger for food, and undertaking excessive exercise and even starving. Tina highlights those girls on social media are fixated with the idea of looking beautiful and are not concerned about personality or

education, but on appearance only. Tina highlights that's girls who cannot perform sexy visual expressions in cyberspace lead to complex and unrealistic ideals that impact on moral judgement.

5.5.3   Sub-theme 3: Identities intersecting technologies

Technology affords young girls the opportunity to adopt multiple identities to negotiate digital spaces within the dominant gender norms. The more embedded girls become through their devices, the more agency they acquire through influence from the media and pop culture, pornography, sexting and gender hierarchies that exists. While girls are stereotyped into the prima donna/slut binary on social media (Tolman & Tolman, 2002), they perform various enactments to challenge oppressive heteropatriarchal mindsets, and adopt the virtual space as a self-learning sexuality opportunity to enhance their appearance. Adolescence is a fluid process, neither located in childhood or adulthood, and is where people's identity is shaped. During this conflicting stage of young girls lives they undergo a process of "becoming" and deterritorialization, which is where they were finding themselves (Austin, 2017). Young girls face conflicts in their identities in relation to ideas, objects, and bodies through a process of fluidity (Austin, 2017), with many not knowing who they are anymore. The young girls were asked if they were the same people in both the online and offline spaces.

> *Interviewer: Do you feel you are the same person online and offline?*
> *Mandy: [Black, 14] I'm not the same person as I am on social media, on social media I'm an actor. Because on social media, I can be anyone I like.*
> *Kelly: [Black, 18] When I'm like around my family, I'm like this quiet girl that you won't think will be the type who is posting or talking like this, but on social media I'll be like [laughs] swearing, posting revealing things and talking bad.*
> *Nita: [Indian, 15] Because I think it's like your personality changes and you must fit in, so you try hard to do so otherwise you get picked on and you in competition with others to be the best.*

The girls above all claimed to be a different person compared to the one they were on social media, where they adopt a different façade for a different situation. Girls use the social media spaces to negotiate their identities and sexualised cultures, yet there is a gendered mindset that females are "*requiring constant monitoring, surveillance and remodellin*g" (Gill, 2007, p. 149).

The theory of performativity by Butler (1990) elucidates that those girls are actors on social media, where they reveal multiple personas to challenge and resist masculine norms.

5.6   Theme 5: Love, sex trust and virtual dating

This theme highlighted two important sub themes, that being the treatment of sex as a taboo topic in the home and highlights the sugar daddy phenomenon and virtual dating**.**

5.6.1   Sub-theme 1: Sex is taboo and virtual relationships are real

Sex and sexuality issues are aligned with secrecy and silence in young people's lives (Bhana, 2017). Parents continue to reinforce notions of sex through conservative and socio-cultural inscriptions in which the girls are meant to be sexually naive and unaware of it, and together with teachers are oblivious to the dangers of the cyber realm. This is largely due to the generational gap that exists with technological interaction and usage. Parents are unfamiliar, ignorant and under-educated about technological devices and are therefore unable to monitor and assist in supervising their children's use of social media. These are some of the responses elicited from the semi-structured interviews on how parents and schools treat sex and dating issues.

Interviewer: Does your parents ever talk to you about sex and dating?

Tina: [Black, 17] I'm just curious. Yeah, I just want to know what's happening. Because I don't have family, my mother died. Like in African families we like that. It's not appropriate to speaks about sex at home and at school, like maybe like a bit in life orientation there's not a lot of information about it.

Ria: [Indian, 17] Yes, that's actually a very big part of how uh social media is a very it's a very open site. It has a lot of different uh adverts and stuff. Some children where uh they don't have open relationships with their parents, they think that they use social media to explore especially if sex is not being talked about or dating is not being talked about openly with your parents, you feel the need to want to explore and find out more about these topics and use social media to read about them because the curiosity gets the better of you.

Kita: [Black, 14] Parents don't talk about sex because maybe they are uncomfortable, but there was this one time people were talking about porn on social media and there was a time I did not know what porn is so I went to

chrome and googled it, I saw what it was and shut it off and disabled my chrome because it's not going to stop popping up on chrome, so I disabled it. I don't have chrome anymore. Porn is a very common thing on social media. people are going to be posting about it and posting pictures about it.

Zingi: *[Black, 16] I just think it comes from my parents. My parents, they never call me. They have my number and my real mom passed away. I didn't cry. I didn't know how to act. My daddy doesn't call me or doesn't text me. He doesn't do anything. Like I can go like weeks without seeing him before he responds.*

Sex is considered a taboo topic in the home and at school, with Tina noting that some parents are of a culturally constructed mindset that if they inform their children about sex then they will engage in sexual activities. This kind of thinking places young girls at risk of sexually transmitted diseases, teenage pregnancy, and sexual grooming. Tina noted that a serious lack of sex education in school curriculum creates a void in understanding sexuality in schools (Albury, 2021). Teachers are preoccupied, their major focus being on driving the school-based curriculum. Life orientation provides a streamlined curriculum about sexuality, but a more comprehensive approach is required to guide impressionable young teenagers quell their curiosity. Felan emphasizes the communication gap that exists between her parents and herself when she explained her lack of being informed about sex. Kita is a classic example of a girl who challenges her parents by watching pornography as a learning tool and defies them by disabling her chrome so her parents cannot track her online activities. Parents are not techno savvy enough to be aware of girls' online activity and how they take full control of their power over their sexual encounters online. Kita turns to pornography as a source of education because there is a lack of comprehensive sex education in schools (Allen, 2013). Zingi explains that a lack of a maternal figure in her life leaves her without anyone to talk to about sexual issues and she therefore uses the internet to overcome her situation.

From the responses provided, it appears that parents do not prioritize their children' sexual knowledge and their sexuality as being an essential part of their existence. Girls are judged by society and stigmatized and are having to clandestinely explore their sexuality. Most parents provide smartphones and other technological devices to their children but are not familiar with online applications, or what social media activities their children engage in. This serves as a catalyst to heighten the girls' vulnerability to the cyberbullying and harassment that persists on social media. Discussions of girl's sexual desires remain elusive, both in the home front and in

the school curriculum. Sexuality education in the school curriculum provides little in the way of understanding the actions, meanings and indebt practices of sex. Many girls develop relationships with boys online who they are familiar with, but also fall victim to relationships with complete strangers. "*Social media platforms, dating sites "bake" gender into their design*" (Albury et al., 2021, p.74). The danger about virtual dating is that people do not know who a profile really represents. Relationships are based on lust, deception, and cheating, and not on love and trust, with girls using social media as online dating sites to experience their own thrills and fantasies.

5.6.2   Sub-theme 2: Sugar daddies and virtual dating

Cross-generational relationships are becoming a common occurrence amongst girls in certain contexts (Brouard & Crewe, 2012), these relationships include the concept of 'sugar daddies', these being older men engage in transactions with young girls where there is an exchange of goods for sex. Many girls are asked by sugar daddies to have sex with them in exchange for material wealth. In some communities being good looking, available and popular on social media is one such reason why girls attract sugar daddies. Girls from poorer backgrounds feel that this is an ideal way for them to be taken care off and in some cases, the parents condone these relationships as they get groceries and other items in return for sex. This trade includes the exchange of sex for the girl to receive an income to maintain her upkeep. Older men use their position of financial power to entice vulnerable girls into potentially damaging relationships which deny girls, their agency and create a moral panic around cross-generationality (Brouard & Crewe, 2012). Men are not concerned with girls' consent, just with how best the relationship could be mutually beneficial. Girls may be devoid of emotional attachments and use these men to get money for their upkeep and necessities. In excerpts from the semi-structured interviews, the participants gave a full account of the inter-generational relationships and the kind of provider masculinity relationships (Bhana, 2014) that materialize.

> ***Interviewer:*** *Really? What is a sugar daddy/ blesser?*
> ***Ana:*** *[Black, 16] A blesser okay so usually you meet blessers online. Like maybe if we want new clothes, perfume, makeup, lip gloss and lashes you wanna do your nails, you wanna buy weave these days uhm, so yes, our family can't provide us with that. My friend thought it was better to get a blesser cos a blesser could provide her with benefits for sex in return, which she doesn't mind doing to get money. So yes, yeah, I understand, I like when I look at it without judging him,*

like looking at the real story. I understand it's because of how his family can't provide her with things that she needs.

Tiny: *[Black, 16] Well, a blesser basically is an older man who is rich, and he wants all the beautiful young women around him for pleasure because obviously women his age can't uh pleasure him the way he wants to be, you know pleasured. So, he buys them expensive stuff in exchange for sex. Those young women are called blessees because they are the ones who received the blessings. Uhm that men will make sure that young girl get a new phone every six months that young girl will have new clothes, that young girl would change hairstyles every week do her nails every week in exchange for sex.*

In the above excerpts there are numerous reasons why girls are involved in cross-generational relationships. Some post over sexualized images believing that they are talking to young boys who compliment them on their appearance, while they are being catfished by much older men. Catfishing is where older men lure young women into transactional relationships through creating false personas. Ana explains that some girls do not come from affluent homes, and they get into these relationships to maintain their image with the finance it provides. Shefer (2016) confirms this claim, when she explains that girls in poverty-stricken contexts use transactional sex as a survival mechanism to establish love and material wealth. According to Tiny, young girls see these old men as fulfilling their materialistic wishes, which give them a sense of completion and happiness. Shockingly, some parents condone these relationships and use their daughters as a bartering tool to alleviate their own economic distress. In these instances, the girl's agency is diminished, as these older men have complete control over these young lives and are at liberty to discard them at will. In addition, girls are exposed to "blessers" who are often in polygamous relationships. Girls are placed in a position of feeling empowered by gaining material wealth, but they face simultaneous risks, such as sexually transmitted diseases and teenage pregnancy. Ana noted how accessible sugar daddies are online and how they will provide free transport and money and demand a girl's location to be picked up in exchange for sexual gratification. Digital technologies make it so much more accessible for young girls to talk to strangers who can provide them with agency through monetary gain or through manipulation of the masked virtual space.

Many participants entwine their romantic relations with their digital devices using multiple forms of expression that foster romantic relationships using emojis, pictures and videos

(Marston, 2020). The responses from the semi-structured interviews shed light on the prevalence of dating through digital technology.

> **Interviewer:** *Have you ever dated anyone online?*
>
> **Kelly:** *[black, 18] My first boyfriend on social media was when I was 13 years old, I was talking to this guy, and we were like chatting and then he asked me for nude pictures [laughs] of myself.*
>
> **Kita:** *[black, 14] Yes, people dating people on Facebook especially during COVID is common, it was lockdown people couldn't see other people. They started chatting on Facebook, talking and then you will find you dating someone, and you haven't even met the person. People break up because it's not the same in person.*
>
> **Nita**: *[Indian, 15] Well, yes, I did. Then I met a few people and I wanted to look, and I saw this guy. I felt he was cute and stuff. Then I started talking to him. I was discussing my problems to him then he was like being so sincere. Telling me it's okay. Then after I felt like I could trust him he gave him a number for WhatsApp. Then we started talking on WhatsApp then out of nowhere, he tells me to send a nude picture. Then after that, I was feeling uncomfortable. I asked myself should I, do it? Should I not do it? Then I like quickly told him I must go.*
>
> **Jade:** *[Indian, 17] Yeah also because of social media, because he used to post other pictures of other girls, he should block me from viewing it, but my cousins used to screenshot it and send it to me, but I still shouldn't believe them. When I should ask him, he should tell me, no, that wasn't him. He said it was his brother that posted stuff. But eventually, in the end when I found out that he was cheating on me and all that then that's when I broke up with him.*

The interviews reveal that Kelly was only 13 when she first started virtually dating, indicating her vulnerability to risks at an early age, when she was asked for nude pictures of herself. The love life of young girls is being reconfigured through technological devices. This intrusion of technology removes the hold that parents have over their young children on social media where they freely explore their sexuality. Kita noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, teenagers experienced an overwhelming sense of boredom, and many started finding ways to engage with their sexualities through online dating. 'Bumble' is an example of a dating app which constitutes how girls are experiencing intimacy in current times (Young & Roberts, 2021).

Girls are using their opportunity of dating, such as on 'Bumble', to challenge gendered norms, where they invert power relations by initiating conversations and are transitioning from passive to active agency (Young & Roberts, 2021). While some girls attempted to visit dating sites, Nita explained how a seemingly sincere boy on social media gained her trust and confidence. She developed an emotional attachment to him while he was harbouring an ulterior motive, which was to obtain her nude pictures. It is evident from Nita's status that while she can feel intimacy and connectedness through digital platforms it can also develop a sense of distrust. Jade was in a relationship in which the masked nature of the internet was a perfect setting for her so-called boyfriend to cheat, deceive, and manipulate her into believing that she was his only girlfriend. Unfortunately, having multiple partners is a common phenomenon on social media, which will impact on Jade having trust issues in her future, real life relationships.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter detailed the experiences of cyberbullying and sexual harassment experienced by girls and mapped out how they resist and challenge their virtual experiences. Young people are submerged in matter and negotiate the virtual world by constantly reconfiguring their identities and the way they capacitate themselves (Coole & Frost, 2010). As a result, a new form of femininity has emerged, wherein the digital feminists strive for agency to confront and challenge heteropatriarchal and heteronormative ideologies through their various performances. In contemporary times females can have intimate communication, explore their sexuality, and reinvent themselves with the knowledge that can allow "*a body to be anything*" (Sanders & Lyons, 2020, p. 5).

Most of the participants in this study were found to have experienced multiple risks online. The themes provided an overview of girls' entanglements with their smartphone devices, where they post sexualised representations of themselves for the purpose of self-expression but are harassed and bullied in the process. Gender binaries maintain hierarchical ranks where there is a reinforcement of passive femininities and aggressive masculinities. Slut-shaming, victim blaming, pornography, sexting, harassment, and bullying were common occurrences amongst the participants. Socio-cultural inscriptions create sexual double standards for men and woman that place men in a space of entitlement. Media has a negative influence on how girls perceive their bodies which results in hyper sexualisation, eating disorders, promiscuity, and other psychosocial ills. Many young people are living life through the expectations of other people on social media and are losing their own identities. Love and sex have become distorted

because cheating and having many girlfriends or boyfriends on social media are normalised in cyberspace. Many young girls are falling into a trap of cross-generational relationships that are not for love but for economic gain. Butler (1990), Connell (1985, 1987) and the feminist new materialism were an integral part of framing this research study. Feminist new materialism challenged the notion of matter being passive and separable (Tillman, 2015). Matter moves through human beings who are active agents of self-expression, where they encapsulate the use of emoji's, pictures, and videos to simulate reality through virtual connections. Despite a heteropatriarchal embeddedness and the gender binary catalysing power relations in cyberspace, girls are finding agency through dynamism. This process involves reconfiguring, territorializing, reterritorializing, de-territorializing and entangling affects, materials, bodies, and assemblages for the critical process of becoming.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This dissertation examined cyberbullying and sexual harassment experiences amongst girls between the ages of 13-18 as they engaged with digital devices and social media applications. The two objectives in this research study were to examine what constituted girls' online experiences of cyberbullying and sexual harassment, and to understand how girls confronted and challenged these experiences. This chapter provides an overview of the content of the four preceding chapters and reviews the findings that shaped girls' interaction with technology with respect to the two research questions. It outlines the study limitations, indicates the significance of findings, and provides recommendations for research and practice.

6.2 Overview of Chapters

Chapter 1 provided a justification for this study, drawing from both national and international examples of cyberbullying and sexual harassment experiences of girls who use online platforms. It outlined the problems that arose from a dearth in understanding girls' experiences and explored the rationale for the study. The aim, objectives and critical research questions that framed this research study were also highlighted.

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature that centered around international and local perspectives of cyberbullying and harassment. Literature on teenage girls' online experiences of sexual harassment and cyberbullying were addressed by focusing in on the key controversies and gaps in research around these phenomena. Various types of cyberbullying were examined, and how girls used technology as a conduit to experience their gender and sexuality.

Chapter 3 detailed the multi-theoretical framework for the research study, these being Connell's gender relational theory (1985,1987), the theory of femininities (Connell, 1987; Pyke and Johnson, 2003; Schippers, 2007; Paechter, 2018) and Judith Butler's (1988, 1990) theory on performativity. Feminist new materialism was also an integral part of this research study, influenced by key thinkers such Braidotti (2013) and Van der Tuin (2011). These theories gave meaning to digital girlhoods and their experiences of bullying and harassment.

Chapter 4 provided an overview of the research methodology, outlined the research design, study location, sampling methods used, as well as data collection, processes, and analysis

methods. It detailed the location and context, outlining the school environment and socio-economic factors. There were 30 participants, all of whom provided parental consent and they were addressed using vignettes, photo-elicitation, and semi-structured interviews to answer the objectives. Ethical Issues were addressed, the data being analyzed using thematic analysis. Issues of validity, reliability, rigour, and positionality also framed this research study.

Chapter 5 presented the findings, their interpretation, collation, and analysis, as acquired from the interviews, photo elicitations and vignettes. Thematic analysis was used to formulate themes that commonly emerged from participant responses. Experiences of cyberbullying and sexual harassment were highlighted by themes to address the two objectives, which are detailed below.

6.3   Study findings

Two Objectives shaped this study.

6.3.1   Question 1. What are teenage girls' online experiences of sexual harassment and cyberbullying?

The study found that girls used technology to enhance their own sexuality, as an emancipatory and experiential learning tool, and a space for self-expression. While it was used positively to uphold femininities in power, it also was seen as a space that created hostility for those who experienced cyberbullying and sexual harassment due to entrenchment of gendered, heteropatriarchal constructs arising for socio cultural contexts. While the girls use the space to take charge and develop their identities, they also see social media sites as platforms in which they become sexually knowledgeable. The multifaceted nature of cyberspace can have a great positive influence in their lives, but also exposes them to risks, such as shame, degradation, psycho-social ills, and suicide. Gender binaries and heteronormative notions that frame the girls' lives predisposed them to cyberbullying and sexual harassment and are common online experiences. The girls were unaware that they are being sexually harassed in many cases and did not really report their experiences to anyone. This often happened because they feel it is normal behaviour, or they lack the emotional maturity to discern the appropriateness of what they are receiving. Unequal power relations continue to permeate cyberspace, where negotiations of relationships are done so using hegemonic and heteronormative means. While digital femininities are striving for upliftment, the virtual space is entrenched in social constructs that perpetuate the double standards that exist for males and females.

6.3.2　Question 2. How do girls confront and challenge online experiences of sexual harassment and cyberbullying?

All 30 of the participants in this research study related some instance in their lives where they had been cyberbullied, harassed, or had experienced a nasty incident on social media. The girls confronted and challenged their experience in numerous ways to get agency and empowered themselves by listening to positive affirmations from YouTube videos for inspiration, learnt to dance, cook, apply make-up from their latest pop star idols, and quoted bible verses to inspire their online audience. They posted sexy representations of themselves to challenge gendered norms by being bold, confrontational, and assertive on social media where they are using the power of language to talk about their concerns openly. Females empower themselves by joining online platforms such as anti-rape forums and promote empowered feminist groups in the pursuit of empowering themselves. However, while the girls portray themselves in a sexualized way, they face sexual harassment and cyberbullying. They challenge these incidences by negotiating practices of sexting and pornography, which they confront by blocking, ghosting, or deleting the perpetrators that abuse their rights. Girls can also challenge their experience by changing their identities online to protect themselves. They challenge socio-cultural inscriptions of how they should dress online by wearing revealing clothing and hypersexualizing their bodies for maximum validation and status. The veiled space allows girls to feel their true experience of their gender without judgment.

6.3.3　Theme 1. Girls' relationship with technology as a sexuality playground

Three sub-themes emerged for this theme, these being views about the importance of connectivity, types of materials that girls posted on social media sites and girls experiences of gender binaries and their heteronormative experiences of pleasure.

6.3.3.1　*Sub-theme 1: Views about the importance of connectivity to their devices.*

Digital technology is engrained in cultural, political, and social theories that intersect with power and privilege (Krebbekx, 2021). Feminist New Materialism demonstrates that it is not solely about the body, but also about its entanglement with multiple connections across virtual territories, relations, assemblages, and machines. Many girls seek belonging on a very public domain through which they experience affects, desires and identities (Kanai, 2017). Girls have created their own virtual identities through entanglements with their technological devices, and without any supervision and guidance. The participant's responses indicated that

their devices are invaluable power garnering tools that give them a space to feel empowerment and an outlet for self-expression.

6.3.3.2   *Sub-theme 2: Types of materials girls post on social media sites*

Empowered female sexualities occur when girls challenge technology as a source of power through sexualized images, such as videos, texts, and pictures. Young people see their devices as investments of affection in which they explore their entanglements of "emergent consciousness" (Mackey, 2016, p.157). Girls going online present hypersexualized images of their bodies (Zarabadi, 2021), this being a form of resistance and retaliation to the cultural and social norms that keeps them silent about their sexuality. Girls' bodies are no longer regulated by cultural norms or limitations online, as is often the case in offline spaces.

6.3.3.3   *Sub-theme 3: Gender binaries and girls' heteronormative experiences of pleasure*

The gender binary legitimizes stereotypical social codes that dictate masculine and feminine standards. Gender constructions are entrenched within the heterosexual matrix, in which skewed power relations perpetuate masculine entitlement, while females experience subordination. Although normative femininity is rooted in heteropatriarchal constructions, girls are now toppling double bind ideologies and challenging the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1993) to seek empowerment. Young girls want to feel intimacy through cyberspace and use their technological skills to socialise and navigate through heteronormative understandings of femininity. (Korkmaze et al., 2020). As a result, relationships that develop are not real relationships, without authentic connection, but can be deceptive and dishonest.

6.4   Theme 2: What kind of experiences are girls navigating online?

Three sub-themes were identified under this theme, these being how girls experience slut and body shaming, how they are engaging in pornography and sexting and their experiences of sexual harassment as normalised behaviour.

6.4.1   Sub-Theme 1: Body and slut-shaming, naming, and blaming

Girls are accessing social media for empowerment through their sexualised dressing and performative acts, yet they are facing multiple risks. Slut and body shaming are dangers that oppress girls through heteronormativity, and when they break from the conventions of normalcy, they are punished by name calling. According to Bhana and Anderson (2013),

boys use words such as 'slut' and 'bitch' to uphold hegemonic acts of masculine power that make young girls complicit. Masculine norms are entrenched by socio-cultural inscriptions and dictate how females be treated.

6.4.2. Sub-Theme 2: Easy access to pornographic platforms and sexting experts

Girls' sexuality is often silenced, and they therefore look to the virtual platform for enablement, turning their ignorance into sexual prowess by their engagement with pornography and sexting. Pornography is built on heteronormativity, a masculine driven discourse that perpetuate gendered constructions. Normalization of the treatment of women in pornographic videos may also disempower young girls who lack true intimacy, suffer denigration, and engage in risky behaviour. Sexting, a criminal offence for minors, is also a common practice that form part of young people's intimate relationships, where they send and receive nudes through coercion or on a voluntarily basis. Notions of empowerment through engaging with sexting reinforces sexist and heteronormative reactions (Lee & Crofts, 2015). Virtual fantasy is recreating the ideas of love, sex, and intimacy through exposure to pornography and sexting.

6.4.3 Sub-theme 3: Sexual Harassment: normalized occurrences amongst young girls

While the young girls transgress virtual boundaries to seek empowerment, they can be subjected to humiliation, harassment, and cyber bullying (Lee & Crofts, 2015). Digital technology platforms are seen to emancipate young girls and uplift them in innumerable ways, but can also create a space of hostility, divisiveness, and exclusivity. This results in disenfranchisement for some through harassing, teasing, and belittling. It also allows perpetrators of sexual harassment to exercise domination over girls and use aggressive means to coerce and gain sexual gratification. Girls are subjected to multiple forms of online abuse while trying to gain agency. Shockingly, many girls do not understand when a sexual advance is made on them, and when they are spoken to suggestively and they do not know how to react. Youth and lack of life experience often mean that sexual innuendo and inappropriate advances can be misconstrued by girls, who are unable to identify and act on condemnable situations. This type of behaviour is internalized and can manifest in psycho-social deficits.

6. 5 Theme 3: Socio-cultural inscriptions that perpetuate the vicious gendered cycle

This theme outlined one sub-theme that highlighted the double standards that exists for both boys and girls.

6.5.1   Sub-theme 1: Patriarchy and sexual double standards

Traditional patriarchal practices create power differentials that exists where male supremacy is constructed by socio-cultural norms supports, and macho complex and female subjugation are condoned. Butler (1990) refers to the shaping of norms that oppress women through patriarchal means. Patriarchal attitudes influence how young people construct their identities. Girls are destabilizing the virtual space, which is entrenched in the gender binary and heteropatriarchal attitudes. When men enacted sexual displays, which were exhibited as cyber flashing, flirting and nudity, they were given a sense of entitlement. However, if girls enact the same performance, they are stigmatized and condemned by society. Hence, hierarchical gendered relations and inequalities of power remain widespread in virtual spaces.

6.6   Theme 4: Role of media and celebrity culture

Three sub-themes emerged for this theme, these being the disease of the body and the mind, girls replacing morality with materiality, their preconceived ideas of beauty and the impact of technology on girls and how it shapes their identities.

6.6.1   Sub-theme 1: The disease of the mind and body

While celebrity and media culture play a role in molding young girls' perceptions of beauty to negotiate agency, they reaffirm heterosexuality with the way they present female sexuality. Media and celebrity culture have always dictated the yardsticks for beauty, and current trends indicating that there is a desire for voluptuous young girls with well-rounded bodies. Ironically, while these sexy bodies are trending, there are also advertising companies that send out subtle messages suggesting that being thin is beautiful. Many young girls go through extreme lengths of starving or purging and see food as an enemy to attain acceptable societal standards. Heteronormative forms of beauty restrict girls' bodies to socio-cultural prescripts, which determine the status quo. Young girl psyches are also compromised when they become insecure about themselves and develop serious psycho-social illnesses and depression due to the mounting pressures around them based on outer beauty.

6.6.2   Sub-theme 2: Materiality vs Morality

Young femininities derive pleasure from technologies in which they express themselves using filter applications to enhance their appearance, gain agency and uplift their online standing. Girls display enactments that are hetero-sexualized, heteronormative and are inadvertently

positioned at the intersection of risk and power, that can blur their ability to make sound judgements.

6.6.3   Sub-theme 3: Identities *intersecting technologies*

The girls are adopting multiple personas online to topple gendered power relations and to seek more agency and adopt a different facade for the various situations they face. Butler (1988, 1990) highlights the theory of performativity, in which girls adopt multiple identities to challenge and resist masculine norms inscribed by society.

6.7   Theme 5: Love, sex, trust, and virtual relationships

This theme highlighted two sub-themes, this being treatment of sex as a taboo topic and girls' interaction with cyberspace to meet sugar daddies and forge virtual relationships.

6.7.1   Sub-theme 1: Sex is taboo and virtual relationships are real

Young people at Victoria High School hail from predominantly patriarchal homes, in which they experienced an ultra-conservative stance on dating and sexual matters. Parents continue believing that they need to protect childhood innocence, yet young girls are using their technological devices as their guide to explore sexuality and dating. This is done in unsupervised ways, where the girls find themselves using pornographic platforms and sexting with strangers on social media sites. Sex is also treated as a taboo subject at schools, where the main aim is to complete the subjects provided for in the syllabus. There is a dire need to develop a more comprehensive sexuality education at schools, where the gaps of enquiring young minds are filled, and teacher attitudes do not contaminate the uncensored and detailed content that this curriculum will bring to schools.

6.7.2   Sub-theme 2: Sugar daddies and virtual dating

Some girls use these social media sites to engage with sugar daddies voluntarily, but may be catfished, where older men are looking for sexual gratification and companionship from young girls. This type of dating is illegal, especially when girls are under the age of consent, but is prevalent in South Africa. Poverty stricken socio-economic conditions contribute to girls using their bodies as a bartering tool, exchanging money and material goods for sexual favours. Moreover, virtual dating may also occur by girls simulating a relationship using emojis, pictures and videos, this type of dating not being based on real emotions. Virtual relationships can thus be seen as one where cheating, distrust and a lack of communication can lead to

manipulation. Several relationships can be forged simultaneously, and because of the masked nature of cyberspace, deception is easy. Very superficial relationships exist online, with the lack of true emotions and intimacy distorting traditional notions of love and romance.

6.8 Limitations

This study was only done with girls within one social context. This study was only conducted in one school therefore the sample size could not be generalized to all schools.

The language barrier did surface when I was asked to rephrase some of my interview questions in different ways for some second language English participants to understand the questions and provide authentic responses.

6.9 Significance of the study

The 21st century has brought about an era in which the intersection between technology and teenagers are inseparable. Due to the unfettered access to technological devices, parents and guardians need to exercise a more active stance especially in girls' involvement in cyberspace and their use of ever evolving digital devices. This is to ensure close monitoring and evaluating young girls' behaviours to lower the multiple risks they face in the cyberworld. Parents must be able to access their children's smart devices at any time and go for skills development workshops on how to equip themselves to be more technologically savvy. It is also significant that along with guardianship, policy changes need to take effect when entering the invisible cyberworld to generate programs that pick up on individuals who transgress cyberlaws and rectify all the gaps in policy that currently exists to protect young girls from the rampant effects of being cyberbullied and sexual harassed. Legislature in South Africa needs to actively keep abreast of rapidly evolving technologies and create new cyberlaws on an ongoing basis to improve user verification and confidentiality. The school curriculum must engage learners from grassroot levels on issues of cyberviolence, sexual matters and using the online space responsibly as it is a lack of information that places them in danger. We inhabit a world where the rapid growth of technology will only continue to further advance so greater measures need to be put in place to curb cyberbullying and sexual harassment from plaguing young girls' lives.

6.10 Recommendations

Several recommendations are made because of this study.

Cyber education needs to be prioritized so that young girls are aware of their rights. This kind of education needs to be integrated into the curriculum, as society is overtaken by rapidly

advancing technologies that converge with post humanism. This will enable teenagers to use technology in a more responsible manner (Meehan, 2021). Media training for young people need to be implemented using emotional intelligence to steer a change in their attitudes to virtual risks. Parents need to foster closer relationships with their children to eliminate the chasm that exists amongst families. Many young girls came from patriarchally dominated homes, where sex is considered a taboo topic. Parents are of the mindset that if they speak about sex then they are encouraging their children to engage in sexual practices. However, young girls are experimental and curious placing themselves at the crossroads of power and risk.

Parents need to play the role of ensuring that they break the communication barrier between their children and themselves. This will ensure that children do not live their lives through their smartphones and have some semblance of communication with their loved ones. The more time spent on social media sites, blogs, and YouTube, the more the youth become susceptible to cybercrime experiences. When parents provide technology as a resource for their children it also comes with risks, and parents must take responsibly for their children by ensuring that time and content is carefully monitored.

Educators should advocate the responsible and critical use of technology by integrating it into subjects to create awareness and conscientize young people of their choices online. Guidance counselors in schools need to be revisited because not all schools have access to counselling facilities. Curriculum developers and policy makers need to work collaboratively in ensuring that the curriculum educates and empowers young girls against acts of cyberviolence, as well as sexuality and issues of becoming. To improve girl knowledge of healthy sexual experiences and understanding of sexuality, educational program needs to be restructured and redeveloped. Thus, exposing young girls to life lessons which are fundamental aspects of Comprehensive Sexuality Education.

 Counselors at schools can assist in bridging the gap between the school and parents. In addition to helping with academic issues, learning difficulties and the key role-players in schools should ensure that learners with behavioral issues arising from social interactions online be counselled. Seeking the assistance of psychologists will help young girls who find themselves experiencing a seesaw of ambivalent emotions and disparities arising from technological mediation.

Therapists must be trained in programs that are specialized and equipped for them to deal with the intersection of technologies with teenagers and its contradictory affects in their lives.

Community leaders and non-governmental organizations need to take an active stance at schools that role play power dynamics and address harmful gendered norms that are perpetuated by socio-cultural inscriptions. Community experts and non-governmental organizations need to advocate debate about cyberviolence and find critical and creative means of addressing teenagers about ethics and the use of technology in a responsible way.

Children need to be taught to understand that they have agency and that they have rights as sexual citizens (Angelides, 2013). Blocking access to technological platforms will only limit agency, therefore it is advisable to impart digital skills and build the necessary knowledge needed to navigate the virtual world effectively. Many young girls need to acquire relationship skills in which they learn how to accept desire, pleasure, and take responsibility for others when online. Virtual rights should be strongly promoted and regulated if cybercrimes are committed. Greater restrictions must be imposed on sharing of confidential information by following cybercrime laws ensure non-disclosure of personal information. If users are below 18, they should not be allowed to access false profiles to beat the system. The loopholes in cyberspace need to be addressed around the globe where there's greater accountability, surveillance, regulation, and greater penalties imposed for perpetrator to curb the spread of cyberbullying and harassment.

The Justice System must put legal mechanisms in place to act and regulate laws to prevent cybercrimes from occurring. Governments need to pay closer attention to curbing gender-based violence, and to adopt a stricter stance on gender-based crimes that impact woman's lives. Social education about the rights of people using the internet and social media should be more greatly focused on. General education on cyberviolence and criminal acts of sexting for under aged people should be promoted. There should be greater support for young people who are harassed. All citizens of the country should be familiar with cybercrime laws to protect and follow the young. My personal sense is that people are being left to fend for themselves in the digital space, and that while the government goes on about the fourth revolution, they are not going ahead with social education in equipping young people on how to responsibly operate within this space. Police are not trained to handle cybercrimes that impact on young people's lives because static laws exist in a rapidly evolving platform. Parents are unaware of what

programs they can access to monitor their kids' smartphones. For many parents who did not grow up in the digital era, technology is foreign territory, and it's time that the government steps up and prepares its citizens for this digital age. No one should be left behind; the media should be full of information and education about how we can adjust in living with online technology as an integral part of our lives.

6.11 Conclusion

An intersection between teenage girls' interaction and very advanced technologies exists in which cyberbullying and sexual harassment manifests and is not easy to track by the key role players in children's lives. Technology allows girls to experience an expanded universe, overcoming the restrictions of their patriarchal home environment. Conversely, it can also narrow, confine, and restrict their agency when they are victims of cyberbullying and harassment. The content displayed in the cyberworld becomes accessible to all and sundry, making it harder to evade the judgments and condemnation of an ever-increasing audience. Even when young people log off their social media, people are still actively fueling these comments which become a source of shame in young girls' life. Social media however is far more invasive because it pervades all levels of society and poor choices as teenager will follow one into adulthood with far reaching consequences. There is no doubt that gender stereotypes, gender binaries, hegemonic forms of femininity and masculinity and heteropatriarchal ideals are perpetuated by culture and society at large. To break the shackles of oppression and inequity that has been entrenched by these constructs along the years, there needs to be a transformation of attitudes and mindsets. Multiple stakeholders such as practitioners, researchers, policy makers, educators, community members, cybercrime specialist, psychologists and parents are all entrusted to contribute to social justice by empowering young femininities through an iterative process.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1A. Vignettes

Create a discussion around these vignettes.

Unpack concepts cyberbullying and sexual harassment.

> *Kate is a high school learner. She is on Instagram and many other social media sites. However, a so-called friend posted a pic of her without her permission on Instagram saying, "Would you get a guy if you looked as ugly as her? "She happens to see this nasty message on her classmate's news feed, and it really upsets her.*

1. Are you aware of this kind of behaviour occurring on social media?
2. Is calling people 'ugly' a normal part of the social media experience?
3. How would you feel if this incident happened to you?
4. Do you know what cyberbullying is?
5. Why do you think people shame others on social media?

> *Tosca Peters was a 14-year-old victim cyberbullying, sexual harassment, and trolling. Tosca had her own insecurities which stemmed from anxiety, depression, and weight gain. When 16-year-old Keaton asked her to be friends on a social networking site, he became the reason she smiled. They communicated regularly online. Tosca's parents worked long hours and she was left with substantial amounts of time on her hands. She arrived home from school where Keaton became her 'virtual escape' from her daily challenges. She started to feel a sense of self-worth and belonging until one day when Keaton decided to pass rude and sexual remarks to her which made her feel uncomfortable. He no longer wanted to just be friends with her. He asked for a picture of her exposing her chest and she said "no". His messages became nasty, and he told her that she was too fat and ugly on the eye anyway! He started name calling and bullying her and posted unpleasant comments on her wall. This drives Tosca to hang herself.*

6. Are incidents of this nature occurring amongst your peers?
7. Do you ever feel like your behaviour online is controlled and regulated by someone else?
8. Do you feel that your online use is impacting on your self-esteem, academic performance, and your overall perception of yourself?
9. Have you ever been asked for nude pictures?
10. Have you ever been sent nude pictures?
11. Do you know what sexual harassment is?
12. How would you react if this happened to you?
13. Do you know of young people who have been through similar experiences like Tosca?
14. Are parents doing enough to monitor children's access to digital devices?

APPENDIX 1B. Photo-Elicitation
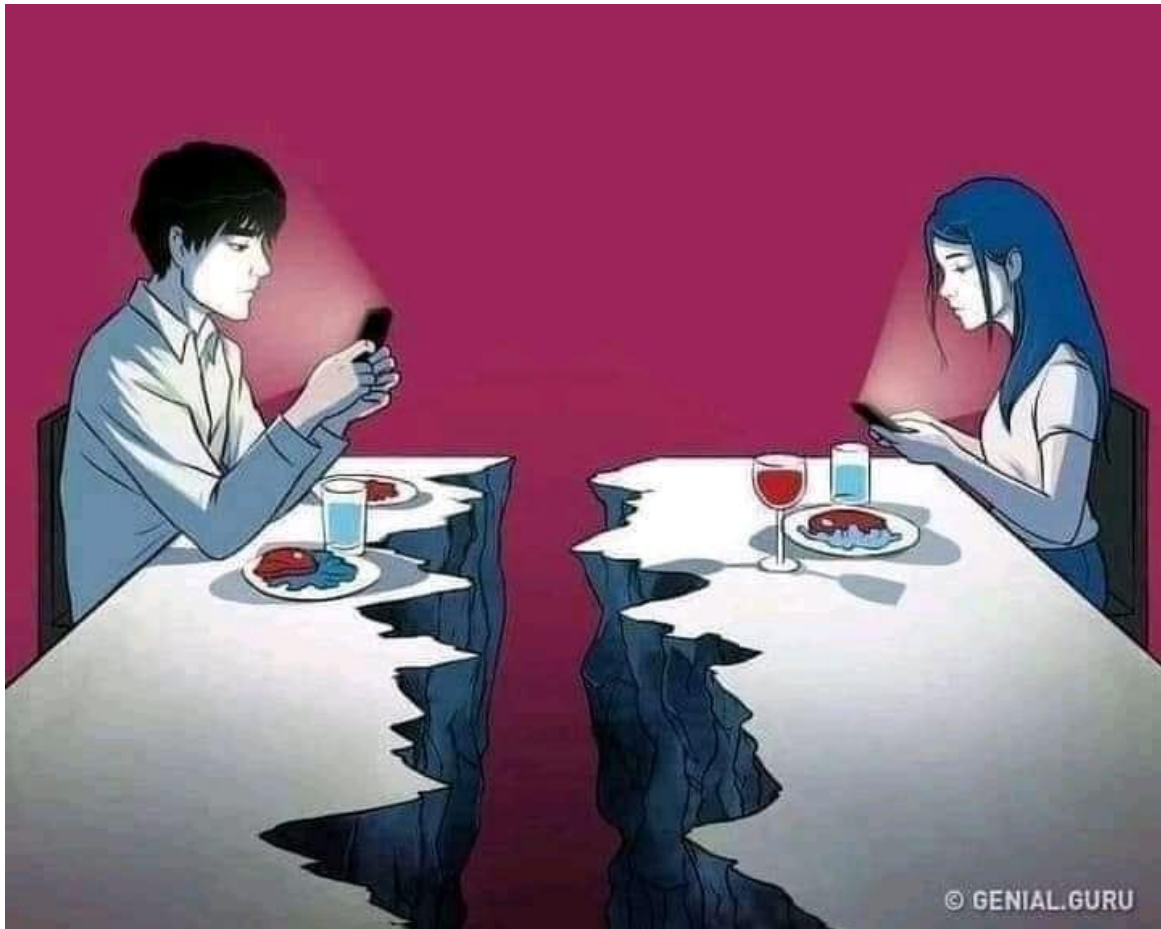
"The widening crack is reminiscent of the continental breaking up." Would this be an apt comment?

Examine the impact of technology on people's lives.

The woman is under the cell phone. Is this gender oppression. Comment with reference to the visual clues.

Comment on the postures, dressing and performances enacted by the girls above.

Comment critically on the point being made with respect to the images portrayed.

Comment critically on the use of the skeleton taking selfies in the picture.

APPENDIX 1C. Interview Schedule

Individual interview questions.

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your life experiences and how do they shape who you are?
- Tell me an incident that has disturbed you recently that may have happened online?
- Describe your friends?
- Do you spend long periods of time on social networks?
- Which social media sites do you frequently use?
- What is it about this site that you enjoy?
- How long are you usually online for in a day?
- Do you accept invites or chat with people other than your friends?
- What are your main reasons for being on social media platforms?
- Do you feel that media has influenced you in anyway on these digital spaces?
- Do you have many male friends or strangers that try to chat to you on social media?
- How do you react to their invites?
- What are some of the major discussions that teenagers have on these sites?
- Are you aware of there being any dangers on apps and social media sites?
- Do you have privacy settings on your social media platforms?
- Do you post and upload info and images on sites?
- What are some of the reasons for why you post?
- Has anyone ever been mean to you on social media?
- List some of your experiences of bullying.
- Do you feel you are the same person in online and offline platforms?
- If you are different, please explain how so?
- Do your parents ever check your cell phones or are your interactions online totally private?
- Would you involve a parent/elder if a situation makes you uncomfortable?
- What makes girls susceptible to cyberbullying and sexual harassment?
- How do Sexual harassment and cyberbullying affect teenagers?
- Do think boys feel more powerful than girls on social media?
- Why are you on social media? For what purpose?
- Have you ever had a relationship with a boy online?
- Do you feel that your social media habits are very distracting in your life?
- Tell me how you express yourself in those photos or videos?
- From your experience on social media, what do boys like?
- What are the risks that girls are facing on social media that you are aware of?
- Do you feel that you are under pressure to look a certain way on social media?
- What kind of videos do you watch and why?
- Do you feel social media is a platform for you to learn about your sexuality?
- Have you ever experiencing sexual harassment on social media?
- What were your worst/best experiences on social media?
- Tell me about your relationship with your phone

APPENDIX 1D. Participants Details

No.	Name	Age	Ethnic Group	Primary Caregiver	How did you acquire a smartphone?	Age that you first acquired a smartphone	Hours spent on your phone per day?	Which social networking sites do you frequent?
1.	Katie	16	C	Mother	Mother	15	7	WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook
2.	Tiny	16	B	Parents	Father	16	6	WhatsApp, Facebook
3.	Sindy	16	B	Parents	Present	12	5	Instagram, Twitter, Tik Tok
4.	Lilly	18	B	Mother	Mother	16	5	Facebook/WhatsApp
5.	Telo	18	B	Mother	Mother	12	6	WhatsApp, Tik-Tok
6.	Kim	17	B	Mother	Mother	13	8	Instagram, Twitter
7.	Pat	15	B	Mother	Mother	12	6	Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp
8.	Shay	18	C	Father	Sister	14	13	WhatsApp, Facebook
9.	Nita	15	I	Father	Brother	9	6	Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp
10.	Rita	18	B	Mother	Present	16	4	Facebook, WhatsApp, Tik-Tok
11.	Tina	17	B	Mother	Gift	12	5	Instagram, WhatsApp
12.	Melo	15	B	Parents	Gift	13	12	Instagram, WhatsApp, Tik -Tok
13.	Zingi	16	B	Aunt	Aunt	13	6	Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp
14.	Jade	I7	I	Parents	Father	12	10	Facebook, WhatsApp, Tik-Tok,
15.	Ria	17	I	Mother	Mother	12	10	Facebook, Instagram, Tik-Tok, WhatsApp
16.	Jen	15	B	Parents	Parents	14	6	Facebook, Tik-Tok, WhatsApp
17.	Zoey	13	B	Mother	Mother	12	11	Facebook, Tik-Tok, WhatsApp
18.	Bella	18	I	Mother	Mother	13	10	Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp
19.	Kelly	16	C	Foster mother	Present	12	12	Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp
20.	Ana	16	B	Parents	Father	13	11	Facebook, Instagram, Tik-Tok, WhatsApp

21.	Nicole	18	I	Parents	Gift	12	7	Facebook, Tik-Tok, Instagram, WhatsApp
22.	Andy	16	B	Mother	Mother	13	5	Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp
23.	Elly	18	B	Mother	Mother	10	8	Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram
24.	Mandy	14	I	Parent	Grand mother	15	13	Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat
25.	Penny	18	B	Mother	Mother	14	7	Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp
26.	Lizzie	13	B	Mother	Mother	10	5	Facebook, Instagram, Tik-Tok
27.	Kita	14	B	Parents	Mother	11	7	Facebook. Instagram, Tik-Tok
28.	Sne	17	B	Mother	Mother	12	7	Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp
29.	Cathy	17	B	Mother	Mother	12	5	Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram
30.	Felan	17	C	Mother	Mother	12	8	Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp

APPENDIX 2A. UKZN Ethical Clearance

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI
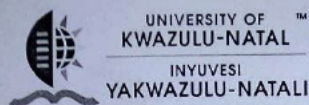
21 July 2021

Miss Omeshree Naidoo (204516166)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Miss Naidoo,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00002893/2021
Project title: Cyberbullying: Teenage girls' online experiences of, and challenges to sexual harassment.
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol

This letter serves to notify you that your response received on 19 July 2021 to our letter of 09 July 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid for one year until 21 July 2022
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours faithfully
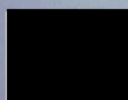
....
Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

APPENDIX 2B. Department of Education Permission to conduct Research Letter

KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE
EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201
Tel: 033 392 1051

Email: buyi.ntuli@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Buyi Ntuli

Ref.:2/4/8/7127

Mrs Omeshree Naidoo
U̶ ̶
K̶
N̶
QUEENSBURGH

Dear Mrs Naidoo

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"CYBERBULLYING: TEENAGE GIRLS' ONLINE EXPERIENCES OF, AND CHALLENGES TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT"**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 05 July 2021 to 31 August 2023.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

Dr. EV Nzama
Head of Department: Education
Date: 05 July 2021

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

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APPENDIX 2C. Principals Permission to Conduct the Research

The principal
Savannah Park Secondary
Pebble Drive
Savannah Park
4092

Dear Mr. A.S Naicker   3 May 2021
Permission to conduct a research study in the school.

I, Omeshree Lakhan (204516166) am currently a Master's student in Gender Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. This is an invitation to request permission to conduct a research study at your school. My research topic is titled: Cyberbullying: Teenage girls' online experiences of, and challenges to sexual harassment.

My supervisor is Professor Deevia Bhana, and this research is established within a larger research project titled, *learning from the learners*, which seeks to explore how boys and girls in schools in KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape learn about and "perform" gender and sexuality. My research project forms part of this project.

My project aims to examine how girls experience and engage with cyberbullying and sexual harassment online. This study will require 30 girl participants within the ages of 13-18. The school's name and all participants will be kept confidential. I will utilize interviews, vignettes, and photo elicitation as my data collection methods. I intend to conduct this research once ethical clearance is obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Department of Education. I will ensure that teaching and learning time is not disrupted whilst conducting this study.

Every effort will be made to ensure anonymity of learners and consent and assent forms will be issued to parents of learners who will allow their children to participate in this study. Participants will sign a consent form and must ensure non-disclosure of this project to other peers who are not involved. Learners are not compelled to participate in the research study if they are uncomfortable and are at liberty to withdraw from this study at any time.

Thank you for your co-operation.
Sincerely,
Omeshree Lakhan

<div style="display:flex; justify-content:space-between;">
█████████   █████████

_____   _____
                                                 Project Leader: Prof. Deevia Bhana
</div>

Email: omeshreelakhan@gmail.com

Tel: (031) 260 2603
Email: bhanad1@ukzn.ac.za

In the event of further queries concerning the nature of my study, you are most welcome to contact my supervisor, Professor Deevia Bhana, on 031 260 2603/ bhanad1@ukzn.ac.za
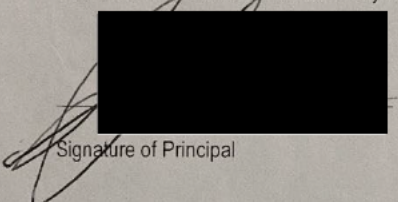For further information please contact the Higher Research Degrees Edgewood office.

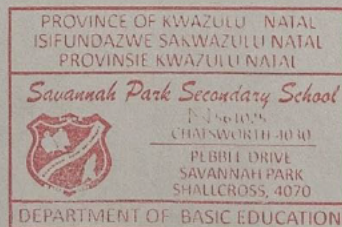Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za

Principal's informed consent reply slip

I _A. S. NAICKER_____ (Full name of principal) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I grant permission to the learners participating in the research project, and I give permission for the school to be used as a research site.

The times and dates of the research will be at the sole discretion of the principal.

I understand that learners are at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time.

03 May 2021

Signature of Principal   Date

PROVINCE OF KWAZULU - NATAL
ISIFUNDAZWE SAKWAZULU NATAL
PROVINSIE KWAZULU NATAL
Savannah Park Secondary School
N J 56 1025
CHATSWORTH 4040
PEBBLE DRIVE
SAVANNAH PARK
SHALLCROSS, 4070
DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION

APPENDIX 2D. Letter to Parents/Guardians: Requesting Permission to Conduct Interviews with your Child

UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL

Dear Parent/Guardian   21 March 2021

Request for your consent to allow child/ward to participate in research.

I, Omeshree Lakhan (204516166) am a Master's (Gender Studies) student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. This is an invitation to request permission to conduct research using your child/ward as a participant. My research topic is titled: Cyberbullying: Girls' online experiences of, and challenges to sexual harassment. My supervisor is Professor Deevia Bhana, and this research project is a part of a broader topic entitled: ***learning from the learners***, which seeks to explore how boys and girls in schools in KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape learn about and "perform" gender and sexuality. My research project forms part of this project.

My project aims to examine how girls experience and challenge cyberbullying and sexual harassment through their smartphones. This study will require 30 girl participants within the age group of 13-18. I will interview learners individually for the duration of an 30-45 minutes using breaks. The school and all learners will be kept anonymous. I will utilize interviews, vignettes, and photo elicitations as my data collection methods. I intend to conduct this research once ethical clearance is obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Department of Education. I will ensure that teaching and learning time is not disrupted whilst conducting this study.

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of learners unless their wellbeing is at risk in which case there will be a disclosure and further investigation to address the matter. Learners will be given pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. The interviews will be taped for more credibility. Learners are not compelled to participate if they are uncomfortable, they are at liberty to withdraw from the study without penalties.

In the event of further queries concerning the nature of my study, you are most welcome to contact my supervisor, Professor Deevia Bhana, on 031 260 2603/ bhanad1@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for your cooperation.
Sincerely,

Omeshree Lakhan

Email: Omeshreelakhan@gmail.com

PARENT'S INFORMED CONSENT REPLY SLIP

I………………………………… The parent/guardian of …………………………………,

hereby give permission to allow my child to participate in this voluntary study.

I understand that my child/ward is not compelled to participate and can withdraw at any time from this study.

…………………………………….. …………………….

SIGNATURE OF PARENT/GUARDIAN DATE

In the event of further queries concerning the nature of my study, you are most welcome to contact my supervisor, Professor Deevia Bhana, on 031 260 2603/ bhanad1@ukzn.ac.za

For further information please contact the Higher Research Degrees Edgewood office.
Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za

APPENDIX 2E. Letter to Participants Requesting Permission to Conduct Interviews

Dear Participant

21 March 2021

<u>Request for permission to participate in a research study.</u>

I, Omeshree Lakhan, (204516166) am a Master's (Gender Studies) student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. This is an invitation to request permission to conduct research with you. My research topic is titled: Cyberbullying: Teenage girls' online experiences of, and challenges to sexual harassment. My supervisor is Professor Deevia Bhana, and this research project is a part of a broader topic entitled: *learning from the learners*, which seeks to explore how boys and girls in schools in KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape learn about and "perform" gender and sexuality. My research project forms part of this project.

My project aims to examine how girls experience and challenge cyberbullying and sexual harassment online. This study will require 30 girl participants within the ages of 13-18. I will interview learners individually for the duration of an hour using breaks. The school and all learners will be kept anonymous. I will utilize interviews, vignettes, and photo-elicitation as my data collection methods. I intend to conduct this research once ethical clearance is obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Department of Education. I will ensure that teaching and learning time is not disrupted whilst conducting this study.

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of learners unless their wellbeing is at risk in which case there will be a disclosure and further investigation to address the matter. Learners will be given pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. The interviews will be taped for more credibility. Learners are not compelled to participate if they are uncomfortable, they are at liberty to withdraw from the study without penalties.

In the event of further queries concerning the nature of my study, you are most welcome to contact my supervisor, Professor Deevia Bhana, on 031 260 2603/ bhanad1@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for your cooperation.
Sincerely,

Omeshree Lakhan

Email: Omeshreelakhan@gmail.com

PARTICIPANT'S INFORMED ASSENT REPLY SLIP

I …………………………………………………………. (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of this research project, and I assent to my participation in the research project.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time should I desire.

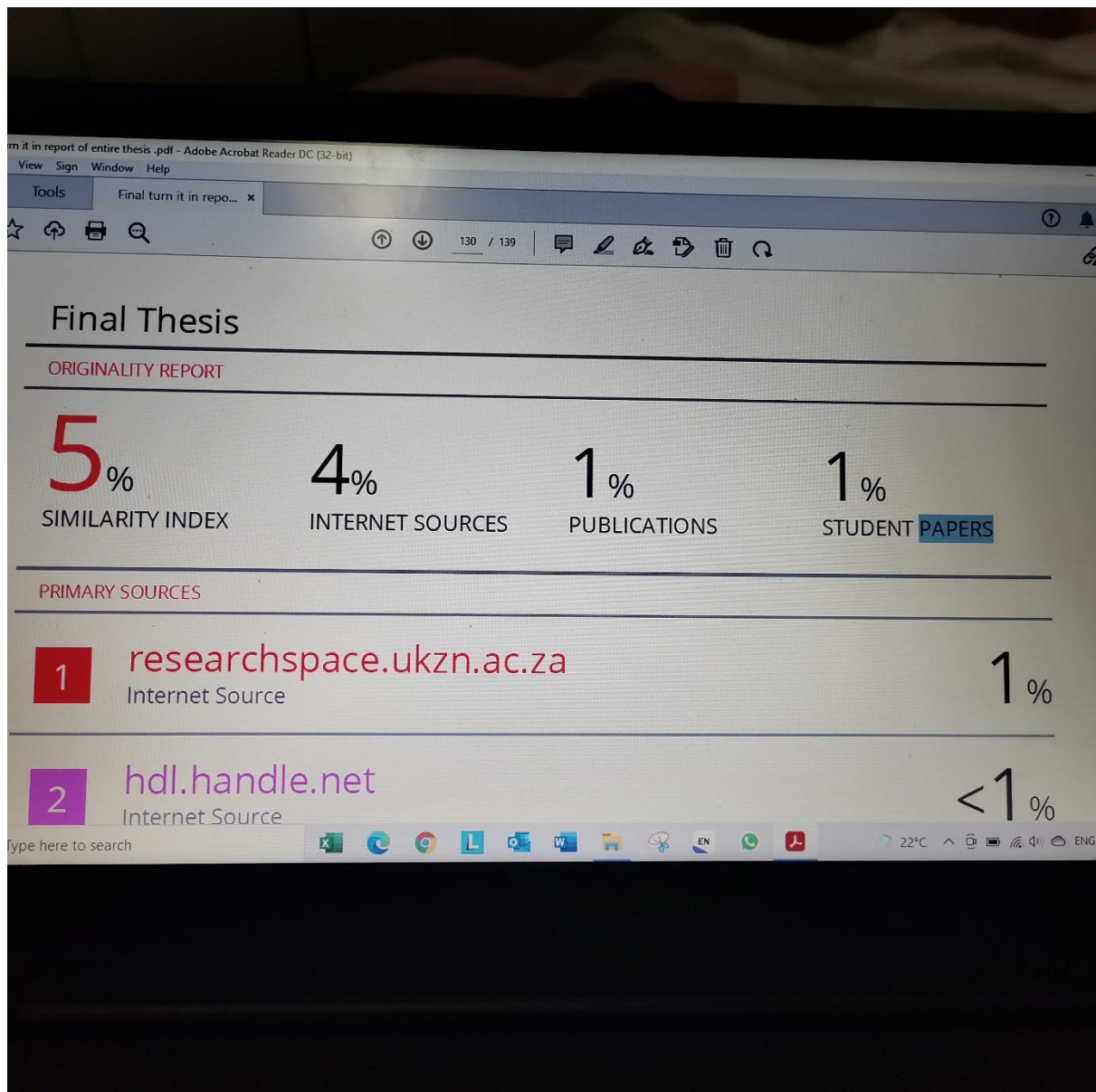...   ....

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT   DATE

Additional consent, where applicable:

I hereby provide assent to:	Please tick	
Audio-record my interview	YES	
	NO	

APPENDIX 3. TurnItIn report

APPENDIX 4. Editors Letter

39 Lorraine Avenue
Umbilo
Durban
South Africa
6 December 2021

To whom it may concern

Title: Cyberbullying: Teenage girls' online experiences of, and challenges to sexual harassment.

Student: Omeshree Lakhan

I have edited the document and provided comments to the student for them to correct, with the final version being at the discretion of the student and their supervisor. However, I am confident that the document has been reviewed sufficiently and is ready for submission.

Regards

Ms Carrin Martin
Academic Editor
MSocSci, PGDPH