Gender differences in adolescent online victimisation and sexting expectancies

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Adolescence, as a stage of life, initiates psychosocial and psychosexual changes in teenagers. Amid the (sometimes confusing) process of sexual development and maturation, many adolescents have access to cutting edge media technologies and could access or be exposed to content which is sexual in nature. Sexting refers to the sending, receiving and/or forwarding of nude or sexually suggestive photographs and/or sexually explicit messages across social media platforms. In the case of minors, sexting is considered a criminal offence. This article describes the gendered experiences of secondary school learners regarding online victimisation and the expectancies (positive and negative) of sending and receiving sexts. Data was collected from 83 learners (mean age of 14.3 years) attending two private schools in Gauteng. The self-administered questionnaire contained standardised scales which allowed for total scores to be calculated. Significant differences featured between male and female learners on 8 of the 14 variables measuring online victimisation, including "People have posted rude or mean things about me online", "People have asked me to send sexy pictures/photographs online" and "People have continued to engage sexually with me online, even after I asked them to stop". The sextpectancies measure revealed gendered differences insofar as positive attitudes towards sending sexts, but not regarding negative sentiments toward sending texts. However, gender differences featured across both positive and negative expectancies of receiving texts. The results suggest gendered policy responses to adolescent sexting. The challenges of gaining access to and participation by adolescents on topics of the present nature will also be discussed.

***Keywords**: online victimisation; cyberbullying; sexting behaviour; sexting expectancies; adolescents*

INTRODUCTION

Adolescents are at the forefront of the debate surrounding new media technology and its rapid adoption worldwide (Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone & Harvey, 2012: 9). Technology and social media have become a major form of communication for adolescents and have transformed peer interactions and relationships (Harris, 2015: 28). Moreover, one critical factor in online victimisation and adolescent sexting is access to and uptake of technology (Sadhu, 2012: 76). While social media enhances social, economic, communication and globalisation opportunities, it is crucial to consider the threats inherent in the use of online and interactive technology, particularly those used by minors. News headlines such as *Children as young as 10 are sexting as police reveal cases have DOUBLED in the last two years* (Paterson, 2017)*, Her teen committed suicide over sexting* (Celizic, 2009) and *Sexting surprise: Teens face child porn charges* (Brunker, 2009) highlight the severe consequences sexting can have on adolescents.

Sexting refers to any sexually explicit content communicated across media platforms such as text messages, instant messaging, multimedia and visual messages (Lenhart, 2009: 3; Judge, 2012: 87). Other definitions elucidate sexting as "The phenomenon … of forwarding nude or semi-nude photographs of other students in school via cell phone or other electronic media" (Boucek, 2009: 10) or the sending, receiving or forwarding both naked photographs and sexually explicit messages via mobile phone (Dilberto & Mattey, 2009: 263). The conceptualised definition of sexting for this article is the sending, receiving and/or forwarding of nude or sexually suggestive or pornographic photographs/ videos of oneself or someone known to the sender and/or sexually explicit messages across any social media platforms using any digital medium.

Sexting by minors has various legal ramifications, most importantly the creation, distribution and possession of child pornography which is illegal regardless of age. Even though the phenomenon of adolescent sexting and the legalities attached to it are apparent internationally (Ahern & Mechling, 2013: 29; Mitchell et al, 2012: 2; Ringrose et al, 2012: 7), little is known in relation to South African youth specifically (Badenhorst, 2011: 1). The reality of sexting among minors, the decrease in age of

those engaging in sexting and the possible link that may be present between sexting and adolescents engaging in actual child pornography offences are all matters which should concern South African communities and society as a whole (Dake, Price, Maziarz & Ward, 2012: 1).

The present contribution aims to address the lack of knowledge on the experiences and perspectives of adolescents and whether these show meaningful gender differences. More specifically, the article describes the online victimisation and positive and negative expectations of sexting among learners attending two independent schools in Gauteng. A secondary aim is to contextualise online victimisation and sextpectancies amid theoretical frameworks. In addition, worthwhile methodology lessons will be shared when conducting research of the present nature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adolescent development and social media

Adolescence is a stage of the lifespan which bridges the gap between childhood and adulthood. The process of maturation initiates change psychosocially and psychosexually and is the stage at which norms and values of the peer network, the family and society at large are incorporated into the behaviour of the adolescent. The adolescent developmental period is also the time when adolescents explore their sexuality (Barlow & Durand, 2002: 311; Sternberg, 2001: 336; Tracy, Shaver, Albino & Cooper, 2001: 3). It is, therefore, not surprising that this developmental stage has been described as a stormy (or the *Sturm und Drang*) phase in the life stages chain (Louw & Louw, 2007: 281; Louw & Louw, 2014: 304).

Amid this sexual development and maturation, adolescents are confronted with new forms of media technology. The patterns of their mobile and internet usage represent the cutting edge of mobile connectivity (Gross, 2004: 634; Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi & Gasser, 2013: 3; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005: 473). Some of the content to which adolescents could be exposed is sexual in nature. Premature exposure to sexually explicit content may cause distorted perceptions about love, a lack of personal boundaries, inappropriate sexual behaviour and a reduction of internal inhibitions (Hesselink-Louw, 2001: 76). Early sexualisation through the media and technological avenues may have negative effects such as inappropriate body monitoring, negative self-image, and risky sexual behaviour (Papadopoulous, 2010: 5). Furthermore, it may encourage deviant sexual behaviour, destructive outlooks towards women, approval of deviant peer sexual behaviour and, lastly, there may be negative effects on sexual development in the adolescent years (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005: 473). Moreover, teenagers now engage in "cyberdating" so they do not have to risk actual face-to-face contact (American Psychological Association, 2002: 22). This is disquieting as cyberdating puts youth at risk of both online victimisation and sexting.

Previously, one proposition concerning adolescent internet usage is that it can be differentiated by gender in that boys appear to spend more time online than girls do (Gross, 2004: 634), however newer research suggests that boys and girls spend equal amounts of time online and they use the internet in similar ways (Van Bavel, 2016: 14). However, girls engage more socially in chatrooms and across social media platforms and boys engage more in activities such as gaming (Gross, 2004: 634; Van Bavel, 2016: 15). These gender specific activity choices are not surprising as male and female adolescents experience various differences during adolescent development. Physically, girls can begin puberty as young as eight years old, although the normal growth spurt which is accompanied by the development of breasts, menstruation and other physical changes normally begins at around age ten. Boys tend to only enter this growth spurt (characterised by the deepening of the voice, growth of pubic hair and increased muscle mass) approximately two years after their female counterparts (McNeely & Blanchard, 2009: 7). Sexually, it can be noted that girls tend to develop ahead of boys (McNeely & Blanchard, 2009: 7). Pubertal timing affects male and female adolescents differently. Female early puberty carries higher risks and girls experience more negative outcomes than boys do (Perry & Pauletti, 2011: 69). Girls who develop earlier may be targeted for sexual harassment and tend to engage in sexual relationships earlier than their male counterparts. With this engagement comes the increased risk online victimisation and cyberbullying.

Online victimisation (and cyberbullying)

The transferral to online communication from face-to-face communication has created a unique and possibly detrimental dynamic within social relationships (Nixon, 2014: 143). Online communication refers to that which is done over the internet whereas face-to-face communication refers to social

interaction without any interceding technology. The anonymity afforded by the internet has led to a marked increase in online victimisation or cyberbullying. Cyberbullying entails any form of harassment or bullying which occurs through the use of technology or electronic devices. It can take the form of text messages, instant messages, picture or video clips, email and across social networks (Burton & Mutongwizo, 2009: 2). Cyberbullying is also not restricted by time or space and as such has far reaching consequences for adolescents.

International research, (conducted primarily in the United States of America), on general online victimisation and cyberbullying shows a prevalence of between 9% and 25.6%. In the Youth Internet Safety Survey I & II, one in eleven (9%) respondents reported being harassed online (Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2006). A 2006 study on general online victimisation reported findings of 25% of male respondents and 25.6% of female respondents being cyberbullied (Li, 2006). A further study showed a lifetime prevalence rate of cyberbullying of 17.3% for middle school students aged 11 to 14 years (Patchin & Hinduja, 2016). It is important to note that both definitional and methodological inconsistencies make it impossible to gain a true reflection of cyberbullying victimisation and perpetration prevalence rates, but what is clear is that cyberbullying is both prevalent and expected during adolescence (Nixon, 2014: 144). A sample of 5593 learners between the ages of 12 and 17 was used to collect data on cyberbullying in 2016 (Patchin & Hinduja, 2017: 2) Thirty-four percent of the sample indicated having been cyberbullied across their lifetime, with mean or hurtful comments or rumours being cited as the most common form of cyberbullying within the previous 30 days (Patchin & Hinduja, 2016). Interesting findings were also present when looking specifically at gender and cyberbullying. Female adolescents (36.7%) were significantly more likely to have experienced online victimisation than male adolescents (30.5%). Furthermore, boys were more likely to be perpetrators of cyberbullying than girls (12.7% vs. 10.2%). Lastly, the type of cyberbullying experienced seems to be gender specific. Girls reported more online rumour spreading while boys cited physical threats as the type of cyberbullying experienced (Patchin & Hinduja, 2016).

Sexting occurs across electronic devices and, therefore, the relationship between sexting and cyberbullying becomes apparent, for example when sexts are consensually sent between those in a relationship, but are then used to avenge a break-up or for profit - known as revenge porn or non-consensual pornography (Badenhorst, 2011: 3). The impact of non-consensual pornography extends to mental health problems, relationship deterioration, social isolation, cyber-harassment and even suicide (Kamal & Newman, 2016: 362). Moreover, statistics relating to adolescent sexting in South Africa are unspecific. In this regard, when local research (*cf* Badenhorst, 2011) is conducted on adolescent sexting it is usually in relation to a confounding variable, such as cyberbullying.

Sexting

Existing quantitative studies have elucidated that adolescents experience the practice of sexting differently across age groups (Ringrose et al., 2012: 8), but there is little data surrounding sexting as a gender-specific practice. Studies conducted in the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK) reveal contradictory findings on adolescent sexting behaviour (Donlin, 2010; Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones & Wolak, 2012; Phippen, 2009; Ringrose et al, 2012). Studies conducted between 2008 and 2012 indicate adolescent sexting as a new area of research and a phenomenon that is under-explored. Respondents (aged 10-18) indicated prevalence rates of sexting as between 17% to 35%. Included in the definition were suggestive emails, unwanted sexual advances, exposure to sexually explicit material and inappropriate messages (Cassidy, Jackson & Brown, 2009; Wolak et al, 2006; Ybarra, Espelage & Mitchell, 2007: S32).

It is difficult to ascertain whether statistics on adolescent sexting are reliable because of under-reporting due to discomfiture of the respondents, or over-reporting due to respondent biases and thus the extent of the problem is incorrectly represented (Ringrose et al, 2012: 12). Reasons for the resultant lack of research include: no national crime statistics on sexting; coercive or manipulative sexting may be reduced to sexual experimentation; victims do not necessarily recognise that they are being victimised; and adolescents may not be aware that the behaviour can be regarded as criminal and methodological flaws of previous studies (Lynn, 2010: 2).

A 2011 American study highlights gender differences in adolescent sexting (Patchin & Hinduja, 2011). The research findings were that males were more likely to have received an image sext than females – 16% in comparison to 10%. Moreover, they were more likely to have sent an image sext; a

comparison of 8.2% versus 7.2%. Both of these findings were statistically significant within the sample of 4400 students evenly split between boys and girls (Patchin & Hinduja, 2011). Such statistics emphasise the necessity of educating adolescents about responsible technology usage because, while sexting may seem like innocent fun or a way of being intimate, the consequences of sexting are far reaching. One study concluded that girls who engage in sexting behaviours are more likely to engage in other high risk behaviour such as alcohol and drug use as well as high risk sexual behaviours including multiple partners (Temple, Paul, Van den Berg, Le, McElhany & Temple, 2012: 831).

The vast incongruities in statistics of adolescents engaging in sexting range from 4% to 20% which supports the need for more research to be conducted. International studies with high estimates (20% of minors) often have methodological limitations and may be exaggerated by the media while those presenting conservative estimates (4% of minors) are not as extensively published (Lounsbury et al, 2011: 4). Such research could ascertain whether adolescent sexting is simply media hype or a moral panic about the sexualisation of adolescents, or whether it is in fact a legal issue which needs to be addressed in order to protect adolescents (Lamphere, 2012: 2; Lynn, 2010: 2). Although there are contradictions in terms of the extent of adolescent sexting, what is clear is that it is a ubiquitous phenomenon which affects both male and female adolescents (Temple et al, 2012: 830).

Sextpectancies

Expectancies relate to an individual's perception of the consequences associated with a specific behaviour and therefore have a predictive value for behaviour (Bushak, 2013). Sextpectancies are specific expectations related to sexting behaviour and can be positive or negative in the context of sending or receiving sexts. Expectancies have been used to predict risk-taking behaviours such as alcohol consumption, drug use, gambling and sex (Reich, Below & Goldman, 2010: 13). Three common outcomes associated with sexting are the expectancy that sexting will lead to sexual encounters, negative expectancies in terms of affect and positive expectancies in terms of affect (Dir & Cyders, 2015: 1675). Recent work on American college students and sexting highlighted certain gender differences and while the age group studied is problematic for the current survey, it is noteworthy that in older females a key finding is that females report more negative expectancies relating to sexting (Dir & Cyders, 2015: 1675). Positive or negative expectancies of sexting could influence an adolescent in terms of engaing in sexting behaviour or not. Findings indicate that positive expectancies of sexting impact behaviour in terms of more frequent engagement in sexting and there is a negative relationship between negative expectancies and sexting behaviours (Dir, 2012: 41). The Sexpectancies Measure developed by Dir (2012) provides pragmatic information surrounding the expectations, both positive and negative, that individuals have in relation to the rewarding or consequential outcomes of sexting. Positive expectancies and sexting beliefs seem to be predominantly sexual in nature and potentially there is a relationship between sexting and subsequent sexual behaviour (Dir, 2012: 41-42). Negative expectancies and beliefs support media reports of the emotional distress that can be caused by sexting (Dir, 2012: 42). Thus, it appears that positive expectancies have more of a predictive value in terms of behaviour, but negative expectancies highlight the serious consequences that could be the result of sexting.

Social learning seems to play a role in the development of expectancies both directly and indirectly (Dir, 2012: 15). For adolescents, this is important because of their developmental phase. Their expectancies of sexting could form out of their own experiences with sexting, their peer group's experiences and from the media regarding the social acceptance and possible risks and consequences associated with sexting (Dir, 2012: 15). The consequences associated with adolescent sexting include peer rejection, peer pressure to engage in sexting, intimate information being shared and legal action for creating, being in possession of or disseminating child pornography (Weiss & Samenow, 2010: 244).

Legal frameworks

Legally, one of the main problems facing the South African judicial system when dealing with adolescent sexting is that constitutionally, adolescents have the right to privacy, which includes communication privacy (Badenhorst, 2011: 9). According to the South African Constitution (s28[3] Act 108 of 1996), adolescents have the same rights as adults in terms of freedom of expression, including the "freedom to receive or impart information and ideas". Any response to adolescent sexting must legally take cognisance of these constitutional rights (Badenhorst, 2011: 7). Furthermore, South African legislation has not caught up with the fast-moving and ever-changing world of technology – currently,

there is no law which deals specifically with the practice of illegal adolescent sexting. Adolescents who engage in sexting can only be responded to in terms of the Films and Publications Amendment Act (s1 Act 3 of 2009) and the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act (ss15-22 Act 32 of 2007), all of which prohibit child pornography (Badenhorst, 2011: 9).

Adolescent sexting could, therefore, fall within the ambit of child pornography according to Section 19 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act (32 of 2007) because it would expose the child receiver of the message to child pornography (Badenhorst, 2011: 10). Moreover, it could also fall within the ambit of Section 22 of the Act which prohibits exposure of the genitalia, anus or female breasts to children (i.e. individuals under the age of 18 years). As such, any image or sext exposing or displaying the genitalia, anus or female breasts has contravened Section 22 of the Act and those in possession of these images could be charged. Lastly, Section 54 of the Act states if any person has knowledge of a sex offence being committed against a child (as defined above), then such knowledge must be reported to a police officer; failure to do so amounts to a criminal act (Badenhorst, 2011: 10). Section 54 is problematic for the friend/s of an adolescent whom they know to engage is sexting because they are obliged to report the individual.

A challenge is that any person, regardless of age, who has engaged in any activity described in the definition of child pornography, is guilty of an offence. But the legal age for engaging in actual sexual intercourse is still a matter of debate. Where previously sexual acts between 12 to 16 year olds were deemed criminal, the Constitutional Court has ruled certain sections of the Sexual Offences Act, criminalising such acts as unconstitutional and, therefore, invalid (Du Preez, 2013: 1; Mtshali, 2013: 3). In essence then, it may be legal for anyone below the age of 18 years to engage in sexual acts, but they may not receive or impart information of such a nature because the Films and Publications Act (s1 Act 3 of 2009) criminalises such behaviour. Furthermore, charging children under these Acts can be seen as overly punitive in that it is recognised that children are not fully mature and/or psychologically developed and, therefore, may not either fully understand or appreciate the consequences of behaviours such as sexting (Badenhorst, 2011: 11). Moreover, Grudzinkas, Cody, Brady, Saleh and Clayfield (2015: 19) argue that using child pornography laws to address cases of adolescent sexting is not effective in terms of responding to the social context of the problem. The application of the mentioned Acts to cases involving sexting should, therefore, be considered with care and reactions to sexting behaviour must take into account more developmental strategies in the form of diversion intervention.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Two theories are proposed to provide an explanation to online victimisation and adolescent sextpectancies.

Lifestyle-routine Activities Theory
The combination of the lifestyle and routine activities theories can be used to explain why adolescents are one of the most vulnerable populations when it comes to victimisation (Finkelhor & Asdigian, 1996: 4). To explain the relationship between lifestyle, routine activities and victimisation, four central concepts have been formulated, namely: proximity to crime, exposure to crime, target attractiveness and guardianship (Finkelhor & Asdigian, 1996: 4). In the case of youth victimisation, increased exposure and decreased guardianship would increase vulnerability. The underlying premise of this theory is that the victim and the offender must converge in physical space for victimisation to occur (Reyns, Henson & Fisher, 2011: 1150). According to the theory, victimisation takes place when an intersection between a motivated offender and a suitable target arises in the absence of a capable guardian. Adolescents are spending more time on mobile devices and the internet which may increase their exposure to being victimised in chatrooms and on social media platforms. Moreover, there is a lack of guardianship both in terms of actual parental presence but also online protection. Due to the anonymity of offenders online, it is easier for them to engage in online victimisation.

Fishbein's Theory of Reasoned Action (1979)
The key premise of the theory of reasoned action is that behaviour is the outcome of a rational decision dependent on the available information presented (Cummings & Corney, 1987: 190). Three distinct components make up this theory: behavioural intentions, behavioural attitudes and subjective norms (Fishbein, 1979). The attitudes towards sexting and the subjective norm related to sexting may provide insight into the reasons adolescents sext. In relation to the theory, variables such as gender are not seen to have a direct impact on a rational behaviour, but rather to have an impact on the individual attitudes

and subjective norms linked to the behaviour (Cummings & Corney, 1987: 191; Sarver, 1983: 156). Fishbein (1979) proposed the following equation to explain the theory of reasoned action:

$$\text{Behaviour} = \text{Behavioural Intentions} = W1 \times A + W2 \times S$$

From the equation, it is clear that the relative important weights (W1 and W2) given to the attitudes (A) about the behaviour and the subjective norms (S) relating to that behaviour inform the behavioural intentions. From the sequential equation, it is clear that an adolescent's intent to engage in sexting precedes the actual action of sexting. The importance that adolescents place on their attitudes towards sexting and also to the subjective norms of the peer group may make adolescents more likely to engage in sexting behaviour. Not all adolescents will place the same importance on attitudes or subjective norms, so it becomes clear how behaviour intentions and thus the practice of sexting becomes individualised.

METHODS

The present results form part of an applied, mixed methods study which aims to develop a comprehensive school policy, informing reactions to sexting in secondary schools, paying attention to, among others, legal matters, assessment, investigation, remedies and prevention. The quantitative strand, which is reported on here, adhered to a descriptive research purpose in order to portray adolescent sexting in the context of online victimisation and sexting expectancies (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000: 154). A cross-sectional design in the form of a self-administered survey was selected as this strategy promotes honesty in responses, reduces interviewer error and is more cost-effective and expedient (Creswell, 2003: 13; Lamphere, 2012: 59, 68).

Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed to select four co-educational and two single-sex independent secondary schools in Gauteng. Criteria for inclusion were similar access to mobile and internet technologies, multi-cultural, multi-racial and English first language. The selection of respondents relied on voluntary sampling where all Grade 8 to Grade 12 learners were asked to participate in the survey through their own choice. The anticipated number of respondents was approximately 1000, but unfortunately only 83 respondents from one co-educational and one single sex school completed the survey. Regrettably, many learners did not take letters home to obtain parental consent, many could not see the inherent dangers of minors sexting and therefore chose not to participate and many did not recognise the necessity of their responses, thus resulting in a low response rate. Another possible reason for the low response rate is that learners may not have wanted to arouse parental suspicion in terms of their online activity, including flirting, downloading and viewing pornography as well as sexting. Further problems dramatically reducing the number of respondents comprised of managerial access to schools being denied due to the sexual nature of the topic, time constraints in the school calendar, and refusing the survey after initial approval was granted. The sampling process was a frustrating one, as the highlighted sample of schools could not see the benefit of the research and those in managerial positions did not recognise the necessity of a policy that both protects a child's online rights and is not necessarily punishment-driven. There appeared to be a "head in the sand" approach to a topic that requires research in order to minimise online abuse, the need for a standardised approach to adolescent sexting and cyberbullying and the need for information to be able to provide practical recommendations. Future research endeavours are advised to take note of these challenges when conducting research involving adolescents and online risk-taking behaviour.

Data instrument and collection method

A questionnaire was developed in order to produce numerical descriptions of adolescent sexting practices and online victimisation, as well as the positive and negative expectancies of sending and receiving sexts. The questionnaire was structured to cover a 14-item self-report measure on demographics. The Online Victimisation Scale was initially developed to address the growing concern surrounding the number of youths being victimised and engaging in online victimisation (Tynes, Rose & Williams, 2010). The scale was designed to address adolescents' experiences of general, sexual and racial online victimisation. The adapted version of the Online Victimisation Scale was structured to cover internet usage and online victimisation in terms of general victimisation and sexual solicitation.

The Sextpectancies Measure was originally developed against the background of sex-related alcohol expectancies towards sexual behaviour (Dir, 2012: 20). The central concept was that sexting beliefs

would be based on expectancies of the individual and expectancies of other people (Dir, 2012: 20). Four factors were included for sending sexts expectancies: positive interpersonal-related expectancies, positive sexual arousal-related expectancies, negative self-consciousness related expectancies, and negative interpersonal-related expectancies. Three factors were taken into account for receiving sexts expectancies: positive affect-related expectancies, negative interpersonal-related expectancies, and negative affect-related expectancies (Dir, 2012: 21). An adapted Sexpectencies Measure was used in order to assess adolescents' expectations of sending and receiving sexts. This 57-item Likert scale (of which 43 items are reported on here) was only adapted to fit the South African context and vernacular and thus the content validity remained high (Punch, 2005:97). All Cronbach alpha coefficients for the adapted scales were above the minimum expected coefficient of 0.7 (Table 1) (Field, 2009: 365).

Table 1: Chronbach's alpha coefficients for Online Victimisation and Expectancy Scale and sub-measures

	n	Items	α
Complete Online Victimisation Scale	55	14	0.843
Complete Sexpectancies Scale:	65	43	0.867
Sending positive expectancies	76	15	0.947
Sending negative expectancies	72	9	0.866
Receiving positive expectancies	81	9	0.963
Receiving negative expectancies	79	10	0.941

Consent forms were handed out two weeks before data collection was scheduled to take place. On the day, assent forms were handed out to respondents who had obtained parental consent. These forms were collected prior to the self-administered questionnaire being handed out. Respondents were gathered in a central location, but were asked to be seated with at least a one chair gap between them. The survey took approximately 45 minutes to complete. Respondents were requested to double fold their questionnaires as a safeguard to anonymity. The researcher was present to answer questions or address problems, very few of which arose.

Ethics

Research ethics are important to ensure acceptable conduct, protection of research participants and unbiased, objective reporting (Anderson, 2015: 11). The essential ethical issues that were adhered to were that respondents obtained parental consent and provided assent themselves, participated voluntarily, the social value of the research was apparent; they were not exposed to physical or mental harm and both confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. Furthermore, arrangements were made with the schools for the school counsellor or psychologist to be available if debriefing was necessary. The Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria, granted ethical clearance for the survey to be conducted.

Data analysis

The data was manually coded and captured in MS Word Excel after which the dataset was exported to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM Corp, 2017). In addition to descriptive results, comparisons were tested between male and female respondents' experiences of online victimisation and sexting expectancies. Since the sample was not randomly drawn and the data did not present a normal distribution, a non-parametric procedure had to be used, in particular the Mann-Whitney U test. Where a significant difference between the two groups prevailed ($p<0.05$), effect sizes (r) were calculated (-0.1 indicates a weak, -0.3 denotes a medium and -0.5 suggests a strong effect size) (Field, 2009: 675). In addition to comparing each variable of the online victimisation and sexting expectancies scales, scores were calculated for every scale thus comparing total scores across gender. The descriptive and bivariate data are presented mainly in table format. In the interest of space, for the Expectancies Scale only the mostly true and true (combined) descriptive results are presented.

RESULTS

Characteristics of the sample

A total of 83 respondents completed the self-administered questionnaire. Three respondents (3.6%) did not indicate their sex and the sample was equally divided in female and male respondents (n=40; 50.0% respectively). The average age of respondents was 14.74 years with a standard deviation of 1.40 years. The home language of the majority of respondents (n=64; 77.1%) was English. Nearly 62.6% of the

respondents were in grade 8 or 9 and the remaining learners were in grade 10,11 or 12. The vast majority (73%) of the respondents were White, 20.7% Black and the remaining 6.1% Coloured, Indian or Asian. There were no respondents from a low income household. The majority (63.9%) rated themselves as coming from middle income and as high income (36.1%) households.

Table 2 highlights the respondents' internet and mobile phone usage. The vast majority of respondents (n=61; 85.9%) had internet access via their mobile phones of whom half (n=32; 51.6%) use it daily, nearly a third (n=18; 29.0%) three to six times per week and one in five (n=12; 19.4%) less than three times per week. Female respondents spent significantly more time using their mobile phones than their male counterparts (*p*=0.049; *r*=-0.22). Three quarters of the female respondents (n=30; 75%) spent six or more hours using their mobile phones in comparison to half of male respondents (n=22; 50%).

Table 2: Respondents' internet and mobile phone usage

	Female		Male		*p*	*r*
	n	%	n	%		
Internet use (hours/week):					0.224	-
> 1 hour	3	7.5	4	10.3		
1 – 2 hours	10	25.0	9	23.1		
3 – 5 hours	7	17.5	10	25.6		
6 – 10 hours	7	17.5	12	30.8		
> 10 hours	13	32.5	4	10.3		
Source of internet access:					0.188	-
Computer at school	8	20.5	8	20.0		
Parents' computer	2	5.1	-	-		
Personal computer	1	2.6	-	-		
Mobile phone	16	41.0	13	44.8		
Multiple sources	12	30.8	19	47.5		
Mobile phone use (hours/week):					0.049	-0.22
> 1 hour	1	2.5	1	2.6		
1 – 2 hours	6	15.0	7	18.4		
3 – 5 hours	3	7.5	11	28.9		
6 – 10 hours	10	25.0	8	21.1		
> 10 hours	20	50.0	11	28.9		

Table 3 provides the number of respondents and the percentage of the sample that responded positively to being victimised online. Eight of the 14 items presented significant gender differences.

Table 3: Online Victimisation Scale (n-values and percentages relate to "yes" responses)

	Female		Male		*p*	*r*
	n	%	n	%		
People have said negative things about the way I look/act/dress online	15	37.5	6	15.0	0.023	-0.25
People have posted rude or mean things about me online	13	32.5	3	7.5	0.005	-0.31
I have been harassed online for no apparent reason	10	25.0	2	5.0	0.013	-0.27
I have been harassed online because of something that happened at school	10	25.0	5	12.5	0.155	-
I have been humiliated or embarrassed online	16	40.0	6	15.0	0.013	-0.27
I have been bullied online	12	30.0	4	10.0	0.026	-0.24
I have been threatened online	10	25.0	8	20.0	0.595	-
People have asked me to engage in unwanted cyber sex	11	27.5	5	12.5	0.096	-
People continued to engage sexually with me online, even after I asked them to stop	9	22.5	2	5.0	0.024	-0.25
People have spread online rumours about my sexual behaviour	3	7.7	2	5.0	0.625	-
People have asked me to send sexy pictures/photographs online	25	64.1	10	25.0	0.001	-0.39
People have shown me unwanted sexy pictures online	16	40.0	17	42.5	0.821	-
I have received unwanted sexual images via email or text message	14	35.0	8	20.0	0.135	-
I have reported unwanted online attention to my parents or teachers	1	2.5	6	15.0	0.049	-0.21

Table 4 presents the total mean scores of the four sub-scales of the Sextpectancies Scale. The ranges of the sub-scales are also provided and vary depending on the number of items that constitute each sub-scale. A low range count lends towards the "Not at all/somewhat true" response categories and a high range count suggests responses in the "Mostly/extremely true" categories. Female respondents generally expressed more negative expectancies about sexting than male respondents.

Table 4: Mean scores for sexting expectancies scale per sex

	Range	Female	Male	P	r
Sending positive expectancy	15 – 60	20.59	28.72	0.001	-0.38
Sending negative expectancy	9 – 36	25.81	21.30	0.017	-0.28
Receiving positive expectancy	9 – 36	12.45	19.34	<0.001	-0.43
Receiving negative expectancy	10 – 40	28.61	21.02	0.001	-0.37

Table 5 presents the gender differentiation in the positive expectancies in relation to sending sexts. Male respondents had higher positive expectancies in comparison to female respondents.

Table 5: Sending positive expectancy (n-values and percentages only relate to the "mostly/extremely true" categories)

Sexting makes/would make …	Female		Male		P	r
	n	%	N	%		
Me adventurous	1	2.6	8	20.0	0.001	-0.37
Me more open with others	1	2.5	6	15.4	0.004	-0.32
My relationship more interesting	5	12.5	15	40.0	0.016	-0.27
Me more intimate with the receiver	3	7.5	14	35.9	<0.001	-0.43
Me more affectionate	3	7.5	3	7.7	0.173	-
Me playful	7	17.5	11	28.2	0.028	-0.24
Me fearless	1	2.5	4	10.3	0.462	-
Me excited	7	17.5	20	51.3	0.001	-0.37
Me feel attractive	6	15.0	8	20.5	0.039	-0.23
Me attracted to others	3	7.5	14	35.9	<0.001	0.45
Me feel sexy	3	7.5	10	25.6	0.002	-0.34
Me likeable	3	7.5	6	15.4	0.069	-
It easier to flirt	6	15.4	10	25.6	0.154	-
Me happy	1	2.5	9	23.7	0.005	-0.31
Me aroused	5	12.8	16	41.0	0.001	-0.38

Table 6 presents the negative expectancies to sending sexts. The gender difference is pertinent in that the female respondents reported a higher level of negative expectancy than the male respondents.

Table 6: Sending negative expectancy (n-values and percentages only relate to the "mostly/extremely true" categories)

Sexting makes/would make …	Female		Male		p	r
	n	%	N	%		
Me immature	18	46.2	15	40.5	0.713	-
Me inappropriate	25	64.1	22	56.4	0.310	-
Me desperate	19	48.7	14	35.9	0.221	-
Me vulnerable	24	60.0	22	57.9	0.856	-
Me embarrassed	27	71.1	17	43.6	0.003	-0.33
Me ashamed	29	74.4	17	43.6	0.002	-0.35
Me feel dirty	31	77.5	25	65.8	0.280	-
Lower my self-esteem	20	54.1	15	38.5	0.129	-
Me feel awkward	28	71.8	18	46.2	0.011	-0.28

Table 7 details the positive expectancies relating to receiving sexts. A gender difference is noted here in that male respondents experienced more positive expectancies than female respondents. All items presented significant differences between male and female respondents.

Table 7: Receiving positive expectancy (n-values and percentages only relate to the "mostly/extremely true" categories)

Receiving sexts makes/would make …	Female		Male		p	r
	n	%	N	%		
Me attracted to the sender	1	2.5	12	30.8	<0.001	-0.51
Me feel more attractive	4	10.0	13	33.3	0.005	-0.31
Me feel sexy	3	7.5	12	30.8	0.002	-0.34

Receiving sexts makes/would make …	Female		Male		*p*	*r*
	n	%	N	%		
Give me confidence	2	5.0	16	41.0	<0.001	-0.44
Me excited	5	12.5	19	48.7	<0.001	-0.45
Me feel admired	5	12.5	13	32.5	<0.001	-0.40
Raise my self-esteem	5	12.5	13	33.3	0.020	-0.26
Me want to have sex	3	7.5	12	30.8	0.001	-0.36
Me feel wanted	5	12.5	18	45.0	<0.001	-0.39

Table 8 presents the data on the negative expectancies in receiving sexts. Female respondents expressed more negative expectancies of receiving sexts than male respondents did.

Table 8: Receiving negative expectancy (n-values and percentages only relate to the "mostly/extremely true" categories)

Receiving sexts makes/would make …	Female		Male		*p*	*r*
	n	%	N	%		
Me feel uncomfortable	27	67.5	17	43.6	0.027	-0.24
Me feel disgusted	25	62.5	9	23.1	0.001	-0.36
Turn me off	26	65.0	9	23.1	<0.001	-0.45
Me feel awkward	30	75.0	14	35.0	<0.001	-0.41
Me avoid the sender	28	70.0	17	42.5	0.012	-0.28
Me feel insulted	20	50.0	7	17.5	0.003	-0.33
Me feel vulnerable	18	46.2	11	27.5	0.025	-0.25
Me feel embarrassed	22	55.0	8	20.0	<0.001	-0.42
Me feel ashamed	20	50.0	10	25.6	0.014	-0.27
Me feel dirty	23	57.5	19	47.5	0.259	-

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to gender differentiate between online victimisation and expectancies regarding sexting. The authors are aware that the study relies on a limited number of respondents and therefore generalisations should be made with caution. Nevertheless, the survey presents valuable insights in adolescents' experiences of online victimisation and sextpectancies.

The results propose that girls spend more time using their mobile phones than their male counterparts which possibly ties with the finding that female adolescents are more at risk of being cyberbullied than male adolescents. The argument is supported by a study conducted in the Netherlands, where it was found that girls are more likely than boys to be victimised online (Van Bavel, 2016: 13). A possible reason may be found in the online activities in which each gender engages. Girls use the internet more for chatting and engaging on social media platforms and boys in gaming (Gross, 2004: 634; Van Bavel, 2016: 15). As such, girls may reveal more personal information and sharing photographs which in turn expose them to more situations in which they might be victimised online. The present survey further shows that girls experience more negative, rude or mean commentary online than boys do and also that they have been humiliated or bullied online significantly more than boys have. These findings are supported by international research which highlight that girls experience more verbal abuse online whereas boys are still threatened physically as is the case with conventional bullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2016). Strikingly, female respondents in the survey appear to have been targeted significantly more for sexual reasons than boys were. Moreover, females were also less likely to report their victimisation, potentially due to fears of personal implications, for example victim blaming/"slut-shaming" or they may be unsure of the reaction they may get from adults. Another reason for the under-reporting could be that they do not feel victimised – victimisation, or even potential victimisation may well have become normalised when engaging in a virtual world. Cyberspace in itself presents numerous challenges when it comes to protecting individuals online and adolescents are no exception. The ease at which online harassment can be initiated between victim and offender, the spatial and temporal elements of the internet and the anonymity afforded by the internet lend themselves to the theoretical discussion of whether traditional victimisation theories can be used to explain online victimisation.

It is argued here that the Lifestyle-routine Activities Theory cannot be fully applied to online victimisation. Adolescents are spending more time on mobile devices and the internet which increases

their exposure to victimisation in chatrooms and on social media platforms. There is a lack of guardianship both in terms of actual parental presence, but also online protection. Due to the anonymity of offenders online it is easier to engage in online victimisation and even if there is parental supervision, the internet allows for password protection, fake profiles and hidden file software which in turn reduce guardianship. When the theory was first developed, cyberspace did not exist and an actual physical interaction was necessary for victimisation to occur – this is not the case with online harassment, victimisation and cyberbullying (Reyns, Henson & Fisher, 2011: 1151). In addition, the temporal aspect of the Lifestyle-routine Activities Theory needs to be revisited since interconnectivity is present at all hours of the day. As such, the temporal and spatial elements needed for victimisation are no longer applicable. Offenders and victims still converge in cyberspace and therefore the potential for victimisation remains.

The element of guardianship takes on a new dimension when referring to online victimisation and as such loses much of its value because the term no longer encompasses that which the authors of the theory intended. Furthermore, adolescents have privacy rights which need to be upheld and thus the role of the guardian in terms of online activity is diminished. When looking at target attractiveness, the dynamics relating to online popularity also differ. With conventional bullying, those who are popular are not often victimised, so the question raised here is whether those with higher online profiles are more seen as more suitable targets in terms of target attractiveness or not. Moreover, exposure to criminal activity – a key tenet in the original theory – is no longer necessary for victimisation to occur. The arguments raised here regarding the ability of traditional Victimology theory to explain online victimisation, particularly in adolescent populations, warrant further theoretical development and testing.

The Sextpectancies Scale used in the survey highlight significant gender differences in relation to positive and negative expectancies regarding sexting. The results indicate that, overall, girls have more negative expectancies for sending and receiving sexts than boys do. Significant differences and medium to strong effect sizes were noted between male and female respondents when the expectancies for both sending and receiving sexts were divided into positive and negative expectancies. The gender differences could be a result of sexting conforming to a sexual double-standard in that girls are perceived as being "slutty" if they engage in sexting whereas boys secure a pathway to higher social status (Lippman & Campbell, 2014: 374). Boys reported that sending sexting made them *adventurous, affectionate, excited, attracted to the recipient* and *aroused.* Girls, on the other hand, reported feeling *embarrassed, ashamed* and *awkward.* In terms of receiving sexts, boys felt they would be *attracted to the sender, sexy, confident, excited, admired* and *wanted.* Furthermore, boys reported experiencing higher *self-esteem* and would *want to engage in sexual intercourse.* Conversely, it is not surprising that girls reported that receiving sexts would make them feel *disgusted, turned off, awkward, insulted* and *embarrassed.* These results are supported by Dir's 2012 research which indicated similar discrepancies when using the Sextpectancies Measure. Moreover, Dir's study proposed that sexual arousal expectancies could influence sexting behaviour which could provide insight into the frequency of male and female sexting behaviours (2012: 42-43). The argument correlates with the Theory of Reasoned Action in that behavioural intentions based on attitudes and social norms lead to a specific behaviour. In other words, positive expectancies associated with the sending and receiving of sexts would increase the likelihood of an individual engaging in the behaviour.

It is noteworthy that behavioural intentions are dynamic and thus an adolescent who sexts a romantic partner may not necessarily sext a friend or an acquaintance. Furthermore, in order to comprehend behavioural intentions, the contributing factors of attitudes towards sexting and subjective norms relating to sexting have to be taken into account. The attitudes that an adolescent may have towards sexting are determined by certain beliefs specifically associated with the consequences of sexting (Cummings & Corney, 1987: 193). Simply put, positive expectations lead to an enjoyment in sexting and vice versa. The final component of the Theory of Reasoned Action – subjective norms – is particularly pertinent to adolescents because of their developmental life stage. Behavioural intentions are influenced by an individual's reference group (Cummings & Corney, 1987: 195) which is important in adolescent sexting because if the behaviour is viewed as acceptable, the adolescent may be more likely to engage in the behaviour. The motivation to comply is valuable in understanding adolescent sexting, because not all individuals feel the same amount of pressure to follow others, but adolescence is a period characterised by peer pressure and this may influence the decision to sext or not.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From this research, it is clear that there is a need to protect female adolescents, particularly in the domain of cyberbullying. It is imperative that safe avenues are created for girls to report the online abuse they face both at home and in schools. Moreover, we should look to focus awareness about the dangers and consequences of cyberbullying and sexting through existing educational opportunities, in particular Life Orientation curricula. Moreover, education surrounding the negative impact of sexting should be directed predominantly to male adolescents who reported more positive expectancies of sexting. Also, access to social media, technology in general and specifically sexually explicit content needs to be more stringently regulated by parents being well informed regarding the apps, specifically that adolescents use. Lastly, policies designed to address online victimisation and adolescent sexting should be gender specific.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The major limitation apparent is the small sample size in relation to the anticipated number of respondents. The effect is that generalisations can only be made with caution regarding the geographic location, access to technology and social media, as well as the age of the respondents. The privileged demographics of the sample vis-à-vis access to technology must also be acknowledged. In terms of future research, researchers should pay attention to the shortfalls presented in terms of access to minor respondents as well as their perceived non-co-operation apropos responding to topics of a sexual nature. A larger sample could provide more answers regarding online victimisation and sexting expectancies in South Africa.

Adolescent sexting contravenes relevant provisions within the existing criminal law legislation and is defined within certain crime definitions. It is, therefore, imperative that the matter be explored further in order to appropriately deal with adolescent online victimisation as well as their expectancies regarding sexting, because these expectancies could influence actual sexting behaviour. Further qualitative research is needed to ascertain the perceptions and attitudes minors have vis-à-vis sexting behaviour. Furthermore, it is vital to further research the online victimisation of girls in particular as the findings of this study clearly indicated a significant difference in the victimisation of girls versus boys.

CONCLUSION

This research article explored the lack of South African research surrounding online victimisation and positive and negative expectancies regarding sexting in the adolescent populace. Interestingly, the finding that female respondents experience higher negative sextpectancies could possibly be linked to their increased risk of being victimised online. They may be pressured into sexting and thereafter be the victim of online harassment or revenge porn, or they may be bullied for not conforming to their peers' accepted practices. Research of this nature is important in order to contribute to more effective intervention programmes and a more cohesive legal framework to deal with adolescent sexting.

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