Cyberbullying and Sexting.
A literature review about characteristics of bullying teenagers and their victims

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INTRODUCTION

This article is a literature review over different aspects of cyber threats that occur among young who are involved in bulling as well as in cyberbullying activities. Sexting is an element of cyberbullying which is treated as well in this article.

The "invisibility" and "anonymity" of cyberbullying make youth more vulnerable and susceptible to becoming victims (Slonje & Smith, 2008), compared to more traditional school yard bullying which is acted upon in face-to-face. While on the other hand, the perceived obscurity of cyberbullying (i.e., no one can identify me) can make those that cyberbully believe they are invincible and not identifiable, thus increasing the risk that adolescents will take advantage of others. Another challenging factor is that adults may not be aware of the events associated with cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is one area in which many youth choose not to talk to their parents (Mishna, McLuckie, & Saini, 2009; Slonje& Smith, 2008). For example, Slonje and Smith (2008) stated that 50% of the students they studied were not willing to talk to any person about the cyberbullying, while 35.7% talked

to a friend, 8.9% talked to a parent or guardian, 5.4% admitted talking to another person, and no students talked to teachers.

Students are not equipped to handle cyberbullying. They generally do not seek help because of fear of reprisal, embarrassment, or because they assume adults will not act. Some try to avoid the situation which may stop a particular incident but does little to protect them long-term or discourage the cyberbully. Some become very withdrawn which can affect their school work, their friendships, and ultimately lead them to dangerous, self-destructive behavior.

BULLING

Abusive bullying behaviors begin in elementary school, peak during middle school and begin to subside as children progress through their high school years (Feinberg, 2003).

Research on male bullying suggests that boys are more frequently involved in physical bullying (Viljo e n*et al.*, 2005). While males usually have physical altercations, females prefer to bully indirectly through relational means. Types of relational bullying or aggression include gossiping or spreading rumors, friendship betrayals, excluding people and other behaviors that manipulate relationships (Raskauskas and Stoltz, 2007).

Terms others have used to refer to similar phenomena include online harassment, online bullying, internet bullying, internet aggression, electronic aggression, cyber aggression, and electronic bullying (e.g., Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007; Wade &Beran, 2011; Williams & Guerra, 2007).

Bullying has traditionally had a specific meaning within the research community, usually implying aggressive behavior "that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated" (Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, & Lumpkin, 2014). This definition excludes many acts of aggression perpetrated through technologies that may not reflect an imbalance of

power (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007). Nonetheless, we use the term cyberbullying in this review due to its common use in the literature, with the understanding that it encompasses any peer-targeted aggressive behavior perpetrated via electronic communication technologies.

CYBERBULLYING

Because online teenage life is ever-present among First World teenagers, cyberbullying may become-or may already be-the dominant form of bullying behavior among children. A telephone study of 886 US. Internet users age 12-17 (Conducted October to November, 2006) found that one-third (32%) of all teenagers who use the Internet say they have been targeted for cyberbullying online (Lenhart, 2007).

A follow-up MARC survey in 2009 of undergraduate students found that 27% admitted to cyberbullying and that, 60% admitted to being victimized online (Englander, 2009). A 2006 poll of 1,000 children conducted by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, Found cyberbullying frequencies of about 33%-similar to those found by Pew (Lenhart, 2007). These numbers suggest that cyberbullying (with about 40-60% admitting victimization) may be more common than traditional bullying (with about 20-24% admitting victimization)

A few studies have looked at gender differences in cyberbullying. A handful of research findings suggest that females are more often involved in cyberbullying both as a victim and as a cyberbully (Dehue *et al.*, 2008; Mesch, 2009;).

The cyberbullying noted among females is consistent with the types of indirect bullying seen between girls in traditional bullying. "Because most cyberbullying is not face-to-face, the gender balance in bullying might beskewed more towards girls than is found for conventional bullying" (Slonje and Smith, 2008). Cyberbullying is an indirect form of aggression which creates a sense of anonymity. The use of text

messaging, Emails and instant messaging, makes electronic communications an easy way for rumors to be spread and friendships destroyed.

Girls may also be more involved in cyberbullying as victims. In a study conducted by (Smith *et al*., 2008) results showed that girls were significantly more likely to be cyber bullied, especially by text messages and phone calls, than boys.

Dehue *et al*. (2008) surveyed male and female participants on their internet bullying experiences, both as bullies and as victims. Girls reported that when they did cyber bully, they often did this by gossiping or by ignoring someone.

Another factor that may be related to vulnerability to cyberbullying is the amount of time spent on computers and cell phones for social interactions. One study found that females are online more frequently for socializing purposes, in comparison to males, who go online more frequently to play games (Dowell *et al*.,2009).

Cyberbullying is defined as harmful and intentional communication exploiting any form of technological device (Belsey, 2006). Technology includes but is not limited to email, text messaging, instant messaging, chat rooms, cellular phones, camera phones, web sites, blogs and social networks such as My Space or Facebook (Brown, Jackson, & Cassidy, 2006). Unique aspects of cyberbullying are the potential anonymity of bullies and the infinite audience.

Cyberbullying is causing students to experience feelings of anger, powerlessness, fear, and sadness. In other words, cyberbullying has some of the same negative outcomes for targets as face-to-face bullying, which studies have shown leads to (among other things) sadness and depression, powerlessness, fear, and delinquency Aluedse, (2006), or more aggressive/retaliatory behavior.

Students who are cyber bullied report feeling sad, anxious, afraid and unable to concentrate on school (Beran & Li, 2005) and may report social difficulties, drug and alcohol

use, and eating disorders (Fosse & Holen, 2006; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007). Victimized youth are more likely to skip school (Wolak, Mitchell, &Finkelhor, 2006). Youth who cyber bully are likely to engage in rule-breaking and to have problems with aggression (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007).

Cyber bullying often occurs in the context of social relationships (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008) which challenges the commonly held assumption that it is anonymous (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008) and is consistent with understanding bullying as a relationship issue (Craig & Pepler, 2007). Previous research found that one quarter of cyber bullying occurs in the presence of witnesses (Mishna et al., 2010) corresponding with evidence that most traditional bullying occurs in the presence of peers who play key roles (Craig &Pepler, 2007).

Much of the previous research has attempted to identify risk factors for cyberbullying focusing on demographic and behavioral factors. Inconsistent findings have been reported regarding gender and age difference (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Examining the behavioral factors, research has shown that intensive use of Internet emerged as a risk factor for child cyber harassment (Wolak et al., 2007). Furthermore, the location of the computer in the home was found to be a predictive factor of cyber victimization.

Children who use the Internet in private places at their home (e.g, bedroom) were at higher risk to be victimized than children who used computers in a public space in their home (Sengupta &

Chaudhuri, 2011). Installing a monitoring system in the computer however, was not associated with level of cyber harassment or bullying (Sengupta & Chaudhuri, 2011). In addition, children who are involved in cyber bullying have been found to be less aware of the risks involved in particular uses of the Internet, such as sharing passwords with others or talking with individuals they did not know in their offline lives (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; An additional risk factor that has

been discussed in previous research refers to a child or youth's involvement in school violence and bullying. Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) found that students who were physically victimized at school were more likely to be perpetrators of Internet harassment. These findings were not supported by Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007), who found that traditional victims were not more likely to bully electronically, but rather to also be victimized by electronic means. They found that youth who were considered traditional bullies were more likely to be bullied and to bully through cyber means.

The negative impacts of bullying on schooling, relationships and the emotional and psycho- logical health of young people who are its victims can be long term; in some cases, the impacts continue into early adulthood [4]. There are also long-term implications for bullies; for example, they have been found to typically exhibit higher levels of antisocial, violent and/or criminal behavior in adulthood (Patchin, &Hinduja, 2012).

Cyberbullying has an effect on both teachers and those being cyberbullied. Qualitative evidence gathered through a survey of teachers has demonstrated that cyberbullying affects the working lives of staff and impacts severely on staff motivation, job satisfaction and teaching practice. Cyberbullying victims face various academic and social problems.

According to Smith *et al.* (2008) cyberbullying is an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or an individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeated and over time against a victim

Who cannot easily defend himself or herself. A more comprehensive definition is that: "Cyberbullying involves the use of information and communication technologies such as email, cell phone and pager text messages, instant messaging, defamatory person Websites, and defamatory online person polling Web sites, to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile

behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others" (Li, 2007).

According to Willard (2005) cyberbullying may involve sending mean, vulgar, or threatening messages or images; posting sensitive or private information about another person; pretending to be someone else in order to make that person look bad or intentionally excluding someone from an online group.

Teenagers who have access to these technological devices are predisposed to online abuse, harassment and other means of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying can occur every time a learner logs into the internet or uses their cellular phone.

Ybarra *et al.* (2007) found that youth who reported deliberately trying to self-harm in the past six months were significantly more likely than other youth to frequent chat rooms and to have close relationships with someone they met online. They were also more likely to have a sexual screen name or to talk with people known only online about sex. These findings suggest that youth who engage in self-harm are more likely to engage in online behaviors that have the potential to put them at risk. Carney (2007) submitted that even children who are without positive personal relationships became vulnerability and at increased risk. They were trying to search online for what was missing in their own lives, but they found that they did not have the judgment necessary to avoid unhealthy Internet relationships. They used the Internet to share their pain with the world but attracted like-minded individuals who encouraged them into extreme and dangerous behavior. In some instances they encountered online predators who exploit their vulnerability to take advantage of them (Carney, 2007). Adolescence may seek various types of relationships online to satisfy different needs. The adolescent may establish social relationships to define their sexuality, intellectual development or an internal value system. Unlike schoolyard bullying, the virtual environment creates an aura of safety and anonymity, which allows children and adolescents to

disclose huge amounts of information, oblivious to who might see it and how quickly it can be disseminated to large numbers of people. As a result of immature thinking processes and an under developed sense of mortality, adolescents underestimate the danger involved. On the contrary, in our tell-all society, the sharing of private, even sexual information and images has become the norm (Carney, 2007).

According to Li (2007) since culture is related to bullying and victimization, it is logical to argue that culture should be considered as a predictor for cyberbullying and cyber victimization (Li, 2007). The perpetration and the victimization behaviors are likely to be shaped by family values and traditions; socio-economic status and educational level, religion and prosocial factors. Although bullying has been identified around the world, previous research suggests that students from different countries and cultures behave differently with involvements in bullying. If cyberspace is the setting where young people are going to spend most of their day and night, they will have a large stake in what happens to them in that environment, hence their reactions and perceptions of the cyber space environment and experiences are for their psychosocial well-being.

Marini *et al.* (2006) confirms that since bullying is a systematic and repeated form of aggression involving peers, there are a range of psychosocial problems including low self-esteem, high acceptance of antisocial behavior and delinquency. Furthermore the victims also report an array of internalizing difficulties related to anxiety, depression and self-esteem. Davis (2001) contended that psychosocial problems like depression and loneliness predisposes some internet users to maladaptive cognitions and behaviors that result in negative outcomes. Florell (2011) found online victims were typically intense Internet users that created content, took more risks online, engaged many friends to feel popular but they found that these individuals had many psychosocial problems offline. Morahan-

Martin and Schumacher (2003) found that problematic internet users were more likely than non-problematic users to use the internet to meet new people, to seek emotional support, and to play socially interactive games.

At a psychological level, perpetrators of cyberbullying experience less guilt and remorse for their actions compared to perpetrators of traditional bullying since they do not personally witness the pain and hurt on the victim's face while the act of aggression or violation is being metered out (Hancock, Jones, & Ryan, 2007). The nature of the virtual world is such that it does not allow actors to be privy to one another's emotions. Kowalski and Limber (2008) have established that this not only increases the number of potential perpetrators of cyberbullying but also the magnitude of the treats, taunts, and soon, that perpetrators are willing to inflict on the victim. Kelner, Capps and Kring (2002) make the point that in traditional bullying perpetrators and victims come face-to-face with non-verbal cues and facial markers such as frowns, raised eyebrows, gritting teeth, winks, smiles, and other expressions which indicate the intent and emotion associated with the behavior. The perpetrator and victim experience the full impact of the real emotional and psychological weight of the bullying event. In traditional bullying this may influence a perpetrator from retracting the severity of the bullying arsenal by witnessing the effect of the punishment. In the virtual world the perpetrator does not have face-to-face contact, a simple emoticons like the smiley face which is supposed to convey a positive effect(Kowalski & Limber, 2008) may be used in a sinister way or may not be a genuine emotional sentiment.

Ybarra and Mitchel (2007) study suggests a relationship between the frequency of cyberbullying and negative psychosocial characteristics and behavioral problems. Youth that reported being perpetrators or victims were more likely to have had more than five drinks in the previous month, to have used marijuana, inhalants, and to have at least one peer

involvement in delinquent behavior. They were also more likely to report poor bonding with their caregivers and/or little monitoring by their caregivers. Overall, youth who were involved in online harassment were more likely to be involved in traditional bullying harassment as well. This implies that aggressive Internet behavior implies troubled offline behavior as well (Ybarra, *et al*., 2007).

Hancock *et al*.(2007) pointed out that the concerns expressed, by parents and school officials about online behavior, is the same as those given to other social and psychological problems such asunder-age drinking, teenage pregnancy, violence and aggression. These concerns are not unfounded since adolescents tend to make online choices contrary to real-world behaviors (Berson & Berson, 2005). According to Carney (2007, p. 1) "teenagers often lack the maturity and social judgment necessary to act responsibly in the unsupervised anonymous free for all of the internet". Although adolescents are able to engage in abstract thinking, the area of the prefrontal cortex that governs decision making is not yet fully developed (Bauman, 2007).

Is cyberbullying more or less harmful than offline bullying?

There is limited evidence at this stage to establish whether cyberbullying is more or less harmful than offline bullying, but there is an indication in the literature that young people may either underplay, minimize or deny the harm associated with cyberbullying (Spears et al., 2008). A 3-year Australian study on the consequences of cyberbullying found that mental health problems, including anxiety and depression, were more prevalent for children who reported that they had been cyberbullied compared to those who had been bullied offline. However, the students in this study stated that they felt cyberbullying was not as bad as offline bullying, even though

the actual results indicated that it was for this group of students (JSCCS, 2011b).

In one UK study, while young people who had experienced cyberbullying indicated that it had affected their confidence, self-esteem and mental wellbeing, the most common answer for how it had affected them was "not at all" (O'Brien & Moules, 2010). However, three-quarters thought cyberbullying was just as harmful as other forms of bullying—those who felt it wasn't harmful stated so because it was not physical, and it was easier to escape. These thoughts were also reflected in the JSCCS survey (JSCCS, 2011a).

Parents and schools together

The relationship between parents and schools is a critical aspect of addressing cyberbullying. Parents can be encouraged to inquire about the strategies that schools undertake to educate children and young people about cyber safety and cyberbullying, and the ways in which they involve parents in cyberbullying initiatives and in developing cyberbullying policies.

Schools are increasingly recognizing that cyberbullying is more likely to happen outside of rather than in school (Smith et al., 2008). As a result there is an increased trend for schools to be prepared to take responsibility for what happens outside school hours to ensure continuity of care (McGrath, 2009).

The literature also indicates that while there is evidence that cyberbullying and cyber safety programs increase young people's awareness, there is limited evidence to show that they lead to behavior changes (Mishna, Cook, Saini, Wu, & McFadden, 2009). While parents may be aware that schools run such programs, they also need to be mindful of, and engage in discussion with children about, the ways in which they can practice these skills online.

According to this study and other researchers victim often are in a situation where it is difficult to disclose being cyberbullied because they fear being further victimized. "Telling at a teacher may be an effective way to stop bullying, but it may also bring costs, which to the victim outweigh the benefits" (Hunter & Boyle, 2002, p. 332). Schools sometimes are perceived as being very judgmental and prescriptive when dealing with discipline and behavior problems. For example, when a learner asks for help it sometimes leads to an investigation of the incident which may be to the detriment of the learner. In many cases victims are afraid of being implicated in school "enquiries and investigations" and may fear repercussions or becoming a target for further retaliation by the aggressor/perpetrator (Kawalski, et al, 2008). It is therefore extremely important that proper procedural methods are adopted at schools to deal with these situations so that learners are not intimated and/or further traumatized. In terms of disclosure of sensitive informative, it is emotionally demanding on the adolescent who may find that talking to personnel at school often involves sharing the information with several people because of the school hierarchy system. This may also lead to secondary traumatization. The confidentiality clause in school disciplinary procedures and codes do not generally adhered to or protects learning the school system. In most instances principals have to inform several key people including: parents of the perpetrator and victim, the school governing body, the School Education Manager and, in some instances, the District Director or the Provincial Minister for Education. Principals, in most cases want to safeguard themselves and readily make referrals to senior officials in the Department of Education. Therefore what was intended to be confidential and sensitive information that was to be contained within the immediate confines of school is disseminated more widely or becomes public knowledge. The factors that school managers are to consider is: the assessment and magnitude of the problem, the potential risk to the victim

and a referral to a professional who may assist with emotional, psychological and/or physiological presentations. Hinduja and Patchin (2007) have made several recommendations for schools to follow. Firstly, schools should provide an empathetic and non-threatening environment where learners are comfortable to speak candidly to teachers and other available support staff. This is important so that learners are able to vent their feelings, obtain help, comfort, emotional support and understanding whytheir "specific instance of internet-based victimization may have happened" (Hinduja & Patchin, p.105). Secondly, such environments are effective in helping to create and maintain better communication between the learners and school administration and this in turn contributes to more awareness of other related and unrelated social conflict that plague the learner (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). On the other hand, developmentally, adolescents are at the stage when they may want to show or assert their autonomy and maintain the image that they are in control, so informing a teacher may be viewed as a sign of weakness. Teachers therefore have to be aware of other symptoms which manifest themselves, such as absenteeism, tearfulness, fluctuates in mood, drop in academic performance and other unusual behaviors which a learner may display.

Equipping school personnel

Sometimes school personnel are reluctant to get involved since cyberbullying is a relatively new type of discipline problem and some of the cyber activities may have taken place outside school hours. There is an urgent need to skill school personnel to deal with cyberbullying situations and understand cyberbullying terminology and conventions.

Workshops and seminars may assist educators to gain more knowledge and skills so that they may feel more confident when confronted with cyberbullying. Educators should make

sure that there is a consistent structured educational drive and awareness program within the school to reinforce online safety.

It is therefore crucial that certain structures and policies are introduced by the school management and educational authorities to support victims and their families and to identify and rehabilitate perpetrators in matters related to cyberbullying. In terms of the schools' code of conduct, a section may have to be dedicated to the schools' policy on possession of electronic and mobile access devices, school bullying and cyberbullying in order to maintain and improve school discipline and functionality. The school code of conduct has to be revised on an on-going basis to guard against new conventions of bullying, cyberbullying and to upgrade the school policy in regard to mobile devices. This will ensure and enhance the safety of learners, teachers and safeguard the school, especially against the legal consequences as a result of cyberbullying.

The present study indicated that there were a substantial number of victims who felt that they were taken seriously when they told someone that they had been cyberbullied and that they felt that they had received the help and support needed. This is a positive outcome which indicates that outside the school environment learners were able to find the kind of support and help they needed. It is recommended that in addition to schools developing infrastructures to cope with cyberbullying, other support networks outside of the school context should be broadened and established. In addition a program to make all children of school going age aware of these support facilities should be implemented in order for them to benefit from these services.

Parental Responsibilities

Parental control of cellular phone internet and cellular phone use should complement the efforts made by industry to regulate cellular phone adult content and cellular phone content services

in order to ensure the protection of children's rights (van Tonder, 2010). The results of this study should alert and caution parents about the need for increased vigilance, monitoring and supervision of adolescent cyber activities. Communicating with adolescence about internet, SMS and other cyber technology activities needs to be vigilantly pursued. Although traditional bullying and cyberbullying share certain features, they are distinct phenomena (Kawalski, 2008). It should not be assumed that knowledge of traditional bullying is automatically used to deal with cyberbullying.

Since cyberbully varies in the way it is perpetrated it is recommended that victims must be helped to clearly communicate the type of threat, the frequency of messages, the potential sources, and the nature of the threat they experienced as this will ensure that proper action is taken by the ISP. Educating potential victims and creating awareness campaigns may help to stop cyberbullying or prevent it from developing any further. Children have to be taught to keep personal information safe while online and be aware of other online dangers (Streicher, 2010).

A strong recommendation is to focus attention not only on cyberbullying but to be aware of the dangers of cybercrimes as well. The police will receive on-going training to deal with cybercrime and he urged parents to involve the local authorities in cybercrimes (van Tonder, 2010).

SEXTING

For most children, sexting and texting are part of the online behaviors on which children are spending more and more of their time. Mishna *et al.* (2009) found that children are using technology at younger ages and that by underestimating their usage we may be failing to protect children from the dangers.

In a study by PEW Internet and American Life Project, Lenhart and Madden (2007) reported that more than half of

adolescents ages 12-18 had cell phones. Texting is regularly used among young people and more than 73% of teens to communicate. Additionally, over 55% teens age 12-17 use social networks with a posted profile and picture. Kowalski *et al*. (2007) define sexting as sending a text containing a nude or sexually explicit photo. It is essential to make students aware that these texts could be sent to thousands with a few clicks. Once disseminated, these photos and texts can harm their reputation and even constitute criminal activity. Research supports that sexting may have long term consequences that impact the future such as higher education choices and employment opportunities (Kowalski *et al*. 2007).

Diliberto and Mattey (2009) discusses the role school nurses could play in schools to educate students and parents to both prevent legal action that may result from sexting and cyberbullying and to alert students and parents to the emotional stress that often accompany these behaviors. Cassidy *et al*. (2009) reported that students want to talk about cyberbullying and be involved as part of the solution. Ybarra and Mitchell (2007) define interpersonal Internet victimization as the report of unwanted sexual solicitation or harassment over the Internet. Requests to engage in sexual activities, sexual talk or an invitation to reveal personal sexual information are all elements of the category of unwanted sexual solicitation or harassment. The possession and production of child pornography is against the law. Youth need to know that if they participate in texting it is not only immoral, it can be illegal.

The social and emotional side of bullying:

Aggression and victimization in child and adolescent peer groups compromises children's safety and development (Snyder *et al.*, 2003). In both the aggressor and victim, bullying is sign of potential psychiatric disorders (Turkel, 2007). Social-cognitive approaches may be useful in preventing relational

aggression. Culotta and Goldstein (2008) found a significantly high correlation of relational aggression with jealousy; adolescents who reported being more jealous than peers engaged in more relation aggression. These jealous adolescents may motivate bullying behaviors. Girls' reported higher levels of jealousy. These findings suggest that gender be considered when in intervention and prevention efforts. The ability to develop and maintain healthy relationships are important skills for children to learn. As a child grows into adolescence, peer relationships are of increasing importance and positive peer interaction during adolescence is an indicator of the ability to maintain successful relationships in adulthood (McElhaney*et al.*, 2008). As they grow, they areconfronted with peer pressure and interpersonal conflicts. Bullying negatively impacts children and adolescents' abilities to create peer relationships and maintain a healthy lifestyle (Dake *et al.*, 2003; McElhaneyet *al.*, 2008 ;). When children know how to choose and maintain good friends, they feel confident and safe. Responsible decision making is about putting the social and ethical skills to action. Children need to be guided to make responsible decisions based on respect, personal safety and empathy for others and a clear understanding of the consequences.

'Sexting' is a term widely used to describe emails, text messages and other forms of electronic communication that contain sexual material, such as a suggestive or provocative text, or images of people who are nude, nearly nude or that are sexually explicit (Ringrose et al 2012).Sexting by children and teenagers not only challenges prevailing views about normative sexuality and childhood (Jewkes 2010), but in some jurisdictions can result in children being prosecuted under child pornography legislation (Svantesson 2011). Weinsand Hiestand (2009) described a variety of responses to sexting, ranging from calls for the decriminalization of sexting to the hardline

position that sexting should be considered a form of child pornography.

Sexting has been defined by Chalfen (2009) as the exchange of sexually explicit or provocative content (text messages, photos, and videos) via smartphone, Internet, or social networks.

Sexting can also result in instances of cyberbullying or violation of privacy when content is shared without consent (Lenhart, 2007).

"Sexting" originated as a media term (Judge, 2012) that generally refers to sending sexual images via text messaging and can also include uploading sexual pictures to Web sites. Sexting has received attention from legal scholars because some youth are creating and distributing images that meet definitions of child pornography under criminal statutes (Leary, 2008).

Sexting is often referred to as sending or receiving sexually suggestive or explicit images from one cell phone to another (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Lenhart, 2009;). Using this definition, Mitchell et al. (2012) indicated approximately 7% of teenagers have reported receipt of nude or almost nude images via cell phone, with half of these participants being females between the ages of 16 to 17 years old. Lenhart (2009) also found that 5% of teens admitted to sending these types of images. However, other research suggests that this is an underestimation of the occurrence of this behavior. For instance, Strassberg et al. (2013) sampled a private school in the Southwest and found that 40% of the respondents received a sexually explicit image on their cell phone.

Sexting also has other adverse issues associated with the behavior. For instance, Reyns, Burek, Henson and Fisher (2011) have found that youth who sext also have an increased likelihood of being victimized online in other ways (e.g., interpersonal relationship violence, and cyber bullying), especially female Internet users. This victimization can result

in psychological distress, such as depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. Further, other studies have found a correlation between sexting and unsafe sex practices.

Sexting relates to a range of practices where sexually explicit materials are circulated, giving rise to widespread public and policy concern over 'risks' and dangers these practices pose to young people (Ringrose and Eriksson Barajas, 2011). Sexting has legal implications for minors who have been charged in both the UK and USA with the production of sexually explicit materials (Arcabascio, 2010). There are also issues of 'stranger' danger and 'grooming' with adults sending minors sexual materials, and peer issues of sexual cyberbullying (Koefed and Ringrose, 2011). Whether, however, sexting is really new or continuous with earlier youthful practices, how widespread it is and, most important, whether it represents a genuine harm or, perhaps, a benefit, is still barely understood.

Characteristics of those who Sext

The majority of research reveals similar findings regarding patterns of sexting. For instance, sexting has been found to be predominant among older teenagers and young adults (Lenart, 2009). Older teenagers (i.e., 17 years old) are more likely to send sexting images than compared to younger participants (i.e., 12 years old), eight percent versus four percent, respectively (Lenhart, 2009). Similar findings also reveal sexting is most common among 18 to 24 year olds (33%) versus 14 to 17 year olds (24%) (AP-MTV, 2009).

The prevalence of cell phone use has also been associated with an increased likelihood of sending and receiving sexting images. Lenhart's (2009) findings suggest teenagers who generally text more often are also more likely to send and receive sexting messages, compared to teenagers who do not use text messaging on a regular basis.

In the USA, Pew Internet reported in 2009 from a nationally representative sample of US mobile phone owners aged 12–17 years that 15 % had received sexually suggestive, nude, or near nude images of someone they knew via text messaging on their cell phone, and 4% had sent such messages (Lenhart,2009). This occurred equally for boys and girls, but more often among older than younger teenagers.

'Sex Tech', commissioned by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy in 2009, found that as many as 48% of 13–19 year olds reported receiving messages online or via a cell phone in a non-probability online sample of US 13–19 year olds, and 20% reported sending or posting 'nude or semi-nude pictures of themselves'.

Ringrose's (2010) UK based qualitative research explored sexual identity construction online for younger teenagers, finding that boys and girls were under new performative pressures to pose in 'sexy' and body-revealing ways through their social networking profiles, with boys posting their 'six-packs' and girls posting photos in bikinis and bras and knickers. Even though not all participants participated in posting revealing photos, for example, the peer groups as a whole are affected by the developing gender norms of the online culture. Young people have to make complex decisions about what to post and what it would mean for their wider social relations at school and beyond.

Theoretical Application

The first theory applied to sexting in this study is the General Theory of Crime, which asserts that low self-control is the predictive factor of criminality. Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) argued that individuals, who were exposed to ineffective parenting, including lack of bond, poor monitoring, and inconsistent or ineffective discipline, were more likely to develop low self-control (Gibbs, Giever, &Higgins, 2003). Low self-control includes the inability to resist temptation when

inopportunity presents itself as the individual does not consider the long-term consequences of their behavior. Individuals with low self-control are characterized as impulsive, Insensitive, risk-taking, and attracted to simplistic tasks (Delisi, 1998).

Crime is attractive because it provides the immediate benefits for the individual with low self-control without considering the long-term impact of the act for themselves or others, whether legally or socially. This logic can be applied to sexting. The impulsive person is not likely to foresee the negative or painful consequences of sexting for the victim. Instead, the offender may only consider the enjoyment he or she will get from taking and/or sending the picture, and the popularity gained by participating in such behavior. Further, an inconsiderate person is not likely to care about the negative consequences of their victim.

In a study of high school students across seven schools in Texas, youth who reported sharing sexual photos of themselves, were more likely to be dating and to have had sex (Temple et al, 2012).

Sexual relationships are normative and age-typical experiences for adolescents and these relationships have significant implications for health, adjustment, and psychosocial functioning (Collins, 2003). Sexually curious behavior is reflective of typical sexual development during adolescence (Ponton &Judice, 2004). Sharing or posting sexual pictures of oneself may therefore be reflective of usual sexual expression in romantic relationships in adolescence. Alternatively, sexting may be a marker for involvement in a larger continuum of risky sexual behaviors. Certainly, sexting may also have a function in both of these arenas.

Bailey and Hanna (2011) further extend previous definitions that involve sending and receiving sexts to include "forwarding, and/or posting sexualized images and/or text through a variety of digital platforms including text messaging, social networking sites, email, and blogging" (p. 409). Some

research distinguishes between consensual and nonconsensual sexting, the latter defined as "where an image is misused and sent on without permission" and considered a form of sexual violence (Walker et al., 2011, p. 13). In contrast, consensual sexting refers to voluntary engagement in the practice with others in any variety of interpersonal contexts (i.e. friends, partners, etc.). Dake et al. (2012) suggest that sexting can be conceptualized as cyberbullying when it is involuntary and harmful, which follows this line of thought involving intention.

Both male and female students may face a variety of social and emotional consequences after engaging in sexting behaviors. The consequences can be very severe. There have been several news stories reporting students who have had nude photos of themselves distributed school-wide and subsequently committed suicide. Hope Witsell, a middle school student from Florida, committed suicide at the age of 14 after a topless photo of herself was stolen from the intended recipient. She was bullied relentlessly both in person and online.

In a focus group study conducted by Lippmann and Campbell in 2014, 43 students ages 12-18 voiced their concerns about engaging in sexting behaviors and how actions are perceived differently depending on the gender of the individual depicted in the photo. This particular group of students provides a much more complete picture of what students are doing today. One out five students in the group reported sexting in the past. Half of them reported receiving explicit content. It is very startling to think 12-year-olds, sixth graders, may be sexting or receiving inappropriate content on their mobile devices.

Most writers date the origin of the term *sexting* to coverage in the popular press, which began around 2007. By 2009, the word was a finalist for the "word of the year" by the *New Oxford American Dictionary (.*Jolicoeur & Zedlewski, 2010) One influential definition came from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC, 2009), which defined

sexting as "youth writing sexually explicit messages, taking sexually explicit photos of themselves or others in their peer group, and transmitting those photos and/or messages to their peers."

Associated behaviors

Shifting across the digital divide to a focus on youth sexting engenders a discursive shift as well, with research investigating the functional aspects of sexting as a communicative tool giving way to research examining its association with risky and problematic behaviors, such as uninhibited sexual activity, cyberbullying, and drug use as well as emotional health problems like depression (Daket al., 2012;). From this perspective, sexting is another type of sexual behavior enabled and encouraged by a hypersexual socio-cultural environment and the peer pressure and social norms operating within it (Bailey & Hanna, 2011; Dake et al., 2012;). Van Manen (2010) suggests that Momus technologies can be dangerous given their capacity to "seduce "young people to give away private information, such as pictures, in a social environment where extensive personal disclosure is expected.

Consideration of more dystopian views of sexting are necessary to contextualizing the practice, as it is clear that the positive or negative potential of sexting to either enhance or ruin interpersonal relationships depends on how and why people engage in the practice.

Expert discourse on the topic also reflects the hypersexualized nature of the social environment in which sexting is taking place, which further suggests that sexting is a cultural issue (Walker et al., 2011). In the first phase of their two-part, qualitative study, Walker et al. (2011) interviewed experts on adolescent behavior to generate insight as to why adolescents engage in sexting, the potential consequences of such activities, and solutions. Participants suggest that youth sexting is a sexual action issue stemming from a sexualized

culture in which girls "face pressure to present themselves in sexual ways, and young men are expected to be interested…" (p. 12). Some informants expressed concern that sexting was the result of youth's desensitization to sex and sexual behavior due to the "mainstreaming of pornography" (p. 12). Multiple participants discussed the newness of the mechanism, such as the mobile phone, for old behaviors, in this case sharing images of naked men and women.

During the second phase of their two-part qualitative study, Walker et al. (2013) asked young people to share their perspectives on others' sexting experiences, making this study the most useful and important first step in research on youth sexting to date. Similar to expert perspectives, young people corroborated the gendered nature of sexting (e.g. more stigma attached to female sexting) and the role of peer pressure in encouraging youth to engage in the practice.

Consequences

In general, youth obsession with social media may have numerous "dire" consequences, such as depression, sleep deprivation, Internet addiction, social anxiety, aggression, social isolation, cyberbullying, susceptibility to online advertising, harassment, sexual solicitation, and over-sharing of personal information (Farber et al., 2012, p. 1225). Specific to sexuality, Theodore (2011) contends that technology is "changing the way adolescents develop sexually" and can lead to the early sexual actions of teens, which is linked to lower self-esteem and other mental health issues such as self-image problems and eating disorders (p. 3).

Potential negative consequences of sexting range in intensity along a continuum of emotional, physical, social, and legal punishment. For instance, youth sexting may result in minimal forms of punishment, such as parents confiscating phones from their children for a set period of time or school authority figures temporarily suspending students caught in

the act. In stark contrast, however, youth sexting can initiate more severe consequences, such as cyberbullying, emotional health problems, and even suicide (Hua, 2012).

Given its ubiquity and potentially harmful consequences, sexting has birthed adversity of opinion, particularly regarding the engagement of youth in the practice. Wolfe's (2000) passage underscores the seemingly typical assessment of teenage sexuality as the out-of-control manifestation of desires promulgated to youth via their exposure to mass media. As a potential consequence of a hypersexualized culture, sexting has been labeled an "epidemic" among members of the digital youth culture, one in need of prevention and control given its potential to lead to other risky and dangerous behaviors such as sexual intercourse, cyberbullying, and suicide (Kiesbye, 2011).

Theoretical framework

Given the need for further research into sexting, particularly among youth populations and members of the digital population, the following section considers a theoretical approach that may be useful in examining the phenomenon. Petronio and Durham's (2008) communication privacy management theory (CPM) could shed light on how young people negotiate the sharing of sexts either interpersonally (one on one sexting) or in masse (what I call 'mass sexting'). Furthermore, it may provide insight into young peoples' values concerning privacy and potentially expose generational or gender differences in this domain, an idea previously proposed by Van Manen (2010) in his exploration of Momus technologies and the outcomes of digital intimacy. A brief overview of the theory, as well as how it has been used to examine privacy management via computer-mediated communication (CMC), will precede a discussion of its application to sexting specifically.

Communication privacy management theory

Originally grounded in research and developed to examine how people manage private information through processes of revealing and concealing, CPM is a dialectically-based theory that is primarily concerned with how people use management systems to regulate self-disclosure of *private* information. This distinction is necessarily dependent upon what individuals consider private as well as how they view the nature of boundaries associated with either private or public domains or between individuals and society. The methodological versatility of CPM allows its theoretical propositions and assumptions to be tested by both post-positivist and interpretivist researchers alike. CPM research has primarily concerned itself with exploring communication in a variety of interpersonal and group contexts, such as between or amongst family members, married couples, and within doctor-patient relationships (Petronio & Durham, 2008). More recently, researchers have investigated privacy management in CMC contexts, such as in e-commerce relationships (Metzger, 2007) and on Facebook (FB) (Waters & Ackerman, 2011). CPM is based on the idea that individuals possess private information about themselves (and potentially others) and control it through information management processes that are governed by what Petronio and Durham (2008) call "privacy rules".

A survey for Pew Internet (Lenhart 2009) found relatively low levels of sexting amongst young people in the US. The survey established that 4% of 'cell-owning' young people (12-17 years) reported 'sending a sexually suggestive nude or nearly-nude photo or video of themselves to someone else' (Lenhart 2009: 4). When it came to receiving 'sexts' the survey found that 15% of those aged 12-17 had received a sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude photo or video of someone they knew on their cell phone.

On the other hand, a study by Cox Communications (2009) of 655 teenagers aged between 13 and 18 in the US

discovered a relatively high prevalence of sexting behavior. They reported that around 20% of respondents had engaged in the sending, receiving and/or forwarding of sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude photos via phone or computer, and that over 33% knew of a friend who had done so. Only 9% of students, however, actually reported producing or sending images themselves, with 3% reporting that they had passed images of others on.

When it comes to motivations for sexting, the US based Sex and Tech Internet Survey (National Campaign to Prevent Unplanned Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy 2010: 9) suggested that the most common reason for sending sexy content was to be 'fun or flirtatious', with 66% of girls and 60% of teen boys responding thus. Of the teen girls, 52% said the sext was a 'sexy present' for their boyfriend; 44% of both teen girls and teen boys said they sent sexually suggestive messages or images in response to such content they received; 40% of teen girls said they sent sexually suggestive messages or images as 'a joke'; 34% of teen girls say they sent/posted sexually suggestive content to 'feel sexy'; and only 12% of teen girls said they felt 'pressured' to send sexually suggestive messages or images (National Campaign to Prevent Unplanned Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy 2010: 4).

Undoubtedly, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have changed the way people interact and communicate with each other rapidly in the last two decades. For adolescents, the use of social networking sites, instant messenger, and mobile Internet devices are an integral component of daily life (Livingstone, Haddon, Gorzig, & Olafsson, 2011).

Cyberbullying can be defined as "any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others" (Tokunaga, 2010, p. 278). Victims of cyberbullying lack good

peer relationships, feel socially more ineffective, and have greater interpersonal difficulties (Tokunaga, 2010).

The focus groups revealed that information technologies play a very important role in the lives of the young women and men who participated in these groups. Whether exploring their sexuality, seeking general education, socializing, meeting potential sexual partners or maintaining existing relationships, the Internet and social networking platforms have become sites where young people congregate, hang out, explore and learn.

When discussing motivations for sexting behavior, focus groups participants identified a wide range of incentives for sending sexts, ranging from boredom and naiveté, to attention seeking and explorations of sexuality. For some, sexting in a 'loving relationship' was considered desirable, as 'sex can be a very personal thing for most people'. Sexting was also seen to play a very important role in maintaining long-distance relationships, and in that context sexting was viewed as an extension of a loving, committed relationship.

Experimenting with sexting was seen as peer acceptable behavior for young men but not for women, as they were expected to protect their modesty. In other words there was seen to be a gendered double standard to acceptable sexting. As one focus group participant pointed out, sexting is 'a normal part of being young and growing up just to joke around in that kind of way.

Peer pressure was also identified as an important incentive to be involved in the erotic digital economy. Some focus group participants acknowledged that such pressures apply to both girls and boys, as often 'they're too quick to trust the other partner'. A majority, however, agreed that peer pressure to sext applies more to young women. As one participant explained, 'girls do eventually get bullied for showing themselves to people on the Internet'. Such pressure was seen as especially pronounced if the young woman in question is dating 'an older guy':

The focus groups findings confirmed the notion that sexting practices are considered to be more harmful when they involve minors and are held to a higher account than sexting involving adults. While focus group participants reinforced the notion that sexting among adults was perceived as safe and acceptable behavior (Weisskirch & Delevi 2011), they reported that alarm bells amongst policy makers and in general public start to ring when teenagers engage in sexting practice. In this context, disparities between sexting in adult relationships, sexting among teenagers of approximately same age and sexting *between* adults and teens was emphasized by many of the young people who participated in the focus groups.

Sexting practices, thus, were seen by focus group participants as not simply limited to mobile phones (phone-to-phone) or traditional social networking websites (phone-to-internet; Facebook and Instagram). As explained by one focus group participant, alternative platforms were 'non-relative because typically those photos would be shared around way too many times for normal people to go back to the source of it' (Female, UWS FG2). At the same time, participants reported that Facebook and other traditional social networking websites were increasingly being avoided and/or not used for sexually explicit 52 purposes.

Many studies indicate that bullying and cyberbullying can lead to self-harm and suicidal ideation (Conn, 2010) Research suggests that educators must intervene in educating students about cyberbullying (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008)

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