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Sexual harassment at school and university as predictors of depressive symptomology

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Abstract

Sexual harassment is a frequently experienced behaviour in schools and universities (AAUW, 1993, 2001; Chiodo et al., 2009). Research has found evidence for a relationship between sexual harassment and negative mental health including depression. Research has also suggested a relationship between early and later sexual harassment. However, the effect that sexual harassment at school and university has on depressive symptomology is relatively unknown. The current study aimed to address this by examining experiences of sexual harassment at school and university, whilst also looking at the continuation of these behaviours from one education level to another and the extent to which this affects depressive symptomology. Participants (n = 130, 83.8% females, age $M = 21.09$ years, $SD = 4.25$) completed measures of current and retrospective sexual harassment and depressive symptomology. Linear regressions showed that online and offline sexual harassment at school significantly predicted online and offline sexual harassment at university. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis revealed online sexual harassment at school to be the only predictor of depression among participants, therefore showing that sexual harassment that takes place at school is especially detrimental to individuals and can have long-lasting effects. These findings suggest a greater need for research to examine sexual harassment in adolescents and young adults, and especially in schools, to further examine the negative effects these experiences have on mental health in individuals.

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Introduction

Evidence from a wealth of research and official reports has shown high prevalence rates of sexual harassment across a variety of settings. However, sexual harassment has been found to be particularly pervasive in schools and universities, with the American Association of University Women Foundation (AAUW, 2001) reporting that eight out of ten students experience sexual harassment in school. Other studies have also reported high prevalence rates of sexual harassment in schools and universities (e.g., Chiodo, Wolfe, Crooks, Hughes, & Jaffe, 2009; National Union of Students [NUS], 2014; Miller, 2016; Wilson, 2000), indicating that sexual harassment is a pervasive problem in educational settings, with adolescents and young adults being particularly affected (AAUW, 1993, 2001; Wilson, 2000). Given the emergence of social media usage, especially among adolescents and young adults, concern has also been growing for these behaviours happening online, or a co-occurrence of the two (Long & Hubble, 2017). It has also been highlighted that experiencing sexual harassment, both online and offline, can have a severe negative impact on individuals including the increase of negative psychological symptoms such as depression. In turn, these symptoms can then lead to further problems for the individual in terms of education and friendship groups (AAUW, 2001; Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000). Considering the effects that sexual harassment can have on an individual and the prevalent nature of the issue in educational settings, the prospect that an individual may continue to experience sexual harassment from school through to university has been highlighted (Chapell et al., 2006; Humphrey & White, 2000). Despite this, there is little explanation for why this might happen, and few studies have examined the effect that a continuation of sexual harassment from one education level to another may have on an individual and their wellbeing. Understanding why the continuation of sexual harassment happens, and the effect this has, is important in the development of

prevention and intervention efforts of sexual harassment in education and could help in attempting to minimise the negative effects of sexual harassment that individuals face. The aim of this thesis is to therefore examine past experiences of sexual harassment at school and current experiences of sexual harassment at university, whilst assessing the continuation of these behaviours, and the degree to which this affects depressive symptomology.

Defining Sexual Harassment

There is no unified definition of sexual harassment, as the behaviour is often difficult to define due to the variety of behaviours an experience of harassment can involve (Fitzgerald, 1990). Typically, definitions can be broken down into either being legal or empirical (Fitzgerald, 1990). From a legal perspective, sexual harassment is defined as "unwanted conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them" (Equality Act, 2010, sec. 26). Furthermore, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC, 1992) classifies sexual harassment into two categories: quid pro quo harassment and hostile environment harassment. Quid pro quo involves the receipt of some benefit or removal of threat in exchange for a sexual favour whereas hostile environment is any behaviour of a sexual nature that is unwelcome and occurs on numerous occasions (Thacker & Gohmann, 1996). Although this definition sets boundaries of what is and is not sexual harassment, it fails to account for sexual harassment behaviours on an individual level (Lengnick-hall, 1995). For example, an individual's perception is important as one individual may experience an unwanted behaviour or behaviours that they then perceive to be sexual harassment however, another individual may also experience an unwanted behaviour but may not perceive it to be sexual harassment. The legal definition therefore tends to

focus on specific behaviours, regardless of how they are perceived by each individual, which adds to the difficulty in creating a universal definition of sexual harassment.

Despite the practicality of the legal definition, defining sexual harassment is more complex and subjective as establishing what behaviours meet the 'criteria' can be complicated, especially in a research context (Hill & Silva, 2005). One definition that has often been used in research refers to sexual harassment as "any unwanted sex-related behaviour that is appraised by the recipient as offensive, exceeding their resources, or threatening their well-being" (Fitzgerald, Swan, & Magley, 1997, p.15). Alternatively, in a study of sexual harassment in schools, the AAUW (1993) defined sexual harassment as "unwanted and unwelcome sexual behaviour which interferes with your life" (p.6). Despite the discrepancies in opinions and definitions of sexual harassment, there does appear to be some overlap in that the behaviour is unwanted and causes some form of harm to the victim (Brandenburg, 1997; Land, 2003).

Experiences of sexual harassment have been found to differ in terms of frequency and severity (Gruber & Bjorn, 1982; Langhout et al., 2005) where the experience of one prolonged and 'very serious' behaviour (i.e. sexual coercion) can be sexual harassment as well as a combination of more frequent but 'less severe' behaviours (i.e. verbal harassment). Therefore, in order to measure and account for sexual harassment more precisely, whilst attempting to capture the elements of the legal definition, researchers have generally agreed that the behaviours of sexual harassment can be divided into three distinct but related categories: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion, with each increasing in severity (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Gruber, 1992). Gender harassment is behaviour that can be deemed insulting, hostile, and degrading; unwanted sexual attention is behaviour of a sexual nature that is unwelcome and unreciprocated; and sexual coercion is behaviours using force or threats for sexual cooperation (Brandenburg, 1997; Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, &

Magley, 1997; Hill & Silva, 2005). In this sense, the behaviours encompassed by gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention reflect the legal hostile environment definition, while the behaviours captured within the category of sexual coercion offer a behavioural equivalent of quid pro quo harassment. This categorisation allows researchers to capture a variety of behaviours that could be seen as differing in severity which is especially important as many do not realise or think that gender harassment is a form of sexual harassment (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine, 2018). Thus, the three categories allow for a wider range of behaviours to be captured that might not otherwise fall into the legal definition of sexual harassment.

The difficulty of defining sexual harassment also arises when researching the behaviours in schools as it is sometimes considered to be a form of bullying (e.g., Ashbaughm & Cornell, 2008; Fredland, 2008; Page, Shute, & McLachlan, 2015). A definition of bullying proposed by Olweus (1993) stated that bullying is a specific type of behaviour that can be direct or indirect, with the intention to inflict harm, occurs repeatedly over time, and includes an imbalance of power (either physically or psychologically), with the more powerful person attacking the less powerful one. Direct bullying can be verbal (e.g. name-calling) or physical (e.g. hitting) and often shows the clear power dynamic between victim and aggressor in an overt manner. On the other hand, indirect bullying tends to be a more covert form of bullying and can be psychological or relational (e.g. purposefully excluding someone, spreading rumours), often in an attempt to damage the victims social standing (Baldry, 2004; Nansel et al., 2001).

Moreover, with the increase in internet usage, especially among young adults and adolescents, such behaviours have been known to take place online. Just as there is difficulty in defining sexual harassment offline, there has been difficulty with defining these behaviours online (Dredge, Gleeson, & De la Piedad Garcia, 2014; Greengard,

1999) and has resulted in a number of terms, including cyberbullying (e.g., Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Smith et al., 2008) and online harassment (e.g., Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008). Cyberbullying has been defined as "an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself" (Smith et al., 2008, p. 376).

Although harassment may not have all three components of bullying (i.e. repetitiveness, a power imbalance, and the intent to cause harm) (Fredland, 2008), sexual harassment can be and has been conceptualised as an adolescent form of bullying by many researchers (McMaster, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2002; Pellegrini, 2001; Stein, 1995, 1997). Likewise, online sexual harassment of adolescents and young adults is often examined in the form of cyberbullying (Van Royen, Poels, & Vandebosch, 2016). Therefore, to appropriately measure sexual harassment in schools, the term sexual bullying can be used to bridge the gap between sexual harassment and bullying that occurs in adolescence (Fredland, 2008). This can be defined as sexually bothering an individual (e.g. making sexual comments or inappropriately touching) with those actions directed at an individual who is viewed by the aggressor as being weaker or less powerful than them in some way (Cunningham et al., 2010). This definition of sexual bullying draws upon key elements of both sexual harassment and bullying definitions; highlighting the imbalance of power and the potential harmfulness of the behaviours, frequently used in definitions of bullying, as well as the indication that the behaviours are not wanted by the victim, commonly used in definitions of sexual harassment. Therefore, it is generally accepted that sexual bullying is a developmentally appropriate term to measure sexual harassment in adolescents (Cunningham et al., 2010; Fredland, 2008). Taking into account the difficulties in defining sexual harassment and how these vary depending on the individual and setting, this thesis will use the term 'sexual

harassment' as an all-encompassing term to capture sexually harassing behaviours in young adults as well as retrospective sexual harassment/bullying in adolescence.

The Nature and Prevalence of Sexual Harassment at School and University

Studies on sexual harassment have continued to show that sexual harassment is a widespread problem that, if not challenged, can result in the normalisation of these behaviours and create a hostile environment with detrimental effects for many individuals (Miller, 2016). As a result of this, more attention has started to be focused towards studying the prevalence of sexual harassment within educational settings in an attempt to gain a more accurate understanding of the prevalence in schools and universities, whilst developing ways to tackle the problem.

Sexual Harassment in Adolescence

With a substantial amount of research focusing on bullying behaviours in school (Fredland, 2008; Nansel et al., 2001), there has been considerably less research focusing on behaviours of sexual harassment within this setting until more recently. In two large scale national studies, the AAUW (1993, 2001) found that both male and female students in American schools either occasionally (59%) or often (22%) experience some form of sexual harassment throughout their school lives; with a large majority of harassed students (85%) reporting that these experiences were perpetrated by their peers in comparison to teachers and other employees of the school (38%) (AAUW, 2001). Moreover, 32% of those who had experienced some form of sexual harassment reported that their first experience had happened when they were aged between 11-15 (AAUW, 1993). Similar findings have also been found for the prevalence of these behaviours online. In a study on cyber harassment, Beran and Li (2005) reported that 21% of children aged 11-14 had experienced harassment online. Similarly, Beran, Rinaldi, Bickham, and Rich (2012), found that 33.6% of participants reported experiencing online harassment during high school. Later studies have also reported similar

prevalence rates of sexual harassment in schools. In their study of sexual harassment in high school students, Duffy, Wareham, and Walsh, (2004) found that 57% of students had experienced at least one behaviour of sexual harassment at school. Likewise, Chiodo et al. (2009) found a significant number of students (43%) aged 14-15 were the victims of sexually harassing behaviours.

Due to the sensitivity of the topic of sexual harassment and the nature of the behaviours involved, a variety of studies have used retrospective data in their research on bullying and sexual harassment (Hunter, Mora-Merchan, & Ortega, 2004; Rivers, 2001). Although there has been some critique of the use of this method (Arvey & Cavanaugh, 1995; Lengnick-Hall, 1995), it has been concluded that adult's recall of their own experiences earlier in life are generally accurate, with events that are consequential to well-being and emotion-provoking even more likely to be remembered accurately (Berscheid, 1994; Brewin, Andrews, & Gotlib, 1993). As experiences of sexual harassment will generally have an emotional reaction and a consequence to the individual's well-being, responses on past experiences of sexual harassment should be fairly reliable. Furthermore, findings from such studies have shown similar results to those using non-retrospective data. In a partially retrospective study asking undergraduate students about their experiences of bullying during various education stages, Chapell et al. (2006) found prevalence rates comparable to those reported in other studies with 66.3% of participants reporting having been bullied during high school. Therefore, retrospective data on experiences of sexual harassment allow for research to be gathered on past experiences that could otherwise not be captured and can be used to reliably investigate the continuity of harassment from adolescence to adulthood.

While evidence to date has confirmed sexual harassment to be a common experience for adolescents, some have also reported sex differences, with prevalence

rates throughout various studies reported to be between 45-88% for males and 52-96% for females. Findings have also suggested that whilst boys are more often the targets of bullying (Olweus, 1993; Land, 2003), girls are more often the targets of sexual harassment (AAUW, 1993, 2001). However, this could be partly explained due to behaviours of sexual harassment being characterised as behaviour that is directed towards girls by boys (Land, 2003; Fitzgerald, Magley, Drasgow, & Waldo, 1999), which has led to a stereotyping of the behaviours being gendered, with females as the victims and males as the perpetrators. This in turn may have influenced some research to focus primarily on the experiences of females when researching sexual harassment victimisation (Gruber & Fineran, 2007; Larkin, 1994; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine, 2018). This is in line with findings by Nansel et al. (2001) who found that in comparison to girls, boys both perpetrated and experienced bullying significantly more. Furthermore, it has been found that boys who bully are also likely to sexually harass (Pellegrini, 2001). This supports findings for sex differences in sexual harassment which states that girls experience these behaviours more whilst boys perpetrate these behaviours more (AAUW, 1993, 2001; McMaster et al., 2002). However, despite this, some studies have found boys and girls to experience similar levels of sexually harassing behaviours (e.g., Chiodo et al., 2009; Hill & Silva, 2005), although the types of behaviours experienced may differ. Differences have been found in the type of sexual harassment behaviours experienced, with some being more common than others. Some studies found girls to have reported more experiences of sexual comments and rumours whilst boys have reported more experiences of being touched or grabbed in a sexual way (AAUW, 1993, 2001; Fredland, 2008; Gruber & Fineran, 2007). One possible explanation for this may be the differences in perspectives that boys and girls have regarding the acceptability of acts (Fredland, 2008), with girls more likely to employ non-physical strategies such as spreading sexual rumours in order

to intimidate other girls (Gruber & Fineran, 2007). Furthermore, the most common sexual harassment experiences in middle school have been found to be the most common experiences in high school, showing that not only does sexual harassment start in early adolescence, but the prevalence and behaviours continue throughout the school years (Gruber & Fineran, 2007).

Sexual Harassment in Adulthood

Although high prevalence rates of sexual harassment have been reported for adolescents, many studies have also reported sexual harassment to be a problem in adulthood. In a recent nationally representative survey, which asked a sample of 2,009 male and female adults aged 18 and over about experiences of sexual harassment and assault, it was found that 62% had experienced some form of sexual harassment during their lifetime (Kearl, 2018). Results of the survey also found that of those who had experienced sexual harassment, approximately half (49%) reported that their first experience of harassment had happened by the time they were 17 years old and 64% reported having had their first experience by the time they were 22 years old. This is in line with findings presented in other studies examining sexual harassment and suggests that a large majority of victims of sexual harassment first experience this at a relatively young age.

In terms of prevalence rates of sexual harassment in university students, a large-scale 2010 survey carried out by the National Union of Students found that 68% of respondents had experienced verbal or physical sexual harassment on campus. In a more recent 2014 survey by the NUS, it was found that in a sample of over 2,000 university students, 37% of women and 12% of men had experienced unwelcome sexual advances. As these statistics are not from academic research, some researchers may argue that the prevalence rates presented in these reports are not as valid as those reported in journal-based research due to standardised measures and standard research practices not always

being followed. This could result in unreliable data, causing prevalence rates to be over or under-reported. However, the findings presented are in line with and supported by, findings in other research studies such as Wilson (2000) who found that 56-78% of students in a Scottish university had experienced some form of sexual harassment by their peers.

The Challenges of Identifying Prevalence Rates

The lack of an agreed upon definition creates difficulties in research as the validity and reliability of findings can be impacted due to the differences in terminology used by researchers, which can affect prevalence rates (Schwartz, 2000). In a meta-analysis of sexual harassment incidence studies, it was found that the use of the definitional approach (i.e. asking participants if they have been sexually harassed) led to considerably lower estimates of sexual harassment prevalence when compared to studies that simply provided a list of behaviours and did not explicitly use the term 'sexual harassment' (Ilies, Hauserman, Schwochau, and Stibal, 2003). This could be due to individuals being less willing to label their own experiences as that of sexual harassment (something that the definitional approach requires) due to not wanting to admit it or feeling ashamed or embarrassed (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2011), or by thinking that their experience is not 'serious' enough to meet the criteria of sexual harassment, and therefore not perceiving it as such. On the other hand, whilst capturing behaviours that individuals themselves do not have to label as sexual harassment, using the behavioural approach can make it even more difficult to compare prevalence rates due to the wide range in variety of behaviours that can be used. Research findings could also be affected by the stigma surrounding the topic as there appears to be a tendency for certain sexual harassment behaviours (especially those viewed as 'less serious') to be considered a 'normal' part of everyday life that individuals are expected to learn to deal with (deLara, 2008; McMaster et al., 2002). This could influence individuals who

have experienced these behaviours, either by making them less likely to label their experiences or less likely to partake in research on the topic due to the normalisation of such behaviours (Greco, O'Boyle, & Walter, 2015); thus having an impact on prevalence rates.

As presented above, data from various studies have shown that sexual harassment is a prevalent problem, especially in adolescents and young adults. However, despite knowing that both adolescents and young adults experience these behaviours, little is known about how these behaviours continue to be prevalent through adolescence to adulthood. Given that sexual harassment can have a number of negative impacts on those that experience it, knowing the effect that the continuation of these behaviours has on an individual could be crucial in understanding the nature of sexual harassment. Studying the continuation of these behaviours could give vital insight into the continued effect of sexual harassment on an individual from adolescence to young adulthood compared to the effect of sexual harassment at just one of these time points. Therefore, given the pervasiveness of the problem and the implications this could have, it is crucial that the continuation of such behaviours is examined further.

The Cultural Context of Sexual Harassment

Evidence from a wealth of research and official reports has shown that there are high prevalence rates of sexual harassment across cultures (e.g., Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020; Collier & Raney, 2018; Mazer & Percival, 1989). However, it is only recently that there has been a growing focus on sexual harassment in UK universities, with the majority of research having previously focused on US colleges. Despite findings that students from both countries experience similar levels of sexual harassment (Wilson, 2000), caution should be taken when interpreting results due to the contextual differences between these countries, especially when comparing UK universities and US colleges (Fisher, Daigle, & Cullen, 2009; Stenning, Mitra-Kahn, &

Gunby, 2013). One complication is the variety of definitions of sexual harassment used in the UK and the US. Although the problem of defining sexual harassment goes beyond this due to the complicated nature of the behaviours involved (Hill & Silva, 2005), there are notable differences in how the UK and the US legally define sexual harassment (Carson, 2007; Clark, 2007). This is important as it is these definitions that can have an impact on policies and how sexual harassment is interpreted in these countries.

Although universities in the UK have a duty to ensure that students have a safe environment in which to live and work, it is not compulsory for them to have sexual harassment policies in place, although most have now adopted processes and procedures to address sexual harassment (Long, Hubble, & Lewis, 2021). In contrast to this, US colleges are required by federal law to address sexual harassment by having mandatory sexual harassment response and reporting structures in place (Lopes-Baker, McDonald, Schissler, & Pirone, 2017). Violations of this can result in the loss of federal funding to the college meaning that US colleges are much more likely to carry out full investigations of reports of sexual harassment on campus compared to UK universities. This is important as it has been found that having rigid policies in place can act as a deterrent to the harasser and can lead to an increase in reporting (Jacobson & Eaton, 2018; Magley & Shupe, 2005). However, the lack of obligation on UK universities to record and report these issues has been reported to result in a distorted view of the problem (Long & Hubble, 2017). In addition to this, it has been found that students in the UK tend to view sexual harassment at university as being a less serious problem compared to those at US colleges (Wilson, 2000).

As well as definitions and policies differing between the US and the UK, the culture of student life also vastly differs between the two. In the US, colleges are predominantly campus-based, with students living and socialising together on or around

campus throughout their college years. However, in the UK, most universities are not primarily campus-based, with students usually only living on campus for their first year (Stenning et al., 2013). Additionally, with UK students, a large amount of socialising takes place off-campus and in venues that are not exclusively for students. It is these differences between cultures and lifestyles that need to be considered when researching sexual harassment in students as there are several different factors to consider that can have an impact on findings. As highlighted above, it is important to consider the cultural differences and the implications that these may have when making evaluations and interpreting findings from sexual harassment research.

The Relationship Between Sexual Harassment in Adolescence and in Young Adulthood

Although it has been well documented that sexual harassment is prevalent throughout numerous settings, some research has found that these behaviours can continue from one setting to another, such as from school to university (Chapell et al., 2006; Humphrey & White, 2000), and from school to work (Smith, Singer, Hoel, & Cooper, 2003). Drawing upon the bullying literature, findings suggest that bullying decreases from secondary school to university (Juvonen & Gross, 2008) but research has also shown that those victimised in early adolescence are more likely to be victimised at a later time (e.g., Breitenbecher, 2001; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Martin, Fisher, Warner, Krebs, & Lindquist, 2011; Smith & Shu, 2000). Furthermore, several explanations as to why the continuation of these behaviours happen have been offered within research. This section will therefore first discuss the theoretical explanations as to why continuation might occur before discussing evidence for the continuation of these behaviours.

Why Might There be a Relationship Between Sexual Harassment in Adolescence and in Young Adulthood?

Although it has been shown that those who experience victimisation during early adolescence are likely to be victimised again later on in life, reasons for why this is the case are scarcely presented and as a result, reasons for why revictimisation is a huge risk for individuals are not well understood. However, there are some theories that may offer an explanation as to why individuals are more likely to be revictimised. The first theory that may help to explain the findings of revictimisation can be based on the Differential Susceptibility Hypothesis (Belsky, 1997). This is based on the premise that individuals vary in how they are affected by experiences or qualities of the environment they are exposed to, with some individuals being more susceptible to both negative and positive influences than others (Belsky, 1997). Therefore, applying this to experiences of sexual harassment, some individuals may be more at risk of revictimisation than others due to their environment and the idea that some individuals are more susceptible than others to the negative consequences associated with these behaviours, and are possibly more likely to perceive it as harassment in the first place. If an individual is more susceptible to the negative effects of sexual harassment, it is likely that they are also more susceptible to experiencing these behaviours more than once. This inherent susceptibility to the victimisation and revictimisation of such behaviours may also make those individuals less likely to take self-protective actions in future situations (Breitenbecher, 2001), which could further strengthen the cycle of sexual harassment and result in the associated negative consequences, such as that of depression. Although the Differential Susceptibility Hypothesis states that some are more likely to be affected by negative events, it also argues that it is these individuals who are more likely to benefit from positive, supportive experiences (Ellis, Boyce, Belsky, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Van Ijzendoorn, 2011). This therefore highlights the importance of

examining the continuation of sexual harassment experiences and the effects this has on individuals in order to develop supportive environments from which those affected can benefit (Cortina & Wasti, 2005; Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Magley, 2002).

The theory of hostile attributions can also offer an explanation for the continuation of sexual harassment experiences. Based within a social information processing framework (Crick & Dodge, 1994), hostile attribution bias is the tendency to process an individual's behaviour as being hostile, even when the behaviour is ambiguous or neutral (Dodge, 1980, 2006; Crick & Dodge, 1994). Therefore, following an experience of hostile behaviour, such as that of sexual harassment, an individual may be more likely to develop hostile attributions, which can then increase the risk of further victimisation, thereby maintaining the cycle of revictimisation as this victimisation leads to an increase in hostile attribution. If an individual experiences sexual harassment and then later finds themselves in a situation that they apply hostile attributions to, they are more likely to perceive the situation to be harmful (even if it is not), which may then influence how they react (Perren, Ettekal & Ladd, 2013; Pornari & Wood, 2010). It is then the tendency to view non-hostile situations as threatening that creates the cycle of victimisation. Furthermore, applying hostile attributions to situations can interfere with an individual's ability to form healthy relationships with others (Wolfe, Crooks, Chiodo, & Jaffe, 2009). This can then limit and affect the individual's support system, which in turn can increase the risk of experiencing negative psychological consequences such as depression (Cortina & Wasti, 2005; Magley, 2002), as well as revictimisation.

This has been supported in research with findings showing that following the experience of an event such as bullying, there is the potential that an individual's hostile attributions will increase. Following on from this, individuals may then incorrectly interpret other events and other's actions, which may result in them attributing hostility even when the situation is not bullying, but instead something more neutral (Dodge,

2006; Kokkinos & Voulgaridou, 2016). For those that do have an increase in hostile attributions, this would then result in more aggressive actions being displayed by the individual as a response to the seemingly hostile situation and viewing the self as being threatened (Dodge, 2006; Perren et al., 2013). This response could then potentially trigger future victimisation, thus perpetuating the cycle. Evidence that victimisation is correlated with hostile attribution biases among adolescents has also been found, with those who apply hostile attributions being more likely to experience victimisation (Kokkinos & Voulgaridou, 2016; Yeung & Leadbeater, 2007).

The theory of hostile attributions can therefore be important in helping to explain why individuals may be more at risk of, and more likely to experience, the continuation of sexual harassment behaviours. In addition to this, not only does it offer insight into why continuation may potentially occur, it could help break the cycle of victimisation. If an individual could be prevented from applying hostile attributions to benign events, then this could stop the aggressive reactions that then trigger future victimisation.

It has also been theorised that some individuals may be more vulnerable to revictimisation than others, with research identifying low self-esteem and loneliness as key risk factors (Kochendefer-Ladd & Wardrop, 2001; Smith et al., 2003). Following an experience of sexual harassment, an individual may be more likely to withdraw from their social groups, consequently increasing their feelings of loneliness (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Graham & Juvonen, 1998). In turn, this could then make them more vulnerable to being a victim of such behaviours (Berguno, Leroux, McAinsh, & Shaikh, 2004). This continuation of victimisation could then further deepen feelings of loneliness within the individual, thus creating a vicious cycle of revictimisation. As both loneliness and sexual harassment experiences have been shown to have negative effects on depressive symptoms (Goldstein, Malanchuk, Davis-Kean, & Eccles, 2007; Gruber

& Fineran, 2007, 2008), it is important for prevention and intervention strategies to pay attention to those individuals that may be lonely or withdrawing. By doing this, it could not only help relieve symptoms of depression by building up and encouraging supportive networks, but it could help prevent individuals from being targeted in the first place.

Taking these theories into account, it is not only likely that there are certain factors and individual characteristics that make certain individuals more likely to be targets of sexual harassment, but that how the individual responds to an experience can put them at further risk for experiencing a continuation of these behaviours. How the initial event is appraised can affect feelings of loneliness and self-blame (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Wardrop, 2001), which can increase vulnerability to future victimisation and create a cycle of revictimisation (Bond, Carlin, Thomas, Rubin, & Patton, 2001; Koss & Burkhart, 1989). Furthermore, young adolescents may be particularly vulnerable to falling into this cycle, as being at a young age, they may be at a disadvantage in terms of their cognitive development; making it even harder to develop appropriate responses to effectively deal with such experiences (Koss & Burkhart, 1989). The fact that these individuals are more likely to seek support from their peers than from anywhere else (Fehler-Cabral & Campbell, 2013; Fry et al., 2014) may also exacerbate the problem, given that the majority of their experiences are committed by their peers in the first place (AAUW, 2001).

Evidence for a Relationship Between Sexual Harassment in Adolescence and in Young Adulthood

Although the continuation of sexual harassment from adolescence to young adulthood has not been commonly looked at, some studies have found evidence for the continuation of behaviours from one level to another. In investigating the continuation of bullying victimisation, Chapell et al. (2006) asked a sample of 199 undergraduates

from a large university about their experiences of bullying from elementary school, through to high school and college. They found that of those who were bullied in college, 72% had also experienced bullying during their time at high school and elementary school, with verbal bullying being the most common experience for these individuals. The significant correlation found between being bullied in college and being bullied in earlier years provides evidence and supports the notion that there is continuity in the status of being a victim of bullying throughout education. Further support was found in a longitudinal study examining the course of physical and sexual victimisation from adolescence through four years of college in a sample of women starting university (Smith, White, & Holland, 2003). Results showed that the greatest risk for first experiencing victimisation was during adolescence with the risk of first experiencing victimisation for those that had not experienced victimisation during this time decreasing during college. Those that had no previous experience of victimisation during adolescence were not at an increased risk of experiencing it during college. Those that had been victimised in the year prior to college were at a greater risk of experiencing a continuation of these behaviours across the four years of college. It was also found that those who were most at risk for revictimisation were individuals who had experienced victimisation during both childhood and adolescence, with those who had experienced prior victimisation only in adolescence having the second greatest risk. Similar findings were found by Humphrey and White (2000) who found that women who experienced sexual victimisation during adolescence had a higher risk of being sexually victimised during college, with adolescent victimisation more than quadrupling the likelihood of experiencing these behaviours during college. The results also showed that although childhood victimisation did not affect college victimisation, it did increase the risk of experiencing these behaviours during adolescence, which in turn increased the risk of experiencing the behaviours during college.

Similar findings have also been shown in studies looking at cyberbullying. Kraft and Wang (2010) found that the experience of cyberbullying in high school was a risk factor for experiencing cyberbullying in college, with similar findings also showing that those victimised in college were also more likely to experience later victimisation at university (Selkie, Kota, Chan, & Moreno, 2015). In determining the relationship between cyberbullying in high school and college using a sample of university students, Zalaquett and Chatters (2014) reported that 50% of participants experienced some form of cyberbullying during the time of study as well as in high school, with a significant association between experiences of cyberbullying in high school and college being found. This not only provides more evidence that those with prior victimisation experiences are more likely than those without to experience it again, but that revictimisation extends beyond in-person victimisation. This further highlights the severity of the issue and points to the importance of studying experiences of sexual harassment during adolescence, as experiencing these behaviours at a young age places the individual at risk for a continuation of these behaviours.

In addition to studies looking at revictimisation from one education level to another, the continuity of victimisation (both of bullying and sexual harassment) has been found to extend beyond education and into an individual's adult work life, thus showing that the issue extends into adulthood. In examining the links between bullying at school and bullying in the workplace, Smith et al. (2003) found that despite many individuals who were bullied at work not being bullied at school, the results still showed that those who had experienced bullying at school were more likely to be bullied in the workplace. Furthermore, the finding was true for both males and females experiencing workplace bullying over the last six months as well as over the last five years, showing that the risk of revictimisation is relevant over long periods of time. In explaining these findings, it was suggested that individual attributes (e.g., self-esteem, temperament)

may affect an individual's coping techniques. Those with low self-esteem may find it difficult to cope whereas someone with high self-esteem may be able to better cope and deal with the experience. In the study, Smith et al. (2003) looked at the coping strategies that participants used when bullied in school and found two strategies to be risk factors for later victimisation. Therefore, individual factors are likely to have an impact on how an individual copes with the experience of bullying, which may make them more vulnerable to further victimisation.

As well as findings showing that bullying victimisation can continue into adulthood, it has been suggested that the same is true for sexual harassment victimisation. When assessing whether sexual harassment victimisation in adulthood was dependent on sexual harassment victimisation in adolescence, Gidycz, Coble, Latham, and Layman (1993) surveyed 857 female students in two separate sessions. The first session asked them about their experiences of sexual harassment during childhood and adolescence, and the second session, which took place nine weeks later, asked them about their experiences of harassment during the nine-week period. It was found that a large proportion of individuals who experienced attempted and completed sexual assault also experienced revictimisation in adulthood. Results also showed that out of all participants in the study that had experienced sexual harassment as an adult during the nine weeks between sessions (18%), only 9.4% of those did not experience these behaviours during adolescence. Gidycz et al. (1993) concluded that sexual harassment victimisation during adulthood was directly related to an experience of sexual harassment during adolescence, with the results of their study offering further support for and contributing to the notion that those who are victimised during adolescence are more than likely to be victimised during adulthood.

Although research has shown that individuals who experience sexual harassment during adolescence have a higher risk of experiencing a continuation of these

behaviours, it has also been reported that those who experience a continuation of these behaviours tend to report more symptoms of depression compared to others. In a study by Holt and Espelage (2003), individuals who had experienced a continuation of victimisation reported more psychological distress than those who only had one experience of victimisation or no experience at all. This suggests that the continuation of sexual harassment victimisation may worsen the negative mental health effects associated with sexual harassment, pointing to a need to further examine the relationship between sexual harassment and mental health.

The Relationship Between Sexual Harassment and Depressive Symptomology

Evidence suggests that experiencing sexual harassment in school, and/or in university, can be related to poor mental health. Yet little is known about the relationship between experiencing both sexual harassment in school and sexual harassment in university on mental health. This section will therefore discuss evidence for the relationship between depression and sexual harassment at school as well as depression and sexual harassment at university. Some other key findings from literature such as the effect of sex differences and different forms of sexual harassment on depression will also be examined.

A wealth of research has consistently found a relationship between both sexual harassment and bullying and a range of negative outcomes including low self-esteem (AAUW, 1993, 2001), posttraumatic stress (Briere & Elliott, 2003; Magley, Hulin, Fitzgerald, & DeNardo, 1999), and anxiety (Chang et al., 2017; Nansel et al., 2001). Students that have experienced sexual harassment have also reported a loss of interest in regular activities as well as isolation from, and loss of, family and friends (AAUW, 1993, 2001). Among the array of negative mental health outcomes, one of the most consistent findings is the relationship between sexual harassment and symptoms of depression (Bendixen, Daveronis, & Kennair, 2017; Gruber & Fineran, 2007; Hawker

& Boulton, 2000). Depression is an affective experience that negatively affects how an individual thinks, feels and acts, and can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

The Relationship Between Sexual Harassment and Mental Health in Adolescence

Although a vast amount of research has highlighted depression as a key consequence of sexual harassment (Bendixen et al., 2017; Fitzgerald, Swan, & Fisher, 1995), there is little research that has examined this relationship in an adolescent population, despite the negative effects of sexual harassment being found to be as strong as those for bullying (Gruber & Fineran, 2008). In a sample of high school girls aged 16-19, Duffy et al. (2004) examined the psychological and educational consequences of sexual harassment. Results showed that for some students, a number of negative psychological consequences, including that of depression, resulted from experiences of sexually harassing behaviours. Although both bullying and sexual harassment victimisation has been reported by middle school and high school students, prevalence rates have been found to be higher in those attending high school (Gruber & Fineran, 2007). The results also showed that both middle and high school girls experienced a range of negative outcomes following the experiences of bullying and/or sexual harassment. However, it was found that these experiences had a greater impact on those in middle school, with both bullying and sexual harassment being significantly related to negative outcomes including mental health. It was suggested that, compared to middle school students, those in high school may be less vulnerable to the negative effects of bullying and sexual harassment (Gruber & Fineran, 2007). One possible explanation for this is that high school girls may have developed active coping strategies and therefore actively seek support from their peers, both of which have been found to sometimes occur after the initial experience (Gutek & Koss, 1993; Magley, 2002; Mitchell, Ybarra, & Korchmaros, 2013). Therefore, results not only show that

both bullying and sexual harassment behaviours have a significant negative impact on the individual, especially in symptoms of depression, but that adolescents are particularly at risk of being negatively affected by such experiences; highlighting the importance of studying sexual bullying in a young adolescent population, even if the behaviours are reportedly less frequent.

The negative outcomes associated with sexual harassment victimisation in adolescents have also been found to have a longer-term impact as well as immediate impact, as with the effect of bullying. When testing the relationship between sexual harassment victimisation and depressive symptoms in a sample of students, Dahlqvist, Landstedt, Young, and Gådin (2016) found support for the stability of depressive symptoms over time in both sexes. Similarly, these negative symptoms were found to persist up to two and a half years later; especially in girls (Chiodo et al., 2009), highlighting that the consequences following sexual harassment can persist long after the event.

In their meta-analysis of peer victimisation studies, Hawker and Boulton (2000) found that individuals who were the victims of peer aggression had a higher tendency to suffer from depression than those who had not experienced peer victimisation, with bullied children being five times more likely to be depressed than non-bullied children. With the largest effect sizes being found for that of depression, it can be inferred from the meta-analysis that peer victimisation has a strong association and immediate impact on depressive symptomology in children and adolescents. In a more recent meta-analysis, Ttofi, Farrington, Lösel, and Loeber (2011) included retrospective studies in their review to assess the effect of bullying victimisation at school on symptoms of depression later in life. The review showed that bullying victimisation as a child is a risk factor for depression later in life, even when a number of pre-existing risk factors were controlled for. Similar results have been found in other studies focusing on the

effects of peer victimisation. Espelage and Holt (2001) found symptoms of depression to be higher in students aged 11-14 who had been subjected to bullying behaviours compared to those who had not experienced such behaviours, with 20% of those bullied scoring within the clinical range for depression. Similarly, Hunter, Durkin, Heim, Howe, and Bergin (2010) found depressive symptoms to be positively correlated with peer victimisation in a sample of primary school children aged between 8-12 years. The findings from these studies, along with others, have shown that the experience of bullying in school can not only have an immediate impact (Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Willness, Steel & Lee, 2007) but a long-lasting effect on the individual. In a longitudinal study, Boulton and Underwood (1992) found symptoms of depression to still be present in individuals four years after experiencing peer victimisation.

Furthermore, individuals can experience harassment online, which can also affect symptoms of depression. In assessing the relationship between depressive symptomology and online harassment in a sample of adolescents, Ybarra (2004) found online harassment to be significantly related to depression in individuals. Results showed that compared to 4.6% of participants who indicated major depressive symptoms but had not experienced online harassment, 13.4% of those who had experienced online harassment reported major depressive symptoms. This is in line with findings that victims of online harassment are more than two times as likely to have five or more symptoms of depression compared to those not harassed online (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000), although this could also be due to repeat victimisation of these experiences. It could also be the case that individuals with depression may be more likely than others to perceive situations as threatening or hostile (Ybarra, 2004), with the perception of an experience online being threatening or hostile causing an individual's current symptoms of depression to worsen, resulting in an even greater effect on the negative mental health consequences for the individual.

Further research has shown that in addition to experiences of sexual harassment resulting in negative psychological consequences such as that of depression, these symptoms can result in further educational consequences (Juvonen et al., 2000). These educational consequences can include reduced concentration in class, lower academic self-esteem, decrease in quality of schoolwork, and decrease in attendance (AAUW, 2001; Duffy et al., 2004; Wolff, Rospenda, & Colaneri, 2017). Bendixen et al. (2017) found that students who had experienced sexual harassment reported more symptoms of depression as well as lower self-esteem and less pleasure in usual activities compared to those that had not been subjected to sexual harassment. Moreover, these educational consequences can then interfere in not only an individual's school life (Duffy et al., 2004) but also in an individual's personal life. It has been found that similar to victims of bullying, symptoms of depression have also been reported by victims of sexual harassment (AAUW, 1993, 2001; Gruber & Fineran, 2007). Therefore, individuals that have experienced sexual harassment may be particularly vulnerable to adjustment difficulties and are not only likely to develop symptoms of depression but also other negative consequences stemming from this that can have a profound effect on their life and their education (AAUW, 2001; Duffy et al., 2004).

The Relationship Between Sexual Harassment and Mental Health in Adulthood

The association between depressive symptoms and experiences of sexual harassment has been found in student populations (Wolff et al., 2017). In a study of 151 female university students, Chang et al. (2017) examined sexual assault victimisation as a predictor of negative psychological functioning. Results showed that although sexual harassment did not have a significant association with positive psychological functioning, it is an important predictor of depressive symptoms in a student population. Significant correlations between harassment and depression in an undergraduate population were also found by Kearney (2004) who examined the prevalence of sexual

harassment and the negative consequences associated with these experiences in a sample of Caucasian and Mexican-American university women. Positive correlations were found between depressive symptoms and experiences of sexual harassment in both Caucasian and Mexican-American female students. Although this study only looked at female students, the findings are in line with other studies reporting a significant relationship between sexual harassment and depression in both male and female students (Gruber & Fineran, 2008; Street, Gradus, Stafford, & Kelly, 2007; Ybarra, 2004). Despite evidence showing that behaviours of sexual harassment in school and behaviours of sexual harassment in university both have an impact on depression, few studies have examined the combined effect of sexual harassment at school and university on depressive symptomology.

Sex Differences in the Relationship Between Sexual Harassment and Mental Health

Many studies have reported sex differences in the consequences of sexual harassment (Romito & Grassi, 2007; Street et al., 2007). Throughout society, the traditional view that males are perpetrators of sexual harassment and females are victims of such behaviours is ever present (Kennair & Bendixen, 2012). It is this social stigma that may result in males being less likely to label and report their experiences of sexual harassment (Stein, 1995) due to not wanting to identify themselves as victims (Carmo, Grams, & Magalhães, 2011). This has been supported by research, with studies reporting that males are three times less likely than females to report their experiences of sexual harassment (Banyard et al., 2007; Turchik, 2012). Furthermore, in a meta-analysis of sex differences in perceptions of sexual harassment, Rotundo, Nguyen, and Sackett (2001) found support that women are more likely to label more experiences as that of sexual harassment than men. This can be partially explained through appraisals as men are more likely to be perceived as threatening compared to women (Berdahl, 2007), which could result in women being more likely to label their experiences as

sexual harassment due to their appraisals of the event. However, as sexual harassment can be perpetrated by men and women, the perceived difference in threat can only be explained by male formidability to the extent that the perpetrator is male. Therefore, the differences in appraisals of the event as threatening are only partially explained by sex differences in perpetrators. Despite these findings, other studies have found males to be similarly affected by behaviours of sexual harassment when compared to females (Duffy et al., 2004; Hawker & Boulton, 2000). It is therefore suggested that males and females both suffer similar negative consequences following sexual harassment however, it is likely that there are sex-specific variables that influence these findings (Turchik, 2012) and contribute to the consequences of sexual harassment experiences for males being overlooked.

The Effect of Different Forms of Sexual Harassment on Mental Health

It has been found that the consequences of sexually harassing behaviours can be dependent upon the type of behaviours experienced. In their study, Duffy et al. (2004) highlighted the different effects different types of harassment can have on an individual. For example, being subjected to unwanted sexual jokes or comments was often associated with feelings of embarrassment whereas being subject to sexual rumours was often strongly associated with being afraid. Similarly, when measuring experiences of ridicule (e.g. being teased), intimidation (e.g. being scared by someone), public sexual harassment (e.g. having sexual messages wrote about you), and unwanted personal advances (e.g. being touched, grabbed, or pinched), Gruber and Fineran (2007) found having sexual rumours spread about oneself to be more upsetting than any other experience. When looking at physical harassment (e.g. being sexually coerced) and non-physical harassment (e.g. having sexual rumours spread), Bendixen et al. (2017) found that although both forms of harassment were strongly associated with symptoms of

depression in adolescents, it was the non-physical harassment that had the more severe effect in terms of increasing depression.

Although two individuals could experience the same sexually harassing behaviours, it is possible that the behaviours experienced may or may not fit with one's own classification of the term resulting in one individual labelling the event as that of sexual harassment and the other not applying the label; something that has been found to be true across different interpersonal relationships such as that of intimate partner violence (Bates, 2019). On the other hand, individuals may not perceive themselves as being a 'victim' of sexual harassment so will then not label the experience as such, despite having experienced the behaviour. However, research has shown that individuals who have experienced harassment do not necessarily have to label the event they are subjected to as that of sexual harassment in order to experience the negative psychological consequences associated with the experience (Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997). It could be that both individuals still find the event upsetting or stressful, which then leads to the negative outcome, regardless of whether it was labelled or not. When examining the effects of self-labelling (i.e. whether the individual labels their own experience of sexually harassing behaviours as harassment) on the psychological-related outcomes of experiences of sexual harassment, Magley et al. (1999) found support for these findings with results showing that the labelling of sexual harassment experiences had no effect on the resulting negative consequences, with those that had and had not labelled their experiences reporting similar levels of depression. From the results of the study, it can be suggested that it is the actual experience of sexual harassment behaviours and not the labelling that is important in the subsequent negative outcomes. Magley et al. (1999) suggested that the varying definitions of sexual harassment, both in literature and between individuals, could partly explain this.

The Current Study

In light of the research discussed, evidence suggests that sexual harassment is a widespread problem that is strongly correlated with symptoms of depression (Bendixen et al., 2017; Duffy et al., 2004; Gruber & Fineran, 2007, 2008). The notion that individuals who experience sexual harassment are at risk of experiencing a continuation of these behaviours later in life has also been brought to attention (Chapell et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2003), with some studies reporting that those experiencing a continuation of behaviours are more likely to report higher levels of depression (Holt & Espelage, 2003). Consequently, it is important to study how the continuation of sexual harassment behaviours impacts depressive symptomology in individuals in order to help aid effective intervention and prevention efforts. Despite this, very few studies have so far investigated the possible relationship between the combined effect of sexual harassment victimisation at university and previous victimisation at school on symptoms of depression. This thesis will therefore aim to assess experiences of sexual harassment at school and university, whilst also looking at the continuation of these behaviours from one education level to another and the extent to which this affects depressive symptomology. Specifically, the following research questions will be examined:

1. Is sexual harassment at school associated with sexual harassment at university?
2. Is online sexual harassment at school associated with online sexual harassment at university?
3. Is sexual harassment at school and university associated with depression?

Method

Participants

Participants for this study consisted of a sample of 130 undergraduate and post-graduate students aged between 18 and 52 years (*M* = 21.09, *SD* = 4.25). Of the participants there were 109 females (83.8%), 20 males (15.4%) and 1 other (0.8%). The levels of study for participants were: 52 first year undergraduate (40%), 22 second year undergraduate (16.9%), 36 third year undergraduate (27.7%), 4 fourth year undergraduate (3.1%), 7 taught postgraduate (5.4%), and 8 not currently at university (6.2%).

Measures

A questionnaire was designed for the purpose of the study which included questions related to participant demographics and a number of standardised scales. The questionnaire was administered via an anonymous link and comprised of four sections which took approximately 10 minutes to complete. The first section included questions about participant's demographics (e.g., age, sex). The second section included questions on retrospective in-person and online experiences of sexual harassment (those that took place during secondary school). The third section included questions on in-person and online experiences of sexual harassment during university. The final section asked participants about their current thoughts and feelings, with questions covering symptoms of depression.

Experiences of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment was measured using the 14-item AAUW Sexual Harassment Survey (1993), which was designed to measure the frequency with which students are victimised by sexually harassing behaviours. Participants used a 5-point semantic differential scale ranging from 0 ('Not sure') to 4 ('Often') to report the frequency with which they had experienced each of the specific behaviours. The scale was used to

collect data on current university experiences, since starting the academic year, and was then adapted and repeated in order to collect retrospective data on adolescent experiences during secondary school. The items measured both verbal (e.g., "made sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks?") and physical harassment (e.g., "touched, grabbed, or pinched you in a sexual way?). Total scores ranged from 0 to 56, with higher scores reflecting a higher experience of sexual harassment behaviours. This scale has been found to be a valid measure of sexual harassment with studies reporting high internal reliability (Gruber & Fineran, 2007; McMaster et al., 2002). Good internal consistency was found for this sample (α for sexual harassment at secondary school = .85, α for sexual harassment at university = .87).

Experiences of Sexual Harassment Online

Experiences of online harassment were measured using a 6-item scale, with items measuring two types of online victimisation: unwanted sexual solicitation and internet harassment. Unwanted sexual solicitation was measured with three items ("Asked you to do something sexual when you were online that you did not want to do?", "Tried to get you to talk about sex online when you did not want to?", and "Ask you for sexual information about yourself online when you did not want to tell them?") adapted from the Youth Internet Safety Survey (Ybarra, Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2007). Internet harassment was measured with three items ("Made a rude or mean comment to you online?", "Spread rumours about you online?", and "Made threatening or aggressive comments to you online?") adapted from the Growing Up with Media Survey (Ybarra, Espelage, & Mitchell, 2007). As with the sexual experiences scale, participants were asked about their current experiences of online harassment at university and again to collect retrospective data about their experiences of online harassment during their time at secondary school. Participants used a 5-point semantic differential scale ranging from 0 ('Not sure') to 4 ('Often') to report the frequency with

which they experienced each of the specific behaviours during the specific time periods. Total scores ranged from 0 to 24, with higher scores reflecting a higher experience of online harassment. Previous studies have shown high internal reliability for both scales (Wolak et al., 2007; Ybarra et al., 2007). Good internal consistency was found for this sample (α for online sexual harassment at secondary school = .83, α for online sexual harassment at university = .85).

Depression

To assess symptoms of depression, the revised 20-item Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression scale (CESD-R-20; Radloff, 1977) was used. The CESD was revised to the current instrument in order to reflect updated diagnostic criteria of depression (Motley, 2016; Walsh, 2014). The CESD-R-20 is a self-report measure of depression, asking respondents to indicate how often they have experienced symptoms of depression such as sadness, suicidal ideation, etc. Participants were asked to use a 4-point semantic differential scale ranging from 0 (“Rarely or none of the time [less than one day]”) to 3 (“Most or all of the time [5-7 days]”) to indicate how much each statement (e.g., “I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing”) applied to them in the past seven days. Total scores ranged from 0 to 60, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of depression. The reliability and validity of this scale has been thoroughly examined, with literature reporting good psychometric properties including good internal consistency, convergent validity and divergent validity (Van Dam & Earleywine, 2011). Good internal consistency for the current sample was found (α = .84).

Procedure

It should be noted that the original aim of this thesis was to collect empirical data in schools from secondary school students. However, due to the extremely low response rate when recruiting the schools, the design of the thesis was adapted to collect

responses retrospectively. Before the questionnaire was administered, full ethical approval was first gained from York St John University Module Research Ethics Committee (Appendix A). Participants were recruited via email which was sent to York St John University students and posted on social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook), where an anonymous survey link was provided to complete the questionnaire online using Qualtrics, an internet survey software program, and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. Before going onto the questionnaire, all participants were provided with a brief outline of the study (Appendix B), detailing the nature of the topic of the questions, and making them aware that all answers would be anonymous and confidential. Participants were also reminded of their right to withdraw from the study, either during by leaving the questionnaire, or after by emailing the researcher with the pseudonym they would be asked to choose. Participants were then asked to read a consent form (Appendix C) and give their consent before moving onto the questionnaire (Appendix D). The first part of the questionnaire asked about demographics and asked participants to provide a pseudonym, allowing for their data to be removed should they wish to withdraw. This was then followed by the second part of the questionnaire, asking about retrospective experiences of sexual harassment at secondary school; the third part of the questionnaire, asking about experiences of sexual harassment since the start of the academic year at university; and the third part of the questionnaire, asking about symptoms of depression. Upon completion, participants were provided with a debrief (Appendix E), thanking them for taking part in the study and reminding them of their right to withdraw. Due to the personal and sensitive nature of the study questions, the debrief section also provided participants with information on relevant support services, equipped for helping individuals that have experienced sexual harassment, should they wish to use them.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using IBM Statistics SPSS 24. There was no missing data and the reliability of each subscale was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Descriptive statistics and frequencies were then calculated to check the characteristics of the sample. The data was checked to see if it met the assumption of regressions. This included the no multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, independent errors, and normal distribution assumptions being checked. The no multicollinearity assumption was checked via tolerance being greater than .1 and the variance inflation factor (VIF) being less than five (Field, 2009). The homoscedasticity assumption was checked with scatterplots of *ZPRED and *ZRESID and independent errors were checked via Durbin-Watson values being close to two. The normal distribution of residuals were checked via P-Plots. Two linear regressions were performed to test the association between sexual harassment at school and university, and between online harassment at school and university. A hierarchical regression was also performed for online and offline sexual harassment at school and university with depression.

Results

The Nature and Prevalence of Sexual Harassment in School and University

Frequencies of each behaviour of sexual harassment experienced throughout secondary school (Table 1) and during university (Table 2) were requested. These show that the most common behaviours experienced in school were: being the recipient of sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks; receiving a rude or mean comment online; and being shown, given, or left sexual pictures, photographs, illustrations, messages, or notes. The most common behaviours experienced at university were: being the recipient of sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks; receiving a rude or mean comment online; being touched, grabbed, or pinched in a sexual way; and being asked for sexual information about oneself online.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for the total sample ($N = 130$) were requested for the sexual harassment and online sexual harassment scales for both school and university, as well as for the depression scale (Table 3). The means of sexual harassment at university were lower than those for sexual harassment at school, showing that participants experienced more sexual harassment, both online and offline, at school compared to university. In addition, correlational analyses were conducted and presented alongside the descriptive statistics in Table 3. There was no significant relationship between sexual harassment at school and online sexual harassment at university, and no significant relationship between online sexual harassment at university and depression. All other scales were significantly and positively correlated.

Table 1

Frequency of Online and Offline Behaviours of Sexual Harassment Experienced at School

	Not sure	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often
Offline sexual harassment					
Make sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks?	4(3.1%)	6(4.6%)	24(18.5%)	64(49.2%)	32(24.6%)
Show, give or leave you sexual pictures, photographs, illustrations, messages or notes?	3(2.3%)	42(32.3%)	28(21.5%)	45(34.6%)	12(9.2%)
Write sexual messages/graffiti about you on bathroom walls, in locker rooms, etc.?	14(10.8%)	91(70%)	12(9.2%)	6(4.6%)	7(5.4%)
Spread sexual rumours about you?	5(3.8%)	61(46.9%)	31(23.8)	27(20.8)	6(4.6%)
Say you were gay or lesbian?	8(6.2%)	50(38.5%)	28(21.5%)	21(16.2%)	23(17.7%)
Spy on you as you dressed or showered at school?	22(16.9%)	95(73.1%)	8(6.2%)	4(3.1%)	0(0%)
Flash or "moon" you?	5(3.8%)	81(62.3%)	28(21.5%)	15(11.5%)	1(0.8%)
Touch, grab, or pinch you in a sexual way?	2(1.5%)	33(25.4%)	51(39.2%)	37(28.5%)	7(5.4%)
Intentionally brush up against you in a sexual way?	11(8.5%)	50(38.5%)	41(31.5%)	21(16.2%)	7(5.4%)
Pull at your clothing in a sexual way?	6(4.6%)	75(57.7%)	27(20.8%)	15(11.5%)	6(4.6%)
Pull your clothing up, off or down?	7(5.4%)	76(58.5%)	36(27.7%)	9(6.9%)	2(1.5%)
Block your way or corner you in a sexual way?	8(6.2%)	86(66.2%)	24(18.5%)	10(7.7%)	2(1.5%)
Force you to kiss him/her?	3(2.3%)	90(69.2%)	24(18.5%)	10(7.7%)	3(2.3%)
Force you to do something sexual other than kissing?	3(2.3%)	101(77.7%)	16(12.3%)	7(5.4%)	3(2.3%)
Online sexual harassment					
Try to get you to talk about sex online when you did not want to?	4(3.1%)	61(46.9%)	30(23.1%)	30(23.1%)	5(3.8%)
Ask you for sexual information about yourself online when you did not want to tell the person?	4(3.1%)	44(33.8%)	34(26.2%)	37(28.5%)	11(8.5%)
Ask you to do something sexual when you were online that you did not want to do?	3(2.3%)	69(53.1%)	28(21.5%)	23(17.7%)	7(5.4%)
Made a rude or mean comment to you online?	3(2.3%)	19(14.6)	41(31.5%)	50(38.5%)	17(13.1%)
Spread rumours about you online?	11(8.5%)	57(43.8%)	32(24.6%)	23(17.7%)	7(5.4%)
Made threatening or aggressive comments to you online?	6(4.6%)	62(47.7%)	40(30.8%)	16(12.3%)	6(4.6%)

Table 2

Frequency of Online and Offline Behaviours of Sexual Harassment Experienced at University

	Not sure	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often
Offline sexual harassment					
Make sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks?	1(0.8%)	36(27.7%)	43(33.1%)	31(23.8%)	10(7.7%)
Show, give or leave you sexual pictures, photographs, illustrations, messages or notes?	1(0.8%)	75(57.7%)	23(17.7%)	18(13.8%)	4(3.1%)
Write sexual messages/graffiti about you on bathroom walls, in locker rooms, etc.?	5(3.8%)	110(84.6%)	2(1.5%)	3(2.3%)	1(0.8%)
Spread sexual rumours about you?	5(3.8%)	96(73.8%)	13(10.0%)	4(3.1%)	3(2.3%)
Say you were gay or lesbian?	4(3.1%)	85(65.4%)	16(12.3%)	9(6.9%)	7(5.4%)
Spy on you as you dressed or showered at school?	7(5.4%)	109(83.8%)	3(2.3%)	1(0.8%)	1(0.8%)
Flash or "moon" you?	3(2.3%)	102(78.5%)	13(10.0%)	3(2.3%)	0(0%)
Touch, grab, or pinch you in a sexual way?	1(0.8%)	55(42.3%)	27(20.8%)	26(20.0%)	12(9.2%)
Intentionally brush up against you in a sexual way?	1(0.8%)	54(41.5%)	30(23.1%)	22(16.9%)	14(10.8%)
Pull at your clothing in a sexual way?	3(2.3%)	76(58.5%)	20(15.4%)	14(10.8%)	8(6.2%)
Pull your clothing up, off or down?	2(1.5%)	87(66.9%)	20(15.4%)	10(7.7%)	2(1.5%)
Block your way or corner you in a sexual way?	1(0.8%)	84(64.6%)	17(13.1%)	14(10.8%)	5(3.8%)
Force you to kiss him/her?	1(0.8%)	102(78.5%)	13(10.0%)	2(1.5%)	3(2.3%)
Force you to do something sexual other than kissing?	1(0.8%)	82(63.1%)	26(20.0%)	8(6.2%)	4(3.1%)
Online sexual harassment					
Try to get you to talk about sex online when you did not want to?	1(0.8%)	86(66.2%)	14(10.8%)	15(11.5%)	5(3.8%)
Ask you for sexual information about yourself online when you did not want to tell the person?	1(0.8%)	77(59.2%)	19(14.6%)	15(11.5%)	9(6.9%)
Ask you to do something sexual when you were online that you did not want to do?	1(0.8%)	88(67.7%)	15(11.5%)	10(7.7%)	6(4.6%)
Made a rude or mean comment to you online?	2(1.5%)	80(61.5%)	30(23.1%)	6(4.6%)	3(2.3%)
Spread rumours about you online?	9(6.9%)	103(79.2%)	5(3.8%)	2(1.5%)	2(1.5%)
Made threatening or aggressive comments to you online?	1(0.8%)	97(74.6%)	15(11.5%)	4(3.1%)	3(2.3%)

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Each Scale

	Mean (SD)	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Sexual harassment at school	23.15(7.23)	-				
2. Online sexual harassment at school	11.32(4.36)	.59**	-			
3. Sexual harassment at university	20.46(6.81)	.19*	.29**	-		
4. Online sexual harassment at university	8.22(3.61)	.11	.31**	.72**	-	
5. Depression	24.04(9.85)	.25**	.34**	.28**	.16	-

Note. *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Regressions

A series of regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between online and offline sexual harassment at school and university with symptoms of depression. The assumptions for the regressions were checked and were met. Analysis of collinearity statistics showed there was no multicollinearity identified, as tolerance values were above .1 and VIF values were less than five. The Durbin-Watson statistics showed that the values of the residuals are independent. Based on the scatterplots *ZPRED and *ZRESID, there were no obvious signs of funnelling, suggesting that the assumption of homoscedasticity has been met, with the P-Plots indicating that the residuals are normally distributed. In addition, Cook's distance values were all less than one, suggesting individual outliers were not influencing the results.

Is Sexual Harassment at School Associated with Sexual Harassment at University?

To assess the relationship between sexual harassment at school and sexual harassment at university, a linear regression was used. Results of the regression analysis found a significant model, $F(1, 119) = 19.31$, $p < 0.05$, which accounted for 14% of the

variance, $r^2 = .14$. Sexual harassment at school was found to significantly predict sexual harassment at university ($\beta = .374$, $t = 4.39$, $p < 0.01$).

Is Online Sexual Harassment at School Associated with Online Sexual Harassment at University?

A linear regression was calculated to assess the relationship between online sexual harassment at school and online sexual harassment at university. Results of the regression analysis found a significant model, $F(1, 119) = 19.51$, $p < 0.05$, which accounted for 14% of the variance, $r^2 = .14$. Online sexual harassment at school was found to significantly predict online sexual harassment at university ($\beta = .375$, $t = 4.42$, $p < 0.01$).

Is Sexual Harassment at School and University Associated with Depression?

Table 4 reports the results of a hierarchical multiple regression with depression as the outcome variable. Online and offline sexual harassment at school were entered in step 1 of the regression. During step 1, the variance accounted for is 15.6% and the model is significant with online sexual harassment at school being the only variable significantly correlated with depression. At step 2, offline and online sexual harassment at university were entered and the overall model was significant. The total variance explained was 18.6%. The inclusion of sexual harassment at university did not significantly increase the proportion of variance accounted for. When all independent variables were included in step 2 of the regression model, sexual harassment at school, sexual harassment at university, and online sexual harassment at university were not significant predictors of depression, with online sexual harassment at school being the only variable that significantly correlated with depression.

Table 4

Hierarchical Regression Analysis

	Depression		
	B	β	t
Step 1			
Sexual harassment at school	.16	.11	1.07
Online sexual harassment at school	.73	.32	2.98*
Step 2			
Sexual harassment at school	.11	.08	.70
Online sexual harassment at school	.69	.30	2.72*
Sexual harassment at university	.32	.22	1.73
Online sexual harassment at university	-.23	-.08	-.65

Note. $R^2 = .16$, $F(2, 115) = 10.60$, $p < 0.05$ for step 1. $\Delta R^2 = .03$, $F(2, 113) = 1.76$, $p = 0.18$ for step 2.

*$p < .001$.

Discussion

Previous research has found a relationship between sexual harassment and depression (Bendixen et al., 2017; Duffy et al., 2004) and that the experience of sexual harassment can continue from one setting to another (Humphrey & White, 2000; Smith et al., 2003). From this, the focus of this thesis was to examine retrospective experiences of sexual harassment at secondary school and experiences of sexual harassment at university, whilst aiming to assess the continuation of these behaviours and the effect this has on symptoms of depression. The results showed that sexual harassment was prevalent at both secondary school and university, with participants experiencing this through a variety of behaviours. Results also showed that although similar levels of online and in-person sexual harassment were experienced at school and university, participants experienced these online and offline behaviours more during secondary school than at university. Online and offline sexual harassment at school was also found to significantly predict sexual harassment at university. However, only sexual harassment experienced online at school was found to be significantly associated with current levels of depression.

The Prevalence of Sexual Harassment at School and University

As with previous research that has reported the prevalence of sexual harassment in adolescence (AAUW, 1993, 2001; Chiodo et al., 2009), the data from this thesis found that a large proportion of participants reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment whilst at secondary school. The most common behaviour experienced was someone making sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks, with 92.3% of participants reporting that they have experienced this at some point during their time at school. Previous research has also found being the recipient of sexual comments and rumours and being touched or grabbed to be the most common behaviours experienced by boys and girls (AAUW, 1993, 2001; Fredland, 2008; Gruber & Fineran, 2007). These two

types of behaviours were among the most commonly experienced behaviours reported in this thesis, further supporting the notion that some behaviours are more commonly experienced than others. Moreover, nearly half of all participants reported having experienced some form of sexual harassment online whilst at school, supporting previous research that has reported the prevalence of online harassment during adolescence (Beran & Li, 2005; Beran et al., 2012). Therefore, the findings from this thesis not only show that behaviours of sexual harassment are extremely prevalent during adolescence, with a large proportion of students experiencing this during school, but that sexual harassment is being experienced both online and offline, further highlighting the importance of researching these behaviours among adolescents.

The data from this thesis is also supported by research reporting high prevalence rates of sexual harassment among university students (Kearl, 2018; Wilson, 2000). Although data shows the prevalence of sexual harassment at university to be slightly lower than sexual harassment experienced at school, participants were asked to only report on their experiences of sexual harassment at university since the start of the academic year as opposed to the entirety of their time at secondary school, which could explain why the prevalence of sexual harassment appears to be lower at university. Nevertheless, a substantial number of participants reported experiencing sexual harassment at university, with someone making sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks found to be the most common behaviour experienced. Moreover, just over half of all participants reported being touched, grabbed, or pinched in a sexual way as well as being intentionally brushed up against. Unlike the behaviours reported to be experienced at school, online experiences of sexual harassment were not experienced as commonly at university.

Although the data shows that sexual harassment is a prevalent problem at university and especially prevalent in school, there are some notable similarities and

differences. Experiencing sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks was found to be the most common experience at both school and university. This is in line with findings by Gruber and Fineran (2007) who reported that the most common experiences in middle school were also the most common experiences in high school. Additionally, with the exception of the second most common behaviour, the next three most common behaviours experienced at school were also the next three most common behaviours experienced at university (i.e., being touched, grabbed or pinched in a sexual way; being shown, given, or left sexual pictures, messages and notes; and being asked for sexual information online). This suggests that the behaviours experienced at university could be a continuation of those behaviours experienced during school. However, as the second most common behaviour experienced at school was someone making a rude or mean comment online, and the second most common behaviour at university was being intentionally brushed up against, this also suggests that experiences of online sexual harassment experienced during adolescence become less common during university.

Is Sexual Harassment at School Associated with Online and Offline Sexual Harassment at University?

Results showed that sexual harassment at school significantly predicted sexual harassment at university, supporting previous analyses suggesting that an early experience of sexual harassment is a risk factor for subsequent sexual harassment victimisation (e.g., Gidycz et al., 1993; Humphrey & White, 2000). This was also found for online sexual harassment, with results showing online sexual harassment at school to predict online sexual harassment at university. This is in line with other studies that have found online sexual harassment in adolescence to predict later online sexual harassment (e.g., Kraft & Wang, 2010; Selkie et al., 2015; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2014).

One possible explanation for this is that those who were subjected to sexual harassment at university were already more susceptible to having these experiences due

to their experiences at school, as experiencing victimisation in adolescence can predict vulnerability to subsequent experiences of sexual harassment by lowering defensive and coping mechanisms in the individual (Berguno et al., 2004). Individuals may vary in how they are affected by different experiences, which could mean that some individuals are more susceptible to being negatively affected by experiences of sexual harassment than others. An initial experience may negatively affect an individual through a number of ways such as lowering self-esteem or increasing symptoms of depression (Gruber & Fineran, 2007, 2008; Smith et al., 2003). This may then place that individual at risk for further victimisation (Dahlqvist et al., 2016; Marshall, Faaborg-Andersen, Tilton-Weaver, & Stattin, 2013) and could help explain why sexual harassment at school predicted sexual harassment at university. As the Differential Susceptibility Hypothesis theorises that some individuals are more susceptible to negative effects than others (Belsky, 1997), if an individual who is more susceptible to the negative effects associated with online and offline sexual harassment has an experience of such behaviours at school, the negative effects could result in the individual feeling unable to control what happens. This could lead to a decrease in self-esteem, and make them more vulnerable (Berguno et al., 2004), therefore placing them at greater risk for further sexual harassment victimisation, which could continue into university. It is therefore important to look at factors that could possibly place individuals at greater risk for further sexual harassment. Future research may wish to look at the damage an initial experience of sexual harassment has on factors such as self-esteem in individuals in order to better understand the effects this has on individuals and the role this plays in future victimisation.

The victim-blaming culture surrounding the experience of sexual harassment, whereby victims of such experiences are blamed for their role in the situation due to certain factors such as their behaviour (Arulogan, Omotasho, & Titiloye, 2013), may

also place individuals at risk for subsequent victimisation. Through this, individuals are taught to fault themselves and self-criticise for placing themselves at risk or in a position to be the recipient of sexually harassing behaviours (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). It is likely that those who have experienced sexual harassment may come to internalise these societal views and start placing the blame upon themselves, which could then lower their self-esteem and increase their vulnerability (Janoff-Bulman, 1979; Koss & Burkhart, 1989). It is then this vulnerability through being unable to withstand and cope with the experience that places them at risk for future victimisation. Furthermore, the stigma surrounding these issues could result in the individual feeling ashamed or embarrassed about being the recipient of such behaviours (AAUW, 2001). These feelings could then cause the individual to withdraw more and increase feelings of loneliness (Graham & Juvonen, 1998). If an individual has these experiences whilst at school and withdraws as a result of this, the strain of going to university and the pressures to adapt and form new social circles (Gall, Evans, & Bellerose, 2000; Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2000), could make the individual more vulnerable as they then do not have the social support, which can help individuals cope with experiences of sexual harassment (Cortina & Wasti, 2005; Fitzgerald et al., 1995). Therefore, due to the victim-blaming culture and views of sexual harassment in society, experiencing this at school could result in individuals blaming themselves and withdrawing which could place them at further risk and possibly explain why sexual harassment at school predicts sexual harassment at university. Future research may therefore find it beneficial to examine self-blame attributions in individuals in order to examine the relationship between sexual harassment at school and university. Studying the role of social isolation in individuals could also be valuable as this would allow for the effects of internalised blame and isolation to be compared to see which has the greatest effect. Examining this relationship could help change the victim-blaming

culture and allow intervention efforts to focus on reducing the continuation of sexual harassment victimisation.

It is also possible that following the event of sexual harassment, individuals may not know how to properly deal with these experiences, either in-person or online. This could especially be true in the case of adolescents experiencing these behaviours at school, as it is likely that they have not yet reached a sufficient level of cognitive development to be able to properly process these experiences (Koss & Burkhart, 1989). If an individual cannot effectively process and deal with the experience of sexual harassment in an effective way such as seeking support, which has been found to help alleviate the negative effects of sexual harassment (Cortina & Wasti, 2005), then this may increase an individual's vulnerability to future experiences of sexual harassment. Furthermore, without the proper cognitive development to process and manage the experience, they may be more likely to listen to the societal perception of sexual harassment and the negativity surrounding victims of such experiences and blame themselves (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008) which could also increase their risk of future victimisation. Therefore, if adolescents who experience sexual harassment at school are not at an age to cognitively process these experiences, this can put them at further risk and offer an explanation as to why online and offline sexual harassment at school predicts sexual harassment at university. If this is the case, then it may be beneficial for future research to examine the relationship between level of cognitive development and responses to sexual harassment as this could be vital in developing age-appropriate interventions.

These results could possibly be explained through hostile attributions as research has found peer victimisation to be associated with higher levels of hostile attributions, with individuals more likely to perceive other's behaviour as being aggressive (Dodge, 2006; Pornari & Wood, 2010). This tendency to view situations as hostile could then

lead to further harassment at university. In comparing a group of passive victims and aggressive victims, Alsaker (2011) found victimisation to be more stable for the aggressive victims. It is possible that the experience of sexual harassment could cause some individuals to react more aggressively as a way of responding and dealing with the experience. This could be especially true for online sexual harassment as harassment taking place online has a lack of in-person interactions, which could cause individuals experiencing sexual harassment online to react differently to how they would in person. The experience of online and offline sexual harassment in some adolescents may then intensify hostile attributions, which then cause an increase in aggression in response to others. This increase in aggression could be due to the anonymity and lack of social constraints and repercussions that come with being online (Meloy, 1998; Postmes & Spears, 1998) as individuals may feel less constrained and therefore react more aggressively, thus leading to further experiences of online sexual harassment. Furthermore, considering some individuals may be more likely to apply hostile attributions, even in ambiguous and neutral situations (Dodge, 2006), this could also support the theory of hostile attributions for the continuation of sexual harassment behaviours from school to university. In situations online, the lack of in-person cues for behaviours of sexual harassment could create even more ambiguous and neutral situations, suggesting that not only is there a need to look at the role that hostile attributions play in sexual harassment overall, but future research may benefit from paying particular attention to how sexual harassment situations, as well as neutral situations, are perceived by individuals online.

As the results from this thesis have shown, sexual harassment is prevalent during an individual's time at school and university. Moreover, sexual harassment at school is significantly associated with sexual harassment at university and although there is no explicit reason for why this might be the case, there are a number of possible

explanations for these findings. However, further investigation is necessary to look at these explanations in order to gain a better insight into why there is an association between sexual harassment at school and university, which could be vital in aiding prevention and intervention efforts.

Is Sexual Harassment at School and University Associated with Depression?

The association between sexual harassment at school and sexual harassment at university with levels of depression was tested using a hierarchical regression. Results showed that the inclusion of sexual harassment at university did not significantly increase the proportion of variance accounted for. Online sexual harassment at school was found to be the only variable significantly associated with depression.

Considering the use of the internet and social networking sites, especially among adolescents (Roberts & Foehr, 2008; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008), it is possible that the experience of sexual harassment online is a relatively new experience as adolescents start to use the internet and social network sites. This new experience along with the likelihood that they may not know their harasser (Wolak et al., 2007), makes it possible that individuals may feel powerless as a result. In addition, the anonymity that can come with being online, allows individuals to receive more threatening and aggressive behaviours of sexual harassment that they may not experience in person (Bocij & McFarland, 2002). Therefore, compared to the experiences of offline sexual harassment, individuals who experienced online sexual harassment at school may have been particularly affected by this relatively new way of experiencing sexual harassment.

It could also be possible that participants are better able to deal with the experience of sexual harassment, both online and offline, at university compared to when they were in school as evidence has suggested that as individuals mature, they develop more effective coping strategies and become more successful in using these in specific situations (Hamarat et al., 2001; Monteiro, Balogun, & Oratile, 2014; Zimmer-

Gembeck & Skinner, 2011). This could be through seeking support from their peers or actively coping with the experience rather than trying to ignore it (Magley, 2002; Mitchell et al., 2013). Research has also shown that high school students are possibly less vulnerable to the negative effects of bullying and sexual harassment compared to those in middle school (Gruber & Fineran, 2007). Therefore, it is possible that cognitive development may not have been at a sufficient level to process or effectively deal with experiences of sexual harassment at school (Monteiro et al., 2014). This combined with the emergence of internet usage during this time could mean that experiences of online sexual harassment could still be a traumatic event for the participant, thus predicting depression in these individuals.

Due to the general stigma surrounding experiences of sexual harassment, there is a tendency for behaviours of sexual harassment to become normalised; especially those behaviours categorised as less serious. Furthermore, this normalisation of the behaviours is especially present in universities, with students being more likely to normalise sexual harassment and view it as a less serious problem (Wilson, 2000). Therefore, participants may not be as strongly affected (or may not be able to admit that they are) by the experience of sexual harassment at university compared to their experiences of sexual harassment at school. If they were more likely to listen to the social norms around certain behaviours of sexual harassment during young adulthood, they may be less willing or less likely to recognise and label their experiences during this time as that of sexual harassment; instead seeing it as a normal part of life and being less likely to experience the negative consequences associated with these behaviours. These social norms could have been present during adolescence as well, which could have caused some individuals that experienced behaviours of in-person sexual harassment during school to also classify these experiences as something that was normal and a part of everyday life. However, due to the relative recency of online

harassment, social norms may not have formed about these behaviours and could have affected those individuals experiencing these behaviours more. Therefore, participants could still be negatively affected by behaviours of online sexual harassment they experienced at school.

From this, it is clear that not only does the relationship between sexual harassment and symptoms of depression need to be researched more, but that the experience of online harassment at school may have particularly negative, long-lasting effects for individuals. Therefore, it is important that future research examines the relationship between sexual harassment, especially online, and depressive symptomology in adolescents, as it is the behaviours experienced during this time that can particularly have an impact on depression.

Evaluation of the Current Study

Whilst the results of this thesis are important, the strengths and limitations should be considered. This thesis is among the first to examine the relationship of sexual harassment at school and university on symptoms of depression, with results highlighting sexual harassment at school as a significant predictor of sexual harassment at university and the impact online harassment in adolescence has on depression. This thesis also utilised robust measures of online and offline sexual harassment experiences and depression, with all scales found to have good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha > .70$). In addition, the use of behaviourally specific measures of sexual harassment (i.e. providing a list of sexually harassing behaviours without directly using the term 'sexual harassment') meant that participants did not have to label their own experiences as that of sexual harassment, which has been found to increase the accuracy of self-report victimisation (Koss, 1992; Ilies et al., 2003).

Despite this, there are some limitations worth noting. This thesis initially aimed to collect data on adolescent sexual harassment experiences in schools. However, due to

the lack of responses from schools contacted, the thesis was adapted to collect data of sexual harassment experiences in schools retrospectively, whilst collecting data on current experiences of sexual harassment at university. This highlights the challenges of gathering data on sensitive topics such as that of sexual harassment in schools, as this comes with the difficulty of gaining access and the risk of low response rates. Although the partly retrospective nature of this thesis could be seen as a limitation in that responses may be biased and that it relies on individuals accurately remembering their experiences of sexual harassment at secondary school, the bullying literature has shown memories of these experiences to be stable and has shown retrospective studies to be generally accurate and reliable methods of collecting data (Green et al., 2018; Rivers, 2001). Additionally, studies using retrospective designs have been found to produce similar results to non-retrospective studies (Chapell et al., 2006). Despite this, future research may wish to utilise longitudinal studies to study experiences of sexual harassment over a period of time as the use of longitudinal data can prevent any recall bias and allow associations to be established and causality to be more accurately inferred (Caruana, Roman, Hernández-Sánchez & Solli, 2015; Hatchel, Espelage, & Huang, 2018; Malvaso, Delfabbro, & Day, 2018). It may also be beneficial for future research to further examine the reliability of retrospective accounts of sexual harassment experiences.

The results of this thesis were based upon a relatively small sample and despite data from non-university students being included due to the low response rate, the sample primarily consisted of students. Although the aim of this thesis was to focus on and examine the experiences of students, this does mean that the findings from this thesis cannot be generalised to the wider population. However, other studies have highlighted the importance of looking at student populations due to findings that have shown that despite students and the general population having similar outcomes

following the experience of sexual harassment, they significantly differ in terms of prevalence, with students having a higher risk of experiencing sexual harassment (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020; Revolt Sexual Assault, 2018). In addition, due to the small number of males that participated, it was not possible to examine sex differences. Therefore, a larger sample would have increased the validity of the results and allowed for comparisons to be made between males and females. As previous research has shown males and females to differ in certain aspects of sexual harassment victimisation, such as types of behaviours experienced (Fredland, 2008; Gruber & Fineran, 2007) and girls being more at risk for a continuation of these behaviours than boys (Dahlqvist et al., 2016; Goldstein et al., 2007), future research may wish to examine sex differences when researching this topic. If there are distinct sex differences between sexual harassment experiences, this could help guide and aid intervention strategies.

Furthermore, the data presented in this thesis was largely based on the experiences of students from one relatively small university in the UK and is therefore not representative of the experiences of students in other universities both across the UK and in other countries, where cultural differences can make drawing generalisations and direct comparisons a difficulty (Stenning et al., 2013). Additionally, because this thesis compared students' experiences of sexual harassment during a limited time at university (since the start of the university year) to their entire time at secondary school, this thesis is limited in terms of comparing sexual harassment experiences from a long period of time to a relatively short period of time. Therefore, as suggested above, future research may benefit from utilising longitudinal studies to compare similar time periods in order to get a true comparison of experiences.

Another limitation is that it is not known whether willingness to complete the questionnaire was affected by the use of self-report measures to assess the experiences of sexual harassment and depression. This could have had an impact on the results as

due to the sensitive nature of the topic of sexual harassment, individuals may have been more reluctant to answer questions about their own experiences of sexual harassment. This could possibly be due to the individual feeling humiliated or traumatised by the experience or due to the surrounding stigma associated with this topic. However, as this study was completed online anonymously, this may have helped to overcome this problem. Individuals have also been found to downplay more severe forms of sexual harassment (Gavey, 1991; Wilson, 2000), which could lead results to underestimate the prevalence of sexual harassment. As more severe forms of sexual harassment can be seen as being more aggressive in nature due to the use of force or threats involved in these behaviours (Fitzgerald et al., 1997), it is possible that as aggression is undesirable, individuals may be less inclined to report experiencing it (Wyckoff, Buss, & Markman, 2019). Future research may therefore wish to include more open methods of response when examining sexual harassment as these methods have been found to increase more accurate responses (Lamb et al., 2003; Wyckoff et al., 2019).

Furthermore, although sexual harassment has been found to relate to a variety of negative outcomes (AAUW, 1993, 2001; Nansel et al., 2001), this thesis only looked at depression in relation to sexual harassment. Therefore, future research may wish to examine the relationship between sexual harassment and a range of different outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress in order to gain a better insight into the negative effects that sexual harassment has on an individual and to assess whether a continuation of experiences of sexual harassment has a greater impact on a particular negative consequence compared to others.

Implications

Taking into account the results from this thesis along with the strengths and limitations, it is clear that further research is needed to examine the continuation of online and offline experiences of sexual harassment at school and university and the

extent to which this affects symptoms of depression. As results have shown that sexual harassment (both in-person and online) has been found to occur during secondary school as well as university, this could have further implications. Considering the normalisation surrounding sexual harassment in today's society, it could be beneficial to develop and implement intervention and prevention strategies in schools. For example, many schools have anti-bullying policies and bullying prevention efforts in place, however these could be adapted to also deal with behaviours of sexual harassment in an age-appropriate manner. Schools could start to tackle sexual harassment alongside bullying and focus on teaching adolescents what is and is not acceptable behaviour, both online and offline. They could also help by promoting social support and change current attitudes by empowering victims of these behaviours. This could then begin to change social norms and tackle the issue as it begins to emerge, which could not only lead to a decrease in the prevalence and negative outcomes of sexually harassing behaviours in school but could likely lower the risk of these behaviours happening in further education. Furthermore, taking the victim-blaming culture surrounding experiences of sexual harassment into account, there is a need to not only develop intervention and prevention strategies but to find a way to better focus on supporting and empowering those individuals that experience these behaviours as this could help with reducing the negative effects associated with sexual harassment.

Conclusion

This thesis investigated the experiences of sexual harassment at secondary school and university, whilst assessing the continuation of these behaviours and the effect these have on depressive symptomology. In line with previous research, the findings of the current study support findings that sexual harassment can continue from one setting to another, with results showing online and offline sexual harassment at school to significantly predict sexual harassment at university. Although only online

sexual harassment at school was found to be significantly associated with depression, this thesis points to the urgent need for research to examine sexual harassment within schools and universities and the relationship between these behaviours and possible negative consequences. This is a vital step in not only guiding interventions and reducing the negative psychological effects for victims of sexual harassment, but in calling attention to the issue of sexual harassment within educational settings by highlighting that these behaviours do occur during adolescence and should be something that is dealt with rather than normalised and ignored.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Ethical Approval Letter

York St John University,
Lord Mayors Walk,
York,
YO31 7EX

22nd Feb, 2019

York St John University Cross School Research Ethics Committee
(Health Sciences, Sport, Psychological and Social Sciences and Business)

Dear Kendra,

Title of study: The relationship between sexual bullying, threat appraisals, and depressive symptomology.
Ethics reference: Bassham_04/02/2019
Date of submission: 04/12/2018

I am pleased to inform you that the above application for ethical review has been reviewed by the Cross School Research Ethics Committee and I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion on the basis of the information provided in the following documents:

Document	Date
Application for ethical approval form	29/01/2019
Responses to feedback	29/01/2019

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted at date of this approval, including changes to recruitment methodology or accompanying documentation. All changes must receive ethical approval prior to commencing your study.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Daniel Madigan, on behalf of the YSJU Research Ethics Committee.

Senior Lecturer, School of Sport

Appendix B. Participant Information Sheet

Introduction
My name is Kendra Bassham, an MSc by research student at York St John University, conducting my dissertation under the supervision of Nathalie Noret and Dr Melanie Douglass.

What is the purpose of this investigation?
The purpose of this study is to compare experiences of sexual harassment during time at secondary school and university, and the impact this may have on symptoms of mental health.

Do you have to take part?
Participation within this study is entirely voluntary and not participating or choosing to withdraw from the study at a later date will not have a negative impact upon yourself. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, information on support services will be made available to you upon completion of the questionnaire.

What will you do in the project?
You will be required to complete an online questionnaire asking about experiences of sexual harassment which will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

What are the potential risks to you in taking part?
We don't think that you will be affected in any way by participating in this study. However, as the questionnaire covers the sensitive topic of sexual harassment, a list of support services have been included in the debrief section should you wish to use them.
You can withdraw from this study at any point up until February 28th 2020 by emailing kendra.basssham@yorksj.ac.uk with your pseudonym and that you wish to withdraw.

What happens to the information in the project?
Once the study is complete, and the findings have been published, an anonymised copy of the data will be made openly available on the Open Science Framework website. This data set will be completely anonymised; no identifying information will be included in this data set. All data will be stored on a password protected computer at York St John University to which access will be restricted to the researchers.

What happens next?
Thank you for reading this information. If you are happy to participate with this study then please complete the consent form on the next page and proceed to the questionnaire. However, if you do not wish to participate, thank you for your time and attention.

Researcher contact details
Kendra Bassham
School of Psychological & Social Sciences
Sciences
York St John University,
Lord Mayors Walk,
York,
YO31 7EX
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Nathalie Noret (Supervisor)
School of Psychological & Social

York St John University,
Lord Mayors Walk,
York,
YO31 7EX
Email: n.noret@yorksj.ac.uk

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact York St John Research Office by emailing:
ResearchOffice@yorksj.ac.uk

Appendix C. Participant Consent Form

Before you go on to complete the questionnaire, please read the following statements carefully. If you are willing to participate in this study, please select the appropriate responses to give your consent.

I have had the research satisfactorily explained to me in verbal and/or written form by the researcher.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

I understand that the research will involve completing an online questionnaire which will take approximately 10 minutes.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time without having to give an explanation. Should you wish to withdraw please do so by emailing kendra.bassham@yorksj.ac.uk by February 28th 2020 stating your pseudonym and the fact that you wish to withdraw.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

I understand that all information about me will be treated in strict confidence and that I will not be named in any written work arising from this study.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

I understand that an anonymised data set will be made available on the Open Science Framework website.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

I consent to being a participant in the project.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Appendix D. Questionnaire

Section A: About you

Gender:

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Age

____

What year are you at university?

- ☐ First year undergraduate
- ☐ Second year undergraduate
- ☐ Third year undergraduate
- ☐ Fourth year undergraduate
- ☐ Taught postgraduate (e.g. Masters or PGCE)
- ☐ Research degree (e.g. MRES or PhD)
- ☐ Other
- ☐ I am not currently at university

Pseudo name

____

Section B: Experiences of Sexual Harassment (retrospective)

During your time at secondary school, how often did someone…

	Not sure	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often
1) Make sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2) Show, give or leave you sexual pictures, photographs, illustrations, messages or notes?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3) Write sexual messages/graffiti about you on bathroom walls, in locker rooms, etc.?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4) Spread sexual rumours about you?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5) Say you were gay or lesbian?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6) Spy on you as you dressed or showered at school?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7) Flash or "moon" you?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8) Touch, grab, or pinch you in a sexual way?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9) Intentionally brush up against you in a sexual way?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10) Pull at your clothing in a sexual way?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11) Pull your clothing up, off or down?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12) Block your way or corner you in a sexual way?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13) Force you to kiss him/her?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14) Force you to do something sexual other than kissing?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15) Try to get you to talk about sex online when you did not want to?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16) Ask you for sexual information about yourself online when you did not want to tell the person (e.g. really personal questions, like what my body looked like/sexual things I had done)?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17) Ask you to do something sexual when you were online that you did not want to do?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18) Make a rude or mean comment to you online?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19) Spread rumours about you online?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20) Make threatening or aggressive comments to you online?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section C: Experiences of Sexual Harassment (current)

Since starting university in September/October, how often has someone…

	Not sure	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often
1) Made sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2) Showed, gave or left you sexual pictures, photographs, illustrations, messages or notes?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3) Wrote sexual messages/graffiti about you on bathroom walls, in locker rooms, etc.?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4) Spread sexual rumours about you?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5) Said you were gay or lesbian?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6) Spied on you as you dressed or showered at school?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7) Flashed or "mooned" you?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8) Touched, grabbed, or pinched you in a sexual way?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9) Intentionally brushed up against you in a sexual way?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10) Pulled at your clothing in a sexual way?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11) Pulled off or down your clothing?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12) Blocked your way or cornered you in a sexual way?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13) Forced you to kiss him/her?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14) Forced you to do something sexual other than kissing?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15) Tried to get you to talk about sex online when you did not want to.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16) Asked you for sexual information about yourself online when you did not want to tell the person (e.g. really personal questions, like what my body looked like/sexual things I had done)?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17) Asked you to do something sexual when you were online that you did not want to do?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18) Made a rude or mean comment to you online?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19) Spread rumours about you online?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20) Made threatening or aggressive comments to you online?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section D: Current Thoughts and Feelings

Please read each statement and tick in the box which indicates how much the statement applied to you *over the past week*. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any statement.

	Rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day)	**Some or a little of the time (1-2 days)**	**Occasionally or a moderate amount of time (3-4 days)**	**Most or all of the time (5-7 days)**
1) I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me.	☐	☐	☐	☐
2) I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor.	☐	☐	☐	☐
3) I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with the help from my friends or family.	☐	☐	☐	☐
4) I felt that I was just as good as other people.	☐	☐	☐	☐
5) I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.	☐	☐	☐	☐
6) I felt depressed.	☐	☐	☐	☐
7) I felt that everything I did was an effort.	☐	☐	☐	☐
8) I felt hopeful about the future.	☐	☐	☐	☐
9) I thought my life had been a failure.	☐	☐	☐	☐
10) I felt fearful.	☐	☐	☐	☐
11) My sleep was restless.	☐	☐	☐	☐
12) I was happy.	☐	☐	☐	☐
13) I talked less than usual.	☐	☐	☐	☐
14) I felt lonely.	☐	☐	☐	☐
15) People were unfriendly.	☐	☐	☐	☐
16) I enjoyed life.	☐	☐	☐	☐
17) I had crying spells.	☐	☐	☐	☐
18) I felt sad.	☐	☐	☐	☐
19) I felt that people dislike me.	☐	☐	☐	☐
20) I could not get "going".	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix E. Participant Debrief

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. As the questions included in this survey are incredibly personal and sensitive, below is a list of support services that you can turn to.

Bridge House Sexual Assault Referral Centre
Website: http://www.turntobridgehouse.org/
Tel: 01904 669339

Survive
Website: http://survive-northyorks.org.uk
Tel: 01904 642830
Email: survive@survive-northyorks.org.uk

IDAS
Website: https://www.idas.org.uk/
Tel: 03000 110110
Email: info@idas.org.uk

How to withdraw?
Should you wish to withdraw from this study please email kendra.bassham@yorksj.ac.uk stating your chosen pseudonym and the fact that you wish to withdraw by February 28th 2020.

Thank you again for taking part in this study.